

# Rethinking Research for Transformative Change: From Big Questions to Bold Futures

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Change in Schools

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*This acknowledgment is not simply an apology for what has happened in the past but to recognise and raise awareness about how racial slavery and the history of colonialism have led to the University's development and accumulation of wealth. Through this statement we reaffirm our commitment to reparative justice through our actions.*

# Introducing CenTCS' Inaugural Seminar Series

## Our Mission

In CenTCS, we focus on the power of the teacher and leader as levers for transformative change.

## The Research Compass

1. How do we conceptualize transformative change in schools?
2. How do we prepare teachers for transformative teaching and praxis?
3. How do teachers enact transformative teaching in classrooms?
4. How do we describe the complex relationships between transformative teaching and its impact in different contexts?

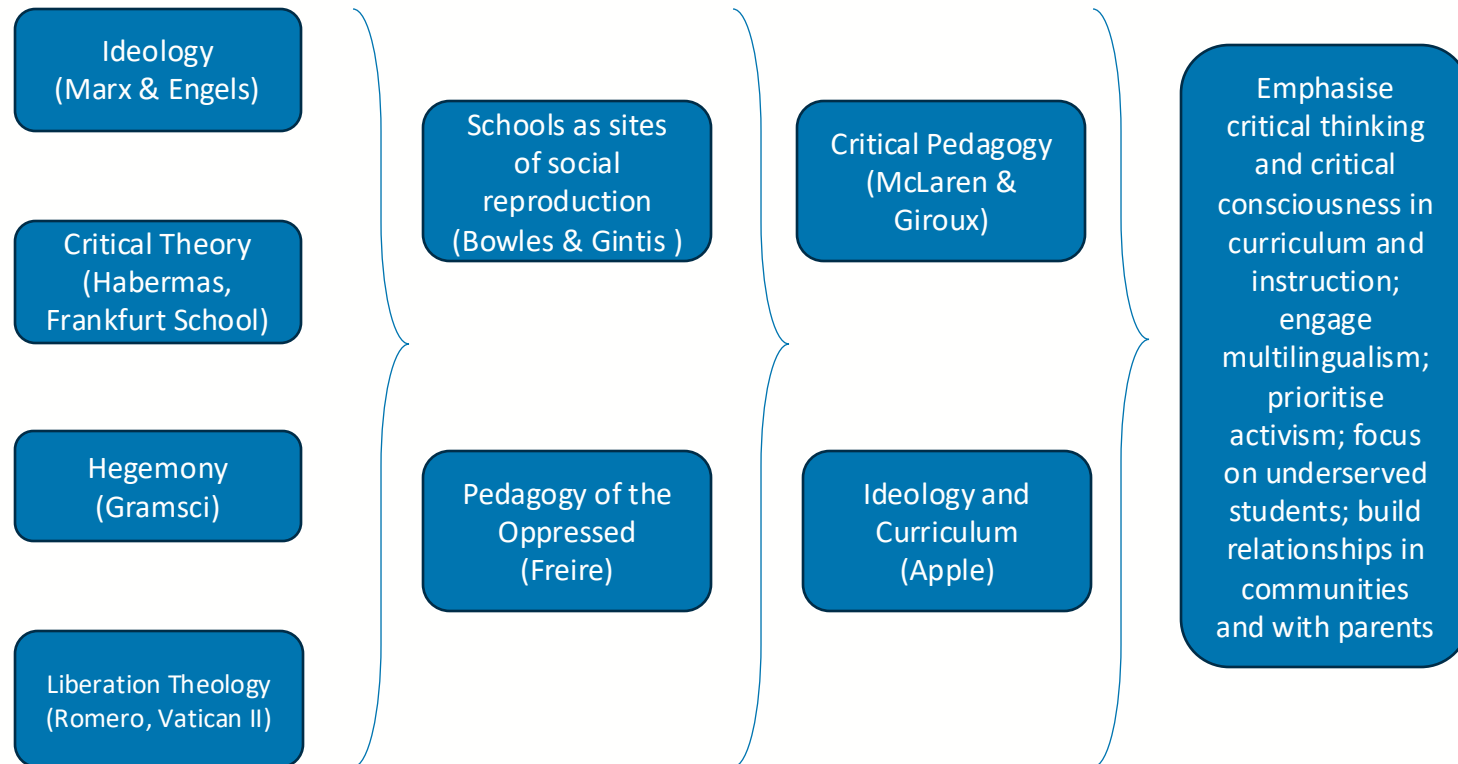


# Overview

1. Defining transformative change in teaching and research
2. Transformative change as a research goal in “research situations”
  - Sociohistorical influences
  - Human geography
  - Positionality
  - Theory-methods
4. Lessons about transformative change research situations: Three example studies
5. Conclusions and directions

