

Curriculum of Imperialism: Good Girl Citizens and the Making of the Literary Educated Imagination

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A living story does not pass from the mouth-of-the teller to the ear-of-the listener, but rather it moves - it lives- from mouth-to-mouth, from telling to telling. (Benjamin, 1968, p. 87)

Introduction

Walter Benjamin's understanding of the ways in which stories "live" through "re-tellings" is helpful to my thinking about how the Girl Guide and Brownie stories participated in my identity-formation because it enables me to conceptualize how *The Brownie Story* was a living story that came to life through dramatization. For example, the story lived in me, through me, and all around me for the majority of my formative years of my childhood. I recall that my aunt was a Brown Owl Leader. My cousins were also involved in Brownies and Guides. My aunt and cousins also read *The Brownie Story*. In fact, I remember that the story was often read aloud to the Brownie group. From my childhood memory, *The Brownie Story* went as follows:

An unruly girl wants to become a Brownie when she learns that Brownies are "good girls" who help their mothers by keeping the house tidy and clean. Her mother instructs her to ask the Brown Owl in the forest how to become a Brownie. The little girl enters the forest and finds the Brown Owl. She is told by the Brown Owl to find a pond at the edge of the forest in order to find her answer. Once she is at the pond, she is to repeat aloud..."Twist me and turn me and show me the elf, I look in the water and there saw ____."

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The little girl in the story fills-in the rhyme with “myself.” I recall having to perform the rhyme in front of a mirror surrounded with garland on the floor of the Anglican Church in order to become a “good girl Brownie.” I also recall that all of my little Brownie friends had to do the same. My experiences are formative to my inquiry into the ways in which cultural forms, such as *The Brownie Story*, play a role in identity-formation because the self emerges from one’s involvements with signifying systems and practices (Davis, Sumara, & Luce-Kapler, 2000). In a way then, engaging with signifying systems such as *The Brownie Story* involves the work of interpretation, that is, the work of hermeneutic activity by way of engaging the hermeneutic imagination (Smith, 1991).

I recognize that *The Brownie Story* was integral to my participation in the Girl Guide movement. From my Western educated imagination, the story represents a particular kind of imperial and cultural knowledge and therefore I question how dominant narratives, such as *The Brownie Story* became naturalized and structured, in part, my beliefs about what a good girl image was. After a rediscovery of my Brownie and Girl Guide handbooks in 2000, I began researching seminal texts held in the Girl Guide National Archive of Canada. I became interested in the ways in which the Girl Guide movement is implicated in imperialism and nation-building in Canada. Moreover, I became concerned with the ways in which my identity-formation was caught up in and mediated through the stories that were part of the Brownie and Girl Guide indoctrination process.¹ For Said, cultural forms, “... were immensely important in the formation of imperial attitudes, references, and experiences” (1994, p. xii). For me, *The Brownie Story* represents what was valued in my white Anglo-Saxon culture, and in a very deep sense embodies imperial beliefs and morals espoused by the Girl Guide movement. I turn to Willinsky, who writes,

At the very least, we need to reconsider how a person coming of age in the West ... was trained in the aftermath of colonialism among imperial habits of mind that now need to be identified, as they might still contribute to the educational imagination. (1998, p. 19)

If imperial habits of mind are formed through the literary imagination and through citizenship practices that are taught in both public school and the Girl Guides, how might I begin to theorize and practice a disruption of imperial habits of mind?

I situate myself theoretically in the field of curriculum theorizing whereby autobiographical educational experience is used to question how Brownies, as part of the broader Girl Guide movement, played a dual role in my identity-formation. In Brownies, I learned to assimilate and be obedient, while at the same time, learning to be independent and capable. My liter-

ary imagination was educated, in part, in the image of the British Empire through the Girl Guide movement. I explore the image of the “good girl” in *The Brownie Story* that informed my understanding of the development of my imperial habits of mind. I conceptualize *The Brownie Handbook* as a cultural artifact, a curriculum and a socializing agent and investigate the following question, “How might an understanding of the involvement of *The Brownie Story* as a social and imperial cultural practices in the construction of self contribute to a twenty-first century discussion of pedagogy?” For my inquiry, I draw on philosophical hermeneutic inquiry and explore dominant cultural stories, such as *The Brownie Story*, in terms of conceptualizing “the whole” and “the parts” of the Girl Guide movement as being important in the development of meaning-making.²

What follows is an interpretation, hermeneutically speaking, of the ways in which *The Brownie Story* embodies a particular curriculum of imperialism. In my inquiry, I uncover how the British Empire’s Girl Guide movement made use of “focal practices” to perpetuate national and cultural (re)production (Borgmann, 1992; Davis *et al.*, 2000). I investigate: 1) how extra-curricular activities like guiding and storytelling activities involve a concurrent exploration of culture and identity, and 2) how narratives of nationhood and citizenship practices informed my understanding of an image of a “good girl.”

