Considering the role of critical religious literacy in Canadian teacher education programs

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my mother.

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Abstract

The role of religious literacy as an educational aim has received increasing attention among educational scholars in recent decades. However, research into religious literacy's role in equipping preservice educators with the skills and knowledge needed in their task of educating for a critical, social justice-oriented citizenship is still lacking. My empirical case study of faculty and preservice teachers in one Canadian Prairie university allowed me to investigate how these participants both engaged with religious diversity in their classroom and how they viewed what I call critical religious literacy (CRL) as an educational aim. As a methodological bricoleur, I blended an empirical exploratory case study approach with philosophical analysis, using a normative case study approach. Empirically, findings demonstrate that while divided on questions of implementation, participants largely agree on the urgent need for CRL as an educational aim in teacher education. Philosophically, analyzing the findings through the mobilization of concepts of epistemic injustice and White Christian privilege highlights the complex ways religious illiteracy among educators may serve to perpetuate discrimination and epistemic harm. Thus, this dissertation argues that the strongest justification for including CRL in teacher education programs is one that links CRL to critical democratic aims inherent in a social justice-oriented model of citizenship in order to reduce or eliminate discrimination and potential epistemic injustices related to intersectional religious identities.

Résumé

Le rôle joué par la littératie religieuse dans l'atteinte des objectifs éducatifs a reçu une attention croissante dans la recherche en éducation des dernières décennies. Toutefois, les connaissances des façons dont la littératie religieuse peut doter les futurs enseignants des habiletés et des savoirs nécessaires à une citoyenneté critique et orientée vers la justice sociale sont manquantes. Une étude de cas empirique réalisée parmi des membres de la faculté et des enseignants en formation d'une université donnée des prairies canadiennes m'a permis d'interroger les façons dont ces participants prennent en compte la diversité religieuse dans la salle de classe et dont ils perçoivent ce que j'appelle la « littératie religieuse critique » en tant qu'objectif éducatif. Misant sur le bricolage méthodologique, j'ai développé une approche combinant une étude de cas exploratoire et une analyse philosophique doublées d'une approche normative des études de cas. D'un point de vue empirique, les résultats de la recherche démontrent que les participants, bien que divisés sur les questions de la mise en œuvre, s'entendent généralement sur le besoin urgent de développer une « littératie religieuse critique » comme objectif éducatif dans la formation des enseignants. D'un point de vue philosophique, les analyses, qui ont mobilisé les concepts d'injustice épistémique et de privilège blanc chrétien, mettent en évidence les façons complexes dont le manque de littératie religieuse chez les enseignants peut résulter en une perpétuation de la discrimination et du préjudice épistémique. En conclusion, cette thèse fait valoir que pour justifier l'inclusion de la « littératie religieuse critique » dans les programmes d'enseignement, l'idéal est de lier la « littératie religieuse critique » à des objectifs critiques et démocratiques inhérents à un modèle de citoyenneté orienté vers la justice sociale, avec comme horizon l'atténuation ou

l'élimination des injustices épistémiques potentielles associées aux identités religieuses

intersectionnelles.

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Chapter 1: Introduction
Personal journey to the topic

Religious literacy (RL) was a term I had never encountered before beginning this doctoral journey. As a seasoned educator with an MA in Religious Studies, I had long held an interest in the intersection between these disciplines, but it wasn't until I began to encounter in my professional life what I would later come to know as religious illiteracy, that my curiosity would drive me to investigate this phenomenon from a scholarly perspective. Director of the Religious Literacy Project at Harvard Divinity School, scholar Dr. Diane L. Moore, defines RL as "…the ability to discern and analyze the fundamental intersections of religion and social/political/cultural life through multiple lenses" (2007), a definition that highlights the importance of understanding the way religion and religious identities may appear in various domains, including educational ones. Indeed, I began to feel deeply unsettled by the religious illiteracy I encountered in the educational institution where I taught, and it was this sense of unease more than anything that led me to pursue this doctoral study on religious literacy in teacher education. I remember one of these unsettling events clearly. I was sitting in my shared office with four or five colleagues during lunch hour. The conversation turned, as it often did, to our students. As instructors of English language learners (ELLs), there was great diversity of all sorts in our classes, including religious diversity, with many Muslim students from North African countries of Morocco, Tunisia, and Algeria, to the Near Eastern countries of Iran, Saudi Arabia, or Iraq. There were also large numbers of Chinese students, many of whom considered themselves atheists and would be either curious or confused about – and occasionally opposed to – any discussion of religion in the classroom. Throw in the French, Germans, Haitians,

Koreans, Turkish, and Vietnamese, and it made for a fascinating mix, but one that could pose challenges for educators given the great variety of beliefs and opinions contained in that diversity. Not infrequently, these students brought in religion to classroom conversations, often as part of a larger conversation about cultural differences and the kinds of challenges these differences posed. On this particular day, my colleagues began complaining about the students from Saudi Arabia and other Gulf State countries and how they were 'too religious' and too frequently wanted to include religion in class discussions or refer to their religious identities or communities in assignments. I was unsettled when there was broad agreement amongst these colleagues that the best technique to deal with these 'problematic' students was to insist on a "No religion in the classroom" policy. My discomfort grew when this agreement became extended to a consensus that religion just didn't belong in a classroom anyway because it was too 'problematic' and a risky source of conflict.

Of course, there are many legitimate reasons for my colleagues' decisions to avoid religion in the classroom. Indeed, it would be difficult to find any educator in a public secular educational institution who believes that proselytizing is appropriate in such a setting. Moreover, there are valid concerns about the potentially harmful impacts conservative, discriminatory religious views on gender roles and LGBTQ2S+ communities (among others) may have on students. However, having a background in Religious Studies, I was familiar with the complexities of religious beliefs and practices and this academic understanding helped me see how religion is an intrinsic part of many individual's identities, and not something that may be easily dismissed. Instead, my own stance has always been that religious or spiritual beliefs deserved consideration at the very least. This certainly doesn't mean that I would condone

views that might cause harm to any student in my classes, but I also don't believe that all religious views are harmful – in fact, religious views can be the helpful because they often form the basis for a deep seated compassion and commitment to social justice issues of equity. A brief consideration of historic social justice movements reveals the central role religious beliefs, identities, and communities have played in addressing and standing up to injustice, from Christian civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr. to Buddhist peace activist Ven. Thich Nhat Hanh, just to name a few. From this more nuanced perspectives on religion and religious identities then, I questioned the anti-religious sentiment being expressed in different educational contexts, and I questioned what was behind this negative attitude that was being so freely shared amongst a group of educators who prided themselves on being sensitive with regards to other aspects of their students' identities, such as language and culture. It became apparent to me that the cultural sensitivity they championed did not always – or even often -- extend to conversations about religion or religious aspects of students' identities. I wanted to understand why and thus became convinced that this was an area worthy of study. When I first proposed my idea informally to a former professor and mentor, she told me to reconsider my topic because although she thought it was really interesting, it was "a bit of can of worms," and she wasn't sure that any faculty member would want to take on a graduate student investigating something so controversial. Of course, that sealed the deal for me. I decided that anything that provoked such a strong sentiment amongst scholars must be a worthy subject indeed!

Like all research, this dissertation is deeply informed by my experiences, both professional and personal. Professionally, one constant in my life has been teaching and my

experiences as an educator are central to and intertwined with my study. I began this research project thinking that I would locate my study in the domain of English as an Additional Language (EAL) studies, as this is where I first observed the phenomena of academics believing that religion had no place in their classrooms. However, as my research progressed, and as I began working with more preservice teachers in the Faculty of Education, I observed how seemingly unprepared preservice teachers were to engage with the religious diversity that they would like encounter in their classes, leading me to shift my research site from ELL contexts to the broader field of teacher education. Given the central role of Kindergarten-Graduation (K-G)[1] educators in equipping students with civic skills and competencies in pluralistic societies such as Canada, and given the role teacher education plays in ensuring these preservice teachers are equipped with the skills to educate within religiously diverse contexts, I decided the shift in research site to teacher education was well warranted.

However, my research journey was influenced not only my professional experiences, but also my personal circumstances. The first two years of my PhD were completed in Montreal, but at the end of my second year my family had to move across the country to a small Western Canadian Prairie[2] city for family reasons. This move had a major impact on my research process as I needed to rethink where I would locate the empirical portion of my study, eventually deciding to shift it to move to the Canadian Prairies. Thus, I had to become familiar with the research of that environment, the K-G educational system, and teacher education programs.

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[1] I use this term because of the many different educational systems across the world and even Canada. The commonly used term K-12 does not accurately describe schools in Québec, for example, where the model is K-11.
[2] I have made the decision to use Canadian Prairies as my location so as to maintain anonymity of participants given the relatively small population of this area, and the small number of universities in each of the prairie provinces of Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba.

Prior to the move, I had anticipated completing my study in a large urban university context characterized by great racial and religious diversity among preservice teachers who would be working in equally diverse K-G urban schools. Although this shift in perspective was due entirely to this unforeseen move of location, it allowed me to contribute to expanding the field of scholarly inquiry into religious literacy in educational contexts in Canadian Prairie provincial contexts. It also opened up a whole new field of research as I encountered unanticipated findings in my data collection related to religion and religious diversity in teacher education. In contrast to what I experienced living in a large Eastern Canadian urban centre, living in the Canadian prairies highlighted how the intersection of Whiteness and Christian identity came together to create situations where White Christian privilege was evident, and how it, at times, served to marginalize those preservice teachers whose identities included racialized and religiously 'othered'. These findings led me to revisit my theoretical framework and expand it to include concepts stemming from Critical Race Theory, including intersectionality, microaggressions, and White Christian privilege in order to understand how these concepts could be mobilized to analyze the ways in which religious illiteracy contributes to perpetuating epistemic injustices that marginalize and silence those perceived as outside of the dominant culture. Thus, as with all reflective academic work, the impact of my professional and personal life permeates this dissertation and have shaped its course.

The remainder of this chapter includes a discussion of the background to the challenges religious diversity poses to public education in pluralistic democratic societies such as Canada. This leads to a consideration of key concepts such as secularization and how these intersect with issues of citizenship. The following section presents the purpose of my study, my research

questions, and a brief overview of my methodology before outlining some key definitions and terminology. I conclude with an overview of my dissertation.

Background to the problem -- Religious Diversity and citizenship
The 'Problem' of Diversity

Diversity poses challenges to democracies such as Canada on multiple fronts. Both gender and linguistic diversity are familiar sites of tensions in liberal-democratic societies, as today's transgender movement (Hines, 2009) and Québec's ongoing linguistic debates demonstrate (Oakes & Warren, 2007). Similarly, ethnic and racial diversity also pose great challenges to liberal-democratic societies. Canada's Multicultural Act of 1971, crafted and implemented by Pierre Trudeau's Liberal government, was partially a response to pressures from minority ethnic groups, especially in Western Canada, who felt their civic contributions and cultural heritages were not sufficiently acknowledged under the Canada's former bicultural French/English policy (Labelle & Rocher, 2000). Moreover, both Canadian multiculturalism and Québec's interculturalism policy frameworks can be seen as attempts by policy makers to maintain and engender social cohesion and unity in increasingly pluralistic contexts (DesRoches, 2016; Waddington et al., 2012). These challenges are substantial tests, but when gender, linguistic, and ethnic diversity intersect with religious diversity, an even greater complexity emerges.

Religious Diversity

Religious diversity has always been a feature of liberal-democratic societies such as Canada; however, the degree of religious diversity is far greater and more visible today than in the past (MacHacek, 2003). Since the mid-1960s, dramatic increases in new immigrant

populations, many from Asia and the Middle East, have brought greater attention to religious

diversity, as the large numbers of diverse religious traditions were now more visible to the

White Christian settler majority in Canada. Furthermore, the demands of citizenship within

pluralistic multicultural societies such as Canada have been complicated and contested by the

growing pressures of globalization and increasing levels of migration, and as Steven Vertovec

has conceptualized, super-diversity and transnationalism (2007; 2009). These factors, along

with the after-effects of the collapse of European colonialism projects, prompt questions

around national identity, civic participation, and the possibility of social cohesion within such

complex cultural, linguistic, and religious diversity (Kymlicka, 2015). Careful consideration of

these questions is required for those tasked with preparing future educators to educate for

civic aims within the midst of this complex diversity, something I seek to do in this dissertation

that explores how teacher education programs equip preservice teachers to engage with

religious diversity. Before outlining the purpose of this doctoral project, I first explore the

concept of secularization and its potential harms as a key consideration for educators working

within secularized societies.

Secularization and potential harms

Although frequently misunderstood, secularism remains a salient characteristic of much

of the Western world, Canada being no exception, and as such, merits consideration. In public

discourse, the notion of secularism is sometimes distorted to mean the complete absence of

religion in public life – this misrecognition of secularism supports the idea that if we could only

prevent the appearance of religion in the public sphere, then challenges related to religious

diversity will disappear. However, rather than the complete absence of religion in the public

sphere, secularism can be more accurately understood as the political separation between religious and political powers, necessary for providing both religious groups and political institutions what political philosopher Amy Gutmann has called a 'two-way protection' (2000). This two-way protection ensures that politicians cannot over-step their influence how religious groups function, nor can religious groups wield influence over the governing state. Moreover, it allows for democratic deliberation, or as Jurgen Habermas proposes, it provides a way for deliberative democracy to allow for conversation between faith and reason (2006). However, for there to be deliberation between those citizens with religious views and those without, both sides must feel their views are heard. I present here a brief overview of Habermas' views on the challenges of democratic deliberation in a religiously diverse 'post-secular' society before turning to a discussion of the different aims of democratic citizenship that best support the inclusion of RL in Canadian teacher education programs.

Religion and the Public Sphere

For decades, social theorist and philosopher Jurgen Habermas, known as "the model interlocuter of the public sphere," has had wide-ranging influence across disciplines (Calhoun et al., p. ix, 2011). His works reveal a growing concern with the role of religious citizens in democratic societies and can be understood as a response to the 'secularity thesis' -- the notion that religion would eventually fall away to be replaced by a 'modern society' based on reason or science. In his landmark 2006 essay, *Religion and the Public Sphere*, Habermas posits a 'postsecular' response amid a time of increasing visibility of a "religious renewal" and a growing political polarization across the globe, especially in the US (p. 2). Of course, Habermas is not the only scholar to point out that the 'secularity thesis' has not come to fruition. Indeed, the claim

that modernity results in the inevitable decline or disappearance of religion has been widely

and compellingly refuted (Calhoun et al., 2011; Casanova, 1994; Taylor, 2007). One only needs

to consider the increasing societal tension as seen in the passing of Quebec's Law 21[3] banning

of head coverings for public servants for an example of how religion remains a powerful factor

driving public life in contemporary liberal-democracies (Patrick et al., 2019). These tensions

highlight, as discussed above, a central problem for pluralistic secular (or postsecular) societies:

establishing legitimacy among all citizens, something which requires providing the opportunity

for all citizens -- believers and non-believers – to engage in democratic deliberation. However,

this is not such an easy task.

Drawing on John Rawls' (1997) notion of 'public use of reason' in deliberative

democracy, which calls for a "willingness to listen to others" and demands the use of a language

that is "accessible to all citizens," Habermas points out the problems this demand creates for

religious citizens. Although the understanding that accessible language is language that is free

from religious doctrine may seem perfectly reasonable – especially to non-believers --

Habermas argues that this places an "asymmetrical burden" on religious citizens. This is

because it requires them to express themselves in language that is acceptable and

comprehensible to non-religious citizens but does not require the reverse, and as such, should

not be a requirement for deliberative democracy (p. 10). Rather, for Habermas, "...the ethics of

democratic citizenship assumes secular citizens exhibit a mentality that is no less demanding

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[3] This contentious law was recently passed although not unilaterally as there is currently an exemption for the English Montreal School Board. However, this exemption is being contested by Quebec Justice Minister Simon Jolin-Barrette. https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/montreal/bill-21-religious-symbols-ban-quebec-court-ruling-1.5993431

than the corresponding mentality of their religious counterparts" (p. 18). This does not mean that religious citizens are relieved from the need to present their views and claims from mutual intelligibility, and Habermas is careful to point out that religious citizens must also endeavour to translate their claims so that they are intelligible to all. Indeed, this can succeed only to the extent that religious citizens convincingly connect the egalitarian individualism and universalism of modern law and morality with the premises of their comprehensive doctrines (p. 14). But for Habermas, there must be a middle way between radical secularists who demand that all political and moral claims must reflect a rationalistic worldview grounded in science and the radical theologists who insist on grounding all arguments in an appeal to a singular faith-based truth.

The above discussion illustrates how mainstream 'secular' views often sideline religious concerns and may even pose harm. For an example of a harm posed by these mainstream 'secular' views, we can look to the ongoing debate in Québec, where the current Coalition Avenir Québec (CAQ) government has implemented Law 21 to ban public service workers from wearing religious symbols at work (Laframboise and Fletcher, Nov. 28, 2018). This debate highlights the increasing tensions faced by many democratic societies as they encounter greater religious diversity. Notably, these tensions are most pronounced in societies with a history of religious control, as in Québec, with its fierce anti-religious sentiment coming from centuries of societal control under the Catholic church; nevertheless, this serves as an illustration of how harms of misrecognition of religious diversity may be committed in the name of secularization (Tremblay, 2019). Arguably, what is required to mitigate this potential epistemic harm posed by 'secular views' is an educated citizenry around issues related to religious diversity. Thus, a key

argument of this dissertation is that my proposed conception of RL as an approach to educating for a social justice-oriented citizenship could rectify these potential epistemic harms that a secularized society may produce by equipping educators with the skills required to engage with religion and issues related to religious diversity in their classrooms.

Purpose of my study/focus of the inquiry

When I began to research the subject of the role of RL in K-G education, I found there was little scholarship being done in Canada. There was plenty of research on the role of religious education; in other words, the study of teaching religion from a religious perspective, as in Catholic school education in Quebec, Canada[4], for example (Boudreau, 2011), or some forms of Religious Education (RE) in the UK and European contexts (Conroy, 2016; Jackson, 2004, 1997; Jackson & Everington, 2017; Shaw, 2020). And there was a body of work that examined the aims of teaching about religion in public K-G contexts, primarily situated within the US (Anderson, 2011; Bindewald et al., 2017; Feinberg, 2014; Moore, 2007, 2014; Prothero, 2007; 2014). While the US and Canada share many similarities as liberal-democratic pluralistic societies with a shared border, and many of the conceptual frameworks found in this body of scholarship are applicable to Canada, there are significant differences in our education systems, political systems, and cultural norms that require consideration. Within Canada, scholarship about RL in Quebec's K-G education is particularly robust, as it is one of two provinces to have had a provincially mandated course[5]. This course, entitled *Ethics and Religious Culture (ERC)*,

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[4] It should be noted that because education is provincially legislated, there are significant differences in provincial approaches to religious education. For some provinces such as Alberta, the Catholic School Board is part of the public school system.

[5] The ERC program was halted in 2020 by the Coalition Avenir Québec, with plans to remove the religious focus portion of the course. They have recently unveiled the new program to be piloted in 2022. See Marchand 2020,

taught religion from a non-confessional or non-devotional perspective (Boisvert, 2015; Chan & McDonough, 2018; Jafralie, 2017; Jafralie & Zaver, 2019; McDonough, 2011). However, when I began this dissertation in 2015, there was little scholarship engaging specifically with the question of the role of RL in teacher education in Canada. There has since been a substantial increase in this body of research related to RL and its intersection with teacher education and a maturing of the field, particularly in the US (Gardner et al., 2017; Marcus, 2018a; K. Soules & Jafralie, 2021), but also globally (Ashraf, 2019; Conroy, 2016; Makeda, 2018). However, with the exception of a small handful of studies, research into the role of RL in teacher education in Canadian contexts outside of Quebec have been limited (Chan, Mistry, et al., 2019; Y. Guo, 2015a, 2015b; Patrick, 2015). Moreover, existing research has tended to be either primarily philosophical in that it consider the aims of RL in education without drawing on empirical data, or primarily empirically based research that rarely attempts to consider these empirical findings from a critical and philosophical lens, such as considering the intersection of RL and epistemic injustice (Kidd et al., 2017); thus, this dissertation seeks to bridge this gap in methodology of inquiry. Finally, while there exists a small body of scholarship considering the role of RL in education and its intersection with White Christian privilege (Ellison et al., 2019; Joshi, 2020), it is limited and does not engage specifically with Canadian teacher education contexts. Given our current political climate in which issues surrounding acts of violence and hatred towards racial and religious communities have prompted many educational institutions to revise their policies and programming to be more genuinely inclusive and equitable, questions around how teacher

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https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/montreal/ethics-religious-abolish-1.5421846 and Caruso-Moro retrieved Oct. 25, 2021 https://montreal.ctvnews.ca/quebec-unveils-curriculum-reform-to-replace-former-ethics-and-religious-culture-program-1.5636274

educators prepare preservice teachers to meet the demands of these societal shifts have taken on a new urgency.

Research questions

The main questions guiding the research undertaken in this dissertation are : "What is the role of critical religious literacy (CRL) as an educational aim for social justice-oriented citizenship in teacher education programs in Canada?" and "What are teacher educators' and preservice teachers' views on the role of CRL as an educational aim for mitigating harm in teacher education and schools in Canada?" I began this dissertation interested in exploring these questions from a strictly philosophical inquiry perspective, but as I proceeded with the research, I began to see how an empirical investigation of this question could contribute to making normative suggestions to guide future policies or curricular decisions in teacher education programs. As my research progressed and I began to develop my approach for the empirical case study, I formed the following ancillary questions:

- How religiously literate are teacher educators and pre-service K-G educators in Canadian Prairies teacher education programs?

- How do teacher educators and preservice teachers engage with issues related to religious diversity or CRL in their classrooms?

- How do teacher educators and preservice teachers view the relationship between CRL and educating for a social justice-oriented citizenship (SJOC)?

- What are teacher educators and pre-service educators' beliefs about the need for K-G teachers to be religiously literate?

- How do teacher educators or pre-service K-G teachers' own religious or non-religious worldviews and identities impact their beliefs about the importance of being religiously literate?

How I went about answering these questions: Research methodology and conceptual frameworks

The dissertation consists of three related dimensions – philosophical, empirical and programmatic/prescriptive. The philosophical dimension of the dissertation consists of two parts – conceptual and normative. Conceptually, a key question for this study is: What is RL? What does RL mean, exactly, particularly in teacher education. In order to answer this question, I explore and differentiate contemporary theories and conceptions of RL. The purpose of this analysis is to clarify in what sense RL should be understood for educational purposes. Because Moore's work on RL contains an intersectional approach that is rooted in the works of critical educational thinkers such as Paolo Freire, this dissertation adapts a Moorean conception of RL. Thus, it promotes and foregrounds what I refer to as *critical democratic aims* -- i.e. those aims that encourage critical thinking with the goal of critiquing authority and questioning oppressive structures and practices, such as Islamophobia or other religious stereotypes. Normatively, the central question is why RL should be included in school curricula and in teacher education programs? My answer to this question draws on the work of Moore and other contemporary RL theorists, who argue that RL is primarily valuable because it enhances goals that are central to the critical democratic aims mentioned above. To bolster these arguments, I bring RL theorists' arguments into closer conversation with the work of contemporary philosophers of education, particularly those whose work has focussed on clarifying and justifying critical aims of a social justice-oriented citizenship, leading me to propose my own adapted conception of

RL: critical religious literacy (CRL)[6]. As my research unfolded, I became increasingly interested in understanding how CRL might be considered a tool for teacher educators to address what Miranda Fricker has called *epistemic injustice* (2007) perpetuated by the pervasive tendency of educators to avoid religion or spirituality in the classroom. This notion of epistemic injustice provides a conceptual framework for addressing issues related to systems of oppression in knowledge creation and promotion, something that aligns with my own critical theoretical orientation. Thus, a key theoretical proposition of this dissertation is how a failure to include CRL as an educational aim may be conceived as an epistemic injustice or harm which teacher education is well-positioned to address. In other words, I argue that the strongest justification for including CRL in K-G teacher education programs is one that links CRL to certain critical democratic aims inherent in a social justice-oriented model of citizenship listed above that may serve to reduce or eliminate potential epistemic injustices related to intersectional religious identities.

Empirically, my data collection process and findings illuminated the salience of intersectional identities when considering CRL in teacher education contexts. This was an important part of my research process, and because of the unpredictable nature of empirical data collection, my findings led me in a new direction, to draw conceptually on scholarship of Critical Race Theoretical concepts of intersectionality, microaggressions, and White (Christian)

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[6] Throughout the remainder of this dissertation, I will use the term RL when referring to the concept as proposed by other scholars and will use CRL to refer to my own conception of RL that is grounded in critical understandings of systems of oppression and how these intersect and inform engagement with religious diversity as will be outlined in Chapter Two and Three.

privilege in order to analyze and articulate the impacts of these intersections when considering

CRL as an educational aim in teacher education contexts.

However, my research questions expanded from ones that centered on understanding

the role of CRL as an educational aim for mitigating epistemic harm in teacher education

programs to the questions cited above that focused on understanding how teacher educators

and preservice teachers perceive the need for CRL as an educational aim and how they actually

engage with it in the classroom. This shift led to my adopting a case study approach of one

teacher education program in the Canadian Prairies, analyzing empirical data collected through

interviews and focus groups as detailed in Chapter Four. This study targeted both faculty

members who teach courses related to educating for diversity and the pre-service teachers

taking those courses, to develop an understanding of the difference in perspectives between

these stakeholders. Because I have embraced an interdisciplinary approach to my research

methodology, I draw inspiration from the notion of *'bricolage'* (Kincheloe & Berry, 2004) that

allows me to weave together the seemingly disparate methodological approaches of

philosophical inquiry and empirical exploratory case study research.

The decision to work within a qualitative methodology was an easy one for me as my

research goals are focused on understanding the experiences and perceptions of my

participants and using this information to then make normative arguments. Withing the vast

array of research methodologies available, I thus decided on an exploratory case study

approach (Yin, 2003) over other possible methodologies because I found it the most flexible

(Stake, 1995) in that it allowed me to create a 'bounded case' from the different participant

groups in a single institution. Moreover, the inherent versatility of the case study approach

permitted me, as 'bricoleur' to combine this empirical data analysis with a normative case study approach (Thacher, 2006) for my own goals of constructing a normative argument for the inclusion of CRL in teacher education programs in Canada. This empirical aspect of my dissertation serves to document not only how teacher educators and preservice teachers actually perceive, support, or understand the role of CRL for educators, but also how their own intersectional identities impact and are impacted by issues related to religion in the classroom. In this way, the empirical data in this dissertation and the analysis derived from it serve as 'building blocks' for making normative conclusions.

However, the purpose of this dissertation is not only to use empirical findings to normatively support the supposition that current teacher education programs are currently doing little to promote CRL as an educational aim. The aim is also prescriptive, in that I aim to motivate and provide guidance for revising and reforming teacher education programs. Thus, another objective of my dissertation is to outline several programmatic recommendations that will help to strengthen teacher education programs in the area of CRL. In particular, I will link these recommendations to the normative aims of social justice-oriented citizenship (SJOC) education mentioned above.

Thus, taken together, my dissertation's philosophical, empirical, and prescriptive aims endeavor to understand which theoretical approaches are most helpful in understanding how educators actually do view CRL and engage with issues related to religious diversity in their classrooms. What follows is an outline of my key objectives in undertaking this research:

Objectives:

1. **Philosophically**

    1. To understand what RL means in educational contexts and explore tensions between theoretical definitions of RL, including my own conception of CRL, and how it is applied in practice.

    2. To articulate why CRL should be included in teacher education programs as an educational aim for social justice-oriented citizenship.

    3. To understand the role of CRL as an educational aim to mitigate the potential harms, including epistemic harms, perpetuated by religious illiteracy.

2. **Empirically**

    1. To understand how CRL is perceived and employed as an educational aim for social justice-oriented citizenship in teacher education programs in a Canadian Prairie context.

    2. To understand the extent to which spiritual and religious identities are included or marginalized within teacher education and how this may impact pre-service teachers.

3. **Prescriptively**

    1. To promote awareness about the intersection of religion with other aspects of individual's identity.

    2. To advocate for greater attention to developing teacher education curricula that incorporate CRL as an educational aim for social justice-oriented citizenship (SJOC).

Definitions/Terminology
Religion

Religion is at the heart of this dissertation, and thus it requires defining. However, religion is notoriously tricky to define. Often times it is used interchangeably with the term 'faith,' and yet the concept of faith has a distinctly Western religious tone. Certain Eastern religions, notably Buddhism, are non-theistic and thus language of faith and deities is not always appropriate to describe one of the major world religions. Moreover, the term 'religion' also doesn't seem quite appropriate to describe how many Indigenous communities view their relationship with a transcendent realm and risks framing Indigenous experience with a colonizing lens (Dylan & Smallboy, 2017). However, it is necessary to attempt to define the term in a way that allows this discussion to proceed. In this light, this study understands and uses the term religion as defined below:

> A religion is a body of teachings and prescribed practices about an ultimate, sacred reality or state of being that calls for reverence or awe, that guides its practitioners into what it describes as a saving, illuminating, or emancipatory relationship to this reality through a personally transformative life of prayer, ritualized meditations, and/or moral practices like repentance and personal regeneration (Taliaferro & Marty, 2010, p. 196-197)

In this definition, we see that what is characteristic of religion is that encounter with the transcendent, along with the idea of some sort of system or organization of beliefs and practices. With its emphasis on a communal experience, this definition does not fully account for those who may consider themselves spiritual but not religious although they do not belong to any kind of community. Nevertheless, it is useful as a starting point from which to begin this study and will be used with the understanding of its limitations.

Spirituality, non-religiously affiliated, and worldview in North America

The terms 'religion' and 'spirituality' are understood to encompass a belief in or connection to something transcendent, whether it is conceived as God or some other form of higher power. For some, the two terms are overlapping, with spirituality being a term that encompasses religious beliefs but may also include beliefs and values not associated with a religion or tradition. However, for others spirituality often serves as a differentiating factor from those who identify with a religion. As Lindholm (2018) indicates, in contrast to how religion is often associated with a public expression, spirituality can be conceived of a "multidimensional construct that is associated with private thought and experience" (p.2). Moreover, as indicated in the 2012 Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion & Public Life, as many as 37% of individuals in the US choose to identify themselves as 'spiritual but not religious.' A 2019 report, *Religion, Non-Belief, Spirituality and Social Behaviour among North American Millennials*, found that eight percent of Canadian Millennials identified as 'spiritual but not religious' compared to six percent of Millennials from the US (Wilkins-Laflamme, 2019). This number may seem small, but when combined with those who identify with 'no preference of religion' but not as 'atheist', the numbers show that 24% of Canadian young adults and 19% of American millennials may see themselves as open to some form of spirituality that does not include belief in God or conventional religion.

Non-religiously affiliated

In a 2018 survey in Canada, the Pew Research Center found that three in ten Canadians said they have no religion (8% = atheists; 5% agnostics; 16% nothing in particular), while their

Religious Landscape study showed 22.8% identifying as 'unaffiliated' in the US.[7] And according

to Canadian census data, those who identify as religiously unaffiliated increased by 20% from

1971 to 2011. As Chan has pointed out, while the numbers of both Americans and Canadians

are dramatically on the rise, the trend is even more distinct in Canada where there has been a

600% increase in the numbers of those who identify as religiously unaffiliated compared to a

400% increase in the US (Chan et al., 2019). Several conceptions of RL exist globally and are

informed by the contextual nuances of the scholars who developed them in the UK, US and

Australia. As five Canadian scholar-educators across British Columbia, Alberta, Ontario and

Quebec, we analyse the well-known religious literacy conceptions of Jackson, Nesbitt, Dinham,

Moore and Crisp through a framework based on the recognition of context and experience. In

doing so, we propose a Canadian-specific conception that considers the contextual nuances in

these four provinces and relates to Canada as a nation and the individual experiences of each

author, and recognises the diversity across Canada. We posit that our conception addresses the

social and political dynamics and shifts in Canada, namely the changing demography of

religious, spiritual and non-religious individuals and the response to the Truth and

Reconciliation Commission report that calls Canadians and its institutions to respond to the

wrong towards First Nations, Metis and Inuit people (Chan et al., 2019) , underscoring the

importance of including this category of non-religious or non-religiously affiliated in all

discussions around religious literacy.

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[7] https://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/ accessed March 28, 2020

Worldview

The term 'worldview' has been proposed by scholars such as Dr. John Valk (2007; Valk et al., 2020) to include those perspectives on life that may include not only those religious or spiritual beliefs and understandings, but also those that are not related to a spiritual or religious view (Gardner et al., 2017). Humanism, for example, could be seen as worldview that encompasses an ethical understanding of one's responsibilities as a human. Perhaps because the term is inclusive of perspectives that permeate the way one understands and interacts with the world, without insisting that it is related to spirituality, 'worldview' is often employed in curricular documents, especially in the current Canadian context where there is a strong effort to incorporate Indigenous ways of knowing or worldviews (Battiste, 2013; Dharamshi, 2019; Dominguez, 2015; Tanchuk et al., 2018).

Ultimately, this dissertation does not attempt to make claims of superiority of 'religion' versus 'spirituality' or 'worldview', but I do acknowledge that these different terms are invoked by different scholars in different ways. Certainly, I do not propose a hierarchy between these terms; however, as will be seen in the next chapter, my use of the term CRL seeks to encompass all three of these commonly used terms.

Dissertation road map

This introductory chapter concludes with a brief overview of this dissertation by chapter. In this chapter, I have sought to articulate my own relationship to this research project through providing a background narrative, a rationale for the study, a brief review of key concepts and definitions, and a road-map to this dissertation.

Chapter Two

This chapter begins by defining RL broadly in the first section and then examining different types of teacher knowledge and teacher education in Canada in the second section. Section three considers the challenges religious illiteracy poses for teacher education along with the difficult realities of implementation. Section four reviews common approaches to this aspect of diversity in K-G education globally. Finally, in Section five, I examine several key conceptions of religious literacy, namely those of established scholars Stephen Prothero, Diane L. Moore, Robert Jackson, Andrew Dinham, along with more recent scholarship by Benjamin Marcus and Alice W.Y. Chan. I then extend these conceptions through a critical lens to arrive at my own CRL conception that will ground this dissertation.

Chapter Three

Chapter Three provides an extended theoretical framework, beginning in Section 1 where I explore the various aims of citizenship, including those I label *minimal democratic aims* and *critical democratic aims* that seek to address forms of oppression. In Section 2, I draw on Kimberlé Crenshaw's notion of intersectionality (1991) and Khyati Joshi's concept of White Christian privilege (2020) to demonstrate the complex ways religion and religious issues and identities appear in teacher education contexts and to provide a theoretical basis from which I ground my dissertation. Finally, I argue that the failure of to include CRL as an educational aim in teacher education programs may result in a kind of epistemic injustice (Fricker, 2007).

Chapter Four

In Chapter Four I provide an overview of my research design. I begin by situating my methodological approach in a critical constructivist ontology and discuss the challenges created

by my interdisciplinary 'bricolage' approach of philosophical inquiry mixed with empirical data from a qualitative case study, utilizing interviews and focus groups for data collection. The chapter then describes the research setting, and my approach to working with the data, including analysis, coding, and interpretation, and finishes with the limitations of this methodological approach.

Chapter Five

Chapter Five presents empirical data from the first phase of my study with faculty members in one Canadia teacher education program. This chapter discusses several key points of contention in public and scholarly debate on CRL in public education, and then presents four themes constructed from the participant interview responses. Ultimately, the data present a case for the inclusion of CRL as an educational aim for teacher education programs in diverse societies such as Canada.

Chapter Six

As in the previous chapter, Chapter Six presents empirical data collected from the second phase of my qualitative case study on the role of religious literacy in teacher education in Canada. This chapter examines the data collected from semi-structured interviews with preservice teachers in the same faculty of education as the previous chapter. Here, however, I investigate the perceptions and views of preservice teachers on the role of religious literacy as an educational aim for K-G schools where they do their practicum teaching.

Chapters Seven and Eight

Chapter Seven presents an analysis of the key findings in the previous chapters, considering the intersections of the two phases of the study and how these findings can be

conceptualized in light of my theoretical framework outlined in Chapter Three. This chapter is structured through a discussion of the two sets of findings for each of my central research questions, before turning to an analysis of these findings through each of the themes presented in Chapters Five and Six, and closes with recommendations related to policy and practice. Chapter Eight concludes the dissertation by providing an overview of the dissertation's key findings along with a discussion of its broad implications along with a consideration of its significant theoretical and methodological contributions to scholarship.

Chapter 2: Religious Literacy and its role in teacher education

My doctoral research set out to examine the perceptions and views of those involved with teacher education – both faculty and preservice teachers – on the role of CRL for Canadian Kindergarten – Graduation (K-G) educators. This chapter addresses the problem of teacher religious illiteracy and seeks to explain why this problem is urgent. Section 1 provides a rationale for the study by introducing the problem of religious illiteracy in teacher education to contextualize and situate the rest of the chapter. Section 2 provides an overview of the context of teacher education and types of teacher knowledge, focusing on how literature in this field has addressed issues that arise in equipping K-G teachers to engage with increasingly diverse classrooms. After examining popular pedagogical approaches to navigating diversity coming from multicultural theorists, I consider how these approaches respond to the need for K-G teachers to engage with religious diversity in their classrooms along with other aspects of diversity. Section 3 of this chapter considers the kinds of knowledge, skills, or capacities teacher education programs need to prioritize for K-G educators to both engage effectively with religious diversity in their classrooms and guide their students through the ethically complex problems encountered in a religiously pluralistic society. It also outlines key challenges teacher educators face in this task, namely lack of RL among preservice teachers, preservice teacher assumptions, and difficulties in program implementation. Section 4 examines how teacher education in other locales characterized by pluralism have responded to the problem of educating teachers for religiously diverse classrooms. Because of its prominence in recent scholarly discourse at the intersection of religion and teacher education in Canada, this section begins with an extended review of Quebec's Ethics and Religious Culture program before

moving further afield to explore the approaches of the USA, Australia, the UK and Europe.

Section 5 explores varying, and at times competing, conceptions of RL from established and emerging scholars before concluding with a proposal for a conception of a critical religious literacy (CRL) to guide teacher education programs in their task of equipping preservice teachers to be religiously literate.

Section 1: Introduction/Background

Canadian teacher educators are tasked with equipping preservice teachers for the enormous tasks of ensuring their own diverse K-G students possess the skills and knowledge necessary for participating in a democratic and pluralistic society. In diverse societies such as Canada, one issue that complicates this task of teacher educators is that today's preservice teachers will almost certainly be working in classrooms that are more diverse than they were even ten years ago, and they will be expected to have the necessary skills to engage effectively with this diversity, regardless of their own background or experiences (Statistics Canada, 2018). Indeed, for decades, multicultural educational theorists have been calling for a culturally relevant pedagogy (Banks, 2006; Cochran-Smith, 2004; Delpit, 1995; Gillborn & Ladson-Billings, 2004; Nieto, 2017) that encourages teacher education programs to consider these intersections, but until recently, these calls generally neglected to include religious and/or spiritual identity as an aspect of diversity (Subedi, 2006; White, 2010). Due to a variety of factors, including what Canadian theorist Will Kymlicka calls the 're-politicization' of religion: a global trend where immigrant youth tend to identify along religious lines, as Muslims, for example, rather than national ones (2015, p. 27). Kymlicka goes on to argue that religion "…is perhaps the key question for multiculturalism at the start of the 21st century" (p. 27). Given

this increasing importance of religious diversity in Canadian K-G schools, this lack of attention to

preparing pre-service teachers for religious and spiritual diversity in their classrooms is

problematic for multiple reasons outlined below.

First, the failure to attend to religious issues or identities in education is problematic

because of the centrality of religion to many aspects of education as has been outlined by many

scholars including Nord, Prothero, Moore among others. Nel Noddings points out how this

omission impacts the teaching of history for example, noting how 'We simply excise a

substantial part of our own history when we omit discussion of religion' (2008, p. 370). Second,

ignoring religion in educational contexts creates the potential to harm students through a

failure to recognize an intrinsic part of their identities(Guo, 2015a; Patrick, 2015). The

consequences of this are outlined by James et al., who write

> We might wish to sweep these issues under the rug—relegating religion to the private sphere where it makes us more comfortable. But in a pluralist, democratic society, we must be willing to engage difficult discussions about the role of religion in schools and classrooms. Our avoidance of religion, after all, does not mean that it goes away. If anything, an unwillingness to examine religions allows attitudes about it to run rampant, leading to marginalization and discrimination through the taken-for granted nature of its presence or absence. (2015, p. 13)

Indeed, scholars have noted how this failure to attend to religious identities of students harms

students through the reinforcement of religious stereotypes (Aronson et al., 2016; Burritt,

2020; Ipgrave, 2010) and even religious bullying (Chan, 2014, 2019; Gardner et al., 2017).

Aronsen et al., notes how "Without unmasking and unmaking these conventions in schools, we

continue to perpetuate hegemonic discourses that reinforce stereotypes like "all Jews are

wealthy" and "all Muslims are terrorists" (Aronson et al., 2016, p.144). Moreover, in the North

American context, omitting religion or religious identities in curriculum or practice upholds and sustains the invisible Christian privilege common in K-G schools that "maintains the marginality of already marginalized religions, faiths, and spiritual communities" (Blumenfeld et al., 2009, p. 196). Invisible Christian privilege manifests in such seemingly innocuous examples such as our societally accepted week days versus weekend, or when school holidays occur, or which religious symbols are acceptable to wear and how decisions about this are related to underlying questions about educational aims and purposes (Guo, 2015a; McDonough et al., 2015; Seljak, 2012). This invisible privilege clearly marginalizes students belonging to religious minorities while benefiting those belonging to the dominant group – whether or not they consider themselves practicing Christians.

This leads to an important related point about the racialization of religion. Religious discrimination is often intertwined with racial discrimination most frequently seen in a North American context when an individual's religion is assumed due to their race. An example of this is when a South Asian student is assumed to be Hindu or Muslim, when in fact they are Christian. Indeed, in her most recent work, Khyati Joshi (2020) convincingly argues that Christian privilege in a North American context is more accurately articulated as "White Christian privilege." If teacher educators are to be effective helping preservice teachers create equitable and inclusive classrooms, then they must consider students' intersectional identities – including religious identities and how these may intersect with other aspects of their identity (Crenshaw, 1991).

Finally, the sidelining of religion or religious issues in teacher education is problematic because increasing religious diversity in Canadian K-G schools complicates a key task for all

educators: to educate their students for citizenship. As Sears and Herriott note, "Good citizenship does not require adherence to religion, but it does require informed and empathetic engagement with it" (2016, p.301). Given the importance of good citizenship as an educational aim for K-G educators, there is good cause to reflect on the competencies and values of citizenship outlined in educational policy documents of the three Prairie provinces.

Indeed, the Saskatchewan Social Studies curriculum includes 'Engaged Citizenship' as one of its three overarching curricular aims along with 'Lifelong Learners' and 'Sense of Self, Community, and Place[9]'. In a similar vein, the Manitoba Social Studies curriculum outcomes document[10] states that "The core concept of citizenship provides a focus for social studies learning across all grades" (p.1). As another example of the centrality of citizenship aims in Canadian Prairies' K-G education policies and their relevance to CRL, consider the example of the *Alberta School Act* which asks educators to educate students to be "engaged thinkers, ethical citizens with an entrepreneurial spirit,"[11] and how these relate to religious diversity. This document describes an ethical citizen as someone who "commits to democratic ideals" (although it does not specify what those are), "engages with many cultures, religions, and languages," and "values diversity in all people and adapts to any situation." Thus, asking teachers to encourage their students to not only *engage* with religion but also *value* this kind of diversity implies that teachers not only value this type of diversity but are equipped to engage with it themselves.

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[9] See page 3 of *Renewed Curricula: Understanding the Outcomes* (2010) retrieved from
https://www.edonline.sk.ca/webapps/moe-curriculum-BB5f208b6da4613/CurriculumHome?id=168
[10] See page 1 of the *Manitoba Curriculum Framework of Outcomes* (2003) retrieved from
https://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/cur/socstud/framework/introduction.pdf
[11] The question of whether the competencies of ethical citizenship and entrepreneurial spirit are at odds is an excellent one that has been addressed by Pashby (2016). It is, however, beyond the scope of this dissertation.

However, research has repeatedly indicated that K-G teachers are ill-equipped to deal with the challenges that religious pluralism presents in their classrooms, regardless of its importance as an aim of educating for a social justice-oriented citizenship (Castro, 2013; Fry & O'Brien, 2015; Kyles & Olafson, 2008; Moore, 2014; Subedi, 2006; White, 2010). Instead, scholars have noted that K-G teachers often choose to avoid potentially controversial subjects including religion or spirituality, prioritizing accepted topics in the given curriculum that frequently represent mainstream views of citizenship (Parker, 2016), rather than those more closely aligned with a social justice-oriented citizenship (SJOC) that directly engage with issues related to equity and resisting oppression (Cook & Westheimer, 2006; Westheimer, 2015, p. 240).

