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Research Article

Geography Teaching, Racial Literacy and Truthfulness

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Abstract: In this paper we address the question of truthfulness in education. How can a concern for truthfulness be preserved (or restored) in an age of post-truth discourse which enables the politics of denial? While acknowledging that such issues raise matters far beyond the scope of geography educators alone to 'fix' in any meaningful way, we argue that teachers can and must respond to the fundamental challenge these matters provide for what even counts as educational today. The paper analyses the challenge conceptually before reporting on a collaborative research initiative developed with teachers in a mid-western state of the U.S. This project focused on racial literacy as an element of truth telling in geography and social studies teaching. It explored with serving teachers the practical enactment of "future 3" (F3) curriculum scenarios. The work, which took place over the period of eighteen months, is presented as a case study of teachers' *knowledge work* which engages directly with the proposition that developing racial literacy is an essential component of F3 curriculum making.

Keywords: Truthfulness; racial literacy; post truth; future 3; geography education

Highlights:

- Collaborative and reciprocal research methodology with school-teachers
- Conceptually explorative, examining an educational response to "post-truth" discourse
- Illustrates racial literacy as a generative component of teachers' "knowledge work"

1. Introduction

This article examines a significant and urgent challenge for geography teachers which arises directly from some of the rapid societal changes currently being felt across the globe. We are interested in addressing a fundamental question that features in many contemporary issues in geography education, whether to do with (for example) climate change education, decolonising the curriculum, or raising levels of racial literacy in geographical explanation. The question impacts directly on what we consider to be the knowledge work that underpins teachers' curriculum making in geography and social studies more broadly. Although it has profound educational implications, we recognize that the question is really one for society more generally: How can a concern for truthfulness be preserved (or restored) in an age of post-truth politics?

Our concern for truthfulness emerged from a collaborative research project developing racial literacy with social studies teachers in a mid-western state in the U.S. The detailed reporting of the empirical findings of that project will appear in subsequent articles. The purpose of this paper is to explore the conceptual resources of the project, and to elicit how the significance of truthfulness in teaching emerged. With hindsight we can

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now see that the project focused on racial literacy as an element of truth-telling in geography and social studies teaching. Concern for truthfulness matters more broadly because without a concern for truth in a world of "alternative facts," denial of truth is not only facilitated and enabled but encouraged (Kavanagh and Rich, 2018). Thus, climate change can be dismissed as a "hoax;" asylum seekers can be labelled "illegal;" racism can be disregarded as merely the product of "woke" imagination; and invasions of sovereign territories or even genocide can be justified as legitimate "defensive" action.

To be clear, we do not suggest that geography education can somehow compensate for these socio-political issues, let alone fix them, but we do argue that truthfulness needs to be placed front and centre in the teaching of geography and the social studies. We use the term truthfulness to positively distinguish this idea from teaching children and young people "the truth" (and not telling lies). Honest explanations imply more than simply "not lying." Honest accounts of the current epoch require a commitment to truth telling. Young people can and must be taught how to judge the truthfulness of assertions, selective evidence, claimed authority, and how to participate in principled, reasoned argument. In making this case generally, but also specifically in the context of tackling race and racism, we range far beyond geography education scholarship as a discrete field. Indeed, one of our intentions has been to open up geography education to wider scrutiny.

Following a brief exploration of the educational implications of post-truth and its close cousin the politics of denial (after Masalha, 2003; see also Milburn and Conrad, 1996), we examine a geography education curriculum response. As John Morgan (2022) shows in the context of post-WW2 Britain, the school curriculum is a "vital battle ground on which versions of the 'good society' are fought over" (p1) and that "(w)hen the world changes, the 'ensemble of stories' that makes up the school curriculum is (also) subject to change" (p9). While Morgan analyses the intersections of knowledge and culture to understand how curriculum content changes as society evolves, in this article we take an additional step to examine the 'knowledge work' of teachers in their curriculum making, exploring their relationship with knowledge, and the role this relationship plays in their teaching.

We build on the GeoCapabilities projects (Lambert, Solem and Tani, 2015; Mitchell et al, 2022; Béneker and Lambert, 2024; Lambert et al, 2025) and especially a more recent project called Racial Literacy, Capabilities and Curriculum Making (RaLiCaM). During this project, which ran from 2024-25, collaborators identified "truthfulness" as a cornerstone principle that can help guide (and indeed defend) teachers' curriculum making in geography and the social studies more broadly. So, just as RaLiCaM now positions racial literacy as a non-negotiable dynamic, underpinning all high-quality attempts to teach more truthful accounts of the ways of the world (Morgan and Lambert, 2023), we argue here that truthfulness itself is a core aspect of knowledge making that ought to be brought more overtly to the fore in the teaching of geography. We argue that truthfulness is a component of epistemic quality (Hudson, 2019) which can be taught in some intellectually honest manner to students of all ages and circumstances. With more general application to democratic participation, Fricker (2015) and Walker (2019) have explored the similar notion of epistemic capabilities.

