‘THE DEEP SLUMBER OF DECIDED OPINION’: HOW TEACHERS AND SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS UNDERSTAND CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES POLICY

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Recognition that political, social and global conflicts are important to education has re-ignited interest in policy approaches dealing with controversial and sensitive issues (CI). The literature review finds the current CI schooling paradigm tends towards depoliticized approaches thus avoiding the very quality that defines education in a contemporary democracy – the political. Research indicates that educators find CI uncomfortable; they feel ill prepared to engage with difficult material. Without a policy framework for engaging in CI education, educators who take up CI pedagogy become ‘deskilled’ by contradictory working conditions.

This qualitative study researches teachers and principals’ understanding of controversial issues policy (The Teaching of Controversial and Sensitive Issues, CSI 2003) using a theoretical framework structured on critical democracy and critical discourse analysis.

The research finds both conceptual and procedural weaknesses in the policy. CSI lacks a cogent conceptual framework in favour of supporting existing curricula and board policies. The policy is invoked to defend the system against perceived challenges from certain community groups. The social justice implications of this finding merit consideration.

Contradictory CSI policy impacts are also evident: CSI has a rationale to support CI pedagogy and it has a rationale as a procedural tool, yet neither rationale is democratic in terms of citizen engagement. Rather, a critical discourse analysis of the document reveals deeply embedded contradictions and competing voices of authority. Teachers articulate feelings of fear
and a sense of falling under surveillance without adequate policy support. School administrators cite the difficulty of broaching sensitive issues of equity with school staff and the myriad competition from competing policies.

The findings suggest inattention to students’ roles in defining or challenging what (and how) controversial issues enter classrooms or the question of resources. It leaves some inherent contradictions unexamined. For these reasons, the findings censure the policy for ‘white privilege’ and ‘liberalism’.

The research sharpens our sense on how policy functions at the local level among policy users. From a theoretical point of view, the thesis asserts the need for more work on the intersections of critical policy, critical democracy and citizen engagement in policy processes.
Acknowledgements

_In the depth of winter, I finally learned that within me lay an invincible summer._ –Albert Camus

Acknowledgements traditionally inform the reader of the roles and tasks taken by our supervisors and friends and our gratitude to them. My acknowledgements must honour individuals for so much more than this kind of support. As a novitiate in the doctoral program, I also descended into a new illness – such unfamiliar terrain inside and outside. Many of us may seem one way on the outside and be battling such difficult issues elsewhere; our psyches, our bodies, our faith, our circumstances and our futures. Humility is a good thing in such times as we know so little about what we see as ‘real’ and believe to be true.

Professor James Ryan once told me, “success is achieved in this program by perseverance” and this idea gained a lot of traction for me; more than I believe he intended.

To anyone who may have occasion to open this page in the future and wonder about the value of his or her studies, let me offer this encouragement: to have the privilege of sustained study, reflection, relationships and dialogue with text and community is a gift. The sense of isolation one may feel in being a doctoral candidate indicates the remarkable nature of an opportunity to study and to focus one’s efforts towards a goal. In my case, I wanted to deal with my own blindness and privilege in the world; conditions I knew had consequences in ways I did not always understand. In learning about education policy, social justice work and democratic theory, I hoped to take action in conscious ways and to do less harm.

For this opportunity and for his support, I fondly thank my supervisor, Professor John Portelli. John, you were fair and kind. For his even-keeled assessment of writing and research, I
thank Professor James Ryan, and for his commentary on curricula and teaching, I thank Professor Mark Evans.

The thesis is dedicated to students in schools and to the individuals who work with them in education. I am an eternal teacher. To my family - Leon, Sophia, Spencer and Bridget –let us continue to share these responsibilities together in the world.
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Chapter One: Introduction

In December 2008, the Israel military set out to re-negotiate the Gaza borders between Gaza and Israel. Seven hundred Palestinians were killed inciting Human Rights Watch\(^2\) to identify serious violations of the laws of war. In Toronto, reports of this action sparked emotional reactions from diasporic communities invested in both sides. On January 2009, the Executive Officer of Student and Community Equity for the Toronto District School Board circulated an internal memo to teachers and school administrators outlining how school board employees should handle a controversial issue – the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the Gaza strip. The memo warned that because of the December 2008 conflict, students might have “deep emotional feelings and reactions” that could lead to “increasing levels of anxiety within the school.” Teachers and school administrators were called on “to ensure that issues about this conflict do not give rise to hostilities within our schools or classrooms thereby eroding the quality of our relationships” by the “spreading of partisan views.” TDSB staff were instructed to refrain from expressing their own viewpoints on the Middle East and to handle the controversy with “sensitivity and in a balanced, non-political way.”

For teachers and school administrators, this memo makes explicit some underlying assumptions: first, the memo affirms the notion that controversial issues are administrative issues

\(^1\) I take my title from J.S. Mill’s *On Liberty*. I have inferred two meanings for the thesis. First, democracy slumbers when institutional elites decide there is nothing to discuss because social issues and policies are decided. This circumvention of dialogue and civic engagement is a breach of critical democracy in my view. Secondly, I advocate for the value of CI education. Has CI education been allowed to slumber despite vocalizations through policy that it matters? Policies or other public acts related to CI may “slumber” via efforts to reproduce the status quo.

\(^2\) Human Rights Watch is a thirty-year-old independent organization dedicated to protecting human rights by exposing human rights violations throughout the world.
best handled by an authority of some kind rather than a school administrator or teacher alone. Second, CI are damaging to the school culture because they arouse emotions, and these emotions are mostly negative ones such as hostility. Third, the memo tells staff that there is an antidote to emotional instability, and it lies in the ‘balancing’ strategy. Through balance, neutral or apolitical school culture is maintained.

In a more general sense, the fact that such a memo is warranted may lead teachers and school administrators to doubt the adequacy of school board curriculum policies on controversial issues. In fact, the TDSB created a Controversial and Sensitive Issues (CSI) policy document in 2003. Thus, the January 2009 memo begs some important questions: where is the CSI (2003) policy at times like this? Why do CI policies appear to have limited capacity for supporting schools on vexing social problems? Why do teachers and school administrators need last minute memos? Many teachers and school administrators would agree that teaching to controversial issues is challenging work, and the memo infers that controversial issues are indeed fearsome. It is not surprising for educators to then have doubts about the value of controversial issues education. The overlying concept is that emotions must be controlled, and the very real outcome is that teachers will avoid any issues considered contentious. Indeed, emotions are to be controlled by constituents at all levels: students, teachers and school administrators. In turn, teachers and school administrators control the school culture and suppress their own feelings. The tone of alarm, or caution, in the memo’s language heightens the sense that real life constitutes an institutional transgression.

Concerns about the silencing and avoidance of showing emotions in public and political spaces are central to feminist theory (Braidotti 2003; Eagleton 2003; Martin 2001; Young 1981; 1986; 2000). Following the classic feminist slogan ‘the personal is political’ (as cited in Braidotti
2003), feminist theory argues the public and private spheres cannot be separated. Ellsworth (1992) and Pateman and Gross (1986) contend institutions such as schools function under false dichotomies—public versus private life, mind versus body, and justice versus reason—to sustain values norms. Institutions do not protect individual rights, but rather, they judge students and teachers alike on their capacity to conform to institutional norms and values. These norms are perpetuated by ‘stake-holders’ through control of discourses, textbooks, policies, and practices. Typically, the values of choice are objectivity and neutrality, though the extent to which educators can claim neutrality and true objectivity is philosophically questionable.

Non-conforming individuals risk exclusion when they fall on the wrong side of the binary by expressing emotion and difference. Moreover, as Young contends, identifiable differences become conflated with particular kinds of people (1986: 389) that incur exclusion. Coercion occurs when participation is contingent on a) on conceptualizing knowledge in a particular way (epistemological coercion), b) the social representation of certain individuals, c) and the structured access to social practices (equity-social coercion) (Popkewitz & Lindblad 2000). Subjective styles of knowledge – what Deborah Britzman (1998) calls “difficult knowledges” – evoke emotions and perpetuate exclusion. Rejecting and/or silencing controversial issues in the classroom can thereby reinforce overarching institutional imperatives and the emphasis on reason and objectivity to preserve a status quo.

Within the context of schooling, students’ lives can be subject to similar kinds of manipulation. Not only are students subject to existing school policies and curricular programs, schools may downplay genuine differences among students to uphold the desire for social cohesion and unity (Joshee & Johnson 2005). Assuming schools can deny the emotional lives of students and the social issues affecting them (e.g. students’ response to Palestinian-Israeli crises),
the argument for attending to controversial social issues must be made in spite of the established institutional function and order (Young 1986). It is essential to make explicit both the assumed aims of policy and the potential implications of policies in terms of enactment and implementation.

The memo from the Officer of Student and Community Equity draws attention to the role of policies in the working lives of educators. Specifically, much can be assumed about how educators understand and relate to policies. There are multiple iterations and interpretations of and for policy activity (Ball 1998). Theorists often construct policy in dichotomous and contradictory ways: policy is both an organized, consensual undertaking driven by rational models (McDonnell & Elmore 1988; Stokey & Zeckhauser 1978), but is also a highly contested field which often challenges the existing social order (Ball 1998; Taylor, Rizvi, Lingard & Henry 1997). In fact, from its earliest conception, the meaning of the word policy has been highly varied. Originating in Greek, Latin and Sanskrit, the root word ‘poli’ refers to many social functions; it occurs in polis, pur and politia (city and state), but also police and politics (De Coning 2000:11). Hogwood and Gunn (1984) acknowledge this definitional complexity as a source of policy ambiguity. They argue policy has variable definitions: policy as specific proposals; policy as decisions of government; policy as formal authorization; policy as program; policy as output; policy as outcome; policy as a theory or model; and policy as process (as cited in de Conig 2000: 12). Therefore, educators understand, enact, and relate to policies in complex ways.

Furthermore, the neoliberal context of contemporary globalization presents a shifting cultural field for education policy processes. Under current global market conditions, the ubiquity of capitalism is conceptualized by neoliberal ideas of work. While the notion of
competition is not new, the direct nature of the competition among workers in different countries has intensified toward homogenization (MacEwan 2008: 45). Changes in the global production and distribution of capital are signified in catch-phrases such as; “re-structuring,” “down-sizing,” “accountability,” and “standards and outcomes” (Griffith 2001:83). In education, as Griffith observes, “textually-mediated relations – the texts of restructuring – that link government policy to everyday work of principals, teachers, students, and parents is central to this transformation” (2001:83). A key underlining assumption of educational aims under an ideology of neoliberalism is that the meeting of externally defined standards increases the quality of education by ensuring the competitive potential of students in a global market (Murphy 2001). Education policy in contemporary Ontario must be understood within the context of the neoliberal ideology of standards. Under the Conservative government of Mike Harris from 1999-2002, the Ontario Ministry of Education enacted neoliberal education policies including the implementation of standardized testing in grades three, six, nine, and ten. Also, there were reforms to curricula that intensified math and science and added a focus on “job related skills” while English requirements were reduced (Gidney 1999: 139). A key policy example of the neoliberal platform of the Harris government was Bill 160, The Educational Quality Improvement Act, which enforced unprecedented reforms in public education. Through this policy, one billion dollars was cut from the education budget while teachers’ instructional time increased and the staffing of the equity department was also extremely reduced. The Harris reforms essentially eroded democracy in education (Griffith 2001:89).

Within this neoliberal context, it is essential to conceptualize a complex and nuanced view of policy development and enactment. Neoliberal ideology imposes norms as externally defined standards in a prescriptive way. Social policy is more beneficial to students and
educators when it shifts away from normative concerns (e.g. developing and implementing prescriptive policy) and towards a responsive conception. Prescriptive policy often emphasizes rationality and neutrality thereby framing policy in a deterministic manner that denies the imposition of discursive boundaries. A false centre is established whereby a problem statement is highly political but is hidden as a social construction and thus depoliticized.

Despite the inherent messiness of contextual policy research (Levin 2007; Roe 1994), policy continues to supplant educational theory as the primary means of setting the education agenda (Kemmis1990 as cited in Taylor et al., 1997: 3). To understand how policy functions in context, it is necessary to explore the conditions around how, where, and under whose authority policy is provisioned, understood, limited, challenged and resisted (Ball 1990 1998; de Coning 2000; Fritz & Halpin 1994; McDermott 2004; Ozga 2000). If democratizing policy processes is desired, then policy must attend to how political power shapes decision-making, and in particular, issues of access and participation (Gran 1983). The interrogation of such conditions unmasks long-standing assumptions of neutrality, and of policy as the textual distillation of expert knowledge.

This dissertation takes a broad, complex and political position on the conceptualization of policy. I reject a narrow, linear and neutral view of development and implementation in favour of broader and more numerous conceptions that include how individuals respond to, feel about and resist policies, including CSI policy. Moving away from a prescriptive policy view involves understanding education policy as inclusive of individuals and their emotions and thoughts. As Mouffe (2000:48) argues, “attempts to arrest the flow of differences and construct a centre are always precarious and unstable because [institutional processes such as policies] take place in a field criss-crossed by antagonisms.” The rejection of the fixed centre in policy study may allow
for more genuine democratic social engagements including a positive view of conflict and the inclusion of controversial issues as essential.

In this dissertation, I conceive of controversial issues (CI) as a field of theory and practice. Controversial issues are forms of social knowledge that are derived neither exclusively from factual inquiry nor by the addition of more knowledge. Rather, the term “controversial issue” describes a topic about which there is doubt and difference of opinion based on varied and conflicting values and/or world views. When an educator presents a CI agenda or program, s/he is deliberately including a contentious topic into a learning activity—a school assembly; a professional development session; a specific lesson, unit, or course; an extra-curricular event; a guest-speaker talk; etc.—as integral and inherent to democratic education. In this sense, a CI policy is a text which deals explicitly with the treatment and handling of controversial issues by educators. The notion that a CI policy could attend to the complexities around what constitutes a controversial issue and how it ought to be handled in a school is challenging, especially in the context of neoliberalism and in the aftermath of the Harris reforms. Therefore, when a TDSB memo comes out regarding how to manage the controversy around the Israel-Palestine issues, it reveals a lack of a functional CI framework, and raises questions about the efficacy of the CSI document. Given that policy continues to hold sway within powerful institutions, and individuals continue to ascribe enormous power to its transformative potential (Bacchi 2000), it is important to consider educators’ assessment of how CSI policy works.

**Research Question**

To research and analyze teachers and principals’ narratives regarding controversial issues policy (CSI 2003), I use a theoretical framework structured on the application of critical
democracy to policy processes. I review the literature on controversial issues and policy to conceptualize the definitional problems, the practical barriers and limitations, and the current state of controversial issues in education. In addition, I review the literature with an eye to locating knowledge gaps in controversial issues pedagogy and policy. The main question guiding this dissertation is:

How do school administrators and teachers understand controversial issues policy?

Sub-questions to the research question are:

1. How do teachers and school administrators’ views regarding CSI policy inform their specific choices of roles and CI agendas?
2. What challenges and barriers do the teachers and school administrators face with respect to CSI?
3. What is the impact of CSI?

Significance of the Research

Broadly stated, the research informs policy study in the area of context as the findings will give insight into how school administrators and teachers understand and interpret CSI policy in schools. McLaughlin theorizes research attention to participants at the local level – what she calls the smallest units – are under-researched aspects of policy research activity (1987: 125). Too much policy production by policy-makers combined with inadequate attention to policy understanding and impacts reduces the overall communication and effectiveness desired by theorists of policy (Fung 2003) and its effective use by practitioners (Fischer & Forester 1993; Hajer et al., 2003).
Secondly, using critical democracy and critical discourse analysis for my research activity is an innovation to policy study. Carr (2007b) and Davies (2006) have both argued for the necessity of a shift in policy study from a focus on purely institutional goals to one on individual experiences, capacities, beliefs and relations within the institution. Carr (2007a) in particular, argues that there is a critical disengagement between democratic education and policy processes interested in equity, social justice and other moral and values questions in education. Looney (2001) observes there are serious implications for ignoring and analyzing curriculum policy: management replaces discussion of meaningful change. Taking an approach to curriculum as policy enables critique, discussion, dissention and opportunities for hope and change (Looney 2001).