Working the Archive

In a hermeneutic sense, working the archive means to write about and report on my experiences (Smith, 1991). I explore the reproductive construction of my imperial culture of a good girl identity that involves a particular kind of relationship as “good citizen.” As I spent time in the archive, there was a familiar sense of knowing and being as I recalled a place of “focal practices” that emphasized an imperial curriculum (Borgmann, 1992; Davis *et al.*, 2000). Focal practices involve the daily routines and cultural practices that humans partake in. For example, in the archive, I took notes and often made reflective annotations and observations in the margins of texts in order to review them later to gain a better comprehension of my experience of tracing the development of my imperial habits of mind.

Smith (1991) outlines several requirements of the hermeneutic imagination to help researchers form a hermeneutic attitude that I use as a framework for this paper. As a hermeneutic researcher, I am to develop attentiveness to language. I am to deepen my sense of the basic interpretability of life and interconnectedness of life because interpreting is viewed as a creative act. I am to be concerned with the hermeneutic imagination and the creation of

meaning. Because the first area of concern for a hermeneutic researcher is language, I found the following definition of cultural imperialism helpful to my inquiry,

Cultural imperialism may be defined as the use of political and economic power to exalt and spread the values and habits of a foreign culture at the expense of a native culture. A familiar example from an earlier period is the export of American films. Although cultural imperialism may be pursued for its own sake it frequently operates as an auxiliary of economic imperialism - as when American films create a demand for American products. (Bullock & Trombley, 1999, *The New Fontana Dictionary of Modern Thought*, p. 419)

With a deeper understanding of cultural imperialism, I begin to peel back the layers of my white Anglo-Saxon identity-formation and work toward an awareness of my relationship with imperialism by identifying the ways in which rhymes and stories informed my understanding of the image of a good girl.

A second area of concern for a hermeneutic researcher is the interpretability of life. For this, I turn to Pinar's method of *currere*. He writes,

It is regressive-progressive-analytical-synthetical. It is therefore temporal and conceptual in nature, and it aims for the cultivation of a developmental point of view that hints at the transtemporal and transconceptual. From another perspective, the method is the self-conscious conceptualization of the temporal, and from another, it is the viewing of what is conceptualized through time. So it is that we hope to explore the complex relation between the temporal and conceptual. In doing so we might disclose their relation to the Self and its evolution and education. (1994, p. 19)

Currere is in an essential way to recover the dailiness of my life as I probe my experience of guiding. What follows is an autobiographical recounting of an experience of (re)interpreting how ideology operates through the reproduction of dominant ideas via cultural practices that can bring the development of imperial habits of mind into consciousness. I learned *vis-à-vis* the Girl Guide movement that assimilation toward imperial habits of mind, thriving in *The Brownie Story* and the Brownie promise, was socially desirable.

Brownie Inspection (literary archive journal excerpt August 22, 2002):

The air at the Anglican Church is particularly stale in the evening. As always, the basement is cold, dreary and void of colour. I enter, hang my coat in the cloakroom, and greet Brown Owl, Tawny Owl and the other Brownies before jostling for my place along the imaginary circle. Brown Owl stands tall in front of us. She is in her 40s and her pale skin contrasts with her dark brown hair tied into a bun, her blue uniform neatly pressed. Tawny Owl is the younger version of Brown Owl, a twenty year old but just as daunting with her trim figure and her dark hair long over her shoulders. Both have all the knowledge in the world that they are ready to bestow upon us. Brown Owl and Tawny Owl move from

Brownie to Brownie as they inspect each one of us from head to toe. They look at our hair to see if it is neatly combed. Then they look at our face to ensure it has been washed and even ask us to turn our heads to see if we have cleaned behind our ears. Next the “all knowing” owls inspect our uniform beginning with our ties and check that it was tied “correctly” (right over left and under, left over right and under).

