

**“GROWING THE FINEST TEACHERS POSSIBLE”: THEORIZING HOW
YOUNG TEACHERS CHALLENGE, (RE)PRODUCE, AND ARE SUBJECT TO
DISCOURSES OF CHILDHOOD, ADOLESCENCE, AND ADULTHOOD**

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Abstract

My thesis analyzes semi-structured, qualitative interviews with seven student or practicing teachers between the ages of 22 and 28. Each participant is currently pursuing or has recently completed a Bachelor of Education degree at the University of Lethbridge. I also analyze a range of educational policies from Alberta Education and the Alberta Teachers' Association which inform teacher behaviour as well as define and manage what is or is not a child, youth, and/or adult. My thesis analyzes how these young teachers struggle to make sense of transitions of life stages – either their own or their students – based on their formal education, their childhood memories, and their experiences in the classroom. Using an approach to Critical Discourse Analysis, I analyze how subjectivities of child, youth, and/or adult – in both educational text and talk – are gendered, racialized, and complex and leave some of my participants feeling like they have failed as adults.

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Introduction:

When I met with Charles¹ in Lethbridge on October 7, 2017 he said:

I hate middle school kids. They're fucking Satan, they're the worst (*Joking tone*). (*More serious*) Like even the kids that *are* good kids, they don't have the societal understanding yet of what is acceptable behaviour, and they always just want to push like constantly and it drives me in (*pause*) sane. And then the kids that *are* bad are monsters!

Charles prefers teaching elementary- or high-school students, but, for the reasons described above, he does not enjoy teaching middle-levels (grades 6-9, sometimes categorized by educators as 'tweens'). Despite his dramatic use of language, Charles is not alone in his tendency to generalize about young people: across North America, children and youth are described by many people and social structures in ways that essentialize, legitimize, and naturalize the seemingly biological characteristics that they 'naturally' possess. Charles, for instance, definitively claims that middle-school kids "*are* monsters" and they "*don't* have the societal understanding yet of what is acceptable behaviour." Claims about children and youth's deficiency or incapability are often even more pronounced when young people are compared to adults or educators. According to childhood studies scholar Leena Alanen (2001), this is because child/adult and student/teacher roles are relational: "neither of them can exist without the other" (p. 131). While children and youth tend to be described as innocent, irrational, in development, and embodiments of the future, adults are seen as authoritative, rational, and complete – each category reinforces the actions of the other.

Since the early twenty-first century, childhood studies scholars have argued that the life stages of childhood, adolescence, and adulthood are created and sustained through

¹ All names of my participants are pseudonyms.

discourse and are therefore not real, natural, or biological (Appell, 2013; Esser et al., 2016; Snell, 2018; Mancuso, 2001; Pufall & Unsworth, 2004). Instead, these scholars believe that who counts as a child, youth, or adult is informed by and informs political moments (Meiners, 2016, p. 55). However, the socially and discursively constructed nature of life stages has rarely been discussed in North American educational literature (cf. Burman, 2017; Cooper & He, 2012; Cherubini, 2008; Haniford, 2010; Shoyer & Leshem, 2015). Instead, these works tend to assume that adults are complete beings while young people are continuously growing and changing. One scholar who has identified and critiqued this gap in scholarship is American educational scholar Carolina Mancuso (2001). She asks:

As models (however unwilling) of adulthood, why do teachers not admit the reality of continual growth and change, giving students a sense of developing personhood, holding a mirror to their future evolution? ...Why not illuminate the foibles of the unattainable yet also tarnished image of “teacher” (p. 24)?

The “fiction of completed growth” in teachers and other adults (Mancuso, 2001, p. 22), Mancuso insists, must be questioned and disrupted.

This thesis builds on the work of Mancuso and interdisciplinary child and youth studies scholarship to conceptualize life stages or age categories – broad labels for childhood, adolescence, and adulthood – not as natural, normal, biological, mutually exclusive or common-sense, but instead as socially constructed, complicated, fluid, and relational (Esser et al., 2016). Like children’s geographer Gill Valentine (2003), I suggest that “the distinction between the states of childhood and adulthood is not clear-cut, neither are transitions a one-off or one-way process” (p. 48). I also demonstrate that ‘youth’ as a category, “which bridges the perceived states of dependent childhood and independent adulthood” (Valentine, 2003, p. 40), is expanding to include more and more people who would have previously been considered adults – including, significantly, my

participants. As student-teachers in their twenties, the seven men and women I interviewed are navigating their desires and the pressures from cultural and developmental scripts to become “complete adults” (Mancuso, 2001) – defined here as authoritative, in control, professional, rational, and autonomous – while markers of adulthood are being increasingly unsettled.

To analyze the complexities of growing older – that childhood, youth, and/or adulthood are not mutually exclusive or completely biological – I conducted semi-structured, qualitative interviews with seven student (preservice) or practicing (in-service) teachers between the ages of 22 and 28 (known sometimes as ‘young teachers’).² Each participant is currently pursuing or has recently completed a Bachelor of Education (B. Ed.) degree at the University of Lethbridge. Along with interviews, I analyzed a range of educational policies from Alberta Education (the provincial Ministry of Education) and the Alberta Teachers’ Association (a professional association that sometimes acts as a labour union to represent Albertan teachers) which inform teacher behaviour as well as define, manage, and discipline what is or is not a child, youth, and/or adult – albeit in competing and contradictory ways.³ Each text was chosen because my participants either led me to them in the interviews or I found them during initial data collection to describe the social and historical context from which I am writing. I analyze these sources to better understand how discourses about life stages are (re)produced and/or challenged in both educational policy and young teachers’ experiences in this specific case study.

² To articulate what it means to be a child, youth, or adult, I used the age-marker of the Albertan and Canadian voting age (eighteen) as a proxy in my interviews. The voting age is a relatively well-known and legal age-marker which provides a clear distinction between when childhood ends and adulthood begins – symbolically, of course. This will be further expanded on in Chapter One.

³ A complete and comprehensive list of these textual sources can be found in Chapter One.

This thesis addresses the following research questions: How do young teachers conceptualize legal and traditional transitions from childhood/adolescence towards adulthood? How do they understand and define these age-based categories and what discourses do they rely on to explain this change? How does the idea or image of the child (Burman; 2017; Edelman, 2004; Mancuso, 2001) inform these young student- and practicing-teachers about their own performances of a normative adulthood, defined here as authority, autonomy, and rationality? Finally, how are life stages conceptualized by my participants when markers of adulthood are becoming increasingly unsettled due to economic and social instability (McDaniel & Bernard, 2011; Quill, 2011; Valentine, 2003)? My thesis addresses these questions to better understand how these youthful educators recognize and question their own growth towards “the image of teacher as ‘completed adult’” (Mancuso, 2001, p. 29), while articulating what it means to be a child.

In this introduction I describe my use of concepts like performativity and subjectivity to describe how life stages or age categories are not real or natural but created and sustained through discourse in southern Alberta. I also define discourses of innocence, futurity, developmentalism to further complicate childhood, youth, and adulthood. Finally, I demonstrate that queering ideas of failure (Halberstam, 2011), in relation to age categories, is central to this thesis. Following this discussion, I outline the context of Lethbridge, Alberta, the University of Lethbridge Faculty of Education, and how I define the category of ‘youth’. Next, I discuss the social and historical framework in which Lethbridge, the University of Lethbridge, and education in general exist: settler colonialism and neoliberalism. I conclude this introduction with a chapter overview, describing how each chapter contributes to the overall argument of my thesis.

Before I describe the setting of my research, it is important to discuss the terminology and concepts at the heart of my research. Like scholars in childhood studies and gender theory, I recognize life stages as performances rather than biologically driven or innate characteristics (Honeyman, 2013; Johansson, 2011; Valentine, 2003). According to childhood studies scholar Barbara Johansson (2001), for instance, life stages “are not constructed from the bottom each time, instead the constructions should be understood as translations or repetitions of collectively shared conceptions, experiences and conditions” (p. 105). Borrowing from Judith Butler’s (1993) notion of performativity, I understand age categories – like gender – to be created and sustained through discourse. They inform how individuals act, interpret, and articulate their own subjectivities or the subjectivities of others. Performativity, Butler writes, “must be understood not as a singular deliberate ‘act,’ but, rather, as the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names” (p. 2). By conceptualizing age as performative, I analyze how teachers enact a range of normative assumptions about childhood in order to demarcate or dissolve discursive boundaries between themselves as adults and youth, and their students as children or youth.

This thesis also employs the term ‘subjectivity’ to describe experiencing life stages of childhood, adolescence, or adulthood. According to educational scholar Michalinos Zembylas (2005), “[t]he concept of subjectivity implies that self-identity, like society and culture, is fractured, multiple, contradictory, contextual, and regulated by social norms. Subjectivity is produced, negotiated, and reshaped through discursive practices” (p. 938). In other words, people’s identities are created through their experiences with their social worlds which act upon them while they act upon their social worlds. American teacher-educator Michael O’loughlin (2001) agrees that concepts of

identity and personhood are problematic because they assume that “we can separate ourselves from the world” (p. 49). I argue that life stages – like other intersections of identity – are experienced relationally. This not only means that individuals can (re)produce and challenge discourse practices that define and manage life stages, but that they are *subject* to them as well.

Other terms that I use in this thesis that are important to define here are childhood innocence, futurity, and developmentalism. Each discourse contributes to the desirability of transitioning in a linear way toward a particular *kind* of adulthood. The idea of childhood innocence is deconstructed by cultural historian Robin Bernstein (2011) in her seminal work *Racial Innocence: Performing American Childhood from Slavery to Civil Rights*. She explores the ways in which ideas of innocence are inextricably linked to the life stage of childhood (p. 4). Innocence also, however, was and is “raced white” (p. 8). This provided white children with the benefits associated with childhood – protection and safety, for example – while excluding black and brown children. I take up this argument in Chapter Two of my thesis by analyzing how my participants discuss innocence and in relation to which children.

Like childhood innocence, many children and youth are described in this specific context as ‘the future’. Futurity as a discourse is often deconstructed by queer theorists to expose its heterogendered roots. Lee Edelman’s (2004) book *No Future: Queer Theory and Death Drive* he explores American fascination with children’s future or children as the future, which, as he argues, (re)produces heterosexual dreams of marriage and reproduction. He states that “the Child had come to embody for us the telos of the social order and come to be seen as the one for whom the order is held in perpetual trust” (p.

11).⁴ In my analysis of the verbal and textual sources, I demonstrate how some children – children of colour, in particular – are excluded from ideals of normative childhood futurity.

Finally, my thesis demonstrates the pervasive impact of developmental paradigms in the textual and verbal sources that I analyzed. Critical developmental psychologist Erica Burman (2017) states that many theories in developmental psychology exercise “a powerful impact on everyday lives” (Burman, 2017, p. 2), including teacher education and experiences of primary and secondary schooling. These discourses, however, are not natural or objective but are “[used to] classify and stratify individuals, groups and populations so as to maintain class, gender and racist oppression” (Burman, 2017, p. 4-5). My research demonstrates how my participants and the sources I analyzed use developmental paradigms to seek to understand or *know* children and youth – through the authoritative means of science – and what kind of adult they should transition into.

In my thesis, life stages are defined as anticipated performances (Butler, 1993) which are “always desirable yet potentially ungraspable” (Snell, 2018, p. 8). Therefore, I argue that – due to intersections of identity including ‘race,’ gender, and age – not everyone can or wants to access the benefits associated with childhood or adulthood. In other words, some children and adults ‘fail’ to achieve the expected performances of childhood, youth, or adulthood. In my thesis, I do not define failure as a negative experience. Instead, like queer theorist Jack Halberstam (2011), failure can offer different rewards outside of

⁴ Edelman’s work has been critiqued by childhood studies scholars because the metaphorical “child” fails to address issues of ‘race’ and socioeconomic status (Dyer, 2016; Munoz, 2009).

punishing norms... [that] manage human development with the goal of delivering us from unruly childhoods to orderly and predictable adulthoods. Failure preserves some of the wondrous anarchy of childhood and disturbs the supposedly clean boundaries between adults and children, winners and losers (p. 3).

While critiquing the “adult/child divide” (Snell, 2018, p. 18), Halberstam proposes an alternative to adult and neoliberal success: failure. A queered version of failure means that discursive boundaries between children and adults are blurred. Failure is therefore used throughout this thesis to identify that 1) some individuals – including my participants and their students – are excluded from some of the benefits and privileges associated with adulthood; and 2) that these failures are not the results of personal mistake or oversights. Instead, my subjects’ experiences make it clear that broader social structures – including neoliberalism, settler colonialism, and conventional gender roles – make it difficult or nearly impossible to ‘successfully’ make the transition from childhood/youth to adulthood.

My research is situated in Lethbridge, Alberta a city located on traditional Blackfoot territory with a population of roughly 100,000. I chose to focus my research here due to its proximity to me as a researcher and because of the high concentration of young people in the area.⁵ According to Statistics Canada, approximately 39% of Lethbridge’s population is defined as either a ‘child’ or a ‘youth’ (between 0-28 years of age) (Statistics Canada, 2017a). Lethbridge also has two post-secondary institutions, Lethbridge College and the University of Lethbridge, and, because of its relatively young population, the city is praised by civic boosters for its “youthful energy” (Choose

⁵ I currently live in Lethbridge, Alberta and have completed my undergraduate degree in Sociology at the U of L. I am currently completing an MA in the interdisciplinary program of Cultural, Social and Political Thought at the U of L.

Lethbridge, 2016).⁶ I also chose to focus on the U of L because of its nationally renowned teacher education program (University of Lethbridge, 2019), the Faculty of Education which was established along with the Faculty of Arts in 1967 (University of Lethbridge, 2018a).

The parameters of where childhood ends and youth begins – and when youth ends and adulthood begins – are deeply contested in these settings, as well as on broader institutional levels such as Statistics Canada. In a Statistics Canada document, *A Portrait of Canadian Youth*, the category ranges from 15 and 34 (Statistics Canada, 2018). This document describes the diversity of youth in Canada, including their sexual orientations and ethnic identity. They exceptionalize youth by claiming that “today's youth are unlike any generation before! They are more: Diverse [;] Connected [;] Socially Engaged [; and] Educated” (p. 2). In a Statistics Canada document describing the workings of the Canadian criminal justice system, ‘youth’ is defined between the ages of 12 and 17 (Allen & Superle, 2016). Finally, when associated with civic engagement practices, including volunteering and activism, youth ranges from 15 to 24 (Turcotte, 2015).

Evidently, the term ‘youth’ is variable when associated with different actions or choices made by individuals. For my project, I define ‘youth’ to be between 15 and 28, arbitrary parameters set by Youth Policy, a global non-governmental organization that seeks policy change for youth around the world (Youth Policy, 2018). I chose this category because it includes the voices of my participants and many of them expressed frustrations that bridge both adult and youth experiences (Valentine, 2003).

⁶ The largest age group of students enrolled at the U of L are between 15-25 and make up about 68% of the total student population (8,700 students) (University of Lethbridge, 2018b).

The U of L's combined-degree teacher education program takes five years to complete and provides students with a total of 27 weeks of teaching experience – “more than twice the amount [of teaching experience] required for teacher certification in Alberta” (University of Lethbridge, 2018). Students can also take the B.Ed. after degree which allows them to complete the program within two years. Prior to admission to the program, students are required to take Education 2500, an orientation class that explores the challenges and rewards of teaching in a classroom setting. Afterwards, students begin Professional Semester I (PSI) where they teach 125 hours in an elementary classroom (kindergarten to grade 6). Once PSI is complete, they begin PSII where they teach for 150 hours at a grade level different than that of their PSI placement. Student-teachers then begin PSIII, a 15-week internship. This internship allows student-teachers to teach on their own with minimal guidance from their teacher-mentors (University of Lethbridge, 2018c). In between each Professional Semester, students take a range of courses which examine child and youth behaviour and teaching methods. These courses include educational psychology, curriculum, assessment, and classes that address the social and professional contexts of teaching.

The Faculty of Education does not allow student-teachers to choose what level to teach in their practicum placements. In other words, student-teachers like Charles, whose strong dislike of middle school students was mentioned at the start of this chapter, are not permitted to act on their age-group preferences. Unlike programs in other institutions in Canada – for example, the University of Calgary or the University of Alberta – student-teachers at the U of L do not specialize in a specific age-group but are instead required to focus on a school subject major (physics, music and instruction, math, science, social studies, and so on). This is pragmatically described by the U of L website as a way for

teachers to be qualified to teach at all grade levels and therefore have a greater chance at securing a full time teaching position. At the same time, I argue that pre-service teachers can challenge their assumptions of age-based categories by teaching levels that they do not prefer. American educational scholars Radcliffe and Mandeville (2007) state that

(a) disciplinary issues, (b) babysitting experience, and (c) ability to influence the student suggest a negative view that middle-level students are relatively immature and that it may be difficult to teach them. Student developmental issues ranking fifth among the concerns, appear to be a significant reason not to teach in the middle grades. “Hormones and puberty issues” and “students' emotional state” were among the top ten concerns (p. 265).

Radcliffe and Mandeville specify that teacher educators can challenge these age-based concerns – which have led to a shortage of middle level educators in North America – by re-evaluating concepts of childhood and adolescence in their teacher training. After nearly completing his Bachelor of Education degree, and teaching in middle-grades, however, it seems that Charles’ age-based concerns have been solidified rather than challenged.

My thesis explores the ways in which teachers and policy in southern Albertan education conceptualize transitions between life stages and age-based categories. My research focuses on the U of L Faculty of Education to explore how life stages are normatively defined and managed based on my participants’ interviews.⁷ I explore how the U of L commits to “growing the finest teachers possible” (University of Lethbridge, 2018) – referencing developmental language – while training them to become “caring, knowledgeable and reasonable adult[s]” (Alberta Government, 1997/2013, p. 3). One of my primary interests, then, is how the adult is defined and managed when compared to children and youth in formal primary or secondary classroom settings . I also chose to

⁷ My research is based on the participants’ own accounts of being student-teachers at the U of L. Although I have no concerns that my participants falsified any information, I also must acknowledge that I was not able to verify their accounts through participant observation. I open this up for further study.

speaking with preservice and young in-service teachers because their ideas about education are sometimes overlooked or undermined by older educators (cf: Haberman, 2012).

To gain further insight into education programming at the U of L, I briefly describe the Native Education Program (NEp) which was designed in 2004 and then re-established as the Niitsitapi Education Program in 2018 (University of Lethbridge, 2017). The Niitsitapi Education Program “is designed to meet all of the expectations and competencies within the Alberta *Teaching Quality Standard* but will further specialize in preparing teachers for teaching within the Blackfoot culture” (University of Lethbridge, 2018d). This program is primarily advertised to Indigenous student-teachers, although non-Indigenous educators who hope to teach on reserves and learn about Blackfoot culture and practices can also enroll. Since I was unable to speak with students enrolled in this program, I do not directly discuss the NEp in my thesis.⁸

Although I do not discuss the NEp, it is important to note that all of the spaces that I am analyzing – Alberta Education, the U of L, teachers’ speech, and the Alberta Teachers’ Association, as well as others – work within a social and historical framework of neoliberalism and settler colonialism. These ideologies and processes are a contributing factor to defining and managing normative subjectivities of childhood, adolescence, and adulthood. Settler colonialism, according to Patrick Wolfe (2006), has two dimensions: negative and positive. He states,

⁸ Emily Kirbyson (2016), a student who has recently completed her MA in Sociology at the U of L, focused on this program for her thesis which explores some of the racial and colonial hauntings (Gordon, 2008) of the 2004 version of the NEp. Please turn to her research to explore the complicated and ongoing colonial history of the U of L with the Blackfoot people.

Negatively, [settler colonialism] strives for the dissolution of native societies. Positively, it erects a new colonial society on the expropriated land base—as I put it, settler colonizers come to stay: invasion is a structure not an event (p. 388).

In this case, educational policy, teacher education institutions, and teaching in classrooms reinforce an existing structure of settler colonialism. This is reflected by Indigenous scholar Leanne Simpson, who states that education systems in Canada are “systems that are primarily designed to produce communities of individuals willing to uphold settler colonialism” (Simpson, 2014, p.1).

Settler colonialism supports the (re)production of normative age-based categories used by educators as well as others throughout Canada (de Leeuw, 2009). This is apparent in a 1905 *Annual Report of the Department of Indian Affairs* (Dominion of Canada, 1906) which characterizes a successful transition towards adulthood for Indigenous peoples marked by individualism, independence, and civility. Frank Pedley, Deputy Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, stated that “care must be taken not to exercise such a degree of paternalism in dealing with the Indians as will sap that individualism essential to the development of character and the attaining of independence” (p. 319). Here, Pedley essentializes, naturalizes, and legitimizes the discourse that Indigenous individuals are inherently deficient – like children – and require minimal state protection in order to achieve settler independence. Decreased state care and greater independence were seen as important characteristics that all adults (as ideal colonial subjects) must internalize, achieve, and, thus, perform.

One hundred years later, Canadian geographer Sarah de Leeuw (2009) analyzes the ways in which life stages continue to be used to justify the (ongoing) settler colonial project in Canada. She states that white settlers have used (and continue to use) normative transitions towards a white adulthood to position Indigenous peoples as inherently child-like and therefore deficient. She states that residential schools

[W]ere understood as a system to ameliorate the childlike qualities of Indigenous subjects, which in turn would result in a civilized (grown-up) Indigenous population who would both cost the government less and, due to adult sedentaryness, not stand in the way of colonial land acquisition and settlement (p. 128).

Adulthood, then, was considered to be achieved through residential schools where children could successfully transition towards “non-Aboriginalness and Eurocolonial whiteness” (p. 129).

Unlike settler colonialism, neoliberalism is a more recent development that contributes to normalizing and legitimizing age categories or normative life stages. Within the last 40 years (Harvey, 2005) neoliberalism has become both a structure (with enforceable policies and procedures within educational institutions, among others) as well as an ideology characterized by individual freedoms, consumerism, and the ‘American Dream’ (Ball, 2012; Brown, 2009; Giroux, 2002). David Harvey suggests that “[n]eoliberalism has... become hegemonic as a mode of discourse” (p.3). As Wendy Brown (2009) has written, neoliberalism is “a form of governmentality, [which] reaches from the soul of the citizen-subject” (p. 39).

In this thesis, neoliberalism contributes to the ways in which normative life stages “reach the status of common sense” (Fairclough, 1995, p. 42). More specifically, transitioning normatively and linearly through life stages (re)produces neoliberal ideologies in the following ways:

1. Adults are considered to be responsible: It is up to the individual to seek out self-help alternatives to their current social and economic situations. Under neoliberalism, individuals are solely responsible to manage their risks of experiencing poverty, addiction/illness, homelessness, etc. (Peters, 2001; Peters, 2011). Under neoliberalism, some people – particularly, in the case of my thesis, children/youth – are also defined as ‘at-risk.’
2. Adults are considered to be entrepreneurial: Neoliberalism normalizes individuals as “entrepreneurial actors” (Brown, 2009, p. 42). Individuals are competitive and can turn their “discoveries into products” (Alberta

Government, 2010, p. 19) in order to benefit their local and global communities.

3. Adults are 'free' to choose (Hardy, 2012; Wilson & Scarbrough, 2018): As a consumer, the neoliberal subject/citizen "rationally deliberates about alternative courses of action, makes choices, and bears responsibility for the consequences of these choices" (Brown, 2009, p. 43).
4. Individuals are optimistic: Although traditionally seen as a 'naïve' or 'young' trait that individuals eventually 'grow out of' (Arnett, 2000), optimism is also a key neoliberal self-making practice (Berlant, 2011). According to Franceschelli and Keating (2018), young people, although pessimistic of society as a whole, are very optimistic about their own futures which they believe will be marked by hard work and success (Kirmer, 2013). This also relates to adaptability and resiliency.

These self-making practices inform the social and historical backdrop of education in southern Alberta. This will become clear later on in this thesis.

Because my thesis analyzes how transitions of life stages are created and sustained through discourse, I consider what part neoliberalism and settler colonialism play in southern Albertan education. Moreover, I consider how contributions of settler colonialism and neoliberalism make it seem like some individuals have failed (Halberstam, 2011) to transition from a dependent and irrational child to an autonomous and rational adult. Throughout this thesis, then, there are theoretical threads which connect specific actions, discourses, or ideas to neoliberalism and settler colonialism. I also recognize that these events and ideologies are not experienced the same everywhere nor are they evident in every textual or verbal source. Therefore, to avoid exaggerating the power relations between and among discourses used in educational policy and resources and in my participants' interviews, I will connect neoliberalism and settler colonialism to some discourses and not others.

Each chapter examines how young teachers struggle to make sense of transitions of life stages – either their own or their students – based on their formal education, their

childhood memories, and their experiences in the classroom. I analyze how these interpretations of subjectivities of child, youth, and/or adult – in both educational text and talk – are gendered, sometimes racialized, undoubtedly complex, and leaves some of my participants feeling like they have failed as adults. In Chapter One, I discuss the contributions and gaps of North American childhood studies and educational scholarship. I then describe how transitioning through life stages is not a one-way process. Instead, I argue that, like Gill Valentine, “children can ‘grow’ in terms of how others regard them” (p. 38). Similarly, adults can ‘shrink’ if they behave in a ‘childish’ manner. In Chapter One, I also discuss the theoretical and methodological frameworks of my project, such as Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). This chapter also introduces my interview participants and the textual sources that I analyzed.