Unfortunately, the current state of the literature does not seriously probe the implications of curriculum as policy for democracy and policy in democratic contexts (adapted from Portelli 2001: 280). Though the literature reviews teachers’ pre-existing beliefs toward controversial issues instruction (Oulton et al., 2004a; 2004b; Brookfield 1995; Pedersen & Totten 2001; Williams 2002), there is a dearth of research on controversial issues policy impacts and effects on the working lives of educators and how these conditions, in turn, perpetuate certain inequities within the education system (Hajer et al., 2003). It is important to understand how society regards controversial issues because socially complex problems are the crux of education (Hare 2003).

Yet, the influence of policy appears to be taken-for-granted, as though no one has questioned Werner’s provocation: “Who should have the right to determine curriculum goals and content?” (1991: 107) The policy direction for controversial issues remains ‘top-down,’ and no challenge to CSI emerges in the literature. Research is necessary on CSI policy to understand
practitioners’ practical judgments confronting policy problems (Hajer et al., 2003). This dissertation lays a foundation for further policy study on the deliberative, pragmatic and participatory aspect of local problem response to CSI policy.

**Position of the Researcher**

My research position argues for a highly politicized critical policy position. This position hinges heavily on my experiences as a teacher in a secondary school in Durham region from 1990 to 2006. Located in Oshawa, O’Neill CVI is experiencing demographic shifts due to immigration and many staff members continue to struggle with the needs of new ELL students.

During my fifteen years of teaching high school (English, philosophy, world religions, drama and special education) and working as a lead teacher in special education, Harris policy reforms felt like a restrictive force or a blunt instrument.¹ I found that OSSTF involvement achieved minimal gains in challenging system reforms. Organizing a student forum for *The Royal Commission on Learning* (1994) was a time-consuming activity which also proved fruitless at effecting policy change. I, and my students, spent weeks organizing our request for support and change. We accomplished nothing; no change to the final document. I became sensitive to who decides education policy and I began to think seriously about my democratic

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² The Royal Commission on Learning (1994) used public consultations as a process for informing educational reform. It identified tensions around teaching international standards, using more phonics, adding math and science courses, giving parents a greater role in running schools, and so on. The Commission concluded by providing piecemeal solutions to isolated problems, which do not, in the end, result in a coherent framework for reform. Unfortunately, the commission mandated that the progress of all students should be monitored systematically and thoroughly from the very beginning of their school careers, with an eye to constant improvement both of the individual and the program.
responsibilities as an educator. Werner’s (1991) question is indeed powerful to me; who does get to decide the direction of curriculum policy?

The Harris Reforms imposed cutbacks. Thus, committees I chaired – equity, professional development and social justice – were eliminated overnight. Special educational funding became mired in paperwork. To access support for identified students through Individual Student Assistance funding (ISA), I had to spend more time doing administration rather than the work of supporting them. I felt that I was fighting a cruel, ironic battle in the name of accountability. I really disliked working in the reformed model of special education.

Imposed standardized “literacy” testing was the ‘final straw’ for me, and I began graduate studies to address/understand what my response could be. Despite engaging in several resistance and research activities, I felt isolated and powerless. I was administering literacy testing to students with learning disabilities. Parents were being phoned to ensure that some students would stay home on the day of testing in order to raise the school’s scores. The context of my work in a very white, middle-class, and shifting toward low-income, school in Oshawa Ontario meant many colleagues were not prepared to challenge the school’s tradition of privilege by acknowledging the changing demographics. Critical inquiry frequently led to leadership opportunities for me, but I had little desire to become a school administrator if it there was no support for me to change the system.

Recruited as a policy intern for the Ministry of Education during my doctoral studies, I glimpsed the area of policy production in terms of research procurement and agenda setting. The Chief Research Officer of the Ministry had me research each deputy minister and his/her department leads in terms of identifying each department’s research agenda and priorities.
Timing mattered more than thoroughness at times in the political policy context (see Levin 2005). Procuring “deliverables” (what goes to the public as policy text or program provision) through research often eclipsed clarity of vision. Theorizing, researching and building a coherent research strategy for education was the panacea for public disengagement for this Ministry of Education that would ensure continued control by the hands of the Ontario government.

Policy work at the local level interests me as it uncovers responses and actions toward educational “isms” most troubling to me: ableism, cultural prejudice, classism, sexism, linguistic racism, and the discriminatory operation of the cultural knowledge canon. I decided only local-level commitments to policy would accomplish incremental, long-standing support.

**Thesis Outline**

Chapter Two of the dissertation begins with the theories and central concepts that inform my work; they account for the critical position I take. It is developed as a discussion of democracy as the central public interest toward which I direct my concern for CI policy. My theoretical framework argues my ethical rationale for education policy based on the work of many theorists, but I ultimately resign myself to the fact of *agonism* (Mouffe 2000).

Chapter Three looks to my review of the literature to identify gaps and issues within the field that justify the question I choose for interviewing. As a thematic review, it answers specific questions related to definitions of CI, purposes of CI education, the roles of the teacher in CI education, and challenges to CI education. It outlines three rationales for CI pedagogy: critical, citizenship and radical. The literature review concludes that the failure to find a definitive approach to CI is understandable as the definition is inextricably linked to the purposes and aims
of education. I then address some policy approaches; managerial, policy sociology and critical policy. I address the literature’s response to the question “what is policy?”

The conceptual framework and methodology section follows in Chapter Four. Represented through a schema, my conceptual framework is informed by critical issues in the literature to justify specific questions related to CSI policy impacts. I rationalize the research and sub-questions from the gaps in the literature and find these to be indicators for research. In the methodology section, I explain discourse methodology and its justification. Important aspects of the research process are accounted for such as; recruitment, data collection, data management, dealing with confidentiality, interviewing, and transcription. Chapter Four ends with profiles of the thirteen research participants.

Chapter Five provides the historical contexts and political conditions for CSI (2003). Historical context is important because it reveals the background tensions and political issues shaping education, even if they are only inferred. My point is that prior policy activity builds lasting memories for teachers and school administrators. Moreover, earlier policies continue to impact, collide and make demands on teachers’ and school administrators’ working lives; they work with policy impacts and the challenges of understanding them daily.

Chapter Six is entirely devoted to a critical discourse analysis of the CSI policy itself informed by the work of Fairclough (1995), which emphasizes the implications of the policy’s language as expressions of power, authority, the main message, ideology and persuasive techniques. I conclude that the CSI discourse demonstrates a tendency toward bifurcation; procedural-authority versus child-centered lesson provisions. The actual claim of authority in the
text shifts in myriad ways; however, there are instances of psychological, democratic, equity and curricular voices of authority.

Chapters Seven delivers the research findings. They are organized thematically. The findings (interview narratives) explore topics including the rationale for creating CSI; the impact of context in shaping their understanding; the role of the equity department; policy challenges; role of the teacher and their judgments on policy use and practice impacts. The interview findings also expand on critical pedagogy which is also a kind of policy challenge as many teachers engage in this work without support. The narratives demonstrate that policy administration is a controversial issue itself; how CSI in-services were conceived and delivered are critiqued as both practical and theoretically relevant problems to CSI understanding. Finally, fear is discussed as a provocative and persuasive topic.

Chapter Eight analyzes the findings in light of my theoretical understandings. Using Ball’s (1990) critical policy framework, I evaluate the impact of rationales embedded in CSI. What is important in the chapter is disentangling what CSI policy claims to be and what CSI policy actually is. Central themes in this chapter are: policy and democracy; CSI in the policy web; neoliberalism; white privilege; positive and negative freedom; and control and surveillance.

Chapter Nine also draws the dissertation to a conclusion. I demonstrate that teachers and school administrators’ understandings shape policy discursively, and as such, they are valuable to policy study. Enhancing our relationship to policy will ultimately serve students, teachers, communities, and school administrators better by unraveling the embedded workings of power which currently prevents them from full policy engagement and I make this argument in light of critical democratic policy. I conclude this work with specific recommendations to leadership, policy and
CI education. I provide a framework for CI suggestive of capacities, dispositions, system responsibilities and dialogue necessary to take on this kind of pedagogy.
Chapter Two: The Theoretical Framework

What remains of reason in its contemporary decline, however, is not just the perseverance of self-preservation and the persistence of that horror in which it culminates.... To be sure, reason cannot hope to keep aloof from history and to intuit the true order of things, as ontological ideologies contend.

- Horkheimer

Central to the theoretical framework is a critique of traditional assumptions about democracy. I argue, in fact, they are barriers to how we think, and what we expect of our social institutions and are thus barriers to critical policy study. I argue for an approach to democracy that theorizes a positive role for conflict as a method of social engagement in democracy and by extension, CSI policy. The final portion of the theoretical framework deals directly with critical policy inspired by the idea of agonism (Mouffe 2000). I conclude the chapter by discussing some practical implications of critical policy as an emerging field.

Policy for Democracy

Policy theorists committed to democratic engagement rally against democracy as a function of voter turn-out. When public activity sustains existing power-structures and decision-making, the activity withers democracy. This is the aloofness Horkheimer cautions against. To mitigate aloofness, critical democratic theorists attempt to align policy processes with democratic interests. They contend that policy study must consider those aspects of theory and practice which hinder both the recognition and the contribution of citizens to policy through the exercise of their agency (deLeon 1997; Vidovich 2001). Advocates of policy in and for democracy are


Theorists who support policy for democracy also expresses concern for the ideological justification for policy decision-making (Popkewitz & Lindblad 2000). Justifications range from techno-bureaucratic interests with power, to rational-empirical emphases on outcomes. This raises the question, ‘What matters to policy research in a critical democracy?’ Moreover, what matters in policy research can be construed or constructed in many ways. Popkewitz and Lindblad (2000: 6) distinguish between the equity problematic – the issue of individual representation – and the problematic of knowledge – the systems of reason embodied in educational policy – though they acknowledge both are instrumental in creating the conditions for exclusion of individuals. Proponents of a critical approach; however, argue that the problematic is more than an issue of governance or the reliance on the system for a cure. For instance, a policy’s complexity, polarization from dominant ideologies, its reliance on other policy texts, and the degree to which a policy engages individuals are all considerable measures of its relevance (Roe 1994). Citizens who employ a critical democratic perspective acknowledge their potential to question, to challenge or to transform inscribed relations. The fundamental question remains, however; ‘What is the desired relation of the public to policy?’

The Myth of Consensus in Democracy

Dewey (1916) argues that school education in a public institution aiming to promote the socialization of students has the responsibility to bridge the public and the private lives of

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6 The definition of public is contested, usually understood in the context of these discussions as that which is non-institutional. ‘Public opinion’ is variously described in different discourses. Such descriptions include the articulated group attitude; a conglomerate of attitudes expressed by different groups; and those opinions held by private persons (See de Coning 2000).
students by engaging them in the formulation of its curricula. But this argument supplies no simple prescription for schools, educators, or policy makers; there is no ‘one-size-fits all’ conception of either ‘the public’ or any prescriptive curricula able to remediate society’s democratic weaknesses. Public life is messy, seemingly disorganized, filled with conflict, and struggles over the purpose of democracy in education – in a word – complex. According to Chantal Mouffe (2000), the key to bridging what Dewey saw as the gap between public and private life lies in relinquishing the desire to apply reason and norms to construct an orderly, consensus-driven society to begin with. Mouffe contends the desire for consensus or unanimity in social and political life is an illusion in the first instance: “…we need to give up the very idea that society could become well-ordered” (150).

The trouble with a consensus-driven notion of the public in democratic decision-making is not simply, or only, that it is an illusion. The problem is that the notion of public in turn becomes restrictive. Both Mouffe and Horkheimer (1941) observe social inclusion is conditional on institutions rejecting rationalism as an ontological paradigm. Using social cohesion to model democratic society is damaging; it denies the truth of social differences. Indeed, social differences and disorder are the very conditions of democracy in society; “…the method of democracy is to bring conflicts out into the open where their special claims can be discussed and judged in light of more inclusive interests” (Dewey 1916 as cited in Barber 1996: 353). Recognizing and speaking about social differences is essential to the function of democracy; it is a necessary, but insufficient condition. Difference, must ideally, be nurtured and sustained for a healthy democratic society. Mouffe (2000:148) upholds resistance to normative and consensual pressure on democracy and decision-making and this resistance occurs through language;
…should offer principles of identification which represent a real challenge to the ones promoted by the right. This is not to say that reason and rational argument should disappear from politics but that their role must be re-thought. For instance, the sterile opposition between rhetoric and logic must be discarded in favour of a new conception of argumentation that takes into account the nature of hegemonic articulatory practices.

Thus, a critical democratic policy must attend to the use and formulation of language practices. Ideological assumptions such as the regard for conflict must be interrogated. For Mouffe, mobilizing social antagonism to ‘agonism’ is not a linguistic turn; it is a politico-ideological act (2000:149). Human expressions of emotion are acknowledged to be natural constituents of democratic life; they are not the “difficult knowledges” that invite rejection and alienation (Britzman 1998). Rather, agonism stands for the mobilization of such conflict (and other emotions) “towards democratic designs” (Mouffe 2000:149).

Mouffe is not alone in connecting citizen participation to democracy and disagreement. As Meier (2008) observes, “We’d hardly need democracy if everyone agreed. Democracy is necessary in that it helps us deal with disagreement and doubt. We should therefore be constantly alert for opportunities to create both” (Introduction IX). Several theorists acknowledge the central roles participation and deliberation by concerned citizens play in both a functioning democracy and education, but they differ in the desired outcome of deliberation (Barber 2003; Benhabib 1996; Gutmann 1987; 2003). Whereas tolerance or deliberation for its own sake is the aim of some approaches to citizen participation in democracy (Gutmann & Thompson 1996), an agonistic approach to democracy cites conflict and exclusion as the contemporary frontiers of political and institutional life.

Certain salient barriers confront a critical democracy dedicated to examining the conditions of exclusion, marginalization and silencing, including; commitments to
representational democracy, democracy’s historical development, contested views on the role and importance of participation in democracy – and even what participation means.

**Two Approaches to Participation in Democracy: Participatory and Deliberative**

The notion of individual and group participation has a long-standing role in the stage drama of democracy and, by association; it is relevant to a critical policy study (Hajer et al., 2003). Dewey defends participation against charges that it is a social corrective to control (1927/1998). However, his notion of participation is not necessarily penetrating in its conception. For example, Dewey is unclear about the purpose of deliberation – talk, action, or accommodation to the existing order. What is the aim of inclusion and participation? Indeed, Dewey maintains that adjudicating public policies and dialogue are adequate forms of participatory democratic engagement in themselves:

The essential need is the improvement of the methods and conditions of debate, discussion and persuasion. That is the problem of the public… It is not necessary that the many should have the knowledge and skill to carry on the needed investigations; what is required is that they have the ability to judge on the bearing of knowledge supplied by others upon common concerns…. In its deepest and richest sense a community must always remain a matter of face-to-face intercourse…Logic in its fulfillment recurs to the primitive sense of the word: dialogue (1927/1998: 208-209 emphasis original).

Another critique of deliberative and participatory approaches to democracy is the treatment of diversity framed in narrow terms such as ‘tolerance’ (Gutmann 1995). Tolerance takes place in an ambit where citizens may express difference of opinion, but the aim is to steel oneself to the ‘other’ as different. Tolerance does not probe the justice of status quo positions or one’s own position as possibly in error. The underlying weakness of ‘tolerance positions’ as
participation is their failure to restructure or trouble existing power structures, or to create
dialogic spaces for discussion to revise the social order (Osborne 2001).

Limitations of Representational Democracy

There are contested notions of a ‘functioning democracy.’ Political democracy that
associates democratic representation with voting activity is distinct from approaches to
democracy requiring citizens to engage in practical, democratic activities such as everyday
decision-making (Dewey 1927). Defenders of representational democracy declare that many
contemporary political democracies must function via voter representation out of necessity; they
argue that the electorate is too big to participate in the political processes (deLeon 1997). The
idea that democracy can be reduced to scale is a flawed idea; not only do representational models
fail to take into account the use of coercion in representational models of government, but the
use of coercion is also sophisticated, underhanded and profoundly covert. The message we are
told is; “the more government withhold information from their fellow citizens the less
accountable they [government] are to those who give them their authority” (Dunn 2005:186).
Misled and disempowered into believing that voting is a sufficient form of political engagement,
the citizenry ‘slumbers deeply.’ Hence, coercion walks hand-in-hand with the ideal of efficiency
and the neoliberal ethos (Ball 1995). Both are potent rationales for representational democracy,
but neither of them is adequate.