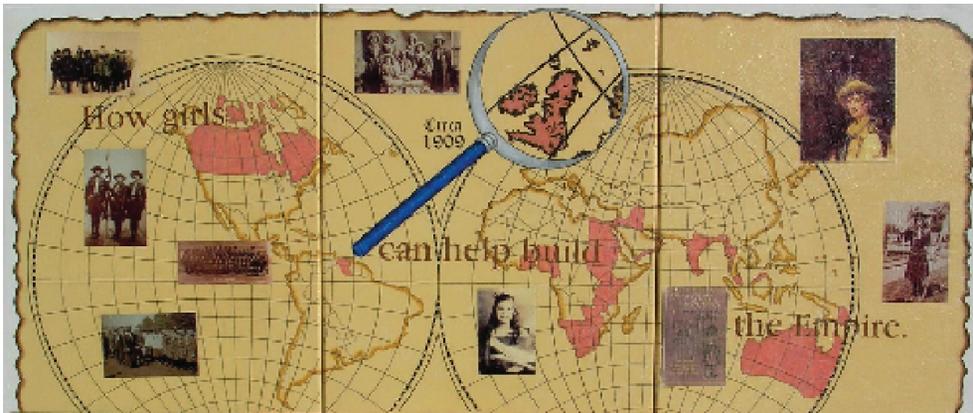
Our badges and pins have to be neatly sewn on our wrinkle-free uniforms. After that they do the dreaded hand inspection. They make us hold out our hands and they touch each finger to see if our nails have any dirt under them. Brownies always have to have clean white shiny nails. They make fun of Brownies who have nail-biting habits or girls who have not filed or cut their nails properly. Finally, the inspection moves down to our feet. We must have brown socks and shoes on to match our uniforms. I always show up in my blue running shoes (in an early act of rebellion) and never pass inspection with “flying colours.” After inspection, we always follow traditional routines: sing O’ Canada, repeat the Brownie promise, law, motto and practice our handshakes before storytelling and badge earning activities. (Young, 2002)

My autobiographical description came out of hours of dwelling in readings of seminal texts located in the Girl Guide National archive, together with continuous anecdotal writings and juxtaposition of theoretical texts with my readings. I used archival texts, such as *The Brownie Handbook* as educational occasions that highlight a research location of cultural imperialism. Archival texts are potential pedagogical sites for learning since they are always an interpretation of relationships with memory (cognition), experience (phenomenology) and text (hermeneutics).

A third area of concern for a hermeneutic researcher is the creation of meaning. I searched for a malleable image to frame my aesthetic response to my reading of the archive. Jameson (1991) writes,

... there was an obvious need for maps in the construction of imperial/colonial relations, and a cognitive map served as a social space of class, nation, local and international realities (p.586). [A map is ...] “A representation of subject’s imaginary relationship to a real condition of existence.” (p. 585)

Much of how I learned to divide the world, as Jameson (1991) and Willinsky (1998) understands was through my engagement with an imaginary map of the world. In fact, I recall how as a young child, I learned that Canada was an “extension” of Britain vis-à-vis geographic maps. Both real and imaginary maps became part of the development of my imperial habits of mind. Therefore a map became an integral part of my visual response to my reading of the Girl Guide National Archive through a painting titled, *Girls of the Empire* (2003). On three 16 x 20 inch canvases, I represent an aesthetic response to my reading of and engagement with Girl Guide National Archive materials.



Girls of the Empire (Young, 2003, ©)

My painting became a practice of art and storytelling. Denzin and Lincoln write:

As with any art form, hermeneutical analysis can be learned only in the Deweyan sense by doing it. Research in the context practice the art by grappling with the text to be understood, telling its story in relation to its textual dynamics and other texts first to themselves and then to public audience. (Carson & Sumara, 1997; Denzin, 1994; Gallagher, 1992; Jardine, 1998; Madison, 1988) (2000, p. 286)

My attentiveness to the series of identifiable connecting structures of images and stories from long ago helps me to learn from the past through an active reinterpretation of my present historical consciousness. In the archive, I trace the origins of my Brownie and Girl Guide handbooks (Cook, 1975; Dennis, 1975) that I read as part of my participation in the Girl Guide organization. The handbooks were written in accordance with the British Empire's early 20th century youth movement of guiding and scouting. The Brownie and Girl Guide handbooks are based on Sir Robert Baden-Powell's (1909) text, *Scouting for Boys: A Handbook for Instruction in Good Citizenship Through Woodcraft*. Agnes Baden-Powell, sister of Robert Baden-Powell, translated *Scouting for Boys* into *How Girls Can Help to Build the Empire: The Handbook for Girl Guides* (1918/1936). In my painting, I place scrutiny on Britain and its colonial relationships, while revealing imperial ideological themes of empire and nation-building and good girl citizenship that are linked to Brownie cultural practices.

