

# Creepy White Gaze: Rethinking the Diorama as a Pedagogical Activity

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*Drawing on gaze and postcolonial theory, this article provides a theoretical discussion of a problematic photograph published in a provincial teachers' newsletter. The photo consists of a White settler child and two White settler educators gathered around his heritage fair entry diorama entitled "Great Plains Indians." This article analyzes this image to gain a better understanding of how curriculum and pedagogical activities work discursively to produce dominant and dominated racial positions in Saskatchewan.*

*Reposant sur un regard et sur une théorie postcoloniale, cet article offre une discussion théorique d'une photographie inquiétante publiée dans un bulletin provincial pour enseignants. La photo représente un enfant et deux enseignants, tous des pionniers blancs, entourant le diorama que l'élève a préparé pour une célébration du patrimoine et qui s'intitule « Great Plains Indian ». Nous analysons cette image afin de mieux comprendre l'effet discursif des activités pédagogiques sur la production de positions raciales dominante/dominée en Saskatchewan.*

I (Andrea) work in a faculty of education at a university in the Canadian prairies. Like any faculty member, I regularly receive newsletters and bulletins from various educational organizations. In spring 2008, one such publication came across my desk. As I flipped through a monthly newsletter from the province's teachers' federation, I happened across a color photograph from a recent heritage fair for elementary school students. In this particular picture, a young boy from grade 3-5 was posed along with two White settler adult educators around his entry in the heritage fair, a diorama entitled "Great Plains Indians." Although the photograph was arguably published as a celebration of diversity or as proof of inclusion of "Aboriginal content" in the curriculum, the word that I first muttered to myself when I came across the picture was "creepy." When I went down the hall to my colleague Val's door, I furthered my thinking about the image by describing the actions of the three photo subjects as a "creepy White gaze."

In retrospect, I probably reacted to the picture in this way in part because I recognized myself and my own elementary school activities in the newsletter photo. In fact I had written about a similar pedagogical experience in my dissertation, as had Val, in my discussions of how I was constructed as a White girl in Saskatchewan (Mulholland, 2006; Sterzuk, 2007). Interestingly, Val had similar school experiences to mine although our educations in Saskatchewan elementary schools were roughly 20 years apart. As we took turns looking at the picture and discussing its relevance, we came to the conclusion that the photograph was not simply a photograph (as pictures never are). The seemingly innocuous, even inclusive,

pedagogical activity of a White settler student and the diorama of “Great Plains Indians” that he had created; the staging of the photograph; and its publication in a provincial teaching newsletter was actually a snapshot of the educational community’s role in the discursive production of the colonized and the colonizer. This realization was alarming to Val and me because we recognized our own schooldays and the construction of our raced selves in this picture. We also despaired when we realized that the pedagogical activities in question, beginning with Val’s education in the 1960s, continuing to my elementary school years in the 1980s, and moving finally to today’s student of 2008, spanned the better part of five decades. The photo seemed to indicate to us that schools and the teaching community continue to play a role in producing Whites and First Nations peoples in Saskatchewan in their raced societal roles.

There is much to be said about this diorama, the boy and the educators, and the photograph and its publication in a provincial teaching publication. In this article, we examine this image at length, but before moving to this discussion, we begin with a brief description of the image and the diorama in anticipation of readers’ questions about the image itself. The photograph in question is simultaneously shocking and banal. It is sufficiently shocking to have caused Andrea to bring the picture to Val’s office in disgust, for her to declare it creepy, to initiate an extended discussion and an article. It is banal for its ubiquity. As stated, we both completed similar projects in our schooldays, and have seen similar products in classrooms that we have visited as faculty advisors.

So what is *there*? Three people are gathered around the child’s heritage fair entry: two adult White settler educators (one man and one woman) and the boy. None of these individuals is staring at the camera; all three have fixed their stare downward on the diorama, and the boy is pointing his finger at his creation. The diorama is dominated by a large, white paper tipi erected using 14 shish kebob sticks. On a center background panel, the child posted illustrated instructions for making a tipi taken from an unidentified resource book.

