

The Labour of Becoming: Schooling in Capitalist Canada

by

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A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of

The University of Manitoba

In partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of

MASTER OF EDUCATION

Department of Educational Administration, Foundations & Psychology

University of Manitoba

Winnipeg

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to elucidate how the performance of school activities by Canadian students within the state public school system constitutes a form of labour that is necessary to the reproduction of Canadian capitalist society. Traditionally, state-education has been understood as a process of producing future labour; my study puts forth an alternative theory that posits Canadian state-schooling itself as a labour process carried out by children and commanded by the Canadian state for its own political-economic purposes deriving from the capitalist social system.

Acknowledgements

This work would not have been possible without the immense support, encouragement, and guidance of my Advisors Dr. Joe Curnow and Dr. Nathalie Piquemal. I cannot thank them enough. I would also like to express my deep gratitude to Dr. Mark Hudson and Dr. Shannon Moore who served on my thesis committee. Their insight and feedback proved invaluable in producing this thesis.

Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to my loving wife Anna, who showed eternal patience and unwavering support as I worked obsessively on this project throughout the most tumultuous of times. I promise you that there are no more last-minute additions, edits, or “final” touch-ups. It’s finally done, and for real this time!

Table of Contents

Introduction	6
Positionality Statement.....	6
General Purpose, Context, and Objectives.....	7
Literature Review	13
Methodology	17
Historical Foundations of Canadian Education	20
Resistance against Schools.....	25
Capitalism, Settler-Colonialism, and the Family.....	29
Schooling, Value, and Compensation	41
Unrecognized Labours.....	45
Unpaid Educational Labour.....	49
School and the Making of Productive Subjects	50
Productivity and Subjectification.....	55
Educational Carcerality and Labour Discipline.....	58
Alienated Schooling	67
Student Rejection of School.....	69
Student Alienation.....	76
Alienation as Inequality Between Youth and Adults.....	81
The Limits of Progressive Education	86
Progressive Pedagogy, John Dewey, and Race.....	95
Concluding Remarks	101
References	105

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to demonstrate how “schoolwork,” that is, the forms of social activity made compulsory for young people in Canada’s state-schooling institutions, can be described as “labour,” not unlike the work performed by adults exchanging labour for a wage in the traditional labour-firm. Rather than characterizing “school” as simply preparation or training for future labour, this research aims to uncover the ways in which schoolwork is a form of real labour that is socially devalued and made invisible. This can be understood as a form of class rule or hegemony over young people. Through a theoretical and historical analysis, I will explain the social character of the appropriated educational labour of children. I will advance my theoretical position through interpreting a diverse body of academic literature focusing on K-12 Public Schooling in the Canadian Provinces. By making connections between the reviewed literature, interrogating their assumptions, and synthesizing these ideas, I construct a theory that posits schoolwork and ‘student learning’ within the Canadian state-school system as forms of (unwaged, unrecognized, reproductive) labour within Canada. I will also argue that all forms of educational activity sponsored by the Canadian state-school system can be subsumed within the social category of labour, including progressive and student-centered forms of learning.

Positionality statement

I first became attuned to this topic of research after noting the hard limitations to what I could accomplish in my job as a teacher. I received considerable pushback when I tried to stop assigning homework; I was mandated to do assessments I found poorly designed and illogical; I disagreed with many aspects of the Eurocentric curriculum I had to teach; I had issues with grading and reports, streaming, the credit system, etc. It became apparent that the school had a set structure and there were limitations to what I could change. It was no fault of my own—I felt

that the problem was not what or how I was teaching, but the social structure I was in and complicit in reproducing. As someone involved in union work and political organising, which also shapes my perspective, I began thinking of how educational issues were in some ways comparable to labour issues. Perhaps teachers are not the solution to every educational problem, I thought, and that we might just actually be an obstacle to social emancipation for young people. My aim is to centre student perspective in my work, while remaining attuned to broader issues of political economy. For adults, there is often unconsciousness tendency to minimize or overlook the struggles of young people as being insignificant, and this work demands challenging this. Interrogating and questioning my own biases as an adult and teacher has been an important step in producing this research. I come to this research as a child of immigrants who had fled a war-torn country, and this critique is colored by my experiences of racism and discrimination so often faced by people of colour in this country. At the same time, I am a non-Indigenous person who has benefited from Canadian settler-colonial society; anti-Indigenous racism is frankly rampant and pervasive and is ever-present in the way Indigenous perspectives and experiences are consistently ignored or distorted in both academic literature and classroom settings. Being attentive to these patterns and challenging my own misconceptions and biases through studying Indigenous scholarship and engaging in dialogue with Indigenous people has been essential to producing this work.

General Purpose, Context, and Objectives

The research is driven by one overriding question: Why is schoolwork not considered “real” labour? Why is it not considered work in the same way stocking shelves, doing audits, treating patients, or driving taxis are? While we tend to see teachers as legitimate workers performing useful social labour, the efforts expended by students alongside teachers in the same

classrooms are not seen as deserving social recognition or immediate, financial compensation. Indeed, children across the country are waking up every morning to get dropped off at school, where they write assignments, complete projects, create presentations, study for tests and exams, prepare for evaluations, and compete for honours, scholarship, and coveted spots in post-secondary institutions; these activities inevitably entail an expenditure of energy that can be highly laborious and mentally taxing, yet they are not socially recognized as a legitimate form of “work” comparable to the labour performed by adults in the conventional labour-form. This research an attempt to solve this social conundrum.

My aim is to demonstrate how schooling imposes a regime of labour-discipline upon Canadian public-school students, while recognizing that this is not a monolithic social group, but one that is riven with racial, gendered, and class relations. I accomplish this through a theoretical analysis of the relationship between education and capitalist political economy within the context of state-school systems in Canada. This research particularly emphasizes the importance early state educational practices in 19th century present day Ontario to locate the originary practices of bureaucratic schooling that laid the foundation for Public Education in Canada as we know it today. I emphasize that I am not discussing “education” or “learning” in a general sense, but I am specifically analyzing the social activity directed by compulsory state-school systems in Canada. The intent of this research is to define the social activity performed by students in the Canadian K-12 public school system and its relation to the broader Canadian political economy

In the following paragraphs, I will outline a roadmap for this thesis, which will clarify how I will construct my argument and the purpose of each individual chapter: In the second and third chapter of this thesis I will review the literature cited and the methodology of this research, respectively. In the fourth chapter, *Historical Foundations of Canadian Education*, I will

establish the historical context of the development of state-schooling in Canada, by detailing how centralized educational institutions were formed in Canada. The single most important historical influence on the development of the Canadian public school system were the radical educational reforms in 19th century Canada West (Ontario), culminating with the consolidation of the first Canadian compulsory school system in 1871. The purpose of this chapter is to explain how the ascendance of state organized schooling in early Canada was bound up with the rise of capitalism, a new political-economic order centered around competitive labour markets, individual property rights, and associated cultural norms of “industriousness” and productivity. Within the context of Euro-Canada, relations of settler-colonialism also cannot be ignored, which were intrinsic to the foundation and functioning of capitalism in Canada, as the state had seized Indigenous land for capitalist development through dispossession, genocide, and assimilative schooling. This is essential historical context that will ground the subsequent arguments around schooling as a form of labour.

In the fifth chapter, *Schooling, Value, and Compensation*, I draw on Marxist-Feminist analysis to elaborate the social character of educational work and schooled activity as organized by the Canadian state in K-12 public schools. The purpose of this chapter is to establish how the educational labour of students is an unrecognized and uncompensated contribution towards the accumulation of capital, and a necessary requirement to the reproduction of capitalist society. While there are many affinities between wage-labour and school, I argue here that the category of invisible reproductive labour explicated by feminists can grant us deeper insight into the labouring quality of educational work, as this work remains socially invisible in ways not unlike the unrecognized domestic labour of women. Rather than reinventing the wheel, I draw on the categories and frameworks established by Marxists-feminists to clarify both *how* schoolwork is a

form of labour and *why* it endures as socially invisible. This form of invisible reproductive labour, I will argue, is essential to the reproduction of capitalism, a system that hinges on the “donation” of free labours “given” by marginalized groups, including women and children, as a contribution to the accumulation of capital. Additionally, I argue that school-labour is distinctly a non-remunerated form of labour that cannot be described as receiving meaningful compensation despite the doling out of accreditation and certification.

In the sixth chapter, *School and the Making of Productive Subjects*, I explain how the how the compulsion of student labour as a functional requirement of capitalism is ensured through the state’s use ideology, internalization, and carceral enforcement. The purpose of this chapter is to explain how the state uses a combination of direct carceral force and more intricate systems of ideological internalization to facilitate the disciplining of student of labour. I will explain how this enforcement is racialized and shaped by relations of settler-colonialism, as students experience the force of the state in different ways depending on their racial, social, and economic backgrounds. I will draw on sociological literature highlighting real examples of students responding to school and police discipline to advance my argument, and to illustrate my broader theoretical points.

In the seventh chapter, *Alienated Schooling*, I discuss the notion of alienation and its relevance to the analysis of educational labour in Canadian public schools. The purpose of this chapter is to explain how this estrangement from one is species-being as experienced in the capitalist firm, as first described by Marx, is also largely applicable to school-based labour under capitalism as well. Additionally, I discuss how alienation is also in part a product of the inequality between youth and adults, which is implicit to the structure of state-schooling in Canada. I will argue that it is impossible to understand how schools' function without

recognizing the devalued labour of children, just as we cannot understand the devaluation of gendered work without an analysis of sexism and patriarchy.

In the eighth chapter, *The Limits of Progressive Education*, I make a critique of so-called progressive education and its inability to serve as a solution to school-based alienation. The purpose of this chapter to demonstrate both the limits and the real harms posed by progressive education approaches, which range from side-stepping to deepening the existing problems of capitalist education without addressing the structural issues that engender alienation arising from educational labour in Canadian schools. While progressive, democratic, and choice-based pedagogies have been hailed as antidote to the intractable problems facing Canadian teachers today, their relation to racist, colonial, and even fascist regimes of labour discipline are also understudied phenomenon that are analyzed in this chapter. This chapter is followed by a conclusion which summarizes the findings of this research.

Research Question

Drawing on relevant sociological and educational literature, in what ways does the performance of schoolwork within the Canadian K-12 Public School system constitute a form of labour under capitalism?

Sub Questions. In what ways do the economic imperatives of capitalism shape how Canadian students experience and relate to state-organized processes of centralized schooling?

In what ways can the category of “labour” provide insight into processes of state organized schooling in Canada?

What are the strengths and limitations of “progressive education” in addressing student withdrawal or alienation from schooling?

In what ways does schoolwork performed by Canadian K-12 Public School students compare to conventional waged labour? In what ways is it different?

Rationale and Significance

I am writing this thesis because I believe this research can illuminate the exploitation and experiences of Canadian public-school students that remain concealed under existing capitalist social relations. The nature of this obfuscation is complex and multifaceted, and the following research is intended to clarify the political and social processes that enable this. Ultimately, if schoolwork was to be recognized as labour, as the active performance of work, and not passive consumption, the duration of the labour, the compensation for the labour, and the conditions of the labour can become legible as things to fight for and negotiate. It is this line of thinking that inspired my desire to pursue this research. Silvia Federici (2012) writes about how, during the Wages for Housework campaign in Italy, women began to recognize themselves not just as individual wives oppressed by their own husbands, but as a gendered, social class whose domestic labour was being exploited as a class. This recognition of their domestic work as “labour,” opened up the terrain to new ways of social struggle; as a class of domestic women workers, they sought to organise and strike for improved working conditions and gender relations.

I draw on the experiences and social theory of Marxist Feminists to bring light to the usefulness of the category of labour, and its relevance to the context of Canadian education. Kathi Weeks (2018, p. 135) writes that labour is the “enabling ground from which to construct a collectivity ... the ‘we’ that coalesces around a particular standpoint, is a dynamic achievement rather than a static fact.” This is an important social insight that reveals the analytic and political usefulness of the category of labour, which has the power to confront and challenge, what Marx

calls, “bourgeois ideals.” These are the societal values that atomize students as individual achievers pursuing credentials necessary for the capitalist labour-market (Marx, 1988). This research can be situated in the critical theory tradition, which draws on social philosophy as a way of critiquing power structures and is often in dialogue with past or ongoing political and social struggles.

Theoretical Framework

The study utilizes a Marxist framework to arrive at its conclusions. Marxism is a framework that uses a materialist understanding of the development of history to understand class, class struggle, and capitalism (and its overcoming). The major concepts that underlie the argumentation in this thesis are explicitly Marxist or Marxist Feminist categories, such as social reproduction, reproductive labour, capitalism, and labour (Marx, 2004; Federici, 2012). Marxism is a diverse field and one of the central tasks of this research is to bring together a few separate theoretical traditions within Marxism in order to structure my argumentation. To situate ‘schoolwork’ as a form of unwaged and unrecognized labour, I draw on the Marxism-feminist social theory, Marxist or “neo-Marxist” sociology, works of history attuned to a class lens, and the Marxist critique of abstractions (primarily as articulated by Marxist critical educational scholars). These theoretical traditions provide the analytic categories and framework necessary to make sense of the reproductive labour performed by students in schools within the context of Canadian capitalist social relations.

Literature Review

Throughout this thesis, I draw on a rich and diverse body of theoretical and empirical literature to illustrate the class character of the schoolwork performed by students. The economic and social character of schoolwork performed by children continues to be severely

under-theorized and there is an absence of scholarly work analyzing this theme as it relates to capitalism in the context of Canada. My research aims to be a novel and important contribution to educational social theory.

Much of my argument is constructed through analogy by drawing on existing theorizations of gendered oppression by feminist Marxist theorists like Federici (2012), Fortunati (1989), Vogel (2014) and Gonzalez (2013). While my research does not directly focus on the exploitation of women under capitalism, this work is invaluable, as it provides a rich and fruitful analytical toolkit to make sense of social reproduction under capitalism, which I employ in the context of students and children. Adult oppression of children is an important dynamic of patriarchy that tends to be neglected within Marxist-Feminist literature or is referenced as an afterthought; I aim to properly situate the oppression of children within the tradition of Marxist Feminism.

The work of Canadian historians of education is crucial to my research, as this is necessary in depicting an accurate portrayal of the specific Canadian context of capitalist schooling. While my research heavily relies on historical research, it stands apart from this purely historical work because it utilizes historical findings to interrogate and rethink the nature of state-schooling in the present. I interweave historical, sociological, and philosophical scholarship to produce a unique intervention in the social sciences. I heavily draw on Bruce Curtis (1984) and Susan Houston (1972) who detail the history of schooling in 19th century Canada West, which laid the groundwork for the nation-wide Canada school-system, emerging out of early Euro-Canadian capitalism. John Milroy (1998), Sean Carlton (2022), and Robert Carney's (1995) work has been very useful in my attempt integrate the history of Indigenous schooling and settler-colonialism into my broader Marxist critique of Canadian state-schooling.

Benjamin Justice's (2023) work, *Schooling as a White Good*, has also been essential to my theorization of schooling as a racial project. I bring these historical accounts into dialogue with theorizations of settler-colonialism by Indigenous scholars Glen Coulthard (2007) and Leanne Simpson (2017).

I also cite a rich body of literature that analyses the nature of student resistance in relation to these coercive schooling practices; while Paul Willis (1978) is the most notable scholar associated with theorizing student resistance, I primarily draw on Julius Tanner (2008), and Randle Nelson (1985). Additionally, scholars like Kathleen Nolan (2018), Jan Hare (2011), Nadine Bartlett (2019), Skiba et. al (2014) and Anette Ferguson (2001) contribute important perspective on discipline and student resistance in the context of racialized youth. This sociological research is useful, because it allows me to draw continuities between historical and ongoing practices within education and provide an empirical basis to my theoretical claims. This thesis is about Canadian school-systems, and therefore the research cited is predominantly from a Canadian context; however, I draw on two American works that provide unique insight into anti-Black racism in U.S public schools which evoke broader implications on race and schooling relevant to this research (Ferguson, 2018; Nolan, 2001). Indeed, the border between Canadian and American school practices is sometimes blurry, as Egerton Ryerson himself closely studied state-schools in the United States before beginning his reforms in Canada West (Curtis, 1984).

I also draw on philosophical and Marxist theory that addresses the conception of alienation. The notion of student alienation is often understood as a vague sense of malaise or dissatisfaction in school (Davies, 2007). I look to Marx (1988) and Hägglund (2019) to illuminate the concrete philosophical, economic and political basis to student alienation, establishing a more rigorous interpretation of this concept that is relevant to schooling. This fills

a major gap in the literature as alienation has largely been an analytic applied to waged workers, as intended by Marx. While some scholars have used this concept in relation to gender and race, I have not come across any scholarship applying it to school children (Glimenez, 2018; Murphy, 2019). Additionally, I cite Marxist social theorists like Mojab and Carpenter (2017), Moishe Postone (1993), and Bertell Ollman (2009), who provide insight into how our individual subjectivities are shaped by existing social relations and social structures reliant on capitalist exploitation. These theorists have constructed dense and sophisticated Marxist analyses, which I draw “real life” lessons from by applying them to relevant historical and sociological contexts.

The question of progressive pedagogy is an enduring question in Education Studies and one that needs greater engagement with Marxist theorists critical of state education. The popularity of progressive pedagogy poses a serious counterargument to the characterization of schooling as a factory-like process (Bowles and Gintis, 2011). On the other end, there is abundant discussion on progressive pedagogical techniques in both professional teacher settings and Instruction and Curriculum studies, but much of it is uncritical; I attempt to bring a new perspective to this topic by situating these pedagogical trends within their economic and political contexts (Davies, 2007; Vaughn, 2018). I draw on the scholarship of scholars like Luc Boltanski (2005), F.K Clarke, Peter Axelrod (2003), and Scott Davies (2002) to ground my argument that “progressive” visions of education are structurally unable to break free from the domination imposed by capital, and, in fact, may even strengthen it. I integrate this work with the findings of a rich and emerging body of historical scholarship that has theorized the ways progressive pedagogy exists under the shadow of fascism, racism and colonialism. Matthew Villeneuve (2021), Kelly Vaughn (2018), and Anja Giudici (2019) shed light on how major currents within

progressive education, that endure were historically predicated on problematic ideas of racism and coercive “vocational” learning.

Methodology

This thesis attempts to depict how the schoolwork performed by children constitutes forms of reproductive, unwaged labour. In this section, I will explain how I do this. A key work of methodological literature I draw on is Bertell Ollman’s (2013) *Dance of the Dialectic*, which articulates Marx’s method of dialectics. Ollman’s (2013) methodological interpretation of Marx structures how I employ a diverse body of academic literature to make my arguments and answer the research questions listed above.

Ollman (2013, p. 78) writes:

In Marx's division of reality into objective and subjective conditions, it is by abstracting a vantage point first in one and then in the other that he uncovers the more objective aspects of what is ordinarily taken to be subjective (extending the territory of the objective accordingly), and vice versa. ... changes in the abstraction of vantage point enable Marx to actually see objective and subjective conditions as "two distinct forms of the same conditions.”