Conflict, controversy and participation are often upstaged as necessary and vital
components of active democratic engagement by the (however false) ideal of consensus, which is
typically buttressed by an assurance that democracy is working on our behalf. Therefore, it
matters what notion of democracy we embrace as individuals who constitute the diverse public. If we take for granted first that democratic processes can function in the absence of conflict and intentional individual engagement, and second, that the content itself (of, say, decisions) is neutral, then we hardly need to consider the processes of democracy. We in a complex society may rationalize that since the active inclusion of different others in deliberative processes is too unwieldy, we need representational democracy. Yet having powerful others represent our interests – so characteristic of our institutional lives – is anything but democratic in its best conception, no matter how cynical we may become.

Another consequence of ascribing to representational models of democracy is the application, use, and misuse of power. Issues of public importance, including policy processes, tend to fall under the aegis of individuals with ‘expert’ information who take control of the agenda and responsibility for decision-making. They do so because it is assumed these matters are either too complex or too divisive for public deliberation (deLeon 1997). This construct of knowledge production, including policy production, develops a citizen binary: elite experts who produce knowledge versus citizens who become the reservoirs or recipients of procedural democracy (Popkewitz & Lindblad 2000). Top-heavy decision-making limits substantive public participation and deliberation – both of which are often construed as the troublesome irritants in a weak democracy (Gutmann & Thompson 1996; 2004). This research aims to address this misperception.

**Critique of Democracy and Education**

It is possible the ideal of a flourishing democracy is neither realistic nor achievable. Barr (2005) contends that most current political ideology which positions itself as democracy actually imposes limitations on education. Education policy makers choose actions from competing
agendas and pedagogical ideologies and these in turn restrict the democratic potential of education insofar as different educators stress different kinds of social CI themes (Barr 2005). As Joshee and Johnson (2005) have argued, Ontario education policy appears to embrace the notion of social cohesion. If the notion of social cohesion retains a stronghold on democratic discourse, then other important questions related to the purpose of education, and the benefits of and access to its policies, may be silenced or marginalized in the service of upholding a coercive, “consensual” discourse which is anything but democratic in the critical sense (Popkewitz & Lindblad 2000: 25).

Participation and democracy do not necessarily ensure socially just conditions for citizens – practical competence and instrumental skills are different things. For instance, government could call itself ‘democratic’, but still marginalize individuals through economic oppression and by restricting personal freedoms (Mouffe 2000). Equally possible, government could claim it embraces civic engagement or participation, as long as such participation conforms to government’s version of citizenship. Narrow conceptions of participation such as voter representation or participation are no guarantee of democratic policy activity. Terminology using democracy, citizenship and participation do not ensure critical democracy. Neither inclusion of citizens in the decision-making processes nor the identification of oppressions follows from using these terms. The problem is further exacerbated by typical thinking, which assumes democracy is something too complicated for the public to handle, while education is accessible to the public but is not viewed as political (Portelli 2001: 283). Social transformation toward inclusion requires systemic and epistemic equity activity (Popkewitz & Lindblad 2000).
Critical Democracy and Participation

Critical democracy contends *participation* has social justice implications in addressing power structures. Indeed, critical democracy makes requirements for individuals, school principals and teachers, to use their agency for social justice, specifically in relation to equity and diversity (Portelli & Solomon 2001). The aim of these engagements is to stay close to the complexities and contradictions of our human experiences and to reject democratic ‘talk’ and use of slogans (Portelli & Solomon 2001).

A deeper, pluralist democracy accepts the *agonism* of social life – the differences and divisions. Individuals supportive of this perspective accept policy as contentious and messy. If there are uncertainties in life, democracy must reflect the lack of harmony; “the clear consciousness of a communal life in all its implications constitutes the idea of democracy” (Dewey 1927/1998: 295). Hence, education *in* and *for* democracy (Portelli 2001: 280) requires distinguishing whether education aims to help students develop dispositions supportive of the existing social order or, whether the aim of democracy is to encourage students to understand the inconsistencies and injustices of their world and in doing so, change them. Therefore, the position individuals take on critical thinking and emotion as expressions of difference is one indication of democratic effectiveness. By extension, individuals who take positions on policy and use their agency to speak to policy, other than in the current nominal ways such as being “represented” through voting, signal deep democratic process.

Social Justice

Whereas critical perspectives interrogate conditions in the world and can be linked to social justice aims, social justice as a category, and the concepts that underwrite it, makes
explicit and continuous commitments to confront the sources of marginalization, inequity and oppression (Kohli 2005; Rezai-Rashti 2003). However, conceptions of social justice are themselves contested. Formulations of the aims of social justice vary, from access to and attainment of equitable resources, practices, legal provisions and institutional opportunity (Gale, 2001; Teasley & Rice 1996); to the redistribution of material goods to reduce inequality (Gewirtz & Cribb 2002; Russo 2004); to educational mimicry wherein students adopt existing educational practices so they can appropriate the dominant discourse; and to students’ challenging these practices so they can alter the conditions that oppress them (Merrett 2001: 98; Williamson, Rhodes & Dunson 2007). I am critical of social justice conceptions advocating personal choice/individual freedom models because these tend to deny the historical and systemic constraints on individual freedom (Razack 1998).

Under the contemporary influences of globalization and neo-liberal market economics, policy and social justice concerns intersect and intensify exclusions (Apple 1989). An educational agenda focused on ‘standards’, ‘credentials’, and ‘competitiveness’ in school, exacerbates other efforts to build inclusive school curricula. All of this competition mimics the market-place penchant for winners and losers and inserts a competing agenda for social justice policy workers (Apple 2001). For example, schools often promote individual competitiveness and school achievement at the expense of attention to collaboration, to community or to responsibility for others (Young 1990). At times, the only responsibility that schools seem to promote is responsibility to self and the school to get the desired grades.

Social justice consonant with the theory grounding this dissertation, informed by the work of Iris Marion Young (2001) in Democracy and Inclusion and The Politics of Difference (1990), demands a transformative agenda which entails collective action and citizen participation
to work against the five faces of oppression: exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism and violence and to address policy as a site for transformative activity. This view argues exclusion is not random social activity; it functions at the levels of social relations, institutional practices and knowledge production. It recognizes that exclusion is heavily concentrated in already marginalized groups (Razack 1999; Said 1994).

Ideology remains an important tension in the work of policy study concerned with values such as social inclusion and oppression (Young 2000). Social justice perspectives support inquiry into broader educational contexts, including institutional and systemic power relations, educational policy, inclusion of marginalized others, and student representation, while examining hierarchical processes, content and outcomes (Carr 2007b). These actions stand in stark contrast to current classroom discourse where communication vets indoctrination (Young 1989). Students are typically prevented from exploring the validity of facts. Policy research and activity supportive of social justice actively challenges false assumptions and the generalizations students are given as lesson content.

In addition, students are not homogenous. They are not a monolithic body with consensual or universal education experiences; their cultural, ethnic, and religious commitments and identities show Ontario schools to be a place unique in culture and context (TDSB 2001). This unique context of Ontario schools foregrounds for all educators the need to pay attention to both what is being taught in classrooms and how it is being taught. Such a politicized perspective helps all educators to invite policy into the nexus of social justice work by examining the function and effects of curriculum policy on individuals (as they say it affects them).
Moreover, abuse, racism, classism and homophobia are often part of the everyday lives of many students and teachers (Leach et al., 2002 as cited in Davies 2005a; 2005b: 363). Denial of these lived realities constitutes violence, social injustice and a category of exclusion within the curriculum policy. To address injustice, policies, as well as the work of teachers and school administrators, might consider privilege as discourse needing deconstruction (Freire 1998).

Curricula are inherently political. They have the potential to do violence through embedded assumptions and biases based on a dominant (e.g. white) cultural canon (Freire 1998; Young 1990; 2000). Excluding junior-level and older students from political education and the politics of education constitutes cultural imperialism (Gewirtz 1998 drawing on Young 1990) or at the very least, leaves their CI education to chance. However, educators feel reticent about including young children in exploring controversial issues (McBee 1996).

Controversial issues policies constitute an important means of working toward social justice by supporting students in overcoming the external sources of internalized oppression by changing the system (Kohli 2005: 100). Engaging with controversial issues interrupts the universalizing gesture that views knowledge or learning as a neutral kind of engagement, and has the potential to re-open debate around our orientations to knowledge assumptions. Gewirtz (1998) argues along with Young (1990) for social justice work to extend its arena of concern beyond its conventional boundaries of human interaction by addressing educational policy explicitly. For instance, policy and social justice are connected through the use of power. Controversial issues policies constitute an important means of working toward social justice by supporting students in overcoming the external sources of internalized oppression by changing the system (Kohli 2005: 100). Specifically, policy must address issues of power toward unjust or just ends through language, rules, and relations (Hajer et al., 2003). Further, policy processes can
be subjected to social justice concerns for collective dialogue and user agency to build system inclusion (Fischer & Forester 1994). My contention is that social justice includes developing the policy capacity of individuals at all levels in the system as an indication of the commitment to equity and inclusion. Therefore, policy also must take up the same robust system of analysis and direct intervention in any manifestation of social oppression or barrier to liberatory education.

To summarize, there are many justifications for working toward social justice in education. My conception argues we must address issues of student marginalization and alienation by altering the system-institutional landscape, which includes the use of policy text. Certainly, policy plays a supporting role in ameliorating alienation among individuals in society, but it is important one. Popkewitz and Lindblad (2000) contend that policy for social justice must accomplish two tasks: address student alienation/exclusion as an imperative; and secondly, address exclusive norms applied in the production of knowledge. This framework can confront the oppressions identified by Young (1990); exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism and violence to policy. For example, teacher interrogation of textual norms for racist or sexist overtones is one act of knowledge production equity. The research activity does not engage directly with these stated oppressions, but pays attention to their production. Further, this section explicates my theoretical position so that my critical analysis of the policy can be held accountable to these commitments.

**School Administrators and Policy**

Myriad ideologies stake central claims on school administration offering them lens for educational administration. Ideologies include leadership: as an ethical imperative bestowed on administrative authority (Campbell 2000); as a process of inclusive social justice achieved
through inclusive practices (Cambron-McCabe & McCarthy 2005; Carr 2007b; Ryan 2008); as applied organizational management theory (Culbertson 1988; Taylor 1895); and as a general means of social emancipation (Foster 1989).

Because social justice claims can rationalize very different administrative actions (e.g. narrowing the achievement gap, hiring school administrators, or privatizing education), conflating school administration as leadership neutralizes a varied discourse (Cambron-McCabe & McCarthy 2005; Foster 1986; Hess 2002). Within the current hierarchical school system, school administrators make decisions, they engage with parents and the community, and they mediate policy agendas from the school board and ministry. School administrators occupy a compelling position in education – the intersection of policy, school relations, and social reform.

Though this section will theorize an approach to leadership, I affirm with Greenfield (1993) that there is no ontological reality to the ‘science’ of organizational leadership and thus no definitive ‘position’ on educational leadership can be abstracted from the context and power relations in which it functions.

**Inclusive Leadership in Action**

The purpose of this theoretical section is not to discuss the merits of various leadership approaches, but rather, to argue explicitly for an inclusive approach, and to ask what this approach lends to the theoretical framework on critical democracy and the conceptual commitment to critical policy processes. Despite the argumentative shortcomings of not considering alternate positions and their merits, I endorse inclusive leadership in order to examine the implications of CI policy on school administrator understanding. I make the distinction between current administrative practices and leadership in this section, but I will not
compare their practices to this inclusive ideal. Rather, I am working with administrative roles as they are currently constituted in the educational hierarchy. I do this not to valorize the current hierarchy in education, but rather to maintain my focus on the relation between school administrators and policy rather than forge an argument for an ideal conception of leadership within the current system. My working position is supported by the reality that praxis is philosophically committed to the ongoing symbiosis of theory and practice so leadership theory and practice are not easily disentangled from each other.

I believe that inclusive leadership can, like any other approach to leadership, make claims that cloak ulterior motives. School administrators could, for example, construct an inclusive-looking agenda, invite community members and so on, and then claim to have created an inclusive school community. A genuine approach to leadership most advantageous to critical democratic policy is both inclusive in its desire to power-share, and honest in its aim to serve social justice ends (see social justice section, specifically Young 2000). Inclusive leadership is about activism; it is an ironic stance to the extent that a school administrator must attempt to redistribute the power vested in them by the system and so transgress the authority typically ascribed to this role. In effect, inclusive leaders are ‘sheep in wolves’ clothing’; they are individuals who use their vested power to disperse it, and to make schools accessible spaces for learning in ways which are not always sanctioned by the education system or tradition.

Broadly stated, inclusive leadership works differently from other approaches in that it critically interrogates the uses of power toward the social ideals of inclusion and democracy (Ryan 2006:14). In its best realization, subversion is embedded in inclusive leadership because the approach requires that very specific actions redistribute power. For example, inclusive leaders make policies explicit and are willing to compromise, to challenge, and to change
inequitable ones. Other stakeholders, such as community members, who are not typically engaged in school activity are included in school life and are able to make contributions to learning. Policies are not viewed as air-tight, but open to the negotiation of contextual application and needs. Finally, inclusive leaders challenge the practices of others when they act inequitably, by creating “cognitive dissonance” among colleagues (Marshall 2004; Ryan 2006: 106). There are of course various obstacles to social justice and inclusion for school administrators.

**Inclusion and School Administrators**

Because critical approaches are sensitive to context (Foster 1989) and usually reliant on collective actions (Ryan 2003: 59), school administrators are called on to be fluid in their responsiveness. This requires administrators to be aware of the school context and to have the skills to communicate within the school context if they seek inclusive aims. Obstacles to inclusive aims are widely held assumptions about both student diversity and educator diversity, which become entrenched given the selection processes for school administrators. Current hiring practices work against inclusive aims because normative dispositions are reproduced through non-equity oriented hiring practices (Blackmore et al., 2003; Retelle 2010). Hiring practices often reproduce normative values such as technicism and organizational power relations over commitments to student learning. Another barrier is simply the nature and degree of systemic inequities. Gender, race and ability bias, along with social classism, are so pervasive in school texts and policy language, they travel unnoticed in the educational lives of teachers, students and administrators as the norm. It is therefore difficult to identify the degree of inequity in the system
at all levels, because it is impossible to step outside a system so profoundly shaped by inequity; it is more difficult still to challenge, and then to change it.

To be truly inclusive, school administrators must engage with critical pedagogy, and not just administrative processes. Some ideas, however, cause anxiety in schools. For example, a significant number of pre-service teachers identify they fear teaching critical thinking (Schommer-Aikens & Hutter 2002). Teachers and school administrators fear backlash from parents and the local community in situations where they take pedagogical risks. They worry they will face charges of indoctrinating and creating bias in students (Lockwood 1996). Teachers say they also dread questions from students such as; ‘What do you think is right?’; ‘What should the character have done?’ and ‘Which side in this historical conflict was fighting for good and which side was wrong?’ (Schommer-Aikens et al., 2002). Teachers holding neutral personal stances to develop students’ critical thinking (Campbell 2003) contradict the free exercise of open-mindedness in schools (Hare 1984). School administrators must take on curricular issues as a defense of epistemological inclusion. Attendant to this aim, school administrators are implicated in processes of developing teacher supports and resources, of cultivating the conditions of social justice in the school culture, and of understanding the political implications of curriculum policy.

Leadership and Social Justice

Attempts by school administrators to develop inclusive leadership processes such as inclusion are complicated by definitions of achievement that perceive students in a deficit mode based on their race, ethnicity, national origin, culture, religion, disability and social class among other factors and conditions (Bruner 2008; Portelli, Shields & Vibert 2007). Programs often label
students on the basis of these perceived deficits. They do not invest students with the capacity to critique the assumptions of what they are learning (Portelli et al., 2007; Visano & Jakubowski 2002). Often well-intentioned programs flood the administrative agenda with itineraries that over-emphasize the vulnerabilities of certain students, and that focus primarily on ‘narrowing achievement gaps’. These programs and policies create dissonance (internal or otherwise) for administrators interested in developing inclusive leadership processes.