Seemingly, the replica was constructed without awareness of the visual language of any recognizable Indigenous traditions, which in any case are not monolithic. The wavy purple and turquoise lines that decorate the tipi are reminiscent of a Disney cartoon or preschool alphabet primer. In the foreground of the display, a miniature bison grazes dangerously near the red-fabric fire. Two female dolls, both dressed in hide dresses, one with a Métis sash, the other with a feather in her hair, tower over the bison. A birchbark canoe rests against the left panel, below full-scale rabbit and otter skins that hang from the top. On either side at the top of the panels, two feathers flank the title “Great Plains Indians.” And finally, a dream-catcher hangs from the right panel above a collection of photocopied pictures of pre-contact Aboriginal cultures apparently taken from elementary reference books. The remaining space on the panels is decorated with passages of text and pictures of tools for hunting and gathering. We return to the diorama, the image, and the question of its inclusion in a teaching publication in more detail below. We ask that the reader hold this brief description in the back of his or her mind.

As teacher educators with an investment in the activities of schools and teachers in this province, our discussion of the diorama in question and the staging of the photo spurred us to write this article, which consists of the following sections: a theoretical discussion of gaze theory as we understand its relevance to this article; a theoretical exploration of the diorama as a practice of imperialism; a discussion of problems with the image drawing on the theories discussed in the first two sections; and a concluding summary of what a modern-day diorama might look like. In writing this article, we make sense of some of our immediate and visceral reactions to the picture when we first saw it as well as gain a better understanding of how

curriculum and pedagogical activities work discursively to produce dominant and dominated racial positions in Saskatchewan.

### **Theoretical Foundations: Gaze Theory**

This section (like the following section) outlines some of the theoretical underpinnings of this article. The article begins with a description of Andrea's initial reaction to what she described as a "creepy White gaze," a phrase that also appears in the title. As it is used in academic writing, *gaze* is a term with variations, permutations, and applications. Here we use two French theorists—Michel Foucault and Jacques Lacan—to make sense of the image that is the focus of our article and the White gaze that it both includes and invites. Our choice of theorists may at first glance appear confusing to readers familiar with Foucault and Lacan. Yet following the example of Evans and Gamman (1995) in their discussion of gaze theory and "queer viewing" of cinema, we too find it useful to "help ourselves to concepts from both" (p. 14). Evans and Gamman explain that *the gaze* has been theorized in two ways. First, in a Foucauldian sense, the gaze of the dominant on the dominated can be understood as a means of surveillance or as a way to control. Second, drawing on Lacan, film theorists have "raised questions about the viewer's identificatory experiences in relation to what is seen/read" (Evans & Gamman, p. 15). In this article, we draw on both approaches to understand(ing) the White settler gaze within (and upon) this image as (a) surveillance and control, and (b) as an identificatory experience.

#### **Gaze as Control**

When I (Andrea) first used the word in my comments to Val, I was thinking of the term as it is often used in academic writing influenced by critical race theory, anti-colonial writing, and poststructuralist ideas about the relationship between identity and power. In these bodies of literature, the use of *gaze* is probably most aligned with Foucault's concept of gaze as a form of surveillance. From this perspective, power lies at the root of the gaze. Warren (2005) is one such author who draws on Foucault in his discussions of White gaze and how it works on "bodies of color in education." Warren suggests that the White gaze behind disciplinary and regulative acts in schooling is an exercise of power, control, and dominance from White subjects on the bodies of non-Whites. In terms of what the gaze accomplishes, Warren argues that "the gaze, by virtue of the act of looking and the repetitive nature of those acts, helps to constitute race as a category of difference" (p. 98).