Even when issues of equity, identity, and oppression are explicitly addressed in K-G education through a SJOC approach, religion and spirituality are still often omitted. In the Canadian context, K-G educational institutions are currently responding to the *Calls to Action* of the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2015)*, creating a strong impetus for teacher educators to ensure that pre-service teachers will be equipped to teach in a way that acknowledges, reflects, and respects the various First Nations, Metis, and Indigenous (FNMI) communities and histories across Canada. As one Canadian Prairie example, 2016-2018 drafts of the revised K-4 Alberta Education curriculum contained an explicit focus on issues related to FNMI cultures in Alberta, and significantly included this focus as one of the Teaching Quality Standards, as TQS #5 (Alberta Education)[12]. There is no doubt that this focus on indigenizing

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[12] The K-G curriculum is again under revisions under the UCP government. The UCP's most recent K-6 draft has been heavily criticized on multiple fronts, one of which is the decreased focus on FNMI issues, especially in K-3

curriculum is long overdue as a move to create a more equitable and inclusive education system, but even in this move to Indigenize K-G classrooms and curriculum, a notable omission in that K-G curriculum draft was any mention of religion, and only one mention of spirituality. Similarly, in the Manitoba Education and Youth teacher handbook *Integrating Aboriginal Perspectives Into Curricula* (2003)[13], created to help teachers indigenize their classrooms, spirituality is the focus of two short paragraphs in the comprehensive seventy-three page document. These omissions are significant not only because of the important role spirituality plays for many FNMI individuals and communities (Big Head, 2011), but also because religious and spiritual diversity has been increasing in the Canadian Prairies in recent decades due to both high rates of immigration as well as high birth rates among Indigenous communities (Chan et al., 2019).

When there is this kind of curricular silence, or what Eisner (1994) has called a 'null curriculum,' there is an inevitable impact on those who do not find themselves represented. This impact may be conceptualized as what Miranda Fricker (2007) has called an epistemic injustice, perpetuating a kind of harm to those religiously or spiritually identified students. While a closer examination of these concepts and of the aims of citizenship in public education as they relate to RL will be presented in the proceeding chapter, what I wish to highlight here is how religiously and racially diverse educational contexts present challenges for all educators tasked with educating for aims tied to certain conceptions of citizenship. Ultimately, I argue that in order to meet the complex task of equipping preservice teachers to educate for social

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years. (https://globalnews.ca/news/7722850/cree-elder-alberta-k-6-curriculum/). The latest draft is undergoing revisions and will not be ready until late 2022.
[13] Retrieved from https://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/docs/policy/abpersp/ab_persp.pdf

justice-orientated citizenship and mitigating epistemic injustice, teacher education programs

must prepare them for the skills and capacities to engage with religious diversity and identities

in their classrooms.

Defining religious literacy

Increasingly, scholars have turned to the concept of RL as a framework for discussing

the competencies and knowledge necessary to understand and navigate issues related to

religion. Although the term has been in circulation since the 1990s, it has gained traction in

recent decades and has generated a proliferation of scholarship concerned with the role of RL

in public education in localized contexts within North America (Chan, Mistry, et al., 2019; Chan

& McDonough, 2018; Moore, 2007, 2014; Prothero, 2007; Richardson, 2017; Subedi, 2006),

Europe (Hannam & Biesta, 2019; Kuusisto et al., 2017; Niemi et al., 2020; Rissanen et al., 2016;

Ubani, 2018; von Brömssen et al., 2020), and the UK (Conroy, 2016; Dinham & Francis, 2015;

Jackson, 2004; Jackson & Everington, 2017; Shaw, 2020), as well as Australia (Bouma and

Halafoff, 2009; Burritt, 2020; Byrne, 2014; Halafoff, et al., 2020; Keddie et al., 2019) and

Pakistan (Ashraf, 2019).

Perhaps one of the first to use the term religious literacy in academic discussions,

Andrew Wright defines RL as 'the ability, and inability, to reflect, communicate and act in an

informed, intelligent and sensitive manner towards the phenomenon of religion' (Wright 1993,

47), highlighting the importance of developing awareness of religious difference. One of the

most commonly cited definitions of RL comes from the Director of the Religious Literacy Project

at Harvard Divinity School, Diane L. Moore, who describes RL as

...the ability to discern and analyze the fundamental intersections of religion and social/political/cultural life through multiple lenses. Specifically, a religiously literate person will possess 1) a basic understanding of the history, central texts (where applicable), beliefs, practices and contemporary manifestations of several of the world's religious traditions as they arose out of and continue to be shaped by particular social, historical and cultural contexts; and 2) the ability to discern and explore the religious dimensions of political, social and cultural expressions across time and place.

While a thorough analysis of Moore's conception is presented in Section 5 of this chapter, briefly, this definition encourages K-G educators to consider the integral role religion plays throughout all parts of students' lives, including historical, social, and cultural aspects. Others, such as Adam Dinham, remind educators that any concept of RL must include a conception of the secular as well as religion, noting that "The conversation about religion is impeded by the paucity of the conversation about the secular" (Dinham & Francis, 2015p. 14). Thus, a well-prepared K-G teacher must be ready to engage in discussions and activities that provide room for *all* viewpoints, religious, spiritual, or not, and possess the nuanced understanding that secularism is so often the default, unarticulated backdrop in the K-G classroom. Furthermore, a teacher well-equipped to engage with religious diversity and identities should also understand that RL ought to be seen as "an individual and social good, from the ability of individuals to make informed choices about the beliefs that influence their moral understandings, to the moral goods of increasing understanding respect and tolerance, and responsible political and civic engagement" (Richardson, 2017, p. 364). To summarize briefly, RL provides a blueprint to prepare K-G teachers to demonstrate sensitivity to religious difference, to situate religious and non-religious perspectives in context, and to attend to those 'moral goods' of a social justice-oriented citizenship, preventing them from perpetuating epistemic harm.

Section 2: Teacher education, teacher knowledge, and curricular considerations

Teacher education can take many forms, including one that begins even before preservice education begins and lasts throughout educators' careers. Indeed, all teachers will have received their first experience in teacher education long before they ever set foot in a university or college. As noted by Gardener et. al, the teaching profession is unique in that virtually everyone has had the experience of observing teachers through having been a K-G student (2017). This process of observation will, for many future teachers, have a profound effect on how they understand what it is to be a teacher. This has implications when considering the role of RL as an educational aim because we know that in most North American K-G public schools, there have been little to no curricular mandated learning outcomes related to religious literacy for generations, ensuring the likelihood that today's K-G educators, and teacher educators, will not have observed RL being taught (Gallagher, 2018).

In Canada, education lies under provincial jurisdiction, resulting in great variation in formal teacher education programs provinces. In most provinces, those wishing to become K-G teachers will typically enrol in either a four- or five-year Bachelor of Education, often in combination with another bachelor degree, such as math or history. In some provinces such as Ontario, preservice teacher education is completed as a two-year post-bachelor program, although there are institutions such as Queen's University which provide concurrent degree programs. Meanwhile, in other provinces, such as Alberta, preservice teacher education programs are either a four-year Bachelor of education or a two year after-degree program. In line with other locales, these teacher education programs generally include components of

subject-knowledge, pedagogical theory, teaching strategies, and practical teaching experience

(Shulman, 1986; Ball, 2000; Beck & Kosnick, 2017).

Another place where teacher education occurs is through professional development

during a one's career as an educator. Indeed, in-service workshops, formal or informal

mentoring, and professional learning communities (PLCs) are common ways for many teachers

to expand and increase their pedagogical knowledge and skills (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009;

Zeichner & Liston, 2013). One of the few examples of such a professional learning opportunity

for in-service teachers to gain understanding about religion or teaching about religion in public

schools is the Harvard Divinity School's '*Religious Literacy Project*'[15]. However, to date, there is

no equivalent for professional learning opportunity for K-G educators in Canada. Scholars such

as Beck & Kosnick (2017) remind us that teacher education is best conceptualized as a

continuum of preservice and in-service education that coordinates the professional learning

throughout one's education and career; in other words, preservice teachers are encouraged to

understand themselves as lifelong learners who use their practical experiences to strengthen

their academic understandings. This is useful to remember when considering RL as an

educational aim for teacher educators because it highlights the importance of having RL a part

of K-G teachers' education from inception – not only as professional learning workshop or

program later in their careers. Indeed, because it is the most common point of entry into the

teaching profession, and because there is a paucity of research in this area, this dissertation

focuses on preservice teacher education programs.

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[15] Harvard Divinity School's "Religious Literacy Project" https://rlp.hds.harvard.edu/programs/religious-literacy-and-education-initiative

Types of teacher knowledge

There are several ways of considering and conceptualizing teacher knowledge. First, there is a distinction between subject matter knowledge and pedagogical knowledge. In other words, having a thorough understanding a subject does not mean one is able to teach it effectively, to which scores of university students can attest. Thus, a starting point in a discussion about types of teacher knowledge must be that teachers must possess both knowledge about a particular subject matter along with the pedagogical knowledge and skills to teach it effectively, something Shulman (1986) has referred to as pedagogical content knowledge. Regardless of how we conceive of teacher knowledge, there is a long-standing pattern of teachers resisting theoretical knowledge over practical experience (Labaree, 2008). This is important to consider when considering the role of RL because it reminds us that any attempts to introduce religious literacy into teacher education must be based on more than theoretical conceptualizations. For RL to be effectively transmitted in teacher education, it must be grounded in the practical experiences and challenges preservice teachers face in their classrooms. Teacher educators may accomplish this through strategies such as using case studies that involve issues related to religion from the preservice teachers' practicum placements, for example, or by encouraging preservice educators to include examples of religious diversity in their own lesson planning activities.

However, it is equally true that the teacher educators' task is never as simple as providing preservice teachers with a series of tools or lesson plans for them to take with them into their future workplace. Rather, teacher educators are faced with a complex task of ensuring that preservice teachers will be prepared to not only deliver lessons that ensure

students meet specific outcomes, but also to handle difficult situations that may arise in their classrooms. In recent decades, teacher education has worked to articulate strategies of how to educate preservice teachers to deal with the complexities of navigating issues related to diversity, such as race, gender, and class. This next section examines how teacher education scholarship has addressed diversity-related issues more broadly, focusing on work grounded in multicultural educational theory and considers conceptions of culturally relevant pedagogy and its role in educating in diverse societies.

Multicultural and Culturally relevant pedagogy

The domain of multicultural education is vast and may encompass dramatically different pedagogical theories; as such, scholars have proposed different frameworks to map the terrain of this field. Building on the work of McLaren (1995) and Jenks et al. (2001), Gorski (2009) developed a useful framework for considering the different possible approaches that fall under the term 'multicultural teacher education' (MTE) – this framework is particularly useful when considering how teacher educators navigate issues of power, oppression related to identities such as religion or race. Gorski's typology of MTE (2009) is as follows:

Table 1: Gorski's typology of MTE

Conservative approach	Liberal approach	Critical approach
Teaching the 'other'	Approach #1: Teaching with cultural sensitivity	Approach #1: Teaching in Sociopolitical context
	Approach #2: Teaching with multicultural competence	Approach #2: Teaching as resistance and counter-hegemonic practice
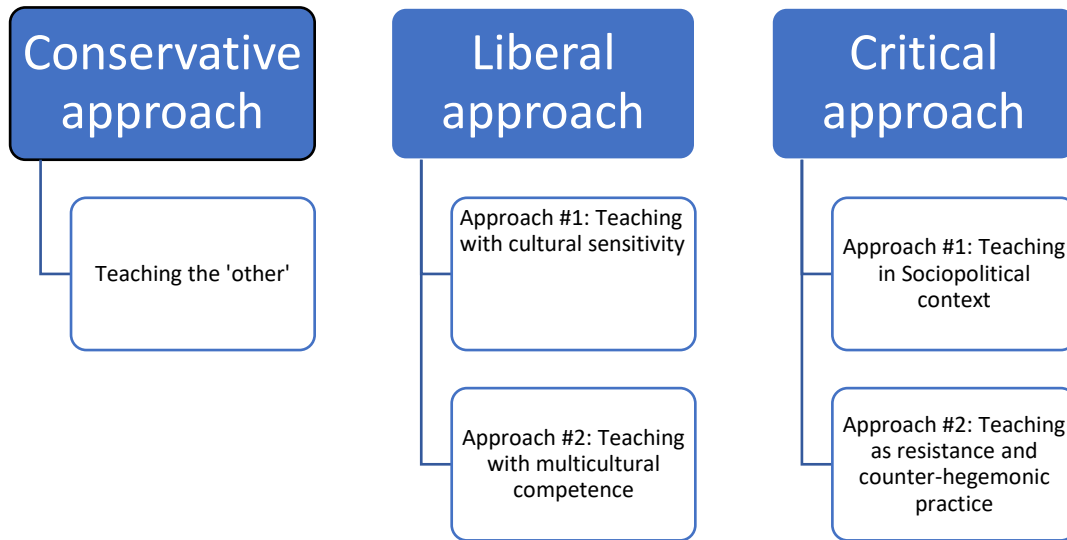
While all three approaches agree that sociopolitical context is relevant educationally, they differ in terms of how they define the sociopolitical context and what they considered as relevant in multicultural education. Gorski critiques both conservative and liberal approaches to MTE: He critiques the former because it does little more than seek to assimilate those perceived as 'other' into the existing hegemonic institutional structures, whereas he critiques the latter because in their efforts to encourage preservice teachers to celebrate diversity in their classrooms, they ignore or obscure questions of power and structures of oppression. Gorski's conservative and liberal conceptions of MTE share similar features of the first two of Banks' four phases of multicultural education (ME): contributions and additive (2012) and with Nieto's monocultural education and tolerance (1994: 2017). In this sense, Gorski's critical approach to MTE is aligned with educational policy scholars such as Ghosh (2011, 2013), who has likewise argued that a conception of critical multiculturalism is needed to move from education that simply asks for recognition or tolerance of different identities to an education that demands that educators engage in critical discussions with students about issues of power

and equity. This critical MTE also aligns with what Banks has called 'transformative' and 'social action' ME (2004; 2012) and what Nieto has called 'respect' phase and 'affirmation, solidarity and critique' phase (1994; 2017). I conceptualize teacher education within a critical typology, and agree with Gorski & Parekh's articulation that "Critical MTE prepares teachers to participate in the reconstruction of schools by advocating equity, confronting issues of power and privilege, and disrupting oppressive policies and practices" (2020, p. 266).

For at least three decades educational theorists have been calling for a 'culturally relevant pedagogy' that provides a framework for educators seeking to understand and engage with diversity in the classroom (Delpit, 1995; Gillborn & Ladson-Billings, 2004; Nieto, 2017). Ladson-Billings (2014) has been especially influential in defining culturally relevant pedagogy as "the ability to help students appreciate and celebrate their cultures of origin while gaining knowledge of and fluency in at least one other culture" (p. 75). In a similar vein, others have noted that what educators need is a "culturally responsive teaching" (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). It is thus logical that for teachers to teach with a culturally relevant or responsive pedagogy, they must possess the knowledge and skills required to do so. However, for decades teacher educators have struggled to equip preservice teachers for culturally responsive teaching. A central challenge for teacher educators in this task is that pre-service teachers in North America remain a largely homogenous population of White , middle-class, heterosexual females compared to the increasingly diverse classrooms within which they will be teaching (Castro, 2013; Gay, 2010; Sleeter & McLaren, 1995). Before entering their classrooms, many, if not most, of these pre-service candidates will have had little engagement with diverse populations (Kahn, Lindstrom, & Murrary, 2014; Hollins & Torres-Guzman, 2005). Moreover, research has

long indicated that although pre-service teachers should be knowledgeable about issues related to diversity (Delpit, 1995), they often resist challenging their own preconceptions and biases (Sleeter, 2008; Obidah & Howard, 2005). Thus, critical multicultural theorists have argued for teachers to develop a greater critical awareness about various categories of diversity, such as race, gender, and social class (Banks, 2006; Cochran-Smith, 2004; Gillborn & Ladson-Billings, 2004; Nieto, 2017; Obidah & Teel, 2001; Sleeter & Grant, 1999), proposing that teacher educators prioritize critical self-reflection (Kyles & Olafson, 2008), diversity-related courses, and even promoting intercultural experiences or friendships (Kahn, Lindstrom, & Murrary, 2014).

However, as White (2010) notes, when it comes to the inclusion of religion, even critical multiculturalists such as Banks (2001) and Sleeter & Grant (2003) tend to omit religion as a category of diversity in the practical examples given. Indeed, when it comes to equipping pre-service educators with the tools needed to encounter and engage with religious diversity in their classrooms, research suggests that teacher education still has a long way to go to do this effectively (Nord, 2010). Anderson et. al (2014) indicate that in the US over 90% of members of the National Council for Social Studies stated that their teacher education had not prepared them sufficiently to engage with issues related to religious diversity in their classrooms.

Section 3: What are the challenges for teacher education programs to include RL?

K-G educators have the challenge to simultaneously teach students with the goal of fostering shared civic values and competencies while acknowledging and respecting the diverse identities these students bring. This is a complex task when these students bring with them deep diversity, especially religious diversity. The following discussion examines current

educational scholarship to explore the challenges teacher educators may encounter in educating for RL: teacher religious illiteracy, teacher assumptions about religion in the K-G classroom, and difficulties in implementing RL.

Teacher religious illiteracy

Although there has been an increase in public discussions and initiatives to increase RL as an educational aim for public education, the impact initiatives is often limited partially because K-G teachers have so little RL themselves (Gardner et al., 2017; Moore, 2007; Morris et al., 2011). In Subedi's 2006 empirical study of preservice teacher beliefs about religion, she notes how the vast majority of her 50 preservice teachers knew very little about religious traditions other than their own predominantly Christian one. Moreover, these preservice teachers tended to resist developing lesson plans about religious diversity, even when asked; those who did demonstrated their strong epistemological assumptions of Christian privilege with lessons about "Christmases around the world" (p. 235). One salient example of the problem of teacher religious illiteracy is the Ethics and Religious Culture (ERC) program in Quebec. This program has had an ambitious goal of teaching about religion and religious diversity but research indicates that the program's ability to meet this goal is seriously hampered by K-G teachers' lack of RL (Boudreau, 2011; Estivalèzes, 2017; Gravel, 2019; S. Jafralie, 2017).

Teacher assumptions

Perhaps one of the greatest challenges to ensuring preservice teachers are equipped to navigate issues related to religious diversity in K-G schools is that K-G teachers often contribute to religious illiteracy by choosing to avoid directly engaging with religious diversity in the classroom. This is often due to commonly held assumptions, including that religion is not an

appropriate topic because it is too personal or that it is liable to lead to difficult conversations

(Anderson D. et al., 2015). These assumptions are problematic for at least two reasons. First, in

failing to adequately consider the role of religion in the classroom, teachers are complicit in

maintaining a 'hidden curriculum' where secular views are promoted and encouraged over

religious ones (Gardner et al., 2017; Moore, 2007). This fails to account for the impact of beliefs

– either students' or teachers', whether they are religious or not -- and how these beliefs

necessarily impact teaching and learning (Anderson et. al, 2015; Hartwick, 2015; White, 2009).

Second, in assuming that religion is not an appropriate subject for classrooms because it may

lead to difficult conversations, teachers miss an important opportunity to engage in a critical

and transformative pedagogy that accounts for the intersection of religious identities in the

construction of learner identity (Subedi, 2006; White, 2010). Thus, there is a strong rationale

for teacher educators to consider RL as an important component in helping preservice teachers

in their task of educating for social justice-oriented citizenship.

Implementation

Even if preservice educators are open to the idea of teaching for RL, the act of teaching

RL as an educational aim for social justice-oriented citizenship in the K-G public school

classroom poses several challenges to educators (Wertheimer, 2015). Given the low levels of RL

across the public in recent decades (PEW Forum, 2016), today's young people are often left to

learn about religion – if they learn about it all – from one of three places: the media, their

parents, or their own faith community. These other sources may present distorted or ill-

informed views about religion and about particular religious traditions, practices, or

communities. First, the media's tendency to portray negative religious stereotypes has been

well-documented (Nord, 2010; Subedi, 2006). Second, parental beliefs about religion have a strong impact on their children, and parents may make considerable demands on teachers to address or not address religion in specific ways, or to address or not address certain topics due to religious beliefs (Patrick et al., 2017). Quebec's current on-going debate over public servants, including teachers, wearing religious symbols is an example of a context where K-G teachers are likely to encounter parents with strong beliefs about the place of religious attire, highlighting the kinds of challenges today's K-G teachers are likely to face in implementing RL as an educational aim. Third, faith communities may educate their members to have a broad perspective of diverse worldviews, but then again, they may not (Gutmann, 1999, 2009; Moore, 2010); it is not unusual for faith communities to offer little education about traditions other than their own, and there is a real danger of religious indoctrination (Valk, 2017). Furthermore, unlike public schools, these other sources of information about religion are not legally accountable to public, democratic norms[16]. Yet another challenge to consider when discussing implementation of RL for teacher education programs, is that even when religion does appear in K-G classroom content, such as in a social studies class, it is frequently presented in a context of conflict, focusing on historical wrongs such as the Crusades, the Inquisition, or 9-11 (Valk, 2017). While there is no denying religion's role in such events, focusing exclusively on religion as a site of conflict or violence creates a distorted view of religion that neglects the contributions of religion on the human rights movement, anti-poverty work, and commitments to social justice movements (Ibid).

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[16] Although of course, the extent to which private religious schools are legally accountable also varies significantly across different contexts in Western societies (Maxwell, Waddington, and McDonough., 2013).

The call for RL in teacher education programs is thus one that clearly faces substantial challenges, and different locales have sought to treat the issue of religion and religious diversity in K-G schools differently – with varying levels of success. The following section examines how the different geographic contexts of Canada, the US, Australia, the UK, and Europe have engaged with religion in their K-G education systems.

Section 4: Teacher education and religion in other locales

Canadian contexts

In Canada, education has been under provincial jurisdiction since the 1867 Constitution Act, thus, each province's education system reflects the unique locale and whichever political influences are in favour at any given time. With the exception of Quebec and Newfoundland that have (or 'had' in the case of Quebec) a provincially mandated program to teach religion in public K-G schools, other Canadian provinces such as Ontario and BC have adopted a similar approach wherein they provide explicit focus on religion or spirituality mainly through optional World Religions courses at the high school level (Chan et al., 2019). The exceptions to this are the many publicly funded Catholic school boards that exist in six of the Canadian provinces or Territories, which have their own religious education programs that maintain a confessional perspective. [17]As a rare example of a mandatory religious education program that was non-confessional in nature, the controversial ERC program in Quebec ran for more than a decade and received a great deal of both public and scholarly discourse. Because of its prominence in these forums, and because it serves to highlight both the difficulties of implementing a K-G

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[17] As mentioned earlier, in Quebec, the current English and French school boards are relatively recent categorizations that were previously separated along faith lines of Protestant and Catholic up until the late 1990s. This is one reason why the ERC program was created as a replacement for the previous Moral and Religious education course that was mandatory in the former faith-based school boards (Boudreau, 2011; Gravel, 2019).

program that directly addresses religious literacy and the ethical complexities that teachers of

such a program may encounter, this program will be explored before considering religious

education in the other locales of the US, Australia, the UK and Europe.

Quebec – the Ethics and Religious Culture Program

Established in 2008, Québec's Ethics and Religious Culture program (ERC) was one of the

only government mandated K-G programs in North America that included explicit teaching

about religion (as distinguished from religious education) and has been the focus of much

research, from teacher perspectives and imposed teacher neutrality (Boudreau, 2011; Morris,

2011; McDonough, 2011; McDonough et al., 2015; Zaver & DeMartini, 2017; Jafralie, 2016;

Jafralie, 2017; Gravel, 2018; Maxwell & Hirsch, 2019), to curriculum (Abdou & Chan, 2017;

Boisvert, 2015; Hirsch, 2018) and to comparative studies on similar programs globally

(Bindewald et al., 2017; Brockman, 2016). The ERC program received significant public attention

due to negative media reaction and to controversial legal cases challenging its legitimacy,

including the Drummondville case (2009) where parents contended that the mandatory nature

of the case infringed on their parental rights to teach their children their own values; the case

was eventually overturned by the Supreme Court (Estivalèzes, 2017). Another legal challenge

faced by the ERC was the Loyola High School case where a private Catholic school's request to

be exempt from teaching religion from a neutral position infringed on their rights to teach their

own tradition from a faith perspective. In 2012 the Supreme Court ruled that Loyal High School

teachers could be exempt from the mandated neutrality, but that they must teach other

religions from a neutral stance (Boudreau, 2011; Estivalèzes, 2017; Morris, 2011; Tremblay,

2019).

Considering the ERC as an example is useful in that the issue of teacher religious illiteracy has already been established as a key problem in the program's implementation (Boudreau, 2011; Estivalèzes, 2012; Paradis, 2014; Gravel, 2015; Jafralie, 2016; Chan, 2018). It is also a cautionary tale regarding the difficulties of establishing a program that overtly addresses ethically complex topics such as religion; for, in January 2020, the Coalition Avenir Québec (CAQ) provincial government voted to replace the ERC with an 'updated' curriculum that, in the words of Education Minister Jean-François Roberge, "The objective is to make more room for 21st-century themes. Inevitably, by making room for these new concepts, there will be less room for the concept of religious culture" (Marchand, 2020). This move to deemphasize religious content in the ERC is unsurprising in the context of the political currents of the CAQ government, which has also introduced and upheld the contentious Law 21 that prohibits public workers to wear religious symbols. As noted by McDonough et al. (2015), this debate about the wearing of religious symbols by public servants effectively obscures legitimate conversation about the ethical complexities of professional obligations of teachers of religiously diverse classrooms in pluralistic secular societies by replacing such necessary pedagogical reflections with a low-level polarizing public debate on bans (p. 262).

The revisioning of the ERC may signal an uphill battle for the inclusion of religious literacy in Canadian K-G schools, which in turn impacts teacher education programs. The decision highlights the contentious nature of religion in K-G schools, as well as the difficulties facing teacher educators who are tasked with preparing preservice teachers to engage with religious diversity in their classrooms. As Chan, (2018) has noted, even when teacher education programs create room for equipping preservice educators to teach a course like the ERC, there

is often little attention on helping preservice teachers understand how to teach rather than simply what to teach. In other words, the focus on content of different religious traditions often takes up all the space in these teacher education programs at the expense of focusing on the pedagogical skills required to teach an ethically complex subject like religion in a religiously diverse society.

Regardless of the substantial difference between Canadian and US K-G education, US scholars have likewise highlighted the need for K-G teachers to be better prepared to educate in religiously diverse classrooms and to educate for RL, noting that teachers refrain from engaging with religious issues in their classes either because they are scared of the controversy it may create, the legal issues they may encounter, or because they deem it unimportant (Gardner et al., 2017; Soules, 2019). Moreover, Soules & Jafralie note in their 2021 review that while teacher education programs may offer electives on religion or religious studies, there are few programs in North America[18] offering a certification specifically for teaching religious studies in public schools, suggesting that religion as a subject is seen as peripheral to teacher education (p.12). This urgency to address this lack of attention to RL in teacher education is amplified in a recent White paper calling for US educational institutions to establish effective teacher training for both preservice and in-service educators (Marcus & Ralph, 2021). While there are some promising professional development opportunities for teachers in the US to develop their own religiously literacy, such as the Harvard Divinity School's Religious Literacy

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[18] Université de Laval in Québec is one exception offering a BEd in Univers social et développement personnel in which one pathway is 'histoire, éthique et culture religieuse' that includes mandatory courses on religions.

Project[19] mentioned previously, there appears to be few efforts to integrate this aspect of diversity into existing courses in university level teacher education programs (Robinson, 2015). This absence is notable as it suggests that university level teacher education programs may balk at including robust discussions of religion or religious literacy in their classrooms because of an underlying hostility to religion in the North American academic environment, something which is explored later in this dissertation.

Australia

Australia, similar to Canada, has a historical legacy of education being under the jurisdiction of a colonial Christian education system that has transformed into the contemporary secular K-G public school system. And similar to the other jurisdictions we have seen, scholars have called for a greater focus on RL in K-G education to combat religious intolerance, stereotyping, and even hate crimes that befall religious minority groups (Bouma & Halafoff, 2009; Byrne, 2014). In response to rapidly increasing diversity, the newly revised Victorian (provincial) K-G Humanities curriculum includes the aim of understanding religious diversity; however, scholars have noted that as with Québec's ERC program, there appears to be little attention in teacher education programs to equipping preservice teachers to actually teach this aspect of the curriculum (Keddie et al., 2019; Burritt, 2020).

UK and Europe

Religious education in the UK and Europe has developed quite differently from North American and Australian contexts. In the UK, Religious Education (RE) is compulsory for all K-G

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[19] "Religious Studies in Public Schools Mapping Project," Religious Literacy Project, https://rlp.hds.harvard.edu/programs/religious-literacy-and-education-initiative/religious-studies-in-public-schools-mapping-project

students in state funded schools although local school districts work closely with RE Standing

Advisory Council to create a syllabus that reflects the local religious or non-religious make up of

that community (Newcombe, 2013). Along with the academic study of religious traditions, the

RE curriculum has the aim of personal development, and asks students to engage in reflective

thinking, requiring what Robert Jackson calls an Interpretive approach (1997). This bridging of

personal reflection with a facts-based approach to teaching RE underscores the importance of

equipping RE educators with the skills, disposition, and attitude to handle the complexities this

classes will inevitably require (Dinham, 2015; Jackson & Everington, 2017; Shaw, 2020). As

Jackson and Everington (2017) note,

> Initial teacher education can play an important role in enabling teachers to reflect on the potential of personal beliefs and experiences to influence how they present religions in the classroom and to develop the skills to present these in an informed and objective manner which reflects and respects the right to hold a wide range of views, including those held by their pupils. (p. 12)

Over a period of three years, from 2006 – 2009, the *Religion in Education: A*

Contribution to Dialogue or Factor of Conflict in Transforming Societies of European Countries

(REDCo) implemented several studies over eight countries, investigating the different models of

RE across Europe. While the European context differs from the North American or Canadian

context, several findings from these projects reveal insights relevant to scholarly and public

debate on the role of religious literacy and education. Many of the studies cited below come

out of this large-scale project.

Given its diversity, the European context is predictably complex with differing

approaches to the issue of Religious Education (RE); there are three models of confessional,

non-confessional, or mixed. Historically, the most common approach has been confessional,

especially in states where there has been a majority religion involved in the education system, such as Ireland, England, or the Netherlands. However, even within these countries, there may be localized diversity, with some providing confessional instruction for different traditions: Catholic and Protestant, for example (Knauth & Körs, 2011). In some countries, confessional RE is a part of the public school system but students may choose to opt out, such as in Belgium. Other countries, such as Sweden offer mandatory non-confessional RE, where students learn about different religious traditions from an academic perspective. Scandinavian countries Denmark and Finland have long-standing RE programs similar to the UK where, as Niemi et al., (2020) point out, "In spite of the fact that pupils take different classes depending on their membership of religious communities, all teaching is defined as being non-confessional and it is thus not allowed to include religious practices, such as praying, in these classes" (p. 117). Despite this complexity, across Europe there has been in recent decades a move towards approaches to RE that, even in confessional contexts, places stronger emphasis on students' gaining knowledge about religious diversity than on understanding their personal faith (Patrick, 2015).

In a study of three European countries' (Scotland, Austria, and Sweden) RE curricula, von Brömssen et al., (2020) note how although all three countries' programs are compulsory in K-G education, there are significant differences in how RE is conceived depending on whether they are located in denominational or non-denominational programs and especially depending on the particular historical, cultural, social and political approach to religious education in each country (p.133). However, in line with what we see globally, European scholars highlight the dangers of entrusting RE to teachers who have not been educated to critically reflect on their

own views about religious identities, including teachers' tendency to nationalize minority

religions, notably Islam, isolate religion from lived experiences, stereotype religiously identified

students, and equate religious identities with ethnicity (Ubani, 2018; Rissanen et al., 2016;

Kuusisto et al., 2016).

Section 5: Conceptions of Religious Literacy

While gaining in popularity, the term RL often gets employed in ways that are vague and

confusing. Therefore, this chapter's final section is devoted to a thorough analysis of competing

conceptions of RL to determine which is best suited to guide teacher education and practice

with respects to educating preservice teachers to be equipped to engage effectively in

conversations about religion and to educate within religiously diverse classrooms. This analysis

also examines these conceptions in light of their broader political aims and values that inform

them, either explicitly or implicitly. The first part of this section compares approaches and

conceptions of RL, including those put forward by established scholars, Stephen Prothero,

Diane Moore, Robert Jackson, and Andrew Dinham, and those from emerging scholars,

Benjamin Marcus and Alice Chan. These scholars have been selected both because of their

prominence in literature on RL in the last decade, and because they are salient conceptions that

represent certain identifiable categories in which most current discussions of RL fall. This

chapter concludes with a formulation of my own conception of CRL. I argue that current

formulations may be adapted to include more emphasis on what I call critical aims of

citizenship as described in the following chapter.

Perhaps one of the most common approaches to teaching religion in the classroom is the silent approach where religion is either not taught in the public system, or taught only as an optional course: the model that is currently in effect for all Canadian provinces except Quebec and Newfoundland and Labrador (Patrick et al., 2017). Contemporary scholars have identified several ways in which this silent approach is ineffective, or worse (Cush, 2007; Byrne, 2014; White, 2010; James, 2015). First, when we fail to include religion as a subject of discussion or investigation in our public schools, we are supporting what Elliot Eisner (1994) described as a 'null curriculum,' that simply omits religion as a topic of learning and deprives students of the opportunity to learn content knowledge about religion. Moreover, we are also removing the opportunity for students to learn the skills needed to navigate potentially 'controversial' or difficult conversations around values. In a real sense, the omission of religion from K-G schools, also serves as a kind of 'hidden curriculum' that teaches students that religion is a controversial subject or that it is an inappropriate subject to discuss in the public sphere. The result of this omission has resulted in a situation in which, as Paul Bramadat (2009) has pointed out,

> …the virtual exclusion of religion from public discourse (including its absence from, or awkward presence in, national ceremonies, media coverage, and in most public schools) has produced a kind of religious illiteracy the result of which is that Canadians are increasingly ignorant about world religions, including Christianity. (p.5)

Second, by not including religion in the classroom in a 'silent approach,' teachers and schools risk perpetuating the harm of what Charles Taylor (1994) has called 'misrecognition'; that is to say that by failing to acknowledge the importance of religion to some students in their classrooms, those students for whom religion is an important aspect of their lives and identities

may feel misunderstood, or possibly even marginalized. James et al. (2015) remark how "Our

avoidance of religion, after all, does not mean that it goes away. If anything, an unwillingness to

examine religions allows attitudes about it to run rampant, leading to marginalization and

discrimination through the taken-for granted nature of its presence or absence" (p. 13). For

students who face other barriers because they are immigrants or racial minorities, for example,

being misunderstood in this way represents yet another avenue in which they experience

discrimination. In a 2010 study about Muslim students' experiences in public schools in the UK,

Julia Ipgrave describes the ramifications of this marginalization, commenting that "An

education system (such as the English system) that claims to focus on the 'whole child' and that

requires teachers and managers to organise the school and the curriculum around the diverse

needs and also the knowledge bases, aptitudes and aspirations of the pupils cannot ignore the

power of religion in the lives of so many" (p. 15). Third, this silent approach of omission leaves

the teaching about religion to sources such as the family or, perhaps the dominant source, the

media, increasing the likelihood of perpetuating dominant religious stereotypes (Valk, 2017).

Fact-based approach

A second approach to religion in public schools is what I will call a facts-based approach.

This conception maintains that the best way to teach religion in schools is to teach only the

facts about religions, such as important dates, holidays, and figures, without delving into beliefs

or positions as these are liable to lead to difficult conversations, a view that tends to be popular

among many educators tasked with teaching religion in the public school context in North

America (Prothero, 2007; Nord, 2010; Subedi, 2006). Briefly, a facts-based approach means that

someone, either teacher or curriculum developers or both, has determined which 'facts' about

religion should be taught, along with which religions, practices, spiritualities should be featured.

This raises concerns about power and authority and questions concerning who decides what is

important in any given tradition, and which traditions or worldviews are deemed 'important

enough' to merit inclusion in class discussions or curriculum? In addition, a facts-based

approach suggests that religion is something exterior, concrete, found in buildings, texts, and

associated practices rather than something that is a lived experience. Another potential

problem with a facts-based approach is that in K-G schools this may take on the form of a

celebrations model, where religion is treated as an aspect of cultural diversity to be celebrated.

On the surface, this may not seem harmful. After all, in that movement to celebrate religion by

showcasing food, clothing or dance of a particular religious tradition, there is an affirmation of

students' religious identities. But as Ipgrave (2010) has cautioned in the context of Muslim

students in UK schools, "There is a danger here of pathologizing pupil religion, even as it is

being affirmed, so that it becomes a special need for which strategies have to be found to

ensure it does not hinder learning" (p.14-15). Ipgrave's comments highlight how even when

there is a move to 'celebrate' or 'affirm' students' religious identity through a facts-based

approach to teaching religion, if this move is not accompanied by teaching students the skills

needed for both contextualizing various aspects of religion and for having meaningful dialogue,

it will be of limited value.

Confessional approach

Finally, it is important to distinguish RL from a confessional or sectarian approach to

teaching religion in schools; in other words, instead of teaching religion in order to encourage

students to adopt a particular set of religious doctrines, beliefs or faith commitments, RL seeks

to teach *about* religion, from a stance that does not privilege one religious perspective over another (Moore, 2007). Moore points out an important distinction between 'intentional sectarian' approaches which promote one religious tradition above others, and 'unintentional sectarianism' in which one religious tradition is unintentionally privileged, such as in most Canadian schools where the school week is scheduled around Christian holy days (Ibid, pp. 59 – 66). Neither form of sectarianism allows for a critical understanding of RL, either because they present only one perspective as religious truth, or because they do not consider the ways that one religious tradition is privileged over others (p. 61).

Having concluded that silent, 'facts-only', or confessional-based approaches to RL are insufficient for educating for a robust engagement with religious pluralism in diverse societies, what follows is a comparison of contrasting conceptions of RL by prominent scholars Prothero (2007), Moore (2007; 2015), Dinham (2015; 2016), alongside more recently proposed conceptions from Marcus (2018) and Chan et al. (2019).

Stephen Prothero

Stephen Prothero (Boston University) brought the term RL to international attention with his 2007 book, *Religious Literacy*: *What Every American Needs to Know – and Doesn't,* wherein he defines RL as "the ability to understand and use in one's day-to-day life the basic building blocks of religious traditions—their key terms, symbols, doctrines, practices, sayings, characters, metaphors, and narratives" (p.196). Prothero believes religious illiteracy has become an altogether too common characteristic of US citizenry, and that this inability to understand 'the basics' about religion poses a threat to civic life. He draws attention to the many ways in which religion impacts civic life, particularly through politics, noting that "The

costs of perpetuating religious ignorance are too high in a world in which faith moves, if not

mountains, then at least elections and armies" (p. 180). Drawing on E.D. Hirsch's (1988)

concept of cultural literacy, Prothero argues for educators to teach 'core knowledge' about

Christianity and world religions in order to mediate the danger posed by religious illiteracy

(p.4). In line with others such as Warren Nord (2010), Prothero's central argument for

developing RL is a civic one -- that is he believes RL ought to "produce citizens who know

enough about Christianity and the world's religions to participate meaningfully—on both the

left and the right—in religiously inflected public debates" (2008, p.209). He recognizes that the

task of knowing everything about all religions is an impossible one and thus proposes a series of

religious literacies. These range from tradition or even denomination specific literacy, such as

Jewish literacy or Anglican literacy, to literacies around a particular function, such as ritual or

narrative literacies (Ibid). As a religious studies scholar, Prothero's religious literacies reflect the

way religion is understood within that discipline, distinguishing practice, ritual, and textual

understandings.

Moreover, Prothero agrees with Nord that public education is the most appropriate

venue for religious illiteracy to be addressed, and he also agrees that Christianity deserves to

receive the most attention (p. 212). Recognizing that in today's crowded curricula there is not

likely room for educators to devote substantial time to all religious traditions, he argues that as

the founding religion of the nation, Christianity ought to be the central focus of a RL program,

given that most Americans are Christians and the important place it holds in the American

political landscape (p. 213). Although Prothero acknowledges that this education in Christian

literacy must be accompanied by attention to other world religions, due especially to the

growing religious diversity of the US, he nevertheless maintains the centrality of Christianity,

stating,

> Of course, students can learn much from reading the Quran and the Tao Te Ching. But the Bible, which the Supreme Court has described as "the world's all-time bestseller," is of sufficient importance in Western civilization to merit its own course. Treating it no different than Zend Avesta of the Zorathrastrians or Scientology's Dianetics makes no educational sense. (And what teacher has the hours -- or the training -- to give "equal time" to all the world's scriptures?) (p. 134)

As another example, in his commonly cited Religious Literacy Quiz, only five of the

fifteen questions deal with a religion other than Christianity or Judaism sending the message

here that the rest of world's traditions can be adequately covered in five questions (p.35-36).

Prothero's facts-based approach to RL has epistemological limitations, as his conception of RL

insists that the content of RL can be filled by dominant, existing authoritative accounts of what

counts as "central" religious knowledge. This critique extends to two levels of content: 1)

regarding what is the central religious tradition in a religiously pluralistic nation, and 2) what is

central to any specific religious tradition.

First, Prothero's epistemic privileging of Christianity as the central component of RL is

certainly susceptible to critique from the lens of epistemic injustice. His position is one where

he assumes that the most important religious traditions are those that are dominant in a given

society. As seen above, he suggests that minority religious traditions are less important because

they are not part of the dominant mainstream. Although I do not dispute that Christianity has

had a profound influence on Western society, the decision to render Christianity as central to

RL is neither an inevitable nor neutral choice. Rather, privileging Christianity over other

traditions has civic implications for his conception of RL. One such implication is that this view

of RL promotes certain aims of citizenship that are interested primarily in maintaining Christian dominance, and in relegating religious minorities to the sidelines – as something to be understood, but only marginally. Indeed, I argue that in promoting the epistemological authority of Christianity, Prothero's conception of RL adheres more to conservative civic aims of tolerance and civic duty than to more liberal civic aims of mutual respect or to what I will refer to as critical democratic aims that seek to promote critical thinking and to address oppression and discriminatory harms.

Second, Prothero also makes epistemological decisions about what counts as knowledge within other 'minority' religious traditions that likewise adhere to a particular vision of citizenship. For example, as indicated by Shrader (2013), his decision to include the term 'Wahhabism' over the term 'Sufism' in his Dictionary of Religious Terms is an example of how his selection of 'central' religious knowledge cannot be seen as neutral, as he is choosing which elements of a particular tradition are worth teaching (p. 100). This critique of Prothero's RL is the same critique that has been leveled against Hirsch's concept of cultural literacy, namely that promoting the dominant religion (or culture) as being crucial to RL for a given society is not a neutral act (Feinberg, 1997; 2014). Prothero attempts to avoid this critique by insisting that the choice of what is 'central' religious content ought to be grounded in those issues or terms that have 'political relevance'. However, this rationale is likewise susceptible to critique. While it may be true that the term Wahhabism is likely to appear in the US public, it is also arguably a side of Islam that confirms many Westerners' negative perceptions of Islam as ultra-conservative – a perception that would be greatly nuanced and corrected by the inclusion of other branches of Islam, such as Sufism. So Prothero's decision to include this term over terms

such as Sufism brings up an important question around what determines political relevancy. According to Prothero's rationale, it would seem that whatever issues are being discussed most broadly in existing political discourse determine what is politically relevant. However, we know that existing political discourse includes (inevitably) some inaccuracies, biases, prejudices, misunderstandings, and even malevolent attitudes regarding certain religious practices, groups or views. Thus, part of what is "politically relevant" about RL has to do with concepts or ideas that can help to illuminate these problems, and provide avenues for correcting or rectifying them. The problem with Prothero's apparent assumption about "political relevance" is that it seems to ignore the fact that in a religiously diverse society, political relevance will often have as much to do with what is neglected and left out of political discourse, as it has to do with what is most common or frequently used in that discourse. So, Prothero may not entirely wrong to say that RL should be grounded in judgements about political relevance, but he seems to be guided by a narrowly ideological, and possibly politically conservative, certainly US-centric, conception of political relevance. However, it is possible to call into question why a particular tradition being 'politically relevant' is considered more important than ethical decisions or principles of civic equality. Relatedly, his conception does not actively engage with intersectional issues of race. Considering the impact of social-justice movements for racial equity, such as the BLM movement, currently have in our educational institutions, the lack of discussion of White Christian privilege is a major limitation for today's educators.

Thus, I suggest that Prothero's conception of RL aligns with *conservative aims of citizenship* that promote tolerance and civic duty in the goal of creating a more cohesive society. Prothero's account of RL aims to educate citizens to participate in public discourse by

providing them with the 'basics' of religious traditions. However, as we have seen, in

privileging both dominant religions and dominant religious terms that are explicit within current

terms of political discourse, he underestimates what is excluded, marginalized, or ignored in

that discourse and as such, arguably contributes to a kind of epistemic injustice. Other

conceptions of RL go further than Prothero's account, or any other that advocates a 'facts-

based' approach, to meet different aims of citizenship as we shall see below.

Diane L. Moore

Perhaps the scholar most closely associated the term 'religious literacy,' is Director of

the Religious Literacy Project and Professor at Harvard Divinity School, Dr. Diane L. Moore.

Moore's influential work "Overcoming Religious Illiteracy" (2007) deserves extended

consideration here because her conception of RL goes some way to rectifying the blind-spots

within Prothero's conception.