So it is that individuals occupying traditional administrative roles which we associate with educational leadership – principals and vice-principals – are implicated in producing and reproducing these tensions if they fail to acknowledge their own potential to reproduce them. For example, school administrators are often called on to support contradictory agendas (Shields, Bishop, & Mazawi 2005). Administrative leaders in schools inevitably confront false equivalencies such as: social justice as lowering student drop-out rates, as improving graduation rates and literacy and EQAO performance, and social justice as lowering “the achievement gap” (Marshall 2008 ; Shields, Larson, Moja 2008). On one hand, they may express concern for human rights and social justice via a concept of fairness predicated on equity; on the other hand, equity often competes with student performance discourses, or management theories (Bruner 2008). The unwitting outcome of this policy and program competition is the conflation of student diversity with student deficit – the remediation of which leads to ‘social justice.’ Social justice in this sense means getting students to comply with existing aims and programs applied to them. This notion of social justice is neither robust nor desirable. The conflation of social justice with coercion towards pre-determined ends is disingenuous.

In effect, intentions to support diverse students through a leadership agenda committed to ‘social justice’ can ironically and unintentionally preserve the institutional status quo when
equity means raising test scores (Blackmore 2003). Leadership is thus more than a dispositional condition or a philosophical stance; inclusive leadership requires practices directed toward social relations in schools which, in some cases, transgress or are contrary to, traditional ideas about school administrators. Indeed, some school administrators will be forced to be wolves yet again.

Laverne Smith (1988) expressed long ago, "The notion of social justice goes beyond equality of opportunity to include affirmation of such basic human rights as participation in making decisions which affect one's life, freedom of speech without fear of reprisal and assurance of human respect and dignity (229). However, her call for educational administration to engage in social justice by confronting inequities and oppression appears to be forgotten. Unwittingly in some cases, intentionally in others, educational administration has “been chewed up and swallowed down by the needs of managerial theory” (Foster 1989: 45).

**School Administrators and Policy**

Policy in the context of educational administration has a representational history that is conservative and top-down; one not typically associated with social justice or progressive policy action (Gidney 1999). Thus for both policy and school administration, social justice is a challenge; however, school administrators can choose how they respond to it. They play an important role in determining how a policy such as CSI (2003) enters the school culture. Moreover, administrators can, in some cases, determine the momentum of a given policy among other initiatives. They can also allocate the professional development and resource support for teachers throughout the school year. While policy documents may never be read first-hand, they can still exert a force over administrators directing them to function as gate-keepers. In this role, they relay the information contained in formal documents to school staff (Ball 1994). In addition
to their conscious administrative responsibilities, it is also true that school administrators are also
discursively shaped by policies (Ball 1994). Power is therefore elusive, as policy elicits
recursive effects on administrative processes in ways not simply felt through top-down actions.
Whether policy engagement becomes inclusive of a social justice agenda is another matter.

There are salient policy challenges for inclusive leadership processes which hinge on
asymmetrical social relations (Young 2000). Policies seldom reveal their embedded
accumulation of administrative privilege or power because our democratic tradition has a long
lineage supporting liberal individualism (Pateman & Gross 1987 as cited in Marshall 1999). We
assume school administrators merit their privileged use of power and decision-making. We do
not consider that they excel at compliance and supporting discourse norms. Feminist theory
compels school administrators and others to consider framing their work with policy in ways
other than as control and compliance procedures which threaten to dehumanize individuals
(Pateman 1988; Pateman & Gross 1986).

Theories from critical feminism (Eagleton 2004; Pateman & Gross 1986; Roland Martin
2003; Young 1990; 2000) challenge individuals in traditional administrative positions to explore
the intersections of public and private life for incurring tensions and contradictions. If school
administrators must work with policy, and that policy cannot adequately describe what has been
omitted or unattended to in the social world, school administrators cannot predict the effect or
suitability of a policy. In other words, a policy cannot seamlessly support an ideal for school life
if it is delivered from a government perspective in a deterministic fashion. Gaps between the
perceived issue and the lived experiences of individuals who may have never been consulted
prior to the procurement of research or policy statements are a call for school administrators to
adopt advocacy or critical positions on policy as a form of leadership (Ball 1994). At the very
least, it seems worthwhile to plumb how school administrators understand the effects of policy on their working lives.

One way school administrators can take a leadership position on policy is to explore issues of dehumanization in text - the notion of ‘policy tokenism’. Tokenism can be defined as policy provisioned for expedience or public advantage. A central feature of policy tokenism is the absence of contextual sensitivity or understanding about the policy users. School administrators sniff out tokenism by asking questions such as, ‘Does this policy support a genuine educational need or has it been created to fill a perceived gap?’ ‘Did the policy engage individuals who will use the policy in its development?’ (Marshall 1999; Vidovich 2001) When school administrators fail to adopt a critical policy stance they undermine education for democracy and social justice because they alienate students and other who have less power than them and who cannot author their educational realities. In effect, the failure to adopt a critical policy stance makes everybody ‘policy spectators.’

Young (2000) argues weak leadership takes the form of administration and not only enables the reproduction of dominant and normative ideologies, but it also embeds a coercive discourse. For example, it is possible that school administrators benefit from control over policy. It is possible formal schooling has discouraged critical thinking about complex social issues from its very beginnings:

Schooling traditions...were designed for social control by elites instilling social and religious values, and developing nationalistic pride...Critical thinking, controversy and social issues were kept outside of school, designed only for social elites destined for leadership positions (Nelson 2001 as cited in Walker 2006: 175).
Students schooled within this construct are twice oppressed; they are denied access to building capacities for critical thinking and dispositions for democratic citizenship, while the hierarchical arrangement of the school prevents them from attaining the power to address such inequities:

[T]he curriculum represented a closed set of historical and cultural referents, and ... the prescriptive nature of most programs of studies effectively excluded and de-legitimized the histories of others who were not named (Richardson 2002: 4).

Thinking about power is a salient feature of the discourse, though it is not isolated as an interest of inclusive leadership. For example, Torney-Purta and others (2001) found several problematic outcomes of civic curricula designed to engage students in CI and conflict education, outcomes which speak to the embedded nature of power relations. Most teachers reproduced traditional perspectives with transmission-style lessons, win-lose debates, and discussion guided toward pre-determined learning outcomes, despite stated aims of transformational pedagogy. The researchers found there was little clarity regarding systems or institutional factors to explain why this was so. They concluded that the school system and the operations of institutional practices remain frustratingly opaque; they could only generalize about conservative tendencies.

Other research has highlighted the significance of teachers preferring particular topics as curricular content (Gallo 1996; Johnson & Johnson 2004; Zoric et al., 2004). Rather than appreciating the potential value of certain controversial issues for dialectical transformation by questioning the institution or society, limiting choices of what controversy to teach undercut the potential for more democratic engagement (Cotton 2006a; Pedersen & Totten 2001). Leadership by school administrators is therefore a crucial component of the policy discourse on CI to support and to advocate for policies which work toward social justice in real ways.
To conclude these theoretical considerations, several policy perspectives are foregrounded: critical democracy (Mouffe 2000), inclusive leadership (Ryan 2006) and social justice (Young 1990; 1998). Democracy sensitive to agonism views conflict and other social responses as legitimate forms of democratic engagement, not barriers, as conflict is both the product of pluralism and political life. Consensus is misguided; it often entails coercion of some kind. Thus *mature democracy* (Mouffe 2000:149) recognizes and supports its pluralism:

In a pluralist democracy, divisions and conflicts are not to be seen as disturbances that unfortunately cannot be eliminated or as empirical impediments that render impossible the full realization of a good constituted by a harmony that we cannot reach because we will never be completely able to coincide with our rational universal self. In a democratic polity, conflicts and confrontations, far from being signs of imperfection, are the guarantee that democracy is alive and inhabited by pluralism.

Further, this approach to democracy is well-positioned to examine society’s progress on social justice issues. Young’s (1998) framework identifies five oppressions which create injustice: *exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism* and *violence*. Policy is not exempt from these social justice imperatives; it, too, must be subjected to interrogation and transformation of its oppressive or exclusive agenda. Here critical leadership is essential to making education democratic and to dealing with multiple oppressions.
Chapter Three: Literature Review

The controversial issues literature surveys an array of scholarly sources: civics and citizenship education; science, peace and environmental education; philosophy of education dealing with open-mindedness; the teacher’s role and ethics; and social studies research in transnational settings. The review is thematic and critical issues are considered as they inform CI policy. Five central strands from the literature will be discussed, they are: controversial issues definitions; the state of controversial issues education; critical challenges in CI education; theorization the teacher’s CI role; and critical issues at stake in CSI policy. These topics represent concerns for theorists throughout the literature and fertile ground for research.

Defining Controversial Issues

There is considerable definitional inconsistency throughout the various educational fields of philosophy of education, civic and social studies (Cary 2006; Cotton 2006a; 2006b; Torney-Purta et al., 2001; Evans & Reynolds 2004; Faulks 2006; OXFAM 2006; Segall, Heilman & Cherryholmes 2006; Shinew 2006) and critical pedagogy (Freire 1998; Verma 2008; Visano & Jakubowski 2003). In this review of the literature, policy implications are important and relevant aspects of CI definitions; however curriculum policy treats definitions mostly in the context of specific lessons such as health education. Policy then, fails to develop a CI discourse and the attendant definitional complexity (Faulks 2006).

On the other hand, philosophical literature pays considerable attention to theorizing a definition of controversial issues (Dearden 1981; Davies 2006; Hare 1984; Lockwood 1996; McLaughlin 2005; Stradling 1985). Philosophical definitions contend that controversial issues spark controversy, conflict or disagreement over the nature of an issue, what is at issue, what
features of reasonableness should ground our decision-making around the issue, and what should be done where different ends cannot be simultaneously realized (McLaughlin 2003). Epistemic criteria for controversial issues include lacking consensus or universal terms of agreement in our decision-making (Hare 1984; McLaughlin 2005). Dearden (1981: 38) cites a well-known position on controversial issues that defines the discourse:

A matter is controversial if contrary views can be held on it without those views being contrary to reason. This can be the case when sufficient evidence is withheld in order to decide the controversy. Similarly, an issue can be controversial when the outcomes depend on future events that cannot be predicted with certainty, and where judgment about the issue depends on how to weigh or give value to the information that is known about an issue.

Stradling (1985: 9) defines controversial issues as “those issues on which our society is clearly divided and significant groups within society advocate conflicting explanations or solutions, which are based on alternate values.” All three definitions defend controversial issues as morally sound (Hare 1993); however, these kinds of definitions fail in explaining to educators why they should take on this work. Moreover, philosophical definitions are ‘low-key’ responses; there is much more potential to a CI agenda than the appreciating the value of ‘holding alternate values.’ Indeed there is no sense of social justice urgency in these kinds of definitions and this can lead to complacency in dealing with social difference, emotion and conflict (Faulks 2006). Moreover, definitions do not make explicit the position, or regard, that should be afforded to students or others. Thus the status a CI agenda should have in education is ambiguous. Alternate viewpoints are acknowledged as having value; however, the philosophical literature does not suggest that treating CI is more than a function of good thinking (Siegel 2000: 307). This stance overlooks

It is important to point out that controversies based on lack of evidence such as scientific controversies are substantively different and are likely to be treated differently in classrooms than controversies eliciting intense emotions such as 9/11.
the fact that education is political – that CI can engage with global contexts, transform social conditions or power relations. Philosophical definitions are rather concerned that CI are epistemologically relevant to critical thinking, fostering attitudes, dispositions, values and character traits.

Social studies curricula provide an alternate approach to defining controversial issues. Using civics, peace, social sciences and history education, social sciences uses an issue –driven approach to defining CI lessons. Social sciences are less concerned with the meaning of conflict than with the specific conflict as educational. Werner states, “Some issues are so intrinsically important to our individual and collective experiences that they are worth studying for their own sake” (1998:117). For this reason, I call this a descriptive approach. Strategies are intended to develop students’ critical thinking and these range from debating, locating the opposing viewpoint, playing devil’s advocate, sorting, classifying, and sequencing information, to employing compare and contrast techniques (Ballagh & Sheppard 2004; Myers et al., 2004; OXFAM 2006). Whereas philosophy of education focuses on the epistemic justification of a CI conception, social studies develop descriptive lesson content and strategies. Research on social sciences approaches also reveal that global forms of political participation are missing as most social studies curricula tend to focus on national or local curricula (Faulks 2006; Torney-Purta et al., 2001).

Therefore, subject-focus approaches to CI leave social studies vulnerable to some challenges. One teacher-resource says, “Most teachers recognize the power of healthy interactions between learners, but in the global classroom it is essential to nurture safe zones from day one, since controversies can arise at any time and provoke a range of emotional responses” (Ballagh & Sheppard, 2004: 30). Here “safe zones” appear to provide refuge, but the
risks implicated by the activity are unclear; is not controversy implicit in the activity? As a result, controversial issues have a relative value; they are not “healthy interactions” when they are “provocative” or “emotional.” The comment from the social studies resource presupposes skill development or tasks enable the development of critical thinking, but not emotions, or disagreement. This reflects a rather ‘light touch’ approach to controversial issues.

When a CI agenda presents a strategy and not as a full conception, controversial issues seem like chameleon ideas – that is, there is no substance or consistency on controversial issues instruction. Lessons appear to be ‘add-ons’ so that resources reflect lack of purpose. Thus, CI pedagogy does not live up to its potential to engage students in critical reflection or social transformation when it is narrowly conceived as an educational extra to the real curriculum. CI lessons appear as a ‘soft option’ compared to non-controversial (non-emotional) curricula and this suggests an underlying attitude of complacency or fear. It is understandable that teachers disengage or ignore controversial issues when its justification is conceptually unclear and they are over-burdened with the accountability-stretched curricula (Faulks 2006; Oulton et al. 2004a; Schommer-Aikens 2002). Definitional problems are understandable because it is difficult to universalize the nature of CI. The problem has a lot to do with the complex nature of CI; defining them is tricky. It is simply very difficult to provide a comprehensive, universal and useful definition for all contexts and users. Werner (1998: 117) argues that widespread political bias against CI education obscures clear aims and prevents content development. Soley (1996) concurs; the policy conditions surrounding assessment and controlled knowledge production encourage knowledge regurgitation, rather than encourage an atmosphere supportive of

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8 Hahn (2001) contends that pre-service and in-service teacher education programs do not fully consider the importance of teaching about student diversity and conflict education.
controversial issues. This explains the plethora of superficial lessons. We may shy away from controversial issues because we do not want students to uncover the assumptions, contradictions, privileges and prejudices in education. Thus our regard for CI pedagogy is so central to education that how we value CI instruction depends on how we envision education’s aim (Hare 1984).

A critical pedagogy identifies controversy in all aspects of education. Definitions may be necessary, but they provide insufficient conditions for teacher-student engagement. Teachers, students, and school administrators need to consider controversial issues as potentially serious disagreements involving many people with deeply-rooted epistemological and ethical differences (Hahn 2001). As McLaughlin observes, controversial issues invoke disagreements “about whole frameworks of understanding relevant for judgement” (2005: 63). For example, educational aims, values, content, methodology, assessment, institutionalization and teaching and learning are equally the substance of controversial issues (2005: 61). There are, however, risks associated with working broadly and deeply with CI:

We risk alienating students. We risk difficulties associated with managing fear, resistance and dissent in the classroom. When dealing with material that can generate multiple viewpoints, teachers must be prepared for the possibility that difference of opinion can escalate into angry, frustrating encounters among students in the class or, alternatively, draw nothing more than silence as a response (Visano & Jakubowski 2002:19).