Chapter Two asks how my participants and the policies of the Alberta Teachers’ Association and Alberta Education describe children and youth using discourses that categorize childhood/youth as deficient when compared to adulthood. Here I highlight some of the many discourses (particularly innocence, futurity, and developmentalism) that are used in educational resources, policy, and union policy and by the young teachers I interviewed to define and manage who is or is not a child. This chapter analyzes the discourses used by young teachers, the province of Alberta, and/or the ATA to conceptualize legal and traditional transitions from childhood/adolescence towards adulthood.

Chapter Three builds on this foundation by analyzing how discourses of childhood/youth described in Chapters One and Two inform how my participants recognize themselves as adults and educators. More specifically, I explore how my participants’ own memories of being children and youth are similar to or different from

what they observe among their students. This chapter discusses how young teachers use the discursive strategy of exceptionalism (seeing themselves as having been unique young people in the past) and identification (comparing themselves to their students), among others, in order to better understand how life stages are created and sustained through discourse. This chapter also questions how the idea or image of the child (Burman; 2017; Edelman, 2004; Mancuso, 2001) – either their own memories of childhood or their students today – inform my participants about their performances of adulthood?

Chapter Four builds on Chapter Three by analyzing how my participants recognize their performances of adulthood in relation to subjectivities of childhood/adolescence that they have created and/or obliged to throughout this thesis. Here I analyze how my participants' expectations of adulthood (authoritative, autonomous, respected) were not always what they experienced in their classrooms. This chapter also discusses ways in which these experiences were often gendered.

In the conclusion, I summarize my findings and claim that student- and practicing-teachers are not always capable of performing their subjectivities as teachers and adults due to their gender, age, and 'race' – although I mostly speculate here.⁹ Turning to queer theory, I end by applying Jack Halberstam's (2011) work on failure to my participants' not-entirely-successful transitions to adulthood. In doing so, I explore how binaries of failure and success – like child and adult – can work to denaturalize transitions of life stages and normalize the notion that life stages, like gender and 'race', are socially constructed categories.

⁹ Stuart Hall (1997) in his famous lecture entitled *Race, the Floating Signifier*, explores how race is *made to mean* certain things through language, specifically through classification and categorization. To demonstrate how race is not real but has very real consequences (i.e systemic discrimination), I put it in quotation marks.

Ultimately, my thesis explores how age categories are normatively defined and managed across spaces within southern Alberta education, including young teachers' experiences working with young people. It examines how young teachers conceptualize transitions of life stages based on their formal education, their childhood memories, and their experiences in the classroom. I demonstrate how their interpretations of subjectivities of child, youth, and/or adult – and within the educational policy and resources that I analyze – are sometimes gendered. Moreover, I speculate that producing normative expectations of age categories are also implicitly racialized as well. The complexities of transitioning through life stages – rather than the essentializing discourses of developmental paradigms (Burman, 2017 – leaves some of my participants questioning what it means to be an adult and when or if they might achieve this transition. Ultimately, I argue that life stages are complex, experienced relationally, and are socially constructed (Esser, et al., 2016).

Chapter One – Theory, Methodology, and Context

[C]hildhood, along with adolescence for that matter, is one of the most generalized social positions, usually essentialized by those who have long since been adults and cannot speak for the marginalized young with any verifiable accuracy or political neutrality.

- Susan Honeyman, 2013, p. 168

Introduction:

American children’s literature scholar Susan Honeyman suggests that adults “speak for” and essentialize children and youth subjectivities. This tendency is not restricted to the authors of the children’s texts studied by Honeyman; as this thesis will demonstrate, childhood and adolescence, like adulthood, are also essentialized by young teachers, Alberta Education policy, and the ATA. This chapter, like the entire thesis, argues that transitions between life stages are not natural or biological, but are instead socially constructed, managed, and then sustained through discourse. I analyze how subjectivities of child, youth, and/or adult are discussed in educational text and talk in gendered, sometimes racialized, and essentializing ways. More specifically, the sources I examine are Alberta Education policies (the *Alberta School Act* and the *Teaching Quality Standard*); resources that inform Alberta Education policy (“Inspiring Education: A Dialogue with Albertans”); ATA policies (the *Code of Professional Conduct*); and an ATA document that informs teachers of their rights and responsibilities (*Problems in Education Series: Teachers’ Rights, Responsibilities and Legal Liabilities*).

The purpose of this chapter is to provide the academic foundation for the rest of this thesis. It does four main things: 1) identifies the main bodies of scholarly literature to which my research adds and responds; 2) describes the project’s methodology, focusing

in particular on Critical Discourse Analysis; 3) discusses the different types of data on which my arguments are based; and 4) outlines how I coded my findings.

Literature Review

While gender, ‘race,’ and class have been extensively explored in Canadian educational scholarship, the analytical category of age – as it affects both students and teachers – has remained relatively unproblematized (cf. Cooper & He, 2012, p. 90; Cherubini, 2008; Haniford, 2010; Shoyer & Leshem, 2015).¹⁰ In many cases, educational literature in North America addresses ideas of age and competency of students and teachers by using scientific discourses of developmentalism, which assume a linear progression of growth and progress (Burman, 2017). This developmental understanding defines age categories as natural, normal, and biological; it also, crucially, overlooks the complex and diverse ways in which individuals experience life stages.

To remedy this lack of understanding, my thesis combines two bodies of literature that, to date, have not adequately spoken to one another: educational scholarship and the interdisciplinary field of childhood studies. Whereas North American education scholars commonly discuss life stages as natural or normal, the interdisciplinary field of childhood studies works to complicate and reconceptualize these categories. Childhood studies scholars commonly ask: Who gets to be an adult? Who gets to be a child? How is power negotiated within and throughout transitions from childhood, adolescence, and towards adulthood (Esser et al., 2016; James & James, 2008; Johansson, 2011; Mandell, 1988)? And finally, how do experiences of life stages shift depending on individuals’

¹⁰ A survey of articles published between 2006 and 2016 in both the American and Canadian *Journals of Education*, for example, reveals that chronological age continues to be largely naturalized and left unquestioned by both educators and policy makers. *The Canadian Journal of Education* published only a single article that questioned the efficacy of age-based education by studying gifted students’ abilities to surpass academic expectations (Clelland & Kavensky, 2013).

intersections of identity ('race', socioeconomic status, gender, age, and so on) (Meiners, 2016; Punch, 2016)? I apply these questions to the southern Albertan context to better address how life stages are defined and managed both by young teachers and in educational policies that play a part in shaping their training and careers – albeit unequally.

The interdisciplinary field of childhood studies – which many scholars argue began in the late 1980s and early 1990s with the implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) – has worked to denaturalize childhood as a social rather than biological construction (Alanen, 2001; Qvortrup, 1994; Mayall, 2000; James & James, 2008). The UNCRC specified that children have the right to protection, provision, and participation (Wall, 2017). Unlike previous international declarations of children's rights (including the 1924 Geneva Convention and UN Declaration of the Rights of the Child in 1959, both of which focused mainly on children's protection), the UNCRC insisted that children had the right to be heard – that they were capable, in other words, of participating in decisions about their lives and futures. Reflecting this shift, research in childhood studies published in the 1990s and 2000s demonstrated that children are social agents who engage with as well as change the world around them. Foundational studies by Berry Mayall (2002), Alison James, Chris Jenks, and Alan Prout (1998), for example, explored how childhood is constructed through children's actions in ways that are both similar to and different from that of adults.

More recent childhood studies research inspired by critical developments in sociology, anthropology, and gender/queer studies – published in the mid 2000's and beyond – has re-conceptualized life stages of childhood, youth, and adulthood as

relational, performative, multiple, and complex categories (Esser, et al., 2016). Twenty-first-century childhood studies scholars have also worked to re-think the supposedly universal effects of the UNCRC by questioning what type of child these rights were geared towards. For example, Reynaert and colleagues (2009) claim that the children and youth who have been and continue to be excluded from the Convention are those who are still very young (ages 6 and under), have disabilities, and/or are ethnic minorities (p. 522). In other words, the idea of childhood and what a child should look like was exclusionary and western. These more recent works further expose childhood as a social rather than biological construction to demonstrate that who “counts as a child and what evidence is used to make these claims informs [and is informed by] our political moment” (Meiners, 2016, p. 55).

By contrast, few sources from North American educational scholarship have analyzed how age categories are normatively defined in specific contexts. However, there are two exceptions that are worth briefly noting here. First, American educational scholar Carolina Mancuso (2001) suggests that student and practicing teachers should admit their struggles of transitioning towards a normative adulthood. In a more recent study, Canadian educational scholars Sandra Chang-Kredl and Gala Wilkie (2016) explore the ways in which childhood memories inform how educators conceptualize their students as children today. They argue that many teachers use their own childhoods as a projection for their present or future students:

Juxtaposing the conceptualized child with what one imagines actual children to be may be useful in assisting the teacher to disentangle the imagined, remembered, conceptualized and actual child, and to interrupt our tendencies to project our own experiences onto others (p. 316).

Read together, these studies denaturalize popularly held ideas about life stages in general and childhood in particular by demonstrating how they are defined and managed through education for both the student and the teacher.

My thesis expands on this work by arguing that life stages and/or age categories are not natural or normal, but are instead constituted through discourse for specific political purposes. As my interviews made clear, transitioning through life stages varies based on intersections of identity (Crenshaw, 1989) including gender, socioeconomic status, age, and ‘race’ (Meiners, 2016). This thesis demonstrates that transitioning through life stages is neither a linear nor a strictly biological process. Instead, life stages – like other intersections of identity – are created and sustained through discourse.

Critical Discourse Analysis

To explore how transitions between life stages or age-based categories become discourses, I employ Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), an analytical method that is centrally concerned with the “relationship between language and power” (Weiss & Wodak, 2003, p. 12). As scholar Michelle Lazar (2005) has written, this relationship is “(re)produced, negotiated and contested in representations of social practices, in social relationships, and in people’s social and personal identities in texts and talk” (p. 11). The types of social practices I analyze are my participants’ accounts of their experiences in schooling and university teacher education. I also focus on relationships and identities of student, child, teacher, and adult. Finally, I analyze a range of textual sources including policy, teacher resources, and union documents produced by the ATA and Alberta Education. My use of CDA also reveals how unequal power relations fuel the ways in which ideologies or identities “reach the status of common sense” (Fairclough, 1995, p.

42). In this case, text and talk work together to define and manage subjectivities of childhood, adolescence, or adulthood in this case study of southern Alberta classrooms.

The range of data analyzed in this thesis reflects the interconnectedness of language. Discourse analyst James Paul Gee analyzes how language (re)produces power relations in two primary ways: the first being an “active process” of individual action which is made up on the spot; and the second being “a social process” that is “influenced by our affiliations with various sorts of social groups” (Gee, 2005, p. 54; Fairclough, 1995; Weiss & Wodak, 2003). I analyze some of the discursive strategies that are used by teachers and educational policy to (re)produce age categories as seemingly natural, biological, and/or common-sense in written policy (the macro-level); the institutional level and the teacher education program at the U of L (the meso-level); and through my participants’ spoken word (the micro-level). The use of levels provides me with a framework to analyze how discourses that work to characterize life stages are (re)negotiated within an individual’s account of their relationships with, as well as perceptions of, others.

Throughout my thesis, I analyze both educational resources – including policy – and my participants’ use of discursive strategies/practices.¹¹ Discursive strategies are linguistic and performative practices that work together to create narratives, stories, and, eventually, discourse. They are repeated across institutional and other discursive contexts. The verbal and textual sources that I analyze “[constitute] [their] object” (Foucault, 1972/2010, p. 39) through the following discursive strategies: identification (comparison); essentialism (all children or adults are ‘this’); legitimization

¹¹ Discursive strategies and discursive practices are terms that I use interchangeably throughout this thesis.

(children/adults are ‘this’ because of ‘some authority’); exceptionalism (children are like ‘that’, but I was not); subversion (children, youth, and adults are complex); naturalization (explaining away based on common-sense or popular culture: for example, ‘boys will be boys’); impersonalization (children are sponges and therefore have non-human characteristics); and erasure of things like racial and gender inequality in my participants’ accounts of what is or is not a child.¹² This is not an exhaustive list of the discursive strategies used by the textual and verbal sources analyzed here. I also identify and describe other strategies when they come up. My participants and the textual sources I analyze use these discursive strategies to (re)produce or challenge the notion that life stages are natural, normal, and biological and therefore “solid, regular, [and] ‘out there’” (Law, 2009, p. 240).

I define discourses, broadly, as hegemonic systems of knowledge, including normative values, traditions, identities, and beliefs. These knowledge systems are produced and distributed by political and social institutions, and are consumed and (re)distributed through the words, actions, and social relationships of “ordinary people” (Fairclough, 1995; Gee, 2005; van Dijk, 1995, p. 20). Here, I focus on how discourses about children and childhood – including innocence, futurity, and in-development – work in tandem with discourses about adulthood to normalize a “fiction of completed growth” (Mancuso, 2001, p. 22), a “complete[d] adult” (p. 29) and thus an ‘incomplete’ childhood, in comparison.

¹² It is important to note that my participants do not only use these strategies to explain children and youth behaviour, but that they are also subject to these discursive strategies in macro- and meso-levels including policy and their experiences at the U of L. This is primarily explored in the last chapter.

In southern Alberta, the discourses that socially construct age categories or life stages are indefinable and are unevenly distributed to some groups and not others. In other words, discourses are recontextualized across time and space since we cannot trace their exact origins. Instead, discourses are shape shifters which means that no two utterances – bodies, texts, and/or talk – are the same. Canadian geographer Sarah de Leeuw (2009), for instance, applies this notion in her analysis of how Indigenous adults were and continue to be conceptualized as simultaneously child-like and criminal in order to advance the Canadian state’s ongoing settler colonial project:

[T]he power of colonial discourses to form Indigenous peoples, and other ‘othered’ peoples, likely lays in the amorphous nature of discourses. While always managing to position non-colonial subjects as deficient, the nature of how and why those subjects were deficient shifted to match the desires of the colonial powers producing the discourses (p. 126).

Here, de Leeuw describes how discourses change to equate race with age in order to infantilize and then legitimize ideas of the presumed deficiency of Indigenous peoples in Canada. In relation to my project, the elusiveness of discourses that define and manage life stages work together to essentialize experiences of childhood, adolescence, and adulthood as real and natural across time and space (albeit unequally). Therefore, I suggest that the figure of the child/adolescent does political work to define and manage behaviours of individuals who are of a specific gender, socioeconomic class, ‘race’ and, of course, age-group.

Discourses are not only indefinable, but they also (re)produce existing power relations. According to critical discourse analysts Weiss and Wodak (2003), “language is not powerful on its own – it gains power by the use powerful people make of it” (p. 14). In other words, power is asymmetrical. ‘Powerful people’, in the context of this thesis, include policy makers and teacher educators at the U of L, Alberta Education, and the ATA. While my participants anticipated having power *over* their students, these

expectations of authority and control in the classroom were rarely met.¹³ In other words, their expectations of complete and authoritative adulthood were not upheld in their lived experiences.

Power relations between students and teachers/teacher educators are not only asymmetrical, but they are also productive (Foucault, 1976/1990). According to Michel Foucault, power

is not ensured by right but by technique, not by law but by normalization, not by punishment but by control, methods that are employed on all levels and in forms that go beyond the state and its apparatus (p. 89).

My participants are informed about child, youth, and adult subjectivities through discourses of developmentalism, futurity, and innocence which go beyond the state or its control. Instead, these discourses are normalized in text and talk in education and popular culture, and they are positioned under a veil of empowerment to uphold a ‘normal’ and linear progression from an unruly child to a successful adult.

Markers of a ‘successful’ adulthood in Alberta include graduating from high school, completing post-secondary education, acquiring full-time work, owning a home, getting married, and starting a family. Those who follow this normative and linear path towards an appropriate and successful adulthood are celebrated by the media, parents, teachers, employers, and so on (Burman, 2017). However, those who defy this categorization – either by attempting and failing or by choosing alternative routes – are motivated to conform back to normative markers of adulthood through self-regulation. The productivity of power is seen through the celebration or push to conform to these narrow ideas of success. Therefore, power, in the case of defining and managing life

¹³ This will be further expanded on in Chapter Four.

stages in southern Alberta, is not always negative but, instead, it “exerts a positive influence on life, that endeavors to administer [and] optimize” (Foucault, 1976/1990, p. 137).

As a reminder, the ‘failure’ I speak of is not considered to be a personal oversight of my participants, a mistake, or an action that requires consequences from a disciplinary body. Instead, I argue that by demonstrating the consistent failure to transition towards a particular kind of adult, we can begin questioning some of the unhelpful expectations of life stages. In other words, in this thesis, failure to adult is a potentially liberating idea which may begin to disrupt “a society obsessed with meaningless competition” (Halberstam, 2011, p. 5).

Finally, I suggest that the power effect of discourse is ideology. By this I mean that the power relations that work to normalize, biologize, and sustain life stages are legitimized when they achieve a truth status through some form of authority. According to Terry Eagleton (1991), “ideology has to do with *legitimizing* the power of a dominant social group or class” (author’s emphasis; p. 5) – in this case those who are legitimized are often adults who address young people as lesser than for a range of reasons. When ideologies are taken up in discourse, they naturalize or universalize belief systems and silence views that challenge them. Following Eagleton, I suggest that the discursive strategies used by the textual and verbal sources in my thesis reclaim, (re)produce, and/or resist dominant ideologies. This dominant ideology suggests that life stages are natural, normal, mutually exclusive, and biological. Further, these age-based discourses work to “[mask] or [suppress] social conflicts” (p. 6) that are bred in and are (re)produced by settler colonialism and neoliberalism.

Before I describe the sources that I analyzed for this project, it is important to note the challenges of using CDA. While analyzing data and writing up the results, I had to be careful not to “jump too quickly to the macro context, making assertions as to how macro relations might be mapped onto micro interactions” (Breeze, 2011, p. 513), a common critique of CDA. In other words, while I connected the policy and texts from an institutional level, I was mindful that my participants’ experiences navigating these spaces do not always reflect “conclusions in terms of meta-categories such as “gender” or “power”” (Breeze, 2011, p. 513). Throughout my thesis, then, I relate some of the textual sources and participant transcripts to broader, macro-contexts of neoliberalism, settler colonialism, discrimination, and power. Ultimately, however, I recognize that some examples and discourses reflect these broader contexts of power, while others did not.

Methods: Triangulating Interviews, Policy, and the Educational Context of Southern Alberta

This thesis analyzes how discourses about childhood, adolescence, and adulthood are taken up, cited, paraphrased, and occasionally challenged in educational spaces across southern Alberta. These spaces include policy written by Alberta Education (the provincial Ministry of Education), the Alberta Teachers’ Association (a professional association that sometimes acts as a labour union to represent Alberta teachers), the institutional bureaucracy and policies of the University of Lethbridge’s Faculty of Education, and through my participants’ accounts of their experiences as new educators. Each space informs how student- and practicing-teachers conceptualize life stages. In this section, I describe my use of triangulation in the analysis. I then describe the importance of intertextuality and interdiscursivity when analyzing how the sources and discourses

that I explore in my thesis are connected with one another. Following this discussion, I introduce my interview participants and the textual sources that I analyzed for this project.¹⁴

Throughout the thesis, I interweave analysis of interview transcripts with analysis of texts (policies and educational resources produced by Alberta Education, the University of Lethbridge, and the ATA) as a form of triangulation. According to Ruth Wodak (2015) triangulation “enables the researchers to minimize any risk of being too subjective. This is due to its endeavor to work on a basis of a variety of different data, methods, theories, and background information” (p. 2). In other words, I engage with a variety of sources to explore how life stages are defined and managed (dis)similarly in southern Albertan educational spaces.

My use of triangulation draws on mechanisms of intertextuality and interdiscursivity to demonstrate how discourses that characterize life stages remain consistent but are also challenged and changed over time. Intertextuality demonstrates the ways in which texts “refer to or incorporate aspects of texts within them” (Baker & Ellece, 2011, p. 188) through practices of citation of ideas or histories (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997; Wodak, 2001; Wodak & Meyer, 2001; Hodes, 2018, p. 7). Literary and cultural scholar Graham Allen (2000) argues that intertextuality requires tracing discourse and meaning across textual relations:

To interpret a text, to discover its meaning, or meanings, is to trace those relations. Reading thus becomes a process of moving between texts. Meaning becomes something which exists between a text and all other texts to which it refers and relates, moving out from the independent text into a network of textual relations (p. 1).

¹⁴ I discuss the data collected in this order because it was the participants who led me to the textual sources that I analyzed.

I build on Allen's work by analyzing the ways in which bodies and verbal utterances can also be read as texts (Butler, 1993; Hall, 1997). In my project, intertextuality is evident when the educational resources/policy and my participants cite or embody discourses. For example, the educational resources and my participants (re)produce a dominant narrative that children are incomplete and irrational, and adults are complete and rational in comparison.

Interdiscursivity, as Caroline Hodes has written (2018), "is different in that it refers to the ways that discourses are linked to one another" (p. 7). Interdiscursivity also analyzes the relationships between discourses (Baker & Ellece, 2011, p. 62). For instance, a discourse which constructs Indigenous peoples as inherently child-like (de Leeuw, 2009) is related to broader discourses of racial inferiority and infantilization. In this thesis interdiscursivity plays a role in defining and managing the life stages of childhood, adolescence, and adulthood through broader discourses of gender relations, neoliberalism, and settler colonialism. These discourses then "seep into" (Fairclough, 1995a; Baker & Ellece, 2011, p. 62) my participants' language when they speak about their experiences working with children or youth and being/becoming educators.

Intertextuality works with interdiscursivity when individuals rely on a variety of sources to appeal to some sort of truth or reality. A range of texts – including bodies, verbal, and textual sources – are cited, embodied, and/or paraphrased across spatiotemporal locations. This repetition then naturalizes and legitimizes discourses that create normative expectations of what each life stage *should* look like. Some individuals – due to their gender, 'race', and/or socioeconomic status or broader macro-contexts of neoliberalism or settler colonialism – are barred from or resist these transitions. However, others are celebrated when they appear to have achieved the "fiction of completed

growth” (Mancuso, 2001, p. 22) – an example of the productivity of power. The discursive strategies used by my participants, along with the educational resources/policies of the ATA and Alberta Education, work together to (re)produce, reclaim, or challenge dominant discourses of normative transitions through life stages. These discourses assume that children and youth are inferior, the future, innocent and that adults are autonomous, rational, and complete.

Participant Interviews

I interviewed seven student- or practicing-teachers between May and November 2017. I interviewed Jackie in Calgary, Mia in Red Deer, and I interviewed Doug, Addison, Charles, Delaney, and Jennifer in Lethbridge city limits. I conducted the interviews in the following order: Addison is a student-teacher from rural, central Alberta. She is 22 years old, white, and identifies as a woman. Jackie is a 23 year old white woman from Calgary, Alberta who had recently completed her Bachelor of Education degree. Mia is a 25 year old white woman and practicing teacher from rural, central Alberta. Doug is a 27 year old white male from Calgary, Alberta. Although Doug had completed his Bachelor of Education degree, at the time of the interview he was not teaching in schools. Next, I spoke with Delaney, a 24 year old woman and student-teacher of Asian descent. Charles is a 25 year old white male and student-teacher from Calgary, Alberta. And, finally, Jennifer is a 24 year old white woman from rural, central Alberta. She was a substitute teacher at the time of the interview.¹⁵ While completing their Bachelor of Education degrees and when they started working as practicing-teachers, my

¹⁵ Due to the constraints of language, I use the terms ‘female’ and ‘male.’ However, I do not associate biology with gender.

participants taught students between five and eighteen years of age in both Catholic and public school systems.

The demographic of my participants is somewhat representative of teachers in Alberta and Canada. For instance, in 2011, 84% of elementary school or kindergarten teachers and 59% of all secondary school teachers in Canada were women (Statistics Canada, 2017). Although women continue to dominate the teaching profession as a whole, there are far more women than men teaching younger grades. Educational scholars, sociologists, and gender studies theorists speculate that this has to do with gendered and/or infantilizing discourses which tend to equate “the early childhood educator with the concept of the child” (Chang- Kredl & Wilkie, 2016, p. 309). The infantilization of female educators further demonstrates how life stages are not natural or normal but are positioned unequally to devalue certain groups (Daniels, 1987).

My participants are also mostly white. The whiteness of my participants reflects the demographics of Lethbridge (approximately 95% of its inhabitants are white) (Statistics Canada, 2017a) as well as the demographics of teachers in general. Canadian educational scholars Ingrid Johnston and Joyce Bainbridge (2013) have shown that both currently and historically, teachers in Alberta and the rest of Canada are primarily white women from European descent. Meanwhile, Ryan, Pollock, and Antonelli (2009) contend that in 2006, teachers who are visible minorities made up only 6.9% of all Canadian educators (p. 598).¹⁶ By speaking with young white teachers I analyze how whiteness further normalizes specific kinds of transitions between life stages for both students and

¹⁶ Although there is much research about diverse students in Canadian primary and secondary schools – including statistics and resources about how to educate students of colour – Ryan et al. argue that there are few studies identifying the needs of diverse educators. This, I suggest, is another area that requires further research.

teachers (Shalaby, 2017; Rollo, 2018; Valentine, 2003). In other words, I analyze how ideologies of whiteness (re)produce discourses of innocent childhoods and complete or autonomous adulthoods (Bernstein, 2011; de Leeuw, 2009; Meiners, 2016).