To define the purpose and social character of the tasks performed by children in Canada’s centralized state school-system, I examine the conditions of student social life from two levels of generality or vantage points, objective and subjective. I cite historical, economic, and sociological literature which explains why Canadian educational institutions of centralized schooling were formed and the socioeconomic imperatives which guide them to this day. This structural or systemic analysis will frame the “big picture” analysis of education. On the other end, I look at how students experience the social life of schooling. I draw on the theory and

analytic categories of Marxist-Feminism to interpret student life and how individual educational practices are employed by state-schools and experienced by students (Federici, 2012; Fortunati, 1989). These student experiences are illustrated through existing sociological literature and field research that provides important insight into the nature of student resistance, school withdrawal, and youth countercultures. These real-life examples of collective opposition towards school-systems reveal how public-school students, especially racialized public-school students, experience the coercion intrinsic to the capitalist organization of social life. The microstructure of human social interaction at the classroom level is dialectically interrelated with the societal macrostructure of capitalism as a social system; I shift between these levels of abstraction, like different levels of magnification in a microscope, to bring to light different, yet always related, aspects of capitalism (Ollman, 2013). Ollman (2013, p. 202) writes “what the state does, therefore, as well as the specific forms through which it does it, are internally related to what the ruling class is and what its interests require.” Ollman is not describing a mechanistic or instrumental relation, but an internal, dialectical one, representing the “two sides of the same complex relation.” The analysis of subjective conditions of students presents the “objective” conditions of educational political economy in a new light and vice versa, creating a cohesive picture of capitalist and settler-colonial schooling in Canada.

I will identify the key pieces of data I will be using to construct my argument. This is a conceptual piece of writing therefore my data consists of secondary literature. The historical and theoretical works of Peter Axelrod’s (2003) *The Promise of Schooling*, Bruce Curtis’ (1984) *Building the Educational State*, Susan Houston’s (1972) *Victorian Origins of Juvenile Delinquency: A Canadian Experience*, Cynthia Comacchio’s *The Dominion of Youth* (2008) Andy Green’s (2013) *Education and State Formation*, John Milloy’s (2017) *A National Crime* :

the Canadian Government and the Residential School System, 1879 to 1986, Moishe Postone's (1993) *Time, Labour, and Social Domination*, Benjamin Justice's (2023) *Schooling as a White Good*, Patrick Wolfe's (2015) *Logic of Elimination*, Robert Carney's (1995) *Aboriginal Residential Schools Before Confederation: The Early Experience*, Glenn Coulthard's *Red Skin, White Masks*, and Marx's (2004) *Capital* are essential in supporting my analysis of the historical and present day nature Canada's settler-colonial and capitalist form of education; their writing provides insight into the class and racial structure of Canadian public schooling and how it came to be. In conjunction with Davies' (2018) sociological study of modern Canadian public schooling, *The Schooled Society*, these data points provide what Ollman calls the "objective" understanding of Canadian education. To construct the subjective level of generality, I draw on research on student life in Canada. Julius Tanner's (2008) *Reluctant rebels: A case study of Edmonton high school drop-outs* and Nelsen's (1985) *Books, boredom, and behind bars: An explanation of apathy and hostility in our schools*, Ferguson's (2001) *Bad boys : public schools in the making of black masculinity*, Nadine Bartlett's *Assess, Sort, Classify: "Othering" of Indigenous Students in Manitoba's Schools* and Jan Hare's (2014) *The Way of the Warrior: Indigenous youth navigating the challenges of schooling*. I also draw on critical research that depicts the contradictory, coercive, and labour-disciplinary dimensions of so-called progressive education as a way of situating the entire Canadian public school system under capitalist exploitation. Maureen Ford's (2003) *Unveiling Technologies of Power in Classroom Organization Practice*, Lilie Chouliaraki's (2010) *Regulative Practices in a 'Progressivist' Classroom*, Scott Davies' (2002) *The Paradox of Progressive Education*, and Popkewitz' (1998) *Dewey, Vygotsky, and the Social Administration of the Individual: Constructivist Pedagogy as Systems of Ideas in Historical Spaces* allow me to draw out these characteristics. Eve Chiapello

and Luc Boltanski's (2005) *The New Spirit Of Capitalism* helps contextualise these pedagogical developments within the context of capitalism's evolving form. Progressive pedagogy's relation to race and colonialism is brought to the surface in Matthew Villeneuve's (2021) *Instrumental Indians: John Dewey and the Problem of the Frontier for Democracy in Indigenous Education, 1884-1959*. Marxist-Feminist literature on reproductive labour and the devaluation of invisible work is used to put these objective and subjective perspectives in dialogue with one another to produce a theory of reproductive labour. Federici's (2003) *Zero Point at Revolution*, Fortunati's (1989) *The Arcane of Reproduction*, and Maya Gonzalez' (2013) *The Logic of Gender* deploy analytical frameworks and categories which are used to interpret the work of children as unwaged, unrecognised reproductive labour. Lastly I draw on Marx's (1998) *Economic and philosophic manuscripts of 1844 and the Communist manifesto* to theorize the concept of alienation in Canadian schools.

Historical Foundations of Canadian Education

The intent of this thesis is to explicate how centralized, state-planned education within Canada constitutes a mode of organizing the labour of students. In this fourth chapter, I will establish the historical foundations of compulsory state-schooling in Canada, which is important historical context necessary to understanding how state-education developed as a form of labour. I will review the colossal social changes that occurred in Canada West (Ontario) between 1840-1871, under the leadership of Egerton Ryerson, fundamentally revolutionizing how those living in what was to become Canada came to understand teaching, learning, and labouring, and culminating with the state mandate of compulsory schooling in 1871 for Euro-Canadian children (both boys and girls) (Curtis, 1984). This specific time-period covers a crucial historical window in which the state discovered the various techniques and modes of governance that have come to

define state-schooling and continue to this day. These sweeping educational reforms preceded rise of the residential school systems in 1879 (which was then made compulsory in 1920), yet we can locate that system's origins, and the state's broader approach to the educational governance of Indigenous peoples, within the colonial encounters between state-architects, religious institutions, education planners and Indigenous populations during this historical window of 1840-1871 (Milloy, 2017). The formation of compulsory state-schooling was a revolutionary development, but one that was not instantaneous; it was a gradual and piece-meal process that grew to encompass various groups, but not in ways that were necessarily equal or the same (Carney, 1995; Curtis, 1984). Indigenous schooling and the traditional public schooling developed as separate systems, and the former was made compulsory 80 years after the later, yet both were deeply interrelated and exerted a degree of mutual influence upon one another. The formally instituted residential school system was modeled off religious mission schools for Indigenous students that existed alongside the early public school for settler students (Carney, 1995). These mission schools borrowed the curriculum and institutional arrangement pioneered by the public system (Carney, 1995). Thus, the history of settler-colonial forms of educational governance and racial violence cannot be neatly bracketed off from the broader history of public schooling in Canada, as usually done (Carleton, 2022). In the following section, I will recount this history that provides essential context for my subsequent argumentation.

The burgeoning state of Canada West saw a totalizing educational regime as increasingly necessary in mobilizing the work-output of students towards state goals deemed necessary for the benefit of capitalist society. The 1846 Common Schools Act in Upper Canada marked the beginning of state-schooling in present-day Canada, which established a rudimentary form of state education broadly intended for settler, Euro-Canadian children (Curtis, 1984). It led to the

formation of various school districts, school-tax collection, and centralized teacher training (Curtis, 1984). Prior to this, all forms of schooling were localized, contingent, and entirely dependent on the needs of the individual community, as those settler families who did have access to schooling would have attended informal “voluntary” school-house settings, where school was attended on a basis of family choice (Curtis, 1984). Indigenous children, prior to confederation, would have largely learned in traditional ways conducive to the typically nomadic lifestyles that were far-removed from “book learning” in desks between four walls (Axelrod, 2003). However, prior to the establishment of the formal residential school system, there were scattered instances of Indigenous children learning in the aforementioned colonial mission schools, which were notably based on voluntary parental enrollment. Regardless, these schools still prefigured the formal residential school in their “spartan atmosphere and rigorous discipline” (Axelrod, 2003; Carney, 1995, p. 17). The early mission schools suffered from abysmally low attendance, but, for some Indigenous families, the technologies and knowledge of Europeans, or Christian religious devotion, compelled enrollment (Carney, 1995). Voluntary schooling allowed education to be taken up by individual families, either Euro-Canadian or Indigenous, to the extent that they found them useful or necessary for their children, and the feelings of children themselves were considered an important factor in this decision-making (Carney, 1995). Curtis (1984) describes how the seasonal demands of labour determined the ebb and flow of life for the populace, as any strictly educational needs largely took a backseat to life's more pressing familial and directly economic concerns (Curtis, 1984). The rise of state-schooling introduced a radically foreign concept that proved unpopular and was actively resisted by families whenever it was introduced: the expectation of regular school attendance in educational institutions (Curtis, 1984).

Decades before compulsory schooling were officially codified in 1871 for settler youth (and 1920 for Indigenous youth), the leadership in Canada West began to see school non-attendance as an economic and political problem that could be solved through new modes of governance. The desire for children to collectively attend an assigned schoolhouse, punctually and continuously, became understood as a new moral standard, and a precondition for school learning under the new centralized school system (Davey, 1975). Curtis (1984, p. 185) writes: “the public school...embodied the same orientation to labour and time as the factory: uniform time work.” The rise of industrial capitalism necessitated reliable, punctual, and regular work to meet the demands of a new economic order that generated unparalleled profits (but also unparalleled inequality) (Houston, 1972). Schoolwork indeed embodied this same orientation to clock-time as present in the waged factory—but without a wage. In the absence of economic incentive, bureaucratically codified micro-penalties and disciplinary measures for transgressions, such as lateness or absence, was a way of producing economically and morally desirable behaviours in individuals by the state (Curtis, 1984). This was an unwelcome development for those who were accustomed to their existing way of life that had a considerably laxer tempo. In the early days of state-schooling, where it was available and encouraged, parents, both settler and Indigenous, often insisted that their children should be able to come to school whenever they wanted, if at all (Cartney, 1995; Curtis, 1984). This may come as a surprise to a contemporary Canadian parent, but the perception of an intrinsic social and moral goodness of regular school attendance reflected the belief that schooling represented universal objective social progress, and that the more schooling we have, the better things are. Curtis (1984) and Davey (1975) explain how families in Canada West at this time mostly adhered to “task-oriented” and seasonal time. Their lives ebbed and flowed according to the rising and setting of the sun which regulated their

direct economic and social needs. They did not work to rigid clock-time, time-tables, and formal schedules, but to an informal rhythm of life. Clock-based organization of time was a radically new form of time-keeping originating in the need to discipline labour in the industrial factory (Postone, 1993).

The subordination of workers to time-discipline, in turn, enabled new ways of organizing educational life in schools (Curtis, 1984). The tumultuous introduction of industrial capitalism in Canada was in part experienced in the school, bringing the coercion of factory wage-labour to children. This is not to say that schools functioned identically to industrial factories; rather, both institutions organized work-output according to a historically specific temporal logic grounded in the capitalist organization of social life. The internal practices and organization of particular labour-firms (including schools) in capitalist society may widely differ while still being animated by the same uniform social logic of productivity according to clock-time. Like different forms of conventional waged labour, educational labour in the early schools of Canada West were structured by capitalist temporality and consequently subordinated to objectives of “industriousness” and productivity, as timekeeping could better regulate work-output. Carney (1995) describes how schoolmen of the early Indigenous mission schools eagerly borrowed from the burgeoning public school system, which offered a ready-made template for religious institutions that sought to mould Indigenous youth into “productive” European-like citizens; of course, these religious institutions inserted their own spiritual and vocational imperatives into this borrowed structure, introducing a dynamic of settler-colonial cultural assimilation into the public school structure. However, it should be observed that Canada’s legal racial caste system was not as firmly in place during the time of these early or proto residential schools, as Carney notes that there was a not insignificant degree of white enrollment in Indigenous schools, a

practice which was specifically promoted by Jesuit groups, in contrast to other Christian denominations (Carney, 1995). Although this position of integration lost favour by the 1870s, as the state solidified its segregationist position (Carney, 1995). This period must be understood as a window of pedagogical experimentation in which the state was still “learning” how to best impose schooling upon its population, and these “lessons” defined what was to come. The government displayed confused and inconsistent ways of dealing with the problem of race. For instance, the question of educational placement of black children was a source of confusion for state-makers (2004, McLaren). Technically, there was no legal prohibition of black children in public schools, yet Ryerson had encouraged black people to create their own schools, as any group of people, of at least 12, could petition for their own public school (McLaren, 2004). There were instances where schools and schoolteachers welcomed black children into their schools to learn alongside white children, but this provoked great backlash. Some courts even doled out fines and terminations for these acts of integration despite no explicit laws being broken (McLaren, 2004). This exemplified a gap between legal structure and an overwhelming popular white sentiment that believed schooling should be racially segregated. Thus, racism was not just an ideology imposed from above, but a widely embraced, white class-collaborationist project, securing systematic racial advantage (Justice, 2023).

Resistance against Schools

In the following section, I will discuss how children and families resisted the compulsion of educational labour, which was not accepted passively. Many of those who lived in a time “before school,” as we know it, both settler and Indigenous, resisted and defied schooling because, from their vantage point, it represented a highly intrusive social campaign from the state which sought to reconstitute the social, cultural, and moral fabric of daily life through the

compulsion of educational work. Young people, with the support of their families, simply did not want to work all day without any immediate purpose or perceived benefit. Indigenous families were mostly successful in avoiding and resisting colonial attempts at schooling in the historical period covered here (1840-1870), and largely maintained their own traditional systems of learning, until this was made increasingly difficult by growing patterns of land theft, settlement, capitalist development, and colonial violence, paving the way for the genocidal residential school system. Settler-children were the first group to experience concerted state efforts to impose compulsory schooling, which provoked resistance from families who protested its emergence in a variety of ways, including school tax avoidance, mob violence against teachers, and even burning down schools themselves (Curtis, 1984). These families saw state-schooling as a major disruption to their existing way of life and responded in frenzied, unrestrained ways. Curtis (1984) observes how violence served as a regulatory function in checking the abuses in the early settler schoolhouses before the rise of hegemonic state-schooling, documenting instances of when Euro-Canadian children and parents attacked and physically assaulted teachers for alleged abuses. This included transgressions such as perceived poor teaching practice, occupational negligence, excessive punishments, and sexual impropriety, among other complaints. These outbursts of violence in 1820s and 1830s Canada West had social acceptance among Euro-Canadian families, who saw violence as a socially legitimate form of regulating the power of schools and teachers who could otherwise abuse their powers if given free reign over their children (Curtis, 1984). While the architects state-schooling quickly clamped down on acts of student and family resistance, it institutionalized and protected the right of teachers to inflict violence upon students, forming a monopolization of violence that consolidated powers of force under its primary educational agents: teachers (Curtis, 1984). This meant that the teacher's right

to corporal punishment was protected while retaliatory violence coming from students and families was not. One might question the relevance of this shift to a contemporary audience given the eventual outlawing of corporal punishment (which only occurred in 1971). However, the use of state-violence in schools did not follow a linear path of progress culminating with its elimination; for instance, corporal punishment took on the form of genocidal violence and lethal neglect in the residential school system, which persisted past the official abolition of corporal punishment in 1971 and only ended in 1996; rampant physical and sexual abuse, cultural assimilation, and woefully inadequate living conditions led to the deaths of thousands. It also must be noted that this chapter of history does not exist in isolation from the broader history of racism in schooling, as the historical legacy of colonial violence permeates the present: state-violence in schools has not disappeared, it has simply transformed. For instance, school staff and administration are still protected agents of violence within schools, but the violence now largely takes on a carceral or exclusionary form that tends to express itself in racialized form, as Indigenous, black and other racialized groups are disproportionately victimized by carceral violence in schools (See chapter 6 for an elaboration on this in a contemporary context) (Wun, 2017). While state-schooling has evolved through its existence, accumulating a vast array of bureaucratic and state-powers, its grammar and fundamental structure has remained continuous (Axelrod, 2003). The monopolization of violence under schooling is a significant development in the history of Canadian schooling. It is demonstrative of the state's desire to regulate student productive capacities, as a form of labour discipline. The Canadian school-system must be understood as an educational labour regime transitioning the labour of children away from communal, informal work managed by individual families to disciplined, state-driven labour under the mantle of education intended to optimize student performance in navigating a capitalist

social system. It's important to emphasize that the economic need for children to carry out labour for the family was one reason why parents opposed schooling, but that was just one; the time investment and perceived monotony of daily schooling was also undesirable in and of itself, as many children would have simply preferred to do other things, a notion that parents often sympathised with and supported (Curtis, 1984). For Indigenous families, the perception of the irrationality of the mission school was further heightened by concerns around assimilationist objectives, the prolonged separation from families in boarding school placements, and culturally alien ways of instruction, as the state began to increasingly pursue more punitive forms of educational governance as it learned from the limitations and failures of early missions schools that functioned on a more voluntary basis. State-schooling must be understood as a political, economic, and racial project. Bruce Curtis (1984, p. 199) writes:

“Many students...existed as full-fledged and largely independent members of the local community: actively engaged in labour processes as soon as their physical capacities permitted. The reality of schooling, by contrast, was one in which they appeared as 'children' to be governed by an alien 'necessity,' determined by anonymous others, and imposed upon them for their 'own good'.” Community and student perception of schooling as irrational and coercive was, in some sense, a legitimate and sensible position given the way it upended their lives and subjected them to new forms of state authority.

The introduction of state schooling was devised as a set of political technologies to produce desired social, moral, and political conduct within children, and a means of ensuring society's capacity to respond sufficiently to the sweeping economic changes occurring in Canada with the advent of capitalism. Canadian state education invented a “social grammar” of schooling that appears to us as now obvious, necessary, and transhistorical, when it was a contingent social

phenomenon experienced as radically foreign and intrusive. Curtis (1984) notes how the entrenchment of educational bureaucracy was the “normalization of power as procedure.” (Curtis, 1984, p. 100). In the face of new economic developments, political and social stability was sought through new forms of population management (Curtis, 1984). The desires and interests and children themselves were rendered irrelevant under the iron tutelage of the state, and children, in turn, both settler and Indigenous, to different extents, perceived this social control as coercive and irrational. Although it must be noted that the “normalized” bureaucratic exertion of power on settler children existed alongside genocidal violence for Indigenous families. Genocide was a constant association with schooling; during the early patterns of colonial settlement in present-day Ontario, Indigenous parents correctly associated European institutions with the spread of disease and smallpox, and thus schooling carried the prospect of death; in addition to the general opposition towards schooling as a state-imposition, assimilation and disease brought additional, existential challenges to Indigenous families (Axelrod, 2003).