In contrast to Prothero's factually driven conception of RL that requires one to have

knowledge of "the basics," of dominant religious beliefs and practices, Moore's definition

highlights the importance of understanding how religious beliefs and practices shift in and

reflect diverse political, sociological, and cultural contexts. This means that instead of learning

some facts that constitute 'central knowledge' about a particular tradition, real understanding

of religions must consider how these traditions shift and change through place and time. As an

example of a temporal shift, she points out how the Southern Baptist convention supported the

'moral legitimacy of abortion' in the 1970s but went on to reverse this support in 2003 (2015).

Because Moore's definition calls for this intersectional knowledge of religion to be understood

as always spatially and temporally evolving, she avoids Prothero's problems of epistemological

authority, which primarily address religion in response to current dominant political forces.

Moreover, Moore's conception of RL emphasizes both religion's external and internal

dimensions of diversity; in other words, she highlights the great diversity of religious traditions

in North America, while also stressing upon the diversity within a particular tradition. In

addition, Moore focuses on the embeddedness of religion in all political, social, and cultural

contexts. RL in this sense highlights the need to foster knowledge of both internal and external

diversity and understanding of how these different forms of diversity can give rise to conflicts

and misunderstandings that citizens must negotiate.

For those tasked with teaching RL, Moore outlines a 'cultural studies' approach to

teaching about religion, characterized as something that,

1.   Is interdisciplinary;

2.   Understands that all knowledge is situated;

3.   Views texts and interpreters as situated;

4.   Considers power relations (which perspectives get promoted and why? Who is marginalized?); and

5.   Draws on Johan Galtung's typology of violence/peace to understand that "…in all cultural contexts, diverse and often contradictory religious influences are always present" (2014, p. 386)

Each of these characteristics merits further discussion. First, for Moore, it is imperative to

understand how religion is 'fundamentally entwined' in the realms of politics, economics, and

culture or history (p. 383). For teachers that means that teaching about religion ought not to

occur as an isolated unit, for example, as an 'added-on' unit to a social studies course. Rather,

religion is better taught across the curriculum where appropriate so that its 'entwined'

character is revealed. Thus, religion could appear not only in a social studies or history course,

but it may also be addressed in an art, science, or English literature class, depending on the context. The idea here is that religion is best understood from multiple, interdisciplinary perspectives rather than as a discrete category, removed from the rest of human experience. Instead of learning only about the Catholic Church's role in the Inquisition in a social studies class, for example, students would also learn of the way Christianity has influenced the arts, or how it informs or challenges contemporary issues in the sciences. While Moore acknowledges that this interdisciplinary approach poses considerable challenges to implementation, interdisciplinarity is seen as central to grasping the complexities of religious experience.

Second, Moore's conception of RL rectifies some of the problems outlined above about Prothero's troubling epistemological stance. While Prothero's work assumes a privileged epistemic stance from which to evaluate what is of central importance to RL (i.e. Promoting a Christianity-based stance instead of a religiously pluralistic one), Moore draws on Donna Haraway's (1988) notion of the 'situatedness of knowledge claims' which understands all knowledge as constructed from a particular, always partial position. Applying Haraway's call for "…a practice of objectivity that privileges contestation, deconstruction, passionate construction, webbed connections, and hope for transformation of systems of knowledge and ways of seeing" (Haraway, p. 585) allows Moore to challenge, or at least complicate, the kind of epistemic authority that lies at the heart of Prothero's account. Thus, regardless of one's religious or non-religious beliefs, there is no attempt at a "presumed objectivity" capable of providing a 'neutral' account (Moore, 2007, p. 56). Likewise, the third characteristic takes this notion of situatedness and extends it to not only knowledge claims about religion, but also to

religious texts and their interpreters, recognizing that texts, and those who interpret them, are located in a particular place and time, and can only be understood within this complexity.

As the fourth characteristic differentiating Moore's approach from those who promote a 'back-to-basics' approach to teaching religious knowledge, Moore's situated epistemological approach to teaching religion requires a critical perspective of power dynamics inherent in all relationships. Here, there is an explicit focus on understanding how certain religious interpretations or traditions gain credibility and influence among others, and a consideration of whose voices are heard and whose are marginalized – and for what purposes. Moore recognizes that education is always political, reminding us that "Learning is never a neutral activity and all knowledges are formed in service of ideological claims" (p. 82). To take a recent Canadian example, this focus on power dynamics pushed scholars to consider why certain groups, notably FNMI communities, received considerably less curricular consideration in Québec's Ethics and Religious Culture program (ERC) than the culturally dominant Catholic Francophone majority community received (Abdou & Chan, 2017).

Moore's fifth and final characteristic for her cultural studies approach to RL draws on Johan Galtung's (1990) typology of violence/peace outlining the following three categories of violence: 1) direct violence; 2) structural violence; 3) cultural violence. Briefly, Galtung's first category of direct violence is the most self-evident as those acts of physical violence, whereas structural violence refers to systemic structures that prevent certain groups from accessing resources or services to meet basic human needs. The second form of violence refers to systemic structures that represent barriers to basic human needs, whether these are legally implemented or not. An obvious historical example given by Moore is the legal apparatus of

Apartheid in South Africa (Moore, 2014, p. 385); an equally powerful example in the Canadian context would be the residential school system in Canada. The third category of cultural violence refers to those cultural norms or beliefs that allow direct or structural systems of violence to perpetuate. Here, Galtung gives the example of the notion held by many Whites that they were superior to Blacks, which made the slave trade morally acceptable. The Doctrine of Discovery and how it allowed the Settler population to a sense of entitlement to the traditional lands of FNMI populations is a clear example of this cultural violence in the Canadian context (*Dismantling the Doctrine of Discovery,* Jan. 2018). This critical examination of structural and cultural violence is vital to any proposed theoretical framework or pedagogical approach to teaching about religion and has particular significance to the current Canadian educational institutions that are grappling with their own complicity in the structural and cultural violence enacted towards generations of Indigenous peoples through the residential school system.

Robert Jackson

Robert Jackson, Professor Emeritus, Warwick Religious Education Research Unit, has contributed to scholarship in the field of religion and education for decades, and is best known for his interpretive approach to religious education. Like Andrew Dinham, Jackson's approach must be situated in the European, and specifically the UK context where religious education (RE) has long been a part of the public education system. Thus, much of Jackson's work does not use the term religious literacy, but rather refers to religious education. Moreover, it should be noted that Jackson's scholarship is grounded in decades of empirical ethnographic research informed by anthropological approaches to interpretation championed by ethnographers such

as Clifford Geertz. Jackson's work in part responds to previous scholarship on RE that argued for

the removal of RE from the UK public school system in favour of citizenship education that does

not attempt to include religious perspectives (Hargreave, 1994). In his 2004 book, *Rethinking*

religious education and plurality he disagrees that those teachers who have religious

convictions are incapable of being objective and professional while teaching about other beliefs

or traditions (p. 35). Instead, Jackson calls for an approach to RE that is grounded in

epistemological openness with the understanding that claims of ultimate truth can never be

proven (p. 36). Jackson provides a three-layer model that considers religion and religious

identity in education on the levels of individual, group, and tradition (p. 68). His work differs

from that of Moore and Prothero in part because of his focus on the individual's interpretations

and perspectives on both theirs' and others' traditions in discussions and debate about the role

of religion in education. Jackson's interpretive approach, first fully articulated in his 1997 work

Religious education: An interpretive approach, calls for RE to address religion and spirituality

through the actions of representation, interpretation, and reflection. Through *representing*,

educators ensure that religions, and the diversity within religious traditions are presented in a

way that "considers the hermeneutic relationship between individuals, groups to which they

belong and the generic religious tradition" (2018, p. 80). The call for educators to emphasize

interpreting ensures that individuals and groups consider the way these relationships impact

meaning making when considering religious language. Finally, in *reflecting*, religious educators

encourage students to engage in self-reflection in order to understand their own relationship to

different religious traditions and the preconceptions they may harbour as a result of their own

tradition. Indeed, Jackson's notion of edification refers to a form of learning where students

engage in a reflective 're-assessment' of their own beliefs and also those holding different beliefs. He posits that edification will "build upon a genuinely positive attitude towards diversity, seeing the meeting between people with different beliefs and practices as enriching for all, and seeing individual identity as being developed through meeting 'the other'" (2012, p. 26).

In line with Benjamin Marcus' focus on understanding RE as a kind of literacy (2018), Jackson notes that a central aim of RE is 'to develop an understanding of the grammar – the language and wider symbolic patterns – of religions and the interpretive skills necessary to gain that understanding' (1997, p. 133). Moreover, he emphasizes the instrumental aims of developing students' dialogic skills, noting that his interpretive approach "… is consistent with a set of aims regarding the study of religions as a worthwhile part of a broad liberal education, and as instrumentally important to the personal development of students, and to their lives as social beings, living in complex modern societies" (2018, p. 82). While his approach emphasizes teaching the skills of dialogue, he does not outline a specific framework for what this dialogue may look like. Nevertheless, beyond its major impact on decades of RE scholarship, Jackson's conception of RL is useful not only because it underscores the importance of developing skills of dialogue for the promotion of social cohesion, but also because it includes a focus on self-reflection that is necessary for critical thinking. If teacher education is to prepare preservice teachers to engage with religious diversity effectively in their classrooms, it is imperative that they work from a conception of religious literacy that includes the skills of critical self-reflection.

Writing from a UK perspective, Andrew Dinham shares the concerns of Prothero and

Moore that the secularization of western society has led to a deficit in the vocabulary needed

for society to engage productively in conversations about religion and its role in a pluralistic

society (2016). He notes, how

> [w]e find a sort of 'fuzzy secularity' alongside a general muddle, often tinged with indifference and sometimes with hostility. Many people have a vague sense that religion ought not to matter, while grasping, at the same time, that it somehow does. But the majority are largely unable to articulate the debate – as we have said, there is a lamentable quality of conversation about religion. (p. 16)

Dinham points to a number of contributing factors to this state of affairs, including the

tendency for religion only to appear in public discussion if it is deemed a problem to which

there is a 'knee-jerk' response, often related to legal cases, such as public debate about Bill 21

in Quebec around religious symbols. In their 2015 book, *Religious Literacy in Policy and Practice*,

Dinham and Francis note that "The conversation about religion is impeded by the paucity of the

conversation about the secular" (p. 2), highlighting both the invisibility of secularism to many in

the west, and the negative impact this has on the ability for those in western pluralistic

societies to engage in discussions about the role of religion those societies.

Dinham (2016) proposes a framework for RL that may be applied to multiple contexts,

including education, both K-G schools and higher education. His framework includes the

following four categories for thinking about religious literacy: a) *category*, b) *disposition*, c)

knowledge, and d) *skills*. The first term, *category* is meant to describe the ability to understand

religion within a sociological context. The second term, *disposition*, refers to one's ability to

question one's own views or deeply held beliefs and prejudices towards either religion or non-

religion in general or towards others' religious or non-religious beliefs. *Knowledge* aligns with

what I call a facts-based approach in that by this Dinham means the facts about a particular

religious tradition, belief or practice. Finally, the fourth term, *skills*, accounts for how to convey

knowledge effectively. Like Moore and Jackson, Dinham's framework is particularly useful for

educators because it addresses the need for not simply an academic or facts-based approach to

educating for religious literacy, but it considers the compelling need for teacher educators to

help preservice teachers to possess the skills to engage in discussions about religious and non-

religious views and identities with students in their classrooms.

Benjamin Marcus

Benjamin Marcus (2017) has proposed another framework for conceptualizing RL that

bears consideration, what he calls the 3Bs: belief, behaviour, and belonging, that builds on

popular frameworks for conceptualizing religion in the domains of sociology (e.g. Putnam &

Campbell, 2012).

Table 2. *The 3Bs Framework*

3B Framework	A: Transcendent	B: Mundane
1. Belief	theologies, doctrines, sacred narratives, and holy texts	social values and ethics
2. Behavior	holy rites and rituals	habits and daily practices
3. Belonging	trans-historical, trans-national community of co-religionists complete with a social structure	racial, ethnic, familial, gender, sexual, and other identities

Marcus draws on linguistic inquiry to develop his framework that takes as its starting point the

notion that "If religious communities communicate meaning through different "languages,"

religious linguists interrogate the construction of those languages to more clearly see how

individuals and communities communicate meaning" (2018, p.8). He suggests that what is needed is to build one's vocabulary of religious literacy through using the three building blocks of belief, behaviour, and belonging, and draws attention to the ways that just as with linguistic diversity, religious language needs to consider all the diversity between languages and within an individual language itself through use of 'slang' or 'dialects.' This analogy illuminates the internal diversity of religious traditions that are so often obscured or ignored. In addition, he notes that as languages change dramatically over time and place, so too does religion, giving the example of how queer Christian theologians and conservative Christian theologians may interpret key biblical concept such as 'sin' differently (p.11).

The *Three Bs framework* suggested by Marcus (2017) is helpful for highlighting the diverse ways individuals and communities may identify with religion or spirituality. For many, religion or spirituality is primarily about belief; what is important or what gives comfort or motivation is having faith or conviction in one's religious beliefs. For others, their connection to a religious or spiritual tradition is primarily about their enacting of certain behaviours, such as going to mass on Christmas Eve as an indicator of their connection with a Roman Catholic identity even though they may not consider themselves believers in most Catholic doctrines (2018, p. 12). Likewise, the last category of belonging underscores the importance of belonging as an indicator of religious identity for some. Marcus points out, the salience of belonging over belief explains why at least half of those who identify as Jewish indicate uncertainty about their beliefs in the existence of God (Ibid, p.10, citing Putnam and Campbell, 2012). The Three Bs framework thus provides a way of addressing the problem of a facts-based or 'basic vocabulary' approach to religious literacy, such as proposed by Prothero by highlighting the complexities

and diversities in the way individuals and communities adhere and create their religious identities. Similar to Moore in that it provides space for understanding internal and situated diversity of religion, the Three Bs framework also allows for a focus on the unique ways individuals and communities may experience religion in a personalized way, more in line with Jackson's interpretive approach (1997).

Summary of this section

Among the various conceptions of RL presented in the previous section, I adopt aspects of Moore's, Jackson's, Dinham's and Marcus' conceptions of RL for several reasons. First, these authors' conceptions of RL go beyond the more conservative aims of citizenship advocated by Prothero, (i.e. tolerance and social cohesion), and align with what I will call *critical aims* of citizenship that have the potential to address issues of social justice in the classroom. These critical aims are those that seek to promote critical thinking, by de-biasing thinking, addressing oppression and discriminatory beliefs, such as Islamophobia or religious bullying, critiquing authoritative structures and systems, including religious authorities. Moore's approach meets these aims by promoting a robust consideration of issues related to power, identity, and situatedness. Moreover, RL in Moore's, Jackson's, Dinham's, and Marcus' conceptions requires developing a critical self-reflexivity that is crucial to understanding phenomena such as the Holocaust or the Canadian residential school system, as this skill requires asking difficult questions about human nature, religious beliefs, and systems of authority. Indeed, these more critical conceptions of RL allow for addressing the ignorance that leads to stereotypes and other forms of religious discrimination and equips future citizens with the tools needed to not only

engage with religious diversity but also to critique structures of authority, religious or not, thus promoting critical democratic aims for educating citizens.

A critical RL for the Canadian landscape

The preceding discussion analyzed conceptions of RL in order to determine which conception ought to be adopted by Canadian teacher education programs. All the above conceptions advance certain elements that are valuable, and I draw on Moore's, Dinham's, Jackson's, and Marcus' conceptions because of their ability to promote a RL that includes critical aims of social justice-oriented citizenship; however, I adapt these in the following ways. First, I draw on Moore's conception of RL focuses primarily on the social/political/economic intersections of religious experience, combining this with Jackson's and Marcus' focus on engaging with religion from a level of personal experience or belief. Second, I argue that although the above conceptions of RL provides a solid framework to teach about religion from a situated and critical perspective, they may be modified to better respond to the Canadian educational context. Dinham and Marcus' conceptions do not explicitly address Indigenous spiritualities, and while Moore's definition does mention Indigenous spiritualities, they do not feature prominently in her definition. Given the current political climate in the Canadian educational landscape, specifically in its need to respond the calls of Truth and Reconciliation Commission of 2015 (TRC) to address the historic and systemic injustices to Canada's Indigenous peoples, a comprehensive definition of RL for Canadian teacher education contexts must explicitly address Indigenous spiritualities. This is particularly important when considering RL within educational discussions, for historically religion and education both played major

roles in the oppression of Canada's Aboriginal peoples through the Residential School system

(Battiste, 2013, 2000).

Thus, I adopt and adapt Chan et al.'s definition of RL, as including the following

characteristics:

> (1) Understanding the diversity in and between religious, spiritual, non-religious, moral and other worldviews among individuals, groups and traditions; that these terms are used interchangeably for individuals to refer to the same or different tradition as some are overlapping. This is to recognise the terminology, focus, belief or practice as defined by the individuals themselves;

> (2) Recognising the non-static nature of religious, spiritual, non-religious, moral and other worldview traditions as they are influenced by social, economic, political and cultural spheres of society across time and geography;

> (3) Understanding each religious, spiritual, non-religious, moral and other worldview tradition from its own distinct worldview and not through the lens of another tradition, and that each tradition consists of several representations of a worldview;

> (4) Recognising Indigenous spirituality within a discussion of spirituality overall, and that an understanding of it is based on the terms and perspectives of specific Indigenous communities in Canada. (2019, p. 12)

As one of the co-authors of this definition, I believe the specific inclusion of recognizing

Indigenous spirituality is a necessary addition for not only the Canadian context, but also for

any locale that wishes to be truly inclusive and work towards reconciliation with Indigenous

peoples. However, I wish to amend this robust definition, by adding a fifth point:

> (5) Recognising the complex and intersecting ways in which different religious, spiritual, non-religious, moral and other worldview traditions, communities, or individuals may either benefit from, or are oppressed by existing power dynamics on personal, institutional, and systemic levels.

This last point is important because it addresses the need for RL to explicitly address power and oppression experienced on a personal scale, not only on the more systemic issues of power and oppression in Moore's calls fifth point that draws on Galtung's notion of structural and cultural violence. While this focus could arguably be included in the fourth point, "Considers power relations (which perspectives get promoted and why? Who is marginalized?)," Moore's emphasis is on highlighting religion as a historical, political, and social phenomena to counteract the belief that religion is a purely private, individual matter (2007, p.5). Thus, going forward, I propose the term critical religious literacy (CRL) as a term that highlights both the need for the inclusion of Indigenous spirituality in any discussion about religious literacy and the need to keep questions of power and oppression at the forefront.

To conclude this section that has examined various conceptions of RL, CRL is best understood as a critical response to a major challenge of pluralistic liberal-democracies: the challenge of deep religious diversity. As Moore reminds us, "Neither of the current practices of virtually ignoring religion altogether or promoting sectarian assumptions is acceptable. Neither will help us responsibly address the deep cultural divides that plague us and neither will help promote democratic ideals within and beyond our current cultural crisis" (p. 52). Nevertheless, despite the fact that promoting CRL would seem to be a natural means of strengthening and enhancing the goals of civic competency in democratic, religiously diverse societies, few educational theorists have addressed it at length. Therefore, one main purpose of this chapter has been to explain how CRL may play an important supporting role for teacher education programs to educate preservice teachers with the attitudes, skills, and dispositions associated

with the civic competencies needed to educate within religiously diverse contexts. The next

chapter examines the intersection of CRL with a theoretical framework that draws on SJOC,

concepts drawn from Critical Race Theory, such as intersectionality and white Christian

privilege, and epistemic injustice.

Chapter 3: CRL and its intersections with social justice oriented citizenship, White Christian privilege, and epistemic injustice

Introduction

This chapter extends the previous chapter's review of diverse conceptions of RL in their applicability to teacher education by placing my own conception of CRL into conversation with key concepts and theories to develop a theoretical framework from which to ground my study. Although the content of this chapter overlaps somewhat with that of the previous chapter, here the focus is on why my theoretical framework is well-suited to address the problem outlined in the previous chapter: the problem of religious illiteracy in teacher education programs in societies characterized by religious diversity. Section 1 considers the aims of citizenship by categorizing these into what I call the *minimal* and *critical aims* of democratic citizenship. I draw on Joel Westheimer to argue that a social justice-oriented or critical model of citizenship is the most appropriate model for the inclusion of CRL in teacher education programs. To better understand how teacher educators should approach religion in relation to other facets of identities in the task of educating for critical aims for citizenship, Section 2 draws first on Kimberlé Crenshaw's notion of intersectional identity to lay the groundwork for examining the intersection of race and religion, before turning to a review of Critical Race Theory and concepts of White privilege, and ends with a consideration of Khyati Joshi's conception of White Christian privilege to examine the intersectionality of race and religion. Finally, Section 3 considers how CRL can be justified as a way of mitigating epistemic injustice (EI) that may occur as a result of the failure to consider the intersection of race, gender, and religion within teacher

education contexts. To this end, I review Miranda Fricker's conceptualization of EI, both her notion of testimonial injustice and hermeneutic injustice, arguing that a lack of CRL on the part of teacher educators can be adequately framed as such an injustice and may be resolved by greater epistemic inclusivity (Ipgrave, 2010). Ultimately, this multidimensional and multidirectional conceptual framework supports understanding CRL as an essential tool for teacher educators to mitigate the epistemic injustice perpetuated by the failure to engage with religious diversity or consider intersectional religious identities in the context of educating for social justice oriented citizenship.

Section 1: Aims of citizenship and religious diversity
Aims of citizenship

Educational institutions and educators must consider carefully the aims of citizenship that they intend to promote – a task that is especially important in pluralistic societies, such as Canada. Before turning to a discussion of how this dissertation conceptualizes citizenship education, I first delineate two categories of democratic citizenship aims: what I will call 1) the *minimal democratic aims* of tolerance, respect, and recognition; and 2) the *critical aims* of critiquing authority and opposing injustice. I argue that CRL as a framework for educating for citizenship meets the minimal democratic aims while prioritizing critical democratic aims as essential, particularly in the context of teacher education.

Minimal democratic aims of tolerance, mutual respect, and recognition

As an educational aim, tolerance can be understood as a minimum requirement for educating to live with diversity. Although he admits that tolerance is the most undemanding of virtues -- even one that is "perfectly consistent with contempt" (2003)-- proponents such as Chandran Kukathas argue that, "Nevertheless, the greater the extent to which an association

tolerates difference, the more it is a liberal association; and the greater the extent to which it

suppresses dissent, the less it is a liberal association" (Ibid. p, 24), marking it as a cornerstone

characteristic of liberal democracies. Though the form of liberalism he proposes is distinctly

different from that of Kukathas, William Galston nevertheless agrees that liberal societies ought

to have a "…vigorous system of civic education that teaches tolerance" (1995, p. 528).

However, from an CRL perspective, a society that depends solely or even substantially on such a

'thin' notion of tolerance sense is inherently unstable because unpredictable events may

increase anger and antipathy among members of different minority religious groups (e.g.

terrorist acts in the extreme case). Another reason why this minimal version of tolerance is

insufficient to be considered a primary aim of CRL is that even where tolerance can guarantee

negative forms of social cooperation (i.e. a "live and let live" attitude), it is unlikely to foster

more ambitious forms of social cooperation, such as encouraging members of diverse religious

faiths to make progress on pressing issues of justice such as homelessness or educational

equality, or reconciliation with Indigenous peoples.

Often characterized as a more robust form of tolerance is the aim of mutual respect;

this goes further than tolerance because "it requires a favorable attitude toward, and

constructive interaction with, persons with whom one disagrees" (Gutmann and Thomson,

1996, p. 79), an important consideration in pluralistic societies, particularly ones with deep

religious diversity. As Moore reminds us, "…cultivating an informed respect for religious

differences will equip students with the skills and temperaments to function more meaningfully

and effectively within their home communities and the workplaces realities they are likely to

encounter in the future" (2007, p. 33). Thus, this aim of cultivating a favourable attitude

towards religious difference is inherent in my proposed approach of CRL, which is the understanding that learning about religious diversity is necessary to deepen our understanding of the world.

Critics of tolerance and mutual respect as aims of democratic citizenship argue that these are consistent with an educational approach that encourages student disengagement and alienation, and thus that it does not go far enough in what it asks of citizens confronting diversity. Those who consider tolerance insufficient to assure mutual respect in diverse societies believe that the demand to become engaged must be more explicit. For Charles Taylor, the key to civic engagement rests on the concept of 'recognition' (Taylor & Gutmann, 1992). Recognition, as Taylor describes it, goes beyond mere tolerance -- which to some implies passivity --to a necessary act of identification with the other. Recognition of difference is essential because it is "a vital human need" and its absence or misrecognition "…can inflict a grievous wound..." (Taylor, p. 26). In other words, in failing to recognize difference, for example, the diverse religious backgrounds of our students, due to belief in the liberal strand of thought that calls for equal treatment of all, teachers may unwittingly harm their students who internalize that misrecognition. If we want all citizens to feel a sense of belonging, we cannot undermine their identities by ignoring something that forms a central part of these identities. So, if a key aim of pluralistic liberal-democratic societies is to encourage mutual respect of all citizens, including religious minorities, according to Taylor we must be willing to give full recognition of the differentiated identities of those minority groups (p.43). In so doing, we commit to mitigating the potential harm of misrecognition. Because my proposed conception of CRL has the aim of "Understanding the diversity in and between religious, spiritual, non-

religious, moral and other worldviews among individuals, groups and traditions," it supports

Taylor's recognition for those with differentiated identities, just as it supports the aim of

promoting mutual respect by its commitment to educating about religious diversity.

Critical democratic aims of citizenship

However, CRL as an educational aim should do more than simply encourage awareness

about religious diversity, i.e. a 'facts-based approach' that hopes to promote the minimal aims

of tolerance and mutual respect. Rather, I share educational philosopher Kevin McDonough's

view that, "Insofar as public schools are justified in promoting civic virtues…*they are justified in*

doing so because an education in such virtues is necessary for citizens to secure the conditions of

social justice and stability across generations" (2011, p. 227). Indeed, CRL must go beyond

teaching respectful values -- CRL must also promote critical democratic aims that include

critiquing authority or structures of oppression and resisting social injustice. These critical

democratic aims are crucial because liberal-democracies require citizens who, as Westheimer

has stated, "…know how to think critically, ask questions, evaluate policy, and work with others

toward change that moves democracy forward" (2015, p. 99). Thus, in educating future citizens,

teachers must educate students to question their own beliefs and knowledge, meaning that

there is a need for students to develop an awareness that 'the facts' are not always immovable

(Ibid). Central to cultivating this understanding is both exposing students to diverse views and

beliefs and teaching them to critique these views; in so doing, students must critically evaluate

their own beliefs through self-reflexivity. This task becomes especially difficult – and important

– when it comes to religious views and beliefs as these may be central to students' identities

and values. Nevertheless, if educators remain silent about both the ways religions have

contributed to or maintained oppressive systems, and the ways that religious groups may have themselves faced oppression, they may prevent students from functioning "...as engaged, informed, and responsible citizens of our democracy" (Moore, 2007, p. 4). Thus, in line with Moore's cultural studies approach, a CRL approach encourages students to understand religious perspectives as 'alternative frameworks' to other culturally dominant views, such as capitalism, for example.

Although scholarly discussions surrounding systems of oppression, such as racism, in Canadian education have been taking place for decades (Dei, 1995), in the current national and global context, the centrality of critical democratic aims for educating citizens has taken on a new urgency. With growing calls for educational systems to show a commitment to address issues of oppression, most especially racism in all its forms, the need to equip preservice teachers with the skills they need to help their own students stand up to structural and systemic inequities has never been greater (Adjei, 2018; Bakali, 2018; Lopez & Jean-Marie, 2021). In Canadian K-G schools and institutions of higher education there has been a sharp uptick in efforts to Indigenize education (Dharamshi, 2019; Tanchuk et al., 2018). Moreover, calls for educational spaces to address anti-Black racism have been renewed as a result of the growing global movements spurred by the murders of George Floyd and Breanna Taylor (Adjei, 2018; Lopez, 2020; Lopez & Jean-Marie, 2021). The increasing visibility of these movements in educational scholarship and practice, along with the findings from my studies, prompted me to consider a framework for a model of citizenship education that prioritizes critical democratic aims.

Westheimer and Kahne (2004) provide a framework that describes three different models of citizenship to be promoted in schools: 1) the personally responsible citizen; 2) the participatory citizen; 3) the justice-oriented citizen. Because these different models of citizenship will require different approaches and aims of education, they warrant a closer examination. First, the personally responsible model of citizenship is one where good citizenship is related primarily to obeying societal laws and having a 'good' moral character. The authors give the example of a tax-paying citizen who may donate to charitable causes, or help out in a time of crisis (p.241). Second, the participatory conception of citizenship emphasizes the necessity for citizens to actively take up leadership roles in their community. So, while a personally responsible citizen may donate to their favourite charity, a participatory citizen will organize the donation campaign. In contrast, the third and least common model of citizenship is the justice-oriented conception, one which promotes critical democratic aims. Here, societal problems cannot be solved by simply participating within societal structures, but rather requires a critical questioning of the structures and systems themselves (p. 242). Westheimer & Kahne's justice-oriented model of citizenship provides a compelling rationale for an educational approach that builds on critical pedagogy theoretical legacy of Freire (1970; 1990; 2000), Henry Giroux (1988, 2020), Kincheloe (2008) and prioritizes a deep questioning of the roots of social injustice. As recent scholarship has indicated, this social justice-oriented model promoting critical aims of citizenship is not always present in Canadian K-G school curricula, where citizenship is often conceptualized as variants of either personally-responsible or participatory models; in other words, Canadian K-G schools may promote a form of citizenship that aligns with the liberal aims of tolerance and mutual respect, rather than the more critical aims that

seek to challenge oppressive structures (Broom et al., 2017; Butler & Milley, 2020; Pashby et al., 2014; Peck & Pashby, 2018).

As compelling as the social-justice oriented approach is for this dissertation examining CRL in teacher education, Westheimer and Kahne's framework focuses on broad goals of citizenship education and does not address the specific goals of CRL with regard to religion. Thus, this dissertation adapts their social justice-oriented model of citizenship in order to explore ideas about the specific role of teacher education in promoting CRL to meet the critical democratic aims of critiquing authority and challenging oppressive structures. To that end, I henceforth refer to *social justice-oriented citizenship education (SJOC)* instead of the more ambiguous or 'loose' term of citizenship education.

Religious Diversity, Educators, and SJOC

As key sites where the civic values are promoted, K-G schools must employ teachers who are equipped to deal with the challenges imposed by increasing religious diversity due to rapid globalization and increasing flows of immigration to countries such as Canada. Indeed, issues relating to religion and education are a common source of tension and disagreement – something that is even more salient when considering how these issues intersect with a SJOC model of education that seeks to address inequities and oppression. In the Canadian context, there have been multiple cases of disagreement between religious parents and school curricula. In Ontario 2015, the provincial government's revised sex-education curriculum has met with strong opposition from some parents, many who were from religious communities including

Muslims and Catholics (CBC, 2015).[20] Although this debate often gets portrayed as one

primarily about parental vs. state control over education, religious beliefs around sexual

conduct and moral behaviour underlie much of this discourse. Likewise, religious diversity is

also at the heart of a widely publicized incident in 2015 at York University where a professor's

decision to refuse a request for religious accommodations was overturned by York

administration. The request in question came from a male student who wished to be exempt

from working on a group project with female students on grounds that it conflicted with his

religious beliefs.[21] With religious diversity on the rise, so too can we expect that questions

around religious accommodations become increasingly common – as will the tensions these

accommodations may pose for educators. As growing religious diversity impacts all Canadian

educational institutions, both K-G educators and teacher educators must consider how issues

related to religious diversity, such as religious bullying, stereotyping, extremism may intersect

with teaching for SJOC citizenship.

Bullying, Religiously motivated violence, and Religious extremism

Increasingly, scholars have identified religious bullying as a form of bullying primarily

targeting children from religious minorities (Chan, 2012; 2014; 2019; Craig & Edge, 2012).This

may take the form of being shamed or ridiculed for wearing religious or spiritual garments or

ceremonial clothing, such as head gear. The World Sikh Organization published a 2016 report,

The Experiences of Sikh Students in Peel, indicating that 34% of students with visible articles of

faith had experienced bullying (p. 2). Researchers have also documented cases where Christian

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[20] http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/sex-education-ontario-curriculum-1.3220454
[2121] http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/york-university-student-s-request-not-to-work-with-women-stirs-controversy-1.2490514

students have reported discrimination and bullying (Moulin, 2016). Chan notes how this form of

bullying may be unacknowledged because teachers are often unfamiliar with it or

uncomfortable around issues related to religion (2012). This can create challenges for educators

if they are a) unable to address this type of bullying effectively because they do not understand

or perceive it; and b) unable to address this form of bullying because they do not possess the

skills to effectively engage with the underlying religiously motivated tensions present in the

situation (Chan, 2019; 2016). In addition, religious diversity creates challenges for educators as

religiously motivated violence hold such prominence in contemporary media discourse. Events

such as the 2019 New Zealand mosque massacre, the Pittsburgh synagogue shooting, and the

troubling uptake in religiously motivated hate crimes (Statistics Canada, 2018) are sobering

examples of how issues related to religion are likely to make their way into the K-G classroom.

Moreover, the growing prevalence of religiously motivated violence in Canada points to

another related challenge for educators in religiously diverse democratic societies: the rise of

extremist views. As a source of much global fear and apprehension, religious extremism poses

a significant challenge to educators (Ghosh et al., 2017). With religious stereotypes stoked by

simplified and distorted media representations and politically charged rhetoric, fear of religious

extremism is likely to be a concern for K-G educators wishing to protect their minority religious

students from discriminatory views that may be expressed in the classroom as a result of these

fears (Ghosh, 2018). Beyond these problematic and, at times, irrational fears of religious

extremism in the classroom, religious extremism may also be a genuine concern as research

shows how disenfranchised youth may be susceptible to extremist ideologies (Ghosh et al.,

2018; Tiflati, 2017).

For K-G educators, the challenges presented by religious diversity described above may be addressed by promoting critical democratic aims of a SJOC, such as critical thinking, or de-biasing thinking, addressing oppression and all forms of religiously-motivated discrimination. At times, it may even require teaching students to critique authoritative structures, including religious ones, whether these are visible – as in the case of Christian-run residential schools for example, or whether these are less visible – as in the Christian privilege enjoyed by those who do not need to request accommodations to celebrate their most sacred holidays (Blumenfeld et al., 2009; Blumenfeld & Jaekel, 2012; Joshi, 2020). Teaching these complex skills is a substantial task for even the most experienced educators. Teacher education then, must ensure that preservice teachers are equipped with these SJOC skills in order to meet the needs of teaching in a religiously diverse society.

Section 2: Intersectionality, Critical Race Theory, and White Christian Privilege

Intersectionality

Because discussions surrounding religious diversity, marginalization of religious identities, and the role of a CRL for SJOC in Canadian teacher education program contexts requires an understanding of intersecting identities and the underlying structural systems that permit or deny access to power and epistemological resources, I draw on the foundational concept of intersectionality. In turning to primarily academic conceptions of the term intersectionality, I do not suggest that this academic application was the first and only usage of the term or concept. Instead, I ground my usage of the term in what Moradi and Grzanka (2017) call a 'responsible stewardship' that acknowledges the activist and community-based use and understanding of the term as seen in works of early feminist activist and authors from

the Black and Chicana communities, such as bell hooks (1994), Audre Lourde, Gloria Anzaldúa (1987), Patricia Hill Collins (1989), among others. It should be noted that while race and gender were the defining categories of intersection for many of these Hill Collins and Bilge (2016) define intersectionality as

> …a way of understanding and analyzing the complexity in the world, in people, and in human experiences. The events and conditions of social and political life and the self can seldom be understood as shaped by one factor. They are generally shaped by many factors in diverse and mutually influencing ways. When it comes to social inequality, people's lives and the organization of power in a given society are better understood as being shaped not by a single axis of social diversion, be it race or gender or class, but by many axes that work together and influence each other. (p. 2)

Building on legal scholar and social theorist Dr. Kimberlé Crenshaw's (1991) framework that applied the concept of intersectionality to the various forms of structural, political, and identity intersectionalities, I draw on intersectional analysis as a complimentary framework because it allows me to attend to the complexities of the intersecting power relations at play in the religious and non-religious identities of preservice teachers and faculty in my studies. Specifically, the concept of intersectionality enables me to analyze the way those religious identities intersect with other aspects of identity, specifically race, to explore the impact of that specific constellation of these identities within the larger cultural, political, and societal power dynamics in educational milieus and how those intersecting identities may create barriers to access certain domains of power that operate in educational institutions. Moreover, for teacher educators to understand the rationale for, and to engage in educating within a SJOC approach that seeks to uncover and address oppression and inequity, they must attend to religion as one of the overlapping and intersectional identities preservice teachers both have and will encounter in their own classrooms.

The framework of intersectionality provides the necessary building blocks to ground a discussion of White Christian privilege, one that has until quite recently most often been neglected by scholars across disciplines. This section will discuss the separate categories of identity that both have considerable bodies of scholarship supporting them, beginning with White privilege and then turning to Christian privilege. Understanding these two foundational concepts paves the way for considering the intersection of these identities of White Christian privilege and the impact this particular intersection for teacher educators and integrating this intersection into a cornerstone of this theoretical framework to investigate the role of CRL in teacher education contexts.

Critical Race Theory and White Privilege

To begin, the concept of White privilege stems partially from a scholarly and activist movement called Critical Race Theory (CRT), established in the 1980s as a response to institutionalized racism experienced by legal scholars and community activists, including Crenshaw, Richard Delgado, and Patricia J. Williams (West et al., 1995). CRT was informed by, and ultimately dissatisfied with critical theorists in the Frankfurt School traditions that critiqued hegemonic structures of oppression and sought to understand issues of power on a societal level. Indeed, these CRT scholars and activists sought to critique and expose the systemic racism and normative White supremacy in the very fabric of society. However, the notion of White privilege was also influenced and taken up by a broader range of writers, from early Black civil rights activist-scholars, including W. E. B. Du Bois and Theodore Allan to Anti-Racist scholar-activists and feminists, such as bell hooks and Robin DiAngelo (DiAngelo, 2011). While

various definitions of White privilege have been forwarded by scholars and activists, one of the

most frequently cited is by Peggy McIntosh (McIntosh, 2019) who describes it as

> an invisible package of unearned assets that I can count on cashing in each day, but about which I was "meant" to remain oblivious. White privilege is like an invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, assurances, tools, maps, guides, codebooks, passports, visas, clothes, compass, emergency gear, and blank checks." (McIntosh, 2019, p.2)

McIntosh goes on to enumerate a lengthy list of ways she 'cashes in' as a White woman,

including being able to move to a new home without worrying whether a landlord will rent an

apartment to her or that her neighbours will treat her poorly, or being able to go shopping

without worrying about being followed by store personnel (p. 4). McIntosh's original article has

been criticized on the grounds that it suggests that White people's contribution to dismantling

racist structures of oppression is mainly accomplished through reflecting on one's privileges

rather than taking an active Anti-Racist stance (Lensmire et al., 2013). While these critiques may

be justified and even necessary for propelling scholarship forward, given the prevalence of

usage of the term White privilege in current public discourse and educational scholarship, I

believe it is important to include it in this theoretical framework.

Even the broader scholarly focus on Whiteness as an identity has been critiqued by

scholars such as (Bonnett, 1996) who argues against the concept of Whiteness is mistakenly

'fixed' and ignores the fluidity of this identity through time and space, preferring a more

nuanced usage of the concept of White ness that encompasses the complexities of this identity.

However, retaining a focus on Whiteness as a racial category is arguably necessary, particularly

in the White dominant North American context wherein this dissertation is located. As DiAngelo

explains, Whites often perceive their experiences to simply be 'reality' and argues that this

> …belief in objectivity, coupled with positioning White people as outside of culture (and thus the norm for humanity), allows Whites to view themselves as universal humans who can represent all of human experience. This is evidenced through an unracialized identity or location, which functions as a kind of blindness; an inability to think about Whiteness as an identity or as a "state" of being that would or could have an impact on one's life. (2011, p. 59)

Because this state of 'blindness' allows White people, including educators, to remain ignorant to the oppression and injustices experienced by racialized people, it has real and harmful consequences, highlighting the importance for White educators to develop an awareness of their own racial identity and privilege.

As an example of a common harm perpetuated by those with access to power on the marginalized, the concept of microaggressions has proven a useful tool to conceptualize a form of oppression. Originally coined by Chester Pierce in the 1970s, the term 'racial microaggression' was a way to describe the kind of "automatic, preconscious, or unconscious" ways White people discriminated against racialized people, especially the Black community (1974, p. 515). The concept was broadened to include other aspects of identity, such as sexual orientation, gender, ability status, or class. In the field of psychology, Sue et al., note that "…often unconsciously delivered in the form of subtle snubs or dismissive looks, gestures, and tone" (2007, p. 273). As opposed to instances of what has been conceptualized as macroaggression that operates on a systemic level, as in racist policies or curriculum, for example, microaggressions may be harder for the dominant group members to detect or acknowledge because they are often unconscious, such as mistaking a Black woman for a service worker (Torino et al., 2018, p. 5). These subtle forms of racism are commonly perpetuated in educational contexts and may have far-reaching harmful repercussions for those who experience them, such as increased stress and anxiety, self-doubt, and low self-

esteem (Martin, 2018). Because the intersection of religious and racial identity is a location where microaggressions are commonly experienced, as seen in the earlier discussion around religious bullying, and because of the important role played by K-G educators in educating for SJOC, incorporating CRL into teacher education programs may help ensure that future K-G teachers avoid perpetuating these harms.

White Christian Privilege

Scholars in disciplines related to Critical Race Theory or social justice tend to shy away from discussion about religion, in the same way that Religious Studies scholars have frequently avoided robust engagement with issues of race, social justice, or work informed by CRT (McTighe, 2020). While there is a small body of literature devoted to exposing how a "stealth" Protestantism underpins much of North American society, the particular attention to the intersection of race or Whiteness and Christianity has only recently been addressed (Blumenfeld et al., 2009; Clark, 2020; Ellison et al., 2019; Joshi, 2020). As one of the most prominent voices in this burgeoning field, Khyati Joshi in her 2020 book, *White Christian Privilege: The Illusion of Religious Equality in America,* calls for a social justice approach to examining religion in a North American context that considers the intersection of race and other identity markers that impact the particular advantages or disadvantages that an individual or community experiences. She draws attention to how the typical approach to understanding religion and religious identities focuses on helping the dominant normative population -- White Christians in a North American context -- to understand and accommodate for the differences of religious minorities. She argues that this approach is problematic because

it fails to illuminate the advantages of the dominant society, contributing to an invisible

hegemony, as Joshi notes how

> To truly understand the dynamics of oppression, we have to see the "up": the advantaged group or identity. It took decades for the scholarship and popular dialogue on racism to go beyond looking at how Blacks and others are targeted for racial discrimination, and to focus on Whiteness and White privilege – the "built-in" advantages that members of the nation's historic majority enjoy whether they want them or not. (p.13)

Here, Joshi draws the parallel of how critical race scholarship and public dialogue have evolved

to how scholarly and public discourses about religion in public life must also begin to shift focus

to how Whiteness and White privilege afford advantages to those in the dominant culture.

Joshi identifies White Christian privilege as contemporary by-product of the historical colonial

European project of White Supremacy, wherein racial superiority and religious superiority were

fundamental rationalizing concepts for enslavement and genocide as part of the "Doctrine of

Discovery" (p. 5-6). Writing within the US context, Joshi notes how this historical legacy has led

to a dominant White Christian normativity, where the identity markers of White, Christian, and

American become conflated and are thus often rendered invisible to those who belong to the

dominant society. Moreover, White Christian normativity becomes set up in opposition to the

racial or religious 'other', leading to resistance to, suspicion of, or even oppression of those

outside this constructed, normative identity (pp. 8-11).

This is an important piece of the theoretical framework for this dissertation that seeks

to understand the role of CRL in educational contexts because of the urgent need for educators

– and teacher educators -- to understand and address the intersection of race and religion in

the classroom.

White Christian Privilege and Education

The concept of White Christian privilege and its intersection with teacher education and K-G education, is one that has received little scholarly attention. There is ample scholarly evidence and discussion about the problematic disconnect between the majority K-G White educators and their increasingly diverse student body in North American contexts (Castro, 2013; Gay, 2010; Sleeter, 2008; Case & Hemmings, 2005; Lensmire et al., 2013), with recent discussions addressing anti-Black racism in educational contexts (Lopez, 2020; Lopez & Jean-Marie, 2021). There is also a body of scholarship that considers the importance of addressing Christian privilege among educators (Blumenfeld, 2006; Blumenfeld et al., 2009; Blumenfeld & Jaekel, 2012). However, because of the predominance of White Christian female K-G educators in the Canadian context, especially in rural or agricultural communities (Anthony-Stevens et al., 2017; Anthony-Stevens & Langford, 2020; Han, 2018), and because of the way White Christian educators may consciously or unconsciously uphold normative structures of oppression that operate to marginalize those perceived as 'other', there is a strong need to consider how these intersectional identities may impact curricular and pedagogical decisions and practices within teacher education programs.