Articulating Life Stages: The Voting Age as an Interview Strategy

In order to ground the conversations with my interview participants, I used the Canadian voting age (eighteen) as a proxy. I chose this particular age-marker because it excludes young people from participating in provincial and federal elections due to essentializing discourses of childhood irrationality, incapability, and innocence (Cook, 2013; de Schweinitz, 2015; I’Anson, 2013; Wall, 2010; Wall, 2017). This is explored by childhood studies scholar Tom Cockburn (2013) who states that “children [are] represented as incapable of full personhood and thus excluded from citizenship” (p. 48). Other age-markers, including driving, smoking, drinking, getting a job, completing secondary-school, and/or getting a full-time position were commonly brought up by my participants in the interviews to further justify why the voting age should be raised or lowered.¹⁷

Originally, I was interested in how student- and practicing-teachers discuss the value of the current Albertan and Canadian voting age to shed light on the assumptions that we as adults hold about children’s abilities to participate in certain aspects of society, specifically in relation to democracy. Initially, I hoped to challenge essentializing understandings of children and youth by imagining what would happen if children and youth were included in elections. For example, theoretical ethicist scholar John Wall (2014) argues that if young people were allowed to vote, legislators, educators, and

¹⁷ An interview guide is attached to this thesis as Appendix C.

politicians would be more likely to “respect children’s voices and agency” (Wall, 2014, p. 652), among other benefits. Wall also suggests that including children and youth in democracy in this way would challenge the notion that there is “some definition of ‘adulthood’ [that is] the true model and standard of ‘humanity’” (p. 3-4).¹⁸ Once I started interviewing participants, however, other themes including my participants’ own difficulties accessing complete adulthood and childhood memories began to emerge. I decided, then, that the voting age would be used strictly as a proxy with some connections to notions of adulthood and what it means to be a citizen. All of the changes, however, were “generated from, and grounded in, the data” (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003, p. 289).

Recruiting & Interviewing Young Teachers

After receiving ethics approval from the Office of Research Ethics at the U of L, I recruited my participants through three primary means: I hung up posters on the bulletin boards around the U of L campus; I posted a call for participants on the Institute for Child and Youth Studies social media (as well as my own); and I utilized a ‘snowball effect’ by asking participants to recruit others they thought might be interested.¹⁹ Five of my interviewees were recruited from the call for participants posted around campus, none of my participants were recruited through the snowball method, and three were recruited

¹⁸ Although using it as a strategy to analyze and better understand young teachers’ age-based assumptions, I am also critical of the idea of democratic participation because it reinforces ongoing practices of settler colonialism (Wolfe, 2006). Glen Coulthard (2014), for example, argues that providing recognition of Indigenous peoples by the state – through human rights, law, and participation in democracy, for example – is problematic since it assumes that people must embrace rather than transform a violent settler state (p. 69). Audra Simpson and Glen Coulthard (2015) articulate that a “generative politics of refusal” (para. 7) can amplify resistance by mobilizing outside of the state. An example of refusal, in this case, would be choosing to abstain from voting to stop providing legitimacy to a settler colonial state. Although a deeply complex and history that I do not have room to flesh out in my thesis, I acknowledge that, for some, exercising the right to vote is a form of assimilation.

¹⁹ The poster that I used to recruit participants is attached to the thesis as Appendix E.

through mutual friends or acquaintances.²⁰ I also asked professors in the Faculty of Education to advertise my study in their classrooms. The Office of Research Ethics did not allow me to advertise my study in Dr. Amy von Heyking's classroom – a member of my committee – because the board was concerned that student-teachers may feel pressured to speak with me or fearful that (non)participation could impact their grades.

Initially I specified that I only wanted to speak with student-teachers who were currently enrolled in the Faculty of Education and had (at least) completed their first practicum in a secondary classroom, PSI. When practicing-teachers emailed me asking to participate, I decided to open my research to include the experiences of young practicing-teachers as well (under the age of 28). Practically, this was because I had to recruit more participants. Analytically, however, opening up my study in this way allowed me to better understand how young teachers thought about age and life stages after they reached one traditional marker of middle-class adulthood: completing a degree.

Opening up my study also allowed me to analyze how my participants navigate the workforce in a neoliberal era. Many of the young teachers I spoke with found it difficult to get full time teaching jobs following graduation. Some of my participants left the country to teach, took substitute positions in and around Lethbridge, or accepted a variety of temporary term contracts because full time work was unavailable.²¹ Many full-time positions are disappearing and are being replaced with precarious, part-time work – a process indicative of the neoliberal social and economic processes in Alberta. I describe the economic precarity that many of my participants face using Lauren Berlant's notion

²⁰ I began recruiting participants to interview in June of 2017. I spoke with four participants in the summer and three in the fall of 2017.

²¹ Only two of the seven participants that I interviewed currently have full time, permanent teaching positions in Alberta. Two out of seven left the country to teach overseas, while two others have decided to pursue a completely different career. I am unsure about the status of the final teacher.

of ‘cruel optimism.’ Berlant claims that optimism can be cruel when “attachment to compromised conditions of possibility whose realization is discovered either to be impossible, sheer fantasy, or *too* possible, and toxic” (p. 24). In this case, ideas of adulthood can be interpreted as fantasy or impossible because normative markers of adulthood are increasingly being broken down due to social and economic unrest. Further, by analyzing this small group of new and young teachers working in precarious teaching positions, I explore how accessing normative transitions of life stages is either not available or is not desired by everyone.

Each individual, in-person interview lasted one to two hours and four out of seven of the interviews were conducted at the University of Lethbridge library. I always gave the option to conduct the interview in a space where both of us could feel comfortable, although I recognized that “no space is truly ‘neutral’” (Elwood & Martin, 2000, p. 651). One participant with whom I was previously acquainted asked that the interview take place in her home. Another interview took place in a coffee shop in Calgary, where the participant was living.

There were many factors that impacted what my interviewees said and how they said it, including where the interview was conducted and/or if the interviewee and I had met each other before. For instance, the participant who answered the questions in her own home, Jennifer, may have been more likely to share her experiences there than if she had been in an institutional space like the university library. Jennifer in particular may have also been more likely to share because I had met her on two occasions prior to the interview. I had also met two other participants, Delaney and Charles, prior to their interviews.

I understand that being previously acquainted with these three participants impacted some of the data that was collected. There were times in the interview when I could tell that the participant spoke freely and seemed to forget about the recording device. If I had any questions about whether or not I should include something into the analysis, I would email my participant and ask them if the transcript was viable. For example, I deleted a portion of Jennifer's transcript when she felt that she spoke too freely about a fellow teacher. I also emailed all my participants if a term or statement required clarification.

Another factor that may have impacted what my interviewees said was my own presence as a young white woman. In many of the interviews, I was of a similar age, gender, and/or 'race' (at least visibly) to the participant that I was interviewing.²² Appearing similar, as well as going through similar transitions towards adulthood – an 'insider,' so to speak – allowed me to build rapport quickly (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009; Miller and Glassner, 2010). I was mindful, however, of how my identity impacted the data collected in the interview because being an insider also runs the risk of raising "issues of undue influence of the researcher's perspective" (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009, p. 59). I recognized that I could not claim to understand my participants' experiences – and then interpret the data accordingly – simply because I shared some of their intersections of identity.

Although I was an insider to many of my participants in terms of various aspects of my identity, I was an 'outsider' to the Faculty of Education. This was ultimately beneficial to my analysis because the participants rarely assumed that I had any previous

²² Although I am white, I have Cree-Metis heritage on my mother's side.

knowledge about the B.Ed. program or their experiences as educators. This frequently led them to describe roles and responsibilities as educators and representatives of the U of L in considerable detail. What is important to note, however, is that ‘insider’ or ‘outsider’ memberships are not a simplistic dichotomy. According to Dwyer and Buckle (2009),

Holding membership in a group does not denote complete sameness within that group. Likewise, not being a member of a group does not denote complete difference. It seems paradoxical, then, that we would endorse binary alternatives that unduly narrow the range of understanding and experience (p. 60).

As with many other research projects, the focus of thesis I ended up writing is different my original research question which focused on the value of the voting age (see Appendix D for the consent form preamble).²³ These changes reflect the data that I collected. I used an inductive approach to my research which means that the conceptual changes that were made to my research project were “generated from, and grounded in, the data” (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003, p. 289). According to Thomas (2006) “[t]he primary purpose of the inductive approach is to allow research findings to emerge from the frequent, dominant, or significant themes inherent in raw data” (p. 238). This allowed me to explore multiple realities and interpretations of the data (Gordon, 2008; Law, 2004; Law, 2009), but while continuously consulting my participants for clarity. Ultimately, my research process demonstrated John Law’s claim that research “needs to be messy and heterogeneous, because that is the way it, research, actually is. And also, and more

²³ During the consent form preamble, I always gave my participants the option to read over any future transcripts, presentations for conferences, rough drafts, and publications. Only one participant took an interest in this and asked me to read the work that I had produced. I allowed this participant to read anything I had written in order to validate what was said in the interviews and to make explicit the collaborative nature of qualitative research (Mero-Jaffe, 2011). Other than making recommendations to the transcript or asking to delete portions that they were uncomfortable with, I did not allow this participant to re-write their answers.

importantly, it needs to be messy because that is the way the largest part of the world is” (2003, p. 3).

Textual Sources

In this section I discuss my textual sources and why I chose them. I focus on educational policy from Alberta Education and blog posts and union documents produced by the ATA. Alberta Education is the provincial ministry which creates policy related to schooling, including teacher-training standards and curriculum for all grades Kindergarten to grade twelve. Alberta Education also administers practices and policies of and for new, veteran, and substitute teachers in Alberta. The other organization whose documents I consulted, the Alberta Teachers’ Association (est. 1918), is the “professional organization of teachers, [which] promotes and advances public education, safeguards standards of professional practice and serves as the advocate for its members” (ATA, 2018). The ATA also acts as a union to protect teachers, bargain on their behalf, and provide them with resources and professional development training.

As current and future teachers, students in the Faculty of Education at the University of Lethbridge are mandated to abide by the policies and procedures set out by the ATA and Alberta Education. The Faculty of Education website states:

In addition to professional code of conduct, students are expected to meet expectations set out in other University and Faculty of Education policies, and to adhere to expectations set out by The Alberta Teachers’ Association, Alberta Learning [Alberta Education], and School Jurisdictions (University of Lethbridge, 2018e).

I therefore chose to analyze the *Alberta School Act* (2018) and the *Teaching Quality Standard* (Government of Alberta, 1993/2013) because my participants were supposed to be familiar with how these government documents described the roles and expected

behaviours of adult teachers and child/adolescent students.²⁴ Based on my interviewees' answers, I also chose to analyze some of the ATA union documents including the *Problems in Education Series: Teachers' Rights, Responsibilities and Legal Liabilities* (ATA, 1978/2013).²⁵ This document, written by the ATA, aims to protect teachers from accusations of verbal, emotional, sexual, or physical assault (among other issues). ATA and Alberta Education policies provide me with the context of how teachers, both student and practicing, are trained to perform as "caring, knowledgeable and reasonable adult[s]" (Government of Alberta, 1997/2013, p. 3).

These policies also provide me with a standard (of sorts) of how life stages of childhood, adolescence, and adulthood are normatively defined and managed at the meso or institutional level. The discourses which characterize age categories are then connected to my participant transcripts where I found continuities and discontinuities of how adults, children, and youth are defined. Ultimately, I analyze these sources because "policy represents the authoritative allocations of values and goals" (Woodside-Jiron, 2004, p. 174) which get (re)produced, distilled, and/or sometimes challenged in my participants' lived-experiences teaching and being young people. I also analyze textual sources provided by Alberta Education and the ATA that are not necessarily policy, but that nonetheless inform how teachers understand and articulate life stages. For instance, I analyze blog posts on the ATA website found while doing an initial search for data to provide context for the project.

²⁴ I recognize that policies are always changing for educators to reflect political and social contexts outside of education. For instance, Alberta Education has recently published a new TQS. It specifically includes "First Nations, Métis and Inuit education; a new expectation for all teachers to continuously enhance pedagogy in literacy and numeracy; and a competency on creating inclusive learning environments" (Alberta Education, 2018).

²⁵ Dr. Caroline Hodes, a member of my committee who has a Bachelor of Education degree, sent me the *Problems in Education Series* document.

My analysis also considers “Inspiring Education: A Dialogue with Albertans” (Government of Alberta, 2010), a study conducted by Alberta Education to anticipate the future challenges that Albertan students will face as adults. I chose this particular document because Charles led me to it. This document informed the *Framework of Student Learning* which is currently an appendix to the *Alberta School Act*. “Inspiring Education” includes voices from thousands of Albertans including students, teachers, parents, grandparents, and administration. This document urges teachers to implement a “transformational” vision of education into their classrooms (p. 5) so young people can make “successful transitions to adulthood” (p. 4).²⁶

“Inspiring Education” was produced by a steering committee of teachers, economists, and CEOs and it emphasizes the importance of self-accountability, responsibility, individualism, and entrepreneurship. The steering committee consisted of Mark Anielski (“an economist, professor of corporate social responsibility” (p. 42)); Cheryl Knight (Executive director of the Petroleum Human Resources Council of Canada); and a variety of Albertan educators, including two with First Nations, Metis, or Inuit (FNMI) ancestry. The *Framework of Student Learning* cites the main findings of “Inspiring Education,” specifically the goal “to inspire all students to achieve success and fulfillment” (Government of Alberta, 2013, p. 2) by becoming ethical citizens and engaged thinkers, with entrepreneurial spirits.²⁷ Together, these documents (re)produce a number of common assumptions about the transition from childhood to adulthood. For instance, children and youth are inherently ‘becomings’ and not ‘beings’ (Mayall, 2000) and that children are lacking ethics while adults are completely ethical.

²⁶ These principles replaced the previous Ministerial Order from 1998 and were accepted on May 6, 2013.

²⁷ I do not specifically analyze the *Framework of Student Learning*. Instead I analyze the original research document that informed policy change in Alberta Education.

It is important to note that these documents are the products of a specific period in Alberta's political history, since the governing party controls the provincial curriculum. The Progressive Conservative Association Party (PCP) of Alberta formed the provincial government for 44 years from 1971 to 2015. The PCP's focus for education reflected the values of individualism, privatization, and entrepreneurship – all of which are evident in “Inspiring Education.” The New Democratic Party (NDP), in power since 2015, has published a working draft of a new kindergarten to grade four curriculum which emphasizes social issues that children and youth experience. For instance, the new curriculum teaches consent beginning in grade two (French, 2018; Alberta Education, 2018). Although the NDP stresses the importance of providing students with a good and affordable education in order for them to participate in a diverse workforce later on, it seems that they have put less direct emphasis on entrepreneurship compared to the PCP.²⁸

Coding the Data

After completing my interviews and textual research, I used NVivo for Mac and coded my data thematically (King, 2004). In particular, I applied Nigel King's notion of template analysis because it seemed to provide “a more flexible technique with fewer specified procedures, permitting researchers to tailor it to match their own requirements” (p. 257). According to King, “a code is a label attached to a section of text to index it as relating to a theme or issue in the data which the researcher has identified as important to his or her interpretation” (p. 257). I chose my codes inductively, which means that I sorted through the large amounts of data collected – keeping in mind my general research questions – and then followed themes and patterns. Since template analysis allows for

²⁸ I do not consider the new curricular draft because it was not in place at the time of the interviews. Instead, I analyze the resources and policies that were available to my participants at the time of the interviews in order to explore how life stages are managed and defined at an institutional level.

flexibility of continuous revision throughout the entire process of analysis, my ideas and interpretations of the data changed over time and therefore so did my codes.

The primary codes that emerged through patterns in the data are as follows:

Children/youth as...

- Guilty/criminal
- Developing
- Innocent/sheltered
- The future

Adults/teachers as...

- Complete/Autonomous
- Non-adults
- School police-force
- Strategizing/Subverting adulthood

I also recognized a series of ‘coded’ phrases that implied or related to intersections of identity. For example, intersections (Crenshaw, 1989) of ‘race’ and socioeconomic status were commonly silenced in the interviews. Therefore, I argue that in parts of the interviews, many of my participants used coded language about race and socioeconomic status to categorize some children and youth as “unsalvageable,” “checked out,” or “falling through the cracks.”

The codes I produced necessarily reflect my own lens of the U of L, my experience as a primary- and secondary- student in rural central Alberta, and my broader social experiences as a young white, cisgender woman. Therefore, my positioning as an acquaintance, my identity, the placement of the interview, and how I coded the data (among other things) work together to further fragment the already partial perspectives stated by my interviewees. Miller and Glassner (2010) suggest that qualitative researchers are not able to get full and authentic accounts of lived experiences and that these partial perspectives get more fragmented through “[t]he coding, categorization and typologizing

of stories” (p. 134). Instead, they suggest that these partial perspectives – although in no way generalizable – are important to the interviewee, the interviewer, and the context of the research. My goal for this project is to provide new insights about how life stages are defined and managed in this case study of southern Albertan education. I also hope that my thesis might begin a dialogue about these issues at the U of L so that future educators can begin to question their own assumptions about childhood, youth, and adulthood.

Conclusion

This chapter introduced the relevant literature, theories, and methodological approaches that have guided my research questions and to which I seek to contribute. I then discussed how I used Critical Discourse Analysis to examine discourses that define and manage life stages in text and talk in southern Alberta education. I argued that the power to normalize life stages is both productive and asymmetrical. Following this exploration, I introduced my participants and the textual sources that I analyzed. I also described how I coded my data. The next chapter builds on this theoretical and methodological approach to analyze how children and youth are characterized by policy – and other types of documents that inform teacher behaviour – and by my interview participants.

Chapter Two – Conceptualizing Childhood(s): Discourses of Development, Futurity, and Innocence

The developmental fallacies of ‘catching them young’ that inform early intervention agendas correspondingly become earlier and earlier, while ‘risk’ – like vulnerability – has moved from context to individual body, and now is individualised further into ‘resilience.’

- Erica Burman, 2017, p. x

Introduction:

Erica Burman is a critical scholar in and of developmental psychology and her influential work challenges the methods and assumptions of the discipline. Her work demonstrates how childhood and adolescence are characterized by authoritative disciplines of knowledge, including science and primary school education, in particular ways. The notion of ‘catching them young’ – described in the epigraph – assumes that young children are particularly malleable and therefore easier to mould into appropriate and productive citizens.

While conducting my research, I was struck by the pervasiveness of this developmental (and deficit-based) way of thinking about young people and life stage transitions in both my textual and interview data. Each discourse used by my participants and the textual resources – including innocence, futurity, and development – essentializes life stages as natural, normal, and common sense. The discursive strategies I describe in this chapter work together to characterize childhood/youth characteristics into the “status of common sense” (Fairclough, 1995, p. 42) are essentialism, legitimization, impersonalization, and naturalization, among others. This chapter demonstrates how life stages are created and sustained through discourse and are used in text and talk in

educational policy and experiences. It builds on the previous chapter by applying the theory and methods that I described to the data that I collected.

‘They are Crazy by Design!’: Discourses of Development

Many of my participants’ transcripts – including those discussed in the introduction of my thesis – relate to and (re)produce age-based discourses of development. This is unsurprising because, according to Burman (2017), discourses of development exercise “a powerful impact on everyday lives” (p. 2) including schooling and teacher education. Since the early twentieth century, in Alberta and across the Western world, developmentalism has played a significant role in the production of educational policy and teacher-training schemes. According to Amy von Heyking, by the 1920s it was decided by academic elites that “education need[ed] to be approached more ‘scientifically’” (von Heyking, 2006, p. 34). This meant that education in Alberta was increasingly sorted based on age due to the assumed normal development of children (Chudacoff, 1989).

These early twentieth-century changes to curriculum and classroom organization in Alberta and beyond were influenced by psychologists including Granville Stanley Hall, and their evolutionary assumptions about young people’s bodies and behaviour. Hall, for instance, applied the logics of recapitulation theory to the stages of human development from childhood to adulthood, depicting the latter as ‘civilized’ and the former as ‘savage’ and ‘primitive.’ These theories – which were further developed by other twentieth-century developmentalists like Jean Piaget and Erik Erickson – characterized young people as “more or less morally blind” (Hall, 1904/1972, p. 136) and therefore required the supervision of ‘rational’ adults to help children to grow morally and ‘normally’

(Rollo, 2018). By the 1930s and 40s, many educators and policy-makers assumed that “a carefully crafted school environment could create a specific *kind* of child” (emphasis added, von Heyking, 2006, p. 66). This kind of child, which continues to be idealized today, is an efficient, self-sufficient future adult – and an implicitly white and middle-class figure.

My participants – as well as other individuals including parents, youth workers, and myself – often rely on developmental paradigms when speaking about children and youth because they are so pervasive in popular culture, the media, and educational resources (Burman, 2017). For example, in a 2018 blog post on the Alberta Teachers’ Association website entitled “The Mystery of the Teenage Brain,” the author (who is not specified) describes teenage behaviour scientifically by relying on and citing research in psychology and neuroscience. They state:

In the past, explaining the frustrating and sometimes dangerous behaviour that accompanies adolescence was the job of social scientists, psychologists, psychiatrists, educators and, perhaps, an exorcist or two—but not neuroscientists. (The Alberta Teachers’ Association, 2018b, para. 5).

They conclude the article by claiming that,

Adolescents are vulnerable, impressionable and raw—even in the deep regions of their tangled dendrites, writes Barbara Strauch, author of *The Primal Teen*. She sees adolescence as one of the most necessary and crucial steps in human development—one to be endured, indulged and even celebrated. As it turns out, teenagers may be a little “crazy,” but it is according to a very primal blueprint: they are crazy by design! (para. 10).

This article uses developmental paradigms – citing a variety of neuroscientists including Barbara Strauch and Jay Geidd – to legitimize age-based discourses and practices that characterize young people as inherently untrustworthy and irrational. This blog post also appeals to truth by citing scientific discourse which is further justified through the use of medical jargon such as “tangled dendrites.” By definitively stating that “adolescents are

vulnerable, impressionable, and raw” – while also applying developmental paradigms of aging – this text essentializes, legitimizes, and naturalizes adolescent subjectivities as singular, dangerous, and deficient.

This blog post can also be read as a form of exceptionalism when the authors claim that neuroscience – and not other disciplines – can explain and definitively know the brain and behaviour of adolescents. While “social scientists, psychologists, psychiatrists, educators, and, perhaps, an exorcist or two” have tried and failed to understand youth, this blog post assumes that neuroscientists have the authority and the tools to know the truth. Meanwhile, educators’ practices – along with other disciplines – are categorized alongside exorcists. In the introductory paragraph of my thesis, you may recall that Charles claims that he hates middle school kids because “[t]hey’re fucking Satan, they’re the worst.” This excerpt can also be interpreted as Charles performing the assumed ‘exorcist role’ of an educator in order to manage the seemingly “dangerous behaviour that accompanies adolescence” (ATA, 2018b).

One document created by the ATA uses a similar demeaning and developmental discourse to describe youth behaviour. The *Problems in Education Series: Teachers’ Rights, Responsibilities and Legal Liabilities* – written by the ATA in 1978 and then updated in 2013 – reminds teachers about their professional responsibilities as well as their rights as workers. It also uses developmental discourses to essentialize child and youth behaviour in Alberta schools and delegitimize concerns brought forward by students regarding the professionalism and actions of their teachers. For example, a section describing what to do if students claim that they have been sexually, emotionally, or physically assaulted by an educator states:

Children are human. They have been known to make up stories to keep themselves out of trouble with their parents or to shift the blame in a situation to a

teacher. Some children are unstable. Some have difficulty coming to grips with their own developing sexuality. Often a child who has to face his or her parents with the fact of having been in trouble at school will try to cause the parents to become more interested in the teacher's conduct. In such scenarios, an accusation that "she hit me" or "he touched me" is made to parents in response to inquiries as to why the pupil is in trouble at school or is not performing up to his or her ability. Once the parents respond with horror and call the police (a response that is often totally unexpected by the untruthful child), children find it difficult to admit their fabrication. They feel they must continue to maintain their story for fear of getting into trouble if they do not (p. 33).

The ATA works to protect and represent teachers if allegations are made against them. It is reasonable, then, that the ATA would support the accused educator. Less reasonable, however, are the ways in which the experiences and voices of children and youth are devalued because of their presumed irrationality, instability, and incomplete development.

These categorizations, I suggest, have broader social consequences for the ways in which teachers in Alberta consider the children and youth with whom they interact. This document, read by teachers across Alberta, essentially positions young people as liars who, due to their apparent inability to tell the truth ("the untruthful child"), might be more likely than an adult to falsely accuse another person of a crime. In this case, "*the* is a seemingly tiny word, [but] it carries with it a tremendous amount of power" (author's emphasis; Woodside-Jiron, 2004, p. 185) to naturalize and essentialize the subjectivities of young people. Children are also categorized as "unstable" due to their "developing sexualit[ies]" (ATA, 2013, p. 33), normalizing the notion that the allegations should be blamed on the development of the child and therefore ignored. Again, this excerpt is provided with a truth status because it uses developmental and medical language. The ATA concludes this section of the document by demonstrating their commitment to the educator. They state that the teacher should "not panic. While this may be a terrible experience, staying calm, listening to advice and taking the situation one step at a time will at least avoid making it worse" (p. 34).