Similar to Warren (2005), Yancy (2008) also draws on Foucault's notion of gaze as surveillance in his discussions of the "Black body within the context of whiteness" (p. xv). He explains that,

On any given day in North America, the Black body vis-à-vis the White gaze—that performance of distortional "seeing" that evolves out of and is inextricably linked to various raced and racist myths, white discursive practices, and centripetal process of white systemic power and white solipsism—undergoes processes of dehumanizing interpellation. The white gaze, given the power of the ocular metaphor in Western culture, is an important site of power and control." (p. xviii)

From the perspective of gaze as surveillance, in creating a diorama; staging the "Plains Indians"; and inventing the lives of the Métis and First Nations characters in his diorama allows

the small White settler boy mastery over the racialized objects in the diorama. This is not dissimilar to the gaze of Whites on non-Whites in the White settler educational system in terms of keeping cumulative files, referrals for speech and language, and disciplinary actions (Ferri & Connor, 2005). These actions, like the gaze of the child, are related to fixing the White gaze on the alterity of Indigenous students. There is more to the image than simply the White settler child's gaze on his creation. Present in the image, but not visible, is the White settler educational community that shares in the spectatorship. This aspect of the image leads us to the next section of our theoretical discussion, gaze as identificatory experience.

### **Gaze as Identificatory Experience**

Lacanian film theory, which also makes use of the term *gaze*, is useful in understanding the teaching community's gaze on the staged image as readers of the provincial teaching publication. McGowan (2007) explains that Lacan's 1949 essay on the mirror image stage offers a way for "film theorists to think through the ideological problems inherent in the act of film spectatorship" (p. 1). Although in this article we discuss viewing an image, the ideas put forth in film theory are relevant to the current discussions. Before moving to a discussion of how film theory has applied Lacan's views, we begin with McGowan's summary of Lacan's mirror image stage:

Lacan argues that infants acquire their first sense of self-identity (the formation of ego) through the experience of looking in a mirror and relating to their bodies. For Lacan, this experience metaphorically captures a stage in the child's development when the child anticipates a mastery of the body that she/he lacks in reality. The child's fragmented body becomes, thanks to the way that the mirror image is read, a whole. The ideal of the body as a unity over which the child has mastery emerges as the illusion produced through the mirroring experience. Though the mirror simply returns an image of what the child actually does, the mirroring experience deceives insofar as it presents the body through a coherent image. The wholeness of the body is seen in a way that is not experienced. (p. 1).

What do Lacan's views on how infants acquire a sense of self-identity have to do with film analysis, or more specifically, our discussion of a photograph? This image, the staging, the publication, the diorama, the gazes are linked to the construction of the social order in which this little boy assumes his position and fixes his gaze on the other. *Film Theorists* applied Lacan's ideas to their understandings of "cinematic spectatorship." They were able to "link the illusory qualities of film to the process through which subjects enter into ideology and become subjected to the constraints of the social order" (McGowan, p. 1). McGowan explains that the viewers (of a film or of an image) inhabit "the position of the child looking in the mirror. Like this child, the spectator derives a sense of mastery based on the position that the spectator occupies relative to the events on the screen [in the photograph]" (p. 2). The gaze is something that the spectator finds in the film (or image). Or as McGowan explains, "it becomes an objective, rather than a subjective, gaze ... But as an object, the gaze acts to trigger our desire visually" (p. 5).

Interestingly, McGowan (2007) also draws links between Foucault's and Lacan's theorizations of the gaze. In fact McGowan explains that early Lacanian film theory is more aligned with theorists like Foucault and Nietzsche than with Lacan. He explains that the desire

that is triggered by the gaze that the spectator finds in the film (or photograph) is not “enigmatic or uncertain,” it is the desire for mastery over the other or the object.

Well-known film theorist Mulvey (1975) draws on Freud and Lacan in her writings on gender and film. Her work suggests that sharing in the gaze allows narcissistic identifications for the viewer or reader. Indeed, it is perhaps our identification with the White settlers in the photograph as well as the gaze that we find there that triggered our initial feelings of unease. Identifying with or as a colonizer is not necessarily the kind of position we wish to take, yet as White settler women, we are unable to avoid this identificatory practice. Thus the inclusion of this photo in a provincial teaching newsletter is not inconsequential. Its publication permits thousands of teachers to share in the spectatorship, voyeurism, and objectification of the other. This section examines gaze theory and its implications for this article. The following section furthers our discussion of White gaze and examines a second theoretical notion that is useful for understanding this photo: dioramas as a practice of imperialism.