Section 3: Epistemic Injustice

To illuminate discussions surrounding CRL as an educational aim for teacher education, this dissertation draws on Miranda Fricker's notion of epistemic injustice outlined in her 2007 work *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing* as a part of a theoretical framework. Fricker's work builds on a robust feminist epistemological body of scholarship that has developed notions including 'epistemic violence' (Spivak, 2003) 'silencing' and epistemic

exclusion that share a concern with how marginalized communities or individuals may face

oppression in their agency as knowers. This section considers how Fricker's seminal work,

Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing (2007) helped spur this growing body of

scholarship on epistemology and its relationship with power, identity, and the kinds of harms

that may propagated through forms of epistemic exclusion (Dotson, 2011, 2012; Polhaus, 2012,

2020). I begin with a discussion of key components of Fricker's conceptualization of epistemic

injustice before considering the relationship between EI and religious diversity and religious

illiteracy. I will summarize key points of her conceptualization before briefly attending to some

of the ways Fricker's notion of EI has been both contested and expanded in the decades since

its publication (Dotson, 2012; Pohlhaus, 2012, 2020).

Fricker divides EI into two main categories: testimonial injustice and hermeneutical

injustice. As what she acknowledges is likely the most common type of epistemic injustice (p. 5)

, testimonial injustice occurs when the speaker is not given due credit for her epistemological

capacity because the hearer has some sort of identity prejudice, thus imposing what Fricker

calls an *identity-prejudicial credibility deficit* (p. 28). This wrong can create a kind of

developmental harm that may result in the speaker's inability to fully realize themselves (p. 4).

An example from educators could be the teacher who has unconscious bias that results in

calling on male students in a math class, thus giving them more opportunities to participate.

This form of injustice is intrinsically linked to power and identity because, as Fricker notes

"...identity power is an integral part of the mechanism of testimonial exchange, because of the

need for hearers to use social stereotypes as heuristics in their spontaneous assessments of

their interlocutor's credibility" (p.17). In other words, the hearer exercises a kind of power over

the speaker based on their negative perception of the speaker's social identity, resulting in the deflation of that speaker's credibility as a knower. This testimonial injustice may, in connection with other forms of prejudice, result in a systemic form of injustice, where the speaker is inflicted with multiple forms of social injustice (p.27).

Hermeneutical injustice occurs when an individual or community is prevented from understanding their own lived experiences because there is "gap in collective interpretive resources" (p.1). This is a structural form of epistemic injustice that Fricker defines as "the injustice of having some significant area of one's social experience obscured from collective understanding owing to a structural identity prejudice in the collective hermeneutical resource." (20). To illustrate, Fricker gives the example of working women prior to the 1970s who were unable to articulate or even understand their experiences of oppression and harassment in the workplace because there was a gap in the collective consciousness at that point in time (p. 151). Once women began to develop the language and understanding of sexual harassment, the conversation opened and public discourse began to shift. A Canadian example of hermeneutical injustice can arguably be identified in the failure of the Canadian education system to include or address historical wrongs towards Indigenous peoples of Canada (Tanchuk et al., 2017). Until quite recently, with the emergence of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC, 2015), Canadian public discourse, particularly in educational contexts, had an almost total blind-spot for all issues related to Indigenous issues and communities. From my own experience as a student in the Canadian K-G system in the 1980s, I can attest that I only learned about FNMI issues or communities very infrequently, and only in a 'far-off' historical context, as though these communities no longer existed. This massive gap in hermeneutical

resources can certainly be seen as a hermeneutical injustice towards Canadian Indigenous

individuals and communities, who have been severely disadvantaged because of this omission.

There are those who critique Fricker's conceptualization of EI, such as philosopher Kristie

Dotson (2012) and Polhaus (2011), who point out that Fricker's hermeneutical injustice

suggests that the lack of hermeneutical resources is experienced equally by all or that there is

one collective hermeneutical resource to which some have access and some do not. For

example, in the Canadian K-G education system in the 1980s, the lack of access to knowledge

about FNMI communities and issues was hardly felt equally by the dominant White settler

society and Indigenous communities. Moreover, Pohlhaus contends that although Fricker's

conceptualization of hermeneutical injustice acknowledges the role of systems in the

perpetuation of epistemic harm, it maintains the system at the centre as something that needs

to be fixed, rather than acknowledging the possibility of other alternative epistemic systems to

exist (2020, p. 235). Here, it is useful to consider Pohlhaus' concept of *willful hermeneutic*

ignorance as a way to highlight the importance of situatedness of the knower, and to describe

how a dominant situated population may refuse to make use of epistemic resources that have

been produced by marginally situated communities (2012, p.721). Similarly, Dotson points out

that in Fricker's framing of hermeneutic injustice "The power relations that produce

hermeneutically marginalized populations do not also work to suppress, in all cases, knowledge

of one's experiences of oppression and marginalization within those marginalized populations"

(2011, p. 31). As discussed below, these notions of testimonial injustice, hermeneutical injustice

and willful hermeneutic ignorance provide a piece of my conceptual framework for examining

the role of CRL in educating for SOJC in teacher education programs in Canada. This requires

extending these notions of EI to the domain of religion and religious identity.

Epistemic injustice and religious diversity

There has been a recent revival of interest in issues surrounding epistemological justice

across multiple domains such as Writing Studies (Godbee, 2017) and health professional

sciences (Thomas et al., 2020), however, application to religious issues in education has been

limited. Philosophers such as Ian Kidd have noted that religion is a particularly tricky

phenomena to conceive of epistemologically because it may be considered as both the

perpetrator of epistemic injustice and also a victim (2017). Indeed, there is no shortage of

historical examples that demonstrates the first category of perpetuator. From historical

understandings of Christianity's role in oppressive or disastrous events such as the Spanish

Inquisition, the Crusades, or the long standing subjugation of the female religious figure

through multiple traditions (Gross, 1996; Paludi & Ellens, 2016; Sharma & Young, 1999) to

contemporary discussions about the central role Catholic and Protestant churches in Canada's

residential schools, religion's role as a perpetuator of epistemic injustice has been rigorously

documented (Miller, 2017, 1996; Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2016; Van

Die, 2001). However, there also remains the possibility of a religious person being the 'victim' of

an epistemic injustice if, in the context of teacher education, a student or community is

discredited or seen as unintelligible because of their religious identity and beliefs. Of course,

the expression of religious views in a public education context will always be challenging

because as Kidd (Kidd et al., 2017)notes,

> Such contexts complicate judgments of credibility and interpretation because epistemic
> possibilities that are crucial to one group are ruled out by another – for instance, if talk

of a sense of love of or union with god can only be heard as symbolic or expressive at best, or 'outmoded' or literally senseless at worst, then there is a space for epistemic injustice" (2017, p. 392)

Thus, if a student's attempts to contribute to knowledge are completely discredited because these contributions are grounded in the student's religious identity, this can be understood as an epistemic injustice because the speaker is being discredited in their capacity as a knower. As Pohlhaus explains, "… those dominantly situated may be encouraged to develop a kind of epistemic arrogance in order to maintain that their experience of the world is generalizable to the entirety of reality" (2017, p. 18). Moreover, this possibility for epistemic injustice may occur even when there is not a direct shutting down a students' expression of their religious or spiritual identity. Indeed, an epistemic injustice may also take place when underlying an apparent openness to all varieties of knowledge, there is in fact what Pohlhaus has called 'fractured epistemic trust' when either on an individual or institutional level the speaker experiences sustained distrust in their capacity to be heard (p.18), or what Dotson has referred to as epistemic silencing (2011).

Religious illiteracy as an epistemic injustice?

Thus, religion and CRL present a complicated terrain for understanding epistemic injustice that relies on both Fricker's branches of testimonial and hermeneutical injustice. This dissertation draws primarily on Fricker's notion of testimonial injustice to examine the kind of wrong visited on those religious individuals and communities who experience a credibility deficit due primarily to their social identity as 'religious' or spiritual – or not. However, it also considers the possibility that religious illiteracy may contribute to a kind of hermeneutical injustice through creating the conditions where a dominant situated group maintains a kind of

willful hermeneutic ignorance as a refusal to consider the epistemic resources that may be developed by marginally situated groups.

From Epistemic Injustice to Epistemic Inclusion

As a final building block in my theoretical framework that will provide an analysis of my empirical studies about the role of CRL in educating for SJOC in teacher education programs, I turn to the concept of epistemic inclusion as outlined in Julia Ipgrave's (2010) study on Muslim students in secular, pluralistic schools in the UK. Ipgrave's case study addressed the concern that Muslim minority students were struggling academically by suggesting that rather than relying on an model of inclusion based on identity, educators work from a model of epistemological inclusion. Ipgrave argues that identity-based approaches to inclusion are unsatisfactory because ultimately, they rely on the educational authority to determine which religious tradition or aspect of a religious tradition gets celebrated or recognized. Moreover, identity-based approaches to inclusion tend to oversimplify understandings of religious communities or traditions, with little attention drawn to the internal diversity within all traditions. However, for Ipgrave, the main problem with identity-based approaches is that they "justify the accommodation of aspects of Muslim pupils' religion in school in terms of the self-esteem and self-confidence of the believer rather than of any intrinsic value in that which they believe. Because Islam is so much a part of their pupils' identity, the school affords it recognition so they do not feel marginalised or disaffected" (p. 14). Teaching through this approach to inclusion leads to comforting students rather than truly valuing their contributions to knowledge.

Instead, Ipgrave (2010) proposes what she calls an epistemologically-based approach to inclusion. Drawing parallels with Cheron Byfield's research that noted that black students' achievement was positively correlated with their Christian identity, Ipgrave argues that teachers must not only acknowledge students' religiously based knowledge, they must allow it to exist side-by-side with other forms of accepted epistemologies. She notes how "…an epistemology-based approach to inclusion does not confuse the accumulation of facts with truth. Instead, students are invited to bring other conceptualisations of the world into the classroom and share experiential and theological (as also philosophical and political) perspectives on the subjects of their learning and to learn to distinguish between them" (p. 18). Ipgrave's model of epistemological inclusivity is useful in this discussion because it highlights the importance of teachers and teacher educators developing a kind of epistemological openness to their students' contributions. Moreover, it suggests a way to address a hermeneutic injustice impacting marginalized populations and perpetuated by the dominant epistemology. However, epistemological inclusivity is no easy task. Many scholars, including Ipgrave, have named critical self-reflection as a key skill teachers must acquire to develop this epistemological openness, particularly with regards to addressing issues related to religion in the classroom (Jackson, 1997; Rissanen et al., 2016).

Chapter summary

This chapter has taken a multidimensional, multidirectional, and transdisciplinary approach to outline the building blocks to develop a robust conceptual framework from which to examine the role of CRL as an educational approach for teacher educators. This framework builds on a SJOC model of education that is informed by scholarship on critical citizenship,

intersectionality, White Christian privilege, and epistemic injustice to create a theoretical

foundation. These concepts provide a vocabulary that will enable me to analyze my empirical

findings to demonstrate that CRL needs to play a key role in educating for social-justice

oriented citizenship in Canadian teacher education programs.

Chapter 4: Methods chapter

Chapter Three provided a theoretical framework for addressing the epistemic injustice of the failure to include CRL as a part of educating K-G students within a SJOC approach. This chapter examines the methodological paradigms that underlie my approach to my research inquiry, introduces the case study method and the normative case study in particular, and outlines key considerations in my research design, including, data collection and analysis. It follows with a description of my data analysis process and considerations of ethics and trustworthiness. The chapter closes with a discussion of the various limitations of the methodology, methods, design and those of myself as researcher.

Methodological paradigms
Constructivist

My research is partially informed by a constructivist paradigm. Ontologically, this paradigm is grounded in a relativistic stance that understands social reality as multiple and that these realities are constructed in ways that reflect one's own localized experience (Guba, 1990; 1996). Epistemologically, the constructivist paradigm understands that knowledge is constructed by both the researcher and participant in multiple domains including social, cultural, mental and experiential. As Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba (2018) summarize, "This means we are shaped by our lived experiences, and these will always come out in the knowledge we generate as researchers and in the data generated by our subjects" (p. 116). Methodologically, the constructivist paradigm draws on hermeneutical or dialectic processes, where an interpretive approach to analyzing naturalistic methods of data collection such as interviews, observations or document analysis are used (Angen, 2000; Lincoln et al., 2018). The constructivist paradigm uses an interpretive approach to data analysis because it posits that

there is no one objective reality or truth capable accessible to all; rather the way 'reality' is

understood will vary depending on how an individual interprets that meaning (Guba & Lincoln,

1998, p. 203). Thus, the constructivist position seeks to generate knowledge through

interaction and dialogue between participants and researchers. Accordingly, my doctoral

research aligns methodologically with Lincoln, Lyndham, & Guba (2018) who describe the aim

of constructivist inquiry "To understand and interpret through meaning of phenomena

(obtained from the joint construction/reconstruction of meaning of lived experience); such

understanding is sought to inform praxis (improved practice)" (p. 118).

Critical theory

Along with a constructivist paradigm, my work is also grounded in a critical theory

paradigm. I include in the critical theory paradigm all those scholars whose work seeks to

disrupt and challenge the power structures that marginalize certain groups, such as feminist

and critical race scholars. Critical theorists draw on scholarly traditions that include scholars

such as Marx, the Frankfurt school, Foucault, Freire, Derrida, hooks, Haraway, Giroux, Ladson-

Billings, among others. Ontologically, critical theorists ground their work in a worldview that

assumes that underlying all human interactions are power dynamics that result in either

oppression or privilege for all participants (Lincoln et al., 2018). These power dynamics result

from the way we value or deny an individual or community based on characteristics of race,

ability, gender, culture, religion, language, class, or sexual orientation, among others.

Epistemologically, critical theorists understand that because knowledge is constructed within a

socially, culturally, mentally specific position within 'society,' it is impossible to separate that

knowledge from the underlying power dynamics at play within any given community. Critical

theorists generally aim to take a dialogic approach to research, attempting to uncover existing structures of oppression (Merriam, 1991). Moreover, the aim of inquiry from a critical theory standpoint is to both uncover and transform those oppressive structures (Lincoln et al., 2018, Giroux, 1982). Thus, the ultimate goal of research from a critical theory perspective is to reveal and challenge injustice and to seek a more just society.

My project is informed by both these methodological paradigms because I seek to both interpret data through a lens that understands knowledge is co-created (constructivist), but also to reveal the underlying power dynamics at play when there is religious illiteracy (critical theorist). In line with critical scholars such as Kincheloe & McLaren (1998), I approach my research with the anticipation that it will contribute not simply to increasing 'knowledge,' but that it will also serve as a call to action for the inclusion a critical approach to RL in teacher education.

Methods and analysis
Traditional Case Study

I considered several methodologies before settling on the current design. I chose to use a qualitative case study methodology because of the inherent flexibility of qualitative approaches (Stake, 1995) that allowed me to use multiple data collection including semi-structured qualitative interviews, focus groups, and field notes. Precisely what constitutes case study methodology has been long disputed among scholars (Creswell, 2013; Ragin, 1992; George & Bennet, 2005; Yin, 2014). Contributing to the wide array of case study applications or varieties is the fact that this methodology gets taken up by scholars across disciplines as diverse as clinical medicine to political science to philosophy who employ both quantitative and

qualitative methods (Schwandt & Gates, 2018). Even the definition of what a 'case' consists of is up for question, though most scholars will agree on its being a "instance, incident, or unit of something" (p.341). Broadly speaking, my understanding aligns with Yin (2003) who notes that the case study method "…allows investigators to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events…" and "investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident" (p.13). Accordingly, my research seeks to gain a broad understanding of a specific case or phenomenon which is how teacher educators and preservice teachers in Canadian universities understand religious literacy as an educational aim. This study falls into Yin's case study category of 'exploratory case study,' using a small data set that allows for 'thick' and detailed description of a 'contemporary phenomenon' of RL within the 'real-life context' of a teacher education program. I also draw on an understanding of case studies conceptualized by scholars such as Flyvbjerg (2006) who stresses the importance of case studies, noting "….that a discipline without a large number of thoroughly executed case studies is a discipline without systematic production of exemplars, and that a discipline without exemplars is an ineffective one" (p.242). In drawing on case study methodology, I hope that my findings may have implications for how we understand what the role of RL should be; in other words, the normative implications of my findings. I shall outline my specific approach to case studies using normative case study methodology below.

The question of whether the case study is truly a methodology or more of a method that can be used as a tool within another methodological framework has been the source of much debate (Stake, 2005). Schwandt & Gates go so far as to declare that "Beyond positing that case

study methodology has something to do with "in-depth" investigation of a phenomenon (notwithstanding that all good scientific research is "in-depth," that is, thorough, careful, painstaking, and the like), it is a fool's errand to pursue what is (or should be) truly called "case study" (p. 344). I share Schwandt & Gates doubts about the ability – or need – to definitively categorize the case study as either method or methodology; however, I find their four distinct uses of case study methodology useful: a) descriptive case study; b) hypothesis generation and theory development; c) hypothesis and theory testing; d) contributing to normative theory (p. 346 – 352). While my research could be said to have characteristics of all these categories as it seeks to describe and generate theory, my aims in this case study lay primarily in Schwandt & Gates' (2018) fourth category of contributing to normative theory development.

Normative Case Study

The normative case study methodology has been mostly used by those scholars in philosophy of education or related fields. It is outlined in David Thacher's 2006 essay *The Normative Case Study* wherein he argues that the main purpose of the normative case study is to create normative knowledge, or in other words, to answer questions about whether or not we should think a certain way about something. This is substantially different from what he calls causal or interpretative case studies that seek to contribute to explanatory knowledge making (Thacher, 2006, p. 1638). Instead, Thacher explains that "Normative case study rests on the assumption that we can make better judgements about values by reflecting on actual cases, and indeed that such reflection is indispensable for ethical growth" (p.1637). While reflecting on normative ideals through examining hypothetical cases is a typical methodology used by philosophers of education (and philosophers in general), reflecting on these ideals through use

of empirical case studies is a more recent phenomena, one championed by Thacher, but promoted and extended by others, notably Meira Levinson (2016). However, as Thacher points out, it is not only philosophers who ought to be concerned with questions of normative ideals, but all social scientists; he goes on to note that while they may not call their work a normative case study (NCS), researchers in the realm of social science such as Foucault and Kuhn have engaged in this kind of normative work for decades.

As Levinson proposes, the NCS approach is useful because it moves educational theorists, for example, out of the realm of simply theorizing about hypothetical cases, and offers a way to test and create what Levinson refers to as action-guiding theory with the goal "…to foster the *capacity for judgment* that necessarily fills the space between theory and action" (2016, p.1). Levinson characterizes action-guiding theory with the following characteristics: 1) Applicability; 2) Theory of transitional action; 3) capacity to address uncertainty and ambiguity; 4) fact-sensitivity and often domain specificity (p.5). Levinson sums up the importance of the applicability and real-world relevance of action-guiding theory by comparing the relevance of the oft-cited trolley switch example wherein one is asked to make decisions about who gets to live and die in a hypothetical situation to the potentially life-altering decisions educators, administrators, and lawmakers have to make in the real world. She argues that "A normative theory that tackles the challenges that real agents struggle with is likely to be more relevantly, reliably, and validly action-guiding than one that strives for theoretical self-sufficiency" (p.5). Because it uses data garnered through empirical qualitative data collection methods to generate normative theory to guide and ideally transform policy and curricula in teacher education, this research draws on the NCS framework as conceived by

Thacher and developed by Levinson. In addition, because it allows me to bridge the gap between empirical case study research and philosophical scholarship, this NCS model fits well with my own attempt at interdisciplinary dialogue.

Researcher positionality

Indeed, an important part of my own doctoral journey has been my discomfort with disciplinary boundaries. Having shifted from an MA in Religious Studies (itself an eclectic discipline but one with a strong philosophical, textual-based tradition) to the semi-professional discipline of education, I initially found my footing in the realm of philosophy of education. Part of this is undoubtedly because my supervisor is a philosopher of education, and I was thus strongly influenced by his work and ways of approaching research. However, as I progressed in my doctoral studies, I became involved with different, more empirically grounded research projects. As my familiarity with the formidable diversity within educational research as a field increased, I found myself growing frustrated by the seemingly rigid distinctions between the sub-disciplines of philosophy of education versus more empirically based research. At first unarticulated, I eventually came to understand that my frustration was about the lack of dialogue that these rigid disciplinary norms engendered. Why couldn't I bring in philosophical analysis to analyze data from focus groups? Similarly, why did so few philosophers of education engage with their own real-life research projects, instead of discussing issues from primarily hypothetical perspectives or cases. More than anything, I felt stymied by the seemingly accepted disciplinary boundaries that prevent scholars, all of whom are dedicated to creating a better educational world in some way, from having meaningful discussion with each other. I felt this same frustration with regards to the ever-evolving debate among education scholars who

understand research from within a positivist paradigm and those who do so from more constructivist or critical paradigms.

Bricolage

As a solution to the dilemma described above, my overarching approach to research methods is captured most cohesively within the concept of 'bricolage,' a French term which is often directly translated as 'do-it-yourself' 'craft' or the work done by a handyperson or artisan. Its scholarly application is articulated by Kincheloe et al. who define it as "…the process of employing these methodological processes as they are needed in the unfolding context of the research situation" (p. 244, 2018). The bricoleur in this conception understands that the research process is necessarily messy, and abandons any attempt to stick to a static and supposedly 'universal' set of research methods in preference of seeking to understand and articulate their own research identity, positionality, and participation in the co-construction of knowledge (p. 244).

> The bricolage, with its multiple lenses, allows necessary fluidity and goes beyond a traditional triangulated approach for verification. The lenses expand the research and prevent a normalized methodology from creating a scientistic approach to the research. Bricolage becomes a failsafe way in which to ensure that the multiple reads create new dialogues and discourse and open possibilities. It also precludes the notion of using research as authority. (p. 252)

Within the bricolage paradigm, research methods ought to be not only eclectic, but also reflect a situated complexity that cannot be fully understood by a passive adherence to a static and 'correct' method. Thus, the idea that the researcher must follow an exact methodological procedure that does not vary across situations or circumstances in place and time is antithetical

to the bricoleur. The bricolage framework is also applicable to theoretical frameworks, where

again, the notion of a single concrete theoretical construct from which one may solidly stand

and draw objective conclusions disassociated from the researcher's self is disputed and

problematized. As Kincheloe et al. explain, "...bricoleurs act on the concept that theory is not an

explanation of nature – it is more an explanation of our relation to nature" (2011, p. 245).

The notion of bricolage has ontological and epistemological consequences that disrupt

those empirical methodological constructs such as triangulation or generalizability. The goal of

the bricoleur is never to achieve some sort of reproducible result in some clearly defined and

limited setting. Rather, the bricoleur seeks to weave diverse research methods and disciplines

together, in uncharted ways that reflect the unique context in which they appear. As Kincheloe

et al. (2018) explain

> This deep interdisciplinarity seeks to modify the disciplines and the view of research
> brought to the table constructed by the bricolage (Jardine, 1992). Everyone leaves the
> table informed by the dialogue in a way that idiosyncratically influences the research
> methods they subsequently employ. The point of the interaction is not standardized
> agreement as to some reductionistic notion of "the proper interdisciplinary research
> method" but awareness of the diverse tools in the researcher's toolbox. (p. 248)

Lincoln (2001) delineates two categories of bricoleurs as 1) those who apply the notion of

bricolage to creating diverse research methods; and 2) those who apply bricolage to a larger

theoretical purpose, such as an attempt to bridge disciplines. My research reflects both these

articulations of the bricoleur. First, I actively resist a reliance on methods that are grounded in

an empirical theoretical mode 'that operates without variation in every context' in preference

of exploratory methods that are grounded in elasticity. My desire to enjoin methodologies as

diverse as philosophical inquiry (normative case study analysis) and empirical qualitative

methods such as engaging in data analysis of interviews and focus groups is a clear example.

My research is bricolage in the second sense in that I weave together the disciplines of religious

studies, philosophy of education, and teacher education in an attempt to move beyond

disciplinary constraints, and into the realm of interdisciplinary dialogue.

Another key characteristic of the bricoleur that informs my work is the understanding

that the bricoleur is always actively engaged in a critical reflexivity that demands a rigorous

questioning of evaluating one's own assumptions that lay behind all research choices. As a

researcher, I must constantly consider my own positionality within the community I am

researching. As a bricoleur, I understand that the attempt to achieve an objective distance to

one's research subject is a futile task. Moreover, the bricoleur embraces difference as a

necessary piece in the construction of knowledge; for example, researchers that engage in

active research with marginalized communities in an effort to disrupt established and accepted

Western ways of knowing could be said to be informed by bricolage. Indeed, bricolage is

grounded in the domain of critical pedagogists such as Freire (2000) in its concern for social

transformation and justice, and thus the bricoleur necessarily brings criticality to the research

journey; in other words, bricoleurs are always concerned with an 'unsettling' of traditional

means of production of knowledge. Thus, I engage in critical reflexivity to consider my own

positionality as researcher, I understand myself as a "researcher-as-bricoleur-theorist (who)

works between and within competing and overlapping perspectives and paradigms" (Denzin &

Lincoln, 2018, p. 12).

Research setting

This section outlines the research context of my study, describing characteristics of both the locale and participants. Because the two phases of my study are located in the same program and university, I will describe that setting first before giving more specific details for each phase.

This research was carried out in a faculty of education in a primarily undergraduate university in a small city in the Canadian Prairies. The education program is recognized for an extensive field-work component and attracts students from all over the province and adjacent provinces to its five-year combined degree teacher education program and a four-semester Bachelor of Education after-degree program. Being a small city, many students have connections to smaller rural communities. In addition, there is a significant population of FNMI students from neighbouring reserves and Metis communities throughout the province.

Setting Phase 1 – Faculty

The first phase of this study drew its participants from the university's 30 – 40 dedicated 30+ faculty members, most of whom have years of experience as K-G teachers along with their expertise as researchers. In addition, the faculty employs a number of seconded K-G teachers. Those who I successfully recruited are in many ways representative of the demographic trends within the faculty. The faculty members are predominantly White and about half are male. My participants were all White, but four out of five were male, significantly more than the proportionate population within the faculty itself. While it is difficult to determine why this was so, it may be that female faculty members tend to spend more time on a larger amount of service work and may be more reticent to volunteer for anything representing extra work.

Significantly for this study, four out of the five participants indicated that they had either been raised within a faith tradition or they currently had a faith commitment within the Christian tradition. This again, is indicative of the demographics of the greater community, which has a majority population of White Christian settlers.

Setting Phase 2 – Preservice teachers

The second phase of this study took place in the same faculty, but it focused on the perspectives of the students or preservice teachers themselves. I originally sought to recruit 10 participants and ended up with 11. Of these 11 participants, 10 were female. Most participants were in their early or mid-twenties, but there were two who were in their 30s and 40s respectively. Many of the participants identified with a faith background. Two of the participants were practicing Muslims, four were practicing Christians, three were raised Christian but no longer considered themselves part of that tradition, and two identified themselves as not religious. Most of the participants were in the 5-year combined degree program, except for the two older women who were completing the two year after degree program.

Recruitment

For both phases, I primarily used convenience sampling strategy for recruiting participants. My goal was to recruit between 5-10 faculty participants and 10 preservice teacher participants. As its name suggests, convenience sampling is a popular method of recruitment across all spectrums of research because it is convenient for the researcher, who generally uses some form of advertising or public announcement to access participants (Patton, 2002). In the faculty study, I relied on the departmental administrative assistant to put out my

call for participants on the departmental listserv. My original plan to host a series of informational meetings did not proceed, mainly because the Faculty's administrative assistant, and also the gatekeeper, indicated that it would be more efficient to simply email faculty members through the listserv. Because of the inconsistent schedules of most faculty members who were all tasked with supervising preservice teachers in their placement schools, I was cautioned that an optional meeting outside of regular hours would be unlikely to be well attended. I therefore made the decision to abandon the informational meetings in favour of the email recruitment process. In the initial email, I described the overarching goals of the project, the recruitment process, the participation requirements, risks, and benefits, as well as the consent process. Anyone interested in participating was invited to contact me via email or phone at which point I would send a follow-up email with formal invitation.

In the preservice teacher phase, I used departmental listserv, posts on student association social media pages, and posters throughout the department to recruit participants. However, a small portion of participants in both phases of the study used what is known as a snowballing technique (Patton, 2002), where I asked recruited participants if they knew of anyone else who may be interested. In both cases, there were at least one or two participants who agreed to pass on the information to a friend ended up being recruited as well.

Data Collection
This section will outline my approach to data collection, with a description of my primary sources of data collection in this case study: interviews and focus groups as detailed below. Finally, I address my use of field notes throughout the research process.

Interviews

Both phases of this study relied on data collection through semi-structured individual interviews as they are perhaps the most common method of knowledge production in qualitative research, enabling the researcher to achieve the aim of "eliciting the views and opinions of the participants" (Creswell, 2003, p.188). While the interview has been accepted as qualitative research method de rigeur for at least half a century and appears only to be gaining in popularity, Brinkmann reminds us that up until the beginning of the 20th century, it was a technique met with much suspicion from renowned scholars such as Rudyard Kipling who refused to be interviewed as a 'respectable person' (2018, p. 577). Brinkmann's purpose of mentioning this anecdote is simply to draw attention to how little thought contemporary researchers often give to this widely accepted research practice. Of the three most prevalent categories of interview – the structured, unstructured, or semistructured – the latter is by far the most widely used. While the structured interview is limited by its inability to include a dialogic approach and the unstructured interview is limited to being used primarily when generating life stories or narratives, the semistructured interview allows a much greater flexibility to the researcher. As Brinkmann notes, "semistructured interviews can make better use of the knowledge-producing potentials of dialogues by allowing much more leeway for following up on whatever angles are deemed important by the interviewee, and the interviewer has a great chance of becoming visible as a knowledge-producing participant in the process itself, rather than hiding behind a preset interview guide" (p. 579). I chose to use semistructured interviews because I felt this technique was most closely aligned with my own understanding of my research within a primarily constructivist paradigm (Roulston, 2010) – that is to say, I do not believe that there is a pure, authentic objective reality that the interview will

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uncover, or "data as stable nuggets to be mined" (Brinkmann, p. 586). Rather, I understand my role as interviewer to be one that is determined by my own situatedness in the dialogic interaction between interviewee and interviewer. However, I am also aware that the notion that the qualitative, semistructured interview is inherently more ethical than other forms of research is a common pitfall for qualitative researchers (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2005). It is therefore important to bear in mind certain ethical considerations that arise during the interview practice, such as the asymmetrical power relationship inherent in the interview process, working with participants you know, and interviewer interpretation (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Brinkmann, 2018). Each of these ethical considerations will be describe in the sections below.

Interview processes

Interviews in both phases of this study took place in a closed setting of the participant's choice. For faculty participant's, this was in their own offices on campus, whereas for preservice teachers this took place in my own personal office on campus. We began by reviewing and signing the consent forms which they had received via email prior to the interview. I recorded the interviews using both a digital recorder and my mobile phone. Once we were settled, I began the interviews by engaging the participant in some small talk, thanking them for taking the time to meet me and so on, and opened the interview with an open-ended question such as "Tell me a bit about yourself and how you come to be here today." Beginning this way was an invitation for the participant to ease into the interview by engaging in telling part of their own story.

Power relationships

In the first phase I was interviewing junior, senior, and sessional faculty members in a Faculty of Education at a university where I also have worked as a sessional lecturer and in administrative capacity. Four of my participants were tenured or tenure-track faculty members while one had instructor status (with an MEd in progress). As a doctoral candidate in the field of education, I was aware of the power differential between myself and the faculty members, and I was aware that that differential may impact how participants responded. Faculty, especially tenured or tenure-track faculty hold a distinctly privileged position of authority in academia, and as a fledgling researcher, I am keenly aware of this distinction. Moreover, the majority of the participants were White, heterosexual males. As a White queer female student, I am always aware of how gender and sexual orientation impacts my interactions with others. However, I am also an insider to this population on two fronts: 1) as a member of the academic community; and 2) as a member of the specific academic community of the discipline of education which may have provided me with a certain amount of acceptance from the participants.

In the second phase with preservice teachers, the asymmetry was inverted. As a middle-aged doctoral candidate/researcher interviewing primarily undergraduate students, the majority of whom were significantly younger than me, I was in a position of power. This was heightened by my position as the expert in the subject matter, CRL. Moreover, as White Canadian woman, I was aware of my position of privilege vis-à-vis the racialized participants, both of whom were also Muslims. However, there were other power dynamics at play,

including my own identity as a queer woman interviewing participants who held anti-LGBTQ2+

beliefs. This proved challenging for me as I discuss later in this chapter.

Confidentiality

Confidentiality is a key concern for qualitative researchers as one needs to protect the

participants from being identified. Failure to do this may have serious implications for the

participants that could have negative impact on their lives and deter them from being open to

participating in future research (Berg & Lune, 2012). There were times during the interviews in

both phases when interviewees reported potentially sensitive information about their own

beliefs or struggles within the faculty when I was reminded of this ethical responsibility I hold as

researcher. This is particularly true when the research is done in a relatively small community.

Thus, it was important for me to ensure that various protocols were followed, from having

participants sign consent forms, to using pseudonyms, to changing names and identifying

characteristics of locations.

Participants you know vs. working with strangers

Working with participants you know versus those you do not know present different

ethical challenges. Garton & Copland (2010) refer to interviewing someone you know as an

'acquaintance interview.' Ethical challenges that may arise in this type of interview include

being careful not to use an existing relationship as a means of pressuring someone to

participate. On the other hand, Braun & Clarke (2013) remind us that one needs to be keenly

aware of not including information that may have been disclosed to you outside of the limits of

the interview (p. 87).

In the first phase with faculty members, my relationships with the participants did not uniformly fit into one of these neat categories. At a small institution it is not unusual to be loosely acquainted with many people or at least 'know' people by name. Three out of five participants were complete strangers to me – although I was aware of who they were in their capacities at the university, but two were people I had met before in different contexts at the university. They approached me through the general invitation, but had indicated interest in my study when I had introduced my project in prior informal conversations. Thus, while I needed to be mindful of the above ethical considerations, my loose familiarity with participants also afforded me a degree of comfort that allowed me to very quickly build rapport with participants and delve into the interview questions (Oakley, 1981).

In the study's second phase with preservice teachers, I did not know any of the participants prior to interviewing them. Although I did not find this problematic, there were a few participants who indicated that they felt quite nervous at first as they had no idea what being in a research interview entailed. However, the few participants who did make this comment, also went on to say that once we began talking, they quickly felt at ease.

Focus groups

Focus groups have moved from being primarily conceptualized as a tightly structured group interviews in positivistic research fields such as marketing or health sciences to being used in what Kamberelis, Dimitriadis, and Welker (2018) describe as "critical, poststructural, and postqualitative research in most humanities and social science disciplines (p. 694). Indeed, because of the dynamic of having multiple conservations taking place in which the researcher is not necessarily directing, focus groups may be seen as a useful way to mitigate researcher's

authority. Kamberelis & Dimitradis (2014) explain that the focus group performs the three primary functions of pedagogy, political action, and inquiry, with the pedagogical function found in the dialogic and transformative nature of the focus group (Freire, 1993). The political function is related to the collective mobilization that may occur with the focus group, such as those used in feminist research because "focus groups decenter the authority of the researcher" (p. 10) and because "…with skillful, responsive, empathic facilitation, focus groups can go a long way toward democratizing interactional spaces, allowing participants a sense of safety and ownership of the activity and thus generating deep, rich, complex understandings of the issues under study" (p. 16). In terms of inquiry, focus groups may be used as a useful means of opening up "deep philosophical questions about 'the research act' itself, including the relationship between 'self' and 'other'" (p. 15). To conclude, focus groups are at once personal and public – they are spaces in which people tell their personal stories, but they do so in a public space, surrounded by like-minded peers; thus, focus groups allow for a more natural conservation between participants to emerge and may promote solidarity and perhaps even provide participants a pathway to political or social justice activism.

In the second phase of this study, I used focus groups to follow the interviews in the research design. My rationale for doing this had primarily to do with my belief that as undergraduate students, there would be a significant power imbalance between myself as a doctoral researcher. Not only that, considering that the subject matter is highly sensitive and deeply personal, I decided it would be beneficial for the participants to engage in conversation with peers in a less formal environment to draw out other details. What I had not fully anticipated was the political function of the focus group. This will be discussed in greater detail

in my preservice teacher study chapter, but suffice to say that I was surprised to find that the participants began to mobilize themselves during the focus group and discussed ways in which they could begin to address what they considered a gap in their education, a lack of religious literacy.

Field notes

Throughout the fieldwork process, I kept field notes or memos to document my reflections and observations to aid in idea generation and to shape the overall research design and process. These were in the form of notes using OneNote and were categorized into different sections depending on the topic. For example, for each participant, I had notes on the initial interview, and then subsequent notes during the transcription and the coding phases. For the interviews and focus groups, I would record information relating to participant behaviour or tone, moments of hesitancy, doubt or confusion, along with notes on my overall impressions of the interview or focus group itself. Although these notes were frequently quite short and informal, reading through these notes throughout my research process helped guide my understanding and allowed me to deepen my understanding of recurring themes in my analysis. I also used these field notes to record any sticky areas in the interviews and bring these issues forward in the research itself.

Working with the data
Thematic analysis

Once data had been collected and transcribed, I began to analyze the data, using thematic analysis. Although the term thematic analysis has existed in a variety of fields since the 1970s, it has only relatively recently been articulated as a distinct method of data analysis

(Braun & Clarke, 2013). One of the advantages of using this method is the flexibility it offers the researcher. Unlike methods such as grounded theory or discourse analysis that are used in seemingly unending variations and are both closely linked to an epistemological framework, thematic analysis as proposed by Braun and Clarke is posited as a method separate from any theoretical stance (p. 178, 2013). In other words, thematic analysis is best understood as a method, rather than a methodology. Thus, its flexible nature means that it may be used not only across disciplines, but also across research theoretical positions; that is to say that it may be used for research that is primarily descriptive or research that comes from a critical perspective, for example. Moreover, thematic analysis may be used with varying research questions, data collection methods, and sample sizes (p.180).

Finally, thematic analysis allows the researcher to analyze a data set in a way that is either data driven or theory driven. For my study, I used an approach that was primarily bottom-up, or data-driven, where I constructed themes from the data set itself. Although I had my research questions and ideas about what I anticipated to find within the data, as I moved through the process of data analysis, I discovered, as have so many researchers before me, that the themes that I ended up constructing were sometimes quite different from what I had expected to 'find.' Allowing myself to let go of my anticipated outcomes in the data set was a messy, imperfect, and necessary part of the analysis process.

Data Coding and analysis

I followed the six steps outlined by Braun & Clarke (2013) of familiarizing myself with the data, generating initial codes, finding overall themes, reviewing themes, naming themes, and producing my final report. First, I transcribed the data from both phases directly after I

completed the interviews in each set. For the faculty participants this took place in Summer

2019 whereas I finished my transcription for the preservice teachers in Winter 2020. During the

transcription process, I would familiarize myself with the data, highlighting certain comments

and also making notes in my OneNote data journal after each transcription session where I had

a series of folders with a page for each participant in the two phases. I then uploaded the

transcribed data to NVivo 12 where I created folders for each phase and files for each of the

participants. This enabled me to engage in thematical analysis using a process Braun & Clarke

describe as complete coding (p. 206). Contrasted with selective coding wherein the researcher

chooses or selects instances of a 'type' of data that fit a predetermined analytical category,

complete coding requires the researcher to create a code for all that data that is of interest and

only later engaging in a thorough analysis of the codes.

      Thus, using a process akin to what grounded theory advocates Antony Bryant and Kathy

Charmaz (2007) describes as *initial coding*, I began by creating a code for each line or utterance;

at times one sentence, phrase, or paragraph, could have as many as 7 - 10 different codes. The

faculty data set ended up with a total of 37 different codes whereas the preservice teacher data

set had 43 different codes at their largest points. However, the coding process was discursive

and recursive in the sense that each time I went back to re-examine the data set, in a process

that Braun & Clarke call data revision where I would refine and readjust or rename the codes to

better fit emerging insights. The next step in the thematic analysis process was constructing the

themes themselves. As with the construction of codes, the construction of themes was similarly

recursive, and involved trial and error as I attempted to capture my interpretations of the data

into cohesive themes. Eventually, I found commonalities among certain codes that could be

categorized into overarching themes. As I worked with both sets of data, I began to see how although there were some differences in the codes of each data set, there were also many similarities. I thus made the decision to categorize the codes for both sets under the same themes. Eventually, I settled on the four overarching themes of 1) Religion is tricky; 2) Religion as a source of harm; 3) "We're not equipping them!" – Religious illiteracy in teacher education; and 4) CRL to counteract harm. The actual coding and analysis process was completed using NVivo 12, a software application that allows the researcher to gather all data and facilitates the coding process by permitting flexible categorization of themes (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013).

Interpretation

Another related consideration in qualitative research methods is the issue of interpretation versus description. Morse (2018) highlights how every qualitative researcher must clarify their primary purpose of research, differentiating research that aims to primarily describe versus research that seeks to interpret data, as this distinction will determine "how data are handled in the process of analysis and the methods used" (p.809). Morse goes on to differentiate between qualities of data hardness as a means of determining appropriate rigour. The four categories are summarized below:

Table 3. *Qualities of data hardness* (Morse, 2018, p. 798)

Quality of data	Characteristics
HARD data	Numerical data using standardized instruments
Hard data	Demonstrates accuracy (through coding or inter-rater reliability) but not necessarily replicable.

Soft data	Descriptive-interpretative data results that may be verified through processes such as member-checking)
SOFT data	Highly interpretative data analysis where interpretation may rely on theory (sociological, phenomenological)

Drawing on this framework, my research primarily lies in the Soft and SOFT data categories as my aim is to interpret empirical data from semistructured interviews using both interpretative and philosophical analysis. Morse describes these SOFT data as "Phenomena that are experiential, such that the only data available are reports from those who have had a certain experience...these data are interpretive because participants report them; the researcher does not experience or see the event firsthand" (p. 808).

Epistemological positioning

Doing qualitative research requires a critical reflexivity where the researcher carefully considers their paradigmatic and epistemological positioning throughout the process. I sympathise with Braun & Clarke when they decry the frequency in which qualitative research draws on various qualitative methods and methodologies with seemingly little consideration of the values, assumptions, or epistemologies underlying the research (2019). Thus, it is essential that I carefully consider my own research values and assumptions, and also to distinguish the way I understand and approach thematic analysis from other approaches. Differences in the way TA is understood is perhaps most evident in post-positivist approaches that seek to code data into pre-established themes that have been created by the researcher (Guest et al., 2011). Braun & Clarke describe this approach as a code-reliability as the emphasis is on the accuracy of the coding process. Thus, my approach to thematic analysis is in line with what Braun & Clarke

have recently described as reflexive thematic analysis (2019). This form of TA is unburdened by

the need to follow linear steps that place a strong emphasis on reliability insisting instead in a

constant reflexive and transparent process wherein the researcher is engaged in a "continual

bending back on oneself" to understand one's own assumptions one brings to the data analysis

process. As the authors explain, "*Quality* reflexive TA is not about following procedures

'correctly' (or about 'accurate' and 'reliable' coding, or achieving consensus between coders),

but about the researcher's reflective and thoughtful engagement with their data and their

reflexive and thoughtful engagement with the analytic process" (p.594, 2019).

Thus, themes are not understood to 'emerge' from the data. As Braun and Clarke

explain "Developing themes from coded data is an active process: the researcher examines the

codes and coded data, and starts to create potential patterns…Searching for patterns is not akin

to an archaeologist digging to find hidden treasures buried within the data, pre-existing the

process of searching for them. It's more akin to the process of sculpture" (2013, p.225). Indeed,

although insights would emerge during the analysis process, the decision to apply those insights

to the data or not is an active and deliberate process.

Objectivity, Validity, and generalizability or trustworthiness

Inevitably, whether within the domain of education or more broadly with social science

fields, conversations about qualitative research methods often centre around issues of

objectivity, generalizability, and validity. The quest for objectivity has been subject to much

scrutiny and has been contested across the spectrum of theoretical positions. Indeed, as Lincoln

et al. remind us, "Even within positivist frameworks, it [objectivity] is viewed as a conceptually

flawed" (2018, p. 137). While it may still highly valued as a primary goal among the hard

sciences, qualitative researchers are in broad agreement that pure objectivity is a goal that has

had its time.

The question of generalizability or what some call trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba,

1985) is also an important consideration for qualitative researchers and consists of the how or

whether the conclusions from a particular study are generalizable to another context. However,

my approach to the question of generalizability is in line with scholars such as Flyvbjerg (2006)

who argues

> "That knowledge cannot be formally generalized does not mean that
> it cannot enter into the collective process of knowledge accumulation in a given
> field or in a society. A purely descriptive, phenomenological case study without
> any attempt to generalize can certainly be of value in this process and has often
> helped cut a path toward scientific innovation."

Flyvbjerg suggests that there is great value in descriptive case studies, noting that "…formal

generalization is overvalued as a source of scientific development, whereas 'the force of

example' is underestimated" (p.288). This force of the example what draws qualitative

researchers to make use of case study methodology, and indeed, I understand the purpose of

my own research not to make generalizations that are broadly applicable to other specific

cases, but rather to use the findings from my case to make certain recommendations about

normative ideals for teacher education's approach to CRL.

Discussion around the validity of qualitative research elicits more debate than those

centered on the more easily dismissed arguments surrounding objectivity or generalizability.