Davies (2005) cautions that while guided lessons are understandable, they work against students’ confronting the political dimensions and global contexts of CI education. Specifically, students lose the opportunity to become engaged beyond identifying their own responses. Because the definitions for controversial issues range throughout the literature, it is necessary to articulate distinct justifications for teaching them. This discussion comprises the next section.
Three Rationales for Teaching Controversial Issues

I have identified three central rationales for controversial issues teaching from the literature; however, these rationales are not entirely discrete – there is some overlap, but what make these three rationales discrete are the values they foreground. The rationales for engaging with controversial issues can be categorized as: *philosophical-critical, democratic-citizenship* and *critical-activist*, which are derived from the foregrounded values positions.

The philosophical argument for the inclusion of controversy in education is compelling in a number of ways and toward a variety of moral ends. Freire observes, “…if education is not the key to social transformation, neither is it simply meant to reproduce dominant ideology” (1998:10). Because education is not politically or morally neutral, it cannot help but transmit values. Dewhurst (1992) and Hare (1985) argue students’ lives are naturally in contact with global contestation and moral issues. If education aims to do more than transmit pre-digested learning material, it needs to help students learn the dispositions and skills to unravel, to interrogate, and to challenge the conditions of their own education and life issues. Therefore, ignoring controversial issues in education amounts to failing to educate students well, because without controversial issues students miss the chance to learn about the realities of life and in education (QCA 1998 as cited in Oulton et al. 2004a: 491). We fail students when we tell them that it is not a good idea to learn about conflict and controversy, or when we encourage students to blindly accept whatever they encounter in schooling, and when we do not pay attention to how they will learn to challenge what they encounter (Hare 2001). The reasons we fail in our responsibilities to students are understandable, but not excusable. Developing open-mindedness is very difficult:
We take it too much for granted that we are open-minded without noticing the various ways in which we allow prejudices to distort and limit our consideration of new ideas. We may also lack the courage to face unfamiliar and unwelcome ideas and consequently dismiss them without the attention they deserve; and we may draw back from the uncertainty and ambiguity that open-mindedness requires us to live with (Hare 2005: 17).

Moreover, in the absence of exposure to controversial material in their education, students lose opportunities to cultivate open-mindedness, critical consciousness or their capacity to act in and on the world (Freire 1973; 1998; Hare 1985). Students need the opportunity to examine hidden assumptions and prejudices with independence and in an atmosphere of open inquiry. Without this disposition – critical consciousness – students can become dependent on their teachers – they rely on teachers to tell them what to think or what knowledge is worth knowing. Though critical consciousness is ideally directed toward social ends, the literature presents it as an end in itself, which aligns it with a critical-philosophical rationale.

At its most basic level, controversial issues admit to difference and uncertainty; “A student who thinks is likely to think something that his teacher does not think” (Russell 1939 as cited in Hare 2009: 55). Education is richer for including controversial issues and it is distinct from normative schooling where the teacher acts as a knowledge authority. Finally, Tomasi (2001) contends that students’ non-public lives should have more power in determining the direction of education (as cited in McLaughlin 2003:149). Respect for students’ differences and developing their critical consciousness highlight the moral complexity of controversial issues and the benefits – the ability to engage in the world now, not just later (Dearden 1991; Hare 2001; Portelli & Vibert 2001).

A second rationale for CI in the literature develops in the social sciences curricula (Cherryholmes 2006; McBee 1996; Pedersen & Totten 2001; Torney-Purta et al., 2001). Its
general aim is to develop citizenship skills, and in some cases, civic-democratic virtues. The rationale here is that many contemporary social issues are controversial, so students need to understand the nature of social problems which affect their lives as effective citizens (Cherryholmes 2006; Soley 1996; Werner 1998). Though it too aims for social engagement, the literature is angled towards ‘democratic’ citizenship:

Teaching about controversial issues in the classroom can provide a safe a place for students to ask questions, express their fears, learn how to listen to one another, and deal with the difficult topics of pluralism, creation of a common civic culture, and the benefits and challenges of living productively in an increasingly multicultural society (Soley 1996:11).

There are very specific learning goals associated with cultivating the citizenship rationale; students perform tasks such as sharing views, understanding and clarifying different points of views, and researching. The justification is often stated in skill-set benefits; learning research skills, employing critical thinking to assess an argument as sound or faulty, inductive and deductive reasoning skills, and exercising skills in persuasive argumentation and writing (Hahn 2003; Lockwood 1996: 29). Theorists working with this version of controversial issues pay attention to setting an agenda tied almost exclusively to curriculum delivery in the areas of: social studies, peace education (Bickmore 2006), citizenship education and environmental studies (Dearden 1991; Evans & Reynolds 2004; Heilman 2006; Torney-Purta 2001; Werner 1998), and science education (Levinson 2006; Schommer-Aikens & Hutter 2002). Prominent features underpinning this rationale are students’ mutual obligations as constituent of democratic and effective citizenship (Hess 2004).

9 What kind of democracy is unclear; democracy is somewhat tokenized; but it appears from the CI conceptions in this literature that democracy is a passive, transmitted notion, not one that acknowledges conflict and diversity.
Many civics courses take up citizenship as an understanding of government function (Torney-Purta 2001). For example, students are encouraged to determine what values or actions should take precedence in a pre-determined conflict (e.g. supplied by the teacher), rather than examine questions related to democracy and which go to the heart of issues such as ‘What is it to be free in society?’ or ‘What are fundamental rights and what do they do?’

Human rights issues are taught in diverse ways – and the skill sets and strategies vary enormously, with methods including TRIBES (students are organized for co-operative learning), Devil’s Advocate turn-taking, debating, learning the structure of government, and honing research skills around specific issues featured prominently in the literature (OXFAM 2006; Torney-Purta et al., 2001; Zoric et al., 2004). Lockwood calls this approach “disciplined inquiry” (1996:29). Harwood and Hahn (1990) employ several ‘considerations: students’ maturity level, guidelines for interaction, adequate information sources, climate for discussion, maintaining focus and direction, ensuring intellectual balance, and ensuring equal participation. What make this discourse distinct are the nature of the controversial issues, the intended benefits, and the source of information control. In making specific curricular goals, educators hope students will gain skills which then transfer to other situations (Hahn 1996; Sheppard & Bellagh 2004). The limitation of such a rationale is the risk of students not extending their learning beyond a specific lesson. Students may ultimately lack the capacity to critically apply their knowledge to anything else because they have not learned the skills and dispositions to really critique inequity or internalize conceptions of controversy, as these have not been explicitly taught within a critical framework. The teacher is very much the controller of the investigation. As Leighton (2004) observes, the official line on citizenship education “is designed to encourage participation in the system, not to question or challenge it”, so rather than explicitly addressing or taking up complex
and potentially irreconcilable perspectives on controversial issues, topics within the civics literature is often presented through binaries (as cited in Faulks 2006: 65). Deliberation is frequently reduced to debates, parliamentary models or teacher-directed problem-solving. Straw men arguments are therefore rampant and created to stand-in for more trenchant and troubling social issues. One example of a straw man argument would be asking, ‘Should people express their feelings when they are upset?’

A weakness with the civics approach to CI is that the students are made to assume a passive role to affirm the values outlined in the lesson plan (Irish & Pashby 2007). It is often the case that instruction becomes restricted by narrow pedagogy – lesson content becomes ends (Cherryholmes 2006). Despite scholarship efforts to broaden the social studies agenda through strategies aimed at generating comprehensive global awareness for the teaching of peace and non-violence (Bickmore 2006; Cherryholmes 2006; Hahn 2001), teaching about our assumptions of family and reproduction (Turner-Vorbeck 2006), or connecting popular culture to pedagogy (Walker 2006), the field in general, is often disappointing. Classroom practices on controversial issues in social studies contexts remain largely rhetorical, theoretical and sporadic (Davies 2005b: 363).

The third rationale or approach to CI outlined in the literature actively engages students to transform their schooling conditions is critical-activist. This approach encourages students to transform the conditions of their society; its dominant method is the interrogation of all social contexts – relations, texts, systems and structures (Selden 1987; Visano & Jakubowski 2002). The socio-political rationale for CI education in this approach is to engage students as active, critical thinkers who learn how privilege confers dominance, marginalization, and how curricula function to reproduce embedded knowledge norms (Pedersen & Totten 2001). By re-positioning
their roles, students are encouraged to breach the typical division between school and private life (Portelli & Vibert 2001). In threading together these two realities, students’ political potential reaches farther. Without a division between inside and outside school, activism is a clear possibility (Tomasi 2001 as cited in McLaughlin 2003). Being political becomes a way of looking at the world. It involves making explicit attempts to contribute to the public good (Kincheloe 2005).

The idea of students being meaningfully engaged in curricula is itself controversial, because they can disrupt the hidden curricula (hidden racisms, sexisms, and prejudices) (Razack 1999; Verma 2008). The disruption is necessary to democracy (Parker 1996). Lessons perpetuating a dominant (or white) perspective are unjust as they misrepresent the heterogeneity of students’ worlds (hooks 2003; Maher 2005) and constitute oppression (Young 1986). Critical theorists (Kumashiro 2008; Verma 2008) argue the repercussions of avoiding controversial issues in curricula include, among other things, the failure to disrupt emerging operations and stereotypes regarding white privilege, sexual orientation and cultural differences. Verma (2008: 31) observes that one result of ignoring them is that students from diverse and different backgrounds resort to teaching fellow students about their ethnicities, because the dominant ideology of whiteness pervades the classroom. Ignorance about diverse perspectives perpetuates social injustice and inequality- conditions which run counter to democratic values (Davies 2006; Heilman 2003; Parker 1996; Visano & Jakubowski 2003).

Institutional normativity is also subject to interrogation on points including the content of textbooks (Colesante 1999; Selden 1987; Tanner 1999; Williams 2002), methods of inquiry (Levinson 2006; Monhardt & Monhardt 2000), and the aims of engaging in CI (Verma 2008). Moral and ethical questions threading throughout curricula assert controversial issues are neither
educational ‘add-ons’ nor an accommodation to ‘special interests.’ Students develop skills and encounter knowledge as much from its hidden curriculum as from its explicit content. This does not imply lack of structure in CI education rather; democratic structure exists as a process of engagement, and in democratic education taking the differences among students seriously (Portelli & Vibert 2001: 71; Schniedewind 1987:170).

Another aspect of supporting students requires engaging with uncertainty and fluidity Davies (2006) which is a departure from current conditions. Kumashiro (2008) contends education is not repetition of what we already know; education should change something in us all, causing us to enter a kind of crisis where we can question existing knowledge values and norms. Specifically, entering crisis releases teachers and students from traditional “banking” methods of education (Freire 1998) where knowledge is deposited into student as though they were receptacles - a method that denies students’ epistemological curiosity in favour of programmatic teaching practices. Promoting liberation from these practices, CI education can both support the unlearning of false assumptions, and encourage students to understand themselves and others in different ways. Freire (1976: 18) relies on a critical consciousness that interprets problems deeply, avoids preconceived notions, rejects passive positions, and uses dialogue rather than polemics. These transformative insights offer possibility for system inquiry and change through engagement. hooks reminds us this possibility places significant demands students also. We are by asking them to:

link personal troubles with public and social issues; to connect patterns in their lives with the events of society; to appreciate the intersection of biography and history when approaching phenomena deemed to be “controversial”; to delve into social sources, meanings and implications from various vantage points, using different analytic lens; and to de-mystify, become more tentative in, their traditional appraisals of controversial or social issues (1990: 8, 13).
As stated at the outset of this literature section, justifying controversial issues in practical contexts is a fundamental moment in defining them and then making a connection to a policy position. The justification also requires answering whether there is something unique about controversial issues which cannot be attained by other means and the literature has answered with a variety of reasons for their inclusion in schooling. The next section examines the literature on educational programs, followed by a review of literature summarizing the challenges educators say they face in the CI field, and a consideration of the role of the teacher.

**Controversial Issues Programs and Resources**

OXFAM (2006) cites an annual report conducted by the Department for International Development on students aged 11-16. The report says 79% of students asked for information about developing countries, 54% thought they should learn about international controversial issues in school, and 65% were concerned about poverty in developing countries. OXFAM curricula offset mainstream media through “an alternative perspective in terms of images, information and values” with the stated aim of developing students’ global awareness (6). They created a document intended for junior-intermediate and secondary students. Intermediate students are guided in creative thinking, engaging in knowledge application activities, posing hypotheses, and looking for alternative outcomes. The program emphasizes skills such as: drawing inferences, making deductions, using appropriate language to state points of views, and using evidence to support decisions (OXFAM 2006). It provides an interesting questionnaire for students on arms trading, civilian casualties of war and other thought-provoking questions.

The UK has a very well-known program cited extensively throughout the academic literature (Davies 2006; Oulton 2004a; 2004b). It is a non-statutory framework for Personal,
Social and Health Education (PSHE) and Citizenship, developed alongside a revised National Curriculum for secondary education in 2001. PSHE developed four areas of growth targeted through CI education: thinking skills; moral development; social development and education for sustainable development (as cited in Oulton et al. 2004a: 490). These outcomes are vaguely stated as values and aims such as “appreciation of issues of right and wrong”; “helping students to engage in social issues that require the use of reasoning”; “participation in democratic and other decision-making processes” (490). The resource affords teachers a resource to work with, but because these programs state general aims, they do not provide insight into global contexts, or the issues of identity and difference (Davies 2005b).

Human rights frameworks remain a resource of choice for exploring social justice controversies and for developing critical inquiry skills (Zoric et al., 2004). Human rights discourses, however, often backfire when they reinforce a problematic binary; that of the stable Western democracy and the rest of the world ‘out there’. Teachers might view human rights resources as taking an interest in global perspectives, but in their formulation the resources often make assumptions of a neutral and stable Western society. For example, resources use the common discourse of ‘being there’ or ‘fighting for’ the ‘freedoms’ that we enjoy here by solving ‘their problems.’ What is even more ambiguous is how teachers are supposed to develop programs using human rights frameworks effectively. How teachers are to be supported, or inserviced, in building critical thinking skills in the context of democratic ideals is unclear. Davies (2005: 23) identifies negative and positive conflict as one approach to teaching conflict. Negative conflict leads to passive responses: stereotyping, making excuses, defending a binary, whereas positive conflict is the position most likely to lead to active response. Positive conflict takes action to challenge violence.
Torney-Purta and others (2001) survey the civic knowledge of 90,000 fourteen year-olds (secondary students) across twenty-eight countries. Their research finds the biases and restrictions of the educational systems are reproduced in the cultural and curricular values despite the civics initiative\textsuperscript{10}. Though CI initiatives demonstrate how citizenship education is gaining prominence worldwide, it is difficult to plumb either the social or political contexts or the impacts of CI curricula on the individuals who work with CI (Cherryholmes 2006; Torney-Purta et al. 2001). Moreover, the literature fails to communicate to what extent teachers and students continue to engage democratically with issues after exposure to research intervention, and this remains problematic because it calls into question the validity of any program intervention.

In one teacher resource, student reflection is presented in rather limited journal writing activities where students are to answer rhetorical and benign questions such as “Is it important to understand what is happening in other places in the world?” (Goodreau et al., 2004: 14) Significantly, in the ‘reflecting on the lessons’ sections, teachers comment about the tensions that arise when an agenda to promote for example, human rights focused global citizenship, clashes with a commitment to promote student-centered experiential and autonomous learning. This occurs when, given the opportunity to select their own topics or causes, students choose topics that are inconsistent with a human rights agenda. Thus, the role of the teacher is extremely important, and yet there is very little explicit attention to what is at stake for teachers in taking up controversial issues even within a citizenship or GCE agenda (Zoric et al. 2004).

\textsuperscript{10}In fact, the study found the following program shortcomings: authoritarian instruction, instruction focused on nation-building rather than global awareness, text selection reproduces dominant norms and values, students receive little direct instruction on politics and democracy and CI teaching is aimed at proving a single point of view with little input from students.
In the following instance, student research into non-governmental organizations, community\(^{11}\) groups, places of worship and other schools, reflects the tensions inherent in a CI program:

…the [] project presents some ethical, legal/ safety and logistical problems. Attempting to provide students with an authentic activist experience demands that students have a considerable degree of freedom in the causes they commit to, the creative strategies they develop, and the personal connections they form over the course of the campaign. How do you respect a student’s individual freedoms, give them scope to tackle sensitive and often controversial issues, while ensuring that they exercise sensitivity and mature judgment? Keeping on top of this requires frequent meetings with students and careful communication with administration and parents (Evans et al., 2004: 129).