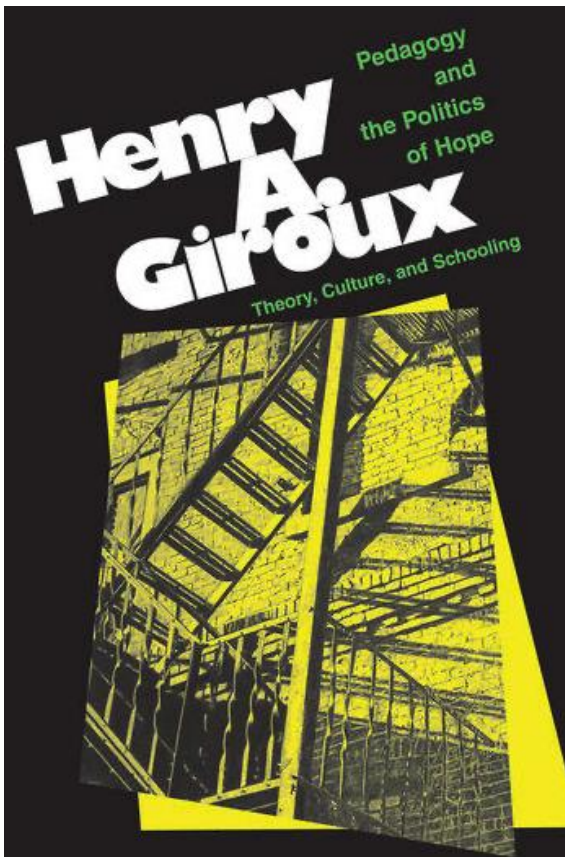
# Defining transformative change

Foundations in **teaching** for transformative change:





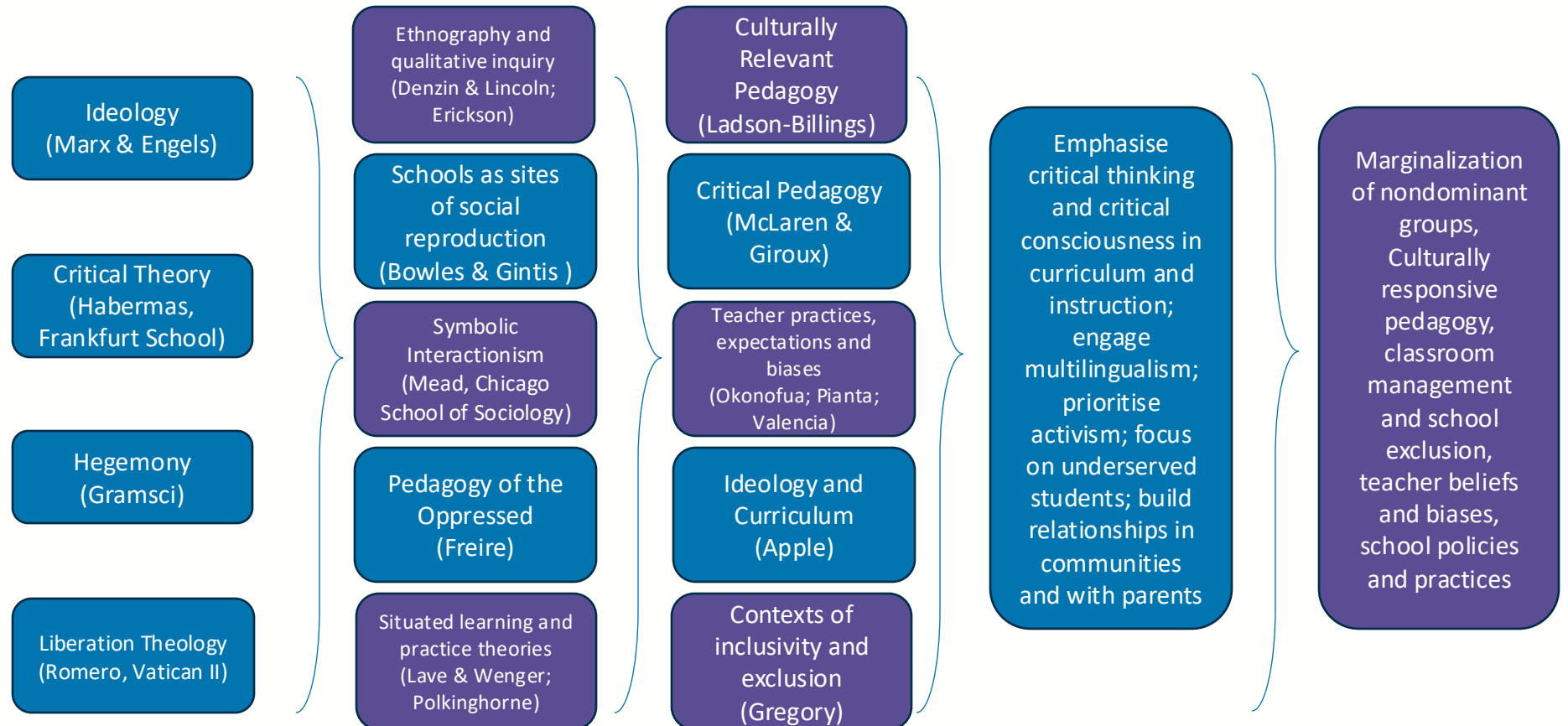
# Defining transformative change



*“...struggle within ongoing relations of power in order to be able to **alter the grounds on which life is lived**” (p. 103).*