## **Theoretical Foundations: Diorama as a Practice of Imperialism**

### **The Genealogy of the Diorama**

Schools are sites of knowledge production with epistemological connections to other cultural institutions that perpetuate national narratives that distribute power. In this section, we further the above discussion of gaze theory by examining more closely the object of the gaze in the photo, the diorama. The genealogy of the diorama as a pedagogical practice is traced to the development of curatorial practices of Western museums. Drawing on the history of the museum as presented by Willinsky (1998) in *Learning to Divide the World: Education at Empire's End*, we argue that the diorama is of similar design to that of artefacts that are presented in museums to create knowledge of a world that functions as an extension of dominant national narratives. The role of the boy in the image can be seen as similar to that of the visitor to the museum, as one entitled to view and to possess the world (Willinsky, 1998).

### **Making the World an Object of the Gaze**

Willinsky (1998) sees a direct relationship between the school and curricula with other institutions that classify and categorize knowledge of the world. He argues that the world was made an object of the gaze through European imperialism. Willinsky writes that through colonial expansion, the world was rendered a picture; as an object to be possessed through travel and exploration; to be looted and ransacked; and then reproduced in the quiet, dignified spaces of the museum to be viewed and consumed by the educated imagination. The museum is one of the

instruments of public instruction ... that took shape under the auspices of private enterprise, corporate concerns, nation-state, and church. Their imperial display educated the eye to divide the world according to the patterns of empire. As the eye was disciplined, so was the body. (p. 57)

The boy in the image, then, not only embodies the gaze, but manifests the entitlement of the male White settler in a colonial society.

The collections of the great museums of Europe are expressions of imperial power and furthermore, evidence of the belief that the powerful, and by implication the culturally sophisticated, are entitled to collect significant objects from the less sophisticated, less powerful peoples for purposes of cultural edification. Once assembled, the objects are decontextualized and reconfigured to present the story of the world from the perspective of the powerful. Willinsky (1998) writes,

The ethnographic display in the museum domesticates “our terrors as well as our desires” for an empire over the primal ... The object’s careful mounting neatly belies the imperial violence, symbolic and otherwise, that has afforded this ethnographic display. The museum’s lessons are always partial. (p. 67)

In other words, the powerful are free to display their stolen loot flagrantly and claim that the practice is an educational enterprise.

In recent years, Indigenous peoples have engaged in legal and moral battles to reclaim stolen, sacred, and as well as prosaic, artefacts collected by “explorers” during times of colonial expansion. These property claims range from efforts to return bones stolen from grave sites to sacred objects bought or stolen from private collectors and museums. The effort to reclaim filthy lucre acquired through imperial expansion is not restricted to Indigenous peoples. So-called ancient civilizations have launched similar legal efforts to repatriate remnants of material cultural, most often referred to as art in such cases, from former imperial powers. A notable example is the fight over the Elgin Marbles between the nation states of England and Greece. Although compelling legal arguments can be made for either side, arguments that marshal concepts of common law and property rights, it should be noted that these cases operate at the highest levels of government and involve large sums of government money. High culture is taken seriously in many quarters. Not so with Indigenous peoples’ claims for stolen objects, which rarely are supported by capitalist interests with the same vigor.

How are the beliefs and practices of the imperial museums reflected in contemporary schools? One strong example is the demotion of non-Western systems of beliefs to mythology. Students from kindergarten to high school are engaged in the study of various “mythologies” as literature. The diorama is certainly another example. In the case of the image interpreted for this article, Aboriginal people are preserved in static pre-history on display for the curious, represented by random childish objects assembled in a child’s version of the world. Willinsky (1998) writes, “We need to learn to read again the exhibition of the world, to see the display of the civilized and the primitive as the history of an idea attuned to the benefit of the few” (p. 86).

The diorama as a pedagogical practice may be perceived by many as appropriate activity for elementary grades, perhaps in part because the objects assembled to create a diorama are similar to toys and therefore associated with play. We see as troubling the use of the diorama to teach history and culture as a call to teachers and teacher educators to cast their gaze on ubiquitous practices with another understanding. Rethinking the diorama may be seen “as the crucial first step in teachers’ focused gaze in identifying, questioning and re-imagining the enduring but often taken-for-granted inequities that continue to characterize schooling contexts” (Naylor & Keddie, 2007, p. 212). In the following section, we identify, question, and reimagine some of the taken-for-granted themes found in the image (and the practices it represents) that is the focus of this article.