Capitalism, Settler-Colonialism, and The Family

In the following section, I will describe how public schooling was created as a means of addressing the host of social and moral anxieties of the ruling classes of Canada that arose from transformations in the global economic landscape. Paul Axelrod (2003) explains how capitalism brought forth the promise of unprecedented economic opportunity while also introducing a host of perceived social and moral ills in its wake: urban densification, crowding, inequality, poverty, disease, social vagrancy, and idleness. Capitalism enabled unprecedented development, but produced social problems that were conceptualized as moral failure, necessitating the intervention of a powerful state that could mould the individual, through the compulsion of their work output, in ways conducive to state-making goals. Illiteracy and “ignorance,” too, came to

be seen as great moral failures and were intolerable for societal elites who saw an incurious and uneducated settler lower class as an obstacle to the expansion of a prosperous economy (Houston, 1972). This, in their view, required an industrious, literate, and rational population. For the settler ruling class, Indigenous people represented the epitome of this “ignorance” as their interrelated traditional cultural practices and land-based political economies were seen as being entirely at odds with the Euro-Canadian capitalist state-building project that looked upon Indigenous land stewardship as a “waste” of the raw material necessary to fueling the settler-colonial expansion of capitalist development (Coulthard, 2007; Wolfe, 2015). British Canadians looked towards London and New York with envy, mesmerized by steam engines, locomotives, railroads, and emerging metropolis centers, wrought from colonial plunder, and saw what could be possible in Canada West (Houston, 1972). Thus education, both in its Euro-Canadian and Indigenous forms, were intimately bound up with settler colonial expansion, Indigenous erasure, and capitalist development.

I would also emphasise the clear gendered and patriarchal implications in the origin of centralized state schooling and its relation to capitalism. The first public schools in Canada West ushered in free and universal education for both boys and girls, a notable departure from older, informal modes of school-house schooling which prioritized boys' education and relegated girls to domestic training (Bamman, 1972; Curtis, 1984). Despite this, patriarchal social relations still very much shaped the development of public school. The ideological transformation of school attendance into a moral good and social necessity resulted in the stigmatization of children staying home and assisting their families with daily labour of life (Curtis, 1984). This anticipated the emergence of the patriarchal “male breadwinner” model society in which the man was expected to be the sole producer of wealth whereas the rest of his family, women and children,

were merely dependents (Christie, 2004). This is not to claim that the rural communal labour that preceded the consolidation of capitalism was somehow idyllic or exploitation-free, but that this era ushered new forms of patriarchal domination that reorganized social value of labour depending on the gender and age of those performing it (Christie, 2004). Domestic work or schoolwork was characterized as simply doing one's organic and natural social function, undeserving of recognition and compensation as real labour. However, this invisible labour still required significant time, effort, and energy, yet these expenditures of energy became socially devalued to the point of unintelligibility as “real” labour (Federici, 2012). Without exploited women being made to cook, clean and reproduce the male worker's daily existence, and without children being made to acquire the habits, norms, and skills to replace the next generation, capitalist society would not be able to adequately reproduce itself and would enter an interminable crisis. Thus, the maintenance and reproduction of society rests on the unrecognised labour of those cast as familial dependents.

Egerton Ryerson, the architect of Canadian education, was clear that his vision of state education was deeply integrated with patriarchal conceptions of the traditional family (Prentice, 1972). For Ryerson, the Euro-Canadian family was now to be an “inward-looking institution that was to concentrate on the nurture of its own offspring at home and in schools” (Prentice, 1972). Responsible parenthood, which in practice was largely left to mothers, became tied to ensuring good school attendance in children, a concerted effort to stigmatize and destroy previous social norms of voluntary and informal schooling within settler communities (Prentice, 1972). In the years prior to the emergence of a centralized school system, parents would balance the child's time with education, recreation, and the occasional use of their labour, based on direct individual, familial and community needs (Prentice, 1972). Ryerson and other leading officials sought to

associate the deployment of settler's child's labour in seasonal and agricultural tasks as neglect and poor parenting, a deliberate effort to re-engineer cultural norms of parenting in ways conducive to state-building educational plans in the face a burgeoning market economy (Prentice, 1972). Conversely, the Indigenous parent was not seen as a necessary, cooperative or reliable ally in compelling their child to school during this era and were accordingly pushed out of the life of the child and replaced with the church and state as their primary educational guardian responsible for attendance (Milloy, 1998). For most of the nineteenth century, Indigenous school attendance was not a central preoccupation for the state, which largely concerned itself with schooling for settler children—a priority that shifted in the residential school and post-confederation era, taking an exceptionally brutal form of compulsory schooling where students were kept in boarding schools for prolonged periods of time, often their entire school career (Carney, 1995). Without reliable parental accomplices, the state took unprecedented levels of state intervention in the lives of Indigenous families. Once this residential school system collapsed in the 1990s, Indigenous children were folded into the general public school system in which parents, and in practice, mothers, became responsible for their child's attendance. Indeed, Indigenous, particularly Indigenous women, continue to be over-policed, and the "truancy" of their children is often used as an excuse to inflict carceral violence on Indigenous women and to facilitate the apprehension of their children—a practice that has continuity with the residential school system (contemporary implications of racialized school violence is further elaborated in chapter 6) (de Leeuw et al. 2009). While the gendered association between school attendance and morality originated in the context of mid-nineteenth century Euro-Canadian families, this phenomenon served as foundational discourse in the legitimization of state-schooling as a social necessity in Canadian society and speaks to

persistent societal presumption that renders children and childcare as the sole responsibility of women, which also takes on racialized dimensions in the contemporary context.

Moral Duty and Christian Conviction

In the following subsection I will explain how public schooling became understood as a moral obligation inflected with an ideological colonial-Christian religiosity. Changes in the way everyday Euro-Canadians understood their role in society was complex. I previously noted the resistance and violent opposition to schooling, but many also welcomed and demanded a greater degree of state schooling (Curtis, 1984). What explains the uneven and mixed response to the rise of state-schooling? The Canadian state builders did not simply impose their will upon a non-consenting population in dictatorial fashion nor did they indoctrinate people through ideological coercion. They deployed modes of governance and political technologies to produce “Canadian” subjectivities—new forms of consciousness and social life that were to ground the emerging Canadian political state order. While schooling was first made legally compulsory in public schooling for settler children, both boys and girls, in 1871, the preceding decades saw various state-driven efforts to convey the utmost social and moral importance of regular school-attendance, which anticipated the universal legal mandate in Canada West (Curtis, 1984). Teachers, administrators, and schoolboards tirelessly promoted the necessity of school attendance, gradually reshaping how individuals understood and related to schooling institutions. Prior to its compulsory mandate, school attendance was poor, but the campaign to reconstitute schooling as an institution necessary to the social, moral, and cultural flourishing of human life was a successful one, as its contemporary hegemony demonstrates. However, the notion of morality and attendance is one that deserves greater scrutiny. Mandatory and regular attendance in any institution was unheard of prior to the onset of industrial

capitalism. The factory system compelled mandatory attendance not through conscious political coercion, but through the tyranny of indirect economic coercion. As the labourer became dispossessed of his land and separated from the means of production, they had no choice but to sell their labour in exchange for a wage in the wage-labour system. To opt out of wage-labour was to expose you and your family to destitution, hunger, and most possibly death. The school system was modelled after the temporal logic of the factory, but was an unpaid form of compelled work, necessitating more direct forms persuasion, conditioning, and coercion with the lack of a direct monetary incentive (Davey, 1975). However, within the traditional labour market, there were those who could not attain employment. The state set up “poorhouses” or “workhouses” for unemployed adults who could not find work (Goulem, 2018). These oppressive institutions conscripted workers into brutal work conditions and paltry pay to produce a “work ethic” in these individuals who were presumed to be lazy or unmotivated (rather than victims of capricious and volatile economic system that often left available a number of waged jobs less than the available population). The cultivation of a “work ethic” and labour moralism was an essential facet of the reconstruction of Canadian subjectivities in the context of industrial capitalism and early state formation. There are clear parallels and continuities between the poorhouse, the public school, and the residential school; all three arose in the context of early industrial capitalism, which demanded compliance with rigid, scheduled shifts of long work hours, and all three were instrumental in the state’s ambition to produce a “work ethic” in its citizenry believed to be lacking one—due to perceived laziness, deficient cultural/racial attributes, or simply young age and inexperience; these categories overlapped to varying extents (residential schools embodied all three in interrelated ways). The capacity for individuals to work for an extended period of time under coercive supervisor-worker relations was, in part,

developed through the internalization of moralizing discourses that posited labour as an intrinsic moral good. This new system of values structured an array of institutions and social forms during the onset of capitalist social relations, including state-school, and continues to dominate life under Canada's variant of settler capitalism today. The state took concerted efforts in valorizing the value of work and, conversely, stigmatizing the "non-work" during hours that were supposed to be dedicated to work.

Essential to the mission of entrenching the "work ethic" as the moral basis of Canadian capitalism was the production of a new moral landscape, which railed against the vices of idleness and vagrancy (Houston, 1972). To be a "productive" member of society capable of performing "useful" work was deemed a desirable quality in the burgeoning world of industrial capitalism. One's usefulness was redefined according to a new set of values aligned with the sweeping social and economic changes of the era. Capitalism' twin products of economic opportunity and social inequality brought an influx of poverty, street-children, and homelessness, as well as unprecedented population density and the spread of disease which alarmed social reformers and early state-builders (Houston, 1972). While orphaned children in Canada West were not a new phenomenon, this era saw the proliferation of "semi-orphaned" settler children in newly developed urban environments. These children did have living biological parents, but these parents lacked the means to provide for their children (Houston, 1972). The particular economic and political developments of the capitalist period inspired a novel utopian ideology in the state that engendered new ways of state building and population management. The historically unprecedented expansion of market relations opened economic opportunities that emerged alongside the perceived growing threat of moral decay. Public schooling became an avenue to remake the individual and produce a new kind of political subject necessary for the

flourishing of the Euro-Canadian citizen. The early public school system could condition the child at an early age with the industrious economic habits and moral attributes that were conducive to the ideal political-economic order as envisioned by Canada's state-makers—this is applicable to both the settler and Indigenous child, but in different ways, as the state had an implicit racial caste system that saw white Euro-Canadian as the primary benefactors of education; even poor and vagrant white children could potentially be remade as societal leaders, whereas the primarily vocational education of Indigenous children relegated them to a subordinate role as “industrious” farm-workers, nothing more (Curtis, 1984; Justice, 2023; Millory, 1998). In the context of public schooling in burgeoning settler urban environments, Houston (1975) emphasizes that the desire to place youth under centrally organized state-schools was in part driven by moral outrage at the reality of so many children now being stranded on the streets due to urbanization and poverty caused by the rise of industrial capitalism; Houston (1975) clarifies that it was not necessarily poverty or crime itself that bothered Euro-Canadians, but visible “vagrancy” and “idleness,” which came to be seen as moral deficiency. The prospects of booming economic advancements and unprecedented industrial productivity was eagerly welcomed, but, at the same time, it could not be reconciled with perceived laziness and idleness of the mass of individuals now cast into the streets (Houston, 1972).

The Indigenous child, too, was the subject of “remaking” through the state control, but in ways that were more repressive, violent, and carceral in nature. The persistence of Indigenous traditional practices amidst the expansion settler-capitalist development proved to be a political problem taken up in moral terms that also had continuities with previously mentioned problems of “idleness” and “vagrancy,” which implied an inability or refusal to participate within the state-facilitated capitalist economy (Cartleton 2022; Coulthard, 2007). Yet, at the same time, the

contention with Indigenous peoples went far beyond a perceived laziness, as their very existence as a cultural identity presented an obstacle to the erection of “Christian Civilization.” (Houston, 1972; Coulthard). The Canadian politician Hayter Reed had once commented that the Indigenous genocide was a product of Indigenous people’s own failure, claiming that they lacked the kind of “Christian conviction” that allowed the white man to succeed and acquire prosperity (Carleton, 2022). Christianity and adaptability to capitalist work productivity were seen as interwoven concepts in this time. Ryerson theorized, in 1847, that Indigenous children required an approach to education distinct from the broader public school system intended for white children, believing Indigenous children should be placed in “vocational” or “industrial” education in denominational, boarding schools, where they would be subjected to a primarily religious and hyper-disciplinarian form of boarding school (Milloy, 1998). This would isolate them from the “savage” and heathen influence of their own community and ensure the absorption of Christian morality and a properly European “work ethic.” This would, in Ryerson’s reasoning, expeditiously facilitate the transformation of the “Indian” into a productive Euro-Canadian who could meaningfully contribute to the new capitalist system, but only in ways that seemed sensible given their racial background (Milloy, 1998). Indigenous children were offered a form of state-schooling in which social-mobility was foreclosed; they could become basic agricultural workers but were deemed ill-fitted for the kind of education that could produce statesmen, lawyers, clerks, or any other occupation that demanded skills beyond using a plough and planting crop. This “civilizing mission” applied to the children settler workers and farmers as well, although on a lesser scale and with a class-basis, lacking the annihilationist impulse of genocidal settler-colonialism. The traditional ways of rural life practised by settler farmworkers were seen as an obstacle to Canadian state goals of modernization (Houston, 1972). Ritual, custom,

seasonal life-styles and folk practices that regulated social life in the colonies for over a century were to be destroyed, and the settler populace was to be “re-Christianized.” It should be noted that Christianity was also the foundation of the ostensibly secular public school system for settlers (Curtis, 1984). Ryerson championed something he called “Common Christianity,” which, from a contemporary perspective, appears as entirely secular; there was to be no doctrinal, scriptural, or denominational teachings, as this would cause friction between different denominational groups; in fact, there was no discernable Christian teachings at all, at least as commonly understood today (Curtis, 1984). Curtis writes, “Christianity meant a form of self-development or subjectification whereby people in Canadian society would govern themselves rationally in keeping with certain moral/political postulates.” (Curtis, 1984, p. 110). In Ryerson’s view, the very notion of students internalizing state discourses of productivity and compliance was an intrinsically Christian enterprise. It’s difficult to overstate the extent to which a particular kind of 19th century thoroughly capitalistic Christian morality is baked into the political structure of Canadian schooling as an institution, a ruling ideology that legitimized the complete moral transformation of the individual. Being Christian and being a productive worker merged into a single category (Curtis, 1984). Schooling, as a radical experiment in Christian capitalist modernity, could break the chains of the past and thrust the child, and by extension, society itself, into a new tomorrow (Houston, 1975). Edgerton Ryerson writes “pre-eminently with us an ocean of change, the waves of which are obliterating so many ancient landmarks,” and adding that Canada’s future rested on “simple manufactories growing into prosperous towns, and towns swelling into cities—canals and railroads intersecting the various districts, and commerce covering rivers and lakes” (Houston, 1975, p. 87). Amidst a period of social and economic revolution, the state, imbued with utopian ambition, Christian conviction, and Promethean zeal,

sought to remake the individual and society itself. Commercial expansion and industrial productivity hinged on the capacity for people to work with steady discipline and for long durations (Davey, 1975). The practice of industrial labour was understood as refashioning the individual in ways that were fitting for a modern community and nation no longer tethered to the “ancient landmarks” of the early-colonial and pre-colonial past (Houston, 1972). State-education represented, from the vantage point of state-architects, a bold and forward-thinking promise of a new kind of society.

“Work” as a moral attribute in and of itself was felt acutely in the educational sphere and was directly related to the call for regular and daily attendance in school (Davey, 1975). This had a twofold effect: it produced a future citizen who retained the discipline and propensity to work to six to eight hours under the direction of a superior, and it also simultaneously kept children off the streets and away from the perceived corrupting vices of idleness and vagrancy (Axelrod, 2003; Houston, 1972). In lieu of directly attempting to alleviate the social and economic conditions of poverty or acknowledge the root cause itself, capitalist social relations, the state attempted to reshape the individual character and moral outlook of children to produce the ideal worker-citizen. Essential to this pursuit, was “accountability,” creating bureaucratic systems capable of tracking and comparing the individual performance of children, and (de)-incentivizing favourable and unfavourable behaviors as deemed necessary. This is best evidenced in the ubiquitous and enduring competition-based grading system that determines the individual child's progress through the school system, and their eventual labour-market prospects (Davies, 2006). The “report card,” which emerged in the mid 19th century, served as an essential labour-disciplining technique, similar to a workplace evaluation. Bruce Curtis (1984) writes that the report card functioned as a moral balance sheet codifying and assessing the child's perceived

value through a numerical score. The fine-tuning of the child's labouring process could not simply be enforced uniformly from above through direct coercion; rather, it needed to be produced through the regular habituation of new norms, habits, and dispositions oriented towards productive study. This transformed how children understood work—not as tyranny from above, which could prompt resistance, but a moral obligation and cultural norm that every hardworking Christian Euro-Canadian should embrace.

Prior to the hegemony of schooling, the casual, task-oriented, seasonal labour of “helping out on the farm” represented modes of work that were far less intensive and laborious for children than what came afterwards in the form of the centrally organized state-schools, first emerging in 1840s Canada West. School, despite lacking the social recognition of “labour,” represented an intensification of work demands placed on children due to the industrial tempo of productivity which structured the classroom (Curtis, 1984). Euro-Canadian state-makers envisioned schooling as a state-process that acted upon children as passive recipients; in reality, it relied on the expenditure of their physical, mental, creative, and sensuous capacities in a non-voluntary manner compelled by educational institutions, which were, in turn, shaped by economic imperative of labour-market pressures. For state leadership, education was imagined as a universal institution designed around the individual pursuit of knowledge for all. In this idealized image, every child, regardless of class background, could participate and reap the benefits of mass social mobility (this ambitious scope suffered from a glaring flaw, as Canadian universality was racially exclusionary; “everyone” meant everyone white) (Curtis, 1984). This had the effects of depoliticizing the overtly political nature of the imposition of a daily and mandatory school-regime on all children. It neutralized class consciousness, contained working class opposition to school, and invisibilized the labour of children as strictly “learning” (this last

point will be elaborated in the next chapter). In the new state school system, class divisions were to be dissolved (in actuality, they were simply masked, and poor and working class children were to be remade in the unitary vision of middle class Canada) (Curtis, 1984), and persisting class stratification was to be dismissed as the incompetence of individuals who failed to seize the promise of Canadian social mobility. The early moments of mass truancy, school burning, and anti-teacher violence were demonstrative of a rapidly closing historical window in which compulsory schooling, as a concept itself, was still up for debate; these protests were the dying gasps of an unorganized and confused opposition that crumbled under the emerging state-hegemony engendered by the rise of capitalism. After this, mainstream political debates pertaining to education largely happened within the arena of compulsory education, rarely ever against its existence (Curtis, 1984).