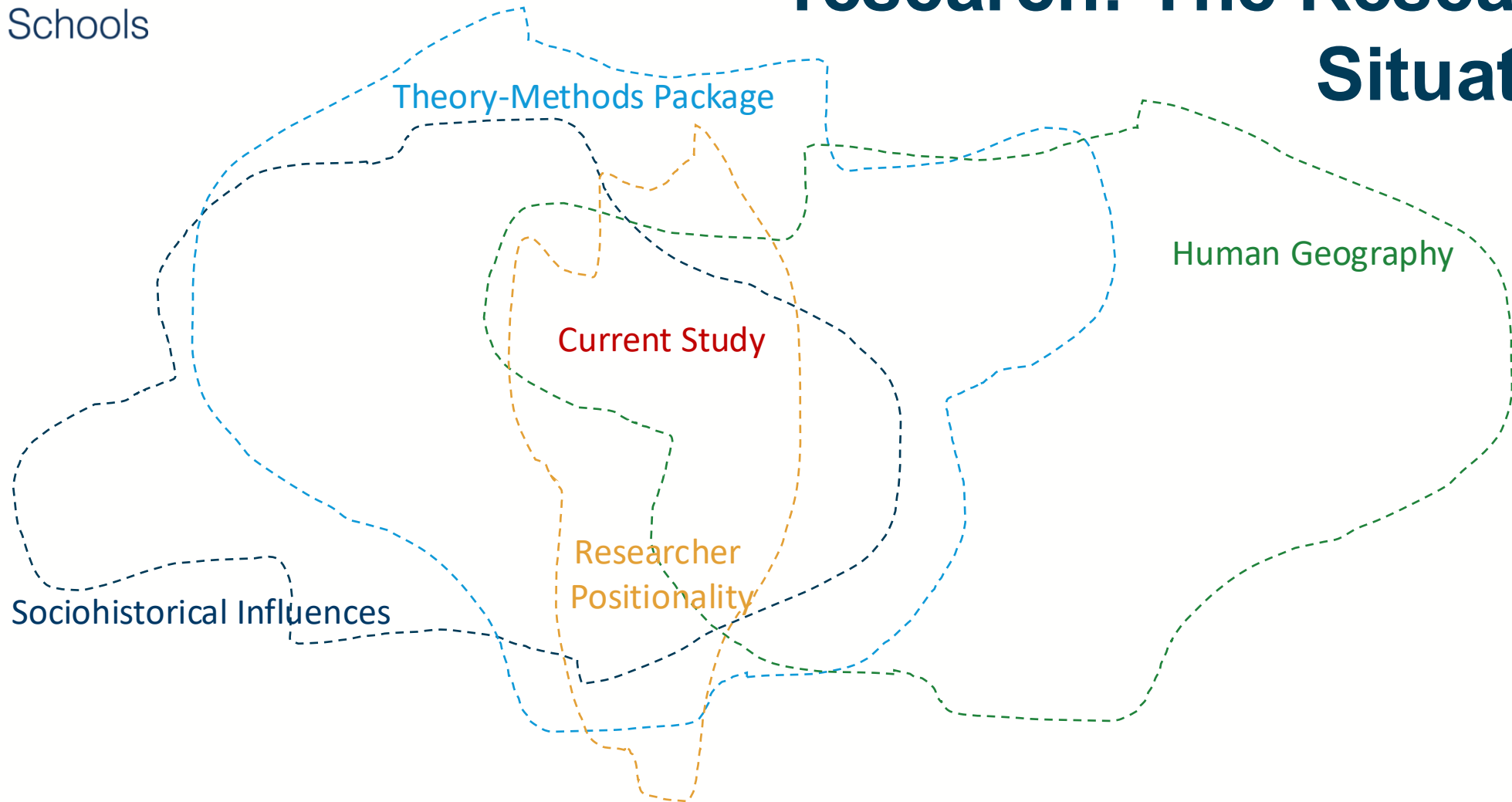
# Transformative change and research

Foundations in **researching** for transformative change:





# Transformative change and research: The Research Situation





# The Research Situation

## Sociohistorical influences

Culture, social structures (e.g., race, class, gender, language), historical trajectories and struggles, and discourse, which are determinants of phenomena (Bourdieu, 1977; Cole, 1996; Freire, 1970; Giroux, 1988; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Nieto, 2010; Rogoff, 2003)

## Human geography

Space, place, and location, which are socially produced, historically contingent shapers of values, power and resource distribution, and experience (Harvey, 1989; Helfenbein, 2021; Massey, 1994; Soja, 1989)