The argument here calls for renewed and sustained focus on "Future 3" (F3) forms of curriculum making (Young and Muller, 2010; Young and Lambert, 2014; Béneker, Bladh and Lambert, 2024; McPhail, Pountney and Wheelahan, 2024; León, 2025; Lambert, et al, 2025). As we see in more detail below, these are curriculum scenarios in which teachers and students focus in some meaningful way on their relationship with the knowledge itself, or what Firth describes as their "disposition towards disciplinary knowledge" (Firth 2018, p 276). Both GeoCapabilities and RaLiCaM projects worked with teachers to bring F3 thinking to practical classroom application, in a manner which, Deng (2022; 2025) has also noted, seeks to cultivate intellectual capabilities and human potential. This was achieved through the development of curriculum artifacts and the writing of curriculum "vignettes," briefly illustrated later in this article. As readers will note, the curriculum vignettes are not lesson plans, but forms of description and analysis designed to bring out the curriculum thinking – akin to how students might be asked to "show their work" in solving problems in mathematics. In this sense, vignettes are both professional tools and expressions of professional expertise.

2. Responding to post-truth

Although we take as given, almost to the level of cliché, that "all that is solid melts into the air" (Berman, 1983) - the manner in which capitalism and the logic of the market renders the structures of society as fragile, unsubstantial and temporary - we argue that the astonishing emergence and *normalisation* of "post-truth" in social and political relations adds a sharp new twist to this endemic instability. The truth about anything, from vaccines to invasions has, to coin a phrase, become "lost in the post" (Lambert, 2009) – a reference to the late post-modern zeitgeist in which grand

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narrative truth-telling has been replaced by multiple standpoints. This is a phenomenon that Gert Biesta (2025) has recently described as incurring a kind of "loss" (even though we can, at the same time, also acknowledge the benefits arising from unsettling given and imposed narratives). But when perspectives *on* the world replace knowledge and understanding *of* the world, the difficult, painstaking task of helping students to 'arrive' *in* the world can be lost behind a cloud of standpoints, sometimes equating truth-telling to one's opinion or position(ality). Unlike having an opinion *on* the world, claiming knowledge *of* it necessitates a regard for the truth, for gaining knowledge itself "seems to be more like a way of getting at the truth" (Ichikawa and Steup, 2024. np).

In the intensifying heat generated by the AI 'gold-rush,' Sundar Pichai the head of Google, which itself has by now invested many tens of billions of dollars in the technology, announced rather disarmingly in a BBC interview that the "current state-of-the-art AI technology is prone to some errors" (BBC, 2025). He had nothing to say about the implications for schools or for teaching, apart from implying that schooling will not have to change that much – there will still be mathematics, languages, science, art and the rest. And of course, we agree that geography as an idea will always exist and contribute to the educated person (Bonnett, 2025; Lambert and León, 2023). However, merely stating this scarcely begins to address the epistemological threat posed by AI to anything purporting to be a commonly held or agreed (let alone, truthful) understanding of the world that can be taught. Deepfake video can quickly produce convincing 'evidence' of events and things that have never happened. Thus, the challenge to truthful journalism, for example, when we come to depend on browsers with baked in AI, as Zuckerman (2025) points out, is obvious: "AI needs news to answer questions about the world but is undercutting the business model of news gathering organisations" (p35). In other words, without public service reporting and large-scale independent fact-checking any notion of a shared reality is lost. It is perhaps already too late to make this argument as "the news" is increasingly mediated through social media "influencers" often within manipulative echo chambers.

Society in these circumstances becomes a cacophony of opinion and bias in which many voices, including those of the minoritized and working-class, are easily drowned out by those with power, wealth and influence. Education must stand outside this "noise" and somehow exist in what David Wadley (2008) memorably described as a "garden of peace," a calm space in which teachers and students can rediscover and further develop their intellectual capacities. Notwithstanding Basil Bernstein's (1970) famous dictum, that "education cannot compensate for society," the need for a robust *educational* response to the cacophony is surely urgent. Of course, Bernstein and others (e.g. Shelton, 2023) have suggested that education (alone) cannot redress disadvantage and social inequality. We agree but also argue in this paper that there is a need to resist classroom cacophony and continually assert the significance of high epistemic quality in teaching. In short, we are asking how do we create educational space motivated by truthfulness when we live in a culture that worships multiple truths?

Furthermore, we want to urge readers of this article to imagine geography teachers playing an active part in creating educational responses fit for preparing children and young people to grasp and face the world of multiple crises, for as Seldon (2025) asserts so clearly, a "tired and redundant system of education" fixated on assessment and grade levels may in part be responsible. He argues,

> *"It fails to prepare young people well enough … and focusses on the very cognitive and linear skills that algorithms will always be able to outperform humans on, rather than the human skills on which AI will never be able to compete with humans" (p xi).*

Education *systems* are perhaps notoriously conservative and slow to change. But change they do, not least from within. The rest of the book in which Seldon makes his assertion, is replete with recommendations for change that would include, for example, more stress on critical thinking (which includes nurturing intellectual curiosity, honesty, humility and empathy) and nurturing classrooms that are more "deliberative" (Brown and Handscomb, 2025). We embrace these generic attributes and in particular the notion of "sophistication" in relation to what the authors refer to as "epistemic beliefs" (ibid. p 7).