The question of validity requires us to consider whether our research findings are sufficiently

authentic or trustworthy that we may take some action; in education as in other social sciences,

this may take the form of creating policy, for example. Increasingly, scholars note how

contemporary research has been increasingly influenced by postmodernist or poststructuralist

paradigms that force the researcher to question the possibility of a research method to

accurately portray 'the truth'. For example, Lincoln et al. outline two categories of

argumentation in the quest for validity: 1) the argument for a kind of rigor in method; and 2) an

argument for 'rigor-defensible reasoning' (p. 138). They go on to suggest that it is particularly

the second question of interpretative rigour that is the focus of much qualitative research

today. Scholars such as Patti Lather (1993), Richardson (2003), and Ellis and Bochner (2000)

have written extensively from this 'new paradigm' perspective, that seeks to understand how

our own interpretations of human phenomena "make life conflictual, moving, and problematic"

(Lincoln et al, p.138). This paradigm shift has had dramatic consequences for how qualitative

researchers conceive of their own research methods. Lincoln et al. summarize this as

> "…in the postmodern (and post-postmodern) moment, and in the wake of
> poststructuralism, the assumption that there is no single "truth" – that all truths are but
> partial truths; that the slippage between signifier and signified in linguistic and textual
> terms creates representation that are only and always shadows of the actual people,
> events, and places; that identities are fluid rather than fixed – leads us ineluctably
> toward the insight that there will be no single "conventional" paradigm to which all
> social scientists might ascribe in some common terms and with mutual understanding.
> Rather we stand at the threshold of a history marked by multivocality, contest
> meanings, paradigmatic controversies, and new textual forms. (p. 245)

Thus, my approach to questions of validity is rooted in the understanding that any

interpretation of data must itself be grounded and guided by a constant engagement in a self-

reflective process. To be a reflexive researcher, one must question one's choices, or

"interrogate each of our selves regarding the ways in which research efforts are shaped and

staged around the binaries, contradictions, and paradoxes that form our own lives" (Lincoln et. al, 2011). Thus, this commitment to interrogative self-reflexivity as a means of responding to questions of objectivity and generalizability is central to my approach to my research design that is grounded in a critical constructivist paradigm that draws Kincheloe's notion of bricolage.

Limitations

This last section outlines the limitations of my choice of methodology, methods and research design. It concludes with a discussion of how my own identity as a researcher created some tension and limitations in this study.

Methodology

I chose to use a case study methodology within a critical constructivist methodology. Case study methodology appealed to me because it has great flexibility and I could marry my philosophical analysis with my empirical data collection easily. However, case study methodology has been critiqued due to what some consider its loose boundaries.

Methods

In terms of my research design, there were a number of limitations. First, the voluntary nature of participation meant that those who chose to participate in the study are those who mostly already had an interest in or affinity with religion or spirituality. This naturally resulted in a selection bias, where I had few participants who had negative feelings towards religion. This was especially pronounced in my study with faculty members, all of whom had positive attitudes towards religion or were religious themselves. For the preservice teacher study, there was still a bias towards those who had positive views towards religion, but there was more diversity of opinion. A few participants had been raised in a Christian tradition but had left and thus had either negative or conflicted feelings towards religion in the classroom and two who

were not raised as Christian, and they had more measured perceptions of Christianity in particular.

Another limitation in my research design was the geographic location. Originally, I had anticipated conducting my research in Quebec and thus my original plans and background research centered around the Quebec context. However, we ended up moving across the country to the Canadian Prairies just before I completed my candidacy which had a major impact on my research plans. As I became acquainted with the Canadian Prairies context, I realized that not only would situating my research in this province make sense from a practical standpoint, it would also present a unique context that has received little research focus in educational scholarship. However, I did not fully anticipate how the specific regional context of this university would impact my study. Moving from a diverse urban setting to a much less diverse small city with strong ties to rural agricultural communities, many of which were dominated by conservative Christian traditions, meant that many of my participants, especially the preservice teachers, were a part of those conservative Christian communities. This inevitably impacted on my findings. While this can be considered as a limitation, it can also be seen as an important factor that shaped the course of this dissertation, resulting in some unanticipated but noteworthy findings.

Study design

While my use of fairly informal conversation as the primary mode of data collection in both the semi-structured interviews and the focus group allowed for a more natural conversational flow and for less influence of the researcher, this also meant that at times my own bias would show through in responses to questions from the participants. I realized during

the transcription and analysis phase that there were moments in the first interviews I conducted when it was clear that I had a bias towards including CRL in teacher education: in other words, I became aware that a question I was asking demonstrated a bias towards CRL. I addressed this by revising my questions so that they were more neutral. Another limitation that I had not fully anticipated was the degree to which it would be difficult for participants to understand the concepts of both religious literacy and citizenship. I worked to rectify this in my later interviews by defining RL at the beginning of the interview, but as I transcribed and analyzed the data, I came to the realization that certain preservice teachers still seemed to not fully comprehend the difference between teaching religion and teaching about religion. In the same vein, some of the preservice teachers could only identify notions of citizenship with concepts like "voting" or "politics". As I became aware of this difficulty, I shifted my vocabulary choices to provide synonyms like "civic values" to help those participants who struggled.

Self

There was one moment of tension that highlights an issue of concern for me around the design of this study, namely around issues of transparency and disclosure. In one interview with a preservice teacher, the participant began to discuss her strong feelings about what she called the "LGBTQ agenda." At that point in the interview I began to feel very tense because of my own identity as a queer woman. Although I tried to remain neutral and curious about her comments, I must have shown some sort of reaction which the participant noticed because not long after she made the comment that she felt uncomfortable not knowing what my own beliefs were. This incident made me wonder how I could have avoided this situation or perhaps dealt with it more skillfully. It also highlighted the tension that can exist between deeply

conservative or fundamentalist religions and those social justice-oriented values of equity and

diversity in educational contexts.

Chapter summary

In this chapter, I provided my rationale for situating myself as a researcher-bricoleur-

theorist within a critical constructivist paradigm. I discussed how the case study methodology

(and methods) permitted me to marry qualitative data collection methods of interviews, focus

groups with philosophical inquiry. I outlined how conceptualizing my research design as a

normative case study allowed me to draw normative conclusions about the role of CRL for

teacher education programs. Finally, I discussed limitations of my chosen methodology,

methods, and research design, along with those limitations related to myself as researcher. This

chapter has aimed to provide context for the following two chapters on teacher educator views

(Chp. 5) and the preservice teacher views (Chp. 6) wherein I present my findings.

Chapter 5: Teacher educators' views on the role of CRL as an educational aim for teacher education

Chapter Overview

Previous chapters reviewed a body of scholarship addressing the role CRL in classroom contexts in pluralistic democratic societies. Chapter Two discussed the role of CRL in teacher education programs within pluralistic societies such as Canada, while Chapter Three examined the theoretical aims underpinning how democratic societies educate for SJOC and epistemic justice as these relate to religion and religious identities in K-G education. These theoretical rationales provide a framework for prescriptive and normative guidelines to guide how teachers and teacher educators approach religion and religious pluralism in K-G classrooms. However, relatively little is known about what teacher educators actually think about this or what they actually do to address these issues in their classrooms, although there is ample evidence that K-G educators and teacher educators either do not engage or do not engage effectively with issues related to religious diversity (Chan, 2018; Gardner et al., 2017; Marcus & Ralph, 2021; Moore, 2007). Even when educators have an openness or willingness to consider or engage with religious issues in the classroom, or in the few instances of mandatory curriculum that requires educators to include religious issues in their courses, there remain questions concerning feasibility and effectiveness of such programming (Anderson D. et al., 2015; Hirsch, 2018; Jafralie & Zaver, 2019; Patrick, 2015; Soules & Jafralie, 2021).Thus, for normative or prescriptive recommendations about engaging with religion in the classroom to be realistic and effective, we need to know more about what teacher educators are thinking

about these issues on the ground. To that end, this chapter seeks to understand how those

tasked with educating preservice teachers view the role of CRL in teacher education programs

in light of the aims of social justice-oriented citizenship, in particular how these serve to

mitigate epistemic injustice. It also considers how or if these teacher educators are engaging

with issues related to religion in their own classrooms. Thus, the primary purpose of this

chapter is to describe themes constructed from interviews with five teacher educators in one

Canadian Prairie teacher education program in the first part of my qualitative empirical study –

the second part of my study will be presented in Chapter Six where I present the second data

set from interviews with the preservice teachers. I analyze the issues and tensions brought to

light in my conversations with teacher educators, contributing to dialogue around the place of

CRL in Canadian teacher education programs. Before describing constructed themes found in

the data set, I will review my research questions and present some background considerations

to ground the discussion in the broader context of this dissertation.

Research Questions

This part of my study seeks to address the overarching question: How do teacher educators

view the role of CRL as an educational aim in teacher education? Ancillary questions included

the following:

- How religiously literate are teacher educators in Canadian Prairie teacher education
  programs?

- How do teacher educators engage with issues related to religious diversity or CRL in
  their classrooms?

- How do teacher educators view the relationship between CRL and educating for citizenship?

- How do teacher educators' own religious or non-religious worldviews and identities impact their beliefs about the importance of being religiously literate?

How this chapter is organized

Section One begins by describing the research locale and by situating the teacher educators in terms of their gendered, racial, and religious identities, along with their perceived level of CRL. This is important because those intersectional identities inevitably form the positionality from which those participants experience their world. I follow this with a discussion of their views on two key concepts of CRL and citizenship and how these revealed the various tensions that arose in the relationship between these two concepts. This follows with a discussion of the teacher educators' responses to questions of where religion appears their courses. In Section Two, I then examine these tensions within the broad themes of 1) Religion is tricky; 2) Religion as a source of harm; 3) "We're not equipping them" – Religious illiteracy in teacher education; and 4) CRL to counteract harm: looking to Indigenization.

Section 1: Background

This study took place in a university in a small city in the Canadian Prairies. As historian Amy Von Heyking (2006), has noted, Canadian Prairie provinces have a long history of socially conservative governments implementing progressive educational reforms (p. 5). Indeed, the current Canadian Prairie educational landscape has long been home to diverse historically socially conservative Christian groups, such as the Hutterites, Mennonites, Latter Day Saints (LDS), and other groups such as Christian Reform. In addition, recent demographic shifts highlight an increasingly diverse population resulting in greater religious diversity in Canadian

Prairie K-G schools. In 2016 federal census, while the majority of immigrants still choose to live in Ontario and Quebec, increasing numbers of newly arrived immigrants are choosing to settle in the Prairies (Statistics Canada 2016). Given these demographic shifts, Canadian Prairie provinces' K-G classrooms are arguably in need of teachers who are prepared to engage with cultural diversity of all sorts, including religious diversity, as they endeavor to educate students for SJOC. Recent scholarship has noted that many current K-G teachers feel unprepared and lack the skills and competencies needed to teach religion or engage effectively with religious diversity in their classrooms (Gardner et al., 2017; Patrick, 2015; K. Soules & Jafralie, 2021). Moreover, as seen in the data from this study, it is not uncommon in this locale that preservice teachers are placed in faith-based schools that are a part of the public system, such as Hutterite Colony schools, Catholic Schools, or other Christian-based schools.[22] Thus, because of this educational and demographic diversity, the Canadian Prairie provinces represent an interesting context for exploring the role of RL in teacher education. Moreover, because this context is similar to locales in North America, UK, and Australia among others, examining the role of CRL in Canadian Prairie teacher education programs has the potential to shed light on those jurisdictions.

Research locale, participants, and methodology

This study targeted faculty members of the Faculty of Education at a university in small city in the Canadian prairies. My recruitment goal was to gain the participation of a small number of faculty members (5 to 10) who teach mandatory courses related to diversity issues

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[22] As mentioned earlier in this dissertation, some provinces publicly fund faith-based schools. There's certainly a possibility that preservice teachers are placed in non-Christian faith-based schools, such as Jewish or Muslim schools, but in the semi-rural locale of this study, this occurs infrequently compared to being placed in a Christian faith-based school.

in teacher education, such as a course on social foundations or a Social Studies preparatory course. To recruit participants, I gained access through the Faculty of Education's faculty listserv with permission of the Faculty Dean. I succeeded in recruiting five participants whom I identify with the following pseudonyms: Helen, Michael, David, James, and Matthew. Two (Helen and James) were late career, tenure-track professors who had been in the faculty for 15+ years. David and Michael were both early career tenure track Assistant Professors who had been in the faculty less than 5 years each, whereas Matthew had been teaching in the faculty as an adjunct for two years while completing his MEd. These five participants reflected the faculty demographics at large as they were all White and were either Christian or had some connection to Christianity, either through their spouse's religious affiliation (David) or because they had been raised and educated in the Christian tradition although they no longer identified as belonging to the religion (Matthew). This is not surprising as at the time the study was conducted there was very little racial diversity in the faculty. However, contrary to what research on demographics of Canadian professors of education indicates, the majority of participants were males, with only one female among the five. The implications of this are discussed below.

Participants were invited to participate in a 60-minute one-on-one interview at either their own office or a different location of their choice, with all opting for their own offices. They had been sent the consent form (see Appendix B) two weeks prior to the interview and asked to contact me with any concerns or questions they may have. They were thus informed of the voluntary nature of participation. Upon arrival, I reviewed the consent form with them before they signed it. The interviews were all recorded on my cell phone and on a voice recorder. I

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tried as much as possible to ensure that the interview followed the questions in the interview guide, but I also wanted the conversation to flow naturally as participants brought up different points of interest to them. After the interview was finished and I had transcribed the recordings, I sent the transcription to each participant for their review or to further explain any points that they felt they had not adequately answered. In the end, all participants responded only to thank me for including them in the study; no-one had any further points of clarification. I then began the process of coding and data analysis as described in Chapter Four. Ultimately, the data from these interviews were categorized into the four main themes of 1) Religion is tricky; 2) Religion can be a source of harm; 3) Religious illiteracy: 'We're not equipping them!'; 4) CRL to counteract harm – looking to Indigenization.

Level of CRL

Although all participants had an interest in religion, they differed on their perspectives about their own level of CRL. While she did not use the term CRL, Helen spoke about how because of her own faith background and scholarly interest in Christianity, she brings an "and interest and respect for people's faith commitments." Similarly, Michael's personal and scholarly background in Christianity gave him a depth of understanding in that tradition, but he notes that "…my understanding of other religious communities has mostly come by way of my relationships with other people." Both James and Matthew felt their levels of CRL were or "higher than average" or "pretty good," but both also recognized that CRL was something that always needing nurturing. Of all the participants, David was the only one to say that he did not consider himself religiously literate; however, he added the caveat that "if I don't understand a culture, that doesn't mean I shouldn't be open to learning about it."

Defining key terms

(Critical) Religious Literacy

The faculty participants were either already familiar with the term RL or they accurately guessed its meaning when introduced to it in the interviews. Of the five participants, only Michael expressed some doubts about its usage, asking initially if I were employing it from a within literacy studies perspective. When I defined the term as both an awareness of the basic tenets of a particular faith or tradition and an understanding of how those traditions shape and are shaped by various social, historical, and cultural forces, he paraphrased this as "So, you mean literacy in terms of developing awareness of something?" His question was a helpful reminder to me of the importance of providing clear and comprehensive definitions for key terms in my study and going forward I was sure to begin each interview asking participants if they were familiar with the term and if not, what their initial understanding of it was. As will be seen in the following chapter, this became particularly salient when working with the preservice teacher participants in the second part of my study.

Citizenship

Of all faculty participants, David was the most critical of the term citizenship, as indicated in his following comments:

> That notion of educating citizens, to me that's a bit of a problematic because what does that mean to be a citizen? A lot of times the government will promote the notion that you know it's a person who will be compliant or be law-abiding which I don't necessarily think is the end goal. So that notion of connecting to citizenship to me is a bit problematic because the whole notion of citizenship is problematic.

David resisted the notion of 'citizenship' itself, as he questions how it is often equated with obeying authority, following laws, and so on. Although he did not identify it as such, David's

conception of citizenship is one that can be framed as aligning with what Joel Westheimer (2015, 2020) has described as *personally responsible citizenship.* The other participants expressed less resistance to the term citizenship, with Helen describing its role in K-G schooling by stating that "…public schooling is about preparing people for active and engaged citizenship, understanding the core charter values." However, all participants articulated a belief that understanding religious identities and religious diversity was a key component of educating future K-G teachers in their task to educate K-G students to be civically engaged.

Understanding the relationship between CRL and Citizenship

Participants were asked to describe how they understood the relationship between CRL and citizenship. Michael's initial response to this question aptly described a common attitude: "Fraught, I think is the best description. That we are at a stage now where these private interiorized senses of what it means to be religious have reconfigured the religious landscape in Canada, and also reconfigured what it means to engage in the civic polity." He went on to describe how the common stance of supposed 'neutrality' was in actuality something else: "I think that was frankly a mask for a particular type of White Christianity, which claimed a neutral form of secularity, while actually proffering a certain kind of religious claims on the polity." His comments articulate a sensitivity to how power is conferred to the dominant religious tradition in Canada, Christianity, and how that power becomes aligned with an identity that is both religious and racialized. He went on to describe the consequences of an increasingly religiously diverse citizenry, stating, "And so people are trying to newly understand what it might mean to have a lively political discourse amongst religious plural claims. And what that's done frankly is decentered claims to neutrality of White Christian Canada." This apt description raises concerns

about how teacher educators navigate intersecting racialized and religious identities and the complex power differentials in the classroom.

Foundational understandings

Before presenting the themes, I present here some key foundational understandings of the teacher educator participants. I focus on how these teacher educators actually engaged with religion in their classrooms, or in other words, "Where and how does religion appear in teacher education?"

Where does religion appear in teacher education

The majority of faculty participants indicated that they included religion purposefully in their courses that addressed diversity issues. In response to the question of "Where does religion appear in your course(s) if at all?" four of the five participants, Helen, David, James, and Matthew, all included religion as a planned part of a teacher education course. These four participants felt that because religion is a key part of many students' identities, and because they would certainly be facing these contexts in their practicum classrooms, addressing religion directly was important. For example, Matthew noted how "Well dealing with classes on social issues, social contexts, religion always comes up and it is a planned part of the course. So, it's not accidental." Likewise, David describes how he plans for teaching religion in his social diversity course, noting that "And so I try to have times where we talk about what is the role of religion in education." Helen also described how religion came up in classes where she discussed the history of education in Canada, noting that "…it comes up a lot because of the historical development of public schooling, it reflects the religious communities and priorities of those generations." Similarly, James overtly addressed religion in multiple ways in his philosophy of education and social issues classrooms, stating

If you begin with religion as a set of cultural values and beliefs that inform a way of living…if that's your starting point then it's very easy to talk about religions. You can talk about the geography of religious belief. You could talk about the difference between a religion and philosophy and a theory and ideologies. So that's all very easy.

In contrast, Michael, did not consider CRL as a planned part of his teaching, reporting that "But really plainly, I'm not really specifically addressing religion in the class." While Michael's comments about the role of CRL in teacher education above suggested ambivalence, his subsequent responses indicated that CRL did play a role in class from time to time, stating "I see it's a lot like Social Studies classrooms, like a Morocco unit you have to teach, or a Ukraine unit you have to do, and so religion sort of exists less as a kind of set of theological claims, and really is a set of cultural practices." And although Michael did not include a unit or activity that specifically addressed religion in his classroom, he expressed a deep interest in religion and engaged with issues of religious identity when they arose. For example, he noted how "So that's something that I try to cultivate in students, which is a generous community immersion, a generous neutrality when it comes to understanding other people's faith perspectives." As another example, he noted that "I can say that everybody was super nervous about going to the Hutterite colonies, but what was useful for me was to try to just talk about the children in the community as one of many religious communities and just to be open to that and just to be open to the sort of immersion and everyone had a very successful (time)." Michael's comment about cultivating a "generous neutrality" when it comes to understanding students' own faith commitments raises questions around the skillset required of teacher educators and preservice teachers to do this. As research has shown, cultivating teacher neutrality in the context of teaching issues related to religious diversity is a difficult task, requiring a thoughtful

engagement with questions relating to teacher professional stance and its intersection with religion (Morris, 2011; Zaver, 2015; Jafralie, 2019). Indeed, the complexity of this task underscores the need for a framework for teacher education programs to adequately equip preservice teachers with the demands of religiously diverse classrooms. Michael's responses demonstrate both the participant's openness to discussing religious issues in the classroom, and his commitment to helping preservice teachers develop greater sensitivity of religious diversity. Overall, while there was some variation in how faculty viewed whether they were explicitly addressing religion in the classroom, in fact, all participants did address religion when it came up in their courses and intentionally provided space for it to exist as a topic of discussion in their classes. Moreover, they all signaled to their students that their classrooms were a space where religion and religious identity are subjects worthy of discussion and consideration.

Section 2: Constructed Themes

As described in the previous section, the constructed themes that I settled on were as follows: 1) Religion is tricky; 2) Religion can be a source of harm; 3) Religious illiteracy: 'We're not equipping them!'; 4) CRL to counteract harm – looking to Indigenization. Under each of these overarching themes were a number of sub-themes as summarized in the table below:

Table 4: *Faculty data themes and sub-themes*

Themes	Sub-Themes
Theme 1: Religion is tricky	- Religion is a 'taboo' subject - Fear of offending (students, parents, administration)

	- Academic hostility
Theme 2: Religion as a source of harm	- Inter-religious discrimination - White Christian privilege - Tension between conservative religious groups and LGBTQ2S+ students

Theme 3: "We're not equipped" – Religious illiteracy in teacher education	- Preservice teachers are ill-equipped
	
	 - Practicum
	
	 - Barriers
	
	      o Conflated with cultural diversity
	
	      o Curricular barriers and silences

Theme 4: CRL to counteract harm	- Parallels to Indigenization

Theme 1: Religion is tricky

Participants described challenges posed by religion or religious identities in both K-G

and teacher education contexts. These were categorized into two main sub-themes of 1) fear of

offending/controversy and 2) hostility towards religion in academia itself. All participants

agreed that religion could certainly be perceived as tricky area for educators to navigate.

Fear of Offending

Helen comments on how religion can be perceived as a tricky or controversial topic for

preservice teachers, noting their concerns about how

> You might offend someone or say something controversial or unpopular [which] has
> very real consequences as they see it. And certainly religion comes up in the classroom
> as one area that they see as very potentially damaging.

Helen's observations raise questions about what kind of consequences are perceived by

preservice teachers when it comes to the possibility of offending someone

(student/peer/parent/administrator) based on expressing a view related to religion, and how best to avoid these consequences. As will be seen in the proceeding chapter, this is something the preservice teachers were clearly apprehensive about. Helen's comment also confirms that preservice teachers are aware of the potential for harm that may be perpetuated unintentionally by teachers who do not possess the skills or knowledge to navigate the 'tricky' waters that religion or religious views may create in the classroom.

Academia is a hostile place

Several teacher educator participants mentioned having witnessed or experienced hostility towards religious issues or religious identities within academia, mostly among colleagues. For some, this was an awareness of an underlying institutional hostility towards religion, experienced both by their students and by themselves. For example, Helen commented how

> … it's interesting in these public institutions like _____ , there's a perception, I think among students, that many of their professors are hostile to their faith backgrounds. And for some of them, for good reason because they have been in classrooms with instructors where that [religion] was seen as not appropriate in an academic setting…sort of radical empiricists (laughs), or Evangelical atheists, so it's challenging and the interesting thing.

Michael's comments echoed Helen's in describing what he perceived as a typical attitude toward religion in academia, noting

> Sincerely, most academics -- and this is probably true for public intellectuals and teachers -- subscribe to some version of this secularity thesis, right? Religion is a kind of a vestige of a previous era which is like slowly dying out, and actually attention to it is kind of useless because it's fading.

Helen's suspicion that most academics hold a belief that religion is not an appropriate subject

of study or conversation in a university setting certainly reflects what others have noted

(Dinham & Francis, 2015; Dinham, 2017). While there is ironically a substantial body of research

that has demonstrated the falsity of the 'secularity' thesis, there remains this persistent belief

that religion does not belong in the public sphere, and especially in our public educational

institutions (Bramadat & Seljack, 2009; Patrick, 2015). This same point is confirmed by David

who also referred to the perceived hostility or at least aversion to religious issues in teacher

education, saying that "Well, I mean I would say by and large people just don't think it

[religion]has a place in education."

This underlying hostility towards religion in academia also had complex implications for

some participants' academic career or research choices. For example, as one of the participants

with a theological background, James made direct references to this perceived hostility towards

religion in academia, expressing how,

> I've been met with disrespect, I've been met with the dismissiveness. When one ex
> colleague just called me unenlightened and laughed at my theology background….So in
> terms of within the university there like there are occasions where I've been explicitly
> dismissed because of my belief…my religious position is dismissed as being unscientific,
> being pre-enlightenment…as being medieval.

> He summarized this point even more directly, saying "And so there is a cognitive bias

against a religious belief." James purposefully sought to counteract this by ensuring that

religion was a safe subject of discussion in his classrooms but also by putting a set of religious

symbols on his office door – a way of indicating his openness to religious perspectives to his

students and colleagues. But James also noted that this dismissive attitude towards religion or

religious identities could also come from the students themselves.

This is where the students also come in regardless of in terms of religious literacy too. They've come from a particular faculty department which is totally dismissive generally to religious belief. And If you're teaching the importance of understanding the religious perspectives of a particular religious group, I just look at them and they just kind of… there is a look of disdain.

This comment raises concerns about university student negative attitudes toward religion and their impact on religiously identified peers and professors, bringing to light a gap that has received relatively little attention in CRL scholarship. Hearing how easily a tenured professor could be dismissed as intellectually incompetent simply because he holds religious beliefs made me wonder how much more harm may be experienced by those not in such a position of privilege, such as a female Muslim preservice teacher, for example. Moreover, reflecting on this underlying hostility towards religion in academia broadly, that receives little attention or even acknowledgement, confirmed to me that this harm has real implications for teacher education programs, charged with preparing preservice teachers to educate in religiously diverse contexts. If those religiously identified preservice teachers experience a similar hostility, how should teacher educators respond? Or if the preservice teachers themselves are the ones expressing disdain towards religion, as in James' example, how are teacher educators navigating those moments in their classrooms? Do they themselves feel prepared? Reflecting on these questions about the potential harms created by dismissive attitudes to religion in academia led me to consider how these harms can be considered a form of epistemic injustice. However, it is also true that religion itself can be a force that serves to perpetuate epistemic injustice, as seen in the next theme.

Theme 2: Religion as a source of harm – "We're in the Bible Belt"

One of the unanticipated themes in this study was due to the particularity of location.

As someone who had spent most of my life in large urban settings, I initially underestimated

how great an influence the locale of the university would play in my study. Because I located my

study in a university in small prairie city, both my participants and their responses ended up

being quite different than I had originally anticipated. What quickly emerged from participants

is that the issues they encountered related to CRL and education were dramatically different

from what one might expect in a large urban setting where there is great religious and racial

diversity. The question of being prepared for religious diversity in a classroom is markedly

different in an area commonly considered "the Bible Belt" than in a large Canadian city. The

impacts of this demographic milieu came through the interviews at different points. For

example, in speaking of the students in the teacher education program, Helen noted that

> I don't think that I'm mistaken in assuming that many of the student teachers we teach
> have strong roots in their own faith communities. They understand who they are and
> what they do and their becoming teachers within a maybe spiritual or even specific
> religious context. But that's not something we often talk about. It's something that they
> may, and have, talked to me about or written about on a more one on one basis, and
> that's not something that would typically be the subject of a class discussion.

Echoing this was David who commented that "In relation to my work here at the University...my

understanding of the student population here...I mean we live in the Bible Belt, and there are a

ton of Christian students here." Helen expanded on this, explaining that in the university where

this study is located, not only the students, but also the faculty were often religious. She noted

that how

Many have strong connections to their own faith communities and the diversity of the faith communities represented in the faculty.[23] And yet, rarely is it a focus of instruction or even research, actually. I mean I think just for our student teachers, it clearly informs why we're here and what we do, but not in explicit way, or in a way that we're comfortable talking about.

Indeed, this point about the predominance of religious – namely Christian – identities at the university proved true even among the five faculty participants in this study: three were actively involved in Christian congregations, one had been to theological school although he no longer considered himself a practitioner, and one did not consider himself a Christian but his wife came from a devout Christian background and still practiced.

These faculty comments, along with my own experiences living and working in this region, confirmed that significant numbers of students at the university belong to conservative, largely White, Christian communities. The impacts of this demographic context include polarization among students and the possibility for conservative religious beliefs to create tension in the classroom when they do not align with social justice-oriented aims for citizenship reflected in the greater Canadian society and as taught within the teacher education program.

Helen discussed how there seemed to be a polarization between those preservice teachers who held faith commitments and those who did not: "There's a kind of polarization: they're either churched or they're not…or they're resistant and anti-religious -- I mean there's not just a sense of respect for diversity, but a very strong polarization of views." Her comments raised questions about the impacts this polarization of views might have, both on the preservice teachers and on

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[23] Note that the diversity of faith communities she is referring to is the diverse Christian communities, including LDS, Christian Reform, various Evangelical communities, Anglican, Catholic, and United to name some of the most predominant here.

the Faculty who teach them. It also caused me to question how best to mitigate that polarization and to give the preservice teachers the tools to do the same.

The conservative religious views of many preservice teachers presented a challenge to the faculty members, some of whom described the potential harms or tensions these could create in their classrooms. For example, Matthew mentioned how

> I try to encourage our students to be open minded…because ultimately they are teachers who are teaching students within a context of a pluralistic liberal society in which the norms of that society lean towards inclusion rather than exclusion, lean towards rights instead of segregation. And that becomes a difficult environment.

David also provided an example of the kind of tension the conservative religious views of preservice teachers could create, describing his interaction with his student:

> I remember one woman last year, she wrote 'I'm willing to forgive the sinner if not the sin.' And so she was admitting that based on her religious perspective, she can never agree to all of these things [such as LGBTQ2S+ rights]. But she understands that as a teacher she has a responsibility to support those students. And so she will forgive those individuals and try to support them even if she doesn't agree with what they're doing. I think that's a very common approach that a lot of students that are very religious have adopted in the class.

Strategies for addressing religious harm

All of the faculty participants were aware of the potential for harm that these conservative religious views from the largely White Christian preservice teachers could have in their own classrooms and in the K-G classrooms. Indeed, they were aware of the need to navigate these issues deftly and used different strategies. For example, while Matthew acknowledged the difficulties of this task of preparing preservice teachers who may hold values that do not align with the values of the liberal, pluralistic greater society in which they may

teach, he also acknowledged the importance of understanding those students' viewpoints,

instead of simply dismissing them. He went on to explain

> It's also really important for me to understand the validity of perspectives that I might not personally agree with because it's important for our students to understand within their teaching contexts. That even if they have students who reflect the religious ideologies that would say be anti LGBTQ, it's important to understand why…And so understanding that discourse, I think becomes important for our education students because we don't want them coming into contexts championing a religious perspective of social justice which might be at odds with the societal perspective of social justice.

Thus, for Matthew, creating the space in his classroom for religion to be discussed and for

different views to be expressed provides the opportunity to ask all students to engage in

reflection about their views. Likewise, David spoke eloquently about a key strategy he used in

his classrooms when issues related to sexuality or LGBTQ2S+ identities came up:

> I do understand how religion is such a strong force in their understanding. And if I was to try to critique, or be very overt, it would be counter-productive. So, I always try at the beginning of the course, I try to ground it in the notion of the human or the universal Declaration of Human Rights. I ground it in the teaching quality standard that talks about notions of equality acceptance of all people. And so if anyone talks about religion I would say "Okay that's your right to possess this belief, however, we're grounding it in this documentation. And so it's your responsibility as a teacher to adhere to this." I try to make that separation. I know for a lot of students it's very difficult.

Thus, when confronted with potentially divisive issues such as LGBTQ2+ student identities and

the conservative religious views of some of the preservice teachers, David's most useful

strategy was to ground his teaching in the language of human rights that exists not only in the

Universal Declaration of Human Rights, but also in the teaching quality standards. This

highlights both the usefulness of a human rights oriented framework for teaching such

potentially tricky areas, such as religion and LGBTQ2+ issues, but it also demonstrates the

importance of program documents and guidelines, such as teaching quality standards, in guiding teacher educators through these difficult areas.

Theme 3: "We're not equipping them!" – Religious illiteracy in teacher education

A prominent theme to emerge from this phase of the study is that faculty are concerned that teacher education currently does not well-equip preservice teachers to encounter or engage thoughtfully with religious diversity in K-G classrooms, confirming what scholarship across other locales has noted (Aronsen et al., 2016; Burritt, 2020; Guo, 2015; Rissanen et al., 2016; Ubani, 2018). This may seem contradictory to earlier comments about how often these participants engaged with religion as a discussion topic in their own classrooms, however, all participants felt that their openness towards religion was not typical of the majority of faculty. This difference among my participants' views from what they perceived was more typical of professors in their departments may be attributed to the inherent selection bias, which inevitably attracted participants who were interested in and open to religion. However, having now worked at this university and lived in this community for four years, my own experiences and impressions are that although there may be some hostility towards religion at this institution, there may be more acceptance of issues related to religion in this locale than in a large urban centre. While these impressions cannot be taken as hard evidence, even the fact that three out of five participants were actively Christian suggests a high degree of religiosity. Overall, all participants expressed reservations about whether the teacher education program is equipping teacher educators to be religiously literate, to engage with religious diversity thoughtfully, or to teach religiously literacy in their own classrooms.

Helen's comments underscore how a lack of CRL may pose problems for preservice

educators:

> Our teachers are also walking into classrooms where students of all faiths are
> represented, and I mean the fact that they can be teaching in communities where there
> are Muslim students, there are Buddhist students, etc. I don't know that they feel at all
> prepared. In fact, I would be surprised if they did feel prepared because I don't see that
> we've done very much to help with that.

Helen's last comment here supports what others have indicated, namely that teacher education

has not adequately prepared preservice teachers to encounter the kind of religious diversity

they are likely to encounter in today's K-G schools (Subedi, 2006; White, 2009; Guo, 2015;

Patrick, 2015; Gardner et al., 2017; Aronson et al., 2016; Burritt, 2020; Niemi et al., 2020;

Burritt, 2020). This idea was affirmed by David who went on to comment:

> I mean I think about our students and we aren't thinking about preparing them for
> dealing with religious difference...what's going to happen when they encounter people
> from Muslim country and people with all these different beliefs? I think that we'd be
> setting them up to potentially offend those people, but also I think at the very least, not
> being able to engage them on a deep level.

David makes two important points about the lack of CRL in teacher education programs. First, a

lack of CRL in educators may lead to creating a potential harm for students– that is they risk

offending those who bring religious identities or faith commitments into the classroom. Second,

a lack of CRL may lead to an inability to deeply engage with all their students, especially those

who are religiously different. While she does not use the term, Helen shared David's view on

the importance of developing greater CRL:

> That's where I think if there were first an understanding of those religious traditions...
> that is important. Many (preservice teachers) are not particularly knowledgeable about
> any of them. If they've been raised in a particular tradition, they may think they know a

lot…they might know something about their own but not particularly knowledgeable or understanding of others. But they also need the sort of moral courage and intellectual courage to take on these conversations and understand what their role is, particularly in the context of public schooling.

Here, Helen makes two important points. First, her comments underscore the point that having an awareness or understanding of diverse religious traditions, in other words, being religiously literate, is not something that is necessarily present in those with a faith background or spiritual identity. Indeed, although she does not use the term CRL, Helen's observation aligns with scholarship that demonstrates how individuals from a strong faith community may have little CRL in terms of other traditions (Aronson et al., 2016). This is especially dangerous in an educational context when the educator's faith tradition is the dominant one in a given society, as Christianity is in North America, because it can lead to marginalization or 'othering' of both those students from non-dominant faith traditions and those who have no faith background (Niemi et al., 2020). The second point here is that developing CRL is not simply about learning some facts about different religions. As Helen described, becoming religiously literate also requires this 'moral courage' to engage in dialogue, and thus teacher educators must consider how best to equip preservice teachers with the skills they need to engage in this complex task (Moore, 2007; Dinham, 2015; Gardner et al., 2017).

Need for RL in Practicum

Another unanticipated theme in this study was the frequency with which preservice teachers are placed in faith-based public schools for their practicum placements and the problems that sometimes arose in those contexts. There seems to be little attention to

preparing these future educators for working in religiously diverse environments, or even in a

homogenous faith-based school. Helen remarked how

> When we have student teachers and they're assigned a particular placement, there isn't much consideration given…if they are placed in a Catholic school and they have no religious background, they may be suddenly asked to lead a religious lesson. Our field experience people try to remind mentor teachers that it would be inappropriate to ask [the student teacher to teach a religious lesson], or not to assume that this is someone who shares these views, but it still tends to happen. And there are often discussions around a level of discomfort about being in a faith-informed school environment, and feeling excluded.

Her comment draws attention to the lack of preparation for preservice teachers with regards to

religious diversity in their practicum placements. It also raises concerns about the underlying

assumptions of Christian or Catholic teacher mentors about preservice teachers' religious,

spiritual or non-religious identities and how those identities may impact their experiences in

teaching placements.

In his explanation that preservice teachers are ill-equipped to encounter religious

diversity, David stressed the central role religion may play in shaping one's identity and the

potential consequences of ignoring that aspect of identity:

> Religion is a key part of people's identity and how they think about the world, so if we ignore that element I think we're hurting students, we're diminishing their ability to productively engage with others and navigate to create a better world. So, I think that's kind of the key element… that it's about a deep level of awareness in order to foster productive development within society.

David's observations articulate how the failure to recognize an aspect of a student's identity

has the potential to actually do harm, not only to that student, but also to their capacity to

engage as a fully participatory member of a given society. He connects the ability to engage

with the other with having a 'deep level of awareness' about the other, something we cannot do without some understanding of others' religious identities, beliefs and practices.

Barriers

Collectively, the faculty participants indicated that barriers to implementing CRL in teacher education programs include that religious issues are often omitted from teacher education classrooms because these are easily conflated with cultural diversity, because there is a perception that there is no room in a congested curriculum, and relatedly, because religion does not appear in the program of studies.

Conflated with cultural diversity

In commenting on the conflation of religion with culture, participants indicated that because of the emphasis on educating for cultural diversity, it was permissible to dismiss or simply omit religion as a focus within course content. The reasons for this are not always obvious but may align with those who argue that because of the potential for conflict or tension that comes with discussing deeply seated religious or spiritual beliefs and values, many educators opt to simply ignore or avoid conversations about religious beliefs (Subedi, 2006; White, 2009; James, 2015; Aronson et al., 2016; Niemi et al., 2020). Helen's comments below are worth noting because they articulate how religion tends to be omitted or gets overshadowed by conversations that focus on preparing teacher candidates to understand their own cultural privilege:

> I think a lot of teacher education programs have really tried to help students understand cultural diversity, understand the privilege they have. We're talking about settler colonialism, we're talking about Whiteness, we're talking about rurality and Whiteness, but it's always somehow seen as a racial or ethnic sense, not as a religious one, unless people have a particular research interest.

This comment raises questions about why even when teacher education programs explicitly educate preservice teachers to help them address their own (often) white and/or settler privilege, they still often omit religion as a category of diversity in their important work to educate preservice teachers to become aware of their own biases.

Curricular barriers and 'silences'

All participants agreed that one challenge incorporating CRL in teacher education programs is the question of where it would fit within an already congested curriculum. All participants agreed that CRL of some kind would be useful for preservice teachers and that the best approach would be an infused approach, wherein the subject matter does not appear in a course devoted exclusively to that topic. Rather, participants advocated for an approach where CRL would appear integrated throughout the entire curriculum. For example, James noted how an infused approach could be modeled on how the current curriculum approaches FNMI subject matter:

> We had we had some fantastic elders come in...a beautiful infused approach to education which involved spirituality. It wasn't an add on, it was infused and I thought "Wow, what a great model!" So religious literacy very similar. It's not another add on. It's something that's infused.

Likewise, while Helen understood the reasons why social studies would be seen as a natural place to include CRL as content, she had reservations about this approach:

> My concern about seeing it as a uniquely social studies responsibility is for the same reason that I emphasize to my students that social studies has a unique role to play in citizenship education. That is in fact the whole school's job -- public schooling is about preparing people for active and engaged citizenship, understanding the core charter values. So, when it becomes the sole duty, or when it is seen as content put in a particular course, then it doesn't become part of the lived reality of the classroom or school.

James agreed that adding CRL as another component to teacher education, as a separate course or certification perhaps was problematic as it just added to an already congested curriculum. Instead, like Helen, he advocated for an integrative or infused approach:

> With an infused approach there are many opportunities of bringing in nurture religious literacy in the daily activity of doing good teaching. For example, (when) teaching and a unit an evolution in science…it's a lot better to begin with a critical inquiry question 'Can a Darwinian be a Christian?' than it is to say 'What is evolution?'

Notably, James' approach to infusing CRL into the curriculum was to include it as a part of his pedagogical commitment to teaching critical thinking skills. James went on to describe his approach, stating

> And the nice thing about the pedagogy of critical thinking...is you're guiding them with the tools and the questions, so they get the insights themselves and they can make their relations among the important features of a belief system. And so they all respond positively to that.

James' comments raises questions about the ability or willingness of faculty members to take such an approach to preservice teacher religious views. It made me wonder if it were perhaps because he is someone who has studied his own religion, Christianity, from a scholarly approach in theology courses, he understood a part of his role to help his students question all their assumptions and beliefs from a critical standpoint.

A related concern for all participants was the observation of the impact of structural obstacles within educational institutions, in this case, the Ministry of Education. Participants indicated that one reason why religion tended not to have prominence in teacher education programs is because it is not mentioned in the government mandated K-G program of studies. Helen explains

Like every other teacher education program in this province, we have a memorandum of agreement with the Ministry of Education, and there is a specific set of competencies that teachers need to demonstrate, and understanding how to plan with the curriculum and the program of studies is central to that. So, if things don't appear, these sort of massive silences in the program itself make it difficult to raise within the context of a curriculum and instruction course, for example.

In speaking about preparing a K-G public school teacher to teach a world religions course,

Matthew agreed, saying

I think it's really hard to prepare our students to teach a course in world religions. When a) course isn't being taught in a lot of contexts. And really B) we don't have a certification, we don't have a minor in religious studies, we don't have a way of recognizing that within our current organizational structure.

He continued, noting how the absence of religion in the K-G program of studies for social

studies creates significant challenges for teacher educators because of the way religion is often

intrinsically tied to the themes or topics they are teaching.

So what we try to do is we try to create a context where there is some sort of surface understanding of let's say what a Muslim world view would be within the context of our present society in order to challenge what the media is rolling out. So that would be something that we do without providing a declaration that potentially removes students right. Because it's not directly contained within the program studies it becomes tricky. But it's implied within the program of studies because it deals with current events. So we're kind of caught in a tough place.

Matthew's comments stress the need for preservice educators to be able to help their own

students think critically about how religion may be presented in the media – a task that

becomes very difficult if the preservice teachers lack CRL. He also highlights the importance of a

topic being included in the program of studies, noting that if it is absent, it becomes difficult to

include. He went on to describe how

I think our best pathway forward is looking at the incorporation of the approved curriculum of…religions and bringing that within the context of schools. To do that I

think we need to advocate and encourage the importance of that. And I think that can be done. But it's not being done right now. Not in my experience.

These faculty members' comments illustrate the obstacles faced when attempting to include a major content area into the teacher education program. Because the program must align with the Teaching Standard Qualifications, curriculum content and decisions about what is included or excluded are fundamentally political in nature because, in Canada at least, these curricular decisions are made by the provincially controlled.

Theme 4: CRL to counteract harm: looking to Indigenization

The participants in this study all indicated that CRL as an educational aim in teacher education could go some way to reducing the kinds of harms that can be perpetuated by religious illiteracy among educators. They spoke about the need to help their White Christian preservice teachers with conservative or even illiberal views to consider other views, by framing these in a human rights language, as with David, or by asking them to critically reflect on their views in dialogue with others, as with James. This kind of reflective, critical work is supported by using a CRL approach in teacher education. Moreover, they largely agreed that the preservice teachers lacked CRL, something that could be addressed by including a greater focus on this aspect of diversity in teacher education.

Perhaps one of the most surprising findings for me in this study was the connection between teaching for CRL and Indigenization of the curriculum mentioned by all faculty participants. For some, such as David, indigenization represented an opening to discuss religion and religious identities in the classroom because of the overt role played by the Christian Church and its members in the Residential school system, in particular its role in the attempted erasure of Indigenous spiritualities, heightening the importance for Canadian educators to

consider the role of religious and spiritual identities in their classroom and the power dynamics

those entail. Michael also drew a connection between indigenization and spirituality, noting

that

> What is interesting again about the indigenization move is that actually spirituality is a kind of reclamation project, right? That which was like that was actively annihilated by White settler colonialism is now being affirmed as central and fundamental. And so I think that does sort of like provide a space where we can talk about history of religion, like historical injustices, residential schools.

Likewise, Helen that the move to Indigenize teacher education curriculum offered opportunities

for bringing in religious or perspectives, explaining that

> I think the only time I've heard it [religion] come up in a larger classroom discussion is actually as we've talked about FNMI spirituality, as we've talked a lot more about this, and taken responsibility with the new teaching quality standard that student teachers and all teachers and staff demonstrate what they call foundational knowledge of FNMI. And I think one of the great gifts of that has been to understand that and respect a spiritual perspective. It's actually offered an opportunity to open up conversations much more broadly in the pluralist sense than what students might have felt was comfortable or even appropriate previously.