“The Mystery of the Teenage Brain” and the excerpt from the *Problems in Education Series* (re)produce the century-old developmental claims made famous by G. Stanley Hall about young people’s ‘primal blueprints,’ ‘crazy’ and ‘dangerous’ nature, and, therefore their presumed uncivility or immorality (Rollo, 2018). These texts, which have real effects on young people’s lives, (re)produce and are the products of the ongoing processes of Canadian settler colonialism and racial inequality. Erica Meiners (2016), for instance, explores how conceptualizing children and youth on the path towards developmental progress can have negative consequences, specifically for children and youth of colour. This is primarily because developmental paradigms have also been used to explain or justify racial hierarchies (Roberts, 1997). She states that scientific research rationalizes boundaries between life stages and that “histories and associations between heterogendered white supremacy and innocence are disappeared within developmental categories” (p. 45). Citing Dorothy Roberts (1997), Meiners argues that developmentalism “biologize[s] inequalities” which emphasizes brain development rather than “the relationships between race and poverty and the criminalization of youth” (p. 47). By rationalizing childhood and adolescence as life stages characterized by craziness, primitivity, and danger through science and common sense, settler colonialism – embedded within notions of developmental and social progress – is erased (Rollo, 2018).

Developmental paradigms are further legitimized – especially in the blog post on the ATA website – through the authoritative means of evolutionary science (Burman, 2017). According to John Law (2004), a claim of science is a claim of truth because “the materiality of the process gets deleted” (p. 20). In other words, it is assumed that inscription devices and other non-human processes – including brain scans – used by neuroscientists and psychologists, for example, are measuring brains and behaviour

objectively, and therefore that their findings are inherently objective too. However, in fact, those who are constructing and using such devices reflect “broader ideological assumptions,” especially those regarding “‘good’ (self-sufficient) [adulthood] and (dependent) childhood” (Burman, 2017, p. 4).

Developmental discourses do not only claim authority; they also provide authority to those who are doing the claiming.²⁹ For instance, the ATA *Code of Professional Conduct* (2018c) uses ‘expert’ language to explain the roles of adult educators. It states that “[t]he teacher is responsible for *diagnosing* educational needs, *prescribing* and *implementing* instructional programs and *evaluating* progress of pupils” (emphasis added, 2018c, p. 1). This use of expert language assumes authority by referencing medical terminology (diagnosing, prescribing, implementing, and evaluating). Children and youth are then recognized as deficient or things that need to be cured.

In the interviews, my participants often used developmental paradigms to speak about their students, providing them with an assumption of authority as well. Whether or not this linguistic move is motivated from educational policy is unclear. What is evident, however, is the interdiscursive relationship between what my participants are saying and what appears in policy. Their use of developmental language both challenges and (re)produces discourses of child and youth irrationality and untrustworthiness, many of which are described in the educational policy and resource described above. Significantly, each of them had recently taken Educational Psychology and the Educational Psychology of Exceptional Learners, mandatory courses in the Faculty of Education. Like the ATA,

²⁹ In other words, “language is not powerful on its own – it gains power by the use powerful people make of it” (Weiss & Wodak, 2003, p. 14).

then, the Faculty of Education uses developmental discourses in their courses in order to educate student-teachers about the behaviours and actions of children and youth.

‘That’s when your brain is fully developed, and you’ve got all your critical thinking’

When speaking about the voting age, my participants consistently turned to brain development discourses to either agree with or challenge the requirement of being eighteen or older to vote in elections. Mia, for instance, uses discourses of normal brain development to question the value of the Albertan voting age (eighteen):

There’s all of this research saying that: (*lowers her voice and puts up air quotes with her fingers*) “kids’ brains don’t stop developing until they’re 25 and whatever”, and I’m like okay, yes, that might be true, but peoples’ opinions naturally change over time anyway. Somebody might vote Liberal in an election when they’re 30 and then vote Conservative 5 years later, like what’s the difference? I don’t understand.

Mia also states that, if it were up to her, she would lower the voting age: “sixteen, I’d say lower it.” She critiques discourses of brain development which assume a linear progression of growth towards ‘complete’ adulthood and rationality. In the excerpt above, she uses first-person air quotes and lowers her voice to perform what I interpret as a researcher or scientist with ‘expert’ knowledge on the functions of children and youth.³⁰ In this way, Mia uses a discursive strategy of mockery to challenge or subvert the notion that children and youth are incomplete due to the development of their brains – an ideology described in educational policy and resources.³¹

Here, Mia also demonstrates the inconsistencies and contradictions of developmental ideologies that are prevalent in discussions of the voting age more broadly and in popular culture. For instance, in a 2016 *Forbes* article American political scientist

³⁰ As you may recall, at the time of the interview Mia was only 24 and was therefore still moving through the liminal stages towards adulthood, at least when characterized by developmental psychology.

³¹ I coded Mia’s subversion of this developmental discourse under the code ‘developing’ and is sub-coded as ‘subverting.’ For a complete list of codes, please turn to Appendix B.

David Davenport writes that “researchers generally agree that the brain is still developing until the mid-20s, with moral reasoning and abstract thought coming later in the cycle than previously thought” (para. 4). Mia identifies that this is, in fact, a discourse by challenging it through a discursive strategy of mockery. Mia then challenges this discourse by using an argument similar to the one made by many childhood studies researchers: that children, youth, and adults *all* each change their minds based on their experiences and relationships (Esser et al., 2016; Mayall, 2000).

A few moments later, however, Mia contradicts herself.³² When I asked, “Why the age of sixteen – I mean any age is arbitrary – but why sixteen?” Mia responds:

So I teach junior high and it is very much a time when [students] are still trying to figure out who they are as a person; I know I was at that age. They change a lot, they’re very insecure, they’re trying to understand the world and like their place in it, there’s a lot of big questions that they start to grapple with at that age. I think by 16 most kids have settled down to the point that they feel a little bit more comfortable and confident in who they are that they can focus on like other issues, if that makes sense.

Like, you know, 12, 13, 14, 15, there’s a lot of internal angst (*laughs*) going on, and that’s fine like that’s part of growing up, that’s part of every kids’ development. But I think by 16, kids have resolved some of that enough to the point that things are a little bit more stable and they’re also a little bit less influenced by others.

Mia, who began by initially critiquing developmental paradigms, later contradicts herself by claiming that young people are far too influenced by others to be trusted with big (or adult) decisions. This line of thinking legitimizes the assumption that young people naturally and linearly develop from teenage angst, insecurity, and instability, towards a more rational and independent adulthood. Mia also compares herself to her students

³² Contradictions in my participants’ transcripts have discursive significance because they demonstrate just how complex age really is.

through a process of identification to add personal experience to her understandings of youth subjectivities (“I know I was at that age”).

Charles, on the other hand, uses developmental language to argue that Alberta should raise rather than lower the voting age:

I don't think that the average individual is any more intelligent, really, than most kids or thinks things through more than most kids. ... but (*sigh*) I mean honestly then I would argue that the voting age should be up to 25 when you're finished with the frontal cortex being developed.

In this excerpt, Charles speaks cynically and uses matter of fact language of brain development to claim that both children or adults are not ‘rational’ until well after the symbolic age of adulthood (eighteen). Instead, his assumptions about rationality and intelligence align with notions rooted in developmental psychology.³³ Unlike Mia, Charles uses brain development language (“the frontal cortex”) to further legitimize his observations that both children and some legal adults are foolish. Charles also appears to distance himself among the group as non-foolish, in comparison. In other words, he exceptionalizes himself as an intelligent adult whereas others are equal to children and youth in terms of their rationality.

Addison, like Charles, points out the inconsistencies of the voting age and how it tends to be justified in Alberta and Canada:

A: Well I think either you should lower the voting age... or you should raise it to 25. Cuz that's when your brain is fully developed and you've got all your critical thinking. So, if the argument is that we're too young then it should be 25, but then you should also say that really old people can't vote because they're old and they're not gonna (*laughs*) be around for the benefits of whatever happens ...

I: You say 25, that's really interesting.... did you take neuroscience or like developmental psych?

³³ Charles' frontal cortex had recently finished developing at the time of the interview and I wonder if this impacted how he answered this question.

A: We just learned about that in our special-ed class

I: Oh, interesting

A: Yeah, the brain is not fully developed – the critical thinking, rational side of the brain isn't developed until like 24, 25.

Addison claims that when individuals turn 25, they achieve all of their abilities to think critically (“you’ve got all your critical thinking”). This statement (re)produces the notion that adults eventually reach a stage of developmental ‘completeness.’ Like Mia, however, Addison claims that the voting age contradicts brain development research because – according to her – elderly folks, like children, have reduced mental capacities (“really old people can’t vote because they’re old”). In this way, Addison describes that the voting age is inconsistent from the authoritative means of brain development research. However, Addison also legitimizes its authority when she speaks about the elderly.

Briefly, I would like to discuss the inherent ableism of developmental discourses. I speak to this because Addison mentions that she learned about brain development in her “Special Education” class at the U of L. I also speak to this because broader discourses of ableism are interdiscursive to discussions of brain development and the voting age. Individuals with mental or physical disabilities are often infantilized and are therefore excluded from seemingly ‘adult’ realms in a similar way to children and youth (Malacrida, 2015). Importantly, Canadian child and youth scholars China Mills and Brenda Lefrançois (2018), observe that “[t]he current day Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM-V) continues to list ‘childishness’ and ‘childlike behaviour’ in adults as a symptom of mental illness” (p. 512). These groups, then, are often seen by educators and

medical professionals, among others, as ‘unintelligent’ or ‘irrational’, unable to develop ‘normally’ through developmental paradigms, and therefore unable to vote in elections.³⁴

Developmental discourses, including explicit discussions of brain growth and the cognitive abilities of adolescents, were common when I spoke with my participants about the symbolic age of adulthood. While some participants agreed that young people should be able to make decisions in their classrooms as well as their governments, others thought that children and youth should be sheltered from these seemingly adult realms. In other cases, my participants believed that brain development research should decide who can vote in civic, provincial, and national elections. Although the participants had contradictory explanations of the capacities of children and youth, it is worth noting that all seven of them relied on brain research – although not every example is depicted here. Perhaps this is because of the prevailing discourses that characterize the debate over the voting age in Canadian and American popular media (cf. Davenport, 2016; Burnett, 2017; Steinberg, 2014), or perhaps it is because each participant had taken an educational psychology class within the last five years. Either way, discourses of development were pervasive when speaking about child/youth subjectivities.

Discourses of Childhood Futurity

My interviewees, and especially the textual sources produced by Alberta

Education and the ATA, often referred to children and youth are defined as ‘the future’

³⁴ These discourses are interdiscursive to ideologies made famous by early twentieth century suffragettes including Nellie McLung and the other members of the “Famous Five.” These women fought for women’s right to vote while also advocating for the continued forced sterilization of those defined by the state to be “feebleminded” (Malacrida, 2015). Therefore, I suggest that broader discourses of developmental paradigms in education and other institutions are consistent with the history of eugenics in Canada.

(Edelman, 2004; Dyer, 2016). These discourses of childhood futurity, as articulated in Alberta educational contexts, work to reinforce neoliberalism by assuming that children and youth should transition towards a ‘good,’ ‘individually responsible,’ and ‘entrepreneurial’ adulthood – adjectives used by “Inspiring Education” and criticized by scholars Erica Burman (2007) and Virginia Caputo (2007). This is most clearly outlined in “Inspiring Education,” the 2010 Alberta Education document which describes the province’s young inhabitants as future adults who, with proper guidance, will become ‘ethical citizens,’ ‘engaged thinkers,’ and have ‘entrepreneurial spirits.’ This document also characterizes children and youth as what Tom Cockburn has called “potential or future citizens, not citizens already” (Cockburn, 2013, p. 8), a reference to their inability to vote in elections among other things.

Discourses of childhood futurity are productive (Foucault, 1976/1990) because they provide some children (white settlers, middle- and upper-class people, in particular) with certain benefits while others (black and brown children, children living in poverty) “fall through the cracks” – as my participants commonly claimed. In other words, while many young people are excluded from discourses of childhood futurity and innocence due to their ‘race’, class, sexuality, and/or gender, others are celebrated. Discourses of futurity are particularly productive because, in educational policy and resources, they celebrate bodies who conform to or seem to attain normative transitions towards adulthood, and pathologize those who seem to fail. In this section, I begin by analyzing “Inspiring Education” and then connect discourses of futurity to my participant transcripts. This section demonstrates, again, how educators and educational policy create and sustain life stages through discourse. It also explores how life stages are not natural or biological, but

are instead socially constructed, unfixed, and associated to some while others are excluded.

Ethical Citizens, Engaged Thinkers, Entrepreneurial Spirits

The notion of normative futurity, of the desirability of transitioning in a linear way toward a particular *kind* of adulthood, is exemplified in “Inspiring Education,” a document whose authors seek to know and measure future social, economic, and political challenges and how today’s children and youth will face these challenges as adults. This document explicitly discusses Alberta’s future and asks how students today – the adults of tomorrow – will be able to contribute to Alberta’s economic, political, and social structures in the year 2030. “Inspiring Education” identifies three main challenges that Alberta will face in the year 2030: increased labour competition from outsourcing positions to China and India, depletion of natural resources, and a diversifying and aging workforce (Government of Alberta, 2010, p. 11-12). Here, they are using a discursive strategy of spatialization where diversity and outsourcing are to blame for challenges that Albertan’s face in the workforce. Moreover, the authors are using a discursive strategy of passive agent deletion when they write about natural resource depletion. This issue does not seem to stem from the actions and policies made by past and current policy makers, citizens, or politicians of Alberta. Instead, in this excerpt natural resources are simply disappearing into thin air.

“Inspiring Education” also explores how children and youth can benefit Alberta’s future by anticipating these social and economic changes:

Alberta’s place in the world will be determined by our ability to anticipate and navigate change. Today’s pace of change is greater than at any other time in history. How we define, structure, and measure the effectiveness of education in Alberta must reflect the challenges facing the generation born this year (p. 1).

In this excerpt, the authors are using discursive strategies of conversationalization. According to Fairclough (1995) this discursive strategy creates “an apparent democratization of discourse which involves the reduction of overt markers of power asymmetry between people of unequal institutional power” (p. 79). In this case, the authors position themselves with Albertan youth when they state that “Alberta’s place in the world will be determined by *our* ability to anticipate change.” This works to mask the power relations between children and policy makers to propose a unified vision towards the future.

The pages that follow explicitly position children and youth as embodiments of the future who must be provided with tools of independence and self-sufficiency in order to guarantee a robust provincial economy and achieve “successful transitions to adulthood” (p. 18). The hope is that, armed with these tools, today’s young people will be able to effectively guide Alberta through these challenges several decades from now.³⁵ The steering committee responsible for “Inspiring Education” state that, “[y]outh are our future leaders, workforce, volunteers, friends, and neighbours. Their success will be ours” (Government of Alberta, 2010, p. 13).

This document recognizes Alberta students as having the potential to contribute to or transform society. However, it also insists that young people can only access this potential once they have graduated from secondary school and become normative, economically self-sufficient, and individually responsible adults. In other words, “Inspiring Education” positions children and youth as ‘becomings’ rather than ‘beings’ (Mayall, 2000). This dichotomy is another discursive strategy that contributes to the

³⁵ Further, this document specifies that the values and traits identified “apply to every learner, including those who are urban, rural, Aboriginal, disabled, gifted, or of a minority culture” (p. 5).

discourse of childhood futurity and its power effect, neoliberal ideology. Following Victoria Caputo (2007), I suggest that the “futurity of childhood is indicative of the influence of neoliberal goals in producing future workers who are efficient and competitive” (p. 181). In other words, children and youth are meant to ‘become’ independent and competitive “leaders, workforce, volunteers, friends, and neighbours” (p. 13).

Neoliberalism, Children, and Futurity

“Inspiring Education” claims that if Alberta’s young people are to become successful adults – or successfully become adults – they will need to internalize, achieve, and perform the following three traits: the ‘ethical citizen,’ ‘engaged thinker,’ and an ‘entrepreneurial spirit.’ First of all, the authors of “Inspiring Education” imagine an ideal future adult ‘ethical citizen’ who would describe their identity and priorities as follows:

It’s not all about me. I have learned about and appreciate the effort and sacrifice that built this province and country. My education has helped me see beyond my self-interests to the needs of the community. As a result, I contribute fully to the world around me—economically, culturally, socially and politically. As a steward of the earth, I minimize environmental impacts wherever I go.

I build relationships through humility; fairness and open-mindedness; and with teamwork and communication. I engage with many cultures, religions, and languages. This enables me to value diversity in all people and adapt to any situation. I demonstrate respect, empathy and compassion for all people.

I can care for myself physically, emotionally, intellectually, socially, and spiritually, yet I am able to ask for help when needed from others and for others. I am well-prepared to assume the responsibilities of life – whether they be the duties of a parent, a neighbour, a mentor, or an employee or employer (Government of Alberta, 2010, p. 19).³⁶

³⁶ In the *Framework for Student Learning*, the ethical citizen is characterized in similar ways, but the excerpt is much shorter.

This description of ethical citizenship as a marker of successful adulthood (in the future) begins by focusing on the needs of the community rather than individual successes: “It’s not all about me” and “my education has helped me see beyond my self-interests.” The use of “I am” and “I can” is a discursive strategy of conversationalization and personalization where broader social discourses are seen to be equal to those who speak in micro-level interactions. “Inspiring Education” also simulates “private, face-to-face, person-to-person discourse in public mass-audience discourse – print, radio, television” (Fairclough, 1995, p. 80), again, attempting to unify the vision of Albertan students and policy makers.

This excerpt also demonstrates the desirability of “build[ing] relationships” and “engag[ing] with many cultures, religions, and languages,” in order to “contribute fully” (socially and economically) to local and globalized communities. This is a clear example of neoliberalism being reconstituted “under the metaphor of community, where civil society means an association of free individuals based on self-rule” (Peters, 2001, p. 61). Here, in other words, Alberta Education has altered the notion of community in order to better fit into an individualistic social and economic framework.

The Alberta Education version of ethical citizenship also emphasizes individualized notions of responsibility – a concept at the heart of neoliberalism. This approach assumes a social order in which adults are responsible for themselves and their physical, emotional, and spiritual needs, as well as solely responsible for “asking for help.” In other words, embodying this neoliberal discourse of an ‘ethical’ adult means being aware and responsible for yourself by relying on others and/or the state but only

when absolutely necessary.³⁷

Secondly, “Inspiring Education: states that, as future adults, Alberta children and youth must also identify as engaged thinkers. To make this point, the imagined future adult figure speaks the following words:

I am competent in the arts and sciences, including languages. I know how to think critically and creatively, and how to make discoveries—through inquiry, reflection, exploration, experimentation, and trial and error. I use technology to learn, innovate, collaborate, communicate, and discover. I have developed a wide range of competencies in many areas including the gathering, analysis and evaluation of information.

Because I am familiar with multiple perspectives and disciplines, I can first identify problems and then find the best solutions. As a team member, I integrate ideas from a variety of sources into a coherent whole and communicate these ideas to others.

As I have grown up, I have seen many changes in society and the economy. I adapt to change with an attitude of optimism and hope for the future. As a life-long learner, I believe there is no limit to what knowledge may be gleaned, what skills may be accumulated, and what may be achieved in cooperation with others. And always, I keep growing and learning (p. 19).

This ideal of the “engaged thinker” builds on the figure of the “ethical citizen” by assuming that the future adult is competent, smart, and self-innovative – again, coded language for entrepreneurialism and neoliberal adulthood are (re)produced. This discourse suggests that, somehow, future adults – regardless of their ‘race’, socioeconomic status, or gender – will have access to the resources necessary to participate in producing vast amounts of knowledge that will thereby benefit Alberta. At the same time, however, many Alberta schools – more often than not, schools on reserves

³⁷ This is similar to what is stated in the *Framework for Student Learning*: “They are self-directed and self-aware, using this knowledge to make responsible personal choices and decisions.... Students take ownership of, and responsibility for, their emotional, intellectual, physical, spiritual and social well-being” (Government of Alberta, 2011, p. 5).

– are sorely underfunded and are lacking up to date technology, full time educators, art programs, and funds for extra curriculums (Croteau, 2017; Morin, 2017).

The final paragraph of the description of the ‘engaged thinker’ insists that as individuals grow up, they must adapt to social and economic changes which require a normative adult to have “an attitude of optimism and hope for the future” (Government of Alberta, 2010, p. 19). Lauren Berlant (2011) describes neoliberal optimism as a form of ‘cruel optimism.’ “Inspiring Education,” I argue, embodies cruel optimism and neoliberalism because it ignores the state’s role in generating changes that negatively impact Albertans, including the oil-sands, the lack of investment in social services, and disappearing full-time work. Again, this article uses a discursive strategy of passive agent deletion in which the state is absolved of responsibility by being removed from the account. Instead, this excerpt assumes that individuals should remain hopeful until they find a way to change their own situations rather than holding the state accountable.

The third characteristic of a successful adult, according to “Inspiring Education,” is an “entrepreneurial spirit.” The document defines this trait as follows:

[M]otivated, resourceful, and self-reliant. Many people describe me as tenacious because I continuously set goals and work with perseverance and discipline to achieve them. Through hard work, I earn my achievements and the respect of others. I strive for excellence and personal success.

I am competitive and ready to challenge the status quo. I explore ideas and technologies by myself and as part of diverse teams. I am resilient and adaptable, and have the ability and determination to transform my discoveries into products or services that benefit my community and by extension, the world.

I have the confidence to take risks and make bold decisions in the face of adversity, recognizing that to hold back is to be held back. I have the courage to dream (p. 20).

These future adults are conceptualized as “motivated, resourceful, and self-reliant” working with “perseverance and discipline;” again we see discursive strategies of

personalization and conversationalization. This use of language also refers to Albertan students' identities as commodities (Giroux, 2002) in which discoveries are voiced as 'products' to be used for the benefit a globalized community. Again, we see the 'metaphor of community' (Peters, 2001) which emphasizes acquiring new information in order to compete in an interconnected world.

Within the categorization of an entrepreneurial spirit assumes that resiliency and adaptability are assumed to be individualizing characteristics (Burman, 2017) – two self-making practices that are at the heart of neoliberal ideology. The authors state that Albertan students will “take risks and make bold decisions in the face of adversity, recognizing that to hold back is to be held back” (p. 20). In other words, future adults must rely on their own decisions and risks to avoid adverse situations – for example, poverty – instead of relying on the state. Therefore, Alberta's children, and the adults they will become, should be motivated to adapt in order to avoid using services from, and therefore relying on, the state, non-governmental organizations, the family, etc.

Each of these categories – the 'ethical citizen,' 'engaged thinker,' and 'entrepreneurial spirit' – (re)produces a prevailing discourse about childhood futurity which, as I have demonstrated, is intertextual to ideologies of neoliberalism. Therefore, in this specific context – which you may recall is a government document created during the Progressive Conservative Party's era – it seems that neoliberalism is a driving force that works to legitimize, naturalize, and essentialize life stages and the optimistic achievement

of a normative adulthood.³⁸

‘They are the future, but they can also be the now’

The understanding of children and youth as the future – a neoliberal discourse depicted in “Inspiring Education” and taken up in the Ministerial Order for Student Learning (Government of Alberta, 2013) – was variously embraced and challenged by my interview participants. Mia, for instance, critiqued discourses of childhood futurity when she spoke about her grade eight and nine students who attended a school in a small town. Mia described a time when one of her students’ opinions about a social issue was “deep and complex” – as she put it – while completing a series of public speaking competitions in 4-H.³⁹ Mia states:

M: So this one girl just blows me away because every year when they have their public speaking she usually gives me her speech to look over it and give her feedback, and every year she picks a super critical current issue...

I: Wow!

M: Last year was euthanasia, and this year it was on deforestation. Like [when she was] 13, 14, 15 I’ve watched her [and] I’ve read her speeches, they are phenomenal and she has very deep and complex thoughts about these issues that our society is still like grappling with, and you know, these are the kinds of kids that should be allowed to vote on them, you know? ... And you could probably publish it in like a newspaper or something. And people probably would have been blown away like I was, but wouldn’t take it as seriously: *(unimpressed tone)* “oh a 15 year old girl, a 14 year old girl wrote this,” right?

³⁸ It is important to re-state that “Inspiring Education” was created in a specific historical and social context. During this time, the ruling party – the Progressive Conservative Association of Alberta 1971-2015 – focused heavily on entrepreneurialism. This document also pre-dates the movement to Indigenize curriculum after the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) published its final report in 2015. However, this document has many consequences regarding how my participants, as well as other educators in the province, conceptualize children and youth. I suggest, then, that these characteristics, paired with a reliance on developmental paradigms of aging, inform my participants about what are children and youth as future adults.

³⁹ 4-H is a nationwide program which provides “urban and rural youth and adults life-long skills such as co-operation, leadership, interpersonal relations, critical thinking, decision making, organization, public speaking and community service” (Government of Alberta, 2018b). Gabriel Rosenberg writes about the 4-H entrepreneurialism and agricultural capitalism and its impact on American young people in his 2016 book, *The 4-H Harvest: Sexuality and the State in Rural America*.

In this excerpt, Mia both resists and (re)produces discourses that assume children and youth are in development and should wait until they are older to grapple with ideas that are seemingly reserved for adults. First, Mia seems surprised that her students' views on certain topics like deforestation, euthanasia, and cannabis legalization are so well-developed and critical. The element of surprise – which I mirror (“Wow!”) – feeds into the predominant discourse that children and youth are not natural critical thinkers.