Our research is concerned with how to bring such educational ideals (including an overt concern for truthfulness) meaningfully to the fore in the teaching of geography, which means *with* teachers of geography. It does so with an acute realisation that generic deliberative critical thinking skills, although necessary, are in themselves insufficient. It is not enough, as it were, simply to tick the critical thinking box. Disciplinary and interdisciplinary thinking, which provides much of the reliable knowledge we possess about the ways of world, arises through specialised critical thought, crucially

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oriented towards truth telling. Geographical knowledge does not simply 'exist' waiting to be harvested. It is created, usually for some discernible reasons and is frequently contested. As we suggest above, what is at stake is nothing less than the nature of the didactic relationship teachers and students have with the knowledge itself (as well as with each other).

3. Future orientations in teaching

In addition to truthfulness, a central aspect of the educational challenge facing us in an age of quickening crisis, is the question of how the future is positioned.

As all knowledge is socially constructed, there are constant disagreements and arguments about what is known. What is accepted as knowledge of something in the form of a "justified true belief" itself evolves with novel theoretical insights, fresh perspectives and new evidence (it is not just a matter of opinion). In geography, there is also direct experience to draw from, as we all live in and interact with the world – and we do so very differently, depending on who we are, our situation and circumstances. Nevertheless, the discipline of geography which takes the world as its "object of study" (Firth, 2011), teaches students how evidence, data and ideas (theories) can be used to come to reasoned judgements about how things work in the world. Moreover, geographical perspective reminds us always that how things play out on the ground may differ substantially depending on local, regional and national context.

However, the school curriculum is sometimes criticised for being concerned only with the past (Ball, 1993) even though the future has no recorded data and testimony and can never be known in advance. Forecasts and predictions are always contingent and therefore teaching about the future is more than a little complicated (Morgan, 2021). In place of experience, analysis and evaluation we have imagination and speculation. But of course, the latter can be – indeed, must be – informed by what is already known and how we claim to know it. Thus, although it is impossible to teach directly about the future, it is possible to teach students how to think about the future. This is to acknowledge that the process of education *always* takes place in the context of uncertainty, for the world is always in transition and a sense of 'crisis' is never far away (Lambert et al 2025). In many ways, it is this that makes geography such a compelling and vital subject to teach in schools. Geography teaching at the very least attempts to engage students with contemporary events and trends, plus current forecasts and predictions, leading to one observation (Hicks, 2014) that geography might well be the most future oriented subject in the school curriculum.

So how does our concern for truthfulness inform teaching that takes a future(s) orientation seriously? In geography, understanding human behaviour in the context of possible future environmental and ecological hazards, for example, can be accomplished through teaching existing and developing knowledge of human-environmental relations (Morgan, 2012). The broad point is to teach geography in a way that makes explicit that *futures are made*. That, just as with the landscapes we can observe through the window, they are not inevitable and are to varying degrees shaped (with both intended and unintended consequences) by the actions of people – arguably, the compelling reason why the Anthropocene is such a potentially productive concept for geography in the school curriculum. Information and data literacy, including understanding probability and the evaluation of risk, are certainly relevant in such future oriented teaching, as are several other "literacies," including, as we will see below, racial literacy. We argue that all this calls for a deep reassessment of how teachers – and students – engage with geographical knowledge, thus contributing to their epistemic capabilities. It also calls for close attention to *justifying* the selection of what to teach in a manner that cultivates intellectual and other human capabilities (Deng, 2022 p 613). We agree with Deng (2025) when he advocates for more research on teachers' theories of content that underpin their work as curriculum makers, in order to better understand "classroom teaching as a curriculum practice" (ibid p 73).

4. Racial literacy and Future 3 curriculum making

The RaLiCaM project, to which we now turn, was rooted in critical realism (Bhaskar, 2017) which as Huckle (2019) points out, provides some philosophical heft to underpin social realist curriculum thinking (Young, 2008; Young & Muller, 2010; Young & Lambert, 2014). In brief, critical realism sees the world as complex, open, intrinsically dynamic, emergent and full of novelty, meaning that our understanding of the world is based on informed judgment (not absolute proof or certainty). Central to the research is the emergent and dynamic concept of racial literacy, for which we provide some definition in the next section. The project focused on the development of racial literacy in the context of teachers' knowledge work in what we call Future 3 (F3) curriculum making. Both racial literacy and F3 curriculum scenarios are specified in more detail below, but we stress that both these 'frames' are treated as emergent, embodied in what we

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refer to as 'living documents' (see Appendix A). Thus, racially literate F3 curriculum scenarios possess emancipatory intent and working through what they might look like in practice was key to the RaLiCaM project, an aim roundly endorsed by its 15 teacher participants.

4.1. Racial Literacy

RaLiCaM adopted an understanding of racial literacy as initiated by Guinier (2003) and subsequently developed by social studies educators and scholars (e.g. King, et al., 2018). According to Guinier, racial literacy "begins by redefining racism as a structural problem rather than a purely individual one" and enhances the "ability to read race in conjunction with institutional and democratic structures" (cited in Rolón-Dow, et al., 2021, p 22- 23). It therefore becomes a diagnostic device or analytic tool, and a lens for making sense of socio-political and economic issues such as stratification, inequity, and marginalization.