While the anger and emotions aroused by issues of race and identity are noticed, these tensions are not flushed out beyond the idea that teachers should “attend to social relations” and “be careful/ be aware” (Irish & Pashby 2009).

Thus, distinguishing truly controversial issues gets mired in the tensions between inclusion and exclusion, that is, who is participating, who is defining the issues, and who controls the production of knowledge. These concerns are, in turn, influenced by the specific relationships among the state, the political representation of citizenship, and citizenship education (Tomasi 2001 as cited in McLaughlin 2003). The problem is compounded by the fact that engagement is taken-for-granted. For these reasons, making a claim for CI education distinct from other endeavours (e.g. GCE or citizenship education) is important given the current state of contestation within this field (Pike 2007).

\(^{11}\) Sergiovanni (1994: 218) contends communities are “collections of individuals who are bounded together by natural will and who are together bound by a set of shared ideas and ideals.” I believe that this is a simplistic notion of community as shared cultural practices and other identifiers can bind it; but it can differ in other areas. Communities are not cohesive units. In ‘Organizations or communities? Changing the metaphor changes the theory.’ *Educational Administration Quarterly* 30(2) 214-226.
Understanding the Challenges of Teaching Controversial Issues

Indeed, there is considerable complexity surrounding CI education, particularly in the areas of defining controversial issues, deliberating among approaches, and contending with issues in highly contingent curricular programs and strategies. It is no wonder handling controversial issues can feel like a potential minefield for educators who admit they are uncomfortable, vulnerable, and ill-prepared to engage with difficult material (Lockwood 1996; Oulton et al, 2004a; 2004b; Werner 1998). Education politics control curricular policies which, in turn, shape controversial issues as public policy (Lockwood 1996). Though the literature devotes attention to teachers’ beliefs about controversial issues in general (Oulton 2004a; 2004b; Preskill 2005), it does not probe the conditions of their working lives including their access to resources and policy (Cotton 2006a).

Thus, teachers who take on this work may feel de-skilled by contradictory rhetorical and practical working conditions imposed by policy contrary to their commitments (Kincheloe 2005). Teachers cite lack of time (Werner 1998) and confusion over their roles (Lockwood; Kelly 2001) as reasons for disengaging with CI. Work-place challenges such as inadequate professional development or resource support contribute to the feeling of being de-skilled which add to the challenges teachers face (Kincheloe 2005; Oulton 2004b). The same political influences determine text selection/restriction\(^\text{12}\) and use. Resourcing remains a highly politicized aspect of teachers’ professional work (Levinson 2006).

The literature indicates that teachers may avoid engaging with controversies because they fear repercussions (from parents, school board, other officials, as well as colleagues) (McBee

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\(^{12}\) The Ministry of Education (MOE) lists books sanctioned for school use each year in a circulation called *The Trillium List*, which includes textbooks and course material. Popular media lies outside the list, as do computer technology and other venues for controversial issues education.
1998, Oulton et al. 2004a, Soley 1996). They fear charges of indoctrination (Hare 1985) and they feel uncertain what CI is supposed to accomplish (Kelly 2001; Lockwood 1996). Zoric and others (2004: 40) observe, “…many teachers remain hesitant to teach students how to challenge inequities either because they lack knowledge or confidence about ‘what to do next’ once problematic conclusions are articulated.” The literature shows newer teachers in particular do not feel comfortable, or feel they do not know enough about how to take up controversial issues from a social justice perspective (Zoric et al. 2004: 40). A supportive CI framework is clearly necessary.

In summary, most resources gloss over substantive treatment of controversial issues and this presents challenges for teachers. The political agency or professional support necessary for critical thought remains unexamined. Reports of teachers’ attitudes are therefore taken in isolation from issues such as professional supports, in-service opportunities, resource allocation and philosophies of education. Preoccupations with “teacher neutrality” proliferate in the research literature ( Cotton 2006a;2006b; Evans 2006; Kelly 2001; McBee 1996; Monhardt & Monhardt 2000), suggesting that teachers are responsive to messages they receive regarding their roles. For school administrators, the narrative is even vaguer. Resources focus on the teacher as though pedagogy is exclusively a matter of classroom activity; policy contexts and school conflicts are absent from the literature. Associations of school administrators with certainty and decision-making may make us uncomfortable with administrator involvement in controversial issues because we want to keep administrative authority intact.

**Role of the Teacher**

Efforts to disentangle teachers’ understandings of their roles from the content or subject matter they teach prove difficult. The United Kingdom has researched the effects of teachers’
beliefs on their practice as science and environmental education teachers (Cotton 2006b; Levinson 2006; Oulton et al., 2004a; Pedersen & Totten 2001). Oulton et al. (2001) found teachers underpin their roles on controversial issues in three ways:

- Reasons – sticking to the facts
- Balance of views
- Teacher neutrality (though teachers admit it is hard to sustain)

Schommer-Aikins and Hutter (2002) contend teachers need to be convinced of the merit of controversial issues before they work with the concepts. If the teachers’ capacity to engage with controversial issues relies, in part, on some kind of professional knowledge, then some support and education is clearly necessary. Yet research finds that only one in nine teachers report they received any professional support (Oulton et al. 2004a). This explains neutrality – teachers may feel more like parrots than professionals in regarding their role as apolitical information transmitters. Most research indicates teachers adopt neutral roles and they avoid activist orientations (Oulton 2004a). Indeed, many teachers appear to prefer the role of curriculum deliverer (Revell 2005) under these conditions.

Not surprisingly, the literature expresses caution about the role of the teacher. Bellomo and others (2004) caution the role of teaching in current educational contexts is made more difficult given students’ diverse dispositions:

Teachers need to be cautious about sentiments that are expressed regarding neighbourhoods and newcomers because students might have been affected by stereotypes themselves or are developing guilt as a result of newly acquired perspectives and information about the hurt and pain they have or might have inflicted upon others. The sampled content can also cause anger in students, as the injustices towards women, African Canadians, and the environment are explored (111).
While the authors acknowledge the tensions, there is no insight into how teachers ought to navigate this emotional space being ‘aware’ of CI possibilities and ‘cautious’ about the risk of discrimination. Are the teachers themselves exempt from emotions of guilt, or from the risk of imposing stereotypes on students, or immune to the content of the lesson itself? Furthermore, to what extent is ‘feeling guilty’ necessarily the same as recognizing privilege?

Emphasis on the teachers’ ethical stance points to concerns over teacher interference, or worse, indoctrination (Lockwood 1996; Hare 1984). Such fears inspire Campbell (2003) to argue for a universal principle – “a maxim and best principle for dilemmas in teaching” with the maxim that teachers must always work for the “best interests of children” (Campbell 2003:61). Campbell goes on to argue that there is a “right moral response” for most educational situations, and that teachers have the task of anticipating conflict so that issues are “settled.” Conforming to normative values is an important component of CI education:

Every day we talk about friendship, about being friends, how to get along with one another. We had so many problems at lunchtime. Remember about peace and friendship? I want to hear only of positive things. No more of fights (Campbell 2003: 49).

Consensus is a central aim in this moral ‘training’ view. Sustained differences or conflicts are not tenable because the teachers’ instructional control and tone means he or she guides students toward a theme-based outcome or pre-determined moral view inferring that controversial issues lead to foregone conclusions. Thus the teacher’s role is merely directing students toward these ends. The ‘successful’ teacher is a teacher whose lesson culminates in the preferred value judgment.

Campbell’s moral position prohibits teachers taking a partial position on social issues; “teachers should refrain from saying, ‘this is what I believe’” (2003:81). CI pedagogy is
contingent on the teachers’ moral authority (2003:79). Unable to wade into the waters of authentic cultural and epistemological controversy and conflict, teachers working within such a model function simply as conduits of the moral status quo (or worse indoctrination). What exactly that moral perspective entails is unspecified, except that it is akin to character education “discerning between right and wrong” (Campbell 2003: 50). Issues of genuine difference may not arise in moral education classrooms because classrooms are regulated “for the children’s own good” (50).

Though controversial issues offers a powerful venue for exploring dominant assumptions and unpacking clashing ideologies, education norms and power relations (Richardson 1986), adopting a CI approach within the current schooling paradigm is not without risks to teacher’s professionalism and/or integrity. Philosophers such as Kelly (2001) explore epistemic dependence in the treatment of teachers’ roles regarding controversial issues. Roles range from positions such as exclusive neutrality, exclusive partiality, neutral impartiality, and committed impartiality. These positions are variously considered in the literature in terms of their capacity to be genuinely held by the teacher and in terms of the effect on instruction, indoctrination and epistemic dependence (Andreotti & Warwick 2008; Hare 1985; Kelly 2001; Oxfam 2006). In order to avoid these conditions as seemingly undemocratic, teachers choose to present a range of stances in CI contexts. On one hand, teachers declare themselves neutral (without opinion), and on the other, they declare their opinion and argue to defend it (partiality) (Kelly 2001; Oxfam 2006).

Impartiality is usually taken up as a defense of reason – the pure distilled version of experience untrammeled by another’s emotional baggage, namely the baggage of the more powerful teacher. The argument on impartiality develops as follows: neutral or impartial roles
for teachers are best because students ought to uncover the reasons for their own positions without undue influence, the worst of which is indoctrination. Kelly (2001) observes that reason and emotion are not in distinct orbits of human experience, but that they interact and inter-relate. More troubling, reason detached from emotion as the preferred condition for student inquiry is inarguably outdated, yet so enigmatic that we replay it in the classroom. Robotic rationality as a stance worthy to address the complexities of controversial issues is troubling, first because it is inadequate to the task, and second because students are falsely constructed as developmental tabula rasa. Matthews (1994) has written about our construction of childhood as the preserve of idealism; it is a construction unique to Western culture. He notes how many other cultures do not construct childhood in terms of preserving a false notion of innocence.

On the flip-side, partiality involves disclosure of the teacher’s position (Kelly 2001). The benefit of this approach is that teachers can share their own biases and be open about what they feel. Committed impartiality idealizes the teacher as the “collegial mentor” (Kelly 2001: 237; McBee 1996). This position operates well in one-on-one relations, but it is practically impossible to mentor an entire class at one time –students’ knowledge and interests are not homogenous. Finally, it is false to assume that students will be always ‘open’ and ‘respectful’ towards impartiality that is asymmetrical and disingenuous. Students will not learn the opposite of what they experience.

Emphasis on teachers’ roles constitutes an under-theorizing of curricular authority; the authorities that dictate the ends of instruction. For example, teachers do not always freely choose their units of study (Claire & Holden 2007). Conversely, teachers’ roles may prefer teaching particular subject matter rather than cultivating student relationships. The climate of fear and the
ambiguity regarding teachers’ CI roles (Lockwood 1996; Oulton et al., 2004a; 2004b) indicate that their roles are governed by complex influences in their working lives.

If we agree with Campbell that the success of any CI approach in the classroom rests on how the teacher deals with her or his authority, then we assume CI pedagogy depends entirely on the teacher’s role. Furthermore, none of the roles cited in the literature (playing ‘devil’s advocate’ or ‘debate moderator’) (Lockwood 1996; Oxfam 2006) consider institutional factors as potential pedagogical influences on the roles teachers adopt. The literature does not explore effects such as pre-service or professional training on role development (Schommer-Aikens & Hutter 2002; Scott 2003). As a result, over-emphasis on teachers’ roles or philosophical definitions may mask powerful institutional influences. There is clearly a need to plumb teachers’ understanding of the contexts in which teachers locate, determine, select or default to their current roles, and to establish how such choices interact with institutional policy.

This marks the entry point for policy and controversial issues – the point where the literature detects a gap: the institutional relation of policy to teachers and school administrators’ understanding. There is another missing link. What about the role of school administrators? If as the literature indicates, CI teaching is messy, the teachers’ roles are conflicted and under-developed (the teacher is variously configured as a moral authority, a debate moderator, a gatekeeper, a support to critical thinking, an impartial observer and procedural authority), then who is monitoring the situation and what oversight is in place? Who is/is not providing support? And, the idea that CI pedagogy is a straightforward process of policy implementation or rational

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13 Procedural Authority is perhaps the strongest tradition in CI and values education in general. Stenhouse (1975) argued procedural neutrality attempts to validate students’ rights to inquire without contending with the teacher’s authority. For a more current critique of procedural neutrality (aligning with balance and bias detection strategies), see E. Ashton and B. Watson. Values Education: A fresh look at procedural neutrality. *Educational Studies*, 24 (2) 183-194, 1998.
argumentation is simplistic. Moral dilemmas arouse our emotions and we do not respond in predictable ways.

To conclude, the literature reveals substantive gaps: the absence of a clear CI framework evidenced by an over-reliance on strategies to stand in for richer, deeper understandings of controversial issues, and uncertainty about an approach to CI (specific skill delivery as sufficient CI education, social transformation, civic awareness, moral education, democratic engagement or critical thinking). Finally, the literature shows a gap between the scholarship theorizing the conceptual potential of CI education and the kinds of activities happening in classrooms, particularly how questions of power and authority alter policy on controversial issues. To understand, then, how a policy on controversial issues (CSI) works in the lives of educators dealing with the issues as evidenced by the literature, research is necessary. How do individuals working with CI policy understand its effects and does it support critical democratic education?

The ‘What is Policy?’ Question

In the introduction I asserted a critical-feminist position that policy has historical antecedents in rationalism and masculinity evidenced through the call for cohesive social narratives (Ellsworth1998; Joshee & Johnson 2005; Mouffe 2000). These roots linger and render ambiguity concerning the purpose and future direction of policy – a condition which Ball metaphorically calls policy’s “epistemological dry rot” (1994:15). Ironically, ‘the dry rot’ is not the result of a paucity of ideas about policy, but rather an over-abundance of its manifestations. Policy has been variously defined as: subjectivity (Hogwood & Gunn, 1990); a cycle (Bowe, Ball & Gold 1992; Vidovich 2001); a web (Joshee & Johnson 2005); a political undertaking with uncertain exercise of power (Bascia 2001; Elmore 1977; Levin & Riffle 2000; McLaughlin
1987; Ozga 2000); a settlement (Seddon 1989); and a problem of the smallest units (McLaughlin 1987: 34). More spirited iterations of policy describe it in terms of a “collage” or “the wild profusion of local practice” (Ball 1994:10).

Certainly policy manifests as textual document, but the extent to which this is acted on and how these actions affect or constrain subsequent actions suggest that policy is very much a matter of processes (Ball 1994), power (Foucault; 1980) and language interpretation (Fairclough 1995; MacLure 2003; Roe 1994). Policy has an afterlife beyond its textual creation (Taylor 2004). Effects of human interaction also render unpredictability. Policy is an incomplete authority; its effects are contingent on human agency (Vidovich 2001). What is policy to me?

Policy is the debate and discussion around problems arising from the text/document; it is the effects and interpretations, and the reworking of these interpretations by individuals in the field. These multiple activities constitute a policy discourse. Policy also has critical potential: discourse can probe how policy production, texts and usages invoke persuasion and power to convince us that a proposition is true (Fairclough 1995).

Much of education tradition is geared towards the inculcation of discursive practices and particular cultural meanings and values. Educators’ capacity to interpret policy is vital to their professional responsibility. The problem is; how should the language of policy be interpreted and according to what or whose authority? Further, how is policy interpretation connected or disconnected from a thriving democratic society? Feminist theorists have wrestled against gender domination evidenced through language practices. Their struggles demonstrate that language entails behavioural outcomes. But this is not an obvious 1:1 relation; policy texts can be sensitive
barometers of social changes and individuals’ understandings demonstrate their reconstitution as subjects in society.