At the same time, Mia resists developmental, futuristic, and gendered discourses when she identifies that young people's ideas about social issues are commonly disregarded due to their age and gender (“oh a 15 year old girl, a 14 year old girl wrote this”). American historian Crista DeLuzio (2007) explores how twentieth century developmental discourses, many of which focus on the future and assume a complete adult, excluded women and girls. For instance, G. Stanley Hall's work on childhood and adolescence was gendered because, as she notes, “the girl's development was that she was both [quintessentially] and [perpetually] adolescent” (p. 112). Mia identifies that this discourse remains pervasive in southern Albertan communities and then resists it by providing an example when a female student disrupted the norm. While exceptionalizing this student to be surpassing other youth's and some adults' capacities to think critically (“issues that our society is still grappling with”), Mia also creates a dichotomy of young people who do or do not “blow [her] away.”

Following this discussion, Mia explicitly names and, I suggest, critiques the futurity discourse that was focused on in “Inspiring Education.” She said: “It's a tragedy because [the children and youth] are the future (*long pause*) but they can also be the now.” Although discourses of childhood futurity were common in the documents and policies of Alberta Education, many of which inform Albertan teachers and the U of L

Faculty of Education, in this instance Mia seems to resist discourses of futurity since they devalue current experiences of childhood and adolescence (“they can also be the now”). In other words, Mia challenges the ‘becoming’ not ‘being’ discourse that is pervasive in educational policy and resources for educators (Cockburn, 2013; Mayall, 2000).

In another interview, Delaney insists that young children (grade one) should only grapple with ideas about community – including voting in elections – in the safety and privacy of their homes or schools. In this way, Delaney (re)produces the developmental notion that young people should be sheltered from spaces in which decisions are made until they are old enough to understand the consequences:

D: I don’t think I became really vocal about my own self until like middle school, I think that’s when you like develop changes physically, before then I was just kind of like a sponge that absorbed what my friends said, what my parents said, what my teacher that I liked said. But I think if in your direct setting it can be applied so inside your classroom, yeah, they can think critically or they can make choices but like within that classroom roles, you know what I mean?

I: So it’s like more a private/public divide?

D: Yeah. Yeah! Sphere thing?

I: (*Clarifying*) That’s what I’m hearing if that’s right?

D: Yeah, I think it expands to public eventually but I – Just no ... grade one student really cares about the election in the [United] States, even if we’re like neighbors from that country, you know what I mean? If anything, he or she cares more about our mock election going on in the classroom so, I don’t know.

...

D: But it’s just they’re not fully themselves so how are they gonna, you know? And I’m not trying to say [that] they’re too dumb, that’s not it. They’re just not developed yet.

I: Yeah, that’s what I’m hearing ... It’s just kind of ‘in-training’?

D: Yeah. In progress (*laughs*)... They just gotta go through all the bluffing stages.

In this part of her interview, Delaney's answers to my questions (re)produce discourses of development and childhood futurity which combine to essentialize children and youth as "potential citizens, not citizens already" (Cockburn, 2013, p. 8) – 'becomings' not 'beings,' in other words (Mayall, 2000).

Delaney uses a variety of discursive strategies to articulate her understandings of children and youth. First, she uses a discursive strategy of identification to compare her own experiences as a child to the assumed experiences of her students ("I don't think I became really vocal about my own self until like middle school"). This strategy, I argue, provides experiential evidence to support her expectations of childhood as an unaware and sheltered life stage. Delaney combines identification with a strategy of impersonalization when she calls her younger self a "sponge that absorbed what [her] friends said." By erasing human characteristics from her experience as a child (impersonalization), she effectively erases human characteristics from children today (identification).

Delaney uses strategies of mitigation to get validation for her answers ("you know?; you know what I mean?"). Of course, Delaney is not the only participant who does this. Participating in an interview can be frightening and sometimes awkward, which makes it difficult to articulate one's thoughts. However, I argue that these mitigating strategies also speak to her fears of schooling and teaching, many of which she expressed to me as an issue of unpreparedness:

I think the [Faculty of Education] courses are good, like I learn a lot from [them]. I think (*long pause*) there's something missing though... cuz these courses are meant to provide you with all the tools and all the skills to kind of help you for your practicum, right? But every time I've entered my practicum stage, I've felt maybe it's like my anxiety, I don't know, but I just felt a bit of unpreparedness.

The mitigating strategies used in Delaney’s excerpt discussed above, I suggest, speak to her fears of unpreparedness and being a new as well as student-teacher. I discuss these fears and how they challenge normative notions of adulthood further in Chapters Three and Four.

Delaney’s earlier quote relies on the concept of private/public spheres – with some help from me – to discuss spaces where children can think critically about social issues.⁴⁰ She states that young people should practice making decisions in the safety of their homes or classrooms, describing children as having the potential to make decisions in the future. She was sure to clarify, however, that she does not believe children are ‘dumb’; instead, she claims that young people need time to develop and go through the what she calls the ‘bluffing stages.’⁴¹

Bluffing stages relate to ideas of development which also reinforce discourses of futurity that are taken up by educational resources and policy in southern Alberta. Following many childhood studies scholars, I suggest that individuals are always in a state of ‘progress,’ and that ideas of ‘progress’ look different for different people (Esser et al., 2016; Mills & Lefrançois, 2018; Rollo, 2018). Adults, like children and youth, are always gaining new experiences and learning from relationships; they do not hit a

⁴⁰ Of course, I used a variety of discursive strategies throughout each interview because I am not outside of power structures nor am I capable of transcending discourse.

⁴¹ I did not ask what Delaney meant by ‘bluffing stage’, but I assume she was speaking about ideas of progress, development, and learning from experiences while transitioning into adulthood. When I researched if the term ‘bluffing stages’ had been used by others to speak about children and youth, I found many articles claiming that ‘bluffing stages’ are a time when parrots “[lunge], [nip], [bite], [hiss]” and resist interaction (Kalhagen, 2018, para. 3). I am writing this because, later on, Mia impersonalizes children and youth by calling them parrots of their parents and other adults.

saturation point of learning.⁴² In other words, we are always in the ‘bluffing stages.’

At the same time, however, notions of ‘progress’ are problematic due to their connections to settler colonialism, racialization, and developmental paradigms. Toby Rollo (2018), for example, states that civilizational progress – and progressing from child to adult – justifies

the use of coercion and violence but frames it as an obligatory means of inducing maturity – of motivating feral or premodern peoples along the natural *telos* of humanity (p. 62).

Paired with developmentalism, discourses of child futurity (re)produce a prevailing assumption that children and youth must progress towards a responsible and civilized representation of adulthood. But what happens when individuals defy this ‘progress’ or remain in the ‘bluffing stages’? Who is often excluded from accessing this neoliberal, settler colonial idea of progress? I address these questions in the next section.

‘Falling through the cracks’: Racialized Futurity

Discourses of childhood futurity intersect with both neoliberalism and settler colonialism by defining who gets to transition towards adulthood by achieving or surpassing traditional age-markers including secondary and post-secondary education, monogamous relationships, and full-time careers. Discourses of futurity are overly attributed to white children and youth (Gill-Peterson, 2015). This notion is explored by Canadian sociologists McDaniel and Bernard (2011) who demonstrate the ways in which ‘gravity’ and ‘shocks’ make it more difficult for some children and youth to make normative transitions towards a ‘successful’ adulthood. While ‘shocks’ relate to

⁴² This observation is also supported in the Faculty of Education. Teachers are described as life-long learners rather than ‘complete’ adults: “Our courses are grounded in the best educational practices and are designed to inspire you to become a life-long learner who is excited about a career in education” (University of Lethbridge, 2018f).

unexpected circumstances that everyone can face (including a death in the family or losing a job, for example) ‘gravity’ refers to intersections of oppression which may contribute to discrimination in education, the workforce, or in their daily lives. McDaniel and Bernard state that “initial inequalities can act like the force of *gravity* in pulling down individuals’ efforts to make life transitions that could be beneficial” (authors’ emphasis, p. 4). Experiences of gravity, they state, are far more common among Indigenous people due to legacies of residential schools and ongoing processes of settler colonialism in education and the workforce (First Nations Governance Centre, 2019).

In my interviews, race intersects with notions of child/youth futurity most obviously when my participants categorize some students as “willing to learn” and others as inherently unteachable. My participants justify their categorizations with reference to the many practical challenges in the classroom, including time constraints of the semester, the need to achieve curricular outcomes, and the number of students in junior high classrooms (30-40 children/youth at any given time). For instance, Jackie states:

One of the things that I enjoy about teaching junior high is it becomes more and more their responsibility, right? So if they’re gonna choose to sit in my class and not do anything (*long pause- appearing to think of how to word her next statement*) I’m not gonna spend time with them over the kid who is asking me questions and wants help, right?

As hard as that is to kind of come to terms with that as a teacher, knowing that that kid is probably falling through the cracks, you have to kind of also realize that that kid might fall through the cracks, but it shouldn’t be at the expense of the kid that actually wants to be there and is making that effort. Because you have... 32 kids in your class and you can’t be in 32 places at once.

Jackie states that Alberta teachers are overextended in their classrooms and cannot be at “32 places at once.” Class size is a key factor that inhibits student learning in Alberta (Croteau, 2017). While the provincial government has allocated more than \$2.7 billion in funds to hire more teachers since 2004, as the *Report to the Auditor General* (2018)

states, “the number of school jurisdictions that met the department’s class size targets in 2017 is lower than in 2004” (p. 44). Due to the high number of students in her classroom, Jackie normalizes the notion that teachers must categorize students based on their willingness to learn in order to maximize her time, energy, and influence as an educator. She states that choosing some students over others can be difficult (“as hard as that is to ... come to terms with”) but has come to believe that this is an inevitable part of her job.⁴³

Categorizing some students as ‘falling through the cracks’, I suggest, has an intertextual relationship with broader social structures of socioeconomic status struggles and racial inequality. According to educational scholars and sociologists, the students who are ‘falling through the cracks’ are, typically, students who are already subject to gravity (Gunn, Chorney, & Poulsen, 2008; McDaniel & Bernard, 2011). For instance, in Lethbridge and the rest of Alberta, children of colour – specifically, Indigenous children – are less likely to graduate high school compared to their white counterparts. According to *2008 High School Completion: Alberta Initiative for School Improvement*, a document produced by the University of Lethbridge Faculty of Education, “there is only an approximate 46% chance that an Aboriginal student enrolled in Grade 12 will make it to graduation” (Gunn, Chorney, & Poulsen, 2008, p. 6). The drop-out rate is even higher in the rest of Canada: “61% of First Nation young adults (20-24) have not completed high school, compared with 13% of non-Aboriginal people in Canada” (Chiefs Assembly on Education, 2012, p. 2). Intergenerational trauma from residential schools, lack of funding to on-reserve schools, and racism – in other words, settler colonialism – are referenced by each of these documents as key factors that contribute to the high drop-out rates for

⁴³ Jackie, like Delaney, uses a variety of mitigating strategies (“right? You know? Kind of”). Based on her need for validation and her long pause, it is clear that she was cautious about this part of her interview.

Indigenous students in Alberta and the rest of Canada (Gymiah et al., 2003; Mendelson, 2004; Krahn et al., 2015). Poverty also contributes to low educational attainment among Indigenous groups and other visible minorities (Moore-Kilgannon, Kolkman, & Ahorro, 2012).

Categorizing only some children and youth as having the potential to succeed inevitably forces those who are seemingly unteachable to fall through the cracks. This group then faces other consequences made possible and/or reinforced by a settler colonial and neoliberal nation (poverty, addiction, homelessness, prison, etc.). The ‘success stories’ of normative adulthood work to invisibilize those who fall behind or choose alternative routes. Therefore, while some people are identified “as deviant, helpless, vulnerable, and incompetent” others are constructed “as helpful, charitable, capable, and necessary” (Greenwood, de Leeuw, & Cameron, 2010, p. 290). This clearly spells out the consequences of the futuristic vision articulated in “Inspiring Education.”

“Inspiring Education’s” focus on future challenges also ahistorizes the ongoing consequences of the past – specifically, in relation to settler colonialism. This document states that “[t]oday’s pace of change is greater than at any other time in history” (p. 1), ignoring the fast-paced and often negative changes that Indigenous people have faced for centuries in the territory that is now Canada. The authors of this document also ask: “[w]ill the child born this year have the skills necessary to both continue the Alberta legacy and strengthen it?” (p. 10). The particular “legacy” that is implied is rooted in oil wealth, ideas about entrepreneurialism, and settler colonialism.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ Although the term and structure ‘settler colonialism’ is erased in “Inspiring Education,” it is important to note that this document predates the changes in to curriculum to include Indigenous voices and experiences.

Jackie's excerpt is also indicative of the neoliberal logics at work in North American education more broadly. North American educators – including my participants – are overwhelmed with large classrooms, pushed to implement standardized curricula, and are lacking in educational budgets and resources (Caputo, 2007, p, 173). Although teachers are faced with little resources and overcrowded classrooms, they are continuously driven “by the goal to produce a technically skilled, effective citizenry” (Caputo, 2007, p. 173). In other words, teachers are expected to produce ethical, engaged, and entrepreneurial citizens without economic and social support from the state. In this case, a neoliberal influence in education erases those who ‘fall through the cracks’ by making it more difficult for teachers to support all of their students (“you can’t be in 32 places at once”). Ultimately, I argue that ideologies of neoliberalism within and outside of the classroom – and evidently in “Inspiring Education” – contribute to a gap where categorizing some students as (un)teachable is both acceptable and normalized.⁴⁵

Childhood futurity, combined with developmental paradigms, used in educational resources inform teachers about their expectations of children, youth, and adult performances. These discourses, I argue, are productive because they are established under a veil of empowerment for young people to make ‘successful’ transitions towards adulthood – as indicated by “Inspiring Education.” However, when analyzed more closely, neoliberalism and settler colonialism are foundational to the achievement and

⁴⁵ While categorizing some children as (un)teachable, settler colonialism and neoliberalism also reinforce one another. David Lloyd and Patrick Wolfe (2016) demonstrate that “the refunctioning of settler colonial logics of law and violence ... [further] and [safeguard] the neoliberal economic regime” (p. 116) by contributing to assimilation, alienation, and extermination (Wolfe, 2006, p. 388). In this context, children and youth who are seen as (un)teachable are being placed on hierarchies which originate and are normalized through the workings of neoliberalism and settler colonialism.

thus performance of an imagined future adulthood which is said to be ethical, engaged, and entrepreneurial. Further, by defining children and youth as future citizens, we ignore and devalue young people's current social, economic, or political contributions to society.

The kids 'didn't have any problems': Discourses of Innocence

My interview participants and the textual sources I consulted also often referred to children as inherently innocent. According to Robin Bernstein (2011), in the nineteenth century, American childhood was “not as a symbol of innocence but as its embodiment” (p. 4). In this section of the chapter, I demonstrate how this discourse has continued over time and its pervasiveness in my participant transcripts. Innocence provides young people with certain privileges, especially in the contexts of schooling. If youth are innocent of an accusation, they do not suffer any of the consequences from teachers or parents. However, as Bernstein demonstrates, not all children are able to benefit from discourses of innocence. Instead, discourses of innocence reinforce settler colonialism and neoliberalism because, like discourses of futurity, they assume that some children are more innocent than others (Bernstein, 2011; de Leeuw, 2009; Meiners, 2016).

Addison speaks explicitly about the intersection of safety, innocence, and whiteness in the classroom. She mentions that her grade six students found it difficult to learn about the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* because it was, as she put it, “such heavy information.” She states that many of the articles do not directly relate to her students' lives due to their demographics (white and middle class). Addison also claims that her students in this rural and conservative school are “not worried about getting arrested” because these problems “just [aren't] part of their [lives].” She states:

Then my grade sixes ... the Charter ... was challenging at times for them to understand why we would need to be protected from [the police]? Cuz they were

so isolated and like the demographics of the school were like white, middle-class, like ... they didn't have any problems. And so why would it be important for the police – that one of your rights is that the police have to have a reason [to search you], or that you have the right to legal representation? For them it's just like: "of course!"

Here, Addison essentializes the notion that white children and youth do not have "any problems" and rarely interact with or are critical of the legal system. By specifying the demographics of her students, Addison implies that experiences of safety – and perhaps notions of innocence – are experienced differently or perhaps not at all by poor and racialized children (Crenshaw, Ocen, & Nanda, 2014; Punch, 2016).

Addison continues:

And so trying to get [these students] to understand that it's not like that for everyone but to also not like crush them (*laughs*) and like make them lose all hope with the world is a pretty fine line.

Addison claims that comfort and safety through state and police intervention are privileges that white children, youth, and adults enjoy, but "that it's not like that for everyone." In Lethbridge, as in other parts of Alberta, Canada, and North America, black and brown young people and adults are more likely to be racially profiled, or 'carded,' by police and business owners (cf: Labby, 2017; Wortley & Owusu-Bempah, 2011).

Additionally, compared to white settlers, people of colour are more likely to experience police brutality and be convicted of crimes. According to sociologists Akwasi Owusu-Bempah and Scot Worley (2014), these issues are rarely addressed in the Canadian criminal justice system (and they are notably absent from the self-help discourse in "Inspiring Education"):

[a]mbivalence to address these issues relates both to the manifestations of racial discrimination in the system, as well as to the societal conditions that lead to criminal offending. Discrimination and disparity may be at times acknowledged, but they are seldom wholeheartedly addressed. When addressed, the means are seldom thoroughly evaluated for effectiveness, and, when evaluated, the results are rarely made public (p. 282).

Robin Bernstein (2011) explores how age intersects with ‘race’ to declare innocence (childhood) or culpability (adulthood). Erica Meiners (2016) builds on this analysis to argue that developmental psychology has normalized and continues to normalize this discourse: “adults, or those over the magical age of culpability, have fully developed brains, are capable of reason, and therefore can and should be culpable and fully punished” (p. 48). Meiners contends that discourses of innocence disrupt age-based discourses because they are overly credited to crimes committed by white, adult individuals. Meanwhile adults of colour are disproportionately categorized as criminals. This is also the case for children of colour who are often (mis)represented as criminal adults – like in the case of racial profiling in Lethbridge.

Addison’s excerpt both challenges and (re)produces discourses of white, childhood innocence. Although aware and critical of the intersection of childhood, whiteness, and safety/violence created by the state (Punch, 2016), Addison claims that all white and rural children find it difficult to understand how a system built for white settlers could hurt those who are outside of this category. She then claims that it is important not to “crush” her white students and “make them lose all hope with the world” – as she put it and a trait depicted in “Inspiring Education” – than it is to question her students’ racialized assumptions. Addison’s excerpt, I suggest, (re)produces a discourse of white (childhood) fragility. According to Robin DiAngelo (2011) white fragility creates an “insulated environment of racial privilege[and] builds white expectations for racial comfort while at the same time lowering the ability to tolerate racial stress” (p. 55). White children are further protected due to discourses of innocence and futurity, or the assumption that they will learn to challenge racism sometime in the future. Therefore,

Addison works to conserve her white, middle-class students' innocence rather than providing them with a critique of Alberta's criminal justice system.⁴⁶

In another interview, Delaney claims that she likes “that innocence” of grade one students compared to the seemingly sarcastic and “sassy” demeanor of older grades. When asked to define ‘innocence,’ Delaney discussed her students’ excitement and willingness to participate in a classroom mock election. Innocence for Delaney symbolizes fun, excitement, and pretend – characteristics that are typically used to define very young children.

Like Addison, Delaney suggests that rural children are somehow more innocent than children in urban settings:

Just like the content that [rural students] have to think about ... it's just not as vast with students [within Lethbridge city limits]. Like drugs and alcohol, it's not even talked about [in rural communities]. Whereas it's like the centre of focus in a lot of schools [in Lethbridge] so... But there is some comfort in it. Like you enter [into a rural school] knowing that no one's gonna cause havoc.

Delaney creates a binary between urban and rural communities, essentializing urban spaces as sites of deviance and rural spaces as places of innocence. In the rural community to which Delaney refers – which is primarily white and middle class – she states that difference between urban and rural schools indicate culpability and innocence. Unlike Addison, however, Delaney does not question white middle-class, rural childhood innocence. Instead, Delaney appears to internalize the discourse of childhood innocence, assuming that because her students are from primarily white and rural communities, it is

⁴⁶ I argue that this is primarily due to the fear of getting into trouble with students' parents. Each participant mentioned that they were worried about speaking about certain issues that relate to race, gender, and class due to anxieties that they will be reported to the school principal or even the ATA. These fears, and how they impact my participants' understandings of adulthood, are discussed in Chapter Four.

not necessary to discuss social problems like addiction or crime – both of which are often associated with non-white populations, urban settings, and poverty.⁴⁷

Conclusion

In all of these instances, ‘race’ and class-based discourses of development, futurity, and innocence intersect to create an expectation of a specific kind of child on a path towards a specific kind of adult. I argued that those who do not fit this expectation are defined by either my participants or in policy as deviant, deficient, or failing on their journey from a normative childhood towards a normative adulthood. Each discourse explored in this chapter essentialized, legitimized, and normalized the seemingly biological traits of childhood and adolescence. Discourses of ‘normal’ development, childhood futurity, and innocence were used by my participants and/or the textual sources analyzed to describe students’ subjectivities as children and youth. In this chapter, I demonstrated how these discourses, in particular, (re)produce structures and ideologies of settler colonialism and neoliberalism. In what follows, I build on the discourses used by educational policy and resources, and in the interview transcripts which often describe children, youth, and adults. In particular, I demonstrate how my participants variously support and or challenge ideas about childhood development, futurity, and innocence through their own memories of being a child.

⁴⁷ See, for example, “‘Race’ matters: racialization and egalitarian discourses involving Aboriginal people in the Canadian health care context” (Yang & Browne, 2008).

Chapter Three – Childhood Memories Defining and Managing Assumptions of Childhood

[W]e have all experienced childhood, so in that sense we do know what it feels like to be a child or rather, we know what it feels like to have been our self as a child. In our efforts to understand childhood, how much can we escape our own subjective experience of it?

- Chang-Kredl & Wilkie, 2016, p. 310

Introduction:

Educational scholars Chang-Kredl and Wilkie (2016) make the important point that childhood memories inform how educators articulate their conceptions of childhood and their understandings of the children they encounter in the classroom. They ask: “how can examining one’s adult-self next to one’s child-self unsettle our understanding of either site? How, too, does one’s memory of childhood exist side-by-side with one’s conceptualization of childhood today?” (p. 310). They found that early-childhood educators tend to (re)produce common age-based assumptions that childhood should be a protected, comfortable, and essentially utopian space. Using Foucault’s concept of heterotopia, Chang-Kredl and Wilkie demonstrate how “incompatible spaces” (p. 308) (nostalgic childhood memories and child subjectivities today) can be juxtaposed with one another to create meaning about transitioning through life stages.

This chapter builds on Chang-Kredl and Wilkie’s work by exploring a similar ‘in-betweenness’ that characterized my participants’ reflections on their own childhoods. More specifically, I focus on the ways in which their memories both relied on and challenged popular discourses about childhood and adolescence, many of which were analyzed in the previous chapter. Throughout the interviews, my participants answered

questions about their own experiences as children or youth.⁴⁸ Mostly to gain rapport with my participants, I asked each of them questions about their upbringing, their schools, and their families. My participants also brought up their own childhoods without prompts to add experiential knowledge – and therefore more evidence – about what children and youth supposedly are. As I began analyzing the transcripts, I saw an interesting discursive comparison between their own childhoods and the childhoods of their students. These conversations provide me with a small snapshot of how my participants’ experiences variously support and or challenge ideas about childhood development, futurity, and innocence.

This chapter further complicates our understanding of life stages by analyzing how individual childhood memories impact young adult teachers’ understandings about children and youth more generally. First, I explore how my participants use the discursive strategies of essentialism, identification, and exceptionalism to speak about their experiences as children with agency and unique opinions in the past. More specifically, I demonstrate that while my participants saw themselves as having been ‘socially liberal’ children capable of independent thought, they consider children today to be ‘parrots’ of their parents’ socially conservative views – a discursive strategy of impersonalization.

The second part of the chapter analyzes how my participants’ self-perceived pasts as ‘socially conscious’ or ‘ethical’ children and youth have shaped their current experiences of adulthood. Following Canadian childhood historian Neil Sutherland (1997), I suggest that “the shape a memory takes is as much the product of the process of remembering as of the actual characteristics of whatever it is that is being recalled” (p. 7).

⁴⁸ See the interview guide for more details.

In this way, I analyze the (dis)continuities in how my participants remember being children and youth, and the educational policies that support the internalization and performance of a socially conscious and ethical adult educator. This chapter provides a different lens through which to answer the research question explored in Chapter Two: How do young teachers conceptualize legal and traditional transitions from childhood/adolescence towards adulthood and what discourses do they rely on to explain this change? This chapter also asks: how does the child as an image or myth inform them about their own performances as adults and educators?

Exceptionalism and Teachers' Childhood Memories

Teachers' and students' memories have been adequately theorized by North American educational scholars, historians, and sociologists (Balli, 2014; Mitchell & Weber, 1998 & 1999; Sutherland, 1997). Teachers, as former students, acquire years of experience by “apprenticing through observation” (Lortie, 1977, p. 61). This provides an interesting theoretical standpoint to draw from. For instance, educational scholar Sandra Balli (2014) explores how teachers' own memories can be used to challenge “deeply held beliefs” (p. 119) about curriculum and their roles as educators. Balli contends that childhood memories of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ educators “may be one tool for developing a shared understanding of the past with an intent to confront current beliefs about teaching that can inform future practice” (p. 119). Canadian teacher-educator Teresa Strong-Wilson (2006) argues that teachers should “bring memory forward” (p. 102) to provide insight on the changing landscapes of education. What has been less explored, however, are the ways in which childhood memories impact how educators conceptualize subjectivities of childhood and adolescence – with the exception of Chang-Kredl and

Wilkie (2016). This section continues to fill this gap in literature by analyzing how memories of being a child or youth impact how my participants in southern Albertan define and manage child and youth subjectivities today.