## Positionality

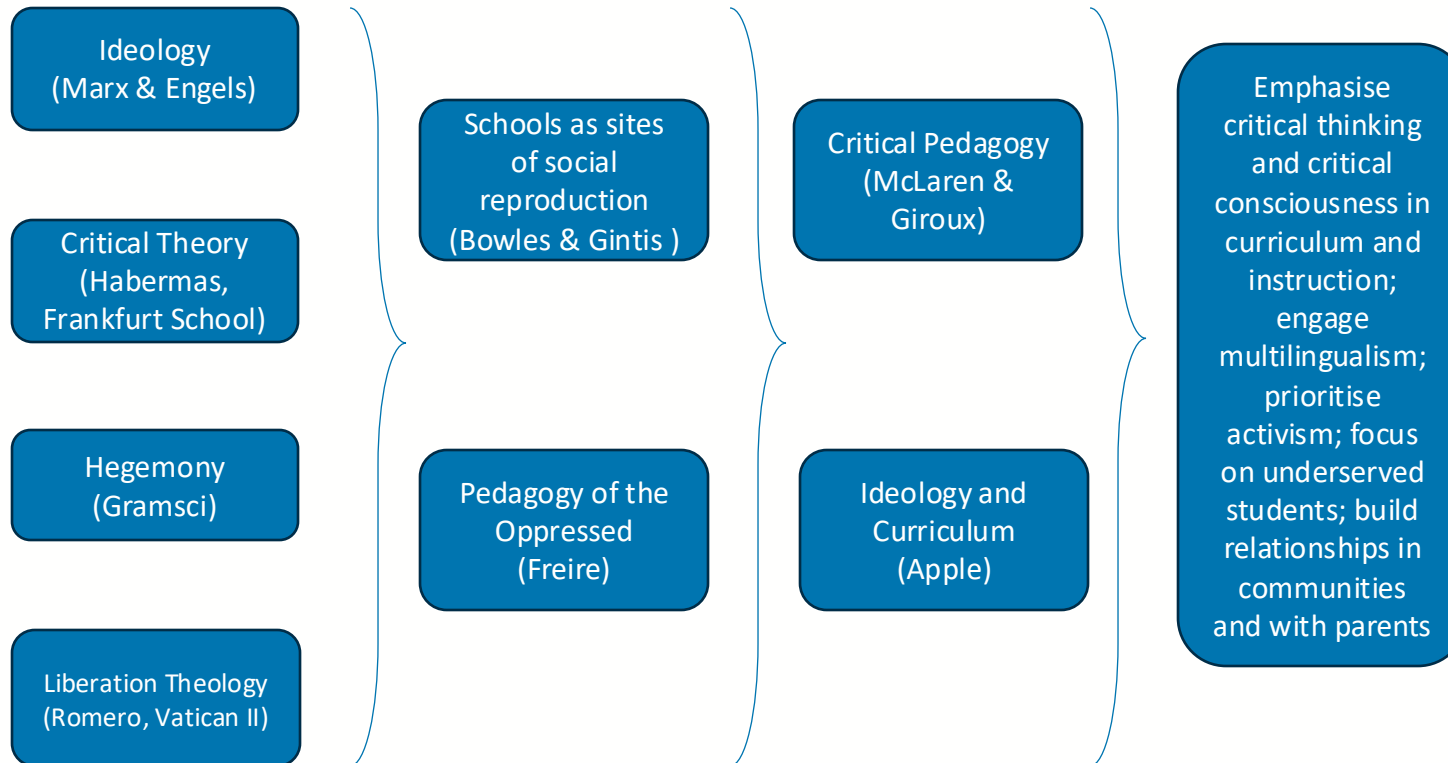
Social group memberships which affect where one stands in relation to others in society and shape what one can see and understand about the world (Fine, 1994; Haraway, 1988)

## Theory-methods package

# The Research Situation

Foundations in **teaching** for transformative change:

- Central focus on social class
- Activism and social justice
- Knowledge positioned in unschooled people
- Male dominated
- Invisible Whiteness, heteronormativity, able-bodiedness