**Managerial Policy**

The dominant tradition in the policy is certainly a managerial one (Ozga 2000). For this reason, it has chronological priority in this review. Traditional theorists have often referred to policy as ‘policy science’ – “that set of procedures which enables one to determine the technically best course of action to adopt in order to implement a decision or achieve a goal” (Fay 1975 as cited in Ball 1995: 258). The managerial model invokes a stereotype of policy process: elected officials typically define and interpret a policy problem and then supply the intervention, with little consultation from public opinion (de Coning 2000; deLeon 1997). Driven by empirical data, so-called rational positions allocate tremendous power and legitimacy to decision-making based on these processes. So great is this reliance on empirical procedures and processes that some theorists view managerial functioning as the rational choice for policy (Clune 1990; Newmann 2002; Ozga 2000). Critics of managerial reliance on objective data cite the failure of objectivity to accurately represent the ‘truth’ or the ‘reality’ that it dearly seeks (Phillips 2000).

More contemporary iterations of managerial policy in the literature align with a specific form of neoliberal ideology that emphasizes “business metaphors, logic and language” (Saltman 2005:126) and through practices such as curriculum standardization and evaluation systems (Vibert 2005). For these reasons, especially for its capacity to serve accountability interests, managerial policy is the mainstay conception of research on policy effectiveness. Managerial policy approaches are not useful to this research study, as the discourse is too abstracted from
theory and is too focused on providing objective accounts (Gale 2001), or “the appearance of integrity and quality” (Vibert 2005:119). In fact, this approach stands in diametric opposition to both the theoretical and conceptual issues underpinning the dissertation; questions of values, knowledge, power and benefit that are not typically accessible from managerial approaches.

Managerial discourses are important and dangerous. Ironically, managerial policy approaches often broadcast the liberal slogan, ‘teachers and students make the difference to educational change because they have within their means the power to improve education.’ The ‘public’ actually being served by managerial policy is typically the powerful privileged public (Vibert 2005: 119) and ‘participation’ is always upstaged by procedures. The policy as managerial science discourse often invokes effectiveness as a tool for blaming on the school a range of ‘problems’ from parents, to the economy, to society (Ball 1994: 260). Either intentionally misguided or politically naïve, managerial policy approaches reproduce the educational status quo. Change is the least likely to follow from managerial policy (English 2005).

Policy Sociology

Other discourse claims for policy, such as its capacity to cut across field specializations to constitute policy sociology, are vibrant and engaging in the literature review. Sociological approaches interrogate both micro and macro contexts in the politics of education (Ball 1994). Policy sociology merges two disciplines and aims to add breadth to policy studies in both the area of policy formulation and in its analysis (Gale 2001). Policy sociology clearly challenges policy as cohesive; it intentionally investigates the ruptures or fissures in policy. As such,
sociological approaches to policy consider the relations between policies, the contribution of narratives to text in forming policy discourses, and the marginalizing effects of policy.

Description is an important feature of policy sociology. For example, Ball (1994) develops a theory of policy as a cycle – influence-text production-practice-outcomes-political strategy – that lays bare the assumptions of policy processes. A shortcoming of policy sociology is that it does not emphasize theoretical commitments, such as critical democracy or citizen engagement, as necessary conditions. There is criticism that the science of sociology inevitably turns individuals into ‘objects’ as a project of the science of making sociological generalizations (Bourdieu 1992; Phillips 2000). Bourdieu claims here that sociology requires exploration also of the ‘unthought’ or ‘unthinkable’ categories of experiences – what is omitted from power relations and accounts of experience more than control of sociological practice. Policy sociology also falls under critique from Raab and Troyna (1994) for ignoring the importance of social justice positionalities and the importance of social change (e.g. anti-racism, feminism, and equity). For this sort of reason, Fairclough (1995) critiques policy sociology’s use of text as the default position of activism.

**Critical Policy**

The literature reveals that sociological and critical policy approaches may intersect. Policy sociology can develop social critique (Gale 2001), and critical policy approaches can draw on sociological methodologies. However, one distinction between policy sociology and more critical approaches is that policy sociology intentionally draws on a wide range of disciplines to build a methodology, whereas critical policy specifically attunes itself to the origins of social injustice and that which we have become accustomed to taking for granted.
Critical policy accomplishes this, in part, by consistently arguing that interpretation is always a construction of meaning, and that these constructs reveal important insights about systems, institutions, governance and the structured use of power. In critical work on policy, exploring how meaning is made entails exploring both the textual boundaries as well as the traditions which create a policy text (Bacchi 2000; Fairclough 1995; MacLure 2003). Critical approaches to policy incorporate problematizations to explore policy’s discursive constructions (unstable or contradictory intentions and responses) and how they are marshaled for a variety of educational purposes (Bacchi 2000: 45-48).

A glimmer of the historical roots of a critical-democratic policy perspective can be found. Long ago, Wildavsky (1979) critiqued policy rationalism because it had positioned itself as the protector of citizens by speaking for it. He argued policy ought to fight this rational-protectionism, particularly in representation of government bureaucracy and policy. There is no better way to start understanding the role and function of policy discourse and narratives in particular, than by exploring those flashpoints where policy narratives are criticized most vehemently (Roe 1994:34). The resistance of critical approaches to totalizing narratives is a constituent function of this approach. Secondly, citizen engagement in policy issues is valued as a form of democratic engagement (Bacchi 2000). Interestingly, Popkewitz, Lindblad (2000) and Stein (2004) contend the resistance to democratic policy processes wags on because institutions uphold a false ideological binary: “equity versus efficiency” (Stein 2004:72). While equity appears to be a new concern of critical policy approaches, efficiency is regarded as the long-standing domain of managerial policy approaches (Newman 2002; Popkewitz & Lindblad 2002; Rezai-Rashti 2003; Stein 2001).
Policy as Critical Discourse

Power

Power is the architect of policy discourse because it influences values and choices. Newman (2002: 347) contends policy studies must probe policy processes as well as documents because assumptions of neutrality can only be challenged through interpretive activity of power. Individuals are not merely objects of policy or social control – they do have subjective power – they make choices which reflect their values in responding to policy (Bacchi 2000). Thus critical discourse is a conceptual tool to establish and examine the connections between properties of text, features of discourse practices (text distribution and consumption) and wider socio-cultural practice (Fairclough 1995:87) including the use of power. Power is not deleterious to these social processes; power is not simply a predator to neutral policy processes. Power is a social reality that helps make assumptions visible. Power circulates through decision-making processes, relations, negations, oppressions and opportunities (Foucault 1980). Power relations require acknowledgement and interrogation especially in the production of text (Taylor 2004) and in the discourse of interpretation (Fairclough 1995; Henze & Arriaza 2006).

Discourse

Discourse is a vital conception to critical policy probing the political dynamics between text and response (understanding and experiences) (Bacchi 2000; Ball 1993). According to the literature, policy discourse has a critical function rather than a definitive one – to disarticulate texts after spotting the ways the texts are stitched together (Bacchi 2000; MacLure 2003). Work by Stein (2004) and Vidovich (2001) call attention also to the historical experiences and their effect as they accrue into traditions and ways of thinking about policy and society over time. Critical iterations of discourse seek more than presentation; they aspire to alter practices for
social justice aims (Taylor 2004). They consider experiences embedded in the marginal spaces of society constituting non-dominant discourses. This critical work pays explicit attention to discrepancies, divergences, and silences such as what is not heard or what is not said. Thus communicative acts address the contexts of oppression in order to transform social conditions toward greater social justice and democratic ends (Young 2000).

Discourse is paradoxically intertwined with: language, textual representation (documentation), and individual experiences (MacLure 2003). Underwriting any plausible intention towards documents is the fact that documents are themselves representations of reality (Irish 2003). In fact, the literature shows discourse being increasingly used for technological-managerial purposes (Taylor 2004). Education goals develop through the lens of globalization. Neoliberal policy discourses talk about globalization as a fact that demands reforms and economic change to enhance educational efficiency and adaptability in order to compete. Neoliberal policy discourses present social justice issues (erroneously) as either social cohesion or threats to social cohesion (Taylor 2004). Ideally then, critical discourse is attenuated to the gaps and disjuncture implicit in engaging with documentary text and human understanding (MacLure 2003; Roe 1994).

To conclude this section, of the three policy approaches prominent in the available literature I prefer a critical policy approach. Critical policy takes democratic agonism (Mouffe 2000) into policy spaces where silences may flourish under traditional policy processes. Institutional change can follow through public critique. Linking public interests to policy process is the only way to overcome the thin conception of representational democracy that divides voters from power-holders and to build towards a thicker and more robust notion of critical democracy as argued in the theoretical section of this dissertation.
Chapter Four: Conceptual Framework and Methodology

Consciousness finds itself inevitably facing the necessity of having to choose a language.

-Mikhail Bakhtin

This chapter delineates the conceptual framework and the research lens and explains how the conceptual schema connects to the research and sub-questions. Next, the methodology section reviews the research process: the research participants, data collection and management. I explain the limitations intrinsic to CDA. I conclude with the research profiles of the research participants.

My theoretical framework asserts that a robust, critical democracy invites public engagement with policy to negotiate agreement about meaning. Young states, “Only in a democratic political system do all members of a society have, in principle, the opportunity to try to influence public policy to serve or protect their interests” (2000:17). Individuals involved publicly\textsuperscript{14} sculpt the form of democracy\textsuperscript{15} through democratic participation.\textsuperscript{16}

The research examines thirteen individuals at the local school level to identify the policy discourse(s) (e.g. allocation of values, statements of prescriptive intent and rationales for action). Discourse values are tethered to language as Bakhtin declares. Therefore, it is crucial to research the stories of school administrators and teachers, as their narratives convey the local context

\textsuperscript{14} \textit{Involvement} is not to be confused with \textit{compliance}. I have in mind a range of engagements: policy transgression and subversion, policy transformation, policy diffusion and denial, in essence, policy as democratic \textit{agonism}.

\textsuperscript{15} Tensions regarding what form of ideal democracy – critical, feminist, deliberative, radical or representational democracy – do not resolve by participation alone, but without public policy discourse, we default to elected elites to make decisions for us (deLeon 1997; Vidovich 2001).

\textsuperscript{16} Paradoxically, there are necessary dispositions for engaging in public policy discussions (participation) such as reasonableness, ability to listen, and open-mindedness, and these are ideally cultivated through public education about controversial issues. Moreover the “polity” involved in decision-making will depend on the situation. Fung (2003) offers models for mini-publics suited to various aims from representational to participatory to deliberative in their approach to democracy.
conditions, the policy’s projected ideals, and the values emergent through enactment. I believe this kind of narrative policy study ought to precede research on policy implementation. Ford (2003: 6) argues, “…the most insidious dangers of system practices are those that hide significant effects in innocuous activity and unacknowledged decision-making.” An analysis of how individuals understand policy sets the groundwork for policy analysis on implementation at a later time once these system assumptions and ‘innocuous’ activities have been excavated.

Individuals face obstacles to gaining access to the dominant policy paradigms. Critical theorists identify two central barriers; the problem of individual representation in policy (the equity problematic) and the knowledge problematic (the reasoning embedded in policies that incur access or exclusion) (adapted from Lindblad and Popkewitz 2000). Ball (1994) indentifies three policy phases as supportive of teacher and school administrator agency: the context of influence in the policy-producing center and in the education system; 2) the context of policy production within that policy center; and 3) school as the context of policy practice influenced by the previous two phases (how individuals understand, enact, interpret policy). I focus on the third phase of policy in policy study – the context of practice (e.g. ‘understanding’).

For me, understanding identifies a phenomenon related to specific events: interpreting policy, communicating policy, identifying barriers shaping policy, administering policy, rationale for practice, and policy impacts. Because policy change is ‘incremental’ and ‘slow’ – ‘it creeps’ (McLaughlin 1987; Weiss 1980) – attention to this range of activities captures the phenomenon of understanding and acknowledges policy discourse as critical, complex and contextual. Understanding reflects the influences of capacity and practice (Ozga 2000).
CI Domain

- CI definitions: conflicted, limited, lack of clarity
- Current CI programs and policies: excludes student diversity; does not take teachers and school administrators into account; reproduces existing programs/lessons/strategy
- Challenges teachers face; poor access to supports, resources
- Role of teachers: mediator, devil’s advocate, neutral, impartial, partial, observer

Policy Domain

- Different definitions of policy: document, text, participation, resources, discourse, enactment
- Critical policy seeks social transformation through participation—the exercise of individual agency
- Teachers’ role: lesson delivery, strategy implementation, policy compliance
- School administrators’ policy roles: communication with community, mediating school board relations, in-service provision, budgeting, resourcing, programming

How do teachers and school administrators understand controversial issues policy?

1. How does CSI inform teachers and school administrators’ choices of roles and CI agendas?

2. What challenges and barriers do the teachers and school administrators face with respect to CSI?

3. What is the impact of CSI?
Explanation of Conceptual Schema: Conceptual Framework

The schema depicts two domains – controversial issues and policy. This research is a policy study – not a policy analysis. Whereas policy analysis aims to improve a given policy process (e.g. effective implementation or content), policy study is much broader. Hence, policy study examines a wide range of processes, objectives and content and takes into account the broader political and social contexts of policy (Hogwood & Gunn 1984). Therefore, research on understanding may indeed clarify policy implementation issues, but the aim of this research is to go beyond improving/evaluating implementation processes17.

Controversial Issues Domain

There are several indicators that research on CSI policy is valuable and necessary. Controversial issues literature develops the following issues, but generates some gaps:

- CI definitions- defence on epistemological grounds; lack of clarity; limited use
- CI Program or lesson implementation – focuses on strategy-in-class application
- Teachers’ roles in CI: neutrality, devil’s advocate, impartial, partial, mediator among others
- CI media resources and strategies accompanied by teacher anecdotes

Many definitions of controversial issues are thought provoking, but they are not always helpful for teachers or school administrators. Philosophical definitions tend to be insensitive to contemporary issues such as globalization, politics and policy effects. Philosophical conceptions often fail to consider a wide range of situations or critical pedagogical purposes because these conceptions develop moral frameworks – ways of thinking about controversial issues – without considering contextual implications fully. One prevalent assumption in the philosophical work is

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17 Anderson (1994) uses the term policy studies to designate the study of public policy undertaken to gain greater basic understanding of political behaviour. This involves an evaluation of the impact of public policies on society, both in terms of expected and unexpected outcomes.
that CI pedagogy is a matter of classroom instruction. This view makes a CI approach contingent on teachers’ dispositional capacity (Hare 1985) or the clarification of values in CI education (Dewhurst 1992). Though development of dispositions and values claims are important aspects of theorizing CI, there is more to the CSI story. These three major definitional shortcomings – lack of definitional clarity, limited usefulness and conflicting kinds of definitions – lead to the research question: how do teachers and school administrators understand CSI? Further, school administrators’ responses to CSI are not evident in the literature, which gives the impression that their role is unimportant, uniform or neutral. I made the research question and sub-questions address theses gaps in the CI literature (e.g. administrator representation and the problems with definitions).

A prominent literature area discusses the context of CI as programs and strategies. These are likely useful to many teachers, but there are some risks in assuming programs represent the full scope of CI. The assumption that teachers control CI pedagogy solely through their decisions regarding CI curricula overlooks the process of administering the policy and barriers to enacting it. Failure to interrogate CI interpretations leads to reliance on narrow strategies and lesson applications to stand in for more substantive kinds of political contexts. It is imperative that we understand how CSI policy is shaping teachers and school administrators’ knowledge of controversial issues and what impact it actually has on their CI agenda. Underpinning this phenomenon are assumptions about the purposes of education, the role of controversial issues in education, and teachers’ capacity to deliver instruction.

Current research contends school administrators play an important role in interpreting policy as local users (Kirst 2000). What kinds of decisions are school administrators making in their working lives that reflect their CSI policy conception? For example, choice of curricula and
current policy conditions are seldom under the control of the teacher (Clune 1990). It is also important to understand policy administration, lest teachers become de-skilled by assessment of their work detached from relations with administrators and others (Kincheloe 2005). Without attention to these broader research issues and implications, much of the available literature on the role of the teacher proves to be consistently stigmatizing because it ignores the factors shaping CSI understandings: the politics of policy (e.g. its rationale); communication about the policy; and the impact of policy at the level of school culture. The second sub-question probes teachers’ and school administrators’ roles in accessing this information.