Memories of being a student are not only common fodder in educational literature, but they are also discussed in the educational policies and documents I analyzed. For instance, the research team of “Inspiring Education” consulted an unnamed Alberta student and included the transcript into the document. The student wrote: “Thank you for listening. Thank you for trying to remember what (it) is like to be a child. Thank you for asking us when you can’t remember” (authors’ edit; 2010, p. 49). Although the adults on the research team were at one point children, this student recognizes that adults cannot completely remember how children and youth are impacted by schooling and curriculum. Perhaps it was not the student’s intention, but by stating “what (it) is like to be a child” and “asking us when you can’t remember”, this young person essentializes the notion that being a child, both today and in the past, is a singular and knowable experience. Subjectivities of childhood, in this context, are something that can be discovered by either being a child today or by reflecting deep enough into one’s past. The fervent gratitude expressed in this statement also suggests that children and youth are rarely included in decision making processes in other aspects of adult society, despite the push from the UNCRC to include young people in decisions that affect their lives.

My participants reiterate a similar opinion to that expressed by the unnamed student. For instance, Mia mentions that there are intergenerational knowledge gaps between adults and children:

M: I think when you’re young they interpret you as like trendy (*laughs*). I think it can make you more approachable because you can identify with their issues or problems more. So like it’s easier sometimes for a young, you know, girl or boy to come and talk to you about something that might be happening to them because

you're young rather than going to their, you know, 50 year old teacher that's like a grandma. Not saying that those teachers are not amazing because I've worked with some that are just phenomenal, but I think for the kids they just feel more comfortable because they feel like they can relate to you a little bit better.

Later on in the interview, we returned to this idea:

I: I really like the idea of you being able to relate to these kids because you are 25 and were experiencing these things not that long ago. Do you think that gets distilled the older we get?

M: Totally. People forget what it was like and then it also becomes this, you know, intergenerational gap, like my dad's life as a teenager is drastically different from what my life was like as a teen. And even more so from what teens are like now. And it's just a fact of time, people forget [and] those memories fade, you know? They have new responsibilities and they don't have any comprehension like that's why people underestimate them, right? Because they don't remember what it was like to be a teen. Or they don't know what teens are like now.

Mia states that, compared to young teachers, older educators today find it more difficult to understand children and youth's experiences. Like the student in "Inspiring Education," Mia states that the memories of older adults fade, and that they "don't know what teens are like now."⁴⁹ Mia also uses strategies of mitigation to get validation from me the interviewer.

Like Mia, Addison also states that childhood and adolescence are experienced and understood differently across generations:

I think everybody always thinks that the people who are younger than them are not as good as them. I think, and especially the older you get the more that happens because the world is changing so rapidly. It's just hard to keep up with what's happening.

Addison's excerpt is indicative of the power dynamics at work across generations ("people who are younger than them are not as good as them"). Following childhood

⁴⁹Mia may have answered this question in this way because I am close to her age. I speculate that she may have answered this question differently if I were, say, closer to 50.

studies scholar Bob Franklin (2002), I suggest that age and childhood continue “to express more about power relationships than chronology, although the two are intimately intertwined” (p. 19). Addison seeks to critique the pervasive notion that moving through chronological life stages means accumulating metaphorical or actual power *over* others. With these two examples in mind, I ask: How do my participants use their childhood memories as a discursive strategy when describing child and youth subjectivities?

‘Total black sheep of the family’

On one level, my participants use memories of their own childhoods as a way to exceptionalize themselves as having been socially conscious or socially liberal young people – something they claim is unlike children today. My participants claim that they had challenged and continue to challenge their families’ generally conservative social values, even from a very young age. For instance, Mia claims that she was always the “black sheep” of her family because she never agreed with the rest of her conservative family or community:

M: Everyone in the [small conservative] town knows everyone. I didn’t love [the town]... It’s a very conservative community, people are really nosey, but I did love the teachers that I had in school... My family is pretty small ... and very traditional, conservative which I don’t fit into at all (*laughs*)

I: I feel that (*laughs*)

M: Like *total* black sheep of the family... So I don’t know like it just didn’t stick with me. So I don’t agree at all with my family about that stuff and I never did and I still don’t. I’ve always just been ... too soft (*laughs*). My heart’s too big. I’m like way too empathetic and compassionate for other people.

Mia claims that she had never supported the conservative views shared by many members of her family and her community of origin.⁵⁰ Mia instead exceptionalizes herself as the ‘black sheep’ – a discursive strategy of impersonalization – whose open opposition to this conservative milieu began when she was a child.

In another example, Doug mentions that, from quite a young age, he “leaned-left” (on the political spectrum). This social value, he stated, is different from his father’s beliefs:

Yeah, I don’t know what it is because normally when you get older ... you become more conservative ... but my dad’s actually become more liberal as he’s gotten older. But he said something weird to me like a while ago ... he said that the money will figure itself out ...but you should vote your social conscience which is like completely contrary to how he had been earlier in life, and like that’s how I was earlier in life [socially liberal].

In this excerpt, Doug suggests that when people get older, they tend to become more conservative. While speaking about his father’s views, Doug states that he was socially conscious when he was a young person (“that’s how I was earlier in life”). Doug, I suggest, brings his father into the discussion to articulate his own values and to exceptionalize himself as having been a socially liberal young person in the past, something that his father was only just catching up to at the time of the interview.

It is important to note that Doug’s excerpts seem to position notions of conservatism as another normative age-marker of ‘complete’ adulthood, an observation that is consistent with “Inspiring Education.” He appears to associate ‘young ideas’ with ‘liberal ideas’ – with clarification from me, of course. He states:

D: Like my dad is still conservative in some things obviously but he tries to be pretty liberal, maybe it’s because he’s teaching at [a] school [University] still? ...

⁵⁰ In this excerpt, I aligned myself with her as well, clearly articulating my own political views by agreeing with Mia.

And so it's maybe that he's like actively being a teacher at the university so he's still exposed to young ideas

I: Liberal ideas?

D: Yeah, liberal ideas; that people believe are inside universities maybe liberal arts universities, I don't know? (*laughs*)

Doug also recalls how a girl from his past aligned herself with her parents' opinions:

She was all like: (*slight falsetto*) "I'm a republican because my parents are republicans" and I'm like: "why can't you think for yourself?" It was very weird to have a discussion with someone where they identify with the political party cuz that's what their parents identified with. Like I never would've done that myself like talking to my parents, like I'm my own person.

By comparing himself to a girl he knew – who "[couldn't] think for [her]self" – Doug exceptionalizes himself as a young person with unique opinions ("I'm my own person").

At the same time, however, he believes that other young people were – unlike him – simply mirrors of their parents' beliefs.⁵¹

In another example, Addison explains how her political values have remained quite socially liberal overtime, even mentioning that she voted for the New Democratic Party (NDP) and the Liberal party in her grade six social studies mock elections:

A: Yeah, I remember because the NDP or the Liberals always had the most votes and the adults told us that was because we were kids and didn't understand the political parties (*laughs*) enough

I: Interesting, and what kind of adults would say those things?

A: Our teachers

I: (*Surprised*) Your teachers?!⁵²

A: Yeah, so like we would vote for the NDP because they were providing health care and helping people (*laughs*) and that's what we wanted to do! And then they

⁵¹ Doug, I suggest, also performs his masculinity by changing the tone of his voice.

⁵² My surprise here indicates some of my own assumptions about teachers and the teachers that I had growing up. For instance, I believe that teachers are individuals who should listen to their students and learn from them. This is reflected in my own childhood memories of the educators that I had.

would say like: *(lowers the tone of her voice)* “you don’t know what they actually do or what the consequences of that would be, so...”

Here Addison exceptionalizes her childhood and her classmates as having been socially conscious (“they were providing health care ... and that’s what we wanted to do”). By performing as one of her educators from the past, Addison identifies and challenges the prevailing assumption that children and youth are inexperienced and uninformed (“you don’t know what they actually do or what the consequences of that would be”). In this way, Addison uses memories of her own childhood to critique the continued exclusion of children from political decision-making today. This interpretation follows Mitchell and Weber (1999) who state that “[w]orking with what we remember and what we have forgotten speaks to the present as much as it does to the past” (p. 12). In other words, Addison’s memory of being devalued by her teachers in her grade six classroom has informed how she teaches and conceptualizes children and youth today.

Finally, Charles, states that today and in the past, students – including himself – often engage in what he calls “armchair activism”:

C: [I was] too busy and ... nothing ever really commanded my attention. Nothing – *(rephrasing)* no social incident pushed itself upon my life personally having enough to spur me into action.

I: Interesting. Anything so far?

C: Not really

I: What about – do you see your students engaging in certain things? Or do they talk to you about them? Any like social issues that they’re super interested in?

(long pause – appear to think about his answer)

I: No. You know how it was orange shirt day the other day? Yeah, I didn’t see any kids wearing any orange shirts at the high school. I was wearing an orange shirt. I mean that’s like the definition of armchair activism.

One of the reasons to keep the voting age the same, according to Charles, is because children and youth today are not politically informed enough. Moreover, young people's brains are not fully developed and so they cannot make knowledgeable decisions, a notion explored in Chapter Two. However, in this excerpt, Charles exceptionalizes himself as having the potential to be politically engaged as a young person, but no social issue then (or now, for that matter) "commanded [his] attention." Charles later describes children and youth today as essentially apolitical beings ("I didn't see any kids wearing any orange shirts at the high school"). Charles, however, is also cynical that this form of activism could ever really be beneficial ("armchair activism").

In each of these examples, my participants claimed that their childhood beliefs about topics like health care, education, social welfare programs, and politics challenged the opinions of their parents, teachers, peers, and communities. Addison, in particular, stated that her opinions, which deviated from the norm of her community, were devalued. Charles, however, claimed that he had the *potential* to challenge social problems, but no social issue was problematic enough to "spur [him] into action."

Although many of my participants described themselves as having been socially and politically exceptional children in the past (challenging, for example, the beliefs of their parents and teachers), they seldom described present-day children and youth in that way. Instead, many of my participants suggested that children today tend to imitate the values of their parents, peer groups, or guardians – that children today are impersonalized as sponges or parrots, for example. Mia, for instance, states that her students – and children in general – are "just parroting back what they hear" and that children do not and cannot know if something is true "because kids at that age [grade five/six] still think their parents are infallible." Mia also claims that "whatever [children's] parents say is what

goes and that's the foundation for all their beliefs." She identifies that their parents' beliefs are, primarily, socially conservative:

I had a couple kids that would immediately check out because their parents say so many things at home – like refugees was a very divisive topic in the classroom – their parents would say so many negative things at home and it's been beaten into them, you know, that they just are not interested in hearing alternative opinions which is bad and I don't really know if there's any specific cure for that.

Mia essentializes children and youth today as 'parrots' whose beliefs have been "beaten into them" at home.⁵³ Mia uses medical language to describe the difficulties involved in being an educator working to create socially 'ethical citizens' ("I don't really know if there's any specific cure for that"). Here, I am reminded of the *Code of Professional Conduct* (The Alberta Teachers' Association, 2018c) which uses expert and medical language to describe the teachers' role: "[t]he teacher is responsible for *diagnosing* educational needs, *prescribing* and *implementing* instructional programs and *evaluating* progress of pupils" (emphasis added, 2018c, p. 1). Mia, while exceptionalizing herself as a unique and socially conscious child in the past, essentializes and impersonalizes her students as parrots of their parents.

The other participants who claimed that they were socially conscious young people, did not award children and youth today with that same observation. Like Mia, Addison claims that children and youth rarely challenge adults. She states that her grade three class "would never challenge the teacher," let alone their parents. Charles states that children and youth "generally listen to their peer group the most so if their peer group has a tendency to act in a certain way it becomes very ingrained." Finally, Delaney declares that children and youth tend to mirror the opinions of their friends or parents: "I listen to

⁵³ This is, perhaps, a poor choice of words.

my parents because that's just what I'm around, right? Or my friends because I wanna be their friend.” Unlike the other participants, Delaney uses the first person to explain characteristics of children and youth today, a strategy that provides experiential knowledge to her assumptions of childhood. Discursive strategies of impersonalization (by Mia) and exceptionalism (from all of my participants) combine to create distance between my participants' own experience of being a child and subjectivities of childhood and youth today. My participants also distance themselves from their parents or socially conservative communities, a point that I will describe further later on in this chapter.

At certain stages of their interviews, some of my participants – Doug, Mia, Charles, and Addison, in particular – described themselves as having been capable and competent children in the past, in direct opposition to the way they spoke about the inherent qualities of children and youth today. When they spoke about their own experiences of childhood, these participants saw themselves as having been exceptionally critical and socially conscious young citizens. Simultaneously, they conceptualize children and youth today to be soaking up or parroting back the opinions of their friends and parents – but not, significantly, the views expressed by their teachers. Again, impersonalization is a key discursive strategy to conceptualize children, youth, and themselves. In these cases, my participants characterize their own childhoods as exceptional ‘black sheep’ who are ‘socially conscious,’ while they define children today as ‘sponges’ or ‘parrots’. My participants also used a discursive strategy of exceptionalism and identification to explain their own past subjectivities as children and youth and how they are similar to or different from children and youth today. These theoretical observations build on Chapter Two, as well as the entirety of my thesis, by

demonstrating that the discourses used in text and talk to describe life stages are socially constructed and are complex.

‘You don’t know yourself or what your values are’

Some of my participants also project their own memories of childhood onto children today. Delaney, for instance, states that children are excluded from making state and family decisions because children and youth are rarely affected by the outcomes of either. She claimed:

You don’t know yourself or what your own beliefs and values are. Like in grade three I think having time to play was my utmost priority, like I could not care about anything beyond [that] cuz I just don’t know and it [didn’t] affect me. If anything, those were the problems that my parents handled for me.

Rather than attributing agency to her own experiences of childhood – as the other participants had done – Delaney (re)produces the notion that young people, including her childhood self, have little interest in being consulted on the workings of their families or the state. Instead, she explains that she had the privilege of her parents handling problems for her and therefore had no reason to make decisions that impacted herself or others. By using memories of her own childhood to describe children and youth today – a discursive strategy of identification – Delaney further normalizes the exclusion of children and youth from participation in political and social spaces typically reserved for adults.

Rather than critiquing the factors that continue to exclude child and youth voices from civic, provincial, and national elections, Delaney seems to uncritically project these assumptions onto children and youth today (“I could not care about anything beyond [that]”). This is relatively unsurprising because, according to Neil Sutherland, “[t]hroughout history, an unchanging characteristic of being a child is a sense of

powerlessness” (p. 260).⁵⁴ However, I suggest that these seemingly normal or natural experiences of child and youth exclusion need to be questioned so that children and youth can be recognized as individuals with valid needs and ideas that are both different from and similar to those of adults. As Philip Cook (2013) has written, excluding children from state and familial decisions is further normalized because “age is a non-permanent feature of a person’s identity... [and] discrimination on the basis of age will end eventually, unlike discrimination on the basis of gender or race” (p. 443).⁵⁵ If individuals challenge this mind-set in education and in their everyday lives, normative life stages may begin to be disrupted – at least partially. Delaney’s memories of the past contribute to how she conceptualizes children and youth today, (re)producing her own experiences of inability onto her students today (Alanen, 2001).

It is important to note that, unlike the other participants, Delaney had experienced childhood as a recent immigrant to Canada and as a non-white person. These experiences, I suggest, further contribute to an imbalance of power between child and adult subjectivities. She states:

[Growing up] my parents could not tell you who our Mayor was in Lethbridge, you know what I mean? And part of that ha[d] to do with the language barrier, we’re not gonna understand the candidates and what their values are... And that also, I think, is because we were like significantly disconnected from our community.

⁵⁴ Power relations are also reflected in the normative generational order in North America. According to childhood studies scholar Leena Alanen (2009), the generational order is “a system of social ordering that specifically pertains to children as a social category, and circumscribes for them particular social locations from which they act and thereby participate in ongoing social life” (p. 161). The generational order is created and sustained through discourses of normal transitions of life stages in North America. In this case, Delaney suggests that powerlessness is a normal experience of childhood across her and her students’ generation.

⁵⁵ Until you get much older, of course, and begin to experience ageism on the other end.

In this excerpt, Delaney recalls how her family had been detached from local politics due to language barriers and feelings of disconnection from the broader community.

Delaney's experience as an immigrant impacted her childhood and made it different from those of my other participants. Her immigrant life story also appears to have impacted how she thinks about local politics and in the past and – based on the excerpt above – how she recognizes child and youth behaviour.

My participants' own memories of being young people proved to be another discursive strategy in order to describe subjectivities of children and youth today. While exceptionalizing themselves as socially conscious black sheep, my participants also essentialized and impersonalized current children and youth as parrots or sponges. Delaney, however, further normalized all young people's exclusion from public and private decision-making by providing an example of how she was as a child. Discourses which characterize life stages do not only reflect or challenge macro-contexts and institutions, like those discussed in Chapter Two, they are also found in my participants' accounts of their own childhoods, something I had not anticipated when I was initially creating this study. In other words, the findings about my participants' memories and how they speak to child and youth subjectivities were “generated from, and grounded in, the data” (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003, p. 289). This demonstrates that the image of the ‘child/youth’ “is considerably more complex and unpredictable than assumed” (Chang-Kredl and Wilkie, 2016, p. 318).

Constructing a Linear Narrative from Socially Conscious Child to Socially Conscious Adult

According to Canadian educational scholars Claudia Mitchell and Sandra Weber (1999), “[t]he term ‘ghosts’ seems to be particularly appropriate in our work as teachers/former students – there are always ghosts of our school pasts lurking in our present situations” (p. 115). Ghosts of being ‘the black sheep’ or ‘socially conscious’ as children and youth in the past, I suggest, are lurking in how some of my participants conceptualize their own performances as adults and educators today (Balli, 2014). This is extensively explored by Chang-Kredl and Wilkie (2016):

What the majority of narratives showed was a drive to present a continuous and coherent self. In these cases, the concept of childhood was “projected backwards” as the founding moment for a subsequent adulthood (Bignell, 2005) and the qualities of childhood narrated were presented as enduring and foundational to the participant’s adulthood (p. 315).

My participants projected backwards in a similar way to explain child and youth subjectivities today by using their memories from the past. This notion was discussed above. I also argue that their memories of being uniquely socially conscious young people are projected forwards onto their current experiences of adulthood. This in turn, creates a (relatively) coherent narrative from ‘black sheep’ or liberal children to liberal adults who are capable of creating ethical citizens and engaged thinkers, a push from educational policy. In what follows, I connect my participants’ memories to their current statuses as practicing or student-teachers, analyzing how the image of the child (or their childhood) informs them about their roles as educators today.

Being ‘socially conscious’ – which I identify broadly as respecting human rights while celebrating multiculturalism and diversity – is mandated by many policies in an Alberta educational context, including the ATA *Code of Professional Conduct* (2018c). It states:

The teacher teaches in a manner that respects the dignity and rights of all persons without prejudice as to race, religious beliefs, colour, gender, sexual orientation,

gender identity, physical characteristics, disability, marital status, family status, age, ancestry, place of origin, place of residence, socioeconomic background or linguistic background (p. 38).

Similarly, the *Teaching Quality Standard* (1997/2013) states that Alberta “teachers must acknowledge the importance of respecting students’ human dignity” (p. 3). Valuing and respecting diversity – to a point – is also enforced in the Alberta *School Act* (2018) as follows:

All education programs offered and instructional materials used in schools must reflect the diverse nature and heritage of society in Alberta, promote understanding and respect for others and honour and respect the common values and beliefs of Albertans (p. 16).⁵⁶

The *School Act* further explains:

For greater certainty, education programs and instructional materials referred to in subsection (1) must not promote or foster doctrines of racial or ethnic superiority or persecution, religious intolerance or persecution, social change through violent action or disobedience of laws (p. 16-17).

Unlike the others, the last excerpt specifically acknowledges that there is a limit to whose views and opinions will be tolerated in a classroom (“must not promote or foster doctrines of racial or ethnic superiority”). In other words, a specifically socially liberal or socially conscious view is privileged. These policies appear to influence how educators think or speak about what children and youth are, as well as their ideas about what it means to be a normative adult/educator. In other words, “the concept of childhood [is] ‘projected backwards’” (Chang-Kredl & Wilkie, 2016, p. 315) and forwards.

It is important to note that the second excerpt of the *School Act* states that education in Alberta does not condone social change that stems from disobeying laws or violence in order to challenge issues like ethnic superiority or persecution. This language

⁵⁶ What are the common “values and beliefs of Albertans?” I implore my readers to take this up in another research project.

supports a neoliberal version of social change in which diversity represents a larger workforce and more consumers. This is similar to what is depicted in “Inspiring Education”: the engaged thinker, ethical citizen, and an entrepreneurial spirit.

My participants recognize that – as adults, educators, and representatives of the U of L, the ATA, and Alberta Education (University of Lethbridge, 2018e) – they are expected to “lean left” on the political spectrum just as many of them did as children and youth. This ‘lean’ however cannot go so far as to ignite a thirst for social change and disobedience of the state in their lessons which is identified in the Alberta *School Act*. However, in “Inspiring Education”, it would appear that although they are expected to be ethical and engaged citizens – notions that seem to connect with socialism – they are also supposed to have entrepreneurial spirits which assumes more “right” leaning individuals. Charles mentions that “if teachers are gonna lean one way, they have to lean left because if you lean right you’re gonna get in trouble from somebody [the principal or the U of L].” Charles does not specifically articulate his own social values (which may be because I do not specifically ask for them). Instead, he speaks about what is expected of him as an educator (they *have* to lean left – not that they necessarily *want* to) – a performance, in other words.

Like Charles, Jackie believes that social studies teachers, in particular, are more likely to “lean left:”

[Because] we obviously have biases as social studies teachers. And we’re generally a little more left on a political spectrum just because of who we are and what we do and everything...

To Jackie, it seems that being socially liberal is not an expected performance, but a quality that social studies teachers in particular internalize (“who we *are* and what we *do*”). In contrast to Charles, Jackie believes that being socially liberal is not only an

expectation, but an attribute that is already ingrained in individuals who choose to become educators – even as children and youth.

Finally, Mia states that:

I'm a pretty die hard like left leaning kind of person, you know, I voted NDP, I voted for the Liberals in the federal election so far two for two (*laughs*). But I think as a teacher I'm naturally inclined to support those kinds of parties because they advocate for education and social programs and things that I just feel are necessary.

These examples demonstrate that some of my participants are aware of and (at least) accept the performance of a socially conscious or liberal educator informed by the educational policies described above. Further, these views have persisted (for some of my participants) since childhood. This, I suggest, reflects a projection forward and backward (Chang-Kredl and Wilkie, 2016) to conceptualize themselves as children and youth, and now as adult educators.

Before I conclude this chapter, I would like to briefly discuss how policy and resources that inform educator behaviour compete with one another depending on who makes them, when they were made, and who is the anticipated audience. In other words, how the policies speak about children, youth, and adults are contradictory depending on the jobs that they do. For instance, in Chapter Two I discussed a portion of the *Problems in Education Series* which reminds teachers about their professional responsibilities as well as their rights as workers. This document essentializes children and youth as liars since the Alberta Teachers' Association works to protect and trust educators. At the same time, "Inspiring Education" essentializes children as in development or future ethical citizens, engaged thinkers, with entrepreneurial spirits – characteristics that are expected to be internalized by teachers and other adults today.

My participants have read or are aware of these policies which, I suggest, influence how they perceive their roles as educators. However, these texts compete with one another in how they describe child, youth, and adult subjectivities. While “policy represents the authoritative allocations of values and goals” (Woodside-Jiron, 2004, p. 174) – like those defining what is or is not a child or adults – they are (re)produced, distilled, and/or sometimes challenged in my participants’ lived-experiences teaching and being young people. My participants, then, make sense of the competing ideas expressed in policy by enacting and/or ignoring them in the contexts of their classrooms.

Conclusion

This chapter explored how my participants’ memories informed how they conceptualize child and youth subjectivities today. These memories – paired with policy which assumes specific beliefs and attitudes of Albertan teachers – appear to inform my participants about their memories of socially conscious childhood(s) and “left leaning” adult educators today. While conceptualizing children and youth today, they sought to create a (relatively) coherent narratives of themselves as consistently socially conscious children in the past and now adults, while essentializing children today as ‘sponges’ and ‘parrots’, a discursive strategy of impersonalization. However, this chapter also demonstrated the ways in which policies are taken up in competing ways. In the next chapter, I connect this push to be socially conscious or ‘ethical’ citizens – a seemingly normative trait of adulthood – to my participants’ narratives of actually discussing diversity and discrimination in their classrooms.

Chapter Four – (Mis)Representations of Adulthood

It would appear that, in our society, the learning behaviors of children—playfulness, make-believe, exuberance—are deemed so inappropriate for adults that they approach the vestigial. The sublimation of these characteristics is surely related to the myth of adulthood unencumbered by deep change, of the sort we begin in childhood but then presume to leave behind. Unprepared for the continuum of growing pains, we create yet more dichotomies...