To grow racial literacy therefore requires a conceptual understanding of how race and racism work in society; for example, through processes of *racialization* whereby groups and individuals are racialized into subjective categories with ascribed meaning. Thus, while we used the word 'race' in our study, we worked with teachers on ways to acknowledge the process of race-making or racialization, understood as a "process of manufacturing and utilizing the notion of race in any capacity" (Dalal, 2002 p. 27). Developing racial literacy with self-identified white teachers involved having them critically analyse a society from which they systemically benefit. This included addressing the normalisation of whiteness and the predominantly white gaze of social studies through its subject lenses, including geography.

In the context of the school geography curriculum, Morgan and Lambert (2023) set out some foundational principles of racial literacy that were used directly with teacher participants. These include the shared understanding that:

- Race is not a biological fact, but a socially constructed idea (but no less *real* as a result).
- Race is designed *to create* a hierarchy, to oppress, control or "other" people.
- The liberal assumption that racism resides in the faulty *prejudice of individuals* is an inadequate underpinning of anti-racism.
- Any colour-blind approach to race (as in 'all lives matter') fails to account for how race and racism *work* in society.
- Racism takes many forms, and evolves, but is present in the *here* and *now*. Any attempts at historical and geographical *distancing* of racisms are rejected.

Furthermore, Morgan and Lambert's book provides a sequential knowledge base and a way of working with race, racialization, and racisms, which is encapsulated by the following list (also the overarching structure of the book):

1. An understanding of the history and geography of the *national context* and how it has perpetuated race thinking.
2. Conceptual understanding of race/racisms and how they have been used in specifically *educational contexts*.
3. An understanding of how race thinking was embedded in the *discipline of geography* and how the discipline has responded and developed.
4. A consideration of how *geography teachers* have tried to teach about race/racisms.
5. An ability and *readiness to plan and teach* a curriculum that addresses race and racism.

This list summarises key aspects of the knowledge work that racially literate geography teaching requires. While we do not for a moment imagine teachers will become scholars of race and race thinking, the RaLiCaM teachers were asked over a period of one year to work with the main content fields expressed through items 1-3. This they did through three in-person workshops and 8 monthly online meetings. Items 4-5 on the list involved practical curriculum making activity by the teachers in their schools, recorded and communicated though written curriculum vignettes and accompanying curriculum artifacts, and reflected upon through professional diary entries. In all, 29 vignettes were produced by participating teachers.

4.2. Future 3 curriculum making

In the prologue to his book on the *Rediscovery of Teaching*, Biesta (2017) reflects on the swing between what we call Future 1 and Future 2 education, frequently described as that between traditionalist and more progressive thought: "What is remarkably absent in the discussion is the consideration of a *third option* …" (p.3, original italics). Bringing this third option to life is what RaLiCaM has sought to do.

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Crucial to this research was establishing a shared understanding with teachers of how the creation of Future 3 (F3) curriculum scenarios relates to what Priestley and Biesta (2013) describe as the "new curriculum" phenomenon. As we have seen in the previous section referencing Deng's recent work, this positions curriculum not as merely 'official text' made and ready for delivery, but more a vehicle that teachers use to design rich educational encounters.

For readers unfamiliar with the F3 moniker, it originates from Young and Muller's now widely cited article (Young and Muller, 2010) introducing the *three future curriculum scenarios* heuristic. As we noted earlier, it has now been taken up internationally (Young and Lambert, 2014; Béneker, Bladh and Lambert, 2024; McPhail, Pountney and Wheelahan, 2024; León, 2025; Lambert, et al, 2025) and was a key framework for RaLiCaM teachers to think through the making of more racially literate (and therefore more truthful) curriculum encounters for students in the social studies. In summary, the three futures heuristic can be characterised as follows:

- **Future 1** "Traditional." Content as "given" and relatively inert. A curriculum of transmission. Under-socialized knowledge. Much teacher talk. Student compliance. Often alienating to students.
  Summary metaphor: **Deliver.**
- **Future 2** "Progressive." Content is arbitrary and fluid. Stresses "learning" as an end in itself. Over-socialized knowledge. Much interactive activity. "Busy" students. Teachers as facilitators.
  Summary metaphor: **Learnify** (after Biesta, 2015).
- **Future 3** Engagement with knowledge itself, including disciplinary knowledge. Content not "given" (F1) nor "arbitrary" (F2). Teacher and students interact. Interrogation of knowledge. Meaning making and making judgements.
  Summary metaphor: **Engage.**

In its initial incarnation (Young and Muller, 2010), F3 was left rather ill-defined. Essentially, what we knew then was what F3 was not (neither F1 nor F2). In later writings, both Young and Muller have added some definition (e.g. Muller, 2022) as have others, including those involved with the GeoCapabilities project (Mitchell et al, 2022). Our reference to knowledge work is key to grasping the nature of F3 curriculum thinking. It refers to the transformational work teachers must undertake when making decisions about what to teach and how to enact the curriculum in the classroom, drawing from a wide range of professional knowledges, including specialist disciplinary knowledge. Knowledge work therefore refers to the *intellectual labour* of teachers as they engage with theory, principles, content, and pedagogy (León, 2025). Teachers recognize the contested and dynamic nature of knowledge and the need to evaluate perspectives and make judgments about what and how to teach.

Crucially, F3 thinking was supported and developed over the course of the project, starting with the initial conceptual workshop and moving through the design and action/reflection phases (see methodology below). Importantly, data were generated and analysed to evaluate the supposition that enhanced levels of racial literacy could inform and enable the creation of rich (and we now say more truthful) F3 curriculum scenarios. Guiding this work was a set of principles (Table 1), encouraging both teachers and students to engage critically with knowledge and to ask questions of its *production* (Healy, 2026) as well as its communication.