# The Research Situation

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## Positionality

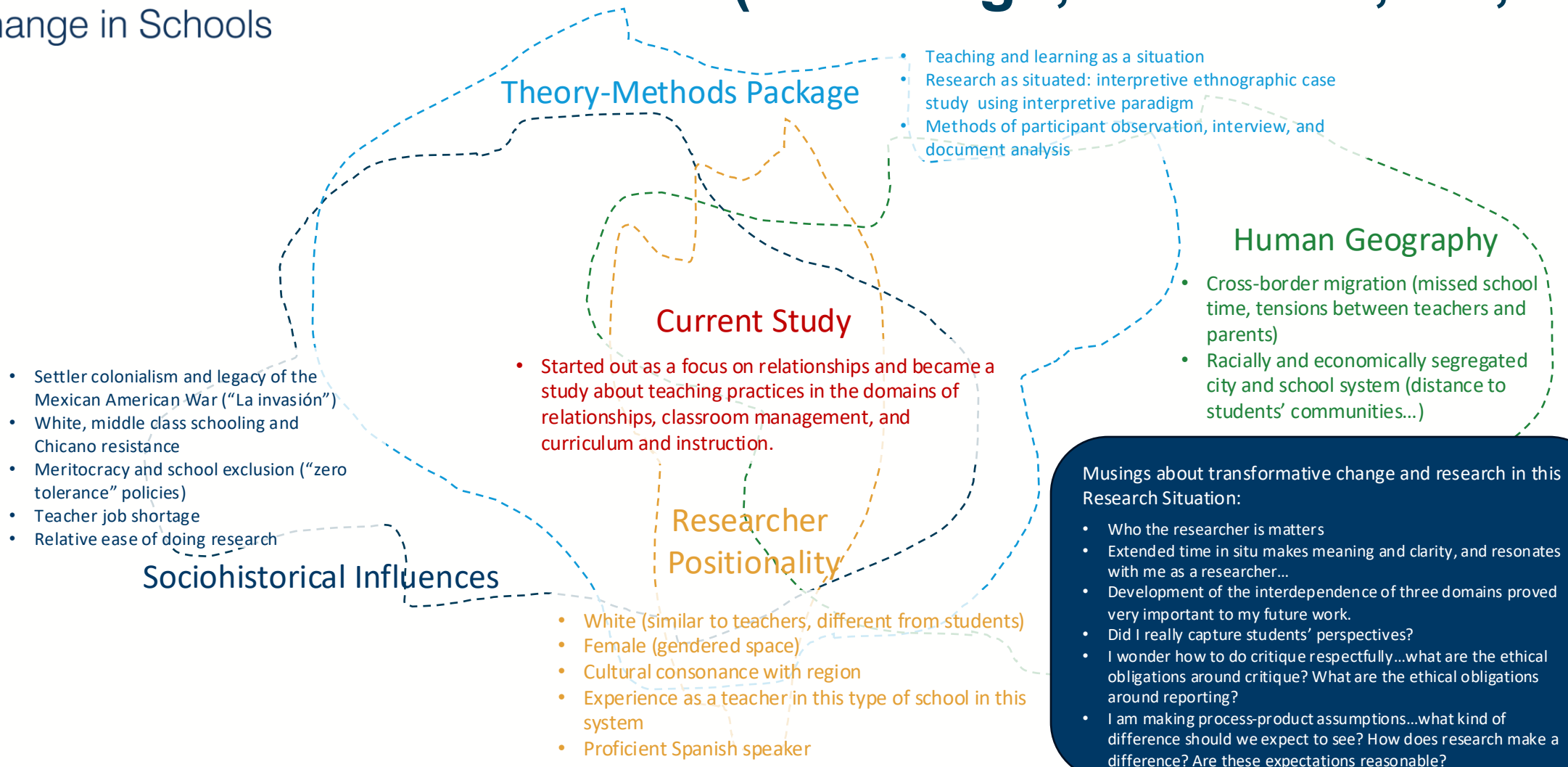
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## Theory-methods package

Combinations of theoretical frameworks, methodological approaches, and methods that share ontological and epistemological assumptions; based on the assertion that theory and methods are “co-constitutive” (Clarke & Star, 2008; Star, 1989 ).



# Example Study 1: Teacher Practices at a Disciplinary Alternative School (San Diego, California, US, 2008)



# Example 1: Artifact

## Reporting of Findings

- Considerations for reporting back to [REDACTED]:
  - "Ring true" to faculty's experiences
  - Have an immediate application
    - Provide unifying, rather than divisive, findings
    - Provide material that can be used for professional development
  - Protect individuals' anonymity
    - Omit direct quotes and specific examples

In keeping with the considerations listed, I am providing reflection and inquiry questions that derive specifically from the data regarding successes and areas of need at [REDACTED]. Setting aside consistent and ample time to discuss and re-visit these questions may enhance your practice and improve your successes with the students. I would be pleased to assist with this process in any way. Feel free to contact me at any time:

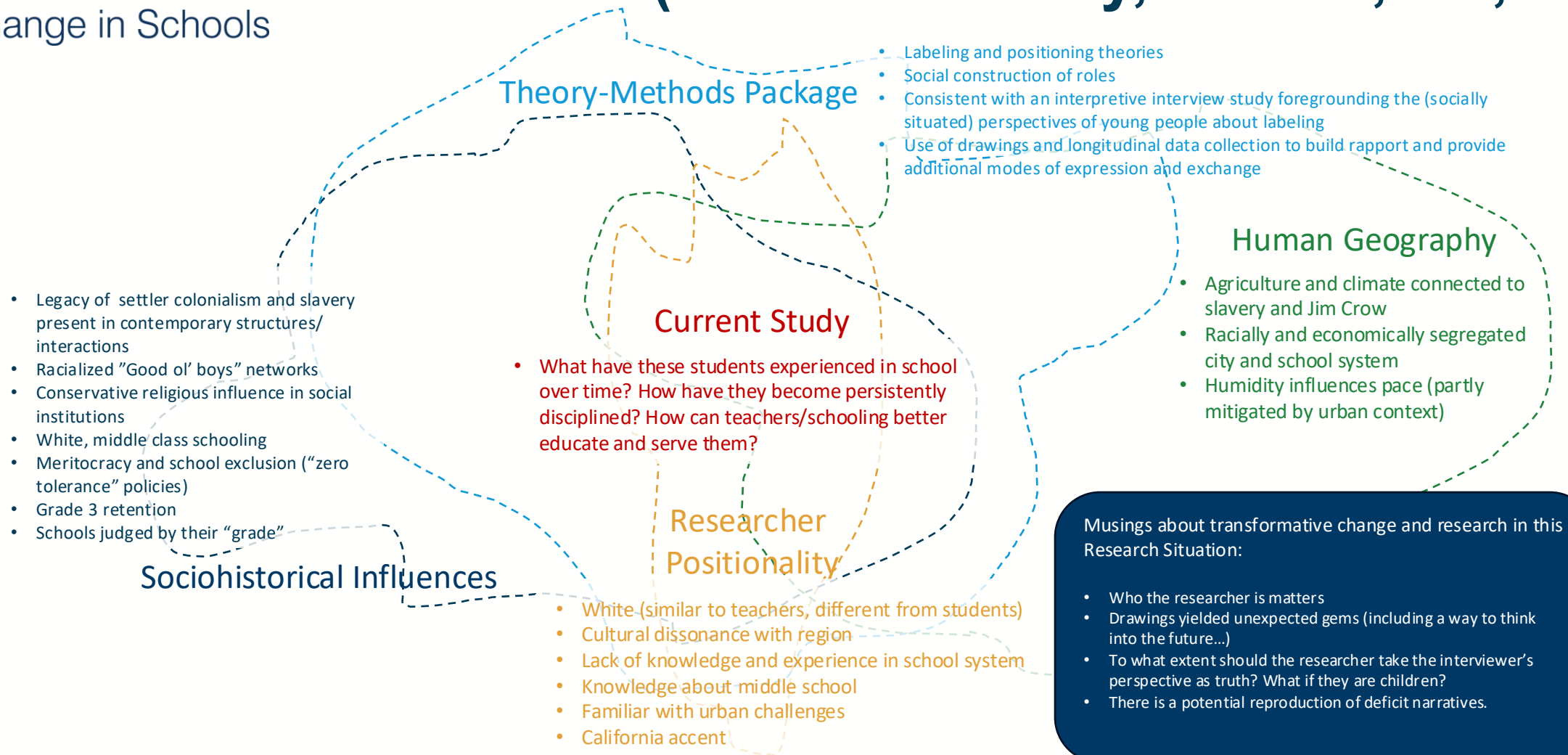
## Finding 1

- According to staff interviews, there are two distinct philosophical perspectives at [REDACTED]:
  - One perspective emphasizes student discipline and measures success by how well students conform to school rules.
    - Students should change to become what schools expect.
  - One perspective emphasizes the support of students and measures success according to students' personal transformations.
    - Schools should change to become what students need.
- Conclusion: [REDACTED] school culture embodies contradictory purposes.

## Finding 1: [REDACTED] school culture embodies contradictory purposes.

- Inquiry questions for staff discussion:
  - What is our true mission?
    - How do we agree or disagree on this mission?
    - How do our agreements enable success?
    - How do our disagreements impede progress?
    - How do our agreements and/or disagreements impact the students?
    - How can we build on our agreements to move past disagreements in tangible ways toward a unified mission and plan of action?
  - How can we collect and analyze meaningful data to reflect our successes and guide future discussions regarding areas of need?