Similarly, James also noticed this connection, commenting that "…I think First Nations

communities are doing some really good work in terms of religious literacy. Their

spiritualities...of understanding a creator of the understanding of the interconnectedness of all

things of the importance of kindness…compassion." Matthew likewise saw Indigenization of

curriculum as an opening to discuss CRL, remarking that "I do see the context of religious

education or religious perspectives being brought in through context courses issues courses or

in contrast to some of these shifts and moves that we see in education for reconciliation being

a big piece."

However, in addition to its opening possibilities towards CRL in teacher education, Indigenization also was seen to have the potential to create challenges or tensions in relation to religious or spiritual identities. Some participants noted that while most students seemed to welcome Indigenization in both curriculum and pedagogy, there was also some resistance, particularly from those from Christian faith backgrounds. There was some discussion or debate around bringing practices such as smudging into a university or K-G school context when other religious practices, such as Christian prayer, were not always welcome. Michael described how

> …in this context of religious -- I don't know what to call it, homogeneity -- that's particularly trying to integrate indigenous conceptions of religion and religiosity, [doing so] ring a bit strange, I think, to students. Because it [smudging ceremony] seems like a very public affirming understanding of religion, which obviously doesn't meld terribly well with some of these other things.

This comment brings to light the question of the place of religion in public education. In this educational context where there is a dominant White Christian population, bringing in a spiritual practice related to a different religious or spiritual group created a tension that one would not expect to see in a less homogenous or more diverse setting. And when there is generally a complete absence of discussion about religion in teacher education, and then spiritual practices are invited in a public way, it is understandable that this may raise questions for those who may feel that their faith backgrounds are not to be brought into the classroom. But the perceived resistance to the incorporation of Indigenous spiritual practices highlights the need for teacher educators to possess the skills to encourage examination of underlying issues of power and social justice within one's own religious or non-religious worldview (Kanu, 2011). In the context of this case study, it would allow teacher educators to encourage the predominantly White Christian preservice teachers religion to critically reflect on their own

White Christian privilege, asking them to consider their own positionality as K-G educators towards all students in their classrooms. Finally, it also indicates what others have noted as one of the challenges of Indigenization and the intersection with spirituality: namely, that even when a curriculum takes an inclusive approach to Indigenous issues, there is often a lack of understanding of Indigenous spirituality on the part of the educators (Battiste, 2013; Kanu, 2011; Tomlins-Jahnke et al., 2019). As Chan et al. (2019) note, this lack of epistemic understanding of Indigenous spirituality is compounded by the fact that teachers lack the skills or capacities necessary to engage students in productive dialogue about religion and spirituality more broadly.

Chapter Summary

In a period of rapidly diversifying student population in both K-G schools and in universities, teacher educators have many reasons to consider the CRL of the preservice teachers in their courses: increasing polarization across the political spectrum (Westheimer, 2020), growing culture of 'fake news' and a reliance on social media for information, and rising rates of religiously motivated hate crimes. As seen in the themes above, faculty responses indicate that while there are compelling reasons to include CRL as an aim in their diversity related courses, this is left up to the individual faculty members because it is not addressed in the current K-G program of studies. While all faculty participants agreed with the importance of CRL as an educational aim for teacher education, especially in equipping preservice teachers with the skills and knowledge needed to educate for social justice-oriented citizenship, there was concern about resistance to its integration into curriculum due to both an institutional/academic hostility towards religion and to its omission from provincially mandated

programs of studies. Reflecting on the teacher educators' responses within the four themes

above, raised questions for me about how teacher education programs can best address the

epistemological injustices that occur in both the 'massive silences' about religion and

spirituality, and in the potentially harmful illiberal religious views that may be held by some

preservice teachers. While it was hopeful to see the ways that Indigenization of the curriculum

creates openings to engage preservice teachers in discussions about religion, it also highlighted

how crucial it is to have a subject matter appear within a program of studies. As long as CRL

does not appear in policy such as a program of studies, incorporating CRL in teacher education

will remain at the discretion of the instructor, many of whom may decide not to discuss it. Thus,

preservice teachers may themselves remain ill-equipped to work in and create their own

classrooms as spaces that are open to CRL.

Chapter 6: Preservice teachers' perceptions on the role of CRL as an educational aim

Chapter overview

This chapter presents the portion of my study involving preservice educators at the same Canadian Prairies university where I conducted the faculty phase of this study in the previous chapter. I situate the findings by reviewing the researching questions, presenting the research locale and demographics of the participants, and by describing how participants viewed key terms in this study. The remainder of the chapter presents the themes I constructed from the data obtained from one-on-one interviews as well as a focus group where I brought all preservice participants together. As described in Chapter Four, I use thematic analysis to find patterns or commonalities in the participant responses and present my interpretation of these responses. While the personal interviews created an opportunity for the preservice teachers to open up about religion and religious identity in a relatively safe and private environment, the focus group provided an opportunity for the participants to engage in a more dialogic encounter that many participants found valuable.

Research Questions

The central research questions that will guide this phase of the study is what are preservice educators' beliefs about the need for K-G teachers to be religiously literate and about the role of CRL as an educational aim for educating for SJOC citizenship? Subsequent guiding questions include the following:

- How religiously literate are preservice teachers in Canadian teacher education programs?

- How do preservice teachers engage with issues related to religious diversity or CRL in their classrooms?

- How do preservice teachers view the relationship between CRL and educating for SJOC?

- How do pre-service K-G teachers' own religious or non-religious worldviews and identities impact their beliefs about the importance of being critically religiously literate?

Section 1: Background
Research locale, participants, and methodology

The target population for this study were Bachelor of Education students at the same university as in the study for the faculty study described in the previous chapter. Part of the rationale for this decision was to identify points of overlap and/or tension between preservice teachers and those who are charged with the responsibility of preparing them for classroom teaching. The majority of the preservice teachers in this study were either currently taking or had taken an education course that focused on issues of diversity. This could be either a course on diversity in the classroom, or a Social Studies preparation course and in a number of cases, this course was taught by one of the faculty participants. I initially planned to have a group of 10 students participating in the study. In fact, I received interest from 11 respondents – one more than the target number, but I decided to interview the last recruit because he was the only male participant, and I welcomed the addition of more gender diversity among participants. Of course, the decision to remain within the same institution was also influenced by practical considerations given that I work at the same institution.

With the permission of the department and faculty member teaching the course, I entered two classrooms at the beginning of the session to describe the overarching goals of the

project, the recruitment process, the participation requirements, risks, and benefits, as well as

the consent process. I was invited into these classrooms by two professors who were

participating in the previous phase of this study (David and James). All students were made

aware of the voluntary nature of the project and that it was in no way a course requirement. All

students were invited to participate in the study through a follow-up email with formal

invitation that invited them to participate in a 60-minute closed setting interview in a room on

campus. After their course had finished, the same eleven participants were invited to a 60-

minute focus group in a closed room on campus, with a total number of seven who attended.

Participants did not receive compensation for their participation but were offered food and

refreshments at the focus group. As detailed in Chapter Four, I recorded the interviews and

focus group using my phone voice recorder as well as a separate voice recorder to ensure that I

had backed up the data. In the weeks and months that followed the interviews and focus

group, in the winter of 2020, I transcribed the data, taking notes in my OneNote data journal

during the process. These notes were often brief and casual in nature, but they proved helpful

when I would return to review the data later. Once I had uploaded the transcribed data into

NVivo 12, I created a folder for this phase of the project and created a file for each interview as

well as for the focus group data. I then engaged in familiarizing myself with the data and

generating codes (Braun & Clarke, 2013). I eventually arrived at 43 separate codes. By

reviewing these codes over time, I was slowly able to see patterns among the data which led

me to eventually categorize the codes into four overarching themes: 1) Religion is tricky; 2)

Religion as a source of harm; 3) "We're ill-equipped" -- Religious illiteracy in teacher education;

4) CRL to counteract harm.

The eleven preservice teachers who participated in this study were overwhelmingly female (10 female; 1 male) as mentioned above. This pattern reflects what recent data shows, namely that women still dominate the field of education in Canada with upwards of 75% of all teachers in Canada identifying as female[24][25]. As indicated in Table 5, the majority of participants in this study identified as religious or spiritual. Again, given the nature of the subject matter along with the strong presence of religious groups in this community, the strong showing of religious/spiritual participants is unsurprising.

Table 5: *Summary of preservice teacher participants by religious affiliation*

Religious/spiritual affiliation	Number of participants
Baptist Christian	1
Canadian Reformed Churches	1
Latter Day Saint (LDS)	2
Muslim	2
Earth-based religion	1
Agnostic/Questioning/Spiritual but not religious	4

However, although many rural prairie communities are sometimes referred to as the 'Bible belt' of Canada, even among my participants, more surprising to me was the diversity within the religious backgrounds of the participants. While more than a third were Christian (four out of eleven) there was diversity even among the four participants belonging to

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[24] Statistics Canada: https://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=EAG_PERS_SHARE_AGE
[25] Statistics Canada: https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/dt-td/Rp-eng.cfm?LANG=E&APATH=3&DETAIL=0&DIM=0&FL=A&FREE=0&GC=0&GID=0&GK=0&GRP=1&PID=110696&PRID=10&PTYPE=109445&S=0&SHOWALL=0&SUB=0&Temporal=2017&THEME=124&VID=0&VNAMEE=&VNAMEF=

conservative Christian backgrounds, with only two coming from the Latter-Day Saints (LDS). This is at odds with the estimations of some participants in the faculty study who suggested that LDS students made up perhaps as much as 80% of their classes. If this is true, then it suggests the LDS students largely were not interested in participating in this study, pointing to another area for future study. The other two conservative Christians were from two different religious communities as seen in Table 1. All Christian participants were white females. Two racialized female participants identified as Muslim (Zahra and Arzina), but again, they represented different branches of Islam: Sunni and Ishmaeli. One participant (Heather) identified as belonging to Earth-based religion, and the remaining four participants identified as spiritual but not religious, questioning, or agnostic. Out of the these four, two were raised within a Christian faith community but no longer affiliated themselves with these traditions (Isabella and Hannah), whereas the remaining two (Gabe and Ashley) did not consider religion as being an important part of their lives growing up although they were both raised in Christian rural communities. Of these unaffiliated participants, Ashley was the one who most strongly identified as spiritual but not religious, explaining "I'm more spiritual, like I believe in more like body energies and things like that."

In Table 6 I present a brief profile and pseudonym of each of the eleven participants in this study conducted in the fall of 2019.

Table 6: *Detailed profiles of preservice teacher participants*

Participant	Profile
Taylor	A mature fourth year student who identifies as Baptist or Protestant Christian and who spent many years as a youth in the Middle East. She was in her last

	practicum. She participated because she finds it frustrating that religion is rarely discussed in Canadian society.
Arzina	An Ishmaeli Muslim fourth year student. She volunteered for the study because she her own religion is very important to her, and she believes people should be able to talk about their own religion more openly.
Kayla	A fourth-year student who is very passionate about her own LDS faith. She participated because religion is at the centre of her life and she wants to be able to discuss her beliefs more freely in her teacher education courses.
Ashley	A fourth-year student who was raised in a conservative Protestant Christian community but no longer identifies with Christianity. She participated because she is interested in spirituality and education.
Emma	A fourth-year student who is a part of the LDS community. She participated because she is passionate about her own faith and would like to share those more freely in teacher education.
Isabella	A fifth-year student who was raised as a Catholic in Ireland. She no longer considers herself Christian, but rather agnostic. She participated in the study because of her experience of the dramatic differences in her own religious education compared to the secular Canadian education system.
Heather	A mature two-year After-degree program participant who identifies as a follower of Earth-Based religion. She participated in the study because of her deep interest in religious studies.
Zahra	A fourth-year Muslim student who has a strong interest in religious studies. Although born in the US, she lived in the UAE for her middle and high school years. She participated in the study because she is frustrated with her own experiences with discrimination due to her identity as a Muslim woman in Canada and would like to see religious identities discussed in teacher education.
Hannah	A fourth-year student who was raised in a small Protestant Christian group which she described as 'cult-like'. She identifies as questioning and participated in this study because of her questions about religious identity and education.
Sarah	A mature student in the two-year After-degree program who identifies strongly with her Protestant Christian religion (Christian Reformed Church). She participated in this study because of her interest in religious commitments and public education.
Gabe	The only male student in the study. He is a fourth-year student who identities as 'spiritual but not religious' and participated in the study because of his curiosity in how religion or spirituality may intersect with education. He also frequently mentioned feeling unprepared for religion in the classroom.

Level of CRL

The perceived level of CRL of the participants was quite varied. Two of the participants

had religious studies backgrounds: Zahra as a current religious studies/education combined

major, and Heather as a former religious studies major before she returned to school to do her education after-degree. Both these participants had a much more nuanced understanding of religion and religious identity and an immediate understanding of the term religious literacy. Importantly, they did not require clarification on the difference between teaching religion and teaching about religion. The remaining nine participants had a lower level of CRL although all of the participants who identified as practitioners of their religions, either Christianity or Islam, were fairly literate in their own tradition, but most acknowledged a lack of familiarity with others as expressed in the comments of Emma who responded with the following when asked about her own CRL: "Vaguely aware, I mean, like I have I understand basically different Christian denominations, I guess. As far as like non-Western religion, very little awareness like I don't know anything like I got to be honest." The two exceptions to this were Zahra, who, as mentioned above, is a religious studies major, and Taylor, who lived in a GCC country for part of her childhood, where the dominant religion was Islam. The low level of CRL was also true of the participants who identified of questioning or agnostic. Overall, although all participants demonstrated an openness and interest in religion or spirituality, with a few exceptions, they could not be considered religiously literate in religious traditions outside their own.

Definitions/Key terms
Critical Religious literacy
During the interviews it quickly became apparent that many participants had not considered the difference between teaching religion and teaching *about* religion; in other words, the difference between teaching from a confessional standpoint, as in Catholic education, for example, and teaching from a non-confessional standpoint, as in a religious literacy approach. Notice how in the excerpt below, Ashley expresses her fears around teaching

religion in the classroom that demonstrate how she has not yet grasped the possibility of teaching *about* religion, "It's like you're scared. I am because I myself don't exactly 100 percent believe in a specific religion. So how can I stand there and preach?" This important distinction had to be clarified by either myself in the individual interviews or by other participants in the focus group. When the distinction was pointed out, by me or a peer, it was often met with an 'aha' moment of understanding, with most grasping the distinction immediately. For example, in the focus group, Hannah spoke to other participants about this moment for her, saying "But like there's a difference with teaching about religion and teaching religion. There's a huge difference!" She differentiated these two by explaining that teaching about religion would involve "many different spiritual practices in the world" compared to teaching religion which would mean "You're coming from like an opinion or like maybe where you're coming from bias". In the focus group, this difference was most aptly described by Zahra – also a religious studies student – as the difference between "teaching or preaching." One participant, Taylor, took this a step further, by pointing out a fundamental problem with the teaching about religion approach, as seen in the dialogue below:

> **Taylor:** But I guess that that's the difficult part about teaching, is that you can't get away from that part of valuing one thing over another…if you start to teach religion…?
>
> **Erin:** Although perhaps it might be possible to teach about religion without teaching religion?
>
> **Taylor:** Yes, but then who are you going to get hired to teach that?

Indeed, Taylor's response highlights a key practical concern for proponents of including CRL as a part of teacher education for a social justice-oriented citizenship – that of implementation. As amply illustrated by numerous studies, finding teachers with enough background knowledge

about different religious traditions is difficult (Anderson et al., 2015; Jafralie, 2016; Moore, 2010; Soules, 2019).

Citizenship

As I began the interview process, it quickly became apparent that the key term 'citizenship' held quite different meanings for various participants and often evoked strong sentiments. These different interpretations fell into two categories: 1) those who understood it as positively related to values of respect or kindness; and 2) those who viewed it as related to a negative conception of nationalism. Most participants gave examples of citizenship as related to values, as seen in Isabella's comment "I think teaching respect and teaching kindness….respect is built through trust and listening compassion." Ashley elaborated on this understanding of citizenship as related to teaching values of respect, which include respect for values of others:

> In my classroom, I will teach citizenship. And to me, that means being open minded to other person… other people's views. And it's OK. It's okay to agree to disagree. I'm not saying everybody has to agree on something, but you have to be respectful that other people have different views than you….and so that to me is citizenship and you know, what can we do inside the classroom to help others or in the school or what can you do in the community and stuff like that? And so I think that's what my main goal is. It's teaching them to be aware of their own values and other people's.

A few participants had a more negative view of citizenship being related to a negative conception of nationalism as exemplified in the comments of Heather, who when asked to define citizenship replied with the following:

> I mean, [citizenship] is being provincially mandated… it's what makes a good citizen right now. I don't want to go there… Citizenship, nationalism. All of those things. There's nothing good about it. If you look at any history, there's really nothing good about it.

Taylor's response to the same question reflects a questioning attitude, stating, "I'm wrestling

with that concept right now because of a couple of classes I'm taking. And because of the fact

that citizenship didn't mean anything to me growing up, citizenship meant your passport,

nothing else." This questioning clearly stems from both the university courses she's taking and

also her upbringing in different countries, which allows her to have a wider perspective and

perhaps a looser sense of national identity. Another participant who wrestled with the term

was Gabe, who commented that,

> … I see that as being civically responsible and challenging the way that things are not
> just like integrating yourself with them, but like looking at it externally and kind of
> seeing like I'm a big proponent of people learning kind of how to be themselves and not
> necessarily be the cookie cutter people that most good educators nowadays are trying
> to move away from anyway.

Gabe underscores the importance of critical thinking in being a good citizen – and that he

believes that most 'good educators' do the same. Finally, one participant, Heather, proposed

replacing teaching for citizenship with teaching for global citizenship:

> So teaching global citizenry right now is quite easy, especially when you when you talk
> about how to take care of your planet and not just for yourself, but for your neighbor
> and not just for your neighbor, but for your provincial neighbor. And maybe not just for
> that, but for your national neighbor and not just for that, but for the poor small
> countries who live in the middle of the Pacific that might not have a country. And for
> those people who are or are being oppressed all the time.

Heather's comments align with a teaching for a social-justice oriented global citizenship that

seeks to address and eliminate all forms of oppression (Franch, 2020; Pashby et al., 2020).

Overall, the preservice teachers did not express the same sense of anxiety about teaching citizenship that they expressed about teaching religion. This raised questions for me, as I wondered if this was because they felt better informed about one subject but not the other as seemed to be the case? If so, this seemed at odds with the fact that religion and citizenship are so closely entwined (as theoretical discussions in previous chapters show) in pluralistic democracies. It raises other questions around the causes for this discrepancy, causing me to wonder if it was because they are less fearful of negative consequences surrounding educating for citizenship – e.g. parental reactions, evaluations of their competence as teachers, or fear of navigating potential controversy in the classroom.

Foundational understandings
Where does religion appear in teacher education courses?
Absence

When asked if religion had ever been discussed in any of their teacher education courses so far, many stated that it had never been raised as a topic of discussion. For example, Taylor commented "I'm in social studies for non-majors right now. So, I'm learning and I'm surprised that religion has literally never come up in any of the things that we've discussed in class yet!" Similarly, Emma mentioned that, "It's never talked about. Like no one. I honestly can't think of any instances like in university or in a professional setting where religion is brought up." Drawing upon her newfound understanding of the term 'religious literacy,' Isabella wondered why she had never learned about it previously, stating "Like, why haven't I learned about this in the program? Because we learn about so many other literacies…why hasn't religious literacy come up?" Hannah expanded on this perceived omission as seen in her comment below:

We even talk about being culturally literate and about celebrating students' different ethnic backgrounds and all of and their culture and those are different. But yeah, I was like, wow, how has the religion never really been brought into this? But then nobody ever talks about religious identity. I don't think I've ever heard the words religious identity ever, but it's sometimes a huge part of somebody's world.

Hannah also pointed out how the main focus in classroom discussion about diversity tended to revolve around diversity in learning styles. She comments "But I would say most of the diversity issues like focus around diverse learning needs and how you can make the classroom universal." This same point is seen in Emma's comments below where she notes the emphasis on diversity and inclusion in terms of learning disabilities and how religion doesn't appear in that emphasis:

> .. I think that throughout the education here, they've done a really good job at emphasizing that you will have lots of diverse kids with diagnosed issues. And here are some techniques to handle it, just like being open with parents, having a strong circle of support, resources, that kind of thing. So I think that dealing with it, dealing with diversity like I have, I have knowledge in how to do that. But yes, specifically religion? As far as giving tips for like having a deal or knowledge about different religions and that kind of thing and what you can do as a teacher to connect with that student? [shakes head indicating 'no']

This perception that religion is never openly discussed in their teacher education program was shared by Arzina, who notes the discrepancy between the attention paid to other facets of student identity or backgrounds versus religious identity:

> So we're all aware that everyone's different governments, different backgrounds, different kind of schemas or whatever. But we don't specifically talk about religion, cultures, traditions. Religion, I think is a touchy feely subject for a lot of people. So like now that I'm thinking about it. I don't think it's ever come up.

Others made a similar point regarding the lack of focus on religion in contrast to the focus on

FMNI issues as in Kayla's comments below:

> My year has been really focusing on FNMI culture and really trying to make sure that
> that is represented, which I've loved. And that's really opened my eyes to things that I
> never thought about. But I do feel like we've talked about culture, we've talked about
> language, we've talked about all that. But I feel like people are just afraid to talk about
> religion.

As one of the deeply religious participants in the study, Kayla felt this omission keenly, stating

that "It's like my religion is 100 percent of who I am, you know? So, I feel like that would be

similar for some of my students, right?" Kayla's experience of being someone with a strong

religious background allows her to empathize with K-G students who may not feel comfortable

sharing that part of their identity within a classroom context wherein religion is completely

absent. Sarah also noted the importance of acknowledging students' religious identities and

contrasted that to the attention given to LGBTQ2S+ identities in K-G education, commenting

that,

> I think [about] the level and the attention that something like sexual identity gets. What
> if religious identity got the same amount of attention? Would that look like and how
> would that change the way people talk?

Superficial

In line with the other participants, Gabe agreed that the teacher education program had

not prepared him well for dealing with religious diversity in the classroom, however, he

mentioned that religion had come up in his courses in a very limited way.

> So I was just thinking anyway about since I've been here and like they're [professors]
> really good at being careful with what they say in that you have all sorts of different

kids. You never know who's going to be in your classroom and that different locations [for practicum] are going to have different kind of demographics. And so it seems like they kind of barely touched and just kind of acknowledged that this [religion] is something that we're going to have to learn more about. But it was like I don't know anything specifically about a whole lot of religions.

From Gabe's perspective, the problem is not so much that religion is never discussed, but rather that it is brought up in a superficial way that leaves them with a substantial knowledge gap. He goes on to comment on the way religion tends to be treated in two teacher education courses he took that focus on diversity:

> I took like a multicultural education in Canada class. And so that was like what most that class was looking at a bunch of different cases of problems. Basically, any time that it's [religion] been brought up, *it's been framed like it's a problem and something like you have to be conscious of and be safe around it*. Like we had a social context of school in class too. So, you get brought up if you're teaching on a Hutterite colony, like you probably don't want bring up evolution or anything like that. Or if you're teaching Mormons. So, it's always just like this kind of *preventative thing* like that, it's just something that you could offend people based on…like something else to be conscious of. But then they still like aren't very explicit with what sorts of things are offensive, or like it's not that offensive to bring up eating beef in front of someone who is right or whatever…So I don't know. It's impossible to draw any of those hard lines, but it's like they won't even talk about that.

Gabe's comments demonstrate a common approach to dealing with religion in education: to consider it a problem to be solved or a potential source of conflict that must be mitigated.

Perspectives on the Relationship between CRL and Citizenship

As noted above, there were participants who were unsure about the relationship between CRL and citizenship. Some participants, including those religiously identified, recognized that there is an inherent tension between some religious values or identities and notions of citizenship. For example, Taylor, a religiously identified participant, commented that,

"So that is a very tender thing where I'm not really sure what to do with it yet, either with citizenship or with religions." Having lived in Saudi Arabia and other Muslim majority countries, Taylor, more than other participants, was more aware of the tensions that may exist between religion and citizenship. However, the majority of preservice teachers described the relationship between CRL and citizenship in terms of either a perceived similarity between religious values and citizenship or of an understanding that CRL promotes values related to good citizenship, such as respect for other cultures.

Religious values and citizenship

A number of participants described the relationship between CRL and citizenship in terms of the common values religions promote that align with their perceptions of good citizenship, as seen in Emma's response below:

> I think there definitely is that connection because to be a good citizen, to be an engaged citizen, you do have certain morals to follow that your nation has determined are ethical. So, for me to be an engaged citizen of Canada, I am looking out for my neighbors. I am being responsible. I am not being a murderer or a thief, which, you know, really are connected, I think to trying to be a better person, which I think is what most religions are about.

In addition to connecting common religious values with being a good citizen, some participants remarked on the influence of Christianity on our Canadian society. For example, Hannah, a practicing LDS preservice teacher commented that "Yeah, I believe like even when you think about like our Canadian context in the laws and stuff -- like especially in the States -- are formed off Christian values" demonstrating an awareness of both how the Canadian legal system has roots in Christianity, and how this relationship between Christian values, citizenship, and the legal system is in many ways more pronounced in the US.

One of the Muslim preservice teachers, Arzina, spoke about how being engaged in your own community and culture, including religious community, may lead to greater civic competency or engaged citizenship. She explains below that,

> But I think in general, if you're aware of your own religious beliefs and yourself, I think as a person in your even your culture, maybe your school community or religious community, then I think that just helps you want to give back more to the community. I feel like that leads to civic competency, because if you're aware of how much you can give, in what ways you can give, then I think that leads to better education. I think and better like more participation and more openness to being a better citizen.

As someone who was actively engaged with her own religious community as a youth leader, Arzina strongly felt that this engagement developed her own sense of responsibility to not only her own religious community, but also the broader community where she lives.

Finally, a number of participants described a positive relationship between religious literacy and citizenship, framing this in terms of CRL promoting respect of other cultures. This is perhaps best exemplified in Emma's comment below where she describes why she believes CRL will help educators in their role in educating for citizenship:

> … I think that connection lies in a lot of emphasis on respecting other cultures because we are such a multicultural nation. And I think that having that awareness and having a higher religious literacy does allow people to have more respect and understanding because when you're only looking at things through your lens, it's very easy to just get fixed in your mindset and think like, oh no, this is right for me, so this has to be right for everyone. That is simply not true. So, I think having a better religious literacy will totally help teachers...bring up those kids into good citizens, open minded citizens, and recognizing that there is value in everyone's point of view and you don't have to believe it to respect it and allow it to be.

Emma's comment aligns with RL scholars, such as Moore (2007), whose work argues that the more prepared educators are to engage with religious diversity, the more successful they may be in creating equitable classrooms for all students, modeling the SJOC values of open-mindedness and deep respect for religious diversity.

Section 2: Constructed themes

Constructing themes is never a simple task, as inevitably, the decision to include a certain number of themes entails the difficult task of choosing how to organize one's data. While a more extended discussion about this process is described in Chapter 4, it seems important to mention here that any attempt to categorize information in a pattern necessarily means the closure to other possibilities of categorization. I sought here to develop the themes around those comments that were most frequent, most salient in the data, letting these guide my research, even when it brought me to unanticipated territories. I constructed four main themes of findings in the data: 1) Religion is tricky; 2) Religion as a source of harm; 3) "We're ill-equipped" -- Religious illiteracy in teacher education; 4) CRL to counteract harm.

Table 7: *Preservice Teachers themes and sub-themes*

Themes	Sub-Themes
Theme 1: Religion is tricky	- Religion is a 'taboo' subject - Academic hostility - Fear of offending (students, parents, administration)
Theme 2: Religion as a source of harm	- Inter-religious discrimination - White Christian privilege

	- Tension between conservative religious groups and LGBTQ2S+ students

Theme 3: "We're not equipped" – Religious illiteracy in teacher education	- Feel ill-equipped – need for training
	
	- Barriers
	
	    o Time crunch
	
	    o Implementation

Theme 4: CRL to counteract harms	- Counteract religious stereotypes, religious bullying - Counteract polarization - Parallels to Indigenization - CRL and dialogue

Theme 1: Religion is tricky

The first theme is presented here as the starting point, both because it came up most frequently in the interviews and focus groups, but also because this theme represents what most respondents saw as a core problem – that is that religion was a tricky subject to navigate as teachers. Indeed, many of the preservice teacher participants spoke about being hesitant to address religion in the classroom for different reasons.

Speaking about religion in public is 'taboo'

Some participants noted how there is an unspoken 'taboo' against talking about religion in public in North America, with Taylor contrasting it to living in a GCC country, "I almost miss the Middle East where at least religion is not taboo to talk about because people talk about religion all the time and it scares North Americans…There really is no dialogue allowed in North American and Western culture, which is sad." In the focus group discussion Heather agreed

with Taylor's belief that talking about religion in Canada is taboo, noting how **"**It's considered rude here. I think so many people feel like they're going to get attacked for their Christianity or their belief system." This notion that speaking about religion is taboo is echoed in Emma's comments where she relates this absence of religion in the public sphere to its potential for creating conflict, "Well, I think it's really religion has really tried to be eliminated from the professional and public world because there is all that potential for conflict and there is a lot of potential to offend someone." In commenting about the 'touchiness' of religion, Hannah's comments highlight the common assumption of religion belonging to the private sphere, "I feel like religion is maybe…can be kind of a touchy subject. Just in my last practicum, I really felt like this, that it's kind of like ignored. You kind of remove that part that's like part of your home identity." These comments provide a segue to the next sub-theme which is the fear of being incompetent or of offending others.

Academic hostility towards religion

Some participants went further to mention experiences about hostility towards religion in academia more broadly. For example, Kayla described her experience in a sociology course, noting how … "My prof literally said word for word in my Sociology class that religion is a sign of mental illness." As a deeply religious LDS student she found that experience upsetting and contrasted it with her experience in another university course:

> I know in one of my French classes where we were able to have our final test in university, it was an oral exam. And my prof asked me about where I lived and stuff and I told her about like the church and stuff like that. And we actually got this really good conversation. And that was somewhere where I felt comfortable speaking because like it was stuff I was familiar with.

Reflecting on these two experiences provides examples of both the potentiality for epistemic harm that a student could experience in a class where a professor creates an arguably hostile environment for students with religious or spiritual belief systems or worldviews, and the contrasting potential for creating a welcoming and inclusive classroom environment where students feel confident that their viewpoints will be heard and considered without being subject to ridicule and shame.

Fear of being incompetent or offending

Some preservice teachers expressed the fear of being seen as ignorant in front of students because they do not know enough about a particular religion to discuss it competently in the classroom. Ashley's comments articulate the multidimensional layers to this fear, stating that **"If I were to bring them [different religions] into my classroom then I get nervous about the feedback. Let's say I don't get it right…. whether that be from parents and admin… I would say like my own fear because I'm not educated on religion."** Ashley's fear that administration would disapprove of her discussing religion in the classroom reflects a common fear among preservice teachers of being reprimanded by administration (Jafralie, 2016, p. 123), but also the specific apprehension about talking about religion in the classroom (Aronson et al., 2016). Other participants also noted their discomfort in bringing up the subject of religion because of a fear of parental reaction, for example, Zahra states, "Well, I think another thing is that you may have an impact on a student in the classroom, but then if they go home and the parents have very strong religious views against other religions or with particular religion."

Another related fear is the fear of being insensitive or offensive. This was a particular concern for a number of participants, including Gabe who notes,

I feel super, like underprepared and like afraid to start a conversation and find myself in one that it would be like I would just be like insensitive and ignorant…But I do feel unprepared to like genuinely have a conversation about it or to like say Happy Diwali or anything. Like, I don't know how to actually like connect with the people who have those religious backgrounds.

Isabella reiterated this fear of being ignorant or of offending others, stating that "I would be so afraid that I would step on toes or that I would say the wrong thing. And then you don't want the parents to be upset and you don't want your school board to be upset and you don't want the students to feel it. That would be my biggest concern." Similar to others, Isabella compared this fear of saying the wrong thing out of ignorance about religion to fears about speaking for FNMI communities, commenting that "…you would never want to speak for a religion because you don't know it. Like you'd never ever want to speak [about it]. That's exactly like when we're teaching about First Nations and stuff. That's the fear." For many of these preservice teachers, there is a strong fear of appearing offensive, leading some, such as Isabella to prefer to remain silent in order to avoid the situation altogether: "…even if someone was wearing a turban, I wouldn't want to be like, 'Oh, tell me about your religion!' You would be like, 'I don't understand because I don't want to offend you.'" This fear of offending was common and suggests that it is a strong barrier for preservice teachers to engage in conversations about religious diversity in their classrooms.

Theme 2: Religion as a source of harm

While many participants spoke of the discrimination or harms experienced by K-G students or preservice teachers who identified as religious or spiritual, many also spoke of how religion can be a force of discrimination or injustice itself.

One finding that stood out and that sheds light on the particular challenges encountered in this semi-rural prairie context was how often preservice teachers spoke of being uncomfortable in their placements for reasons related to religious discrimination perpetuated by schools within a homogenous religious community. This frequently happened on an intra-religious level wherein there was a perceived discrimination by the dominant religious tradition of a placement school against the belief system of the preservice teacher. As an example of this intra-religious discrimination, Emma, an LDS member, discusses below her experience being placed in a public school that was almost entirely attended by students of a Christian Reform community:

> And so the principal asked me to not participate in the parent teacher interviews because he said partially that the issue is a lot of the kids are were Dutch [Christian Reform) with Dutch parents [sic]. And there is a history [here] of a kind of tension between those people and LDS people. So I think he mostly asked me that for my own kind of personal protection, because as soon as a parent... he's like, "I don't know if religion comes up in the interview...you know, they don't like that. You don't want that to affect their perception of you or anything or your role here." So I thought that was really interesting. I was upset because I was like, I want to participate in interviews. So that was just interesting. That was like a big thing that was kind of weird. So because of that, I don't think that I would teach in a Christian [Reform] school, and I don't even know if I'd be able to.

Emma's story describes the kinds of harm that can be posed by religion – even within one broader tradition. As an educator myself, I found most disturbing how Emma felt so uncomfortable and disempowered as a religious minority that she did not feel she could speak up about this to either the K-G school administration or the teacher education practicum supervisor. Even though it affected her so deeply that it has had an impact on her decision of where to teach in the future, Emma was not sure how she would approach such a situation in

the future, or even if she could characterize it as a kind of injustice, remarking, "So, yeah, I was wondering if that was like discrimination. I don't know…" Emma's description of her experience led me to wonder how often this kind of subtle discrimination occurs. This is important because due to this negative experience, Emma was unable to participate fully in her practicum, which may influence the decisions she makes in her teaching career, something that may occur to others in a similar position.

Another example of discrimination that could be categorized as an intra-religious injustice is found in a story recounted by Isabella about her friend who had recently been placed in a Catholic school for her practicum:

> I had a friend that recently had to quit. She was at a Christian school, a Catholic school. And she's not at all that (Christian/Catholic) -- she's quite like me --we're kind of the more Buddhist type. And yeah, she had to quit because it didn't fit and she wasn't able to practice how she was... She said there was no support from admin.

In speaking about her own experience in her practicum as a K-G music teacher, Isabella described how her supporting teacher at the school was very religious. As a questioning or self-defined 'Buddhist-type", Isabella felt somewhat uncomfortable with her supporting teacher as described below:

> …And I found it really interesting because the school was public. Yet he always chose music pieces that were religious and about God. So, of course, I would never say anything. But I just I find that really interesting that even the parents never said anything because there was so much diversity in the school. It was just that they weren't paying attention to the lyrics or that they were also religious because I know that school has a lot of Mormon kids.

What stands out in this passage is how Isabella emphasizes that she would never say anything about her discomfort about the religious musical passages chosen by the cooperating teacher. Her reluctance to speak up echoes Emma's decision to remain silent, suggesting that the religious nature of a school or identity of a cooperating teacher can have the negative impact of causing the preservice teacher to feel excluded or even, in Emma's case, discriminated against. Their silence on this exclusion or injustice also highlights how uncomfortable and unwilling they were to speak up about an issue related to religion.

White Christian Privilege

Another key finding in this research was how prevalent and persistent was the force of White Christian privilege. This privilege became apparent in a number of comments from White Christian teachers when referencing experiences they had in their practicum placements. One example of this comes from Kayla who did her practicum in a school in her own LDS majority town. Kayla's comments demonstrate a clear Christian privilege, as seen in this passage where she describes encountering a student who did not belong to the dominant LDS community of the school:

> So, they don't celebrate Christmas. So, then all of your stuff, it's like, what do I do now? We can't have Santa anything, you know? Or we can't have baby Jesus anything, you know? And it's like, oh, what do we do there?

Kayla was candid with her initial surprise at being asked to create a lesson without elements of a Christian holiday, but she was quick to reflect on this new experience and relate this difficulty to a lack of religious literacy, stating, "And that really opened my eyes to being like…there's little things that maybe you don't think about, you know. So, I wish that there was like even just

within our social context class like that 'to do/not to do' list." This unconscious privileging of

White Christian culture is echoed in Sarah's comments below where she reflects on the

possibility of teaching about other religions in public school:

> It's interesting when the reflections I have to do is how am I going to foster a safe and caring learning environment? And that's one of the things that's in my reflection is how being willing to have open conversation and as a class about the religions that people are part of. You know, giving kids an opportunity to share about religions we celebrate, holidays like Christmas and Easter. But could we celebrate things like Kwanzaa and Eid all these things? Maybe.

> One example of how White Christian privilege is often unacknowledged by White

Christian preservice teachers can be found in the following dialogue between Sarah, a White

Christian and Zahra, a racialized Muslim:

> **Sarah:** I think of what you were saying about this feeling of the need to defend your faith all the time when it's like, why is there that need in the first place when all these values of love and compassion are around? But I still have to defend myself like right now.

> **Zahra:** I think that's because certain things are considered normal and things are considered abnormal when you're born and raised in North America your whole life. What's normal is probably to be Christian. And what's abnormal is to be anything else or what's normal is to be White. And what's abnormal is not to be, you know..

> **Sarah:** It's so interesting because those norms are all…. They're all superimposed because it's not even the reality. You go into the States and it is not primarily White.

> **Zahra:** But White is still what's normal.

This dialogue demonstrates how Sarah feels discomfort and even attacked for her Christian

views, but also how although she wishes to align herself with the discrimination Zahra feels as a

person facing religious discrimination, she is seemingly unaware of her own position of privilege

with the dominant White Christian culture. Zahra is quick to point out this discrepancy, noting

that Sarah benefits from being a part of this dominant culture with her comment "What's

normal is to probably be Christian. And what's abnormal is to be anything else or what's normal

is to be White." Sarah's response is to suggest that 'norms' of the dominant culture are not

'reality' because she believes that there is so much diversity. She then defends this claim by

using her misperception of Whites being a minority in the US, when in fact they make up more

than 70% of the population[26].

Another participant who described ways the dominant White Christian culture of her

small town in this province impacted her own experiences in her teacher ed program was

Heather, who summarizes an activity in her teacher education course:

> We went through a paper bag exercise and the vast majority of those 20 people
> [preservice teachers] are religious. They go to church and it's all a Christian base. So,
> there is no Muslim in our class there, so there isn't a lot of comparing. And I think that's
> a huge issue when it comes to the other side. And in this province it's the total opposite
> of what you might see in other places. So you have teachers who are from the faith that
> are teaching kids that are mostly from the faith, and they're trying to protect that...so
> it's difficult here.

Heather's comments about the unique issues in this region where there is a dominant White

Christian community highlight the potential difficulties this creates for preservice teachers who

are not a part of that community, pointing to a possible blind spot in the teacher education

program.

Conservative religious views and LGBTQ2S+ students

There was only one point in the interview process with the preservice teachers where I

encountered what could arguably be construed as a harm perpetrated by conservative religious

views. I had asked Sarah, a conservative Christian, if religion or religious identity ever came up

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[26]US Census Bureau, accessed on Jan. 12, 2021, https://data.census.gov/cedsci/profile?g=0100000US

in her practicum or her previous work as an educator (she had worked for two years as an educational assistant). She offered this response:

> I worked at a school that was really upholding *the LGBTQ agenda*. And I felt like if I were to say something about how the propulsion of this agenda is actually the exclusion of other agendas, that you'd kind of be looked at like…you know. And you were expected to be just as 'rah rah' about that *LGBTQ agenda,* which was fine. (italics are mine)

As a scholar of religion with a keen interest in intersectional identities, I was well aware that some religious participants may hold views that would be in tension with my own identity as a queer woman; however, I was nevertheless surprised by this response and immediately felt uncomfortable in the interview. I did my best to mask these feelings as I wanted her to feel comfortable and safe with me, but this created an unusual dynamic. This tension may have been perceived by Sarah because later in the interview, Sarah reflected on her own religious identity and how that might impact what she does in the classroom:

> **Sarah**: There are parts of me that wonder if my views might limit me.
>
> **Me:** In what way?
>
> **Sarah:** I don't know. Like, I think about things like the LGBTQ agenda. While I can talk about how I might see a standpoint of that from a faith perspective, what will happen if staff knows that it's coming from a faith perspective? What can happen is that when I am a proponent of the biological perspective and the development perspective is that it will be shut down because of what they know is your faith perspective. [They might think] There is another Christian bigot in our midst.

Sarah's comments cut right to the heart of an underlying tension that renders conversations about incorporating CRL into teacher education so difficult. She rightly worries that her own conservative views about LGBTQ2S+ rights may interfere with her role as an educator. Although she frames this concern as a fear that she will be characterized as a 'Christian bigot' because of

her beliefs, her comments also point to a real fear that her religious beliefs may limit her in her career. This interview with Sarah was one of the most interesting because of her willingness to be vulnerable and express these fears to me, and because she had very strong anti-LGBTQ2S+ beliefs which put me in an awkward and unsafe feeling position. However, it's important to note that this was the only time in all my interviews where I encountered any kind of anti-LGBTQ2S+ sentiment, so it is not at all indicative of the majority of participants, including those who are strongly religiously identified. Moreover, Sarah was deeply aware of the tensions in her beliefs and how they were in conflict with a social justice-oriented citizenship that is common in public schools across Canada, where issues surrounding equity are increasingly emphasized. One of her final comments in the interview about religion and religious identity in education demonstrate her self-reflexive awareness about the possible harms religious views can pose in education:

> Even though you deeply disagree about these core issues, it doesn't make you any less human. And that that's the problem of religion in a lot of senses is that you view people outside your religion as less human.

Theme 3: Religious illiteracy in teacher education: "We're not equipped!"

The third theme reveals responses related to the perceived lack of CRL in teacher education contexts. When asked about where or if CRL or issues related to religion appeared in their teacher education, participant responses varied between those who said these issues were never discussed, those who indicated that the topic of religion was addressed, but only superficially, and a few who found academia overall to be a hostile environment to those with religious beliefs or identities. Certainly, all participants indicated feeling ill-equipped to engage with religious diversity in their teaching practice. Correspondingly, participants also commented

on the importance of training, pointing to parallels in recent teacher education efforts towards

Indigenization. This theme also includes respondents' views on the barriers or challenges of

including CRL in teacher education programs.

We're ill-equipped to engage with religious diversity

When asked if they felt their teacher education had prepared them to engage with

religious diversity within their own K-G classrooms, most participants indicated that they did

not feel equipped. Some participants, such as Kayla, were clear that they did not feel equipped

to engage with religious diversity, "No, I don't feel like we're being well-prepared." Others like

Zahra were equally clear, stating "No, I think my education does not prepare me to engage with

religious diversity." However, some participants took a more ambivalent stance when asked if

their teacher education had prepared them to engage with religious diversity. Many stated that

their teacher education had given them the tools they needed to create an inclusive classroom,

but when asked specifically about religious diversity there was often both hesitation and

acknowledgement that they were not prepared. Ashley's response is a typical example of this

ambivalence:

> I'd say I am and I'm not [prepared]. And I'll explain that I don't think I am because I don't
> know about other religions and I'll be completely honest -- there's lots that I do not
> know. And like, I cannot just go in and say this or that about a certain belief system
> because I have no idea. However, I think I am well equipped with creating a positive
> environment with my kids…So I think I'm well equipped to teach that everybody has
> their own view and we need to respect each other's views. *But in terms of the actual*
> *religions, no clue.*

Ashley's comments point to the gap between being equipped to educate for inclusivity as far as

this means being tolerant, accepting, and respectful of all students and their views. However,

she goes on to explain how this can be quite a difficult task when one knows very little about those diverse views:

> With our schools becoming more culturally diverse, I think we do need to be aware of different religions that are going to be present in schools, because if I don't know about it and if I say something and then after I'm like, "Oh, I wish I knew about that" …like before I did something or said something.

> Of all participants, Emma expressed the most confidence in her preparedness to engage

with religious diversity in the classroom:

> I honestly think [I feel] fairly confident, although I don't know a lot about other world religions. I recognize the physical symbols of them in that kind of thing. So, like, I know that I can recognize them and I know that I'm capable of learning how that affects students.

For Emma, she felt that her level of familiarity of diverse religious symbols translated into her feeling equipped to engage with the religious identities of her students. As a participant who was herself deeply religiously identified, Emma may have been better equipped to understand how religious beliefs impact students in the classroom.

Barriers

While participant responses frequently contained references to various perceived challenges of implementing CRL as an educational aim in teacher education, the majority of these barriers fell into one of two categories of time restrictions and implementation.