- Mancuso, 2001, p. 29

Introduction

While using their childhood memories to describe what children and youth supposedly are, my participants spoke about ‘growing pains’. In their interviews, many of them claim that they were not taken seriously by teacher-educators in the Faculty of Education and their students’ parents. There are two factors of what I define as ‘anticipated adulthood’ and educator performances that my participants discuss. First, my participants claim that they expected respect and autonomy when they transitioned from students and young people to educators and adults. However, many of my participants also imply that they had not always been able to achieve this expectation because of where they were teaching (rural and/or socially conservative school communities around southern Alberta). In the first half of this Chapter, then, I argue that this disconnect between anticipation and lived experience impacts how my participants perceive their own subjectivities as adults and educators. In other words, in the context of teaching in southern Alberta schools, their anticipations of authority and autonomy are not always attainable.

Second, my participants seem optimistic that they would be addressed as adults and educators while teaching in southern Alberta. However, many of them – the women in particular – complain that they are often (mis)represented (or mistaken) as students rather than teachers. In other words, my participants seem to fail at their performances of a normative adulthood. These complaints, I suggest, demonstrate that young adults – and

in this case, educators – are sometimes subject to the discourses that define and manage childhood and adolescence described in Chapters Two and Three. Based on their accounts, I analyze how other adults – including teacher-educators and students’ parents – use discursive strategies of infantilization to describe my participants. This is important to acknowledge because individuals do not only (re)produce and challenge discourses, but they are also subject to them.

Expected and Experienced Adulthood

The Faculty of Education, like many faculties at the University of Lethbridge, boasts about the success of their undergraduate students. The website states: “[e]xcellent teachers make a difference. You can change lives. You can make a better future” (University of Lethbridge, 2019). According to my interview participants, however, their expectations of ‘making a better future’ by creating ethical and engaged citizens – as articulated in policy and curriculum – have not been as attainable as they had initially believed. Although many of my participants hope to model empathy and respect in the classroom – by engaging their students in discussions about race and gender discrimination, for example – they state that the political and social influences of the school would often lead them to censor themselves during classroom conversations. My participants mention that these conversations would often be brought up during language arts assignments or social studies current affairs.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ Current affairs are a specific social studies curricular outcome for students from Grades K-12 to add “relevance, interest and immediacy to social studies issues. Investigating current affairs from multiple perspectives motivates students to engage in meaningful dialogue on relevant historical and contemporary issues, helping them to make informed and reasoned decisions on local, provincial, national and global issues” (Government of Alberta, 2005, p. 6).

Jennifer, for instance, states that in the small, rural community where she had done one of her practicum placements, the teacher mentors she worked with warned her about using certain texts that could be considered what she defines as “racy” – content that dealt with sex in particular:

It was definitely brought to my attention when I was looking at resources to use in English that I could be free to use whatever I thought my students could comprehend as long as it would meet the learning objectives. But, that being said, I was definitely warned by a couple teachers that we were in a conservative area and had to choose according to that and to keep those biases in mind, because it would be easier not to open that can of worms than to fight that battle.

The community in which Jennifer was working is greatly influenced by Dutch Reform and Mormon traditions, both of which focus heavily on abstinence-only education and modesty. Although (theoretically) free to use whatever text might achieve the learning objectives outlined by Alberta Education, Jennifer recognizes that there are unwritten rules about engaging in specific discussions (“keep those biases in mind”). After asking “what kind of text – was it a book or a video?”, Jennifer replies:

I can’t even remember to be honest (*laughs*). It ... might’ve even just been a general question: “like what can I use?” and that was the blanket response that I got.... Yeah, I don’t think I was even thinking of picking anything racy or, you know, with difficult content either, it was more just like: “pick what you want, but FYI, beware this can of worms.”

So, actually, there was one book that had like an almost sex scene in it and I had to send out an email before hand and it was only if the student chose to read that book because it was an independent novel study, they didn’t *have* to read it. Like those who signed up to read it had to get that email sent out beforehand.

I: Interesting

J: So... A little extra careful to cover your bases. I think teachers in general, from what I’ve seen anyways, do a good job of trying to get their students thinking critically about it or stretching perspectives and trying to create empathetic human beings (*laughs*).

The “can of worms” she mentions refers to complaints made by students’ parents about controversial topics discussed in class. Immigration, gender (in)equality, and, in this case,

sexual education can be difficult to discuss in southern Alberta classrooms because teachers often fear that students will share what they learned in class with their parents. Jennifer's fear of her students suggests a reversal of the normative power relations between student and teacher, further complicating discourses that characterize life stages. While students are usually conceptualized as lacking in agency or being deficient, it appears that sometimes students are conceptualized as a form of surveillance of educators. To avoid parents finding out information through their students, Jennifer specifies that she sends out emails regarding "racy" content to avoid any issues from the "can of worms."⁵⁸

Jennifer, it seems, anticipates more freedom as an adult and educator to use texts that would create ethical, engaged or empathetic citizens ("I could be free to use whatever I thought my students could comprehend"). However, her words indicate that she has found it difficult to meet the expectations of normalized adulthood and teacher performance outlined in Alberta Education policies and procedures, documents discussed in Chapters Two and Three.⁵⁹ Jennifer seems to reference "Inspiring Education" – or perhaps other educational policy – when she claims that teachers "do a good job of ... trying to create empathetic human beings." It seems, then, that her expectations of being an autonomous adult and educator – as articulated by provincial education policy – have not been met.

'People are so quick to jump down your throat'

⁵⁸ Notifying parents about any discussions of religion or sexual content is also mandated by the Alberta *School Act* in Section 50.1(1) (Government of Alberta, 2018, p. 54).

⁵⁹ Although teachers are individually responsible for choosing many of the texts to teach in their classrooms, many of which contribute to creating 'ethical' citizens, it is not fully up to them. The idea of an individual and thus neoliberal choice or freedom, in other words, is limited based on the social location in which they are teaching.

Mia also speaks about the challenges involved in discussing gender, racial, and class diversity in her grade seven classroom in a small rural community:

You have to be sensitive of the fact that what kids are being taught at home might be different. And, as a teacher, you have to be *so* careful ... that you don't offend anybody, because all it takes is one kid to go home and say: "This is what we talked about today at school" and "my teacher said this." And then you have parents that are angry, and then the principal is phoned or emailed or someone calls the ATA – like that's never happened to me and I've never had a complaint but I have to be so *so* careful...

But people are so quick to like jump down your throat and say like: (*angry voice*) "I don't want you teaching my kid that. That's not what we believe at home! And you're teaching them the wrong thing!"

And social studies it's tricky... because not everybody agrees with the same thing, and so when we talk about current events, when we talk about ... refugees, I have to be so careful which sometimes can limit the discussion that you have as a class, it can limit what you are trying to say ... or the activities that you do because you don't want somebody to be offended.

Mia essentializes and impersonalizes children and youth as 'parrots' of their parents ("what the kids are being taught at home"). In doing so, she also distances herself from her students and their parents.

I interpret Mia's statement as evidence of a disconnect between the expectation of performing adulthood and her lived experiences. It seems that Mia expected to perform as the reasonable and socially conscious adult educator that is depicted in educational policy and in her childhood memories. However, anxieties about surveillance and discipline from children, parents, and the ATA – an institution that would actually protect her if parents made a formal complaint – led her to censor the conversations that she held in her classrooms. In this example, Mia's expectations of educating young people about social issues as an adult and educator had to be reevaluated. In other words, Mia's expectations of creating 'ethical citizens' and her own freedoms as an adult and educator, it seems, are not easily accessible.

Mia's cautiousness is indicative of the economic precarity and the cruel optimism (Berlant, 2011) that many Canadian young adults face when moving through the liminal stages of youth towards adulthood. It seems then that her methods of self-regulation are a way to avoid any unwanted attention that could threaten her economic future, and thus her successful transitions to 'complete' adulthood. Teacher educators Moore and Clarke (2016) build on Berlant's idea of cruel optimism arguing that teachers are especially subject to ideas or myths of the 'good life' because they are seeking it for themselves while also actively working to put their students on a path towards "upward mobility, job security, more equal social and economic societies, and lasting, dependable relationships" (p. 669). In Mia's case, she feels that she must "limit the discussion" in her classroom to secure her own career. However, by limiting what is discussed in the classroom, Mia limits the possibility for her students to transition from seemingly unethical children to complete, ethical adults, a transformation expected by educational policies or resources like "Inspiring Education."

Delaney states that she also censored herself in the conservative school where she worked during her PSII placement, a decision she made because of the age of her students (grade five) and the conservative environment in which she was teaching:

There [were] a lot of things that I stopped myself from talking about because I was in a conservative environment ... I know what I say didn't really align with [what] the kids' parents were saying – so that's fine. But I also [didn't] wanna put any student in like a dilemma where they're trying to decide whose adult is saying the right things. That's for them to decide when they're older, not when they're in grade five.

Delaney continues, specifying that the conservative views of her students' parents concerned her:

There were also obviously strong Trump supporters and ... I wasn't gonna debate politics with them so I just kinda stepped back, and kinda took in what they said and was like: "okay." And just kinda moved on. I couldn't really converse with

[them] as much as I would've liked to. Many good things could've come out from that discussion, but [just] kinda hearing the background of [their] parents' views, it's not a place for me to put my two cents especially as a student-teacher that was only gonna be there for 4 months.

In this excerpt, assumptions about the age of the students (eleven to twelve-year-old students in grade five) had a significant influence on whether Delaney discussed topics she deems 'controversial'. Delaney specifies that she does not want her grade five students to have an internal dilemma about deciding "whose adult" (parent or teacher) is correct, a sentiment that essentializes children as 'parrots' or 'sponges' of the adults around them. Alternatively, however, this excerpt can also be read as a way that *challenges* essentializing views of children. By stating that her students are aware that they must navigate adults and institutions in order to appease differing views, she admits that her students must be crafty and cunning. In other words, Delaney's students are more sophisticated thinkers than she has previously given them credit for.

Delaney's decision to step back from the discussion and move on to the outlined curriculum was shaped both by her age-based beliefs about her students' capacities and by her status as a temporary student-teacher ("as a student-teacher that was only gonna be there for 4 months"). Delaney, in this case, recognizes that she had less influence than if she was a permanent practicing-teacher. Her lack of motivation to engage in difficult conversations may have also been because she had only a short amount of time in which to build rapport with her students and their parents.

Following the question: "What do you think the roles of teachers are? Like say you had a full-time job, what do you think their role is in teaching controversial topics; for example, the Trump election and Trump's America?", Delaney replies:

D: I think [the teachers'] main goal is to present it and to say that [social issues] exist and not hide away from that it exists no matter how sensitive or touchy [they] can be. And if, depending on the classroom, or the students you have – if

they want to hear your opinion I think teachers have the right or the option to share it, but I don't think it's their job to say this is *the* view.

(back-pedaling slightly)

D: No but – even though there are some things that are just the *right* thing like equality.... Even with what happened yesterday with the whole trans-gender individuals can't play a role in the troops, there's obviously a right and a wrong there but I don't think it's our job to say that this *is* right and this *is* wrong. That's for them to figure it out.

It seems that Delaney's idea of what teachers *should* be able to discuss does not directly align with what she *can* speak about as an educator, particularly as a student-teacher.

Delaney's back and forth about whether teachers can or should outline their own social opinions – “even though there are some things that are just the *right* thing” – demonstrates the challenges of discussing certain topics in conservative classrooms. This also demonstrates that adults, including educators, do not have complete autonomy in or outside of classrooms.

Like Mia and Jennifer, Delaney's transcript also demonstrates how introducing potentially controversial subjects is not always an option for young teachers – or at least, they do not think it is an option. In Delaney's quotes, it seems that the age of her students, her status as a student-teacher, and her concern about possible parental complaints contribute to her silence about current events, including transphobia.⁶⁰ Like many of my other interview participants, Delaney appears to have experienced less autonomy as an adult and educator than she had expected, and made compromises in the classroom due to fears that are similar to those described above. The cautiousness of my participants suggests that securing full time work is difficult in a neoliberal climate.

⁶⁰ This avoidance can also be connected to other difficult conversations such as settler colonialism and the legacy of residential schools – topics that are now mandated to be discussed in social studies curriculum across the province (Alberta Education, 2018).

‘People just need to stop being such big babies’

Unlike my other participants, Charles claims to be unfazed by the potential backlash from his young students and their parents. This is indicative of both his performance of masculinity and his perceived status as an adult. Charles states that he often says what he wants about social issues in the classroom, including gender (in)equality and racial discrimination:

C: I think that people just need to stop being such big babies.

I: Do you?

C: Life is tough, talking about things isn’t going to hurt you, stop with the delicate sensibilities.

Here, Charles uses the term ‘big babies’ – exceptionalizing himself as a non-baby – to describe teachers who are afraid of parental complaints. According to Hellman, et al. (2014), the categorization of individuals as ‘babies’ works to discipline and regulate gendered behaviour amongst small children. I suggest that his use of ‘babies’ as a description for adults, also works to regulate the actions of his fellow educators. Charles’ language could also be seen as a discursive strategy of impersonalization since the implied developmental discourse assumes that babies are outside of full personhood and therefore so are these – according to Charles – less than exceptional educators. This language works to distance Charles from these educators to demonstrate his exceptional abilities to deal with topics that many educators might deem controversial.

Following this discussion, I asked how Charles speaks about difficult or perhaps controversial subjects in the classroom – specifically issues that relate to gender or ‘race’:

C: Have you ever heard of [the town commonly referred to as] Mormons and Meth-heads?

I: No, I haven’t heard of that.

C: Yeah, cuz property is really cheap. So, you get a whole bunch of drug addicts who are living out there because it has a low cost of living so you have this extreme divide of the schools. So then there's only one way to play it because the addicts don't care what you say. At all. Like the parents may not be the most morally upstanding individuals, they don't give a fuck. So that means that you have to play to the one side who does care very much.

The ones who “care very much” belong to what Charles terms the “Mormon Mommy Committee.” Although Charles had previously belittled teachers who avoid “delicate sensibilities”, he later contradicts himself when he claims that teachers – like himself – must “play to” the population that is most involved in the school community and their child’s learning. Like my other participants, then, Charles seems aware that his performance as an adult and educator is context specific. This indicates to me that Charles anticipated more freedom in the classroom as an adult and an educator to discuss topics that he thinks will engage the youth about (in)equalities. However, his discussion of the “Mormon Mommy Committee” reveals that he, like other educators, must sometimes perform as a “big bab[y]”.⁶¹

Importantly, Charles creates a dichotomy of adulthood by categorizing some adults as “Mormons” and others as “meth-heads” – a discursive strategy of othering. Charles conceptualizes ideas of adulthood with “morally upstanding” individuals and parents who “care very much” – behavioural standards that, he argues, are not being met by the “meth-heads.” The dichotomy between “Mormons” and “meth-heads” labels some adults as reliable and civilized, and others as deviant and dependent. In other words, while some parents are seen as adults, those who are seemingly absent from their

⁶¹ For further clarification, I am not saying that teachers should be able to talk about whatever they want simply because they are adults and educators. I am posing an analysis of how child and adult – student and teacher – subjectivities are not natural, normal, or mutually exclusive. Instead, these social positions are sometimes closer to one another than many individuals expect. The aim of my thesis, remember, is to complicate life stages and demonstrate the ways in which they are socially constructed.

children's education are childlike.

Although Charles does not explicitly mention 'race' in his discussion of "Mormons and meth-heads" – nor can I assume that 'race' is what he is speaking about, in particular – in the socio-political context of southern Alberta these are clearly racialized categories. Many communities in southern Alberta are divided based on socioeconomic status and 'race' due to their close proximity of Indigenous reserves. The discursive practices which surround addiction in southern Alberta – like other parts of Alberta and Canada – are overly attributed to poor people of colour. According to de Leeuw, Greenwood, and Cameron (2010) discourses that commonly speak about or intervene on "addiction deviance" in Canada (p. 283) are not only classed and racialized, but they also overlap with intersections of age. These discourses reference "the childlike nature of Indians (see de Leeuw [,] 2009) and to their mental inferiority, violence, unpredictability, and untrustworthiness" (p. 287). In other words, Indigenous adults who suffer from addiction are recognized as more childlike than their white, settler counterparts.

This dichotomy between seemingly civilized adults on the one hand and deficient childlike adults on the other, is indicative of the colonial logics at work when conceptualizing life stages. Under settler colonialism, notions of morality and civility (re)produce a specifically white settler understanding of adulthood. According to Toby Rollo (2018) "it is a moral requirement that those in a superior and authoritative position oversee the transition of an inferior and subordinate state of being to a mature being" (p. 63). In this case, those who are defined as 'inferior' are children or "meth heads" – whether they are Indigenous or not – both of which are not "play[ed] to" but are instead othered in Charles' narrative. Those whose opinions *are* taken seriously and are therefore

recognized as adults – albeit begrudgingly – refer to the Mormons in the community, a primarily white group of individuals. Although making a clear distinction of the moral superiority that the Mormon group seemingly represents, Charles exceptionalizes himself again and seems to distance himself from both communities. Charles, therefore, appears to perform the role of an objective outsider looking in.

North American educational scholars have sufficiently theorized why young teachers tend to erase or silence ‘controversial’ conversations such as those discussed by my participants. One reason to avoid speaking about difficult subjects is explored by Canadian educational scholars Johnston and Bainbridge (2013). They argue that some teachers shy away from difficult texts – including stories about residential schools and settler colonialism in Canada – because of their status as new teachers. What is not discussed by my participants, but is suggested by Johnston and Banbridge, is that many educators believe that any curriculum that describes people or histories that are non-White or non-heteronormative are deemed ‘controversial’ in the classroom and are therefore erased. New teachers – and I expect some practicing-teachers, as well – they argue, “skirt the idea of racism and talk about culture” (p. 89). Similarly, Keonghee Tao Han (2013), an American teacher-educator, states that new school teachers working in rural areas consistently articulate the importance of diversity and social justice education, but in their classrooms they “appear to exhibit passive racism” (p. 146). Charles, in particular, exhibits “passive racism” – some could argue active, as well – through erasure and impersonalization of his students and their families.

Other than Charles identifying socioeconomic status and addiction in the community that he was teaching in – which I suggest is coded language for racial categories – my participants did not discuss how experiences of racial and gender

inequality impact their students. Many of my participants are critical of, but actively reinforce, inequities when conversations about (neoliberal) diversity are silenced in the classroom. This impacts how my participants recognize their roles as adults and ‘socially conscious’ educators. It also complicates the ways in which these young teachers choose to follow the push from “Inspiring Education” to mould unethical children into ethical, engaged, and entrepreneurial adult citizens.

Evidently, my participants are concerned about how lessons about refugees, Donald Trump’s presidency, sex education, and racial/gender inequality more broadly will be conceptualized by students’ parents. According to Moore and Clarke

some teachers may feel caught between, on the one hand, egalitarian hopes of making a difference to the lives of each and every child they teach, and, on the other hand, the necessity of preparing those same children for the precarious realities of contemporary capitalism (p. 675).

To my participants, making a difference means challenging their students’ social conservative ideas that seem to have originated from their parents. At the same time, my participants are concerned about searching for and then accessing full time work. In other words, my participants are finding it difficult to balance their own fears about securing full time work and creating ethical citizens who are critical of inequities, a trait depicted in “Inspiring Education.” In this way, I argue that young teachers’ own struggles to be seen as adults by acquiring a full time teaching position impacts how they teach lessons that are seen to be important in educational policy and in the classroom. My participant transcripts indicate that performing the ethical and socially liberal adult educator – by creating the future, ethical adult identified in Chapters Two and Three – is difficult to attain. Their intentions also make clear that factors such as the age of the students (whether or not they should be sheltered from this knowledge) as well as a general fear of parents, the ATA, and/or school administration contribute to teachers censoring

themselves. In turn, I argue that these factors entice these young teachers to reevaluate their seemingly natural roles as autonomous, rational, and authoritative adult and educators.⁶²

Addressed as an Adult? Intersections of Age and Gender

Normative characteristics of childhood and adolescence are not natural or biological but are sometimes used to describe adults as well (Valentine, 2003). This is particularly important since the category of youth continues to change. In this section, I use a gendered lens to analyze how discourses of childhood/adolescence tend to be unequally distributed to women (Appell, 2013; Britzman, 1991; Daniels, 1987). Like Critsa Deluzio (2007), I analyze how gendered discourses assume that women and girls are considered to be “both [quintessentially] and [perpetually] adolescent” (p. 112), making it more difficult for young women to access the privileges associated with adulthood. Following the arguments posed in the first half of this Chapter, I argue that my participants do not only (re)produce or challenge discourses of childhood/adolescence while speaking about their experiences as educators, but that they are also subject to them. In other words, the female participants seemed to fail at adulthood in ways that were not discussed by the men. In this section I contend that notions of completed growth – defined by the verbal and the textual sources as autonomy, rationality, and authority – are fictional and socially constructed (Mancuso, 2001, p. 22). In other words, “children

⁶² The fear of parents is not specific to my seven participants. If you Google search “teachers fear of parents”, you will get hundreds of blogs and magazine articles that depict strategies of how to avoid online or personal abuse from parents to teachers. One article states that female teachers are more likely to be abused than their male counterparts (Ratcliffe, 2017).

can ‘grow’ in terms of how others regard them” (p. 38) and adults can ‘shrink’ if they behave in a ‘childish’ manner.

‘You are best served by keeping your head down and going with the flow’

Although she is a legal adult, Addison explains that her and her classmates’ perspectives on the Canadian federal election in 2015 were belittled by one of her professors (outside of the Faculty of Education, she specifies):

A: Like with the latest federal election I had a professor who would constantly belittle our class because Justin Trudeau won and it was like our fault for being young and like not knowing who to vote for. And it was like ‘well, you’re horrible’ (*laughs*). It was like, I don’t even know what to say in response to him

I: (*Referencing her past teachers disagreeing with her class voting for the NDP*) Huh, so it’s like the ‘too young’ narrative continued for you?

A: Yeah. Even though we were, by that time, I was like twenty-something? Twenty, twenty-one? We were more than old enough to be legally voting and he was an old guy who was still like: ‘it’s your fault’ and ‘how come you didn’t know better?’

Addison experiences this interaction as a devaluing of her intellect and opinions in age-based terms. Significantly in this instance, the ‘too young’ narrative continues to be used against Addison well past the legal age of adulthood. Addison’s professor re-positioned discourses surrounding childhood and adolescence – incapability and being ill-informed, for instance – onto Addison and her classmates. Addison also seems surprised by her professor’s accusations (“Even though ... by that time, I was like twenty-something?” and “I don’t even know what to say in response to him”). Again, Addison’s expectations of being addressed as a legal adult were not always fulfilled, a theme described in the first half of this chapter. Instead, she remains subject to the disciplining power of developmental discourses of childhood and adolescence.

Like Addison, Charles complains that his expectations about how the Faculty of Education would treat his ideas and status as an adult and a new teacher were not met:

The worst thing about going through education [at the U of L], [was that] I was told multiple times from multiple professors and administrators that I should not have an opinion as a young teacher... Because you are best served by keeping your head down and going with the flow.

He continued,

C: And that one's like super frustrating

I: And do they specifically [say] 'young teachers'?

C: (*Annoyed*) Yep!

I: Yeah. So does that assume when you get older you can have an opinion?

C: I'm guessing? I'm also assuming that they think that you aren't allowed to speak until you've cut your teeth, basically, right? "Once you cut your teeth then you can say what you want, but until you've had experience in the real world don't you dare talk. But we're gonna present you with these ideals and we're teaching you based upon the ideals, but if you voice your concept upon our teachings, you shouldn't do that because you don't understand the real world so why are we actually teaching this idealized version if it doesn't apply here?" It's a big rigmarole essentially which doesn't make sense.

Based on his annoyed tone and his use of terms including 'rigmarole' and 'frustrating', it seems that Charles thought that his opinions about education would be celebrated by the Faculty of Education. However, Charles was surprised when he later recognized that he is "best served by keeping [his] head down and going with the flow." His excerpt, I suggest, parallels some of the discourses that define and manage childhood or adolescence subjectivities that I explored in Chapters One and Two – that children and youth are inexperienced and should be seen and not heard, for example.⁶³ To further the analysis, I ask: how are these disconnects between expected and experienced adulthood heightened due to intersections of identity such as gender?⁶⁴

⁶³ Doug also states that: "I'm 27 and sometimes I feel like people aren't listening."

⁶⁴ Of course, other intersections of identity including 'race' would also be worth considering in this question. However, these were not prominent themes in the data that I collected. I implore other researchers

‘They make comments because I’m young and because I’m a woman’

Although both the male participants suggest that they were not taken seriously as adults and educators because of their age, only my female participants specified that their appearance and gender also contribute to their lack of power and authority in the classroom. For instance, Mia states that she was often mistaken or (mis)represented as one of her grade nine students rather than as an educator by other adults, including older teachers. This (mis)representation, she states, is because she is young and she is a woman:

There [were] plenty of times that people were not from our school would come in – like the health nurse that came to give them their immunization shots for the grade nine’s ... and I’m standing near the front of the room. Like you should’ve been able to figure it out and she’s like (*high pitched voice*): “Oh! Is your teacher here?” And I’m like: “Yes, that’s me!” (*laughs*).

Like it happens all the time... I’ve had people just ... make comments because they don’t realize who I am or they make comments because I’m young and because I’m a woman.