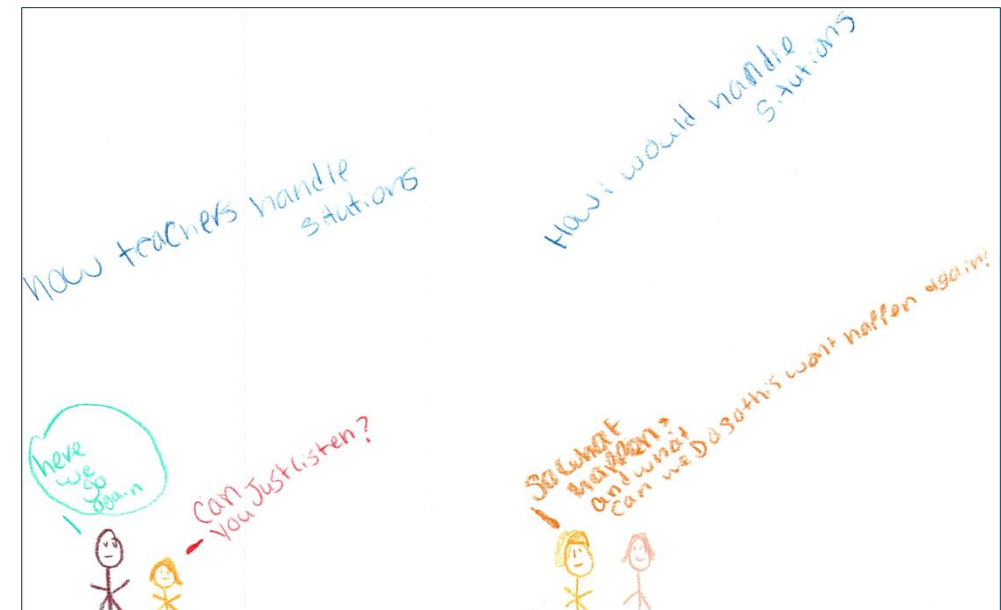
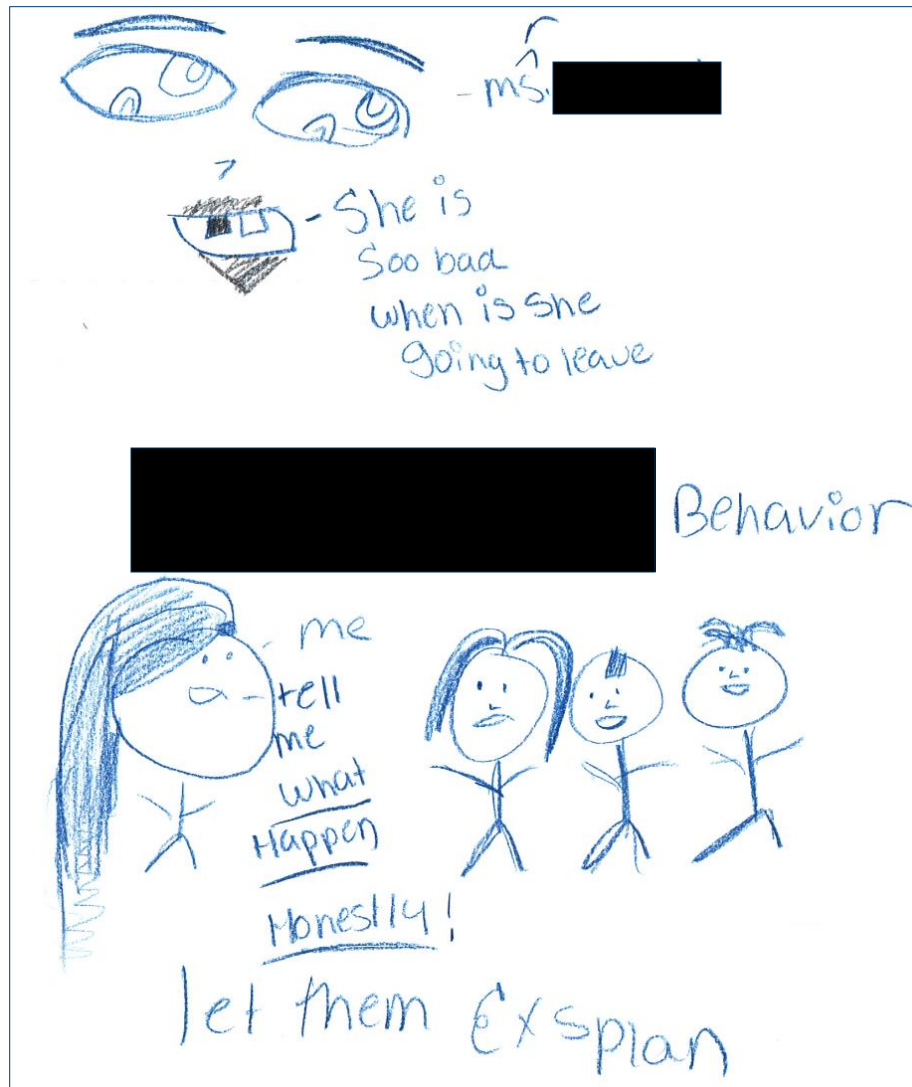
# Example Study 2: Schooling Experiences of Persistently Disciplined Students (Pinellas County, Florida, US, 2012)