## What's Wrong With This Picture?

As cultural texts, photographs are subject to reinterpretation; therefore, how a photographic image is *read* varies according to its historical context and authorial purpose. For the purposes of this article, we read the photograph of the child and his teachers gazing on the diorama of “Indians” that he has made through the lens of postcolonial theory. We draw on the work of postcolonial theorists and researchers who expose the ongoing process of colonization, a process that we believe is at work in the context of where we live and work (Bhabha, 1994; Emberley, 2007; Goulet, 2001; Pennycook, 1998; Said, 1978, 1993; Thobani, 2007; Weenie, 2000). Photographs “as cultural productions, are highly and deliberately selective, are discursively and ideologically bound, and rely on absence and omission as well as—and as importantly as—inclusion” (Kelly, 1997, p. 57). We use the photograph from the heritage fair to textualize a common pedagogical activity that we see as problematic.

Both of us grew up reading the children’s magazine *Highlights*, in which a feature titled “What’s Wrong with This Picture?” was included in each issue. We drew on the skills that we began honing in childhood to read the photograph, to pay attention to what was there, and to what was not there. Similarly, we use the theoretical lens described above to disrupt the reading of the photograph to which we might have been drawn as White settler women discursively produced in a postcolonial setting. First, we describe the content of the diorama in the picture, and then briefly discuss the language used in the caption and on the display label. Finally, we consider the figures and the implications of their positioning in the picture. We make these divisions to draw attention first, to the implications of the pedagogical activity and the curriculum content and finally, of the gaze.

### Problems with the Diorama

Every year, heritage fair competitions sponsored by school divisions, historical societies, and public libraries are held in schools across Canada. Students are encouraged to research a topic of interest from Canadian history and then represent their learning by preparing a talk; writing a brief essay; and creating a display that typically includes text, artefacts, photographs, and other expressions of their creativity. Regional winners are rewarded with a trip to a national heritage fair. The rules of competition prescribe the size and scope of their displays, which are generally restricted to a flat surface on a table surrounded by a three-panel screen. In most instances, whether consciously or not, most heritage fair displays mimic traditional forms of representation developed and practiced in Western museums from the 18th century forward. In a traditional museum, visitors viewed displays, read the captions, and were told what to think about the material culture artefacts presented. Contemporary museums often assume a stance that results in an interactive effort to construct knowledge with the viewer.

The introduction to this article includes a description of what is present in the diorama and the photograph. And what is *not* there? Certainly not an effort to explore history, which we argue is not the objective of the activity in any case. The content of the diorama reproduces the perennial idea of the Indian as frozen in static pre-contact history (DeLoria, 1998; Francis, 1992; Thobani, 2007). Perhaps the allure of the activity of diorama construction lies in its affinity to a particular construction of childhood. Like doll houses, dioramas imitate a version of adult life free of complexity while inviting imaginative play. As Archibald (2008) suggests, the repeated use of the diorama as an activity in the study of First Nations and Métis content conforms to the

“museum and history” approach in elementary schools. Thobani explains the nationals’ view of the role of the Aboriginal person in history:

In their modern incarnations as savages, they were construed as remnants of a past golden age of humanity, or an earlier, purer stage of natural human life, now said to have vanished from Europe. Indigenous peoples became the embodiment of humanity’s childhood, its innocence, lost to Europeans with the development of modernity. (p. 37)

Arguably, the activity takes up the notion of Indigenous peoples existing in a state of relative simplicity, the embodiment of humanity’s perpetual childhood. Those who construct the dioramas are positioned to gaze *naturally* on the other.