'Time crunch'

When asked about possible barriers to incorporating CRL into teacher education, a number of participants commented on the problem of the crowded curriculum. When asked about whether or not teacher education programs should include CRL as a curricular

component, Gabe responded with the following comment about the overall problem of curricular congestion:

> I can't learn different languages and learn about all the different religions and gender identity and expression and stuff and be conscious of all those things without like lots of time and actual thought and actually caring about all those things.

Hannah agreed that there was a 'time crunch' in her teacher education core courses but was concerned that if a course focusing on CRL is offered as an elective, it would be easy for most students to miss taking it – even if they were interested – because very often their schedule is so 'packed' that they simply take electives that will fit in their schedules. She remarked, "Sometimes I feel like in teacher education, I've taken some electives and they're pretty much useless to me…[its] just because they fit into my schedule." Others like Ashley simply described the crowded teacher education curriculum as "It's so congested! And there's so many things in there -- it's insane!" These comments raise questions about the best manner for CRL to be included in teacher education and suggest that from the preservice teachers' points of view, it would be more useful to take an infused approach to CRL rather than trying to carve out room in an already congested program.

Difficulties in implementation

Along with the acknowledged difficulties in overcoming what many participants viewed as a substantial 'time-crunch' in the congested curriculum, a number of participants discussed what they saw as potential barriers to implementing CRL within a teacher education program. Some noted the 'divisive' or 'controversial' aspect of religion or religious issues as a difficult barrier to overcome, as seen in Sarah's comments, **"**I think that while our shift will take a really

long time, I think even just having a conversation [about religion is difficult] … like how can we normalize religion in schools? It's a divisive thing." Other participants noted that even when there is an openness to learning about religion or discussing religious identities in the classroom, it is a subject matter that poses significant challenges due to the complex nature of this subject matter. For example, in the focus group Sarah and Hannah noted how learning about religion or religious diversity is a complex task that takes a significant amount of time and effort on the part of the teacher:

> **Sarah**: And I just think like learning about religion is like learning about a friend. You have to have multiple encounters with it.
>
> **Hannah:** And you can't just like watch one documentary or read one book either.
>
> **Sarah:** Exactly. And I think this is another thing is, yes, you can teach religion as facts. But the reality is, is that religion is a living entity…

These comments underscore the anxieties expressed by many participants about the potential difficulties in teaching and learning about religion and highlight the need for CRL to be a part of the training preservice teachers receive. Noteworthy in the comments above is how both participants recognize the potential danger of just presenting a single perspective on a particular religion, given the 'living' nature of religion and spirituality. When asked about where they could see CRL fitting into the teacher education curriculum, some participants noted that because of the way religion and spirituality are infused in so many aspects of society, it would be possible to integrate CRL into a variety of courses, from the more obvious fit with courses that focus on diversity issues or in subject matter courses for Social Studies teachers. However, Emma's comments underscore a fundamental problem with such an approach of integrating

CRL into a teacher education curriculum, as she notes: "But are teachers prepared to do that? Do teachers have the knowledge?" This, of course, is the challenge that lies at the heart of this dissertation. It is one thing to suggest that there should be more attention to CRL in teacher education programs, but it is another to determine faculty members that are themselves sufficiently religiously literate to be able to teach CRL in an effective manner. As we have seen in Chapter 2, the challenges of implementing CRL in teacher education programs is a substantial one, even in districts, such as Quebec where teachers were tasked with teaching a mandatory course on religion (Jafralie, 2017). However, we also know that teacher education has made massive strides towards incorporating more social-justice oriented content in their programing and come a long way towards ensuring that preservice teachers are prepared to create their own inclusive classrooms. In the same way as the potentially 'touchy' subject of gender identity has become a common topic covered in Canadian teacher education programs (James, 2019), so too could CRL become incorporated into teacher education classrooms.

Theme 4: CRL can counteract harm

The fourth constructed theme from the data set explores the responses these preservice teachers gave when asked questions related to why and how CRL would be useful to them in any aspect of their education as teachers, from their teacher education courses to practicum to their own future classrooms. I was interested in understanding the specific ways in which they believed CRL could enrich their teacher education experience and how it might impact their own approach to teaching, especially in their role as educating for SJOC, however they understood the term. Participants offered compelling reasons why they felt a greater emphasis on CRL in their teacher education program would be (or would have been for those

who were finishing) helpful, the majority of which can be encompassed with the thematic label of CRL as a means to counteract harms. These harms are explored in the subthemes below of religious stereotyping, bullying, or intersectional microaggressions, or viewing it as a means of mediating increasing polarization due to religious illiteracy. This theme also includes participant perspectives on the importance of dialogue as a means of mitigating these harms.

Counteract religious stereotyping, bullying, and microaggressions

Many participants indicated that CRL would be helpful as an educational aim for teacher educators in their task of educating for SJOC because becoming more religiously literate is a way to prevent harms such as the stereotyping of religious minorities and even forms of religious bullying. This was most clearly expressed by participants who had lived abroad, as in the case of Taylor, or those who had experienced religious discrimination directly or indirectly, as with Zahra and Heather. For instance, having lived in a Muslim majority country for a number of years and then returning to live in the Canadian Prairies, Taylor noted how little people here knew about Muslims or Islam – and how quick they were to use negative stereotypes when discussing Muslims with her:

> I lived in the Middle East. I met Muslims all the time. And I came home. I came here and people would tell me all sorts of weird things that Muslim people did. [And I would think] Well, what Muslims have you met exactly? Not in my experience. What are you talking about? And it's a smattering of weird things they've heard from the Internet or from the news and it's like what the heck?

As one of the only two participants who had lived in a Muslim majority country, Taylor's perspective demonstrated an awareness of religious diversity and familiarity with Islam in particular that most non-Muslim participants lacked. Her comments highlight how common religious stereotyping is and also how common it is for people to rely on media for their

knowledge of religion, particularly Islam. Heather also noted how easy it is for the religiously

illiterate to rely on stereotypes of Muslims, commenting, **"**They've [religious people] been

painted as negative, like the idea of the Klu Klux Klan as the representative of Christianity. But

that's how people are painting Muslims now." As a Hijab-wearing Muslim woman (and also

religious studies major), Zahra spoke passionately about her own experiences as a visible

religious minority living in a small Canadian Prairie community. She was one of the few

participants to make the direct correlation between religious illiteracy and relying on the media

for education about religious diversity, noting **"…**everything we know about religion nowadays

mainly comes from the media, which is the worst source to learn anything because it's a

subjective opinionated and full of biases." For Zahra, the issue is not that religion is never

discussed, it's how it is discussed that is the problem, as she goes on to explain,

> Yeah, I think we do talk about religion, but we only talk about religion negatively. It's discussed. But I think we're too busy talking about what we hear on TV. You know, people like Islam, you hear about that a lot, but you never hear about it positively. So we *are* talking about it. We're just talking about it the wrong way.

Zahra also clearly made the connection between religious literacy as a means of counteracting

the harm religious illiteracy can pose:

> …You know, so if we implemented it in our curriculum, then that will not only educate people on the religion, but it also eliminates hate deeply embedded in our society based on not knowing.

Zahra's experiences as a racialized hijab-wearing Muslim woman moving from cosmopolitan

Dubai to a small Canadian Prairie city gave her multiple firsthand experiences of religious

discrimination as she highlights in her story below:

...If there was a spectrum it would be Dubai [on one end] and this city would be at opposite ends and I experienced many, many [acts of discrimination]. I had very bad experiences targeted towards my faith. I was very racialized. I would sit in class... I was in one of my first classes at the university [and I sat] next to this guy.... He got up and changed spots. And this was common. This happened a lot ...the staring. It was hard to make friends. It was really hard to feel welcome. But I feel bad for people like this because how could you think I'm any lesser than you? How could you think we're so different that you have to change your spot? You know, how could you believe what people say, the media about people getting to know me without getting to know me asking questions?

Zahra's story is important because it describes the impact of what can be called micro-aggressions, defined by Sue et al., as "brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults that potentially have harmful or unpleasant psychological impact on the target person or group" (2007, p. 273). Although in this case, the male student did not say anything directly to her, his act of moving seats to be away from her based sent a clear message not only to Zahra but also to the other students in the classroom. These types of exclusionary acts can be also be considered forms of religious bullying that seek to demean and disempower the recipient (Chan, 2019). Because Zahra is a racialized Muslim woman, this is a powerful example of intersectionality as Zahra faces discrimination on at least three fronts of gender, religion, and race (Sue et al., 2007). This is also demonstrated in her comments below where she describes what it is to be a Muslim female:

I have no choice whether or not people know I'm Muslim, for example, because I wear the hijab. And not just students, administrators, other teachers. And that comes with a huge responsibility because they shouldn't have to be responsible for representing an entire faith. Because that's not my job.

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In speaking about how educating for CRL might help counteract the harms of stereotyping,

religious bullying, and discrimination, Zahra notes how "… if we had world religions, maybe, you

know, that would not just make students more comfortable, but it would make teachers like

me more comfortable teaching a class." She succinctly points out that it is not only K-G students

who would benefit from being educated for religious literacy but also the K-G teachers who

may likewise feel the impacts of religious stereotyping, bullying, and discrimination. Moreover,

if preservice educators were required to learn about religious diversity as a part of their own

education, it would help alleviate the constant burden imposed on those religious minority

students as Zahra explains,

> I think it's really important to have that [CRL] as a part of education because
> constant self-advocacy is very exhausting. People who are as a visible religious group
> like myself wearing the hijab, people I'm happy to know, I'm Muslim. And especially with
> what's going on in the media right now, you are going to have to constantly advocate for
> yourself and defend yourself just constantly against, you know, stereotypes and
> whatever it may be.

> Another observant Muslim, Arzina, was placed in a small rural town with a large mostly

white LDS population. Like Zahra, she also faced increased religious stereo-typing and

microaggressions. She brought up a conversation she had one day at her practicum school

where the janitor asked her about her religion:

> And so he was like, "Oh, so do you pray five times a day? Who's covering you when
> you're not there?" I was like "Actually we only pray three times a day. So a little bit
> different, I guess. But we have our own traditions and values." And so he was like, "Oh,
> so you are not one of the true Muslims"

Again, what is clear in this situation is how the burden of education is upon the person

experiencing this microaggression. Arzina noted that she was certain that he didn't intend to

offend her, but nevertheless, the story came to her mind as an uncomfortable incident when

asked how issues related to religious identity came up in her practicum. She also experienced

this kind of casual targeted scrutiny about her religious identity from a professor at the

university (not in the Faculty of Education). She describes a conversation she had with this

professor when she had asked him if she could interview him for another student club project:

> So I wanted to interview him as a prof because we just interview people around the campus. So I was like, "I'm really busy this week because I have religious stuff to do." And he's like, "Why do you care? Like, why do you value that so much?"

While this could be considered simply a curious question, it can also easily be seen as a kind of

challenge, one that involved the professor aligning himself with an epistemically opposite

position to religious belief and one that required Arzina to again defend her belief system to a

person wielding considerable power over her in this circumstance.

Another example is found in Zahra's experience, who was placed in a school that had a

few Muslim students, Zahra noted the harm of ignoring a student's religious identity:

> So, one hundred percent it [ignoring religious identities] has a negative impact because it's part of your student's identity and they're not going to start that conversation. Because why would they? Because if they do, that's getting them feeling more different. So, it's that fine line between inclusive and making people feel different.

Zahra's comments draw attention to how there is a two-fold potential for harm if one is not

religiously literate: 1) there is the harm of ignoring a student's core identity in a form of

'misrecognition' ; and 2) there is the harm of singling out a student because of their religious

identity. Although educators may single out students with good intentions, this act may well

serve to intensify the harms of othering (Aronson et al., 2016; Guo, 2015b; Ipgrave, 2010;

Moore, 2007). Indeed, teachers may experience anxiety when making decisions about whether

to address or create lessons about student identities; in other words, they fear inflicting the second kind of harm expressed by Zahra.

However, othering was also experienced in instances where a white Christian preservice teacher was placed in a predominantly white Christian school setting; for example, a preservice teacher from a Christian Reform Christian tradition may be placed in a Catholic School or a school in a majority LDS community. As Taylor discusses in her own practicum experience:

> I ended up in a district where religion actually was part of…[the curriculum]. The school still felt really weird because the school was Catholic. My teacher was definitely not, so I was in a weird position. I don't know how this works…

For Taylor, being a Baptist Christian placed in a Catholic school with a cooperating teacher who was not religious created a situation with a great deal of tension for her. Navigating the dissonance between her own religious identity with that of the school curriculum was difficult enough, but she had the added difficulty of navigating her relationship with a cooperating teacher who was not religious herself. Perhaps the most notable issue here was the lack of attention to navigating these issues in her teacher education program or opportunities for discussing this within the teacher education courses.

Excluding non-religious students

A few participants also discussed how the harms of exclusion can also be extended to those who are not religious or spiritual. Intriguingly, this was most clearly expressed by Sarah, one of the most strongly religiously identified participants in the study.

> If we're bringing religious dialogs into classrooms, I wonder how we could do it in a way where students who don't really have any religious or spiritual upbringing feel included in a part of the conversation…that they have a voice as well. That be a hard balance to strike especially because I think a lot of religion is belonging behavior. So for a student

who didn't have that growing up…maybe would feel left out…like you have to be careful. Teachers need to make sure they have a voice.

Sarah's comments about belonging aligns with Marcus' *Three B's framework* (2018) which highlights the centrality of belonging in religious identity, and the difficulty this may represent for those students who do not share that sense of belonging. However, her comments reflect her own experience of someone who was a part of a very homogenous religious community growing up and of teaching in some religiously homogenous (Christian) contexts. These comments do reveal the challenges that are frequently faced in this teacher education program, and likely many more that are located in a similar rural, agricultural community-based context. Although concerns about non-religious or spiritual students may initially seem outside the scope of conversation about the aims of CRL for educators, they are not because any CRL framework must allow for teachers to create space for the entire spectrum of beliefs, from atheist to humanist to religious belief systems. Indeed, these concerns remind us that CRL as an educational aim in teacher education programs must consider exclusion as something that not only occurs to those with religious identities, but also non-religious students in certain educational contexts as well.

Counteract political polarization

A related way CRL can serve to counteract harm is in its role in preventing or reducing the increasing political polarization seen across Canada and internationally (Henry, 2021). As Heather explains, "…as a teacher you're dealing with diversity or classroom. That's [religion] the pink elephant in the room. We were talking about it this morning. And if you don't talk about politics and you don't talk about religion, then people are just going to sit in their own camps all the time." Likewise, Ashley spoke about how fear of difference– in this case religious difference

-- appears as stereotypes and on how a lack of education about these differences, or literacy, can lead to increasing polarization in society:

> I think there's a fear in people but it's because of those either stereotypes or they don't have the education. Like you come back here and people are saying all these things and you're like, oh wait a second. Like that's not really how I experience it, but I think people are scared. And I think people also like…I just don't have that education on religions. And then that creates that like divide for sure.

Another participant, Kayla, noted how the act of ignoring an aspect of someone's identity like religion can become a source of pain for those religious students, which may unintentionally serve to alienate them, stating "I think religion is a big part of that that we haven't talked about yet because… I don't know why. And it should be taught in schools like that…so that kids don't feel like alienating religion. So that makes you feel like everybody else in this class is not religious?" If students who identify as religious come to believe that their school is not a welcoming place for any discussion of something that is extremely important to them, it seems likely that in their sense of alienation, they will identify more strongly with their own community, thus serving to further polarize the larger community they are living in. Kayla went on to describe how CRL could serve as what she called the 'next step' from toleration or acceptance of difference (in this case, religious) and to what she calls 'cultural integration' in the following passage:

> But now I think like there needs to be that one more step, which is what I feel like they focused on us. And it's like cultural integration and actually embracing other people around you and not the idea of 'us and them' kind of thing, but just being us, which I think is important in schools.

Kayla's comment articulates an important argument for greater CRL for educators; she distinguishes teaching for tolerance of the 'other' from teaching for 'embracing' or recognizing the 'other' – in this case, the religiously diverse 'other,' in order to truly recognize and include all students in the classroom (Taylor, 1992).

Parallels with Indigenization

As with the faculty members, the preservice teachers drew parallels between CRL and Indigenization. The participants drew parallels on two levels: 1) their own hesitancy to teach a subject for which they felt unprepared; and 2) the potential harm of ignoring an aspect of someone's identity. By far the most common way FNMI issues or Indigenization came into their interview or focus group responses was in their comments about being scared to teach a subject they did not feel equipped to teach as in the comments below:

> **Ashley:** I feel like my it's my own like nerves or like my own like maybe insecurity and fear maybe about like, you know, that might be stopping me from…[discussing religion or beliefs]
>
> **Heather:** That's how I feel about teaching FNMI. Like, how can I speak for First Nations? And I'm supposed to. And it's almost it's almost the exact same thing [with religion].
>
> **Ashley:** Well, you'll have lots of classes on that [Indigenization]. It'll be definitely brought up. I've learned quite a bit which is great...so I guess that's how I feel about the whole religious [literacy] thing.

Ashley's reassurance to Heather that the teacher education program will prepare her well for teaching FNMI issues underscore the importance of preservice teachers having the opportunity to learn about issues with which they are unfamiliar. Ashley's confidence in Indigenizing her teaching contrasts sharply with how she felt about navigating issues related to religion in the classroom. Other participants drew a similar comparison, noting how they felt that the

hesitancy to discuss religion in the classroom could be seen as comparable to how their

cooperating teachers sometimes felt uncomfortable or unable to teach FNMI related content

well because, as Hannah stated, "they're afraid of doing it wrong". Kayla went on to theorize

that the reluctance to discuss religion or issues related to religious diversity on the part of

educators may be because of its controversial nature, commenting that "I guess it's hard

because it's sensitive, but it should be talked about in caring and open way, the same way we're

talking about FNMI."

Some participants discussed how the failure to acknowledge an aspect of a student's

identity can potentially harm that student or community, specifically relating this to the need

for acknowledgement of FNMI issues demanded by the reconciliation process. This thread is

most clearly articulated in Isabella's comments:

> I think that it's important to acknowledge and understand so that we can respect it… kind of relating it to like the first nation when reconciliation and all that stuff. Like if we ignore it, then we're doing as much damage as we were back in the past. You know, it's like we're not acknowledging that their culture exists. We're not acknowledging the amount of abuse and things that they went through. So, I think like maybe not as a parallel, but religion like if we do ignore it, maybe that could be even detrimental…

Isabella's comments here demonstrate an awareness of the harm that either a failure to

acknowledge or a misrecognition (Taylor, 1992) of student identity can have. This comment

also underlines the importance currently given to reconciliation and Indigenization in the

Canadian context where educators must demonstrate awareness of FNMI issues in order to

meet the teaching quality standards (Dharamshi, 2019; Tomlins-Jahnke et al., 2019), something

that has implications for all teacher educators and higher education more broadly (Tanchuk et

al., 2018; Tomlins-Jahnke et al., 2019).

CRL as a means of facilitating dialogue

Within this larger theme of CRL as a tool for counteracting harm, this final sub-theme

presents participant responses related to perceived benefits of participating in the dialogues

about CRL, either in the one-on-one interviews, in the focus group discussions, or in discussions

about CRL that took place outside the research context after the initial interviews. While many

results from the data set described above point to the challenges of engaging with religious

diversity effectively in the classroom, many participant responses indicated the various ways

they saw engaging in dialogue about religious diversity or learning through CRL as leading to

openings or opportunities and a means of mitigating the harms outlined above. Indeed, one of

the key, and unanticipated, findings of these interviews and focus groups was how appreciative

participants were to have the opportunity to speak about a topic that is commonly ignored in

their university education.

Some of the most poignant and hopeful responses amongst participants were those that

expressed how the act of participating in this research had ignited their own curiosity about

religion and religious identities, as seen in Heather's comments below:

> I have initiated a lot more conversations about it. I've actually had really good feedback.
> Had a great conversation with a Mormon this morning who's in my class. He was just
> like, "this is great, we do need to talk about it!" And it was a surprising reaction. And
> then other people start talking about it and the questions start being asked. And it was
> like this really open discussion.

As a self-identified Earth-Based religious practitioner living in a small, LDS majority town,

Heather had expressed how at times it was difficult for her and her family to fit into this largely

homogenous town due to religious difference. Her desire, willingness, and ability to begin to

dialogue with an LDS classmate about religion are undoubtedly at least partially due to her own

curious and confident nature, but she clearly indicates that she was inspired to broach the topic

because of having participated in this research project which got her thinking about the subject

more. Others, such as Sarah, discussed how they had been inspired by participating in this

project to seek out other ways to encounter religious diversity and to educate themselves:

> I feel like I want to learn more about other religions. And yet I feel like I can't just walk
> up to somebody and be like, "Hey, I'm curious, what's your religious background?" But
> I've been thinking about ways I could become more religiously literate. And one of the
> things I was [thinking of] doing was actually visiting different churches and like maybe
> some mosques. And I don't even know if Lethbridge has a synagogue.

In the wrap-up discussion after the focus group, Ashley discusses how her own views towards

CRL have changed since her first interview with me:

> Now that I got to talk to Heather and Taylor and hear their knowledge about it [CRL], it
> makes me think about my own knowledge or lack thereof. Honestly, my lack of
> knowledge about it and how I do have fears and insecurities about religious literacy in
> the classroom. But talking to these ladies, they kind of change things…you know, I was
> thinking about what I said in the interview with you. And now I'm thinking more. I'm
> trying to figure all that out, but it's super cool for me to hear different people's
> perspectives and experiences.

Ashley's comments highlight how important it was for the participants to have a chance to

revisit the questions within the context of a focus group discussion. Moreover, all three of these

responses speak to the transformative power of dialogue. For some, their dialogue with me

during the interview process spurred their interest and curiosity enough that they were willing

to take risks to initiate dialogue with those who are religiously different, as in Heather's case.

For others, the focus group dialogues were the most transformative because it gave them an opportunity to hear the different perspectives of their peers. Hearing different opinions and having a safe space to dialogue with others opened up the potential for their own perspectives to shift, as we see clearly in Ashley's case.

Chapter summary

This chapter opened with an overview that included the research questions, a description of the research locale and participants, along with definitions of foundational terms and understandings. It then presented the four constructed themes of 1) Religion is Tricky; 2) Religion as a source of harm; 3) "We're not equipped" -- Religious Illiteracy in Teacher Education; and 4) CRL to Counteract Harm. These themes presented preservice responses on a continuum that moved from understanding religion as a negative 'tricky' problem to navigate in the classroom to viewing CRL as an opportunity that could mitigate potential harms and even create opportunities for genuine dialogue. Nevertheless, the data clearly indicate an overall perception on the part of the preservice teachers that they did not feel their teacher education was adequately preparing them for the task of educating in religiously diverse contexts, although they all signaled a willingness and desire to create inclusive classrooms for all.

I close this chapter with a comment from Emma, who noted how because religion is such a central aspect of some students' identities, there is a real danger in omitting discussions about religion in teacher education. She states,

> I think that it ignores something that is really important to a lot of people. And I think that ignoring something like that prevents growth and connection. I guess it just prevents learning from happening.

Emma's point that the current tendency of ignoring religion as an aspect of identity in teacher

education or in K-G classrooms actually creates barriers to learning is one that aligns with much

RL scholarship discussed elsewhere in this dissertation. Moreover, it highlights how

incorporating CRL as an educational aim for preservice teachers as a means of counteracting

the harms of othering may contribute to creating safe educational spaces that allow for genuine

learning.

Chapter 7: Discussion

Chapters Five and Six presented the responses of two sets of participants that are involved in the two phases of this study: the faculty members (i.e. teacher educators) and the preservice teachers. In this chapter, I explore key insights to emerge from the entirety of this dissertation, returning to the questions this study set out to answer and guide a discussion of the central findings from both teacher educators and preservice teachers. I also consider the central themes from the data sets and their relationship, interpreting these findings through the lenses of the foundational concepts from my theoretical framework, namely epistemic justice and its role in social justice-oriented citizenship (SJOC) education and CRL.

Section 1: Return to the questions

As previously noted, the main questions guiding this research project are "What is the role of CRL as an educational aim for critical social justice-oriented citizenship in teacher education?" and "What are teacher educators' and preservice teachers views on the role of CRL as an educational aim for mitigating harm in teacher education in Canada?" Before returning to these questions, I will consider the ancillary questions below, aligning these with the themes found in the data of 1) 'religion is tricky,' 2) 'religion as a source of harm,' 3) 'we're ill-equipped'. In Section Two, I address the dissertation's guiding question, aligning it with the last theme, 4) 'CRL to counteract harm' and putting these into conversation with key concepts of epistemic injustice, intersectionality, and White Christian privilege from my theoretical framework.

How religiously literate are preservice K-G educators in Canadian Prairies teacher education programs?

While in its simplest version, the answer to this first question is 'not very', the answer must be nuanced. As mentioned earlier in this dissertation, I began this study in a very different

urban context had been anticipating finding an abundance of religious illiteracy due to large

numbers of atheist or religious 'nones' who had a distrust of religion. However, my shift in

location meant that what I uncovered was very different – there was still generalized religious

illiteracy among preservice teachers, but not for the reasons I had expected.

First, the community where my study is located is firmly in what is often referred to as

the "Bible Belt." This meant that my original assumption that the preservice teachers

themselves and the faculty teaching them would be mostly non-religious or identify as 'religious

nones' and be reluctant or opposed to talking about religion proved to be inaccurate. In fact,

the vast majority of both the faculty participants and the preservice teachers were from

religious backgrounds, predominantly Christian ones. This is a finding that reflects findings from

other studies, including Kimball who notes that teachers are the most religiously identified of

any major (Anderson D. et al., 2015; Kimball, 2009). Among the preservice teachers, I

discovered that the six religiously identified participants (four Christian; two Muslim) all

demonstrated a high degree of CRL within their own tradition. This was true both in terms of

the more doctrinal elements of their religions, such as being able to recite and understand

scriptures, and also in terms of their knowledge of practice. However, with the exception of

Zahra and Taylor, these participants all admitted they had very little CRL in traditions outside

their own. This was particularly pronounced in the Christian practitioners who had grown up in

small rural communities where most belonged to the same church or temple (for the LDS

participants). This finding draws attention to how the lack of religious diversity, or the existence

of religious homogeneity in communities can create the conditions for religious illiteracy to

thrive (Valk et al., 2020). It also echoes how previous studies have shown that having religious

literacy in one's own tradition does not ensure religious literacy in other traditions; in fact, as scholars such as Amy Gutmann have argued, it may often mean the opposite (1999, 2009). Relatedly, Anderson, Mathys, and Cook's 2015 study demonstrated that Christian teachers often have low levels of reflexivity, something that led their participants to underestimate Christian bias in their lesson plans, for example.

Another related finding in my study was that Christian preservice teachers often talked about religious diversity in terms of different Christian denominations. For many of them, this intra-religious diversity was their only experience with religious diversity. And what became clear to me was that what had on the surface appeared to be a largely homogenous community of White conservative Christians, was in fact a community of diverse predominantly White Christian groups, a number of whom experienced significant intra-religious tension between the communities as revealed in participant responses. Significantly, this intra-religious tension was experienced by both those from those preservice teachers belonging to Christian groups who have historically experienced higher levels of oppression, such as LDS, but also to those belonging to more mainline Christian denominations, such as Baptist, working in Catholic schools. This suggests that there although there may be a hierarchy of Christian privilege as some have noted (Blumenfeld & Jaekel, 2012), intra-religious discrimination becomes a factor whenever there is a preservice teacher working in a religiously homogenous school that differs from their own tradition, whether that community has historically experienced oppression from mainline Christian groups or not.

These findings highlighted to me how different the issues around religion and religious diversity in education are depending on where you are; the issues in large urban centres in

Canada, all of which are characterized by incredible diversity of all sorts, tend to revolve around accommodations for religious minorities, especially those visible religious minorities, often Muslims or Sikhs. However, in smaller, more rurally situated Canadian communities, issues related to religion in the classroom are more likely centered on homogenously religious students, specifically Christian(Anthony-Stevens et al., 2017; Anthony-Stevens & Langford, 2020). This strongly suggests that frameworks for incorporating CRL into teacher education cannot be a one-size-fits-all model. Teacher educators hoping to promote CRL in their programs ought to pay careful attention to the way the demographics of preservice teachers influence what is needed in terms of CRL as both the content knowledge, skills and dispositions.

Thus, this question of 'how religiously literate are preservice teachers in Canadian Prairie teacher education programs' revealed three key findings: 1) religiously identified preservice teachers in the Canadian Prairies often possess low levels of CRL; 2) there is often intra-religious tension among Christian preservice teachers that can have a negative impact on their experiences in school practicum placements; 3) CRL for preservice teachers may require different foci depending on the location. Taken together, these findings provide some support for the conceptual premise that there are significant issues related to religious illiteracy among preservice teachers, and that incorporating a CRL approach in teacher education programs would help address these issues.

How do teacher educators and preservice teachers engage with religion or religious literacy in their classrooms?

The question of how teacher educators and preservice teachers engage with religion or religious literacy in their classrooms was less clearly delineated than the previous question. For the teacher educators, there were a range of approaches, from very deliberately including

religiously related content in the curriculum or in classroom discussions, to those like Michael

who did not actively seek to include religion as a topic, though he admitted it did come up

occasionally. For those who included it more deliberately, this was done generally in the

context of teaching a course related to diversity more broadly speaking, for it could be

introduced as a category of diversity, or used as an example or case for the preservice teachers

to consider in their classwork. This integrated approach where religion is infused into the

curriculum aligns with those critical multicultural education scholars who have advocated for

such an integrated approach with regards to various aspects of racial, ethnic, and gendered

identities (Banks & Banks, 2004; Nieto, 2017; Sleeter & McLaren, 1995). However, all faculty

members acknowledged that this approach to infuse religion or CRL into the curriculum was not

one likely to be widely applied by many of their colleagues. As noted in Chapter Five, all faculty

participants except one were themselves religious or previously religious and had a notable

openness to the subject of conversations – undoubtedly a characteristic that led them to

participate in the study to begin with. This is not dissimilar to many other studies on this subject

and remains a limitation that is difficult to avoid when doing research related to a subject such

as religion (Chan, 2019; Soules, 2019). Given how divisive a topic it can be, it is hardly surprising

that those who agree to participate in a study on religion tend to be those who already possess

an openness towards it. Nevertheless, as a researcher with a deep interest in this subject, I was

heartened by the willingness and openness the majority of these faculty participants had to

including CRL in their own teacher education classrooms, whether as explicit curricular

inclusions, or as case studies for discussion.

In contrast, overwhelmingly, the preservice teachers perceived that there was very little to no engagement with religion, religious identities, or CRL in their teacher education program. This is an intriguing discrepancy in the findings that may be explained in a number of ways. First, it is likely that some of the preservice teachers had simply not taken any course with one of the five faculty members who participated in this study. Given that it is a fairly large faculty in this university with approximately forty faculty members, it would not be difficult for this to occur. I chose not to ask the preservice teachers to divulge the names of the professors, although some of them volunteered this information in the course of the interviews. There are however, two remaining possibilities that both involve a difference in perception. One of these is that the preservice teachers who indicated that there was little or no discussion of religion in the classroom did not remember, notice, or disclose that there had in fact been discussions about religion in their classrooms. Another possibility is that the faculty members' perceptions were inaccurate, either because they did not remember correctly what had occurred in their classroom that semester, or because they intentionally misrepresented how they included (or not) religion or religiously literacy in their teacher education courses. Given the degree to which both preservice teachers and faculty members were all deeply interested in religion, it strikes me as unlikely that the participants simply forgot or that they chose to misrepresent what actually happens in the classroom. Reflecting on the gap between the two participant groups' responses, the difference in responses may be explained in light of the importance some preservice teachers placed on their own religious identities. In other words, it may be the case that although the faculty felt that they had addressed religion in their courses about diversity, they did not do so adequately from the preservice teachers' perspectives. Ultimately, within the

context of this research study design, I cannot know the answer to this question, but the discrepancy in faculty and preservice teachers' perceptions about religion in teacher education points to a direction for future studies.

Religion is tricky

This question of how teacher educators and preservice teachers engage with CRL in their classrooms highlighted the theme of 'religion is tricky.' While faculty members were obviously more at ease taking risks with their teaching and engaging in what could be considered a 'controversial' subject such as religion, the preservice teachers showed a great deal more reservations, uncertainty, confusion around, and even fear about engaging with religion or religious literacy as an educational aim in their K-G classrooms. This may be explained partially by the large power differential between the faculty members and the preservice teachers. All these professors were either tenured or tenure track, all were White, and all were either currently or formerly a part of the Christian majority in this semi-rural Canadian context.

Indeed, preservice teachers expressed reluctance to engage in conversations about religion or religious diversity in the classroom for reasons that centered on the uncertainty of or fears about how to navigate this 'tricky' or 'controversial' topic, a finding that is consistent with those of other studies (Gardner et al., 2017; Soules & Jafralie, 2021; White, 2010). This finding is not surprising given how much is at stake for these preservice teachers. Being evaluated by not only their cooperating teacher (in the case of the practicum) but also their professor appeared to cause the preservice teachers to think twice before bringing in any topic or activity that

might result in creating a tense or 'tricky' situation in their classroom, something that has been found in other studies (Gardner et al., 2017; Gravel, 2018; Subedi, 2006).

As noted by Soules and Jafralie (2021), preservice teachers' fear of navigating 'tricky' topics in K-G classrooms indicates an urgent need for educators to possess not only content knowledge, but pedagogical skills, especially the skills of facilitating classroom dialogue. This last point highlights the powerful potential of dialogue about issues related to religion and religious diversity and underscores how educating for CRL cannot simply be a matter of learning facts about religion. Indeed, if teacher education is to take seriously the task of including CRL as an educational aim for preservice teachers, it must consider how to teach the necessary skills for dialogue – in particular, the skills needed for dialogue around 'controversial' subjects such as religion and religious identities in the classroom.

Indigenization

The move to indigenize Canadian educational institutions is a process that has received increasing levels of focus since the presentation of the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC, 2016). As others have noted, education is mentioned in 28 of the 94 calls-to-action, signaling the importance for educators to engage actively in indigenizing curriculum as a part of moving towards reconciliation (Chan, Akanmori, et al., 2019). In addition to addressing underlying systems of oppression present in current colonial structures within Canadian educational institution, indigenizing these institutions means creating spaces for Indigenous worldviews and spiritualities; or in other words, epistemologies (Battiste, 2000; Little Bear, 2009). Because spirituality plays a central role in all Indigenous worldviews, indigenizing education inevitably means creating space for including conversations about

spiritual or religious worldviews and belief systems (Battiste, 2013; Kovach, 2009). Thus,

educating preservice teachers to both understand and teach indigenous ways of knowing has

become a mandatory part of teacher education programs across Canada (Chan, Akanmori, et

al., 2019; Dharamshi, 2019). An encouraging finding in my data was that many of the preservice

teachers indicated that they felt quite confident with teaching indigenous content in their K-G

practicum placements, something that contradicts what many scholars have found in the past,

namely that preservice teachers often resist indigenizing their classrooms (Kanu, 2011; Tomlins-

Jahnke et al., 2019). As seen in the data, one of the most compelling of all the findings in this

research project was that both faculty and preservice teacher participants agreed that

Indigenization of the K-G curriculum, most explicitly as a TQA, created an unanticipated opening

to create dialogue around religious or spiritual identities and issues in the classroom. Indeed, it

was striking – and unanticipated -- how often participants commented on how the inherently

spiritual nature of Indigenous worldviews created a potential space for students to discuss

other aspects of spirituality.

What are teacher educators or pre-service educators' beliefs about the need for K-G teachers to be critically religiously literate?

Both teacher educators and preservice teachers widely agreed that being religiously

literate is an important skill for all educators. For the teacher educator participants there is a

clear need for K-G teachers to be religiously literate, an unsurprising finding that accords with

what RL scholars such as Prothero (Prothero, 2007; 2014), Moore (2007, 2014), and Jackson

(2004; 2020) have been emphasizing for decades. Indeed, the majority of these participants

explained the need of CRL in teacher education in terms of giving preservice teachers the skills

and knowledge to develop a 'deep awareness' about their students in their classrooms. They

aligned these skills to engage with religious diversity as something that helps prepare preservice teachers for the increasingly diverse classes they will be teaching in. Most deliberately chose to discuss religion and engage in issues related to religious diversity in their own courses although it was not officially part of the set curriculum. The one participant who indicated that he did not deliberately include CRL or religion as a part of his courses admitted that issues related to religion and religious diversity did come up in the context of classroom discussions, especially in the practicum supervision. Thus, these teacher educators, either through deliberate planning or through their openness to facilitate discussions related to CRL, demonstrated their beliefs in the importance of educating preservice teachers to be religiously literate.

The preservice teachers as a group showed more diversity in their initial beliefs about the need for K-G teachers to be religiously literate although once they understood the term CRL, the majority agreed that CRL should be a part of their education as teachers. However, there were a few participants that were initially cautious or even opposed to the idea that K-G teachers should be religiously literate. One participant who expressed uncertainty about the need for a focus on CRL in teacher education was Gabe, who described his religious identity as 'questioning'. Gabe noted how although he felt it was important to develop awareness about the identities and backgrounds of his future students, he questioned whether it was possible to "know everything", pointing to the already congested teacher education curriculum and whether there was room to include a topic like CRL. Another participant, Ashley, initially questioned whether it was necessary for teachers to be religiously literate because while she did not know much about other religions, she understood how to be respectful of diversity in

the classroom. In addition, in teaching her K-G students to be good citizens, she believed they would inevitably acquire the values of respect and compassion, which would in turn ensure that they would also be respectful of everyone, including those from diverse religious backgrounds. A few other participants, including Hannah and Isabella, also showed some uncertainty in their answers in the initial interview, however, this reluctance, as discussed in the previous question, often could be attributed to a lack of understanding of the term CRL itself. Significantly, in the focus group discussions, several of these participants showed a shift in their thinking about the importance of CRL for teacher education. For some, this shift took place in the period after the initial interview and the focus group, whereas for others, it appeared to take place within the focus group itself, highlighting the importance of dialogue, suggesting that opportunities for to engage in dialogue where they were able to listen to their peers' thoughts and opinions about the importance of CRL was an important avenue for transformation. These findings reflect critical pedagogist Paolo Freire's insistence on dialogic education and the transformation possible in peer-to-peer dialogue (Freire, 2000). It also corroborate findings in other studies that show how having preservice teachers engage in dialogue was a powerful tool for transformation, including unlearning biases (Damrow & Sweeney, 2019).

Ill-equipped

Many preservice participants pointed to their own religious illiteracy as a key reason why they were uncomfortable addressing such issues in the classroom. Most frequently among the preservice teachers was a preoccupation with appearing ignorant or 'saying the wrong thing' about a particular religion with which they were unfamiliar. Notably, because religious beliefs so often form a core piece of a person's identity, the fears of offending someone

(student, peer, colleague) was commonly cited as an obstacle to engaging in discussions about religion in the classroom. These findings support the literature reviewed in Chapter Two where widespread teacher religious illiteracy results in preservice teachers feeling ill-equipped and/or unwilling to engage with CRL. As Sivane Hirsch comments about teacher preparation in the context of Québec's ERC program , "any pre- and in-service training of teachers must prepare them to deal with religious diversity in their work and allow them to adapt to a changing and complex reality in their own classrooms" (2018, p.265). This sentiment was commonly shared by participants of this study.

The finding that both groups of participants felt that teacher education programs were not equipping preservice teachers to be religiously literate was not surprising as religion is largely absent from Canadian Prairies' programs of studies as part of the knowledge and understanding outcomes[27]. This complete absence creates what Eisner labels the 'null curriculum, (1994), a concept that is helpful when considering a final obstacle for implementing CRL in teacher education programs. Indeed, one of the most salient observations to arise throughout my interviews with the preservice teachers was how seldom the topic of religion was addressed in the course of their teacher education program. This perceived complete absence of discussions about religion with teacher education contexts represents strong evidence of a null curriculum, where educators cannot even begin the work of implementing an

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[27] As of July, 2021, see Alberta Ministry of Education *Social Studies Program of Studies*: https://education.alberta.ca/media/3273006/social-studies-10-12-program-of-studies.pdf
(K-6): https://education.alberta.ca/media/3273004/social-studies-k-6-pos.pdf; Saskatchewan Ministry of Education: *Renewed Curricula: Understanding the Outcomes* (2010) retrieved from https://www.edonline.sk.ca/webapps/moe-curriculum-BB5f208b6da4613/CurriculumHome?id=168 ; Manitoba Education and Youth: *Manitoba Curriculum Framework of Outcomes* (2003) retrieved from https://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/cur/socstud/framework/introduction.pdf

important aspect of educating for diversity because they are simply unaware that it is missing.

Arguably, the null curriculum around CRL contributes to a lack of language or vocabulary to

encourage preservice teachers to speak about religion (Dinham & Francis, 2015; Marcus,

2018b; Patel, 2016). This finding aligns with much of the RL scholarship to emerge in the past

decade, including a recent review of RL in North American teacher education contexts (K.

Soules & Jafralie, 2021).

Curricular constraints

While there was broad support among faculty and preservice teachers for the idea of

CRL as an education aim in teacher education, one obstacle to implementing CRL in existing

programs or courses frequently mentioned was related to time and space; in other words,

there was the perceived challenge of the crowded or congested curriculum. Although they all

agreed, to varying extents, in the need for greater CRL as an educational aim for preservice K-G

teachers, they had differing opinions about where or how CRL might fit and how feasible it

would be. While some suggested a separate course devoted to CRL may be a way to ensure it

gets addressed in the teacher education curriculum, and others preferred an infused approach

into existing courses on diversity, they were all concerned about where it might fit in an already

over-crowded the curriculum. The congested teacher education curriculum was also recognized

as a major obstacle by the preservice teachers who agreed that there was very little room for a

separate course on CRL. However, several preservice teachers commented that they would

have loved to have room to take such a course. Moreover, it is worthwhile noting that the

participants who considered themselves the most religiously literate all had a Religious Studies

background, either as Religious Studies majors (Heather and Zahra) or had taken a number of

Religious Studies courses (Taylor). These participants were able to speak about these potential

harms of religious illiteracy more fluently than the participants who did not have this kind of

education, suggesting that studying about religion provides preservice teachers with a valuable

skill for mitigating the harms of religious illiteracy. Having previously studied within a Religious

Studies context seemed to provide these participants with a vocabulary and epistemic

framework for understanding how to talk about religion, something that seemed to pose a

significant challenge for those participants without this background. This finding strongly

suggests that there is a substantial benefit for preservice teachers to participate in a course or

courses about the study of religion from a non-confessional standpoint (Gardner et al., 2017;

Soules & Jafralie, 2021). Ultimately, the concern about where CRL would be located within an

already congested curriculum could be addressed to some extent by its inclusion in teacher

professional standards which would ensure that CRL becomes integrated into teacher

education programs (Patrick, 2015; Soules, 2019).

How do teacher educators or pre-service K-G teachers' own religious or non-religious worldviews and identities impact their beliefs about the importance of being religiously literate?

All five teacher educators had a connection and familiarity with Christianity. As noted in

Chapter Five, three were practicing protestant Christians, while one had been a practicing

Christian for much of his life although he no longer identified as such and one did not identify

as Christian but was married to a practicing protestant Christian. All these faculty members

expressed liberal or progressive views, such as creating inclusive classrooms for LGBTQ2S+

students. Moreover, they all demonstrated a keen awareness of the historical wrongs

perpetuated by educators in the name of Christianity, specifically as related to colonialism and

the call to reconciliation through Indigenization in the Canadian context. For the religiously

identified faculty members there was an acknowledgement that their openness to issues

related to CRL and engagement with religious diversity was influenced by their own experiences

within a religious community or having religious beliefs. These experiences allowed them to

understand how religious beliefs may form a part of their students' core identities, and thus,

they were very sympathetic to the inclusion of CRL in teacher education. However, the two

participants who did not identify as religious shared the belief in the importance of including

CRL as a part of teacher education courses. While these participants did not identify as

religious, they nonetheless had experienced either being religious or living in religious

communities which may have contributed to their openness to CRL.

The preservice teachers were similarly diverse in the way their own religious beliefs or

non-religious worldviews and identities shaped their beliefs about the importance of being

religiously literate. Significantly, all participants who were religiously identified (either Christian,

Muslim, or Earth-Based) readily expressed the view that CRL should be a part of teacher

education. Many of these participants indicated that they had experienced discrimination, bias,

or misunderstanding related to their religious identities, as with Zahra and her experience with

micro-aggressions or with Heather's experience living as a minority in a largely LDS community.

While they did not label it as such, these participants' experience could be interpreted as a

form of religious bullying (Chan, 2019). Having had the experience of being a religious minority

seemed to create an awareness of the importance of CRL as a means of mitigating these kinds

of harms.

In contrast, some participants who identified as non-religious or spiritual but not

religious did not immediately consider CRL as important. In some cases, such as with Ashley and

Isabella, the hesitancy or uncertainty about the usefulness of CRL was directly related to their

confusion about the term. Both these participants initially believed that being religiously

literate or educating for CRL meant promoting your own confessional religious beliefs, a

common confusion among preservice teachers about what it means to teach for CRL

(Bindewald et al., 2017; Guo, 2015b; White, 2010) . It is worth noting that both these

participants had been raised in conservative Christian communities but no longer considered

themselves religiously identified, which suggests that their hesitancy towards CRL may be a

result of negative experiences they had experienced or witnessed related to religion being a

part of their schooling. This finding represents a possible avenue for further research.