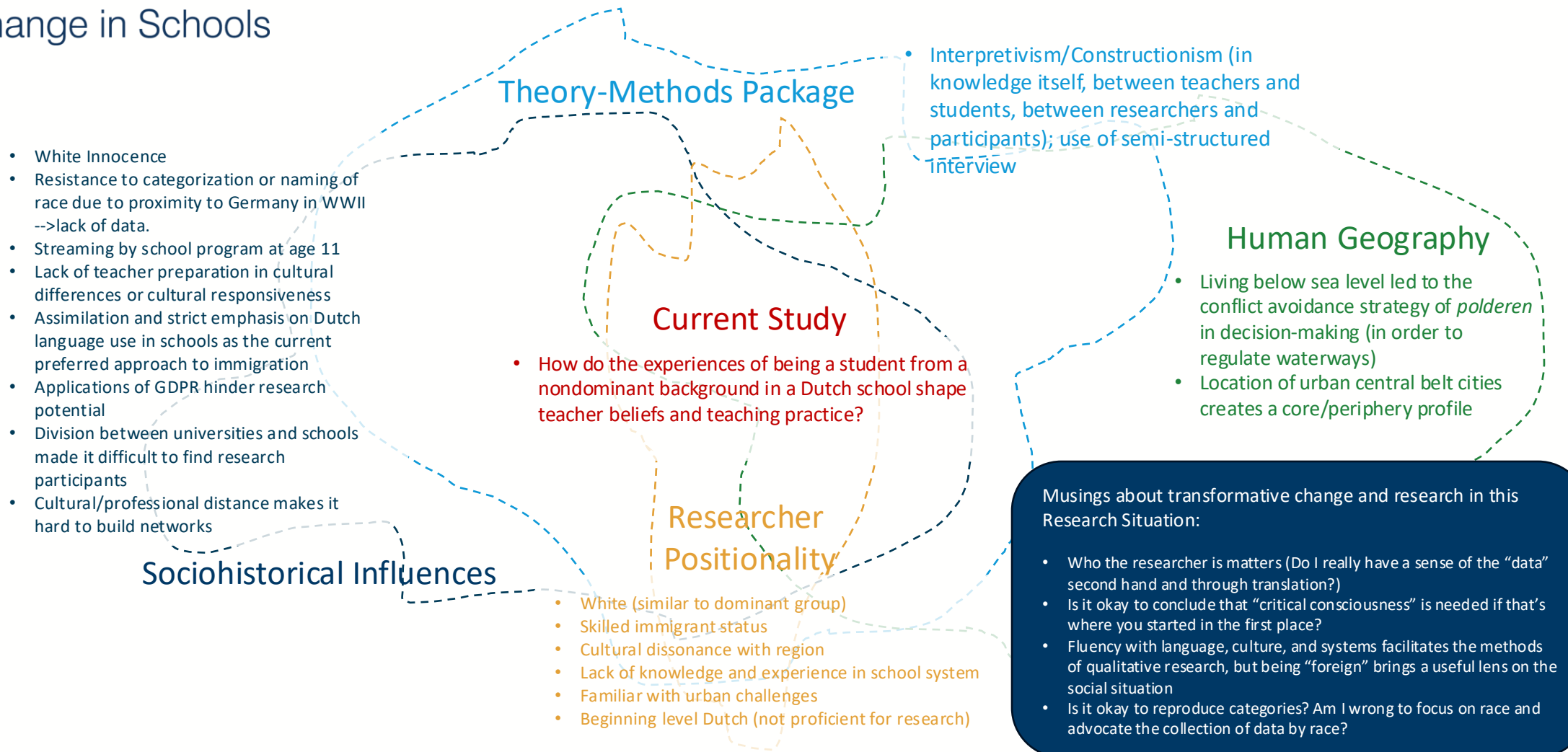




## Example 2: Artifacts



# Example Study 3: Schooling and Teaching Experiences of Teachers From Nondominant Ethnic Backgrounds (Utrecht, Netherlands, 2022)





## Example 3: Artifact

As pupils... → As teachers...

“The teachers said I needed  
to work with my hands.”

“The teachers said I should  
do the lower level because  
it’s safer for me.”

“These pupils will only work  
for teachers they like.”

“These pupils need consistent  
classroom management.”

“These pupils have short  
attention spans.”

# Conclusions and (Self-Directed) Provocations

## Outcomes of the research

- Learning/knowledge: importance of teacher beliefs, student experiences of marginalisation, three domains of teaching (relevant to future research, professional development facilitation, and teaching—my own and others)
- Raising awareness, starting conversations, establishing foundations for increasingly popular topics
- Empowerment of (some) participants

## Dilemmas

- Re-creation of binaries, categories, exclusions/inclusions, and margins
- Linear assumptions about process-product research, promises of continual growth and improvement, incremental building of knowledge
- Insufficient attention and methodological rigour given to complexity
- Over-reliance on interpretive description, backwards facing data collection with future facing recommendations (but no way to move from the present into the future through the research itself)
- Little consideration of nonhuman ecologies, climate, or sustainability
- Discomfort with the unfulfilling nature and duration of relationships with participants
- After decades of equity-focused research, we have a backlash against “wokeness,” polarization, and post-truth policy-/decision-making

# Directions for a Research Agenda Focused on Transformative Change

Marginalization  
of  
nondominant  
groups,  
Culturally  
responsive  
pedagogy,  
classroom  
management  
and school  
exclusion,  
teacher beliefs  
and biases,  
school policies  
and practices

Make  
anthropocentrism  
and the nonhuman  
visible (Massey).

Human Geography

Do something  
different with  
binaries, categories,  
and complexity  
(Clarke, Massey).

Theory/Methods Package

Move away from  
micro/macro distinctions  
and “context factors” and  
toward situations, co-  
constitutions and  
rhizomes (Clarke).

Theory/Methods Package

Adopt or create  
methods that “world”  
with participants  
(Barad; Haraway, etc.).

Theory/Methods Package

Take up “place” as  
integral to the  
research situation,  
focus, and outcome  
(Massey).

Human Geography

Produce work that  
speaks to the post-  
truth era. How does it  
resonate (Roek;  
Rosa)?

Sociohistorical Influences

Place-  
responsive,  
community-  
engaged  
student and  
teacher  
learning;  
collaborative  
teacher sense-  
making (with  
researchers);  
co-constructing  
belonging  
through  
curiosity in the  
classroom...

# Directions for a Research Agenda Focused on Transformative Change

## The Research Compass

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- What type(s) of research do we want to do and why?
- What theory/methods packages will we take up? How? Why?
- How will we take our positionalities into account? What might they yield us and how might they constrain us?
- How do we create the transformation we advocate?
- Which sociohistorical and human geographical themes are relevant? How do we position our work on the international stage?