Table 1. Principles underpinning Future 3 Curriculum Scenarios (*Multiple sources including Young & Muller, 2010; Beneker, Bladh & Lambert, 2023; León, 2025*)

• ask 'who are we teaching?' This is to acknowledge and respect students' lived experiences, aspirations and drive. • seek to recognise epistemological diversity – that there are different ways of 'knowing' the world. For example: recognising that although learning through *experience* is legitimate, it is different from being taught to see the world as *an object of study*. • seek to achieve high levels of epistemic quality, notably by demonstrating the dynamic nature of knowledge development (e.g. 'how do we know what we claim to know?'). • drop the metaphor of *delivery of* knowledge in teaching, in favour of *engagement with* knowledge. • seek to show the 'power' of different ways of seeing and thinking (thinking geographically, thinking historically).

Next, we turn to an explanation of the RaLiCaM methodology as it is essential to grasp the reciprocal, collaborative nature of this work.

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5. Methodology

Drawing on existing collaborative approaches to research that have been shown to "enhance the professional capacity of teachers," (Priestley & Drew, 2019; p. 11), our methodology sought to be overtly asset-based. The research was conducted with a self-selected team of teachers who were recruited from local school districts and through the state's Council for the Social Studies. The teachers work across seven different school districts, but within the same metro-region of one midwestern US state. While all the teachers self-identified as White, many, but not all, work in schools where the majority of students identify as students of Colour and where there is considerable socio-economic diversity.

The research began in its **conceptual phase**, working and negotiating with participants the broad goals and shared purposes of the research. This work was initiated with a full-day, face-to-face interactive workshop to explore and create the first iterations of frameworks and definitions (summarised in the previous sections). The research therefore adopted a design-based research (DBR) methodology (Tinoca et al., 2022) and rested heavily on building "critical friendship" (e.g. Baker & Bitto, 2022), being closely aligned to the "critical collaborative professional enquiry" model espoused by Priestley and Drew (2019).

As the research moved into its **design phase**, participants worked with the researchers (the authors of this paper) to operationalize curriculum thinking with enhanced racial literacy. During this phase, tools (such as vignettes) and approaches/pedagogies (developed from curriculum artifacts) were designed (see Appendix B). This phase also saw updated iterations of the two "living documents," which were built with teachers and became embodiments of both the conceptual tools used by the teachers *and* a research output in its own right. The two living documents addressed Racial Literacy and Curriculum Making respectively and were co-designed and created over the period of the entire project.

The main data generation or **action phase** of the project was when participants taught lesson sequences based on their vignettes and subsequently reflected on their teaching and curriculum-making as it related to building racial literacy in their individual contexts. During this phase, teachers were asked to consider the principles and criteria contained in the project's key living documents and relate that to their work (principally, creating and writing their two vignettes). Much of this process was captured in professional diaries and collaborative discussion in monthly Zoom discussions.

The research phases and how these relate to the conceptual and practical tools of the project are reflected in Figure 1.

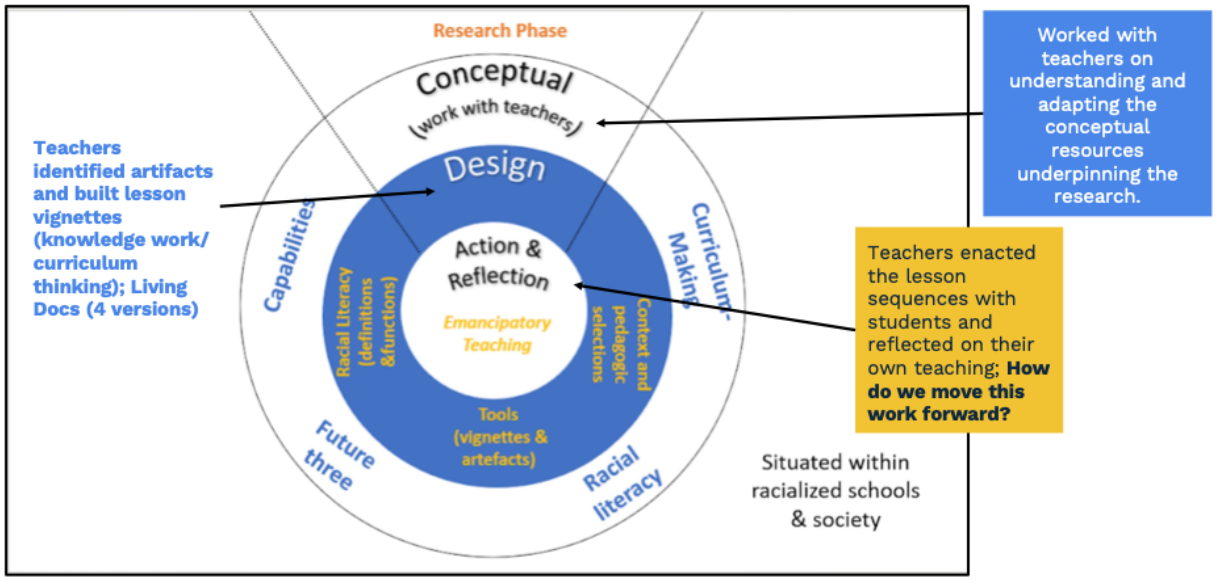

Figure 1. RaLiCaM Research Phases

Data analysis occurred throughout the project and went hand-in-hand with data generation. The research process was formative in the sense that analysis influenced subsequent data formation - through the co-production of the project's living documents, the creation of lesson sequences (vignettes) and so on (Coghlan & Brannick, 2014). This iterative process of analysis has thus far consisted of both deductive and inductive approaches. The former is framed by the putative social realist curriculum making scenarios designated as F3 outlined in Table 1. The latter is grounded in the