In this excerpt, Mia claims that other adults commonly confused her for one of her students (“Like it happens all the time”). Although she assumes that her position in the front of the room would indicate her role as the authoritative adult educator, the nurse still addressed her as a student rather than a teacher (“I’m standing near the front of the room... you should’ve been able to figure it out”). By addressing Mia as a student, I argue that the nurse (re)produces essentializing traits of children and youth onto Mia – many of which have been described in previous chapters.

The politics of ‘address’ and gender are relevant to my participants’ experiences. In an interview with Sara Ahmed (2016), Judith Butler writes that “we are affected by the ways we are addressed, and those modes of address start early and against our will; they

to explore how young educators’ experiences of adulthood are further impacted by other intersections of identity.

are there, as it were, from the start” (p. 485). Butler is speaking about gender identity and the ways in which individuals are addressed as males or females based on gendered binaries and social norms that presume specific performances. She contends that individuals are gendered from an early age and that these modes of address cannot be controlled by the individual performing their gender. In other words, one cannot control if they are seemingly failing at performing masculine or feminine traits. Mia’s excerpt demonstrates that other intersections of identity – including age as well as gender – are also subject to modes of address. Mia’s frustration about individuals “making comments because [she] is young and because [she] is a woman,” is indicative of her inability to control how others see and address her as a normative and successful adult and an educator. Although a legal adult and practicing educator, Mia continues to be subject to discourses that define and manage life stages of childhood and adolescence, denying her the privileges and power that tend to be associated with adulthood. Butler states, however, that there are ways to challenge how others perceive individuals’ gender identity and, in this case, their age. Butler claims: “vulnerability is there in the concept of subjectivation, being acted on from the start by norms we never chose, but also, concretely, through ... contest[ing] the terms of that assignment” (p. 485). In other words, Mia can challenge the terms of her gender and age.

Jackie also discusses her appearance and the strategies she uses to avoid being (mis)represented or addressed as a student. She states that her height, in particular, makes her less visible as an authoritative adult. To avoid confusion, Jackie decides to wear heels to work:

Like all the grade nine boys are like: (*teasing tone*) “how tall are you Ms. Robertson?” cuz I would always wear heels, right? I’m like (*pretending to be sad*) I have to be an adult! And these kids are already taller than me! So [I’d have] conversations like: (*teasing back*) “how tall do you think I am?” (*laughs*).

In this example, Jackie claims that she has “to be an adult!” and not necessarily that she can choose to be addressed as one by her grade nine students – the boys, in particular. One of the many ways to control how other address her as an adult and as an educator, she states, is by wearing heels to appear taller and therefore more authoritative. By challenging how her age is addressed, however, Jackie further performs her femininity to be recognized as an adult woman. Her deliberate choice of heels, I suggest, is a mechanism to avoid being addressed as a student and therefore being subject to infantilizing discourses.⁶⁵

Jackie also speaks about the difficulties of achieving normative markers of adulthood when she states that, “I still don’t feel like I’m ‘adulting’ and I’m done my [University] degree!” In this case, Jackie specifies that being an adult is a performance when she uses ‘adulting’ as a verb rather than a noun. This, referring back to Halberstam (2011), indicates a failure of the anticipated performance of adulthood even after Jackie achieved a normative marker of adulthood: completing a University degree. In these examples, both Jackie and Mia do not only (re)produce and challenge discourses that essentialize childhood and/or youth subjectivities – some of which I described in Chapters Two and Three – but that they are also subject to them.

In a final example, Jennifer mentions that she consistently triple-checks her outfit before going to work as a substitute teacher to ensure that her clothes are modest, respectable, and professional:

⁶⁵ A popular study in *Psychology Today* analyzes how responsive men are to women in high heels compared to flats or sneakers. They conclude that wearing medium- to high-heels “can increase her social or professional response from men” (Nicholson, 2014, para. 11). This study does not question why heels are necessary for men to take women seriously, instead it provides strategies for women to work within a heterogendered society to achieve their professional and personal goals (based around men).

J: I think I can speak for myself and a lot of other female teachers when I say that there's sort of this fear around professionalism that if you don't live up to the standard that's how you get fired.

I: What would you define as 'the standard?'

J: Appearance, behaviour. Yeah, the professional appearance, of course: being very modest. I don't know, I always triple-guess myself before I walk out the door in the morning.

In an attempt to be recognized as an adult and educator, Jennifer chooses to adopt what she defines as "*the* professional appearance" – as if there is only one. In this case, Jennifer's ideas about normative professionalism connects with discourses of modesty and femininity to create what she defines as the 'complete' adult appearance and performance.

Following Jo-Ann Dillabough (1999), I suggest that a "'professional identity' is characterized in terms of the teacher's 'rational' capacity to 'behave competently' in the name of student achievement" (p. 375). In other words, discourses that characterize adulthood as a rational, authoritative, and professional life stage can connect to both aged and gendered discursive practices. This is clearly echoed by Jackie, Mia, and Jennifer who take up as well as challenge this push to be professional in gendered terms. According to Wiebke Tennhoff and colleagues (2015), "the connection between masculinity and professionalism is inherent to a broader understanding of professionalism as being male" (p. 348).

Teaching, particularly early childhood education, is culturally feminized because women are positioned as "self-sacrificing, kind, overworked...and holding an unlimited reservoir of patience" (Britzman, 1991, p. 5). Meanwhile, discourses that surround masculinity (re)position men as inherently professional, authoritative, and rational in comparison, tokenizing them as incapable of nurturing children, youth, and other adults.

However, when men perform these traits in a classroom setting – a space historically dominated by women – they are seen as exceptional and are addressed as more deserving of a raise or promotion (Wingfield and Myles, 2014). While women are conceptualized as *naturally* and thus *biologically* nurturing, their work is not considered extraordinary but predictable.⁶⁶

My interview participants’ discussions of their experiences reveal that, in twenty-first century southern Alberta, youth as a category – “which bridges the perceived states of dependent childhood and independent adulthood” (Valentine, 2003, p. 40) – is expanding to include more people who would have previously been considered adults, including myself and my participants. Therefore, I contend that while the stage of youth continues to grow, so too do the essentializing discourses associated with this life stage – particularly for women.⁶⁷ This is clearly described by American teacher-educator and researcher Martin Haberman (2012). He argues that young teachers (ages 20-25) – and more specifically, female educators – cannot effectively teach children or youth due to the presumed similarities between them and their students. In turn, Haberman essentializes young female educators as irrational, ill-informed, and rebellious children and youth. He asks:

Is it reasonable to assume that ... newly minted teachers transform themselves from impolite, disinterested, disruptive students into the official representatives of adult authority committed to enforcing the rules and regulations of the school systems where they have been hired as teachers (p. 930)?

⁶⁶ According to Wingfield and Myles (2014), “data show that men who were tokens often were able to retain the benefits of their gender and the advantages accrued to men even when they worked in culturally feminized jobs and occupied minority status within them” (p. 1208).

⁶⁷ I speculate that these observations would also intersect with people of colour and gender non-conforming individuals. However, due to the limited scope of my thesis, I open this up to further study.

Here Haberman essentializes all young teachers as “impolite, disinterested, [and] disruptive” (p. 930). He further specifies that this is an issue for female teachers, in particular. He states that “[i]f the late adolescent/young adult teacher still perceives herself in the role of a ‘cool student,’ she empathizes with students resisting school rules and adult authority” (p. 930). By using she/her pronouns, Haberman assumes that there is an inherent overlap between subjectivities of deficient young (female) teachers and rebellious youth. Haberman also naturalizes the notion that these rebellious, deficient, or youthful characteristics eventually dissolve, and a rational, complete, and authoritative adult can be achieved at the age of 26 (after the pre-frontal cortex has grown, of course).⁶⁸

Both Haberman and the adults in my participants’ narratives essentialize and then address young teachers as unruly and inexperienced children or youth. This is particularity relevant for the women who participated in my study. While my participants are essentialized as children and youth by other adults or students – deficient, not-quite adults – this also further devalues the subjectivities of actual young people.

Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated how becoming or being addressed as an adult educator is not always possible in this case study of southern Alberta. More specifically, I explored how my interviewees’ anticipated performances of autonomous and authoritative adulthood in the classroom were – in ways that were often gendered – not always attainable. In other words, they were (mis)represented as children or youth in their

⁶⁸ Haberman’s conceptualization of youth and young teacher subjectivities, also (re)produces ideologies of neoliberalism. He states that at 20 to 25, individuals are in what he calls “the ‘Age of Me-ness’ in which almost every thought and every waking hour is devoted to ‘What do I want?’” (p. 930) – an individualizing characteristic at the heart of neoliberalism.

lived-experiences. This, I suggest, made them subject to the devaluing discourses of childhood and adolescence that have been discussed throughout my thesis.

Questioning Life Stages in Education and Beyond: A Conclusion

[A]dulthood positively shimmers as an always desirable yet potentially ungraspable state of being, accessible to some but not to all.

- Heather Snell, 2018, p. 8

Contrary to common-sense understandings of what it means to ‘grow up’, there is nothing clear or natural about how individuals experience life stages of childhood, adolescence, or adulthood. Further, age categories tend to be recognized as binaries where the “adult/child divide” implies that individuals are “wise/ignorant, mature/immature, [and] protector/protected” (Snell, 2018, p. 18). Instead, this thesis has demonstrated that these categories are complicated, fluid, socially constructed, and sometimes ungraspable – which is indicated in the epigraph by literary scholar Heather Snell (2018). Children and youth are not always innocent, the future, or in development towards a rational, ethical, or autonomous adulthood. Instead, these ideal descriptions are attributed to some children, youth, or adults while others are excluded (de Leeuw, 2009; Esser, et al., 2016; Meiners, 2016).

By analyzing textual and interview data from a particular part of Alberta, Canada, my thesis has demonstrated that life stages can be performative and relational (Alanen, 2001; Johansson, 2011; Esser et al., 2016). According to Barbaro Johansson (2011) student and teacher subjectivities – like child and adult subjectivities – are relational because “[p]upil’ and ‘teacher’ ... mutually [affect] and [construct] each other” (p.106) in the context of a classroom. One is not a student until one has begun teaching and vice versa. I argued that life stages are also performative. Childhood studies scholar, Valentine explains that recognizing age as performative rather than biological means that “children can ‘grow’ in terms of how others regard them” (p. 38). Similarly, adults can ‘shrink’ if

they behave in a ‘childish’ manner. To describe how life stages are relational, complicated, and performed, my thesis analyzed how child, youth, and adult subjectivities are defined and managed in the context of the University of Lethbridge Faculty of Education and in classroom spaces where young teachers are working, either as trainees or as ‘proper’ teachers.

Each chapter built on the overall argument of the thesis which demonstrates the complexities of age categories and how they are defined and managed by these teachers and in educational policy in southern Alberta. More specifically, my thesis demonstrated that young teachers struggle to make sense of transitions of life stages – either their own or their students – based on their formal education, their childhood memories, and their experiences in the classroom. I analyzed how these interpretations of subjectivities of child, youth, and/or adult – in both educational text and talk – are gendered, sometimes racialized, complex, and leave some of my participants feeling like they have failed as adults. In Chapter One, I described the theoretical and methodological approaches that I took to analyze the policies and participant interviews. I used Critical Discourse Analysis to demonstrate how power relations are connected to the ways in which text and talk in southern Albertan education describes age categories. I also explored how this language is (re)produced and/or challenged by student- and practicing-teachers.

The remainder of my thesis explored how discourses that characterize childhood, adolescence, and adulthood are taken up, internalized, or challenged in my participant interviews and the textual sources – policy documents produced by Alberta Education and union documents or blog posts from the Alberta Teachers’ Association. In Chapter Two, I described how discourses of innocence, futurity, and developmentalism were often used to characterize child and youth subjectivities in Albertan educational policy and resources

that inform teacher behaviour – albeit in contradictory ways. This chapter demonstrated that these discourses do not reflect every child’s experiences and are connected to broader social contexts of neoliberalism and settler colonialism.

In Chapter Three, I described how my participants’ childhood memories impact how they recognize child and youth subjectivities today. While my participants often saw themselves as socially conscious and unique children and youth in the past, they were less likely to provide youth today with a similar representation. Instead, my participants essentialized and impersonalized their students as ‘parrots’ or ‘sponges’ of parents or friends. My participants’ childhood memories also provided insight into how they see themselves as adults and educators today. Paired with educational policy – which supports the performance of a specifically socially conscious or liberal educator – I demonstrated how their memories of being ‘socially conscious’ as children created a (relatively) coherent narrative of their experiences as socially liberal educators today.

Finally, in Chapter Four, I demonstrated how my participants do not only (re)produce or challenge discourses that define and manage life stages, but that they are also subject to them. For instance, many of my participants anticipated more autonomy in their classrooms to speak about topics that, they believed, would create more ethical and engaged citizens – a push from “Inspiring Education”. However, due to their fears of accessing job security – a normative marker of adulthood – these young teachers censored their in-class discussions about Donald Trump’s presidency and refugee experiences. In other words, they felt that it was increasingly difficult to produce ‘ethical’ citizens in their classrooms, a push from “Inspiring Education” and depicted in policy. In this chapter, I also explored how many of my participants – the women in particular – were commonly (mis)represented as students rather than teachers. This, I argued, made them subject to the

often gendered discourses of deficiency and development that define and manage childhood and adolescence in western culture. In other words, and contrary to their expectations, they had failed to become and be recognized as professional adults.

In my thesis, I critiqued ideas of success and failure and how they are normatively associated to children, youth, and adults. For example, in some cases, these young teachers seemed to fail at being addressed as normative adults. Meanwhile, I demonstrated that some young people fail to access the privileges associated with childhood discourses. Queer theorist Jack Halberstam (2011), questions the idea of ‘failure’ and ‘success’ and connects them to normative life stage transitions, heteronormativity, and neoliberalism. While notions of adult success were previously recognized by getting full time work, accumulating wealth, getting married, and having children, as I have explored, these traditional markers have been unsettled due to recent economic downturns (McDaniel & Bernard, 2011; Quill, 2011). Rather than writing a ‘how-to guide’ for young people to work harder to succeed at these markers of adulthood, Halberstam questions dichotomies of success and failure. In the introduction I reflected on Halberstam’s use of failure and how it can offer different rewards outside of

punishing norms... [that] manage human development with the goal of delivering us from unruly childhoods to orderly and predictable adulthoods. Failure preserves some of the wonderful anarchy of childhood and disturbs the supposedly clean boundaries between adults and children, winners and losers (2011, p. 3).

Halberstam (2011) critiques the “adult/child divide” (Snell, 2018, p. 18) – while also (re)producing childhood discourses (“wonderous anarchy of childhood”) – by proposing an alternative to (neoliberal) success: failure. My thesis has demonstrated that failure blurs boundaries between children and adults when achieving one does not (always) mean losing qualities of the other. I argued that this way of conceptualizing failure provides a

new perspective to theorize education in southern Alberta and the ways in which child, youth, and adult subjectivities are defined and managed.

An analysis such as this could easily be connected to an educational context; more specifically, in relation to student- and practicing-teachers' experiences teaching or being young people. For instance, moving back and forth between child and youth subjectivities – and experiencing failure and success – is also explored by educator Carolina Mancuso (2001). She argues that teachers must resist the performance of a 'complete' and 'static' adult, and instead “admit the reality of continual growth and change” (p. 24). By normalizing the struggles or the failures of accessing complete adulthood, life stages can be challenged rather than essentialized. Mancuso further proposes this alternative when she asks: why do teachers choose “not [to] illuminate the foibles of the unattainable yet also tarnished image of ‘teacher’? Clinging to pretense only increases division, supports ageism on each side” (p. 24). I argue that queering what it means to succeed and to transition through life stages (backwards and forwards), makes us more flexible to experiences that move away from normative definitions of childhood, youth, or adulthood.

To bring this thesis to an end, I would like to ask a series of questions so that educational, queer, and childhood studies scholars continue to explore how life stages are defined relationally in southern Alberta and beyond: What would happen if educators began to “admit the reality of continual growth and change” (Mancuso, 2001, p. 24)? What does this look like? How can we educate young people and teachers without (re)producing some of the same developmental fallacies that essentialize children and youth as a singular experience? How can new and student teachers be further supported in their transition from student to teacher without (re)producing essentializing discourses of

childhood or adolescence? I urge my fellow scholars to pursue these questions and (re)imagine age not as biological or natural, but as socially constructed and relational in education and beyond.

Appendix A: Demographics Information of Participants

Addison:

- 22 years old
- White
- She/Her
- Taught grades 3 & 6
- From rural Alberta

Charles:

- 25 years old
- White
- He/Him
- Taught grades 1, 3, 5-8, 9-12
- Practicing Teacher in southern Alberta at the time of the interview
- From Calgary, Alberta

Delaney:

- 24 years old
- She/Her
- Attended school in Lethbridge, Alberta. Originally from a country in Asia.
- Taught grades 3 and 5/6 (split)

Doug:

- 27 years old
- He/Him
- Calgary, Alberta
- Taught grades 6, 11, and 11/12 (split)

Jackie:

- 23 years old
- She/Her
- Taught grades 1, 6, 8/9 (split class),
- Recently completed her degree at the time of the interview
- From Calgary, Alberta

Jennifer:

- 24 years old
- White
- She/Her
- Taught grades 1, 5, 9, 10
- Substitute teacher in southern Alberta at the time of the interview
- From rural Alberta

Mia:

- 25 years old
- White
- She/Her

- Taught grade 3, grade 6, grade 7 & 9 (as a student-teacher), grade 6-9 (as a practicing teacher)
- From rural Alberta

Appendix B: Complete List of Codes and Sub-codes

Children/Youth as...

- Guilty/Incapable/Criminal
- Innocents
- Developing
 - o Parrots
 - o 'unstable'
 - o unethical
- The Future
 - o Competitive, entrepreneurial
 - o 'Falling through the cracks'

Teachers as...

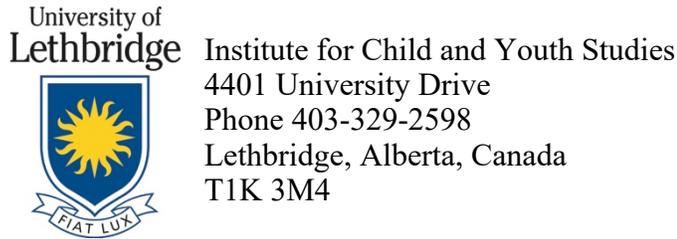
- Completely grown
 - o Experts
 - o Ethical: 'courageous'
 - o "a school police force" (Lam, 1990, p. 67)
 - o censored
- Non-adults
 - o Fiction of completed growth
- Strategizing/Failing to adult
 - o Permeable
 - o Infantilization
 - o Breaking Child/Adult Boundaries

*The order of the codes/sub-codes is irrelevant

Appendix C: Semi-Structured Interview Guide

- 1) Tell me a little bit about yourself (where you grew up, family, likes and interests as a child)
- 2) Can you please tell me about your decision to become a teacher (what motivated you, inspiration, etc.)
- 3) How have your past teachers informed the way you teach today? – Who were your favorite teachers growing up? What did they do? What did they look like?
- 4) What are your favorite parts of being a teacher so far?
- 5) What have been some of the challenges of teaching you have encountered thus far
 - a. Do they differ depending on if you're a student- or practicing-teacher?
 - b. What are your classroom management strategies? (the way you dress, etc.)
- 6) What is your favorite age-group to teach and why?
- 7) What age-group did you imagine yourself teaching before you became a teacher?
- 8) How did you enjoy taking your ed-degree at the U of L?
 - a. What did you like/dislike? Did you like the classes?
 - b. How did they prepare you to interact with children?
 - c. How did they prepare you to take on the role of the teacher?
- 9) If you could attach a few adjectives to it, how would you say the U of L describes children?
 - a. Is the way the U of L talked about kids reflect accurately with your experiences interacting with kids?
- 10) What do you think about the voting age as it is set right now?
- 11) In your opinion, how is 'citizenship' different for adults vs. children?
- 12) Do you think children are 'political' (in any sense of the word)
- 13) Were you political as a young person?
 - a. Participating in protests, etc.
- 14) As a young person did you ever think critically about the voting age?
- 15) In your opinion, do you think the curriculum that you have dealt with thus far is 'age-appropriate' for your students?
 - a. Why do you say that?
 - b. Can you give me an example of a time that you have dealt with a controversial subject in your classroom?
 - i. Who, other than you and the students, were involved?
 - ii. Have you ever had a complaint from a parent?

Appendix D: Letter of Informed Consent



Informed Consent

MA Student in Cultural, Social, & Political Thought
Kaitlynn Weaver, kaitlynn.weaver@uleth.ca

Date: _____

Dear: _____

You are being invited to participate in a qualitative research study exploring why young people are unable to vote in Canadian provincial and federal elections. In particular, I am interested in how you as a student- or practicing-teacher – a future Canadian educator – agree or perhaps disagree with the current voting age excluding children from certain aspects of citizenship, specifically democratic. Further, I am interested in how you as a legal adult (18 years of age or over) discuss your own childhood experiences to explore why present-day children are unable to vote. This research aims to shed light and expand on the assumptions that we as adults hold about children’s abilities to participate in certain aspects of society, specifically in relation to democracy.

This interview will require about 1-1.5 hours of your time. If you are interested in speaking with me again, we can set up a second interview. But for the purposes of this research, I am only asking you to participate in one interview. During this time, you will be interviewed about your experiences teaching children and/or youth, and how this informs your opinions about whether or not young people should be allowed to vote. The interviews will be conducted wherever you prefer – for example, your home – or in a quiet room rented from the University of Lethbridge library. The interview will be audio-recorded and then transcribed. I will also be taking notes if you are comfortable with this. Feel free to ask me to stop the recording or taking notes at any time.

There are no anticipated risks or discomforts related to this research. In fact, you may find the interview to be quite enjoyable and rewarding, as it may give you the chance to discuss your experiences as a student-teacher with a skilled and nonjudgmental interviewer. It will also enable you to connect your own childhood experiences of being excluded from certain aspects of citizenship with the experiences of students’ today. By

participating in this research, you may also benefit others by helping educators better understand children's abilities and capacities in relation to democracy.

Several steps will be taken to protect your anonymity and identity. The interviews will be audio-recorded and will be deleted once they have been typed up. The typed interviews will NOT contain any mention of your name, the names of others, or any identifying information from the interview. The demographic information that you filled out may be used as a descriptor in any publications. Since I will also be taking notes, I will also type up any important information and then shred the physical copies. Again, any names or identifying characteristics will be taken out.

The typed transcriptions and notes will be kept on a locked hard-drive in my locked office at the University of Lethbridge, and will be backed up on my locked personal computer. Only I will have access to the typed documents. The transcribed interviews and accompanying researcher's notes, with all identifying information removed, will be retained indefinitely. The audio recordings will be destroyed within 5 years.

Your participation in this research is **completely voluntary** meaning you can withdraw from the study at any time and suffer absolutely NO prejudices, penalties, or loss of benefits to your academic standing. If you do wish to withdraw from the study, I will ask to keep the information we may have collected so far. If you say no, I will happily delete any and all information pertaining to your interview. If you wish to withdraw after the interview has been completed, please contact me at kaitlynn.weaver@uleth.ca. No payment will be given in exchange for your participation.

The results from this study, as well as your demographic information, will be presented to the staff in the Faculty of Education to better educate student-teachers about children's capacities and abilities to understand Canadian citizenship and democracy. It will also be written in journals read by teachers, teacher-educators, and preservice educators around Canada to help them deconstruct the assumptions that they may hold about young people solely based on their age. At no time, however, will your name be used or any identifying information be revealed in these journals or presentations.

If you wish to receive a copy of the results from this study or the initial transcripts or analysis, you may contact me, the researcher, at kaitlynn.weaver@uleth.ca. If you require any information about this study or would like to speak to my MA supervisor, please call Dr. Kristine Alexander at (403) 332-4623 or email her at kristine.alexander@uleth.ca. You will receive a copy of this letter of consent for your records.

If you have any other questions regarding your rights as a participant in this research, you may also contact the Office of Research Services at the University of Lethbridge at 403-329-2747 or email them at research.services@uleth.ca. This research has been reviewed for ethical acceptability and approved by the University of Lethbridge Human Subject Research Committee.

I have read (or have been read) the above information regarding this research study on children's exclusion from democracy and citizenship, and consent to participate in this study.

(Participant's Printed Name)

(Participant's Signature)

(Date)

(Researcher's Name)

(Researcher's Signature)

(Date)

Appendix E: Call for Participants



Institute for
Child and Youth Studies



University of
Lethbridge

Should young people be allowed to vote in Canadian elections? I'm interested in hearing student-teachers' opinions!

Overview:

Kaitlynn Weaver, an MA student at the University of Lethbridge, is interested in talking to 10-15 student-teachers about whether or not they think young people should vote in Canadian elections. This qualitative interview will focus on what is informing student-teachers' opinions about children's abilities to understand democracy. For example, the media, having children of your own, and/or your own childhood memories.

Criteria to Participate:

Student-teachers must have completed PSI or higher.

Interview Details:

The interview will take approximately 1-1.5 hours and will use semi-structured questions to explore if children should participate in democracy. If you wish to speak with me again, a second interview can be organized.

Participation will be confidential

*If you're interested in participating in this study, please email
Kaitlynn Weaver at kaitlynn.weaver@uleth.ca*

**This study has received ethics approval by the University of Lethbridge
Human Subject Research Committee**

kaitlynn.weaver@uleth.ca

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