Education at its core was a civilising mission. At its most heinous form, we see this in the project of residential schools that sought to annihilate Indigenous cultures and way of life through assimilationist policies rooted in “Canada’s genocidal logic of white possessionism.” (Carlton, 2022, p. 182). The modernizing logic of centralized schooling functioned in tandem with Euro-Canadian racial ideology producing genocidal results, as thousands perished in poorly maintained schools rife with abuse and unsanitary conditions (Milloy, 1998). The Canadian state confronted a paradoxical conundrum: the desire to incorporate the (assimilated) Indigenous child into a stable Canadian social and political order while espousing an ideology of racial supremacy that implicitly refused any notion of Indigenous humanity. The state tried to achieve a distorted form of political inclusion through violent racial and cultural exclusion. Kevin Hutchings (2016) describes how certain colonists espoused a kind of distorted form of “anti-colonialism,” characterizing residential schools as benevolent atonement that offered free Indigenous education

as an apology for the death and disease of colonial conquest—despite these schools only offering more of the same. This underscores the patronizing Christian-colonial rhetoric of righteousness that permeated Canada’s utopian project of schooling. Yet the residential school in practice was more dystopian than anything else; the lethal neglect of Indigenous children, rooted in colonial racism and white supremacy, resulted in the kind of nightmarish institutions that actually came to fruition (Carlton, 2022). The settler child, on the other hand, was the product of a civilizing project that was institutionally and financially supported by the state through vast bureaucratic powers (Curtis, 1984). Both groups of children, settler and Indigenous, faced a colossal campaign of state intervention, but the state only had an interest in ensuring one group was able to meaningfully participate within—and reap the benefits of—the capitalist economy. Once this residential system was abolished, Indigenous education was incorporated into the universal Canadian educational system, which signified an end of a harrowing chapter in Canadian history (Carlton, 2022). However, this is not to say that racism itself somehow ended in Canadian schools, as forms of racial discrimination and colonial rule were integrated into the universal education system, albeit in far less lethal and explicit ways.

The next chapter will generate a theory which explains the social content and character of educational “work” and its relation to political economy. The current historical overview has demonstrated how the emergence of capitalism proliferated new modes of factory temporality and labour-moralism which structured both the traditional labour-firm and the educational labour-firm (ie. centrally organized state-school). In the following chapter, I will further breakdown how schooling is a form of labour, but one that belongs to a subcategory of labour that is distinct from productive, waged labour of the factory.

Schooling, Value, and Compensation

Canadian state-schooling has traditionally been theorized as sites of social reproduction that produce “future” labour. By training youth and providing them the skills to participate in the labour market, education has been indispensable to the reproduction of society, and Canadian scholars have brought attention to the indispensable role schools have in shaping Canadian youth into a future workforce (Davies, 2008; Firestone 1968; Sweetman 2002). However, this characterization of education fails to grasp how education processes compel students to actively expend their “physical and mental” energy in order to complete mandated tasks; it is work. The attempt to fashion a universal subject based on prescribed provincial curricular outcomes and grading criteria necessarily involves mobilising children and young people towards determinate ends. These processes of education pioneered by the Canadian state do not merely facilitate the passive consumption of information, but compel and shape the formative capacities of children in ways that are fundamentally unfree. In this chapter, I will demonstrate how this compelled work is not merely “pre-labour,” but constitutes a form of labour in and of itself. Firstly, it is important that we define labour.

John Bellamy Foster and Brett Clarke (2011, p. 228) write that “For Marx, all human activity has a basis in nature. . . . Labor and production constitute the active human transformation of nature, but also of human nature, the human relation to nature and human beings themselves.” Humans perform labor by transforming nature, which includes their own nature as humans; self-development, human inquiry, and processes of learning are inevitable and necessary dimensions of labour. Marx describes humans as creative producers, a fact that distinguishes humankind from animals, who according to Marx, are driven by instinctual skill drives, as the spider does not raise the “structure in imagination before he erects it in reality” when weaving a web (Marx, 2004, p. 127). For Marx, labour entails acting upon the world in a

conscious, creative, and deliberate manner, and must be understood as a transhistorical social process that has existed for as long as humans have. Labour loses its quality as free, social activity under capitalist social relations. Marx describes how “man” becomes estranged from his plurality of interests and human dynamism through the subordination of the labour process to capitalist exploitation in the form of waged work, where the worker is forced by economic necessity to sell his labour power to the capitalist in exchange for a wage. Dispossessed of his land and his own means of production, work becomes a means to economic survival, rather than “life’s want.” (see chapter 7 for a full analysis of alienation)

Marx’s analysis is largely limited to the exploitation to formal waged labourers, but not all proletariat labourers sell their labour for a wage under capitalism. Many Marxist feminists have pointed out the blind spot in Marx’s critique, which does not address the role of reproductive labourers performing unwaged domestic labour in order to reproduce the daily and generational existence of waged labourers. Silvia Federici (2021) defines reproductive labour as the essential work that the capitalist economy tends not to acknowledge. Feminist theorists have long argued that domestic and household labour performed by women under capitalism is coercive and alienating in ways comparable to formal waged labour, as they, too, are dictated by the laws of capital, while not receiving remuneration (Federici, 2012). Reproductive labour’s non-waged and gendered status has led to this work being socially devalued to the extent that it is not even discernable as a form of “real” labour (Vogel, 2014). Fortunati (1989) elaborates upon Marx’ reference to a “hidden abode of reproduction,” which she characterizes as the domestic household where women perform unrecognized, unwaged labour. This labour maintains and reproduces the labour-power of the male worker who sells it to the capitalist in the labour-firm—making it essential to the capitalist labour process. Here, we see two forms of

labour; productive labour and unwaged reproductive labour. Early pioneers of Marxist feminism argued that the worker cannot make it to the workplace to sell his labour without a mother that has birthed, nurtured, socialized, and educated them prior to this (Federici, 2012; Vogel, 2013). The worker does not spontaneously appear ready-made at the workplace with a resume in hand! However, there are limitations to the analysis of the early Italian Marxist-Feminists. Social reproduction cannot merely be limited to the individual reproduction of labourers through biological reproduction and ensuing gendered domestic labour in the home-unit. It also unfolds systematically through a variety of social and economic institutions mediated by capital in ways “that are spatially and temporally extensive [and] historically specific” (Murphy, 2015, p. 300). A child is not raised by parents alone, and social reproduction is a layered and multi-faceted process that shapes the child’s human capacities in a plethora of ways that generate value for capital.

Unrecognized Labours

In the following section, I will demonstrate the social character of educational labour through a comparative analysis with gendered domestic labour. School is a vital site of social reproduction that ensures an appropriately “skilled” labour force for the labour market (Davies, 2008). However, it must be emphasized that the labour of education in Canada cannot be reduced to the performance of rote tasks in a classroom environment, as if the school was simply a factory, but for children. This is an error made by the sociologists Bowls and Gintis (2011), who correctly identify many coercive aspects of education but reduce schoolwork to rote training for the factory system. State-education, in many ways, bears more similarity to the domestic labour performed mostly by women, which is an invisibilized form of labour encompassing a diverse variety of tasks that women are disproportionately conditioned to perform out of “love” or

necessity for their families. Similarly, in the case of education, uncompensated school-labour is grounded in various discourses including, but not limited to, a “love of learning” (Curtis, 1984). Both are socially invisible labours naturalized by a complex interacting system of cultural values and moral norms.

Following Gonzalez (2015), I break-down capitalist labour as constituting two “layers” : (a) wage-labour (b) and the unrecognized and unwaged reproductive labour—or what I call “invisible labour.” Traditionally, Marxist-feminists have used the term “reproductive labour” as interchangeable with unwaged and unrecognized labour. I use “invisible labour” because “reproductive labour” is too imprecise for our purposes: many examples of gendered reproductive labour (paid cleaning services, state/private childcare, paid food preparation services, etc.) may be reproductive, but they are paid and socially visible (while still being socially devalued), which means they are integrated into the formal, wage-economy (Gonzalez, 2015). Capitalist society is defined by a system of wage labour, where labourers are divorced from the means of production and, consequently, must sell their labour-power to a capitalist for a wage to survive. However, the existence of wage-labour is enabled through invisible exploitation, the forms of labour that sustain, maintain, enable and/or reproduce the lives of wage-labourers to begin with. It is the originary structure or pre-condition of capitalist labour.

Fortunati (1981, p.21) explains:

Within reproduction the elements concerned, the family, prostitution, labor power, the exchanges, and their relations of production are not actually recognized as being agents or elements of capitalist production ... " appearing as a relationship which, since it does not seem to have originated in capital, does not require any investigation as to whether women are exploited within it or not. For capital, this whole sphere of reproduction is a

"natural" process, composed of "natural" elements and "natural" relations. But this is not the real character of reproduction, value is, and despite being hidden, value is the dominant characteristic.

Federici (1981) describes a hierarchical social arrangement in which the waged labourer can coerce, control, and exploit “dependent” members of their family who lack economic and social independence and are hence vulnerable to patriarchal violence. This hidden work is not recognized as “real” labour necessary to the social reproduction of society, but is overlooked as a “natural” social process. Waged and invisible labour, in dual fashion, constitute the bedrock of capitalist society—they are what ensure its maintenance and reproduction. This clarifies how capital instrumentalizes the human capacities of *all* workers exploited under capitalism, both waged and non-waged workers. Unwaged reproductive labour is not external to the wage relation or capital, but is wholly integrated into capitalist social relations, even if its relation to the wage form is obscured through naturalized relations of social reproduction. Although it operates in a structurally distinct manner, educational labour, too, falls under the category of “invisible” labour; it is unrecognized labour (Gonzalez call it “non-labour”) that is a functional requirement for the reproduction of capitalism through the generational replacement of the labour force. The work output of students is largely relegated to a category of “learning,” perceived as wholly distinct from labour, which tends to be associated with a wage under capitalism. The social theorist Malcom Harris (2018, p. 16) quotes this relevant passage by Jürgen Zinnecker, a sociologist of childhood:

Learning is not understood as a type of work, whereby children contribute productively to the future social and economic development of the society. Only the adult work of teachers is emphasized as productive contribution to the development of human capital.

The corresponding learning activities of pupils are thus defined, not as work but as a form of intellectual consumption.

By rendering the efforts extended by students in schools as mere passive “intellectual consumption” and not active contributions dedicated to the future development of society, the abuse of student labour can be intensified and deepened while remaining socially invisible, devalued, and unpaid (Harris, 2018). The student is not a passive object that is programmed by teachers, parents, and school administrators, but are active participants in a social process that demands they *work* for grades, credentials, and degrees, as seen in the completion of assignments, tests, projects, homework, and other mandated activities (Davies, 2008). Labour-power must be continuously produced and reproduced, but in the context of education, it is also *self-produced*. Students employ labour to produce their own labour-power commodity for future sale in the labour-market, and this educational activity often exceeds the regular school day and colonizes the child’s leisure and recreation time in the forms of homework or preparation for testing and examinations (Davies, 2008; Harris; 2018). On a systemic level, this everyday work constitutes the generational production of labour-power that is the basis of the capitalist economy. A combination of both pedagogical and disciplinary strategies at the disposal of teaching staff are necessary in ensuring the compliance of student-labourers; however, labour discipline enforcement in state-school systems is distinct from the enforcement of labour discipline in the traditional adult labour firm, given the structural differences between these institutions (Curtis, 1984). Traditional “bosses” can wield wages to ensure workplace attendance, as well as promotions, bonuses, commissions, hourly-billing and other economic incentives to increase labour productivity (Marx, 2004). These material benefits are largely reserved for the realm of socially recognized wage-labour. Invisible labour, lacking wage incentives and formal

employer-employee contractual relations, is usually embedded within complex cultural value-systems which normalize work as a taken-for-granted, naturalized social activity rather than labour deserving of recognition as such—or monetary compensation (Federici, 2012). In the gendered sphere, this is seen clearly in households in which the male breadwinner may not explicitly command his partner to carry out domestic house-chores, but she may take them on anyway as the completion of these tasks becomes an internalised social norm and cultural expectation stemming from deeply ingrained societal sexism (Fortunati, 1995). Compulsory school is forcibly compelled by Canadian law and institutionalized disciplinary mechanisms; however, it's not enough to have students merely present; optimal levels of student productivity is sustained through various cultural discourses and pedagogical approaches that legitimizes invisible labour as not only necessary, but morally good and enjoyable. (see chapter 6 for an elaboration of ideology) (Curtis, 1984).

Unpaid Educational Labour

In this section, I will argue that the active performance of school activities directed by educational staff is also a form of unpaid labour. While the previous section had emphasized the unrecognized and devalued nature of reproductive educational work, it is also distinctly non-remunerated. This contrasts with claims that Canadian public education is fairly compensated through the accumulation of purportedly useful skills and knowledge that “pays off” in the future (Davies, 2007). In lieu of direct remuneration for labour performed, students are promised vague economic benefits to be reaped in a distant future. Instead of a wage, inter-student competition, the allure of credentials, and the disciplinary and regulatory mechanisms of educational institutions compel students to exert considerable time and energy working on assigned school tasks. Student labour is surveilled, evaluated, and regulated through a vast system of report

carding, grading, degrees, diplomas, state assessments and credentials which structure the students' advancement through the Canadian education system and their post-secondary and career prospects (Davies, 2008). Davies (2008) refers to these economic and social signifiers as “ability badges” which students must competitively work for. These ability badges are enmeshed within a web of universal bureaucratic checks and disciplinary mechanisms that are designed to reliably and consistently produce a new generation of society capable of navigating the capitalist economy “successfully.” (Davies, 2008).

Students exert a considerable amount of work, time, and effort that “contributes productively to the future economic and social development of society” through their contribution to the generational replacement of the labour force, but do not receive any financial remuneration, effectively subsidizing capital as a kind of prolonged unpaid internship of adolescence (Harris, 2018, p. 16). This centrality of schoolwork to the economy became particularly apparent in the 2020-2021 shut-down in schools due to the COVID-19 pandemic, as prominent journalists, politicians, and economists called for the resumption of schooling despite health risks on the grounds of economic necessity (Green, 2021; Sweetman 2002). Students attended school at great personal risk to their own health all because this was deemed an economic priority by the Canadian state. The documented toll school has on the health and well-being of young people in Canada can be understood as occupational hazards of a particular form of labour (Green, 2021).

While the Canadian state invests a great deal of capital into the education system itself, including teacher training and staff wages, the individual labour of children themselves is “compensated” with the promise of potential employment opportunities, which is for from

guaranteed and assumes school derived knowledge can be reliably “cashed in.” For instance, Scott Davies (2008, p. 51):

First, do many young people really possess the ability to make rational investment choices based on expected life-time rewards? Perhaps they have a rough idea, but it is a broad “guestimate” at best. If one becomes a court judge, she or he will probably recoup the investment in law school tuition and forgone earnings, but this will be difficult to calculate in any detail while still a student. Furthermore, does everyone have the ability to turn educational “investments” into rewards? Sociologists have shown that many women earn less than men, even with comparable education in the same occupation (see, e.g., Kay and Hagan, 19988, on lawyers.

Contrary to the claims of the proponents of “human capital theory,” educational markers and credentials do not have a mechanical relation to economic prosperity and advancement nor do they legally entitle the student to any financial or career guarantees; a child with poor grades but with a great degree of family connections and inherited wealth may very well be more successful in their future career path than a child with high grades but who is from a racialized and impoverished background, as trans-national research observing hiring trends in multiple Western countries (including Canada) indicates that racialized and minority groups face systematic barriers in the labour-market in comparison to their white colleagues (Quillian, 2023). State-schooling more so provides a “baseline” level of broad skills, attitudes, and orientations towards work, compliance, and productivity necessary for the capitalist organization of life, rather than serving as a direct path to desired future professions (indeed, the school prepares the child for an office job to the same extent that it prepares the child for prison; see Chapter 6). The accumulation of unpaid experience may very well potentially confer a benefit down the road for

some, but this should not be confused with a contractually guaranteed wage or financial compensation, a hard learned lesson by thousands of Quebecois unpaid interns who went on strike in 2019; both unpaid interns and schoolchildren may be developing coveted skills or professional connections for the capitalist labour market through their unpaid labour, but potentially increasing one's prospects in the labour-market at a future time does not address present moment economic insecurities, and thus cannot be meaningfully described as legitimate remuneration (Laframboise, 2019). Adolescents, too, especially queer and 2SLGBTQ+ youth, are vulnerable to homelessness and parental domestic violence, and the absence of income for their educational work renders them as dependent on families who are abusive and queerphobic; the legal compulsion of unpaid mandatory schooling entraps young people in violence, and alternative educational arrangement could offer a solution to this intractable problem (Ecker, 2016). Indeed, simply giving direct remuneration to adolescents providing a valuable economic service to the state would protect them from situations of economic insecurity and violence.

School and the Making of Productive Subjects

In this chapter I will explain how ideological forms of knowledge and carceral violence have played a powerful role in producing students as “productive subjects” and educational labourers. The formation of work-ready, compliant, productive subject through an unpaid and coercive top-down project is sanitized through ideological discourses of “learning” or “pedagogical individualism,” misrepresenting active labour processes as passive intellectual consumption of the individual learner. The coercive nature of state-schooling is at times not readily apparent to its participants, but this is not because of ideological confusion or “false consciousness” actively imposed upon society by a ruling class, as stipulated in a vulgar Marxism or sociological functionalism. Rather, according to Mojab and Carpenter (2017), these

popular perceptions are: “grounded in capitalism’s phenomenal forms, the ways in which the social relations of bourgeois society present themselves to the consciousness of its participants’ (Carpenter and Mojab, 2015). The historical architects of Canadian education were not scheming conspirators imposing a dystopian brainwashing campaign upon unsuspecting children; rather they themselves vigorously believed in the goodness of state-schooling as a moral venture necessary to unleashing the full development of capitalism, an economic system they saw as the key to human flourishing and prosperity (Curtis, 1984). This sentiment permeated society as a result of the ascendent Euro-Canadian bourgeois social order, normalizing the individualistic pursuit of economic credentials with the emergence of competitive labour markets. To reiterate, capitalist social relations should be understood as “[producing] an experiential reality of a fragmented social life,” that obscures the fundamental material and social relations of society; this is the theory of ideology put forth by Mojab and Carpenter (2017) that has far greater analytical utility and historical insight than older Marxist paradigms that post capitalists as colluding to impose a false ideology on the working class. While capitalists certainly have a direct interest in accumulating capital, these interests are structured by broader economic and social conditions rather than purely ideological motives of greed. Thus, ideology is immanent to certain social forms rather than being the product of the mentality or intentions of powerful individuals or a group of individuals.