The Brownie Story and Curriculum Theorizing

The Brownie Story was originally written over 100 years ago, as described by Betty Bradwell, PRA for Sheffield County, she writes,

... originally written over 100 years ago by Juliana Horatia Ewing from Ecclesfield—a village near Sheffield South Yorkshire, (b. Juliana Gatty in 1841), father Dr Alfred Gatty (Reverent and Vicar of Ecclesfield,) writer and local historian. Mother—Margaret—wrote “Parables from Nature” (her father Alexander Scott) Margaret ran a popular periodical—Aunt Judy’s Magazine. They provide charity to assist medical profession. Juliana published a story in a magazine, *The Monthly Packet*—titled—*The Brownies*. A story within a story... Brownies are a tiny race that teaches qualities of self-denial, consideration, thoughtfulness and kindness. Juliana married Alexander Ewing. Her stories were published in books. Her best known story was called *Jackanapes*—published in Aunt Judy’s Magazine, 1879. Others include: *Jan of the Windmill*, *Mrs. Overtheway’s Remembrances*. *A Flat Iron for a Farthing*, *Daddy Darwin’s Dovecote* and *Amelia and the Dwarfs*. She was a promoter of female emancipation as characters in her stories are usually well educated girls... 1910 Girl Guides established by Agnes... Robert Baden-Powell wrote a pocket-sized adaptation of Juliana’s book—*The Story of the Brownies* in an eleven page booklet. (Bradwell, 1995, UK Guiding, p. 33)

The Brownie Story is an example of what Pinar (1995) terms a “social-efficiency model of curriculum” that was used during the early 20th century. As a focus on classical curriculum made way for a social-efficiency model of curriculum in the early 20th century, Pinar (1995) recounts seven principles of education that dominated school curriculum, “1) health, 2) command of fundamental processes (i.e., basic skills), 3) worthy home membership, 4) vocation, 5) citizenship, 6) worthy use of leisure, and 7) ethical character” (p. 99). These same values were taught as part of the Girl Guide movement’s rituals and storytelling. For example, *The Brownie Story* participated in the making of my identity by providing a model of a good girl that engages in ethical character, good citizenship, and the worthy use of leisure time. In Brownies, the principles were taught through a curriculum that espoused the engagement of focal practices, which involves an active interpretation of self. For example, I learned to become a Brownie by learning to cook, clean, and sew on the one hand and build a campfire on the other.

On Gender and Nation-building

The institutionalizing and naturalizing culture of nationhood, philanthropy and homemaking in schools and alternative settings such as the Brownies and Girl Guides, made it easy for a patriarchal society to embrace liberalism, as Luke argues,

Liberalism grants women citizenship and a place in the public by replicating the public/private power structure: women’s teaching, health care and service labor is seen as a “natural” extension of their domestic abilities (1992, p.32).

As a Brownie, my rituals involved what I term, citizenship practices. The exchanges of citizenship values through repetitive ritual involved a rep-

resentational practice of cultural affiliation that mediated my relationship with stories about universal goodness. Walkerdine writes:

The discourses of natural childhood build upon a model of naturally occurring rationality, itself echoing the idea of childhood as an unsullied and innocent state, free from interference of adults. The very cognitivism of most models of childhood as they have been incorporated into educational practices, leaves both emotionality and sexuality to one side. (1998, p. 256)

Similarly, McClintock understands nationalism as a gendered discourse and draws on Nira Yuval Davis and Floya Anthias' conceptualization of how women have been implicated in nationalism, biologically, socially, culturally, sexually, and symbolically as active participants and reproductive transmitters of culture (1997, p. 90). She asserts that nation narratives, from the Latin, *natio*: to be born, naturalizes the metaphor of the family as "institution" where, paradoxically, McClintock points out, "... a woman's political relation to the nation was ... submerged as a social relation by the marriage relation within the family (1997, p. 91). By focusing on the *embodiment* of *The Brownie Story*, I pay particular attention to the use of water as a Victorian symbol. The Brownie Handbook states, "Twist me and turn me and show me the elf....I looked in the water and there saw -----" (Cook, 1975, p. 7). Of course, the answer to this rhyming riddle is "myself." In my experience of performing the story, water was substituted with a mirror that was surrounded by garland to resemble a pond. Water, as a symbol of purity, can be linked to an early 20th century Canadian discourse of moral and social reform. The reform movement involved a campaign to educate the next generation in what Valverde (1991) terms "purity ideals fitting to 'this age of light and water and soap'" (p. 17). In her study of moral reform at the turn of the 20th century, Valverde (1991) analyzes a discourse of social purity to reveal the ways in which the moral and social reform movement contributed to nation-building. She writes:

The image of reform as illuminating society while purifying or cleansing it was already an integral part of the temperance movement, which developed in the mid-nineteenth century in the U.S. and Britain and was taken up in Canada by such organizations as the Women's Christian Temperance Union and the Dominion Alliance for the Total Suppression of the Liquor Traffic. (pp. 17-18)

Valverde reveals how the purity movement drew upon symbols of purity to advance the moral and social campaign "to raise the moral tone of Canadian society" and describes the reform movement as a "loose network of organizations and individuals, mostly church people, educators, doctors, and those we would now describe as community or social workers" (p. 17). Girl Guides was part of the early 20th century moral and social reform network through a discourse of character training. Part of the discourse included an

image of the good girl that was constructed, in part, through the symbol of water in *The Brownie Story*. What follows is an analysis of the image of water that appears in the story. Allegorically and metaphysically, a mirror can have various interpretations. In the case of *The Brownie Story*, I turn to McClintock (1997), who writes,

The mirror/frying pan, like all fetishes, visibly expresses a crisis in value but cannot resolve it. It can only embody the contradiction, frozen as commodity spectacle, luring the spectator deeper and deeper into consumerism...Mirrors glint and gleam in soap advertising, as they do in the culture of imperial kitsch at large. In Victorian middle-class households, servants scoured and polished every metal and wooden surface until it shone like a mirror. Doorknobs, lamps stands and banisters tables and chairs, mirrors and clocks, knives and forks, kettles and pans, shoes and boots were polished until they shimmered, reflecting in their gleaming surfaces other object-mirrors, an infinity of crystalline mirrors within mirrors, until the interior of the house was all shining surfaces, a labyrinth of reflection. The mirror became the epitome of commodity fetishism: erasing both the signs of domestic labor and the industrial origins of domestic commodities. In the domestic world of mirrors, objects multiply without apparent human intervention in a promiscuous economy of self-generation. (p. 313)

There were many parts of the Girl Guide movement that involved economics. For example, we gave weekly dues, purchased uniforms and worked toward "earning badges." The use of the mirror, however, served as a means to reproduce pretty little girls who wore neat and tidy uniforms as part of the ritual of belonging. A good girl helped to keep everything in the home clean and tidy (including herself and her uniform). The water/mirror symbol served to reinforce an image of a good girl citizen. Another example involves the Brownie promise. *The Brownie Handbook* states,

I promise to do my best:
To do my duty to God, the Queen
And my country.
To help other people every day,
Especially those at home. (Cook, 1975, p. 1)

In my experience, story-telling and ritual repetition of rhymes and promises became an imperial socio-cultural practice of assimilation in the Girl Guide movement. Kerby (1991) understands this as he states, "As social beings we are already indoctrinated into certain traditional narratives that set up "standard" expectations and obligations that guide our explicit evaluations; narrative, as Jean-Francois Lyotard has claimed, is a primary vehicle of ideology" (pp. 12–13). *The Brownie Story*, as a dominant narrative, in my white middle class culture, set up standard expectations that guided, in part, my understanding of what it meant to be a good girl citizen in society. Weekly repetitive Brownie practices contributed to the development of

my imperial habits of mind through recurring themes of duty to God, the Queen, my country, and those at home.

Imperialism and Ideology

In *Teaching the Postcolonial*, the authors paint, in Saidian terms, a “contrapuntal” postcolonial aesthetic tableau of the ways in which literature and other art forms are important in the process of interrupting the, “...origins claims, the Eurocentric claims, the foundational claims of an essential and indispensable core of knowledge that our children need to know, and so forth—all appeals to resentment. These are all tired formulas that have led to the loss of genuine autonomy and creativity in the educational field” (Dimitriadis & McCarthy, 2001, p. 116). With an understanding of Said’s (1994), “contrapuntal ensembles,” I link imperial ideologies, in the form of repetitive rituals, such as the Brownie promise to do my “duty to God, the Queen and my country” with cultural practices that as a Brownie, I engaged in.