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data themselves (Corbin & Holt, 2005), and the teacher participants whose reflections are captured partly by co-designed protocols contained in the living documents.

The RaLiCaM research project recognized that teachers' *achieving* agency (Priestley, et al., 2015; Pantić, 2015) is central to enacting any meaningful educational change. For policy makers, teachers are often reduced to agents of implementation who are quick to be blamed when implementation fails. In this way teachers are often seen as part of the problem rather than the solution, "… responsible for all that (is) wrong with American schools" (Shelton, 2023 p 192). We believe this teacher blame-game is rooted partly in a faulty understanding of the complexity of teachers' work, in particular the role of teachers' curriculum making, the quality of which can be traced to their knowledge work and curriculum thinking. The RaLiCaM project recognized the role teachers must play in educational change and for this reason positioned them as central assets to the DBR approach.

5.1. Data Generation

The project benefited from multiple data sources including: a) pre and post interviews with all the teachers, b) professional diary entries which included teachers' reflections on lessons, c) various curricular resources generated by the group (e.g. questions to ask of social studies knowledge; two living documents, curriculum artifacts and vignettes), and d) eight recorded monthly Zoom sessions (later transcribed) and three in-person workshops involving both researchers and teachers. Each of these virtual meetings featured a particular concept informing racial literacy and/or curriculum making, and both teachers and researchers engaged in the reading/viewing of texts related to the concept prior to attending the meeting. For illustration, a non-exhaustive list of concepts addressed included: capabilities, curriculum making, curriculum scenarios (including F3), whiteness and socialisation, decolonisation, racialisation, Latinx racism, and intersectionality. Without the space to discuss each of these in any detail, we look to two of the project's principal outputs: the living documents and teachers' curriculum artifacts and vignettes.

5.2. Living Documents

The two living documents (LDs), on racial literacy and curriculum making respectively, detail much of what was discussed and learned collaboratively in RaLiCaM. We refer to these outputs as *living* because they were in a constant 'state of becoming' throughout the project, passing through at least four 'official' versions. While the LDs emerged as different from how they were originally conceived, RaLiCaM participants did follow an established protocol for their creation, which was provided at the first workshop (Appendix A). Table 2 shows a summary of the content headings of both LDs. Importantly, one of the final steps taken by the teachers was to identify places in the living documents where their own vignettes could be linked for illustrative purposes. Ultimately, we hope the documents will be useful for various settings in any future work with others (e.g. colleagues, administrators, board members, teacher candidates), being available through a Midwestern university library.

Table 2. RaLiCaM Living Documents

Living Document	**Key Concepts/ Themes**

Racial Literacy	• What is Racial Literacy?
	• Racial Literacy: Key Ideas
	  ○ Whiteness (and the social construction of race/identity)
	  ○ Decolonization
	  ○ Racialization
	  ○ Latinx Experience and Perspectives
	  ▪ Terminology
	  ○ Intersectionality
	• Curriculum Making with/for Racial Literacy
	  ○ Knowledge and ways of knowing
	  ○ Racial literacy and disciplinary knowledge
	  ○ History of U.S. racism and responding to the "now"
	• Curriculum Artifacts and Vignettes

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	○ Guidance for writing a vignette ○ RaLiCaM vignettes ▪ Exemplar vignette ▪ Vignettes listing
Curriculum Making	• Curriculum as an Idea ○ Influences on curriculum ○ Loosening the idea of curriculum ○ A curriculum dilemma ○ Curriculum and capabilities • Three Future Curriculum Scenarios ○ Future 3 (F3) • Teachers and Knowledge Work ○ Knowledge work in practice ○ F3 curriculum making in practice • Curriculum Artifacts and Vignettes ○ Guidance for writing a vignette ○ RaLiCaM vignettes ▪ Exemplar vignette ▪ Vignettes listing

5.3. Curriculum Vignettes

The LDs are especially persuasive when used with the main teacher-generated output, the curriculum vignettes which were subsequently taught in classrooms with students. Using a protocol (Appendix B), teachers selected curriculum artifacts (see Appendix for explanation) and wrote vignettes before teaching their proposed lesson sequence. For illustration, Table 3 provides the titles and main knowledge foci of three sample vignettes taken from the 29 created.