In its phenomenal form under capitalism, state-schooling tends to be viewed as a politically neutral system of knowledge transmission commonly understood as necessary to the functioning of a thriving society (Davies, 2008). This is a fragmented, class-blind, and one-sided view of state-schooling, which is abstracted from its actuality as a process of facilitating the generational renewal of capitalist society through a regime of labour-discipline. The social

reproductive function of state-schooling under settler-capitalism becomes obscured through its self-depiction as a primarily pedagogical institution that simply facilitates “learning.” It is typical for Canadian schoolboards to represent their own objectives through the language and discourses that the very same schoolboards have created for themselves, as seen in the curricular preoccupation with the “[enhancement] of learning” and “[improving] achievement” while their functions of coercion derived from capitalist political economy predictably remain unstated (Ontario Public Service, 2013). An Ontario Education Department report on evaluation and assessment states that the purported purpose of their provincial education programming is to enable students to “reach their potential,” through teaching models based on a “love of learning” and in ways that acknowledge the “unique learning profile” of every student. There are also recurrent references to “equity” and “social justice” (Ministry of Education, 2011, pp.1, 2, 8, 74, 77). These are likely genuine statements formulated by earnest bureaucrats not unlike their institutional forebear Egerton Ryerson, the architect of Canadian education who had also addressed the problem of educating the masses with governing approaches he understood as forward-thinking, progressive, and socially just (Curtis, 1984). Since their inception, these education department documents have been rife with vague, sentimental educational terms and appeals to emotion that are irreconcilable with the actual practices and purpose of schools, such as the standard grading-systems which reify and reproduce class inequality; impoverished and racialized students are more likely to attain low grades due to socioeconomic barriers and systemic biases, and this in turn further obstructs educational opportunities and eventual career opportunities, reproducing social inequality (Ball, 2012; Curtis; 1984, Davies, 2008). Additionally, the Ontario education department exhibits a preoccupation with “fair” and “equitable” assessment practices despite the fact that state-driven data assessment on student

performance itself is an inherently inequitable political tool that is a driving factor in the reproduction of inequality through the sequential ranking of students based on perceived socio-economic utility (Curtis, 1984). This inevitably marginalizes a great deal of students relegated to the bottom of these rankings, entrenching social stratification through the unequal distribution of credentials. The Ontario education department outlines its purported commitment to fair assessment while educational assessment itself is predicated on premises that are intrinsically unfair—these dynamics are essential to the economic sorting and classifying imperatives of state-schooling that no amount of flowery language can displace. Indeed, these rankings are increasingly used to justify segregating Indigenous and racialized populations into stigmatizing “special education” classrooms, a phenomena which will be described in more depth in the *“Educational Carcerality and Labour Discipline”* section of this same chapter. This is also demonstrative of the continuity between state-education as it started in mid 19th century Canada West and how it endures today: a top-down, a political project which legitimizes itself as a moral enterprise through highly ideological self-representation, “ [separating] us from the materiality of our social and natural worlds,” effacing the class divisions, coercion, and labouring intrinsic to top-down bureaucratic schooling, and entrenching schooling as a natural, necessary, and timeless institution of social welfare (Mojab and Carpenter, 2015).

Productivity and Subjectification

Perhaps the single most prominent form of bourgeoisie thought that structures Canadian state-education is that of “productivity,” which is the foundation of the capitalist economy and the labour it is reliant on. In this section I will analyze the centrality of “productivity” to the workings of Canadian education, and the way it shapes the consciousness of students.

Productivity cannot be understood simply as a free-floating idea but is a regulative social norm that takes shape in the context of particular socio-economic conditions. The material reality of capitalist (re)production, and its disciplined temporality and incentive structures, engenders social practices and cultural values immanent to its functioning. Jason Read (2016, p.3 17) writes:

Productivity is ... not just an idea or a concept, but a fundamental restructuring of reality, workers are made more productive, and less, because it does not have a justification or rationalization. It ... does not stand above a practice, dictating its goals and ideals, but is entirely immanent to it ... To be productive is both a cultural imperative and an economic practice.

Following Read (2016), productivity can be described as a metaphysics of capitalism that colonises our very understanding of human nature—it is a deeply penetrating form of ideology or consciousness. Notions of “productivity” and “industriousness” are present in capitalist institutions in an overt ideological manner to varying extents, but they are also “baked” into its structure in a more subtle way (Weeks, 2018). In the educational context of Canada, this has been described as the “hidden curriculum” by scholars, encompassing the norms, values, and beliefs that are taught to students, but not explicitly so (Davies, 2008). Hidden curriculum agenda items include, but are not limited to: orienting to curricular instruction organized through time-slots and timed ringing of bells, deference to the teacher's position as the supreme authority in the classroom with legitimate disciplinary powers, the moral necessity of punctual and regular attendance, and the legitimacy of a social ranking and sorting system actualized through assessments of cognitive performance (Ball, 2012; Curtis, 1984; Davies, 2008; McGarry, 2013). The items of the “hidden curriculum” are bound up with cultural discourses of productivity. The

school is a social factory where labour-power is made, but this labour-power requires labour itself to produce, and labour that is useful for capital must be disciplined and made productive. The capitalist school-system immerses students within a particular body of social knowledge subordinated to the *active* production of labour-power and future capacities. Educational life is structured by an “anatamo-temporal” logic set to the rhythm of completing work (Ball, 2012). The practices of the hidden curriculum are all largely centred around the driving educational purpose of producing “productive” individuals who can carry out assigned tasks in a timely manner (the particular tasks in question may take on a diverse array of forms and cannot be reduced to rote sheet work, as productivity demands the student-worker orient to a plurality of tasks, including those that are “hands on” or “student centred”). A 2018 British sociological study, using “big data,” analyzed tens of thousands of job adverts and determined that employers only had a secondary interest in formal degrees, primarily prioritizing perceived “job readiness” a descriptor which consists of concrete traits associated with productivity and efficiency, such as being able to “perform within short time horizons,” “multitasking,” “prioritizing tasks,” and “meeting deadlines,” (Brown & Souto-Otero, 2018). In the words of educational sociologist Stephen Ball (2012), this is why, “the problem of population, its management and its productivity remain as the main themes of education policy in the twenty-first century” (Ball, 2012, p. 98). These qualities associated with “job readiness” are deliberately and specifically cultivated within school environments by teachers and necessitate a host of dispositions and attitudes towards a particular, and often highly intensive way, of performing work (Davey, 1975). “Off-task” or disruptive behaviour cannot be reconciled with the cultural values and political-economic institutional objectives of schooling, which can provoke disciplinary reactions covering everything from “time-outs” to police interventions (Wun, 2017). Thus, school

behavioural discipline is deeply interrelated with the political-economic nature of state schooling.

Educational Carcerality and Labour Discipline

The teacher is the one who is primarily responsible for tracking attendance, evaluating performance, and disciplining the labour (and behaviour) of students. The section will illustrate the centrality of teachers in the fashioning of students as productive subjects. Teachers primarily occupy a disciplinary and managerial role in relation to their students and employ various strategies of control to ensure they comply with labour directives and the closely related system of moral values enshrined in public schools which stigmatizes so-called disruptive behaviour. Teacher directives of “stay on task,” “do your job,” “no talking”, are all too common classroom mantras that remind students that their primary task in the classroom is to complete schoolwork. The maintenance of labour productivity in the classroom takes on a disciplinary form through the exclusion and isolation of students who pose a “disruption” to the teacher’s desired pace of work output in the classroom. Like other forms of state repression, this exclusion often takes on a racial character as Indigenous and minority students are perceived as being uniquely deviant and disruptive. For instance, In the context of Manitoban schools, Bartlett (2019, pp. 95-96) writes:

the continued use of categorical labels [...] identify students who are perceived to have a severe emotional and behavioural disorder ... the prevalence of segregated classrooms and self-contained programs ... are striking indicators that the implementation of inclusive education remains elusive in this province to the detriment of all students, and especially Indigenous students ... In their early conceptions of disability, MacMillan and Reschly (1998) referred to subjective disability labels like behaviour disorders as

“judgement categories” (p. 15). The authors continued to describe these categories as fraught with imprecision and bias.

Bartlett (2019) explains how “non-violent” forms of ostracization, exclusion, and containment are used within Manitoban schools to the great detriment of students, especially Indigenous students who are too often perceived by teachers as being behaviourally challenged or disruptive and more so than their white counterparts. Essential to this form of racialized exclusion is the use of “special education” categories that isolate students in segregated special needs classrooms. Bartlett describes how the category of “disability” is disproportionately applied to Indigenous students in ways that confuse behavioural difference with behavioral disorder, pathologizing and stigmatizing Indigenous students while justifying their segregation, a practice that in some ways recalls the historical legacies of racist Indigenous schooling in the past (Bartlett, 2019). It is also worth noting the manner in which these racist practices are both glossed over and integrated within the explicit governing ideology of state-school systems. For instance, these segregationist policies are justified in the Winnipeg School Division’s inclusion philosophy statement in which the authors boldly claim that “inclusion is not a place,” implying that the school division’s practices of racial and (perceived) ability segregation are fully compatible with so-called inclusion; thus, despite engaging in explicitly discriminatory and repressive policies, it is of paramount importance for the schoolboard that it maintains its ideological edifice of “inclusion, equity, and diversity,” to the extent that it will make a concerted effort to re-brand policies of exclusion as the literal opposite of that (Bartlett, 2019). Since its historical inception, systems of state-schooling have derived legitimacy from their self-characterization as a benevolent project of social welfare, and practices such as this are no exception; these ideological representations mediate the abstractions of capitalism, masking the relations and processes of class, labour, and

colonialism that form state-schooling. While it may be tempting to attribute problems of this nature to divisional leadership and decision-making at the top, it must be said that these policies rely on teachers for the actualization on the ground, as the removal, segregation, and isolation of students are handled by educational staff directly. For the teacher, removal of “distracting” students is essential to maintaining a productivity workflow and running an efficient labour regime. This teacher ”policing” of students is not far-removed from actual policing. For instance, Skiba et al. (2014, pp. 554-555) write:

A strong link has been established in retrospective studies (e.g., youth already incarcerated) between suspension/expulsion and involvement in the criminal justice system. Sixty-one percent of youth found in juvenile justice detention facilities reported being expelled or suspended from school the year prior to entering juvenile justice custody (Sedlak & McPherson, 2010). Krezmien, Leone, and Achilles (2006) found that, in a sample of over 500 males in a juvenile correctional facility, more than four in five had been suspended from school and more than one in two had been expelled from school ... Stronger conceptual links between school exclusionary practices and juvenile justice contact have been demonstrated by prospective longitudinal studies, tracking students through school from disciplinary encounters to juvenile justice contact.

This form of school discipline is closely related with carceral violence. Capitalist education should not be merely seen as labour training for the capitalist labour market, but as labour training for the capitalist organization of social life itself, as the general orientation towards labour productivity, compliance and hierarchy developed within the school-system enable youth to be streamed into various “life paths,” which include the prison system. Earlier in this thesis, I made a historical comparison between the poorhouse and the school, but this is just one

institutional affinity of many. A number of institutions under capitalism adhere to a similar social logic. Foucault (1995, p. 228) had once provocatively mused, “Is it surprising prisons resemble our factories, schools, military bases, and hospitals—all of which in turn resemble prisons?” A remark that speaks to the way in which capitalism is not just an economic system of labour organization, but a social totality subordinated to capitalist accumulation; within these social relations, societal elements displaying qualities deemed undesirable or unproductive (designations that are largely racialized) are guided into carceral institutions for which school disciplinary zones function as a precursor (much can be said about relations between schooling and youth military recruitment or between “special education” and institutions for the disabled and psychiatric centers; a full analysis of these “pipelines” are beyond the scope of this research, but should be noted nonetheless). Unpaid or extremely low-paid labour is an accepted facet of life in Canadian prison and thus, in some sense, the transition between school and prison is more natural than that between school and the labour firm. The prisoner, having received little or no financial remuneration of her labour, is meant to leave the prison with an increased tolerance for exploitative labour, so they can now (re)join “normal” society as productive labourers—a function not unlike that of education.

While many scholars have characterized the school as being pipeline to prison, Connie Wun (2017) has argued that the school is a prison-like institution itself, given that most school divisions across the country have School Resource Officers directly working within schools themselves. Police officers in schools do not work in isolation from conventional educational staff. On the contrary, educational workers often work in collaboration with them, which is demonstrative of how schools have integrated carceral violence within daily educational life (Salole & Abdulle, 2015). SROs taken on “educational” roles in speaking with classes and

offering presentations, while teachers also take on carceral roles by sharing information with SROs, effectively assisting in carceral apprehension of students (Salole & Abdulle, 2015). For instance, in Salole & Abdulle's (2015) research on racialized inner-city youth in Toronto, they vividly describe how the dual harassment of both police officers and teachers negatively impacts the lives of students; both professions work in tandem to employ varying forms of exclusionary discipline that "manage" youth. Hernandez (2020) describes mass incarceration as "colonial labour extraction," which is an accurate characterization of the hyper-repressive modes of discipline used against racialized youth who deviate from the accepted norms of productivity and "on-task behaviour" in Canadian schools. Detentions, suspensions, expulsion, police apprehensions, and arrests all exist on the same continuum of discipline that occur within the walls of Canadian public schools, which also establishes a seamless transition from school-life into prison life (Salole & Abdulle, 2015). This discipline is both carceral-discipline and labour-discipline; it is punishment, but also a means of segregating "disruptive" (and disproportionately racialized) youth from "productive" youth, maximizing productivity of the latter, while using pathologizing practices of "special education" to mould the former into subjects more palatable to capitalist social norms. Hernandez (2020, p. 3) describes mass incarceration and prisons as:

a form of elimination—a way of containing, surveilling, and ultimately hastening the premature death of Black and Indigenous peoples in order to reproduce a white settler society. The system of mass incarceration and criminalization in the U.S. is the product not only of white supremacy and racial capitalism but also of settler colonialism.

Settler-colonialism, historically, was experienced in present day Canada through the physical elimination of Indigenous people and by processes land-theft and settlement (Coulthard, 2007). Patrick Wolfe (2015) is correct to describe settler colonialism as a "structure rather than

event,” and one that is continuously re-asserting itself today in the form of mass incarceration, ongoing land-theft and hyper-exploitative colonial labour regimes. Elimination does not necessarily have to take the form of direct murder but can assume the form of “slow death” through repressive labour regimes shaped and re-shaped by racialized containment, segregation, exclusion and isolation, as seen in, for example, hyper-disciplinarian educational labour for inner-city and colonized youth (Wolf, 2015; Hernandez, 2020). Capitalism, as a social system, is one that seeks to discipline workers into productive subjects through moral regulation in order to accumulate capital. In settler society, racial categories have developed implicit associations with moral deficiency, incompetence, and laziness, which were deliberately fostered through centuries of colonial and racist subjugation. Thus, the very construction of race is deeply interrelated with notions of productivity, labour, and perceived usefulness to capital. For these groups, labour in Canadian public schools is both labour coercion and punishment. These two facets of education cannot be separated.

It may be tempting to reduce the unsavoury disciplinary behaviour of teachers to some “bad apples,” but the phenomenon described is a structural one that speaks to the nature of teaching within state-schools in a systemic sense. The social structure of Canadian schooling has been designed around instilling particular cultural values and norms grounded in political-economic state objectives, and teachers are essential to the functioning of these structures by the nature of their designated occupational tasks. To be clear, teachers are not complicit in oppression due to an individual moral failing, but because they are subject to impersonal social forces, such as the indirect pressures of the capitalist market. Teachers are mandated with assessing and indexing the performance of students in accordance with provincial curricular guidelines, which plays a significant role in the transition into the Canadian adult labour-market

(Sweetman, 2002). Thus, it is imperative that teachers maintain a sufficient degree of “labour discipline” and social control in the classroom. While a Left critique of unionized state workers may be uncomfortable for some, making schoolwork visible as labour also entails making visible the managers who drive and discipline that labour process. Teachers, like police officers, and other repressive state-workers, are complicit in upholding and partaking within oppressive structures, as their occupational obligations derive from state objectives tied up with facilitating capital accumulation through state power.

Some Marxist feminists theorists, such as Tichi Battacharya and Cinzia Arruzza, have portrayed teachers as a singularly emancipatory force due to their progressive role in the labour movement, ignoring any repressive function they may carry out as a part of their daily occupational responsibilities (Munro, 2021). This uneven portrayal has some commonality with male-centric historical conceptions of the traditional labour movement that valorized the radical potential of factory workers while completely ignoring the struggle of women domestic workers (Righi, 2011). In the 1970s, The PCI (Italian Communist Party) regarded the woman domestic worker as a kind of colonized subject that required “real” industrial labour in order to stir a genuine revolutionary consciousness, largely dismissing domestic labour as having any significance in the struggle against capitalism and ignoring the patriarchal violence men enacted on their wives and partners at home (Righi, 2011). Theorists who romanticise the proletariat role of the teacher, while ignoring their managerial role, do so at the cost of denying or minimizing the struggles of students against the school-system who recede into the background as their supervisors are venerated. The implication is that the young people are political non-actors whose social struggles and marginalization need not complicate the development of the teacher labour movement. For instance, economist Kirsten Munro (2021, p. 3) explains:

However, SRT overlooks the contradictory role of professional women in public-sector employment related to the reproduction of labor power, as well as the antagonistic role of the state in the lives of the working class. Is it possible to separate the state's social provisioning functions from its functions related to violence and repression? My answer to this the question is no. The reproduction of capitalist society depends on the worker continually reproducing herself as a worker—compelled to do so both “physically and socially.... Rather, the supposedly virtuous “activities of life-making” carried out by professional women state employees such as teachers, nurses, and social workers perpetuate the antagonism and social misery inherent to capitalism

Munro (2021) correctly acknowledges the “social provisioning” functions of state employees, like teachers, but this does not undo its integral role in reproducing capitalist exploitation. Fortunati (1989) notes that “with regard to ‘control,’ capitalists cannot make the female houseworker work under their direct command. For Fortunati, the capitalist indirectly subordinates women through the male waged worker, who functions as the capitalist's mediator. This has some commonality with how educational institutions and teaching staff who control the labour of the student on behalf of capital. Although the capitalist teacher-student relationship is more complex; teachers function more like “foreman” of the educational social factory, supervising and surveilling the labour output of the child during the “workday.” The direct capitalist mediator would more accurately describe the parent who functions as the real enforcer of school-attendance. Bamman (1972, p. 381), describing early patterns of school-attendance, writes that “The district system had encouraged patterns of attendance attuned to the interests of the family and not those of the state.” With the disappearance of the apprenticeship system under capitalism, the state-schooling process ensured families that the child would have a broad

range of general skills that would serve them well in the competitive labour market, while also providing child-supervision during the working day (Bamman, 1972). No longer a working contributor to family income through communal labour, children become a future investment for the parent. Gill-Peterson (2015 p. 188), writes: “Becker reads ... demographic trends as parents concentrating their resources more efficiently to invest in the increased quality of each child born. A child in whom more time and money is invested from birth will eventually yield greater returns on human capital, obviating the need for more kids.” Thus, as late capitalism engenders increasing economic precarity, parents become less interested in having more children, and more interested on having a few children, but investing into them more heavily. The child becomes an entrepreneurial enterprise for the parent, who attempts to ensure steady school attendance and strong academic performance as a way of investing in their child’s reproductive future. The exact “payoff” for this investment is not entirely clear, but Gauthier et al. (2022) writes that research points towards parental investment in child-raising being a project of “self-development” and “individualization” for the parent, meaning the child is seen as a kind of extension of the parent’s sense of self. This narrow and self-serving view of childhood conceptualizes the child’s development as the individualistic project of parental self-fulfilment. The reality of labour-discipline and state-coercion are mystified, as parents invest their energies in ensuring their child “succeeds” at all costs; classes, extra-curriculars, homework, tutoring, etc. are not labour processes being imposed on the child at the expense of their mental health and well-being, but are seen as merely nurturing the growth and development; not just for the child, but for the parent themselves (Gauthier, 2022; Harris, 2018). However, it should be noted that Indigenous families often do not have the same relationship to schooling due to historical legacies of educational racism and residential schooling, as research has shown how Indigenous parents,

with good justification, often view schooling with distrust and suspicion (Puxley, 2016). This may very well exacerbate racist perceptions of Indigenous families given the cultural veneration of schooling in Western society, and the moral value placed on regular school attendance. These negative associations of state-school systems reflect not just historical assimilationism in residential schools but ongoing practices of racism and carceral violence that are pervasive in contemporary schools. The way school-systems have alienated racial minorities has led to parental engagement in schools being disproportionately white, which allows white parents to further influence school policy in ways that privilege their own children (Puxley, 2016). Indeed, parenting as a project of individual “self-development,” necessarily involves prioritizing the needs of one’s own child over others. This undercuts affirmative-action style policies, contributing to education’s status as a “white good” that pushes out racialized children and privileges white students as a privileged strata of youth educational labour within the school system (Justice, 2023).