Additionally, this finding that preservice teachers who identified as religious 'none' or atheists

initially did not see CRL as playing an important role – or even saw it as negative -- in their work

as teachers supports the findings of Subedi (2007) who has drawn attention to the tendency for

non-religious students to view other religions in a negative light (p. 232). Significantly, once

these 'nones' or spiritual but religious participants understood the difference between teaching

about religion and teaching religion, they became more open to the idea of CRL and even to see

how it might be important for educators, highlighting again the need for preservice teachers to

possess a vocabulary and epistemic framework to enable them to engage in dialogue about and

within religious diversity.

How do teacher educators and preservice teachers view the relationship between religious CRL and educating for citizenship?

When asked about the relationship between CRL and citizenship, teacher educators –

despite some reservations about the term citizenship (see Chapter Five) – saw an immediate

connection between the two concepts, even for those who were initially unfamiliar with the

concept of CRL. The majority of faculty participants discussed the relationship as a positive one, most commonly pointing to issues of increasing diversity in K-G classrooms and the need for religion to be included as a category of identity in order to increase understanding of the 'other'. For some, such as James, this was primarily discussed in terms of values, such as respect, kindness, or compassion, whereas for others such as David, the discussion was more likely to be introduced when discussing human rights or issues around oppression, or a more social justice-oriented form of citizenship.

In contrast, the preservice teachers had a more difficult time understanding both the terms citizenship and CRL although once these terms were clarified, they all indicated that they believed that being religiously literate and teaching for CRL was an important part of their task in educating their K-G students for citizenship, affirming Prothero's argument that RL is a necessary condition to being "an effective citizen" (2007, p.9). After a few initial interviews where I encountered the issue of participants finding the terminology difficult, I ensured that the preservice teachers understood how I was using the terms by also using examples or at times shifting to the terminology to add more familiar terms. For example, preservice teachers often struggled with the term CRL, frequently assuming initially that it referred to a confessional approach to teaching religion, until I made a clear distinction between 'teaching' and 'preaching'. Likewise, the term citizenship proved challenging to some preservice teachers, so I needed to adjust and shift my language to other terms such as 'educating for values' or 'civic competencies' which seemed easier for some to understand. Overall, their conceptual understanding of educating for citizenship fell into one of three categories: 1) educating for

common values; 2) educating for civic competencies/skills; 3) educating for critical thinking and social-justice oriented engagement.

First, as detailed in Chapter Six, a number of participants drew a parallel between citizenship and educating K-G students for common values of tolerance, mutual respect and compassion. Frequently, these participants identified these 'common' values as the same as those taught in their own religious education or upbringing (Arzina, Kayla, and Sarah, for example). Indeed, for these participants, CRL was seen as helpful to educating for a values-based citizenship because it both encouraged the religiously identified students to draw on their own traditions to understand the importance of these values, and it helped those non-religious or spiritual students to appreciate the contributions religious traditions offer to the teaching of these common values, a kind of two-way understanding has been articulated by multiple scholars (Patrick, 2015; Soules, 2019). Second, for those preservice teachers who understood citizenship in terms of civic competency such as political knowledge of one's community, or civic duties such as voting, the relationship between CRL and this notion of citizenship was most frequently described as favourable because increased CRL would create more awareness of diversity and thus lead to a more cohesive classroom – and society – characterized by diversity, something that is aligned with recent RL scholarship (Shaw, 2020; Walker et al., 2021). Lastly, several preservice teachers' responses suggested that they viewed CRL as having a role in a social justice-oriented type of citizenship; in other words, they believed that CRL plays an important role in addressing issues of identity, power, and oppression in the classroom. While they did not all use the term 'citizenship', they spoke of the crucial task of educating students to become active members of their society by becoming critical thinkers

who would have the skills necessary to question authoritative structures around them, particularly those that perpetuate systems of oppression. This finding emphasizes what other scholars have noted about the importance of developing the skill of critical thinking (Kyles & Olafson, 2008).

Religion as a source of harm

A key finding of this study relates to the intersection of CRL and educating for citizenship because it shows how those who are religiously identified can both harm and be harmed. The findings show a lack of CRL as an aim in teacher education contexts can create a) fertile ground for the perpetuation of various harms of religious discrimination (including intrareligious harm) and academic hostility to religion; and b) a failure to critically and intersectionally address the ways religion and religious identities, especially dominant White Christian identities, can perpetuate harm.

Site of harm -- Religious discrimination, stereotyping, bullying

Since I began my doctoral studies in the fall of 2015, racially and religiously motivated hate crimes have dramatically increased across Canada (Statistics Canada, 2013-2018). Within educational contexts, the most common forms of these harms are religious discrimination, stereotyping or bullying that have shown to be correlated to a lack of CRL (Burritt, 2020; Chan, 2019; Walker et al., 2021). As more research emerges demonstrating the harms experienced by religious minorities in K-G contexts, the need for teacher education programs to develop tools to address these harms has arguably never been greater (Gardner et al., 2017; Soules & Jafralie, 2021). In commenting on the potentially harmful effects of religious illiteracy, Diane Moore has noted how "A lack of understanding about religion actually fuels bigotry and prejudice and hinders capacity for cooperative endeavors across a whole range of possible

publics" (in Riskin-Kutz, 2020).[28] Certainly the participant responses in this study demonstrated

that there were indeed many perceived harms encountered because of a lack of CRL. For the

faculty, these were seen mainly as the potential harms of preservice teachers failing to

understand the 'other' because of a lack of CRL, something argued by Valk (2007) when he

suggests that allowing for and seeking to understand both religious and secular views is an

important part of responsible citizenship. However, my study also demonstrated how these

harms experienced by religiously identified participants were at times experienced as an intra-

religious harm, with one religious group discriminating against another, as in the case of an LDS

student feeling uncomfortable in a Catholic school or vice-versa.

Unfortunately, my findings from both groups of participants indicated that academia is

not a welcoming place for those with religious or spiritual affiliations. This finding aligns with

Dinham and Francis' 2015, *Religious Literacy in Policy and Practice*, wherein they suggest "…that

universities are perpetuators – perhaps even guardians and reproducers – of a particular post-

religious way of thinking that tends to reject religion as distracting nonsense" (p.8). This view

was expressed by both the faculty participants and the preservice teachers who felt multiple

hostilities toward acknowledging religious identities within the context of a secular university. I

agree with those scholars who argue that because universities are increasingly places of

diversity and pluralism, because they generally represent places that uphold liberal ideals and

freedom of thought, and because they are responsible for training the next generation,

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[28] A 'Public Enlightenment': Harvard Divinity School Begins New Program in Religion and Public Life. Blog post, The Harvard Crimson. Oct. 26, 2020
https://www.thecrimson.com/article/2020/10/26/religion-public-life-div-school/

understanding how universities – and their faculty in particular -- view religion is of great

importance (Dinham & Francis, 2015; Jacobsen & Jacobsen, 2012; Nord, 2010).

Perpetuates harm

Another key finding in my study that was how religion was also a site of tension because

of the way it may harm, particularly when it is the dominant religion in a given society. I

encountered this myself when I was put in the uncomfortable situation of interviewing

someone who clearly had anti-LGBTQ2S+ sentiments due to her religious beliefs. This

experience highlighted to me how concerns about illiberal religious beliefs are difficult to

reconcile with democratic views of citizenship and pose difficult challenges for educators

attempting to teach for the more critical citizenship values that go beyond the minimal aims of

tolerance and mutual respect (Gutmann & Thompson, 1996, 2009; Kukathas, 2003). However,

harm was also visible in considering the impact of White Christian privilege and the

unintentional harms this can pose.

White Christian privilege

Situating the findings in light of the above discussion illuminates how the issue of

Christian privilege must be considered in teacher education contexts, especially how it

intersects with other aspects of identity, such as race, revealing hidden power dynamics at play.

North American public schools, while officially secularized, are frequently sites of White

Christian privilege (Blumenfeld, 2006; Aronson, 2016; Joshi, 2020) where religious minority

students are often marginalized, especially those whose identities intersect with racial

minorities as in the case of Muslim, Hindu, or Sikh students, for example, with little to no

attempt to acknowledge their religious identity within the context of school curriculum or

extracurricular school life (Aronson, 2016). The racialized Muslim preservice teachers in my

case study described instances of this marginalization happening to themselves, and also to the racialized Muslim students in their practicum placements, for example when Zahra described how happy her female Muslim PE students were to have her as a teacher while these same students had reportedly never engaged in the class before she taught it. That the majority White Christian teachers at the school had never seen those particular students so animated strongly suggests that this was due at least in part to the fact that the K-G students did not see themselves represented before in that predominantly White Christian environment. Indeed, White Christian privilege is at times barely discernible to those of the dominant tradition, as it is embedded in the days of the week, the timing of winter break, or in the accepted or celebrated school holidays. This privileging of Christianity is so normalized in North American schools that it is largely invisible to not only Christians but to those non-religious students (many of whom enjoy Christian privilege even though they do not consider themselves practicing Christians) who have grown up in this system (Blumenfeld, 2006; James, 2015; Sensoy, 2009). An example of this was in Sarah's reflection on whether it would be appropriate to include religiously diverse holidays in their lesson planning, such as Kwanzaa or Eid, whereas she felt it was 'normal' to include themes like Easter, Christmas and Santa. Guo (2015) notes how Christian bias is also evident in the curricular choices that "continue to be characterized by Eurocentric [typically Christian] perspectives, standards, and values, and thus do not reflect the knowledge and experiences of culturally and religiously diverse student and parent populations" (p. 190). Finally, this unacknowledged Christian privilege is often synonymous with White hegemony which gives lip-service to inclusion and valuing diversity, but does little to address systemic power imbalances, including those that marginalize religious and racialized minorities (Joshi,

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2006, 2020; Aronson, 2016; Keddie et al., 2019). For teacher educators, there is a call to attend

to all aspects of social diversity issues in their work with preservice teachers, including religion

and its intersections with race and gender. As Aronson et al. contend "Without unmasking and

unmaking these conventions in schools, we continue to perpetuate hegemonic discourses that

reinforce stereotypes like "all Jews are wealthy" and "all Muslims are terrorists" (2016, p.144).

White Christian privilege is important to consider when reflecting on CRL's role as an

educational aim because in order to address the potential harms it may pose in teacher

education, there needs to be a framework that promotes intersectional and critical reflection.

Indeed, there needs to be a model of epistemic inclusion that encourages criticality and self-

reflection, something similar to what Jackson has called 'edification' – that is the ability to

critically examine one's own belief system when considering it in dialogue with other belief

systems (1997). CRL can be used as a framework to address the testimonial and hermeneutical

injustices created by being religiously illiterate because it specifically calls for both an

understanding of the diversity in and among religious traditions and a critical engagement with

understanding the way religious traditions "…may either benefit from, or are oppressed by,

existing power dynamics on personal, institutional, and systemic levels." This dissertation

argues that the CRL framework allows for what Ipgrave (2010) has called an epistemic

inclusivity, where there is a true openness to hearing other forms of knowledge. This must go

beyond Polhaus' 'fractured epistemic trust' (2017) that may on the surface indicate an

openness to all views, but is actually unable to be truly open to a different form of knowledge.

The caveat here is that this epistemic inclusivity must be tempered with the ability to use a

critical lens. This means that no view is above being subject to a critical gaze. Questions of

power, oppression, and marginalization should be engaged in all conversations if a teacher educator is to equip preservice teachers in their role as educators for SJOC. Indeed, there also has to be recognition that this epistemic injustice can be a two-way street. Preservice teachers with faith commitments should feel that there is room for them to express their beliefs, but they must in turn be ready to think critically about their own tradition and understand its situatedness in time and place (Anderson D. et al., 2015; Hartwick, 2015; Subedi, 2006). This means engaging in conversations about the way their own tradition has either benefited or been marginalized or oppressed by particular historical, social, and political contexts. An intersectional CRL approach is one that allows for a close examination of the way these factors intersect with each other to create power or limit access to systems of power.

Section 2: Implications -- CRL, Epistemic injustice and teacher education

In this section, I respond to the guiding question of this dissertation: : "What is the role of CRL as an educational aim for SJOC in teacher education?" as framed through the final theme, 'CRL can counteract harm.' The final section of this chapter presents practical recommendations of this dissertation.

Ultimately, this dissertation argues that teacher education programs in Canada ought to include CRL as an educational aim and within K-G program of studies as a means of addressing epistemic injustice. As seen in the interview findings, CRL as an educational aim is largely absent in K-G curricula (and specifically the various programs of studies) in Canadian Prairies contexts. Because of this absence, it is therefore also absent as a curricular aim in teacher education programs in these contexts -- an exclusion that is arguably a kind of epistemic injustice. Specifically, both these omissions represent what Fricker refers to as a testimonial injustice

because they represent instances when a speaker (either the K-G student or the preservice teacher) is deemed as not credible because what they posit as knowledge is not recognized as valid knowledge – an evaluation based solely on the speaker's identity (p. 18). Preservice teachers who identify with a religious or spiritual identity may well express religious or spiritual views or perspectives to make sense of their experiences in the classroom, but if those views are dismissed out of hand as irrelevant or perhaps inappropriate for a university classroom, there is a possibility for a testimonial injustice to occur. Moreover, these preservice teachers will likely be teaching in religiously diverse K-G classrooms, so as educators, they have a responsibility to become aware of how they welcome or shut down those students who express religious identities in class. As philosopher Ian Kidd (2017) reminds us,

> …religious groups might be negatively stereotyped in ways that prejudicially deflate their credibility or find the activities and experiences constitutive of their faith rendered hermeneutically opaque within a religiously illiterate society…Or the non- religious social peers might not only be ignorant of basic knowledge – of doctrines, dietary rules, and so on – but also have a hermeneutically inadequate approach to religion. (p. 392)

This deflated credibility based on negative religious stereotypes was in fact experienced by both faculty members (James) and preservice teachers (Kayla, Arzina, Zahra, Sarah), highlighting how a lack of CRL has implications not only for students but also for the teachers – whether they are university faculty or K-G educators.

For teacher educators, teaching in a way that is informed by CRL is not simply a matter of learning these religious basics in a facts-based approach such as initially proposed by Prothero, where relies heavily on content based knowledge of dates, terms, and facts. Rather, to avoid contributing to an religiously related epistemic injustice, educators must attend to

hermeneutical considerations of how religious or spiritual knowledge is interpreted as well as how it constitutes as knowledge construction -- something that a CRL approach that includes reflection on intersectional power dynamics provides. This is no easy task because as Kidd explains, avoiding epistemic injustice in the case of religious views requires "...an appreciation that 'taking a religious belief seriously' means locating it within a 'form of life', rather than isolating it from its supporting context of thought and sensibility, thereby consigning it to unintelligibility" (p. 392). Thus, the omission of CRL as an educational aim in teacher education could be arguably also be understood as a hermeneutical injustice, because it represents "gap in collective understanding" resulting from a failure to take 'religious belief seriously' and instead upholds the commonly held understanding that faith-based views are in opposition to rationale views based on reason. Moreover, this failure to provide a space that is open to religious or spiritual views can also be understood as a 'fractured epistemic trust' (Polhaus, 2017) and is worth noting in this discussion because it describes how even when space is provided, in a teacher education classroom for example, if this space is permeated by distrust, it may not provide a space that is actually accessible to the student whose views, especially those that are religious or spiritual, are held in distrust (p. 19). Thus, we can see how epistemic injustice, whether it is an overt exclusion or a less overt fracture in epistemic trust, results in what Polhaus describes as a "willful hermeneutical ignorance," or the propensity to dismiss whole aspects of the experienced world by refusing to become proficient in the epistemic resources required for attending to those parts of the world well" (p. 17). In the context of teacher education, the dismissal of spiritual or religious perspectives as inappropriate for a university context, seen in participant responses about academia being hostile to religion, may

not only result in a 'fractured epistemic trust,' but it may also deny preservice teachers (and

their own K-G students) the possibility to engage critically with issues of power and oppression

related to religion.

Section 3: Practice related recommendations

Based on the key findings of this dissertation, a number of normative recommendations

related to policy and practice can be made for Canadian teacher education programs to

incorporate CRL in their programs. These include normative recommendations for

incorporating epistemic inclusivity in teacher education and looking to parallels with the efforts

made in recent years to prioritize Indigenization for ways forward. Practical recommendations

include considering how practicum placements should carefully consider CRL, taking an infused

approach to CRL, and promoting CRL as a means of facilitating dialogue.

Practicum placements

One practical recommendation for faculty is to consider the importance of incorporating

CRL as a preparation for practicum placements. A key finding of this dissertation was how

preservice teacher practicum placements are commonly sites where both faculty and

preservice teachers felt an urgent need for CRL. Because so many placements in this teacher

education program took place in rural locations, there were frequently situations where

preservice teachers were teaching in contexts where there was a nearly homogenous religious

community that differed from their own tradition or background. This created a dissonance

that occurred with different traditions in the same religion as in the LDS participant who was

not allowed to meet parents in a K-G placement in a predominantly Christian Reform

community, or when a Muslim student was placed in an LDS community school, but also

occurred when a non-religious preservice teacher was placed in K-G school with a strong religious community as when Ashley worked with a music teacher who chose all Christian songs for music class. The discomfort and ill-preparedness experienced by these preservice teachers points to a need for being better equipped to navigate issues related to religion in placement experiences.

Curriculum – an infused approach

For teacher education curriculum designers, careful consideration should be given to the question of embedding CRL within existing courses or creating a stand-alone course. Both options present challenges in implementation. Many preservice teachers indicated that they would appreciate having a separate course on CRL. However, the danger of separating it into a stand-alone course is that if it is not mandatory, only those students who are interested will take it, perpetuating the knowledge gap and the epistemic injustice related to CRL. Most faculty participants preferred integrating CRL into existing courses in an 'infused approach'. However, without sufficient training in CRL for the teacher educators, there is an obvious danger of that CRL will either continue to be avoided by those professors who either are not sufficiently religiously literate themselves, or who are among those who consider religion an inappropriate topic in a university. Ultimately, I agree with other scholars such as Patrick (2015) who argues that CRL needs to become a curricular aim in Canadian teacher education programs, although she argues that it is best located in Social Studies education, while I recommend it be infused across curriculum for all preservice teachers.

CRL as a means of facilitating dialogue

A second practical recommendation for teacher educators is to use CRL as a framework within a SJOC approach to create more opportunities for critical dialogue about religion. By incorporating CRL in classroom discussions about systemic injustice and oppression, faculty can encourage preservice teachers to critically reflect on the intersectionality of their own beliefs and attitudes towards religion and religious diversity (Aronson et al., 2016; Dalton, 2019; O'Grady & Jackson, 2020). Moreover, bringing CRL into class discussions is a means of challenging the notion that religion doesn't belong in academia by normalizing religion as an aspect of diversity, serving to reduce the possibility of epistemic harm on those religiously identified preservice teachers and modeling a truly inclusive and equitable space for all (Ipgrave, 2010; Kidd et al., 2017). This same recommendation can also be made based on findings from the preservice teacher responses, where all participants expressed a strong desire for more opportunities to engage in genuine dialogue about religion in their teacher education courses. Moreover, their responses clearly indicated that whatever their religious beliefs or backgrounds, they felt ill-equipped to deal with any issues related to religion in their placements. Perhaps one of the more striking findings – and touching moments for me was when the preservice teachers expressed how much they enjoyed and learned from the focus group discussions, where they could engage in dialogue with peers in an environment where it was 'safe' to discuss religion. This was a powerful example of the importance of creating those spaces where such discussions could happen – not always easy to do on many university campuses.

Indigenization can provide an opening for incorporating CRL

A final recommendation for teacher educators or curriculum designers hoping to incorporate CRL into teacher education programs, is to look to the opening created in efforts to Indigenize curriculum seen across Canadian educational institutions. This move towards Indigenizing curriculum and pedagogy at all levels of education is a move that necessitates the recognition of diverse epistemologies, including ones that are inherently spiritual or religious, and thus reduces the possibility for testimonial epistemic injustices related to religious illiteracy to occur.

Chapter Summary

This chapter has discussed the results of my research study by returning to the research questions, and considering how each of the four themes identified connect with key concepts in my theoretical framework. Additionally, I presented a series of recommendations for teacher educators, administrators, and all those involved with teacher education program design and development.

Chapter 8: Conclusion -- Reflections and Contributions

Overview of dissertation

This dissertation set out to answer the overarching questions: "What is the role of CRL as an educational aim for critical social justice-oriented citizenship in teacher education?" and "What are teacher educators' and preservice teachers views on the role of CRL as an educational aim for mitigating harm in teacher education in Canada?" To accomplish this, I conducted an exploratory normative case study of both teacher educators and preservice teachers in one Canadian Prairie university teacher education program utilizing a 'bricolage' approach to research design that allowed me to address both empirical and normative questions. In the first part of this dissertation, I explored the concept of RL with an overview of literature related to the juncture of RL and teacher education, along with an examination of several key authors' conceptions of RL to arrive at my own conception for this research. Drawing on the work of established RL scholars Stephen Prothero, Diane Moore, Robert Jackson, and Andrew Dinham among others, I developed a theoretical conception of critical religious literacy (CRL) that included attention to intersectional identities, including racialized identities and non-religious identities and worldviews. Chapter Three presented the theoretical foundation of this dissertation, including a discussion of the various aims and models of citizenship education, before aligning CRL with what I call a SJOC model of citizenship that is informed by CRT, including concepts such as intersectionality, microaggressions and White Christian privilege to conceptualize the possible harms that may be perpetuated within educational contexts. I then considered how Miranda Fricker's concept of epistemic injustice applies to the intersection of education and religion. Doing so enabled me to mobilize the

notion of epistemic injustice to build a theoretical foundation from which to argue for a CRL

approach that serves to mitigate the potential harm created by a lack of religious literacy in

teacher education programs. Chapter Four describes my research design and methodology. This

chapter described my epistemological and ontological approach to my research design,

ultimately situating my work within a constructivist and critical theorist approach. Grounding

my research thus, I situated my methodological approach within the broad context of

traditional qualitative case study method, and then narrowing it to my use of exploratory case

study and exploring the concept of bricolage as a rationale for the transdisciplinary nature of

my research project. The remainder of the chapter described my research design for the two

parts of my study. My findings were presented in Chapters Five and Six, exploring faculty and

preservice perceptions of the role of CRL as an educational aim in teacher education. Chapter

Seven placed the findings from both participant groups into conversation and considered the

central issues facing teacher educators and preservice teachers related to CRL as an educational

aim, and presented corresponding recommendations in terms of policy, implementation, and

practical considerations. This final chapter concludes my doctoral project by reflecting on the

doctoral journey before addressing the central problems outlined in Chapter Seven. I conclude

with a discussion of my theoretical and methodological contributions, limitations and directions

for future research.

Reflecting on the journey

When I began this work, I was living in Montreal, QC, Canada, a large urban city with an

extremely diverse population. As mentioned at the beginning of this dissertation, I became

interested in CRL in this context in my job as an EAP instructor, where the vast majority of my

students were international students. This is where I began to notice and become concerned about the lack of CRL I saw amongst some of my colleagues, many of whom seemed to believe that religion had no place in a university classroom. From colleagues who I knew viewed themselves as very progressive and open-minded, I heard many Islamophobic comments that went unchallenged in the lunchroom amongst peers. Too frequently, I overheard conversations in which these instructors were perplexed, or even outraged, about certain students' desire to discuss religious issues in the classroom, at times leading to highly unprofessional and hurtful comments disparaging and ridiculing religiously identified students. Overhearing these conversations deeply disturbed and unsettled me, thus, inspiring to begin my doctorate and developed this research project to understand how CRL is viewed by both faculty and by preservice teachers, who will soon be responsible for their own classrooms. I wanted to know whether these educators considered it an important aspect of educating for the critical aims of citizenship as found in a SJOC approach supported by some teacher education programs in Canada, or whether, as I suspected, they viewed religion or classroom issues related to CRL with some trepidation.

As I have written about elsewhere in this dissertation, my change of locale of my dissertation from Montreal to the Canadian Prairies -- and the findings that emerged because of it – created a dissonance in my research process. I found it difficult to reconcile the findings with what I had anticipated to uncover. As time went on however, I began to see that these findings were not 'off' but rather were pointing me in new directions – I simply had to open myself up to follow these new avenues. Inevitably, this process resulted in opening up new

research horizons, leading me to considering the variety of epistemic injustices that could occur related to religion and all its intersections, including racial ones.

Broad implications

The writing phase of my dissertation began in the summer of 2020 and continued through to summer 2021 coinciding with three events that had a global impact no-one could have predicted: 1) the Covid19 global pandemic; 2) the murder of George Floyd that re-sparked the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement that demanded racial justice across the globe; and 3) the 'finding' of unmarked graves of Indigenous children at former residential schools in Canada beginning in the spring of 2021. Together, these moments exposed stark levels of inequality and injustice experienced by racialized people. The COVID19 pandemic has unequally impacted racialized people and especially racialized women as large numbers have found themselves either at increased risk or unemployed due to the types of industries that have been most severely impacted, namely the food industry sector, retail, and personal care sector. The pandemic also highlighted racial inequalities in terms of the illness itself, with Black people in the USA dying at twice the rate of White people (Wallis, 2020). With this unprecedented moment as the backdrop, the death of George Floyd at the hands of a White police officer in Minneapolis, sparked the resurgence of the BLM movement which as I am writing this has resulted in a surge in public discourse about race and racism within seemingly every sector of society, including education. Almost daily, new statements appear from universities and other educational institutions as they scramble to understand their role in supporting BLM movement, and their role in dismantling systemic and institutionalized racism. Equally impactful has been the 'discovery' of hundreds and perhaps what will eventually be thousands

of unmarked graves of Indigenous children on the grounds of former residential schools, the great majority of which were run by Christian churches, most frequently the Catholic church. As a White Canadian female academic writing about CRL and epistemic injustice, these events demand that I closely consider my own identity and White privilege, and how those impact my role in disrupting injustice within my research and my work as an educator. It has forced me to re-examine my data attending to how racial identities intersected with religion and religious identities. It brought forth the importance of understanding intersectionality in any conversation about religious identity, and also highlighted the significance of White Christian privilege within the data sets. It has forced me to deeply reflect on how CRL cannot shy away from difficult conversations about the atrocities performed in the name of religion, as in the case of residential schools, but also to see how CRL can and must be mobilized by teacher educators to address issues of oppression. Above all, writing this dissertation in this moment that has demanded a close examination of structures of injustice across our planet, compelled me to apply this close examination of epistemic injustice to my own work. However, I recognize that academic reflections on CRL and its role in education are not enough to address these systems of oppression at the nexus of these issues. This is why my doctoral research has both informed and been informed by my co-founding of the Centre for Civic Religious Literacy (CCRL)[29], a Canadian non-profit that engages in training, research, consulting and program evaluation for community and work-related organizations across public and private sectors.

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[29] Centre for Civic Religious Literacy - https://ccrl-clrc.ca/

Contributions

This dissertation contributes to a growing body of literature on the role of RL in both K-G education and teacher education programs. As the only study to date that examines faculty and preservice teachers view on CRL as an educational aim for mitigating epistemic injustice in teacher education programs in Canada, it differs methodologically from much of the existing scholarship that seeks to make recommendations that are either based in empirical data or philosophical analysis. In contrast, as a methodological bricoleur I have attempted to draw on empirical data to make normative recommendations about how educators should consider the role of CRL as a means of combatting diverse forms of social injustice, including epistemic injustice. Some of the key contributions of the doctoral work align with my recommendations: namely that I demonstrated that my initial suspicion that preservice teachers were not being well-equipped to educate for religiously diverse classrooms. Indeed, this research helps move forward CRL scholarship as it relates to education and professional training as a broader field, and teacher education as a narrower field. Because my study took place in the Canadian Prairies, it contributes to a small but growing body of scholarship on teacher education in this locale. Moreover, this dissertation also showed how both teacher educators and preservice teachers in Canadian teacher education programs found that efforts to Indigenize curriculum and pedagogy led to increased openings for preservice teachers to discuss issues related to spirituality and religion, contributing to scholarship on the intersection of indigenization, spirituality, and teacher education. Finally, it contributes to a small but growing field of teacher education scholarship that intersects with scholarship on White Christian privilege.

Limitations

Although this study advances some significant theoretical and methodological contributions to interdisciplinary fields of educational philosophy, teacher education, and CRL, like all studies, it has limitations.

Methodologically, an inevitable issue encountered was that of selection bias. Unsurprisingly, all five participants in the faculty study had an openness and interest in religion and issues related to religious diversity. Given the tendency in many academic environments to view religion as both a potential site of conflict and something to be relegated to the private sphere (Lindholm, 2018), I had hoped that I might find some faculty participants who represented the other end of the spectrum: those who feel strongly opposed to any discussion of religion in an academic setting. However, while I did find significant differences of opinion and openness among my five participants, they all came in with a well-developed interest in the subject. This same limitation was present in the preservice teacher study as well, but to a lesser degree as there was a broader spectrum of openness to religion among the participants. This selection bias limitation was perhaps amplified by the interview and focus group methods, requiring the participant to enter into a conversation about religion – something that those who have an aversion to religion would be unlikely to do. While this limitation was unavoidable given the nature of the research design, it points to potential areas of expansion for further research. For example, developing research tools such as a large-scale survey that includes religion among other categories of diversity may provide a way to explore faculty and preservice perceptions of CRL more broadly, however, the issue of voluntary participation remains.

Another limitation of this study is the notable lack of diversity among my participants. Because of the location of the university from where I drew participants, there was a much less racially and religiously diverse population than I had anticipated when I first conceived the project in Montreal. The distinct characteristics of this community showed through in the majority of White Christian participants, both within the faculty set and the preservice teachers. All faculty participants were White, and four out of five were male. Moreover, four out of five participants came from a Christian background. However, this recruitment sample is arguably representative of the faculty body of the Faculty of Education at this university, where at the time of recruitment there are very few visible minorities among either tenure-track professors or course lecturers. Similarly, a related limitation is the demographics of the preservice teachers, many of whom have strong connections to conservative Christian traditions. Likewise, many of the K-G schools where the preservice teachers engage in their practical teaching experiences have a strong Christian influence because they are in communities that are made up of predominantly one conservative Christian community, such as Mennonites, Mormons, or Hutterites. Thus, faculty members' and preservice teachers' experiences and perceptions of religious identities or the importance of CRL as an educational aim were strongly influenced by their experiences in these contexts. However, as noted elsewhere, the issues raised among these participants propelled the research in different directions, one of them being the impact of White Christian privilege on teacher education. In addition, some might suggest that the small sample size is a limitation, but considering that my theoretical approach does not consider generalizability necessary or even desirable, this was not a concern for this qualitative study.

Finally, combining philosophical analysis within an empirical case study as a methodological bricolage opened up avenues within scholarship by blurring the boundaries of disciplines, but it also limited my empirical data collection that could have moved in different directions had I included more visual data collection or more participatory methods such as using photovoice or similar. However, having very few examples of educational case studies that blend philosophical analysis with qualitative empirical data, such as interviews, I felt that I already had my hands full trying to be a methodological bricoleur. I look forward to gaining experience with visual or more participatory methods in a subsequent study.

Directions for Future Research

As with any dissertation or research project, it was impossible to pursue every question or follow every lead that arises in the scope of this study. Indeed, there were many instances in which I realized that I would need to pursue certain directions in a subsequent study. For example, at one point I considered including a third set of interviews of current K-G teachers who were students in this particular teacher education program, but soon realized that this would be better undertaken as a separate study. Considering this has opened up the possibility of conducting a longitudinal case study following preservice teachers into their first years as K-G teachers and beyond. On a different note, the uncovering of the impact of white Christian privilege and its intersection with notions of citizenship, epistemic justice and educating for social justice are only recently being discussed in literature in both philosophy of education and within critical education circles, suggesting further avenues for exploration. Additionally, scholarship on the impact of religious identity or religious issues in Canadian teacher education programs remains sparse, particularly for Western provinces, and this case study is only one of

a few patchwork pieces – it is challenging to sew an entire quilt with so few building blocks, so

more studies in this area would be most welcome. Relatedly, research into rurality, White

Christian privilege, and their impact on CRL in both K-G education and teacher education

contexts, especially in Canada, are underexamined in much educational scholarship, with

existing research tending to focus on one or perhaps two of these areas but not the

intersection of three: rurality, race, and religion in education. A final direction that this study

touched on but was unable to explore in depth, is to understand in more depth the role of

religion or religious identities of educators and students, and how these relate to the increasing

polarization we are facing in this post-truth era[30] and disinformation.

Conclusion

Ultimately, this dissertation has argued that religious illiteracy among any educator is

form of epistemic injustice to those students who have religious identities (or whose religious

or spiritual identity is different than the teacher) because it is a misrecognition of that identity,

constituting a kind of epistemic injustice or harm. Advocating for CRL as an antidote to this

harm is thus necessary to challenge embedded stereotypes and prejudice perpetuated by

religious illiteracy. Implementing CRL in teacher education in a diverse, liberal, democratic

society such as Canada is no easy task, as we have seen that those religiously identified

individuals and communities can both experience and commit epistemic injustices. Because of

this, integrating CRL in teacher education programs will require a thoughtful and sustained

commitment to understanding of these complexities. However, the difficulty of this task does

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[30] https://www.chronicle.com/article/teaching-in-the-age-of-disinformation?utm_source=Iterable&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=campaign_1900071_nl_Teaching_date_20210114&cid=te&source=ams&sourceId=5168026

not diminish its importance or its urgency. Indeed, if we, as educators, are to truly contribute to

creating a more just and equitable society, we must take seriously the task of educating and

advocating for a CRL approach.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Invitation Letter/Email for Faculty Participants

Dear [NAME OF PARTICIPANT],

My name is Ms. Erin Reid, a PhD Candidate at the Department of Integrated Studies in Education at McGill University. My academic supervisor is Prof. Kevin McDonough. His email address is kevin.mcdonough@mcgill.ca in case you need to reach him at any time.

I would like to invite you to participate in my PhD research study on critical religious literacy (CRL) as an educational aim in Canadian Prairies' teacher education programs. The main purpose of this study is to better understand how teacher educators view and understand CRL as an educational aim for civic competency. A second objective of this study is to see how teacher educators in the Canadian Prairies view and understand their own CRL and how this may impact their pedagogy. This research study will involve one initial face-to-face interview that should take approximately 45 -- 60 minutes, and one follow-up interview via email, virtual face-to-face, or face-to-face interview of approximately 30 -- 45 minutes.

Next steps:

1) Please let me know if you might be interested to participate in this study. If you are interested, please review the attached consent form closely and fill it out.

2) Once we receive the completed and signed form from you, I will

   a. Countersign and send you back a copy for your files

   b. Contact you to set a date and time at your convenience to conduct an interview.

3) Six weeks to two months later, you will receive another email asking for a follow-up interview of 30 to 45 minutes, which can be done via email, virtual face-to-face, or in-person at your convenience.

4) Once the interviews have been transcribed, you will also be given the opportunity to review your interview transcript to provide any feedback or modifications you require.

I look forward to hearing back from you no later than

[I will give participants a WEEK from the date of sending the email to respond].

Erin Reid, PhD Candidate

Department of Integrated Studies in Education, McGill University

Erin.reid@mail.mcgill.ca

Appendix B: Consent Form for Faculty

Research Project: Canadian Prairies teacher educators' views on critical religious literacy as an educational aim for preservice teacher education programs.

Name and contact of Researcher: Erin Reid PhD Candidate, Department of Integrated Studies in Education (DISE), McGill University: erin.reid@mail.mcgill.ca Number: +1-514-777-XXXX

Name and contact of Supervisor: Prof. Kevin McDonough, Professor, Department of Integrated Studies in Education (DISE), McGill University: kevin.mcdonough@mcgill.ca

Address: 3700 McTavish St., Montreal, Quebec, H3A 1Y2

You are being asked to take part in a research study of how teacher educators view critical religious literacy as an educational aim for civic competency for K-G teacher education courses. This study will explore your views as a teacher educator on the importance of including religious literacy when teaching for diverse classrooms. This study will also explore how you view your own religious literacy and if or how that may affect your pedagogical decisions for preparing preservice teachers to engage with diversity in their K-G classrooms. Finally, this study will also address what challenges related to religious diversity you face in your teacher education courses, and what supports you may require. You are being asked to take part because you currently teach in a teacher education program in a Canadian Prairies university.

Your participation involves:

• One in person interview at a private location of your choice and convenience. The interview should not last more than 60 minutes.

• One follow-up interview of 30 to 45 minutes. This interview can be done via email, phone, virtual face-to-face, or in-person at your convenience.

• A preliminary draft of the transcribed interview will be shared with you to ensure your insights are fully taken into consideration including any concerns you might have regarding confidentiality of you as a person.

Dissemination of results:

•*PhD Thesis* -- Expected date of completion is second half of the year 2021.

• *Potential academic presentations and articles*: Findings from this study will possibly also be presented at one or more academic conferences. Findings will also potentially be used to publish articles in peer--reviewed journals. Every attempt will be made to consult with you on any additional publications and conference presentations, in case any arise in the future. Your answers will be confidential. Before commencing the research study, you will have the chance to review all confidentiality and privacy agreements and may withdraw at any point throughout the study. Furthermore, the records of this study will be kept private. Your name will be kept confidential and a pseudonym will be ascribed to you. Neither the names of the school nor the name of the persons interviewed will appear in any publications or presentations. Research records will be kept in a locked file; only the researcher and the faculty supervisor will have access to the records.

Taking part is voluntary:

Taking part in this study is completely voluntary. You may skip any questions that you do not want to answer in the interview. You are free to decide not to take part in the research study. If you decide to take part, you are free to withdraw at any time.

Benefits:

While there are no intended benefits for participants of this study, you may find that your own understanding of the role of religious literacy as an educational aim for teaching civic competency increases. On a broader context, this study aims to benefit teacher education by creating interest among teacher educators to be more open to including religious literacy in their courses and curricula.

Risks: There are no perceived risks in participating in this study. However, if you should have any cause for concern, do not hesitate to contact the principal investigator, supervisor, or McGill's Ethics Officer (see address below).

Compensation: All participants will receive a $20 gift certificate.

If you have questions:

The researcher conducting this study is Erin Reid, PhD Candidate at McGill University.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights or welfare as a participant in this research study, please contact the McGill Ethics Officer at 514--398--6831 or lynda.mcneil@mcgill.ca

Appendix C: Invitation Letter/Email for undergraduate students

Dear [NAME OF PARTICIPANT],

My name is Ms. Erin Reid, a PhD Candidate at the Department of Integrated Studies in Education at McGill University. My academic supervisor is Prof. Kevin McDonough. His email address is kevin.mcdonough@mcgill.ca in case you need to reach him at any time.

I would like to invite you to participate in my PhD research study on critical religious literacy as an educational aim for preservice K-G teachers in the Canadian Prairies. The main purpose of this study is to better understand how preservice teachers in teacher education programs view and understand critical religious literacy as an educational aim for civic competency. A second objective of this study is to see how preservice teachers view and understand their own CRL and how this may impact their teaching. This research study will involve one initial interview that should take approximately 45 -- 60 minutes, and one 60-minute focus group.

Next steps:

1) Please let me know if you might be interested to participate in this study. If you are interested, please review the attached consent form closely and fill it out.

2) Once I receive the completed and signed form from you, I will

   a. Countersign and send you back a copy for your files

   b. Contact you to set a date and time at your convenience to conduct an interview.

3) Based on the interview, I may also send you some additional questions for you to complete in writing as well.

4) Once it has been transcribed, you will also be given the opportunity to review your interview transcript to provide any feedback or modifications you require.

I look forward to hearing back from you no later than

[I will give participants a WEEK from the date of sending the email to respond].

Erin Reid, PhD Candidate

Department of Integrated Studies in Education, McGill University

Erin.reid@mail.mcgill.ca

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information and have received answers to any questions I asked. I consent to take part in the study.

Your Signature _____ Date _____

Your Name (printed) _____

Do you agree to the audio recording of this interview, with the understanding that the recording will never be publicly disseminated? Yes____/No____

Signature of Erin Reid _____ Date _____

Appendix D: Consent Form for Undergraduate students

Research project: Canadian Prairies preservice teachers' views on the role of critical religious literacy as an educational aim for social justice-oriented citizenship.

Name and contact of Researcher: Erin Reid PhD Candidate, Department of Integrated Studies in Education (DISE), McGill University: erin.reid@mail.mcgill.ca Number: +1-514-777-XXXX

Name and contact of Supervisor: Prof. Kevin McDonough, Professor, Department of Integrated Studies in Education (DISE), McGill University: kevin.mcdonough@mcgill.ca

Address: 3700 McTavish St., Montreal, Quebec, H3A 1Y2

The main purpose of this study is to understand how preservice teachers perceive the need to be aware of religious diversity in the Kindergarten-Graduation (K-G) classroom. In addition, this study seeks to understand what kinds of challenges pre-service teachers face when engaging with religious diversity in the K-G classroom, and what kinds of supports they need to face these challenges, and how their teacher education has prepared them to deal with religious diversity in the K-G classroom.

Your participation involves:

• One in person interview at a private location of your choice and convenience. The interview should not last more than 45 minutes.

• Based on the interview, some follow-up questions may be asked.

• One audio-recorded focus group of approximately 60 minutes.

• A preliminary draft of the thesis will be shared with you to ensure your insights are fully taken into consideration including any concerns you might have regarding confidentiality of you as a person.

Dissemination of results:

•*PhD Thesis* -- Expected date of completion is second half of the year 2021.

• *Potential academic presentations and articles*: Findings from this study will possibly also be presented at one or more academic conferences. Findings will also potentially be used to publish articles in peer--reviewed journals. Every attempt will be made to consult with you on any additional publications and conference presentations, in case any arise in the future. Your answers will be confidential. Before commencing the research study, you will have the chance to review all confidentiality and privacy agreements and may withdraw at any point throughout the study. Furthermore, the records of this

study will be kept private. Your name will be kept confidential and a pseudonym will be ascribed to you. Neither the names of the school nor the name of the persons interviewed will appear in any publications or presentations. Hard copies of research records will be kept in a locked file at the PI's residence and all computer files will be kept in a password protected file on the PI's personal computer. Only the researcher and the supervisor will have access to the records.

Compensation: There is no compensation for participating in this study. However, all participants will be offered food and drink during the focus group.

Risks: There are no perceived risks in participating in this study. While all focus group participants will agree to keep all information shared confidential, there are inherent limits to confidentiality in a group situation. Should you have any cause for concern, do not hesitate to contact the principal investigator, supervisor, or McGill's Ethics Officer (see address below).

Taking part is voluntary:

Taking part in this study is completely voluntary. You may skip any questions that you do not want to answer in the interview. You are free to decide not to take part in the research study. If you decide to take part, you are free to withdraw at any time.

If you have questions:

The researcher conducting this study is Erin Reid, PhD Candidate at McGill University.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights or welfare as a participant in this research study, please contact the McGill Ethics Officer at 514--398--6831 or lynda.mcneil@mcgill.ca

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information and have received answers to any questions I asked. I consent to take part in the study.

Your Signature _____ Date _____

Your Name (printed) _____

Do you agree to the audio recording of this interview, with the understanding that the recording will never be publicly disseminated? Yes____/No____

Signature of Erin Reid _____ Date _____

Appendix E: Interview Schedule

This study will use qualitative semi-structured interviews as a method of data collection. This method is used because it provides a base set of questions to guide the interview, but it allows for other questions to emerge naturally within the context of the conversation.

1. Tell me a bit about yourself and why you want to be a teacher.

2. How many years have you been studying, and have you done a practicum yet?

3. What kind of religious education, if any, did you receive?

4. How religiously literate do you think you are? How much do you know about different religious traditions?

5. Do you feel well equipped to teach religiously diverse students? Please explain.

6. What kinds of challenges have you experienced, or do you imagine you may experience, in religiously diverse classrooms?

7. How did/does your teacher education equip you to engage with religious diversity in your classroom?

8. Do you see a part of your job as nurturing or teaching certain values related to being Canadian in the classroom? Which values?

9. What is the relationship between teaching for those values (or citizenship) and being religiously literate?

10. How do you think your own religious or non-religious worldview may impact your teaching students?

Appendix F: Focus Group Protocol

Participants will meet in a closed room on campus. They will be warmly welcomed and offered food and drink before the conversation begins. As these students are all in the same class, they are already familiar with each other, so a warm up activity rather than an ice-breaker activity will be used.

Part A: Warm-up activity

Students will take turns answering one of the following questions:

1. What is something that not many people know about you?

2. What is the best thing that happened to you this week?

3. What is your favourite class this semester?

Part B: Participant analysis of interview process

Participants will be invited to share their thoughts on the interview process. Discussion prompts will include the following:

1. How did you find the interview process?

2. How easy or difficult was it for you to answer certain questions?

3. What kind of impact has the interview had on your experience as a preservice teacher since the interview? ie: Has it had an impact on any of your course work or your practicum?

4. Have you found that your own religious literacy or views about critical religious literacy have changed since participating in this study?

Part C: General discussion and wrap up.

Going around the table, students will discuss their thoughts on the central question the study: What are pre-service teachers' views on the role of CRL as an educational aim for social justice-oriented citizenship in K-G schools?

1. What are your thoughts on the role of critical religious literacy as an educational aim for social justice-oriented citizenship in K-G schools?

2. Do you have any other thoughts about CRL or this study that you would like to share?