Furthermore, a decade ago, in *Race, Identity and Representation in Education*, McCarthy and Crichlow wrote:

We call attention to the organization and arrangement of racial relations of domination and subordination in cultural forms and ideological practices of identity formation and representation in schooling—what Louis Althusser (1971) calls the “mise-en-scène of interpellation.” We are therefore interested in the ways in which moral leadership and social power are exercised in “the concrete” (Hall, 1981, 1986) and the ways in which regimes of racial domination and subordination are constructed and resisted in education. (1993, p. xix)

Drawing on Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci, who advances a theory of ideology, whereby the dominant class imposes its view of history and the world upon other classes, McCarthy and Crichlow are interested in the “concrete” practices that embody racial domination and subordination in education. Moreover, anti-humanist-structuralist, Louis Althusser, offers a revised conception of ideology that is useful to my project. Ideology for Althusser (1971) is “lived practice” in the analysis of everyday culture. In her article, *Racism, Sexism and Nation Building in Canada*, Roxanna Ng conceptualizes race, class and gender as “relations” that are constructed and reconstructed in terms of a social production of power—beyond Althusser’s context of “the school”—toward Gramsci’s formulation of “common sense” that become embodied in daily practices (1993, p. 57). I find both of these formulations helpful to my inquiry as I explore the ways in which *The Brownie Story* played a role in the construction my identity-formation.

My understanding of Althusser’s (1971) interpellation framework involves a concern with a gap between the materialistic and symbolic func-

tion of ideology.³ On one hand, Marxist ideology involves abstract scientific knowledge, with a focus on economics and reductionism, as “social relations of reproduction.” On the other hand, the constitution of the symbolic function of ideology, for Lacan, involves subjectivity, psychic identity, drives and desires. For Althusser, a Lacanian and Marxist understanding of ideology are important in interpreting a “gap in-between” that represents the cultural practices that compel me to become the good girl subject; socially, culturally, psychically.

On Transformation and Pedagogy in the 21st Century

My aesthetic response to the Girl Guide archive in the form of a mixed-media painting involves a relationship between reader, text, historical context, socio-cultural influences and imperial habits of mind that require, in a hermeneutic sense, (re)interpretation. Iser writes,

Aesthetic response is ... to be analyzed in terms of a dialectic relationship between text, reader, and their interaction. It is called aesthetic response because, although it is brought about by the text, it brings into play the imaginative and perceptive faculties of the reader (1978, p. x)

I conceptualize *The Brownie Story* as an aesthetic text. In fact, the text requires young girls to perform parts of the story enabling them to quite literally become the text. In order to consider the ways in which I can begin to disrupt my educated imagination, I engage in conversation with others. In particular, I speak to groups of teacher candidates across Ontario. First, I tell them my story of reading the archive hermeneutically. For example, I explain that as reader, archivist and reporter, I question the implication of imperial cultural nation-building curriculum in relation to identity-formation and consider my participation in the Girl Guide movement. Then, I ask teacher candidates to consider their role and participation in the movement. I explore gendered traditions embedded in the handbooks, in terms of the homemaking and philanthropist themes that are evident in the Brownie promise described earlier in this paper. I use visuals and describe my archival journey in terms of my aesthetic response vis-à-vis my *Girls of the Empire* (2003) painting. Dimitriadis (2002) argues that art and aesthetics provides educators with an opportunity to think differently about the past. He states,

Art and aesthetics, “is a realm for interrogating new models, new theories, new intellectual ancestors, new ways of thinking, acting and being as transformative intellectuals and pedagogues.” (p. 4)

Each time I tell my story of reading the archive, I engage people in a larger conversation about the importance of exploring the educated imagi-

nation and its relationship to the building of a nation that was a part of the British Empire. I continually build a deeper understanding of the ways in which I learned to divide the world through geographical and philosophical constructions that shaped my educated imagination. It is through the retelling of my story that I question the ways in which dominant stories and cultural practices contribute not only to questions of identity-formation but also to a twenty-first century discussion of pedagogy.

Notes

1. For a critique of the Girl Guide movement as an “indoctrination” scheme, see Buttinot (2000).
2. For an overview of philosophical hermeneutics, see (Gadamer, 1976), (Gallagher, 1992) and (Palmer, 1969).
3. Interpellation, Latin: *interpellation-em* n. of action from *interpellare* English use became obsolete before 1700, Fr 19C action of interpellating of interrupting by question or appeal. Interpellate - interrupt (a person) in speaking or to break in on or interrupt (a process of action). (The Oxford English Dictionary, 1989, p. 1466).

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