Alienated Schooling

“Alienation” is a concept that has been used by Marx (2004) to describe the worker’s estrangement from their fundamental human nature in the capitalist labour process. In the following chapter, I will argue that the concept is also applicable to the educational-labour process of students in K-12 Public schools (Marx, 1988). Firstly, I will elaborate Marx's conception of alienation, and then I will articulate its relation to state-schooling, drawing on sociological research that features the real experiences of Canadian students.

Labour under capitalism is alienated from human “species-being,” which is what Marx (1988) describes as the unique essence of humanity; humans, according to Marx (1988), are self-conscious and creative actors on their environment as opposed to animals who lack higher levels

of reasoning. One of the early Marx's most compelling interventions is his characterization of how labour becomes “estranged” under capitalism. Under capitalist labour, the worker becomes dominated by the very social process they are carrying out. The product of the worker now stands “opposed” to the him, acting upon him as an “alien” force; this compelled work renders his labour not as his own activity, but as something that “belongs to another; it is the loss of his self” (Marx, 1998, p. 74) Accordingly the “worker, therefore, feels himself at home only during his leisure time, whereas at work he feels homeless” (Marx, 2004, p. 365). Mészáros (2006) describes “capitalistically structured activity” as the “ground of alienation” which accurately describes school as a social structure indirectly mediated by market incentives through its intricate assessment and credential structures, which bridge schooling and the capitalist labour-market.

Under capitalism, Marx (2004) argues, the worker must take on whatever work he can find, selling his skills in exchange for the opportunity to toil away under a capitalist for a wage. The configuration of the workplace is ultimately designed, and fine-tuned, to maximize profits for the capitalist, utilizing a highly specialized division of labour and forms of managerial work discipline that subjects the worker to supervised work tasks (often rote and repetitive, but not necessarily so) for long hours (Marx, 2004). The capitalist workplace divorces the worker from her fundamentally “free” human essence, and instead subordinates them to a life of toil (Marx, 1988). Conversely, in communist society, Marx (1998, p. 16) describes the unalienated life of an individual untethered by the structural impositions of capital:

where nobody has one exclusive sphere of activity but each can become accomplished in any branch he wishes, society regulates the general production and thus makes it possible for me to do one thing today and another tomorrow, to hunt in the morning, to fish in the

afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticize after dinner, just as I have in mind, without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, shepherd, or critic.

The society that transcends the capitalist division of labour is one of freedom; the worker is no longer a worker, but a fully free individual. In Marx's theorization of communism, individuals can collectively deliberate on how to best use their labour to improve their society as an end itself, and without the exploitation of a capitalist and their imposition of the standard “work day.” Labour is then subordinated to a project of social good, rather than capital accumulation. In addition to the abolition of the worker, Marx’s vision of a communist society necessarily jettisons the capitalist as well, as both the exploiter and exploited classes are abolished, making way for a free association of individuals. As we will see, the bureaucratic and coercive constraints of Canadian state-schooling is fundamentally unfree due to it being mediated by the market demands of capital.

Student Rejection of School

Canadian K-12 schooling, like other forms of capitalist labour, constitutes a means of ensuring one's physical livelihood, but in a strictly delayed fashion: the accumulation of credentials and certifications enables adult employment and post-secondary opportunity. Thus, schooling is alienated in the sense that it is a “means of physical existence,” rather than the fulfilment of “life’s wants.” The logic of capital dictates the pace, tempo, and productivity of work-output which must be regulated and assessed to certain mandated curricular standards through required attendance and state-compulsion (Davey, 1975; Curts, 1984; Ball, 2012). These constraints are contrary to the human essence of children, who, in turn, rationally respond to conditions of bureaucratic compulsion with resistance and opposition (Ferguson, 2001; Nelsen, 1985). Sociologists of education have documented the many ways in which children have

responded to the conditions of state-schools (Nelsen, 1985; Tanner, 2008). For instance, in describing student resistance, Nelsen (1985, pp. 138-143) writes:

Students seem to be at least semi-aware that school is a very constraining institution. One way of exercising some control is to skip school ... Indeed, many students - be they skippers, vandals, early school leavers, eventual graduates, or any combination of these - are bored with school. The pervasiveness of self-reported student boredom has been amply documented in several studies completed during the last decade... the kids are all responding at least in part to the reality of school boredom ... In short, school socialization has failed them and they, in turn, have failed the school by failing to subdue their emotions to school authority and standardization.

Nelson (1985) describes how various Canadian studies documenting the experience of students depict a mind-numbing and pervasive culture of boredom that dominates school life. This phenomenon, he writes, is directly produced by the highly bureaucratic, standardized, and abstract nature of school. Pathologized behaviours identified by schools as “oppositional” or “defiant” often stem from the student's rational response to the school's system's endless array of rules and mandates. Summarizing a study by Paul Corrigan, Nelson (1985) observes how students in a Thunder Bay school described experiencing genuine feelings of community and comradeship during Saturday night outings, a context that was finally free of the watchful eye of the teacher or other social authorities. In contrast, the school and its bureaucratic structures were experienced by the same students as deeply unpleasant, coercive, and “boring” (Nelsen, 1985). Nelson (1985) is clear in that the students did not oppose the notion of following rules in a general sense, as they did not break laws and cause chaos in their non-schooled free time. He emphasizes that it was the school's seemingly overbearing system of rule *enforcement* that was

opposed by students (Nelsen, 1985). Nelson (1985) notes how the choice to skip school can be seen as students “voting with their feet” and disavowing the fantasy of schooling as something with intrinsic moral worth or goodness (Nelsen, 1985, p. 146). This notion may almost seem incomprehensible to the teacher who is deeply invested in the social process of schooling, but, for the young person, it represents a rational choice in the face of an institution whose moral authority they find oppressive (Nelsen, 1985). The experience of racialized students is comparable in several ways, yet they face unique and additional challenges. Ferguson (2001), for instance, writes about the experiences of a group of working-class black boys in an American public school. Like the students of Nelson’s Canadian research, these children deride school as “boring, uneventful, and dull” (Ferguson, 2011, p. 165) When asked about the worst part of the school day, a black student replied “my teacher. Homework. And classwork” (Ferguson, 2011, p. 165). Yet perceptions of racism and discrimination were interwoven through this general feeling of discontent. One student remarks:

My teacher this year . . . she be racist. When she tells us to put something away—mostly all the black kids—she says I'm taking it. When it's like the white kid—she say, one more time play with that and I'm taking it away. And then she gives them another chance. Everybody, everybody knows that it's so! My friend, Lucas, he's white and he says it's not fair. It's definitely not fair. But he's not racism [sic] at all. He's okay. He's nice. He's funny. He plays around in class sometimes (Ferguson, 2011, p. 220)

The anti-school culture of the black students described in Ferguson’s research is interrelated with anti-black and racist treatment. Ferguson (2001) persuasively argues that black boys are disproportionately singled out by teachers, a discriminatory practice the students respond to by forming anti-school subcultures with other black students—shaped by black cultural resources

like Hip Hop music. Indeed, the student embrace of black culture speaks to how the mainstream curriculum excludes black culture, which then becomes of a source of strength and resistance for students. This phenomenon is likewise described by Jan Hare (2011) who documents the experiences of marginalized Indigenous students in mostly white public schools of Northern Ontario who drew on cultural image of the “New Warrior,” as a form of resistance against racist school staff. A society in which certain members are targeted, excluded, and punished on the basis of their race is one in which the realization of freedom is impossible. Racial subjugation of youth must be understood as an essential feature of settler- capitalism, as racism normalizes discriminatory practices towards racial minorities and facilitates their marginalization from society through carceral forms of violence; this is a way of reproducing a settler society with an entrenched racial hierarchy that privileges white people by forming a racial monopoly on social and economic opportunities (Justice, 2023). So while all students may experience alienation in compulsory school settings, racialized students experience this in more acute fashion as standard practices of school discipline are imbued with racial animus. Thus, “bad behaviour,” school-skipping, and opposition towards teachers by racialized children can be seen in some sense as a justified response, as these children are “fighting back” against an oppressive social structure with the only means they have available.

For other students, the rejection of school is less active resistance and more of a muted withdrawal. Julian Tanner (2008) describes how the rejection of school is often caused by a feeling of having “outgrown” it; the adolescent desire to get started with adulthood yet legally stuck in secondary school which is withholding them from immediate economic realities. Educational scholar Julian Tanner (2008, p. 81) study on school drop-out attitudes towards schooling in Edmonton observes that:

[The] fact remains that accounts of respondents dropping-out which emphasize negative encounters with teachers, the irrelevance of the curriculum and mind-numbing boredom are indicative of school rejection. The message conveyed is one of generalized discontent. Something of this embryonic opposition to schooling is captured in the following exchanges. Asked why she quit school, this working-class female replied: ‘Well, mostly, I was pregnant, number one, I never really did like high school. oh, I don’t know, I just never did like the system, they made you feel like a kid and I was really rebellious.’

The school day deprives students of the time and energy that, from their perspective, could otherwise produce an actual income or allow participation in preferred social activity. It is this infringement upon the child’s ability to contribute as an autonomous member of society that produces a state of prolonged infantilization. For this reason, the labyrinthine bureaucracy of education and its system of rules and coercion is experienced by the student as an unwelcome imposition that should be responded to with resistance or disengagement. Students often describe feeling disconnected from the labours of school, especially as they age and acquire more independence, developmentally (Tanner, 2008). Once they perceive themselves as capable of working and producing a wage, the seemingly purposeless and unsatisfying nature of school becomes more and more apparent—a notion which is even more true for racialized and Indigenous students who are pushed out of schools due to racialized targeting from school staff. The school-system, with its varied array of professionals, such as psychologists, social-workers, and school-resource officers, exist to reintegrate the truant or defiant, and often racialized, student back into school-system rather than addressing what the student identifies as the root cause of their malaise: the school-system itself. That being said, the choice to drop-out of school

does not realistically offer an emancipatory exit from oppression, as a lack of high school credentials and passable grades is a strong predictor in lifelong socioeconomic challenges (Tanner, 2008). This underlies the fundamentally unfree nature of capitalism in Canadian society—many students deeply detest schooling but remain enrolled in it nonetheless due to indirect economic coercion: without schooling credentials and certification they will be vulnerable to lifelong poverty and unemployment. Behind the legal threat of truancy law, backed by carceral force and state-policing, is the economic and structural threat of impoverishment; both factors are crucial in imposing mandatory school attendance. As one school drop-out describes:

Cause I don't like - I didn't - it was getting to the point where I just wanted to go to work. I was tired - I was tired of going to school, I didn't like the teachers or nothin so ... I just quit. Well, I - I had no interest eh, I just figured uh, I knew what I wanted to do and I figured school was just a waste of time. It didn't interest me. I thought there was something else out there I was missing and I wanted to work. I've always felt that I was a little more mature than my peers. I didn't really do that well in school. I really didn't care too much about school. I didn't want to go to school, I just wanted to get out and work. I got bored with it. I wanted to get out and work. (Tanner, 2008, p. 82).

This student describes feeling deprived of the opportunity to attain adult wages and social status. Similarly, Curtis (1984), in his historical survey on state-schooling in 19th century Canada West, emphasises how the first students of the emerging Canadian school system had strongly opposed the coercive and compulsory nature of the institution of schooling, which was perceived as an assault on their autonomy as individuals. At times, they did not hesitate to express this through violent means (Curtis, 1984). While the students of the 1800s still retained the collective memory

of a pre-schooled childhood, which animated their opposition, contemporary students seemingly lack a positive alternative, largely withdrawing from school rather than actively opposing the institution itself (Tanner, 2008). Nolan describes how a group of Black children in the Bronx resign themselves to the inevitability of school while lamenting the limited opportunities it provided them as racialized youth in the inner-city:

the school held the belief that a young person with baggy pants and a baseball cap or a red bandanna (potentially signifying gang affiliation), or a tough ‘attitude’ for that matter, was not orientated toward academic success ... They desired to succeed in school because there were virtually no attractive alternatives offered within their political economic context. So they held out hope that school might direct them into some kind of viable employment ‘if only’

The students in the studies of Nolan (2018), Nelsen (1985) and Tanner (2008), grasp the importance of a diploma in improving one's career opportunities, but at the same time they convey deep and intractable problems with the realities of school. The students described in the studies of Nelson (1985) and Tanner (2008) are not proud or happy to be leaving school. They understand the costs of dropping out. Despite this, the prospect of remaining in school remains intolerable. This speaks to the extent of school alienation experienced by many students, who would rather sacrifice future career prospects than continue enduring school's monotony. The explicitly racialized students in Nolan's research had a somewhat different experience: school is a place of exclusion, racism and stigmatization, yet, in the political context of a racialized neoliberal capitalist economy with few career opportunities, students resigned themselves to school as the “best option,” despite even that offering little hope (‘There are a lot of jobs out there, like McDonalds, fast foods, sneaker stores. It's not really a wide variety, but it pays at least

for our standards' comments one student) (Nolan, 2018, p. 8). Without any safety net or viable contingency plans, some racialized students will not risk dropping out, as the alternatives are perceived as worse, even if that means remaining in a racist and resource-starved school. This form of school acceptance is hardly a ringing endorsement of state-school systems and is indicative of the way in which Black and Indigenous children are relegated to the margins of society.

Student Alienation

In the following paragraphs, I will explain how these anti-school sentiments can provide insight into Marx's description of alienation, but as it applies to compulsory school-systems. In all these descriptions of schooled life, the students were being made to perform activities which resulted in the deprivation of their freedom through coerced reproductive labour, which, in many cases, was shaped by experiences of racism. Imposed work activities without any direct material pay-off, sense of purpose, or perceived recreational merit were rejected through both active and passive resistance as a means of avoiding participating in the dullness of school; however, this does not mean that freedom entails the abolition of all toil and work, and that students should simply live a life with no commitments or obligations, wandering from one spontaneous desire to the next. Martin Hägglund (2020, para 9) writes:

At the heart of our freedom, then, is the question of how we should sustain the labor that is necessary to lead our lives ... A crucial question is thus how we can coordinate the activities that we value as ends in themselves with the production and reproduction of the means that are required to pursue those activities. Kunkel insists that such coordination is possible only through "the institution of paid labor" where the seeding, fertilizing, and moving of lawns is taken care of by "people who in most cases would rather be doing

something else” but who are “compensated with a desired wage” for the “undesired work” that they have to perform. Far from overcoming the fundamental form of capitalist social relations, such a wage-system retains the alienated relation to labor. Under Kunkel’s socialism, I work on maintaining a lawn not because I am committed to the existence of green spaces as a social good in our society, but because I need to earn a wage that I can use to buy commodities.

The problem with labour under capitalism is that it becomes a means to securing basic physical existence rather than a means to an end. Hägglund describes how labour completed for the sake of collecting a wage needed to reproduce one’s physical existence is distinct from the same kind of labour being carried out because one sees it as a valuable contribution to a society in which every person is an equal participant in the collective decision-making around labour allocation. The overcoming of the wage-relation and capitalism does not mean the “abolition” of all forms of school, but it does mean freeing school from the imperatives of capital, and enabling the creation of pedagogical structures with democratic governance that allows for the popular participation of children in institutional decision-making. This would give students a voice in the type of educational work they perform, its duration, frequency, form, etc. It’s important to note that the first robust state education system in present day Canada was not democratically planned or created based on popular input even by its settler populace —nor has any education system in Canada ever been governed through direct and universal democracy (Bennett, 2020). State-schooling has largely been developed out of education departments by a minority of statesmen and bureaucrats to accommodate capital (Curtis, 1984). Its creation was a coercive imposition on the lives of communities—this is not a moral or normative statement, but a descriptive and historical one. In the previous section of this thesis, I referenced accounts of students

complaining about the maddening dullness of school, about its racism and unfairness, its work pressures and discipline, the irrelevance of content taught, the cruelty of its teachers. In some sense, what they are really complaining about is alienated work—work that is compelled not by our reciprocal obligations to one another, but by capital and its functional requirement of market ready labour-power produced in schools. These students do not recognize schoolwork as “participating in and contributing to a social good ... as an end in itself,” and instead see it as an abstract, external, and alien force imposed from above, which is rejected through active resistance or passive disengagement (Hägglund, para 10). For instance, a recurring theme in the described experiences of students is disillusionment with the content of school teaching material and the “boring” methods of content delivery. The emergence of state-school systems introduced structured, prescribed learning goals as outlined in provincially mandated state curriculum (Curtis, 1984). The universal and standardized nature of the bureaucratic administration of education demanded common expectations for all students throughout the provinces despite the array of local nuances and disparities that shaped the lives of children (Curtis, 1984). Early school developers like Egerton Ryerson devised the notion of a “curriculum” for specific reasons; nation-wide, universal goals and criteria were used to structure educational processes that produce a reliably uniform product, or at least to the greatest extent possible (Curtis, 1984).

The development of a provincial curriculum universalized uniform learning goals, and were indifferent to local and cultural nuances (Curtis, 1984). Teachers were mandated with delivering a predetermined curriculum to students who may have likely experienced this as irrelevant and coercive (Curtis, 1984). Marx (1988, p. 77) writes that “in degrading spontaneous free activity to a means, estranged labour makes man’s species life a means to his physical existence.” The structuring of the student’s education around determinate curriculum goals and

assessment protocols, historically, represented a degradation in the child's capacity for free activity. The social possibility of the child's life became constrained to the bureaucratic structure of the schools which limited learning possibilities within the confines of curriculum goals crafted in central offices and educational departments. Curriculum implementation may see some flexibility at the local school level but were ultimately subordinate to these institutional mandates shaped by broader political and economic imperatives (Curtis, 1984). Bruce Curtis (1984) notes that before the rise of the centrally organized, state-schooling system, Canadian settler schoolhouses offered diverse curricula that reflected the genuine needs and desires of local communities. Pre-capitalist Indigenous children in Canada did not have any formal "schools" at all, as their lives varied considerably based on the cultural and geographic circumstance, but they offered children, to varying extents, greater opportunity to labour in ways that aligned with their own organic desires and were in accordance with communal norms (Mintz, 2004; Wildcat et al. 2014).