Table 3. Sample Teacher-Generated Curriculum Vignettes

Title of Vignette	**Social Studies Knowledge Foci**
The Global Garment Industry and Economic Geography	• Global labour markets • Women of Colour • Racialized economic structures • Labor struggles
The Tulsa Race Massacre of 1921	• Racial violence and injustice • Economic injustice • Historical memory/erasure, truth, and reconciliation • The role of media (historically and presently)
Understanding the Experience of Latin American Migration	• Migration models • Different groups and individuals' contributions to the experience of migration and settlement. • The use of agency by migrants to fight oppression during migration and settlement. • Ideological, institutional, interpersonal, and internalized oppression

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6. Discussion and Initial Insights

There are three initial insights derived from a holistic examination of the data and from reflecting upon the entire 18 month project. First, we believe that the methodology of the project (collaborative, design-based inquiry) has resulted in a form of reciprocity which supports and encourages teachers in *achieving* agency (Priestley, et al., 2015). The teachers responded positively to the framework co-developed with them, framed by racial literacy and the development of F3 curriculum making. Teachers were quick to acknowledge the inadequacies of F1 and F2 curriculum scenarios, both of which they recognised and had encountered in their work. The capabilities approach (after Nussbaum and Sen, 1993), while not explored fully here, formed an essential backdrop to the project that helped focus curriculum thinking on the freedoms required for students "to be and to do." The capabilities approach therefore expresses the role of education in nurturing human potential, and teachers testified that *their own* capabilities were enhanced through building levels of racial literacy in their curriculum making. It helped focus their work on the potential of subjects in the social studies to educate.

The second initial insight is perhaps unsurprising. Some of the teachers (usually those working outside the main urban school districts) expressed ongoing concerns about the threatening psycho-social political context in which they work. This was well illustrated with a quotation from one participant: "I think we can possibly discuss *whiteness* as a concept, but *white privilege*? Forget it! This is too political for my school administration." The psycho-social politics underlying this reality, which we characterize here as the post-truth *politics of denial* (after Masalha, 2003; Milburn and Conrad, 1996), create circumstances in which racial literacy is misunderstood (sometimes wilfully) as a tool of indoctrination by an imagined subversive educational establishment. This situation is further exacerbated by the already well-documented challenges related to the exclusion of minoritized groups and lack of teaching about race/ism in the social studies curriculum (An, 2022; Jones, 2022; King, 2022).

RaLiCaM teachers described an atmosphere in which some parents fear losing control over what their children are taught at school, suspicious of a "woke" orthodoxy from which (they are told) they need protection. It is clear, and not only in the U.S., that accusations of so-called "wokeness" have become an officially sanctioned form of abuse in national politics, a weapon used in the manufactured culture wars that undermine reasoned discourse on virtually any matter associated with social, economic and environmental justice. It is of profound concern when the *process* of education (Bruner 2009; Biesta, 2015) can be so easily manipulated and distorted by some leaders and politicians to be confused with indoctrination. The project demonstrated that schools and teachers appear to be on the front lines of withstanding attacks on what Biesta (2015) calls the *beautiful risk* of education. RaLiCaM teachers concurred that the key purposes of social studies teaching, deepened and made more 'complete' with raised levels of racial literacy and working with F3 curriculum scenarios, are antithetical to indoctrination. Furthermore, this combination forms a robust basis for principled resistance to calls to "remove improper ideology" in President Trump's March 2025 Executive Order, bombastically entitled "*Restoring Truth and Sanity to American History*."

The final insight arising from collaborative online and in-person discussions, relates to the notion of "truthfulness" and what it might offer teachers in their curriculum making. Owing to RaLiCaM's emphasis on knowledge work conducted through a F3 lens, it is perhaps inevitable that questions about the *knowledge itself* emerged. To examine individual vignettes in detail is a task for another article which has the space to open up and report on a full empirical analysis. Suffice to say here, questions of truth emerged pragmatically through curriculum making, as for example when teachers had to decide what to teach. For example, enhanced racial literacy made it clear to teachers that, unless challenged, the normalized whiteness of many historical and geographical accounts offer students only a partial, incomplete, and therefore less than truthful narrative. Concern for truthfulness became a central *professional concern* for teachers – and in contradistinction from Trump's mendacious and simplistic notion of "restoring truth." The idea of truthfulness goes to the heart of knowledge making. Social realist F3 curriculum scenarios *require* teachers and students to ask questions about/of the knowledge itself. To be sure, this is a challenge for teachers, and while all teacher participants showcased elements of racial literacy in their curriculum making, only some of the teachers coupled this with questions of the knowledge which we might expect from fully formed F3 curriculum makers.

Although F3 presents profoundly radical demands on both teachers and students (simply because it takes knowledge questions seriously), the RaLiCaM project adds further weight to the work arising from GeoCapabilities to suggest that F3 curriculum thinking is an entirely appropriate aspiration in the current febrile times. Teachers must view knowledge as not just given or asserted as in traditional F1 scenarios. They also need to be alert to the risks inherent in

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alternative F2 scenarios - where knowledge is seen as arbitrary. In F2 scenarios, students might be visibly more "engaged," but knowledge questions are *not* taken seriously (which is especially convenient to those who are careless with truth).

7. In Conclusion

In addressing the emergence of post-truth politics, which is both a threat to democracy and sustainable human life on Earth, this paper attempts to cover a lot of ground. The discussion has been sharpened through our focus on race and racism in teaching. Our description of RaLiCaM serves, therefore, to illustrate just one of the epochal challenges facing teachers of geography and the social studies. Its purpose here has been to exemplify our wider research interest which is to delineate the appropriate educational responses in geography and the social studies, strong enough to transform educational encounters *for* the future.