Overall, the effect of the diorama in the photograph evokes the sense that a random collection of artefacts of material culture may be sufficient to represent a way of life. The inaccuracies of scale speak to the imaginative quality of the representation. However young the child who made the diorama may be, the product of his efforts is neither neutral nor innocent, but in fact represents the long tradition of demoting Indigenous peoples to the primitive state of the hunter and gatherer. Seed (2007) writes:

The English colonial fiction of indigenous people centred on the image of the hunter who lacks a real home, having only animal-like “sties and dens” for housing (Mather 88). In this fictionalized depiction, natives simply cavorted on the land, chasing game across grass and meadows. The choice of this representation in the English colonial tradition of native as an almost-animal hunter was far from random. According to the very complicated history of English land and Norman law, even human hunters did not actually own the land on which they hunted. Hunting rights over land, in other words, were separable from land ownership. And under English law, only farmers had the right to own the land, not hunters. Thus began the English colonial fiction that all natives were hunters because hunting did not entitle them as individuals to legal ownership (p. 19).

The image of the prehistoric Aboriginal as hunter is ingrained in the White settler story of the European invasion of North America. Thobani (2007) writes: “Reducing them to bare life allowed for demonizing them and making them sacred after the fact. Indigeneity became a form of life that had to be honoured, if only nostalgically, even as it was a condemnation to extinction” (p. 37). By allowing this fanciful depiction of an invented past, the child participates in the repetition of the Aboriginal “doomed by history and civilization (not Europeans)” (p. 99) and preserves the innocence of the White settler in the imperial project. The incessant celebration of agriculture as the essential activity of pioneer past, which persists even though other industries have superseded farming in western Canadian economies, echoes Seed’s contention that only those engaged in particular uses of the land have inherent rights to the land.

If we accept that this is a worthy pedagogical activity, imagine if a student were to represent White-settler history with the same degree of invention and lack of attention to accurate historical and cultural detail. Picture a diorama, which we might title “Europeans Settle Saskatchewan,” featuring a lone pioneer man at work plowing a field in winter. In the distance, random animals, perhaps including a giraffe, graze in beds of flowers. Two women, one in a ball gown, the other in stereotypical Ukrainian dance costume, perform a minuet in the yard of a nearby waist-high bungalow. What we describe is deliberately absurd, but no less so than the diorama in the photograph that inspired this article. Would the contradictions and anachronisms of such a depiction of the pioneer past be corrected by an alarmed parent or



teacher? Undoubtedly it would. However, we argue that the purpose of the activity is not to represent history, but is about reinventing the colonial history of bringing civilization to the aboriginal.

### **Problems with Language**

The effect of the language used in the caption and in the photograph contributes to the creation of the Aboriginal as other. The titles and text are written in English, which is the most obvious representation of colonization. The diorama makes no reference to the languages lost, recovered, or in use of Indigenous peoples. The White settler gives priority to European culture, language, and knowledge systems by renaming all in their view and under their control including the people and the land. “Great Plains” names the homeland of First Nations people according to a European-American knowledge system, the discipline of geography. The use of the word *Indians* reflects a lack of awareness of the political implications of naming. The provincial Saskatchewan Ministry of Education uses First Nations and Métis to name Indigenous peoples in curriculum and policy documents, and presumably teachers and students in Saskatchewan schools are expected to follow this lead. Although the child may not be aware of the directive or the implications of his language use, presumably his teachers are. If the title was copied from a textbook, which is entirely possible, another layer of complicity is revealed. In any event, the titles show that the child has engaged in the practice of colonial appropriation (Spurr in Pennycook, 1998).

The caption of the photograph is somewhat conflicted and revealing. The title “Youngsters Show their Stuff” is a curious mixture of formal and informal language. Children are more likely to be described by teachers as students, pupils, learners, or kids than they are as youngsters, a curiously old-fashioned term. This term is juxtaposed with the colloquial “show their stuff.” It is a minor point, but “their stuff” comes closer to describing the diorama than the title. The diorama is constructed largely of trinkets, the stuff of dreams, and the dream of the primitive. However, the description of the student’s achievement is most revealing. Referring to the efforts of all of the child participants in the heritage fair, the caption reads: “As this photograph indicates they were more than up for the task with a series of impressive displays depicting the unit focusing on Saskatchewan First Nations history.” Such praise indicates that the effort to represent First Nations history was perceived as successful, taken seriously by the adults involved, and sufficiently worthy of recognition to be published in a professional teachers’ publication. The picture is an isolated example from a series of similar displays.