However, the alienating nature of state-schooling in Canada invites us to consider what a real-life non-alienating learning process could look like. In this section, I will draw on historical examples to illustrate what education beyond alienation could look like. Anishnaabe scholar Leanne Simpson (2014, p. 7) discusses how Indigenous epistemologies enable pedagogical approaches that lack "the overt coercion and authority, values so normalized within mainstream western pedagogy." The historian Steven Mintz (2004) observes this in the daily social life and learning of an Indigenous Mohawk community. Mintz (2004, p. 8) describes how white colonist children, who were captured by Indigenous groups often refused to return back to their colony once "rescued" as they actually preferred staying with their "captors" based on the social fulfilment they derived from these indigenous modes of labour performed by youth:

A fourteen-year-old named James McCullough, who lived with the Indians for "eight years, four months, and sixteen days," had to be brought back in fetters, his legs tied "under his horse's belly," his arms tied behind his back. Still, he succeeded in escaping, returning to his Indian family. When children were "redeemed" by the English, they often "cried as if they should die when they were presented to us." Treated with great kindness by the Indians (the Deerfield children were carried on sleighs and in Indians' arms or on their backs), and freed of the work obligations imposed on colonial children, many young people found life in captivity preferable to that in New England. Boys hunted, caught fish, and gathered nuts ... Girls "planted, tended, and harvested corn," but had no master "to oversee or drive us, so that we could work as leisurely as we pleased." ... In the Puritans' eyes, children were adults in training who needed to be prepared for salvation and inducted into the world of work as early as possible

This form of labour performed by these youth reflected sensuous and creative "life activity" that was largely unconstrained by relations of capitalist, settler-colonial domination and were embedded within land-based relations (Coulthard, 2007). In describing certain Indigenous, pre-capitalist modes of production in Canada, David Camfield (2019, para 18) utilizes the useful label "egalitarian-communal":

Indigenous people produced what they needed for subsistence through kinship group-mediated relations with one another and the rest of nature in forms including foraging (land and marine hunting and gathering), fishing, and agriculture. The modes of production of their societies were egalitarian-communal except in those Pacific coast societies where class relations including slavery had developed.

In these particularly “free” forms of Indigenous labouring and learning, the child's work was embedded within the direct social needs of the individual and the community. This is unlike that of typical capitalist labour which Marx (1988, p. 15) describes as “not voluntary but imposed, forced labour. It is not the satisfaction of a need, but only a means for satisfying other needs.” Similarly, state-schooling is imposed through the force of the state, as evidenced by Canadian law around compulsory schooling (Oreopolous, 2005). Like waged labour, the accumulation of credits and assessments scores is a means for satisfying other needs, and not an end unto itself hence distinctly alienated.

In Mintz' (2004) example of communal Indigenous forms of learning, the child is labouring in a manner that expresses their human essence as a free and creative individual compelled only through reciprocal obligations; this is distinctly non-alienated social activity (1988). This is not to argue that pre-capitalist Indigenous life was necessarily idyllic or easy, but rather that it was non-alienated in the Marxist sense of the word; the child was able to consciously act upon their environment in ways that contributed to a collective social good as end in itself.

Alienation as Inequality Between Youth and Adults

The alienation of educational labour can also be understood as being partly rooted in the fundamental social inequality between Canadian youth and adults under capitalism. In the following pages, I will describe how Canada's educational system finds its origins in a form of structural inequality between children and adults. The realization of human freedom is precluded by a social structure that systematically devalues the work of an entire social group: children (this is a social grouping that includes its own internal racial and gendered divisions). This social inequality is at the root of understanding the nature of educational labour. Just as unrecognized

women's labour cannot be understood outside the context of a patriarchal society that oppresses women and devalues their work, school labour cannot be understood outside the context of an adult hegemony over young people (Federici, 2012). The ostensibly positive developmental character and socialization of Canadian state school-schooling, masks its nature as labour deserving of social validation or remuneration. The radical theorist Butch Lee (2023, para 17) had described the family as a “prison ... as far as women are concerned. That it is also the site of possible affection and support makes it all the more insidious.” While the characterization of the family as a prison may be an exaggeration for polemic effect, it does speak to the oppressive dimensions present in bourgeois familial relations, as women are disproportionately victims of male violence and control within the household unit (Lee, 2023). We can also conceptualise Canadian state-schooling in a similar manner. That it has a positive developmental dimension does not negate its alienation—it exists alongside this coercion, masks it, abets it, and, in many ways, deepens it.

Fortunati (1989) describes how the naturalization of women’s labour unfolds as a structural necessity of a capitalist system that produces a “sexed” or “feminine” category relegated to a sphere of unpaid/unrecognized work, and we can understand the devalued and invisible nature of child “school-labour” in a similar manner. State power over the child in the form of schooling must be in part understood as a social and cultural devaluation of the child, which, as documented by Alison Prentice (1972) , solidified with the historical rise of the patriarchal household. Children, like women, constitute a separate, devalued social category within capitalist society. In the Canadian context, children’s reproductive labour under capitalism is not legible as such because of their status as a child, an unproductive, familial dependent whose human capacities must be sufficiently moulded by the family and state until

they are deemed sufficiently able to produce a wage or capital. Allison Prentice (1972) notes the deeply contradictory nature of state-schooling, which, in its inception, reflected both utopian remaking of society and deep continuity with traditional notions of the family. In this manner, institutions of education reduced the economic and social autonomy of young people, entrenching their positions as dependents, while increasing the power and status of men as “rulers” of the household (Prentice, 1972). The advent of the “nuclear family household” marked a “practical fusion of masculine and parental power” (Prentice, 1972). This is notable as it demonstrates the extent to which domestic patriarchy reshaped the family under the volatile conditions of capitalism's origin. However, this is not to say we can flatten exploitation of women and the parental exploitation of children into one single category. They are distinct but conjoined phenomena rooted in male power over the household. Both the woman and the child experienced dependency on the male breadwinner though changing social and economic circumstances that made pre-capitalist, familial production no longer viable (Secombe, 1995). For Canadian state-makers, the unforgiving industrial tempo of factory labour was seen as not accommodating to pregnant and child-rearing women; additionally, the child needed to attain the basic literacy and workplace “know-how” (among other moral and social qualities) in the school before they were able to generate profits to reproduce themselves as adult-workers in the capitalist system (it should be noted that children are obviously gendered themselves, as girls experienced a double oppression of overlapping parental, gendered exploitation, the latter never expiring; in the case of boys they are socialized to eventually take the place of the male breadwinner, transition from dependent to house-ruler) (Prentice, 1972). This cast both social groups in a position of dependency. This social logic is clarified by Roswitha Scholz (2009, para 6) who describes how

the production of surplus-value in the formal economy is structurally separated from “feminine” work:

Accordingly, value dissociation means that capitalism contains a core of female-determined reproductive activities and the affects, characteristics, and attitudes (emotionality, sensuality, and female or motherly caring) that are dissociated from value and abstract labor. This results in societal devaluation in particular of certain cultural practices associated with femininity and womanhood, as seen in the lack of social status of work predominately performed by women (domestic work, nursing, teaching, etc).

Similarly, the economic position of child dependency produced cultural perceptions and attitudes associated with children and adolescents that enabled the social devaluation of their work. Just as the devalued gendered labour of women is associated with cultural values of femininity and womanhood, student labouring practices are associated with cultural beliefs and social rituals of “becoming” or “coming of age.” As incubators of human capital, children are “the future” of the Canadian nation and have culturally been associated with attributes of innocence, vulnerability, and potentiality that require paternalistic care and guidance by their more knowledgeable elders (Curtis, 1984; Prentice 1972). Mintz (2004) notes how Puritans in early colonial Euro-America viewed children as “adults in training” in contrast to Indigenous Mohawk cultures who saw children as autonomous individuals. Children as embodiments of “reproductive futures,” must be situated as a historically specific conception tied to the development of capitalism and settler-colonialism (Gil-Peterson, 2015). These emotionally laden associations have come to define the pedagogical work of student-labourers in educational settings.

Affective Labour

This is related to what feminist theorists have called “affective labour,” a form of devalued, alienated and often feminized work made to evoke particular desired emotional experiences in those with social power (usually men) —in this case, the adult school staff. Student inability to conform to the social expectations and values of the school system manifest in stigmatization, ostracization, and disciplinary consequences (Ball, 2012; McGarry, 2013) The dynamics of the capitalist system widens the unequal status between children and adults, enabling the characterization of educational-labouring activities as a social expectation or developmental norm of “growing up.” To quote Cinzia Arruzza (2014, para 58), “capitalist competition continually creates differences and inequalities.” The creation of a hierarchy between socially constructed categories of individuals, such as “youth” is an essential feature of capitalist organization. This is because financially compensating and socially recognizing all forms of work would be completely wasteful and inefficient from the perspective of capital, therefore the organization of large swathes of workers into a non-paid underclass serves an important economic imperative that structures social and cultural life in ways experienced as natural or objective. Thus alienation from one’s labour and self are deeply intertwined with other forms of social oppression, such as racism, sexism, and ageism. Between children and adults there is “a profound formal difference which is reflected in the equally profound inequalities of their mutual relationships under capitalism and their unequal status within the capitalist system;” writes Fortunati (1989, p. 31). This passage was written to describe the relation between women and men under capitalism, but it is also an apt description of the unequal relation between children and parentals, one that is deeply inscribed into the capitalist system. Since its inception, Canadian state-education has sought to cultivate a set of affects and dispositions inseparable from student reproductive activities imposed by the Canadian school system (McGarry, 2013).

The way the child's reported “learning behaviours” or “work habits” are quite literally codified in a numerical score in state-mandated “report card” documents is demonstrative of how state-driven data collection is used to subtly modulate and guide the child’s social dispositions, aptitude, emotional responses, and behaviour towards desired politico-economic state objectives rooted in deeply entrenched cultural expectations around how young people should behave (Ball, 2012; McGarry, 2013). The work of children performed in school is not recognized as work worthy of remuneration or codified labour rights, but is conceptualized as an “expectation,” a necessary developmental routine of “growing up.” The ability to constantly socially “perform” and accommodate the emotional needs of (adult) superiors, often at the expense of the individual’s own well-being, is a form of life that is disproportionately imposed upon the labourers of marginalised social groups who received little or no compensation, such as women, children, and the colonized (Federici, 2012)

The Limits of Progressive Education

Progressive, democratic, student-centred, and hands-on teaching are common names for forms of liberal education posed as humane alternatives to traditional or conservative methods that involve prolonged rote paper and pencil work. It could be argued that these progressive forms of education offer an alternative to the labouring and coercive dimensions of schoolwork described in this thesis thus far. This argument does not hold up to scrutiny simply because progressive education, or what Bruce Curtis (1984) calls “bourgeois pedagogy,” has been a part of Canadian education for almost a century; it does not represent an alternative to coercive pedagogues, but is a coercive pedagogy itself that is better able to mask its coercive and labouring social character, which in some ways makes it more insidious. Curtis (1984) notes how Egerton Ryerson, the original architect of Canadian education, emphasised the superiority of

humane and nurturing pedagogy that instilled a love of learning in the student, as opposed to a pedagogy that was reliant on the threat of detention or corporeal punishment. This was not simply out of kind-heartedness, as we know Ryerson was one of the minds behind the genocidal residential school system; rather, bourgeois pedagogy was a set of strategies effective at actualizing the goals of social transformation envisioned by the new capitalist state and could easily exist alongside different, more punitive, pedagogical approaches, depending on the particular need. Historian F.K Clarke (2021) explains how progressive teaching has co-existed alongside traditional teaching methods since the 1930s, although it has gained far greater prominence in recent decades (Clarke, 2021). Clarke (2021) observes how conservative historian Nilby infamously wrote a rather poor, but scathing critique of progressive pedagogy in 1954 describing how the dominance of progressive teaching was supposedly ruining school, childhood, the family, and other institutions that conservatives of her time held as sacred; the notion of a progressive pedagogy being new or solely contemporary current is a myth. Clarke (2021) outlines how, historically, Canadian teachers, to varying extents, have always gravitated towards progressive teaching approaches that encouraged active movement, collaboration, “hands on” learning, and engagement with media sources. Paul Axelrod (2005) writes, “rather than a case of either progressive or traditional education, [Canadian] school policy was an amalgam in which educators were using available and emerging tools to address the perceived instructional need.” Teachers utilised these teaching methods because they were simply effective ways of facilitating student productivity and discouraging oppositional behaviour, which gave the teacher greater ability to surveil, assess, regulate, and document child performance with minimal resistance. Clarke (2021) emphasizes that progressive education techniques were embraced because they offered pragmatic and effective ways of sustaining student productivity

and were conducive to the occupational goals of teachers, as outlined by provincial educational departments (Clarke, 2021). Progressive pedagogical approaches represented alternative forms of managing student labour within the context of Canadian capitalism and state-schooling.

The proliferation of progressive forms of education anticipate, and in turn were influenced by, the rise of the post-taylorist forms of work in the labour-firm (Boltanski et al., 2018; Popkewitz, 1998). Deindustrialization and the steady demise of the assembly-line taylorist factory model, led to a new “flexible” model of labour organisation geared towards the rising, and now predominant, administrative-technological-service sector (Boltanski et al., 2018). Boltanski et al. (2018) have discussed, how in recent decades, we have seen a proliferation of “dynamic,” “collaborative,” and “flexible” workplaces; this is most clear in the booming tech sector: workers are given collaborative “horizontal workspaces,” workplaces are stripped of job titles and formal hierarchies, employers promote a “family” atmosphere, individual cubicles are replaced with collaborative workstations, open-floor office concepts replace traditional office-floor arrangements; yet these same revolutionising industries are notorious for their labour abuse, employee exhaustion, union-busting, and 24/7 work culture (Boltanski et al., 2018; Pardes, 2020). The hyper-exploitation of the “new” workplace, has engendered a crushing re-subjugation of the worker under the guise of social progress (Boltanski et al., 2018; Pardes, 2020). Thus, these progressive reforms constitute a form of “moral theatre” or “ethics washing,” which attempt to provide a human face to new ways of managing and disciplining human populations under regimes of labour.

This is what sociologist Boltanski (2018) calls the “new spirit of capitalism,” which reconfigures the workplace organization in ways that provide it moral legitimacy while maintaining, and increasing, the intensive demands of productivity upon workers (Boltanski et

al. 2018). These new workplaces are designed to meet the demands of a new “flexible” economy superseding the factory model, while also presenting an upbeat, jovial workplace environment that is able to increase worker morale, and in turn, productivity, and profits (Boltanski et al., 2018). Boltanski et al (2018, p. 217) describes the new postmodern shift in capitalism with the collapse of organized labour:

Securing the collaboration of wage-earners in the realization of capitalist profits remained the issue. But whereas in the previous period, notably under pressure from the workers' movement, this had been sought through the collective, political integration of workers into the social order, and by a form of the spirit of capitalism that yoked economic and technological progress to the aim of social justice, it could now be achieved by developing a project of self-realization, linking the cult of individual performance and extolment of mobility to reticular conceptions of the social bond. However, for many people, especially new arrivals on the labour market by comparison with their elders, this was accompanied by a marked deterioration in economic situation, job stability and social position.

However, Canadian K-12 public school students, of course, have never achieved anything resembling a strong collective movement capable of advocating for wages and benefits, as seen in the heyday of Western labour unions. Public school students have always been stuck in a devalued social position as unrecognized labourers. Thus, the cult of individual self-realization and top-down conceptions of the social bond have been a mainstay of state-schooling as an alternative bottom-up collectivity and worker-solidarity, most apparent in so-called progressive pedagogy, for over a hundred years (Boltanski et al 2018; Curtis, 1984). The new spirit of capitalism was actually not so new in the context of Canadian state-school systems and in some

ways anticipated the latter developments seen in the conventional sphere of waged labour (Popkewitz, 1998).

Within the progressive tradition of constructivist pedagogy, educationalists have theorised how learners construct their own knowledge through experiential learning, self-guided inquiry, and collaboration with peers, fashioning a new individuality of “citizen, worker, warrior ... problem-solving and flexible in responding to multiple and contingently defined contexts.” (Popkewitz, 1998, p. 547). However, the incorporation of progressive elements within the classroom merely ends up reasserting uneven power-dynamics, which then become more difficult to detect and fight against. Educational scholar, Popkewitz (1998), draws a connection between constructivist pedagogies pioneered by theorists like Dewey, with the new spirit of capitalism. Popkewitz (1998, p. 554) writes “business literature no longer speaks of stable roles. The new business entails an individual who is enterprising, with certain problem-solving capabilities ... business structures, and horizontal structures organise workers into groups concerned with specific projects that do not have the older layers of management.” The new flexible forms of capitalism shed light on progressive approaches of pedagogy that constitute an “administration of child through the inscription of calculated systems of self-inspection and self-consciousness” (Popkewitz, 1998, p. 536). The child, through her own performance of work guided by the teacher, produces herself as a flexible, productive, problem-solving, and entrepreneurial citizen-worker who is equipped to excel in the contemporary economic social sphere of neoliberal individualism (Popkewitz, 1998). The Canadian student is still bound to curricular mandates, assessments, and inter-student competition as dictated by provincial law; thus the student must autonomously develop the self-discipline, dispositions, and skill-set to outperform their peers, attain sufficient grades, and exemplify their self-developed moral and

intellectual character through the loose guidance or “facilitation” from the teacher (Axelrod, 2003; Popkewitz, 1998). For instance, self-regulation strategies are often touted as a humane and progressive alternative to punitive approaches of behaviour modification in children seen in traditional pedagogy (Chouliaraki, 2010). Self-regulation strategies revolve around teaching the child how to independently manage their own behavior in ways that are conducive to the classroom learning process as dictated by the teacher (Chouliaraki, 2010). Loulie Chouliaraki (2010), in an ethnographic case study, shows how progressivist ‘self-regulation’ behavioural strategies merely exemplify new forms of social control and disciplinary technology that produce self-imposed docility, internalisation of routines and self-discipline. The child is taught an array of techniques which they independently use to self-regulate their own behaviour, attentiveness, and productivity in ways that are conducive to academic success (Chouliarki, 2010). Maureen Ford’s (2003) research on open-concept classroom demonstrate how progressive classroom organization constitutes merely new forms of social control and surveillance where the student must learn to modulate and regulate their own behaviour under learned practices which Ford calls “self-surveillance” and “self-reporting.” The teacher cannot possibly see everything at once, as done in the traditional classroom with rows of desks, and thus the students practise self and group surveillance to ensure the completion of tasks assigned at their particular (rotating) work spot (Ford, 2003). The goal does not change, the disciplinarian does; it becomes the self instead of the teacher (Popkewitz, 1998). These so-called progressive pedagogical techniques are better understood as innovative forms of labour-discipline that are arguably more successful at extracting labour than directly punitive approaches

The teacher no longer doles out iron-discipline and micro-manages every aspect of the student’s learning; instead the student must internalize an array of dispositions, strategies, and

techniques that allows them to independently complete curricular objectives determined by the teacher, which are then surveilled, graded, and assessed in numerical scores along a gradient that are eventually tallied and conveyed through performance evaluations (ie. Report cards) (Ball, 2012) Although it is worth noting that this idealized student self-management does not always play out as described by its proponents, as self-management can often become the norm for white students while racialized students continue to be subjected to direct forms of surveillance and micro-management; “disruptive” and “disordered” Indigenous and racialized students are disproportionately segregated into separate “special needs” classroom where more traditional forms of discipline can be practised (Bartlett, 2019; Ferguson, 2001). The neoliberal valorization of the supremacy of the individual sees its distilled manifestation in the production of the optimized “self-regulating” individuals who do not need the teacher or the boss to tell them to produce work with the threat of punishment; they do it themselves. This “frees” the teacher to attend to perceived unruly and often racialized students. This self-driven, self-disciplining student has so much appeal in the pedagogical imagination because it has moral legitimacy derived from enlightenment-era discourses around freedom and individuality (Popkewitz, 1998). Capitalism has absorbed and repurposed socialist rhetoric of “workers self-management,” re-branding capitalist coercion as something emancipatory. In the context of Canadian education, so-called progressive methods are less the attainment of genuine social justice within capitalist institutions, and more so a way of subordinating discourses and organizational methods associated with social justice, democracy, and individual freedom to the imperatives of a capitalist state. The production of a flexible, problem-solving, and entrepreneurial labour pool can then be represented as a means of realizing a socialistic project of humane pedagogy. This “humane” or “ethical” pedagogy is a mobilizational strategy, a way of sustaining popular

enthusiasm and moral legitimacy of a political-economic process reliant on student labour that is essential to maintaining and reproducing the Canadian capitalist way of life. The driving economic-political aims of the Canadian educational-state are effectively laundered through the lofty moral claims of advocates of progressive pedagogy, who, inadequately, pose individual teaching practices, or “tinkering” in the words of Bowles and Gintis (2011), as a solution to deep, structural problems tied up with the broader question of how society is economically organized.