We are conscious that one of the underlying causes of the psycho-social political inertia in society (and in schools), facilitating the rise of immensely destructive "dark ideas" (Brown and Handscombe, 2025), is the quickening and possibly futile search for technological fixes to capitalism's continuing crises. In the US, the firms driving this (Amazon, Apple, Facebook, IBM, Google and Microsoft, Palantir, X) seem lined up behind a President who has not only discovered ways to use social media to bypass and distort democratic process but also to enrich the new billionaire class with extraordinary power over our lives (as well as untold wealth). As John Morgan points out, this is "platform capitalism," taking control not only of the means of production but the "means of cognition" (Morgan, forthcoming).

In his chapter, Morgan (ibid) urges that teachers need to be "prepared and able to talk about capitalism." In this paper, we draw on this ambition but limit our advocacy to what teachers, as a collective group can be expected to grasp and respond to in their daily work, and to create educational encounters which explicitly value truthfulness. This will no doubt require revisions to what we think of as teachers' work, in particular extending and deepening the knowledge work which underpins their curriculum making.

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Contribution to the Special Issue Topics: This article contributes to the special issue through its overarching theme which is to develop (through F3 thinking) the epistemic capabilities of teachers and students. The argument is that through their *knowledge work* teachers and students are empowered to navigate complex societal changes. The article focusses on the prevailing socio-political condition of "post-truth" and how educators can and must retain and develop a concern for truthfulness in teaching geography.

Appendix A.

Protocol for Creation of Living Documents

What is a Living Document (LD)?

A LD is like an annotated bibliography - giving relatively quick but conceptually robust access to a field of expertise or aspect of high-level professional practice. It is written for a professional audience (not a highly specialised academic audience). It is accessible but at the same time provides routeways to the deeper research and scholarship on which it depends.

We have two LDs. Both are written collaboratively using words and materials from the RaLiCaM Collaborative Inquiry. The researchers take 'editorial' responsibility in order that the LD maintains coherence and does not just grow by accumulation and accretion. It is continuously revised and under review by project collaborators.

Who is the audience for these LDs?

- Ourselves
- Spencer Foundation
- Academics (via articles we write)
- District curricular leaders and officials?
- Other teachers?

What "rules" will we follow? (We can bend these!)

- Introduction - one paragraph 250-300 words
- Concise headings - no more than 10 in total
- Under each heading - one paragraph 250-300 words
- Up to 2 academic references for each heading - open access if possible, each with a 50-word annotation
- Each heading is linked to up to 2 curriculum vignettes (produced by RaLiCaM teachers)- each with a 50-word annotation that explicitly notes why this particular vignette links to this aspect of the LD.

Will these LDs be updated?

Yes! Throughout the project there will be various opportunities to update the living documents to represent new insights and directions.

Appendix B.

Protocol for Writing a Vignette

Background

At our first in-person workshop, we illustrated a lesson using a curriculum artifact (the Kilkelly exercise used to unsettle and deepen the concept of international migration). We also showcased the vignette written to accompany the lesson. Each participant will produce at least two vignettes over the course of the project (RaLiCaM 1.0) and one additional vignette (RaLiCaM 2.0). Together, the vignettes illustrate curriculum-thinking in relation to the conceptual "living documents" on *racial literacy*, *curriculum-making*, and *knowing and truthfulness*.

What to include in the vignette

1. Vignettes should engage with an appropriate curriculum artifact (an image, clip, text, poem, etc) which acts as a source or stimulus of some kind for the students. Ideally, this source is something that can be revisited over multiple lessons, acting as an anchor across a lesson sequence (3+ hours of instruction). The artifact itself should be included.

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2. The vignette will explain how the students interact with the artifact – and what the teacher has to do and set up for this to happen. There should be some indication that the teacher has thought about the specific students they teach. There should also be some indication of what (if any) prior teaching (or additional data) is required and where these lessons could lead next.
3. The vignette should make it clear the disciplinary concepts and thinking which is to be developed with students - for example, what "powerful knowledge" (e.g. enabling knowledge) students may acquire through this lesson sequence.
4. The vignette should also spell out how the lesson/lesson sequence contributes to *building levels of racial literacy* in students: it is hoped that you can make a direct reference to a specific concept or section in the Living Document on Racial Literacy.
5. Finally, if there are any particular teaching *challenges or potential misconceptions* that lie in wait for anyone wishing to try the idea out themselves – then point them out and discuss how you might confront these.

Vignette Checklist

- Explanation of the Curriculum Artifact (e.g. What is it? How/where did you find it? Anything we need to know about it?)
- Why you selected the curriculum artifact (e.g. What is special about it? How does it help you teach?)
- Provide the curriculum artifact itself - or easy links in order to access it
- An overview of the pedagogic strategy, which includes consideration of the particular students you teach
- Perceived challenges and misconceptions with the chosen topic, together with ideas for responding - with this artifact
- Powerful/enabling concepts developed in the lesson sequence - especially the disciplinary thinking that can be achieved through effectively engaging with the artifact
- How racial literacy may be developed and/or enhanced through effectively engaging with the artifact and lesson sequence.
- Connections to past/future lessons - the prior learning assumed and the potential next steps enabled by the lesson sequence.

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