### **Problems with the Gaze**

More disturbing than the reproduction of the fossilized image of the Noble Savage in the diorama are the gazes of the White student and his two White educators, which are firmly fixed on the model created by the young student in the photograph. As mentioned, it was the gaze that first triggered the discussion that led to our writing this article. In posing for a photograph, subjects expose themselves to a variety of responses, including the interpretation that they intend to project of themselves, as well as unanticipated interpretations; photography may be seen as “a theatre of conventions and rituals working to appropriate that self for its own ends” (Barthes in Jay, 1994, p. 194). The subjects in the picture probably intended to demonstrate their approval of the “Aboriginal content.” Marx (2006), Trainor (2005), and Trepagnier (2006)

have researched the attitudes of White teachers who alternately strive for and thwart anti-racist pedagogy. We see the gaze of the White figures on the objectified other as creepy, as a performance of privilege. The story of colonization that we see represented in the photograph is a colonizer's fantasy. "While fiction is always a fiction, a colonial fiction remains a fixed idea despite overwhelming evidence that it is wrong" (Seed, 2007, p. 19). The picture captures a pedagogical practice that has been in continual use since the 1960s.

A possible explanation for why the student is allowed this degree of license in his depiction of "Great Plains Indians" can be found in the postcolonial reading of the photograph that is the argument and purpose of this article. The student is being socialized into the process of reinventing the imaginary past that discursively produces him as a member of the dominant class. The school is complicit in the process. The White adult man and woman identified as teachers in the caption gaze admiringly, approving the efforts of the young student who is learning to assume his role as a member of the dominant White class. He is receiving praise for having invented the Indian yet again and has taken up his position as colonizer, as a White male. The child's work is valorized by recognition not only by the adult authority figures in the picture, but also by the federation's publication of the photo. Whose interests are served? In our theoretical framework, White superiority is reproduced in the picture of the activity. If making a diorama of "Great Plains Indians" were really a history lesson, then the details of content and structure of the diorama would be accurate and specific. They are neither. What is evident is a complete absence of self-consciousness or critical awareness of the process of colonization. The photograph captures a moment of race pleasure, which is not limited to the individuals posing in the photo. The spectators or readers of this image are also complicit. All readers are invited to share in the colonizer's fantasy depicted by this photograph.

### **Conclusion**

Drawing on gaze and postcolonial theory, this article presents a discussion of a problematic photograph published in a provincial teachers' newsletter. In discussions of this image over the past year, we have encountered a range of comments and questions including the frequent "you're damned if you do and you're damned if you're don't." This statement suggests in some way that we do not see a place for learning about First Nations and Métis peoples in Saskatchewan. To be clear, the point of this article is not to suggest that teachers and students should not study Indigenous history, issues, or ways. Instead, we endeavor to make sense of why the study of pre-contact Indigenous cultures remains the preferred point of entry for learning about First Nations and Métis peoples. We suggest that the diorama (and the gaze it invites as evidenced by the image in question) is less about the study of "The Plains Indians" and more about the construction of racialized identities and dominance as well as the colonial pleasure afforded by the publication of this photograph in the provincial teachers' newsletter.

The reading of the contentious photograph illustrates for us that colonial discourses are at work in present-day Saskatchewan schools and the broader school community. We are paying attention to the palimpsest of colonial discourses and history on pedagogical practices that we consider counterproductive to the development of equitable public schools. Our intention is not to offer easy solutions to the problems we address here. It is tempting to imagine that a pedagogical solution exists; indeed we do desire to alter the context that not only permits, but produces the situation as we see it. We choose instead to offer a description of the condition of relations between the colonizer and the colonized in Saskatchewan schools. Until the situation is

acknowledged widely, any hope of disruption seems futile. Any of the following scenes are snapshots that better represent the history of Saskatchewan: classrooms of White settler children studying a static, historical version of settlement; a legislative assembly comprising primarily White settler men in 1905 and 2005; or a prison filled with primarily Aboriginal men. In the interests of full disclosure, we might even suggest a faculty of education with classes comprising largely White settler students taught primarily by White professors.

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