Pedagogical approaches draped in progressive language have historically been useful in presenting generating popular support for education. In the early years of state-schooling in Canada West, Egerton Ryerson was very deliberate in his ambition to depict school absenteeism as a moral bankruptcy, especially when it was done in service of keeping children at home to help on the family property (Prentice, 1972). Intrinsic to this endeavour was elevating school attendance as an utmost moral priority for families, and pedagogical approaches framed in the language of social progress and self-fulfillment served an important role in entrenching the moral bonafides of Canadian state-school (Curtis, 1984). School was not just a place to learn and practice skills deemed important by the state and prospective employers but was one where the individual could find self-fulfilment. At its core, the project of state-schooling in Canada was and is a utopian nation-building project, and its legitimacy and success depended on its popular perception as a moral institution serving a purpose higher than simply politics or economics (Curtis, 1984) Indeed, Scott Davies (2002) has commented on the problems with the label of “progressive education,” which does not constitute a clearly defined approach to learning, but is a catch-all term encompassing a broad category of sometimes contradictory “ideas and reforms” that appeal to abstract sentimentality and are adaptable to various political and cultural climates.

Historically and contemporaneously, education approaches commonly understood as “traditional” and “progressive” existed alongside the longstanding structural features of compulsory schooling in the provinces of Canada: state-mandated curriculum, state-mandated assessments, hierarchical top-down social structure, teacher-centrality, social reproduction of inequality, and the impersonal bureaucratic rationality of school. These are all highlighted as defining features of Canadian K-12 public schooling by sociologist Scott Davies (2008) in his comprehensive sociological study of the Canadian school system; while the nature of these different features can be negotiated to some limited degree, the features themselves remain deeply entrenched (Davies, 2008). While one might concede that progressive education still sits comfortably within the existing paradigm, they may argue that it still is a vision of education closer to social emancipation than traditional educational techniques. This is not necessarily the case.

We must also acknowledge the dark history and, ironically, the implicit conservatism of the vocational dimension of progressive education. For instance, progressive educational thought encompasses trends in hands-on learning, job preparation, learning with “real world” relevance, and vocational training (Axelrod, 2003; Clarke, 2021). Clarke (2021) outlines how, in the context of Ontario, interest in progressive education grew out of the demand for vocational training, which purportedly had more relevance to “real work.” School administrators, politicians, and parents alike saw economic value in instituting industrial education that simulated the labour-firm (Clarke, 2021). In this sense, vocational training has even more in common with capitalist wage labour than the scholastic, mental tasks conventionally associated with traditional schooling. Today, for instance, progressive schools like the MET school in Seven Oaks School division (Winnipeg, Manitoba) offer a “hands-on” alternative education

through workplace internships (Hildebrandt, 2021). In this model of education, the child is placed in unpaid internships and is trained in a traditional labour-firm and performs labour alongside an assigned adult but does not receive any wage or financial compensation. The child is removed from the school environment and is placed directly under the conditions of capitalist exploitation. Here, we can see how the call for “hands-on” vocational learning expresses a desire for an even greater direct correspondence between schooling and the labour-market and renders vulgar functionalist model of education a reality.

Progressive Pedagogy, John Dewey, and Race

Progressive education in many respects is deeply conservative. Charles Eliot, the first honorary president of the Progressive Education Association, alongside John Dewey and other prominent ideological pioneers of progressive education were proponents of “accodomationalist” vocational education for racial minorities, which would allegedly produce self-discipline and practical knowledge in children from racialized communities—who were presumed to lack these qualities in comparison to their white counterparts (Vaughan, 2018). This logic persists today. Career oriented technical and vocational schools for children who struggle with “conventional” schooling continue to disproportionately enrol students of colour, shutting them out of other opportunities due to racialized assumptions around what they are capable of succeeding at (Butrymowicz et al, 2020). The question of educational labour is inseparable from the matter of race, and the notion of youth racial equity in Canada cannot be divorced from how the state compels the labour of students in ways that are racially unequal.

On this note, I would also like to consider progressivist education’s compatibility and affinity with historical fascism, nativism, and far right-wing authoritarianism (Giudici et al., 2019). The authoritarian and racist dimensions of progressive education were seen as highly

attractive to fascist regimes, which cannot be seen as arbitrary. Giudici writes (Giudici et al., 2019 .p. 391-392, 394):

In Italy, for instance, Mussolini's government actively sought the collaboration of progressive educators such as Giuseppe Lombardo-Radice and Maria Montessori in shaping its early education policy ... Leenders (2001) finds compelling evidence that fascist ideologues' reliance on progressivism was also ideologically driven. Progressive education's emphasis on monitoring and activating children to mould their character dovetailed well with the fascist ideal of a (male) citizen whose activism for the community was driven by his genuine belief in the regime's moral value ... Our analysis also suggests that it was not despite their nativist and authoritarian attitudes that these far-right actors embraced educationally progressive tenets, but in fact it was because of them. Progressive education's preoccupation with the student's internalisation of self-discipline and self-regulation has an authoritarian impulse that resonated with fascism and other authoritarian modes of governance, including Canada's genocidal settler-capitalism. The Italian fascists believed that the direct intervention of the teacher and the pencil-paper, rote, fragmented tasks of traditional schooling were not conducive to constructing the ultra self-disciplined exemplary citizen (Giudici et al., 2019). The vocational element of progressive education also appealed to the far right. Giudici (2019, p. 394) writes that progressivist education in fascist Italy "not only trained pupils' vocational skills, but also awakened their love for the soil and their pride of working in the field." The moulding of the individual through "real work" and the internalization of discipline is a notion which has troubling connotations which recalls historical racism, colonial brutality, and fascism.

There is a dark, colonial history around the use of vocational education as a disciplinary regime for racialized and colonised children in Canada that has been justified in the language of progress and utopianism (Vaughan, 2018). The residential school system developed in an intellectual climate suffused with new pedagogical ideas, mostly imported from the United States, and John Dewey, arguably the most influential western educational theorist, exerted an immense influence on Canadian educational thought, as Canadian state-architects largely looked abroad for educational theories to base their institutions on (Peters et al, 2015). For Dewey, vocational training and industrial schooling were to play important roles in sustaining the socio-economic order by offering hands-on, “real work” experience that would prepare them for adult waged-labour—often to the detriment of students of colour who experienced vocational training in a colonial, disciplinary manner (Vaughan, 2018). The not-so-subtle implication is that children of color were lazy and required the civilizing hand of the state to produce productive labourers who could contribute to the Canadian political-economic order. It is also true that experiential pedagogical ideas, as pioneered by Dewey, have normalized a “frontier discourse” (Villeneuve, 2021).

Dewey developed a psychological theory that posited a linear development of “savage” to “civilized.” Through experiential, student-centered learning, the child could develop from being a “primitive” learner subordinated to nature into a civilized learner who had mastery over nature (Villeneuve, 2021). Implicit to this framing was a colonial notion of Indigenous erasure that at the same time had actively proliferated in Canada and the United States in the form of residential boarding schools, which Dewey had never condemned. In this case, it is clear that the signifier of “progressive” in progressive education has implicitly deflected and obscured the shortcomings and failures progressive education, which, as a pedagogical approach, has continually normalized

and protected an oppressive status quo (Villeneuve, 2021). Villeneuve, (2021, p. xxii) writes that:

Dewey's philosophy, especially in the hands of Euro-American educators during his own lifetime, functioned instead as an accessory to the anti-democratic schooling imposed on the education of hundreds of thousands of Indigenous children from the Great Lakes to Hawai'i.

Elsewhere Villeneuve (2021, p. 46) writes:

From the perspective of critical Indigenous studies, instead of mere ethnocentrism, Dewey's synthesis of education and democracy functioned as a part of the logic of Native erasure, which fueled imposed schooling on American Indian people in his own lifetime.

I contend that when Dewey wrote about savage peoples, he mostly had American Indians in mind.

Dewey's savage-civilized continuum is one that strikes to the heart of the labour-moralism that educational labour is structured around. As explained earlier in this research, Canadian state-schooling was a utopian modernizing institution that sought to abandon the "ancient landmarks" of the past and erect a new modern civilization through completely reorganizing the lives of youth around the imperative to work and perform (socially invisible) reproductive labours. For Dewey, Civilization was another way of saying "European colonial-capitalist modernity," which was built upon the discourses of industriousness, productivity, and work ethic (Coulthard, 2007; Weeks, 2018). Those unemployed and impoverished settlers who could not find work despite their best efforts were deemed "vagrant" and "idle;" Indigenous people pursuing their own traditional lifestyles in lieu of participating in the colonial-capitalist economy were seen in similar light (Coulthard, 2007; Houston, 1972). New techniques in labour discipline and

bureaucratic educational governance converged as hallmarks of rationality, science, and modernity, which, in the mind of educational leadership, could not be reconciled with the perceived irrelevant and “primitive” practices of Indigenous people that could only limit Euro-Canadian progress (Coulthard, 2007; Villeneuve, 2021). In the eyes of Canadian state-makers, Civilization was unlocked through capitalist labour discipline, which started at the school. Indeed, Dewey himself commented positively on the labour-training essence of vocational schooling imposed on racial minorities (Vaughn, 2018). The theories of progressive educationists dovetailed nicely with the ambitions of Canadian state-architects, like Egerton Ryerson, who saw himself as a proponent of humane, equitable, and student-centered pedagogy despite his virulent racism (Curtis, 1984). This was not unique to Ryerson. For Dewey, “ideas about the savage mind and its relationship to the civilized one were not only theoretical; they also served as the basis for his entire curriculum for his laboratory school” (Fallace, 2008, p. 336). Dewey’s savage-civilized continuum or “functional evolution” is implicit to the eugenic functions of the Canadian state-school through its array of assessment structures, which rank and index the intellectual capacities and progress of the individual student, and employs the bureaucratic power of the educational-state to compel the labouring capacities of the child towards a desired, “civilized” end. While the words “savage” or “vagrant” may have fallen out of favour, there is an array of substitutions used to describe those who reject the civilization of schooled society in some form or another, such as “delinquent,” “truant,” “oppositional child,” etc. Stephan Ball (2021, p. 91) has written: “eugenic modes of thought remain thoroughly ingrained within education policy and practice,” which was made possible through the rise of the disciplines of statistics, sociology, and biological science. Indeed, the bureaucratic rationality of schooling was shaped by the emergence of various scientific disciplines, and progressive

instructional techniques must also be understood as cutting-edge pedagogical science itself that has allowed for more rational and effective ways of managing, regulating, and the labour of children. It is apparent the repressive, regulative, and coercive powers of state-education are fully entirely consonant with the functions of so-called progressive educational trends, working in tandem with one another (Axelrod, 2005; Clarke, 2021). Progressive educational practices, as articulated by theorists like Dewey, theorized “choice” and “autonomy” within limited and determinate parameters that pose no threat to the fundamental political-economic processes of socially unrecognized youth labour extraction occurring under the Canadian state-school system. Realistically, a genuinely progressive system of schooling attuned to goals of social justice and well-being lies entirely outside the frame-work of colonial capitalist “civilization” and its dynamics of coercion, market pressure, and labour invisibilization.

Today, however, the prospect of entirely abolishing the compulsory school system established by the Canadian state and embracing communal-egalitarian style modes of learning/labouring, that would in some ways be reminiscent of pre-colonial practises used by certain Indigenous nations, is likely unthinkable for most people; such a radical shift may signify a loss of “progress” and even “civilization” to those immersed in the colonial “frontier discourse” that is hegemonic in Canada. The Indigenous Scholar Leanne Simpson (2017, para 8) writes, in reference to her own experiences as a woman in education:

We learn how to type and how to write. We learn how to think within the confines of Western thought. We learn how to pass tests and get jobs within the city of capitalism. If we’re lucky and we fall into the right programs, we might learn to think critically about colonialism. But post-secondary education provides few useful skill sets to those of us who want to fundamentally change the relationship between the Canadian state and

Indigenous peoples, because that requires a sustained, collective, strategic long-term movement, a movement the Canadian state has a vested interest in preventing, destroying, and dividing

Simpson is speaking in the context of post-secondary education, but this passage perfectly describes the K-12 Public School system as well, including its so-called progressive manifestations. Ultimately, progressive education, and Canadian K-12 public education writ large, is highly compatible with, and conducive to, capitalist exploitation through its production and moral fashioning of self-disciplined, self-motivated workers (Popkewitz, 1998). It follows that the overcoming of this oppression requires the creation of a completely new system of child learning created under a non-capitalist economic system that could allow social forms of education to develop organically without being structured by capitalism's economic pressures and its ensuing moral discourses around progress, civilization, and modernity. Progressive education offers a reprieve from traditional forms of schooling, but only insofar that it ultimately produces new modes of subjugation; such is the fate of any schooling pedagogical theory subordinated to the socioeconomic imperatives of a capitalist system and colonial state. In this sense, both traditional and progressivist forms of education are concerned with reproducing the existing socio-economic order, albeit with differing approaches, strategies, and guiding philosophies.

Concluding Remarks

This research has attempted to demonstrate how educational activity performed by youth and facilitated by Canadian K-12 public schools constitutes a form of invisible reproductive labour. These are questions I have been wrestling with over the last decade as a school teacher immersed in academic literature relating to Marxism, feminism, colonialism, and educational

history and sociology. My goal was to address a significant gap in the existing literature. What is the political and economic character of the social activity performed by students in Canadian state school-systems?

As a teacher myself, I have devoted much of my career to researching and trying to implement progressive and student-centered approaches to pedagogy alongside colleagues just as committed to social justice as I am. However, a recurring theme that appeared in my conversations with colleagues was the sense of resignation that popped up when discussing the students in our school who we could not successfully engage in the learning material despite our best efforts, including the implementation of progressive teaching methods and the use of choice-driven and culturally relevant learning materials. Of course, some methods worked better than others, but the notion of a classroom where disengagement, withdrawal, disruptiveness, and opposition were eliminated always seemed a distant fantasy—these intractable symptoms, I began to suspect, were to a great extent intrinsic to the nature of an unequal society itself that the school system was complicit in reproducing. Regardless, every few months there seemed to be a new breakthrough pedagogical “method” that is eagerly shared by our school leaders, as they embrace absurdly expensive guides and materials from the next big educational guru, whose name we would all likely forget by the end of the term. Endless tinkering with pedagogical strategies, approaches, and styles did not actually seem to make any substantial difference, besides irritating students who were subjected to new disruptive routines. The elements of school that I found to be the biggest obstruction to genuine learning could not be jettisoned, such as the mandated curriculum, school discipline procedures, a highly bureaucratized learning setting, and required assessment reporting. This thesis has sought to reveal how the experiences of alienation of Canadian students within school system are bound up with the capitalist social system which

structures educational life; this, above else, is why so many students disengage from and resist schooling.

My research has been motivated by a simple question: What if we took students at their word? What if we seriously and intellectually grappled with student rejection of school, and then tried to find the actual social, political, and economic reasons for this. While it might be easier to dismiss anti-school sentiment as the student's own failure to motivate themselves or the teacher's incompetence, earnestly exploring the answers to this question has proven a more fruitful endeavor. There is likely no shortage of teachers who are greatly passionate about teaching, who form meaningful and authentic emotional bonds with their students and go out of their way to design engaging school activities. Individuals can aim to work towards goals of social justice within the social systems they are embedded within, but individual pedagogical choices are structurally unable to upend a state-educational apparatus integrated within the broader capitalist system and Canadian state. Embedded within these structural features are cultural presumptions that naturalize the unequal status between adults and children, such as the belief that young people ought to accept surveillance, coercion, ideological conditioning, deprivation of leisure time, carceral discipline, and uncompensated labour because it is a necessary trial of "growing up" (Comacchio, 2008). These concerns are not just a sterile academic exercise for me, but are facets of educational life that I have directly observed, and, admittedly, am complicit in. This research is not intended as a denigration of teachers, but, at the same time, is not afraid of pointed critique. Indeed, I've tried to take the advice of Karl Marx (2019) who had famously championed the "*ruthless criticism* of all that exists ... ruthless both in the sense of not being afraid of the results it arrives at and in the sense of being just as little afraid of conflict with the

powers that be.” A “critique” that would absolve myself strikes me as a critique not worth the paper it's printed on.

While critique abounds, tracing out a blueprint for a non-alienated school-system was beyond the scope of this research. However, the student self-recognition of their own schooled activity as labour could serve as an impetus to the organization of students into collective bodies capable of bargaining for collective youth labour rights in the face of structural generational inequality. The recognition of schooled activity as labour is not just an accurate descriptor of the activity performed by students in Canadian public schools, but may potentially serve as a powerful self-recognition of the leverage students hold over a capitalist system that refuses to acknowledge the centrality of their labour to the functioning of society. This could be a means of fighting for structural changes to how Canadian secondary schooling is organized—similar to the “Wages for Housework” campaign led by women domestic workers in 1970s Italy (Federici, 2012). Radical secondary school student unions, such as the ACES in Chile, have shown how direct action, blockades, and disruptions can be used to advance leftist student political agendas and challenge adult power over school setting (Dragnic, 2021). Militant student unions withdrawing their labour in exchange for concessions from school administrators especially holds promise, as the experience of COVID lock-downs in Canada has shown how political leadership trembles at the prospect of prolonged schooling shutdowns (Green et al 2021). The social struggles and resiliency of young people give me hope. Ultimately, my aim is that this research may serve as a starting point for activists, critical researchers, and political organisers theorising pathways to educational futures beyond capitalism.

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