**Policy Domain**

In the introduction to the dissertation, I discuss a plethora of policy definitions. I suggest that definitions do not make knowing what policy is any clearer. For me, policy is a discursive process involving discourse, text, context, problems, resource provision, enactment processes, and conflicting communicative perspectives. Policies are not neutral entities; they are encoded and embedded within historical, social and political constructions (Ball 1994; Ford 2003). Compromises and trade-offs in the day-to-day life of policy are part of the politics of this phenomenon. A policy program is always unstable because it is open to renegotiation, entitlement and the circulation of power (de Coning 2000; Gran 1983; Ozga 2000). Therefore, *policy texts* and *policy interpretations* are intrinsically connected; the dynamic interaction of policy texts and human relations in education to produce discourses. This dynamic phase of policy study deserves research attention, as it is currently under-researched (Ball et al., 1992; Ball 1994; Fitz & Halpin 1994; Vidovich 2001).
A policy text never dictates the absolute meaning of a policy even if it attempts to be prescriptive; policy texts are not closed and complete. Policy texts emerge in real and different contexts — policies layer on top of existing policies already in action and at work in very different school contexts. The complements to text are enactment and interpretation — how policy readers respond to policy’s communication. These are two reasons underlying the choice of research focus and questions: concern for contextual implications of policy and the kinds of meaning made through the interpretive act. Interpretation also implies an acceptance of diverse perspectives and multiple representations; there are ethical gains to engaging in the activity of wider participation in policy processes (de Leon 1997; Fitz & Halpin 1994).

Policy as the domain suggests is both text and discourse. I therefore develop two strands — the critical discourse analysis of the CSI policy document (see critical discourse analysis of CSI: 94–109)\(^\text{18}\) and the research activity engaging teachers and school administrators —structure the research agenda.

To mitigate unjust exclusion and to uphold my beliefs in critical democracy, I contend it is important to know how individuals who ‘receive’ a policy actually interpret\(^\text{19}\) it at what theorists call ‘the smallest unit’ or the ‘street level’ (McLaughlin 1987). Fung (2003) comments the contribution of such understanding to policy study is creative and otherwise difficult to harness through institutional or macro policy investigations.

Focusing on policy interpretation and policy understanding enables two kinds of agency. First, a focus on participants’ understandings enables a full examination of ideas otherwise presented as contradictions or ‘common sense.’ Interpretation can probe relations, articulations,!

\(^{18}\) The critical discourse analysis of CSI renders one interpretation — a backdrop — against which participants cast their own interpretations.

\(^{19}\) I see that I am implying that ‘interpreting’ is mutually constitutive of ‘action’ and it is a recursive dynamic process. One’s interpretation shapes one’s choice of some experiences and actions that, in turn, shape one’s understanding and interpretation.
struggles, and successes that we take for granted such as social cohesion in policy responses. Interpretation can theorize alternative conceptions to the ones embedded by the authorship of policy. I hold the individual as a category for research such that what individuals say they do and what they say they practice in context is foregrounded in the research as ‘understanding.’ For example, individuals will understand policy differently depending on their skills, history, professional experiences, personal experiences, access to resources and working context. Codd contends, “For any text, a plurality of readers must necessarily produce a plurality of readings” (1988 as cited in Ball 1994: 16).

The policy domain in the schema highlights understanding as part of critical policy. The schema draws out points from the literature on critical policy study. Important dimensions of the policy domain for school administrators and teachers are:

- Conceptualizing CSI: what are the key concepts? Who accesses the policy and why?
- Policy rationale: CSI serves whose interests and whose interests are excluded and by whom? What is the policy intended to do?
- School administrators’ responsibility to parents/community: How accessible is the text to another audience?
- School administrators’ responsibility for curricular policy (e.g. curricula such as the controversial Genocide Unit): is there a ‘hidden agenda’?
- School administrators’ work in liaison with the school board: implementation funding or mechanism for evaluating the policy
- School administrators organize in-services and budgeting for resources based on how they judge the merit of CI policy.
- The identification of barriers to CSI enactment – in servicing, professional support, resources
School administrators and teachers share the following areas of policy practice and experience, but in different ways: CI understanding, school culture and relations, policy access, school board communication, in servicing, professional identity understood as ‘role’ and relationships with parents and communities. Research indicates that there is a rich ‘underground’ reality to policy after it has been drafted (Ball 1994; 1998). School administrators are seldom neutral in their role as policy implementers; they often show concern for policy’s values and ideological positions (Kirst 2000). School administrators also take account of interests such as the effects of policy proposals on organizational survival and well-being, personal careers and advantage, both in terms of their own stakes and those of other participants among a host of other contextual concerns (Weiss, 1988 as cited in Kirst 2000: 380). In this way, policy administration is ‘flavoured’ by ideology and personal commitment.

Teachers also work in an environment where competing policies and historical conditions alter their capacity to engage or understand an existing policy. Failure to research and analyze the responses of teachers and school administrators to policy paints an incomplete policy picture of what CSI policy is.

This lens enables me to use gaps in the literature to focus on areas of CSI policy and raise the questions I do because there is evidence that there are ongoing problems in the literature. Secondly, the lens explores the interests in individuals who have not participated yet in voicing responses to this specific policy text. Injecting direct, mobilized, deliberative citizen participation into policy studies can draw out the voices of less advantaged policy users, which reflects my ideological commitments. Theorists observe policy study as an antidote to enhance the equity in legislation and policy-making (Fung 2003).
The Research Question and Sub-Questions:

It seems to me as if the cart comes before the horse when policy research examines implementation before it considers policy users’ understanding. As a conceptual tool for discourse analysis in the policy study, understanding is concerned with experiences, problems and solutions throughout the cycle of policy (Ball 1994; Goodwin 1996 as cited in Bacchi 2000: 48). I want to know how this policy is interpreted by administrators and teachers because policy production without making the effort to examine how it played out in the lives of individuals makes uneven (and unjust) ground for further policy development.

While “understanding” may suggest a quagmire of ambiguity20 for developing the research and sub-questions, I view this uncertainty as space for theorizing power relations and discourses that might be constrained by more leading kinds of questions. Conventional use of “understanding” enables elucidation of policy dynamics such as unintended effects and unforeseen consequences (McLaughlin 1987). I accept its potential uncertainty; it is well-suited to the method of narrative analysis concerned with power, politics and the normative gaze.

I decided to focus on school administrators and teachers because I wanted to bind my research to the school actors. I did not want to eliminate students – they would make a valuable contribution – but for practical limitations of time, access and funding, I could not do this research. I also realize that standards-based reform movements have intensified the work of school administrators and other local level policy users to work with terms such as “evidence base” (Kirst 2000). Honig and Coburn (2007) argue school administrators incorporate or deliberately decide not to incorporate evidence into organizational decisions through what are

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20 I use “understanding” as a conventional term, not as an operational definition where understanding functions to eliminate certain hypothetical assumptions and confirm others (Becker & Bryman 2004).
sometimes complex and intensive processes of interpretation (18). Policy study must consider the user’s context in making decisions about policy processes because obvious differences between and among schools’ political cultures and commitments to local control imply that achieving compatibility between a text and context requires knowledge of users’ organisational settings and policy environments (Kirst 2000). For these reasons, I ask the following questions:

*How do teachers and school administrators understand controversial issues policy? (Research question)*

Sub-questions to the research question are:

1. *How do teachers’ and school administrators’ views regarding CSI policy inform their specific choices of roles and CI agendas?*
2. *What challenges and barriers do the teachers and school administrators face with respect to CSI?*
3. *What is the impact of CSI?*

The sub-questions extend the central conceptual thread of understanding. For example, understanding in the first sub-question, I examine roles in light of the theoretical lens of social justice and critical democracy. The second question addresses participants’ understanding of their agency and the realization of their choices. This is a reasonable way to access experiences without observation of classes or examining school administrators’ daybooks. The general question of “experiences” addresses an open-ended possibility to inquire in a variety of ways in a variety of contexts. This question enables a high degree of sensitivity to context. The fourth and final question conveys judgement and assessment as well as reflection on the practical matters of practice, communication and barriers (Edwards 2005).
Methodology

Policy: Critical Discourse

One important tension among critical policy theorists is the role of the text: specifically, to what extent should text be the centerpiece of policy analysis? Policies also do not operate in textual isolation; they operate within a nexus of policies, or relational webs (Joshee & Johnson 2005). It is important to appreciate the power policy can have over educators’ working lives, but it is equally important to pay attention to external political factors shaping policy text and interpretation (deLeon 1997). For Fairclough (1995), a text like policy is the only thing worth analyzing, whereas Bacchi (2000), MacLure (2003) and Vidovich (2001) regard text as one policy iteration. For me, one value of these collective theorists’ work on critical discourse is the acceptance of ideological uncertainty; it provides a narrative tool to examine political conditions and unstable policy contexts (Roe 1994). Policy as a critical discourse examines a vast range of culturally-sanctioned regimens affecting policy relations in the form of special interests among a wide range of individuals in a given community.

As Bacchi (2000:54) argues, “There is a distinct under-theorizing among these and other policy-as-discourse analysts as to the meaning and uses of discourses at the receiving end of the decisions.” Contextual implications are an often-ignored area of the discourse precisely because generalizing from them is difficult though it challenges traditional policy’s universalizing pretensions. Recognition of challenges to policy is compatible with research methodology working from the ‘ground up’ (Glaser & Strauss 1967).

Foucault (1989) embraces the power and productivity of discourse practices, for him, discourse is not a top-down centralizing force of oppression. This view contrasts with notions of
official policy as “the exercise of political power and the language used to legitimate that process” (235). Of particular interest is Foucault’s approach to authority in discourse analysis (1989: 28):

These pre-existing forms of continuity, all these syntheses that are accepted without question, must remain in suspense. They must not be rejected definitively of course....they must be disturbed; we must show that they do not come about themselves, but are always the result of construction the rules of which must be known, and the justifications of which must be scrutinized...

Discourse practices have the reflexive capacity to pose questions such as, What is the mutual hold policy places on individuals and individuals place on policy? Implicating subjectivity and power enables discursive inquiry. Moving the conversation beyond the ‘text’, discourse exposes other discursive constructions make change difficult and it reveals the political nature of these constructions (Bacchi 2000:50). Thus discourse analysis is useful because it can illuminate, among other things, relational asymmetries in race, gender, class, ability, and sexual orientation (Young 1986). This capacity for critical examination of oppressions cited in my theoretical framework as social justice (Young 1990) as part of critical democracy makes this methods, though a relatively new in the area of policy study (Vidovich 2001), a useful one for my study.

Policy Narratives

Roe defines policy narratives as short stories (scenarios and arguments) which underwrite and stabilize the assumptions for policymaking in situations that persist with many unknowns, a high degree of independence of individual responses, and little if any, agreement (1994: 34). This openness to uncertainty and space for exploration makes narratives a good approach to my critical policy study. Given the complexity of working with controversial issues, it is likely that CI policy disregards shared experience. Narrative enables access to these avenues of difference.
Roe (1994) says narratives form a collective of larger (small m) meta-narratives wherein politics, power and social justice issues around leadership and educational pedagogy can be explored. In addition, policy narratives there are *non-stories, counter-stories* and *meta-narratives* (3). These narrative forms offer alternatives to dominant policy narratives presented by the text and options in addition to possible critique. They support social justice impulses agendas precisely because narratives support complexity, uncertainty and polarization without sacrificing a call to action.

Vidovich (2001) argues conceptions of policy narrative are complicated by the absence of clear frameworks for studying local level policy activity. The assertion here is that multiplicity may not lead to a meta-narrative space for interrogating the roots of policy uncertainty or what is at stake. Whereas, advocates of policy narratives argue uncertainty and complexity underwrite and stabilize the narrative assumptions for decision-making, opponents of it see the risk of polarization- binary argumentation without clear elucidation of the issue. Within the conception of policy narrative, there lies considerable uncertainty with individuals regarding what is actually the situation regarding a policy action or political context, or even what is in their best interests (Roe 1994). However, points of conflict or narratives of concern, conflict, interest or disinterest spark awareness as to the important role policy narratives can play in policy studies.

One important clarification of narrative inquiry and its role in discourse analysis is necessary. According to Connelly and Clandinin (2000), narrative inquiry is a kind of curative against the very socio-political analysis I attempt in this research. They argue socio-political analysis creates reductionism “through the use of abstraction and formalism” (38). According to qualitative researchers like Connelly and Clandinin, narrative analysis works in opposition to
grand narratives. They critique socio-political theorists for collecting data to justify their frameworks whereas narratives (in their view) always stay close to the heart of the issue.

Despite the appeal of narratives as a policy conception and method, many issues remain uncertain or unresolved. Decision-making is clearly more complicated given contradictory or competing narrative evidence. On the other hand, narratives tell us not what we may want to hear, but what actually happens to individuals in schools. Another concern is that dominant voices are heard and marginal voices are further marginalized. If researchers are aware of this potentiality, they can pay attention to what was overlooked, rejected, annoying, embraced, shared, rushed, misconstrued, developed or what was simply confusing and irrelevant. Central conceptual questions I asked during my data analysis regarding the narratives were:

- Realism- account or accurate description?
- Where does the value of narrative reside?
- What is the relation between narratives?
- What is my role?
- What is the interplay between individual and collective narratives?

**Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)**

Ball, Bowe and Gold (1992) attempt to bridge the individual-text dilemma- the well known divide between policy generation and implementation (Taylor et al., 1997) by emphasizing access and agency to text. These theorists invite researchers to consider policy in terms of its ‘readerly’ or textual aspect and its ‘writerly’ potential. Individuals ‘write’ a policy in their words, when they interpret and enact it. This connection between text and practice is important to my conceptual platform; I view them as mutually dependent.
However, literary theorists have long suffered with the problem of theorizing textual intentionality in textual interpretation (Eagleton 1984). Discourse production must contend with uncertainty in this regard. CDA accesses the potential of policy through the “production, consumption and distribution of texts” (Eagleton 1984:13). The central offering of CDA, for the conceptual purposes of this work, is the opportunity to probe “the elision of power/domination in theory and analysis” (Fairclough 1995:17).

As literary critic Terry Eagleton argues, though it is a struggle, concern for the symbolic processes of social life and the social production of power and knowledge is necessary for our survival:

> Without a more profound understanding of such symbolic processes, through which political power is deployed, reinforced, resisted, at times subverted, we shall be incapable of unlocking the most lethal power struggles now confronting us (1984:124).

Wittgenstein cautions about the reliance on textual conceptions. He defines discourse through human interactions and experiences: “It is our acting which lies at the bottom of the language game” (1969:204 italics original). Indeed, any text must be understood as having dialectical relation with our lives if it is to have meaning.

Fairclough (1995:13) acknowledges the importance of action and calls these discourse concerns” distribution” and comments that it is “a relatively neglected issue which merits more attention.” Distribution, however, has unintended effects. For example, my research lens set out to seek answers to four general questions, but the findings range more widely than I intended. I used the conceptual framework to warrant my inquiry, but I did not seek cohesion between the questions and the findings in a 1:1 fashion. Thus, the findings range into areas I did not always
anticipate. To keep the research in tension with the text, I engaged in a critical discourse analysis of CSI guided by theses prompts:

- Is CSI inter-textual or a stand-alone piece? Is it woven into another mandate or agenda?
- Who or what claims authority.
- How is language used to persuade or communicate meaning?
- How does the text construct authority?
- What might be omitted from the discussion/conceptions in the text?
- How is the theoretical work construction: paradoxes, binaries, appeals to reason, patronizing, valorizing or other?
- What historical perspective develops through the text?
- Is complexity simplified or overlooked?

Acknowledging the Limitations: Possibilities

Critical discourse analysis does not make explicit the need for examining the conditions surrounding text production such as institutional power or other policy or political influences and this is a limitation and this explains why I have chosen to take on qualitative research as the second part of the research framework. Fairclough (1995:18) admits CDA cannot judge the “truth or well-groundedness of a proposition.” While this is a well-accepted risk in qualitative research, he suggests theorists “historicize their data” within contexts known to them (19).

There are risks to conceptualizing a policy text. Constructing policy as simply textual reading risks reductionism – reducing the impact a policy can have on individuals’ lives – while over-emphasizing text can over-simplify individuals’ working lives and how they actually understand and work with policy (Kincheloe 2005). Further, it is impossible to fully contextualize a policy as schools change from the time of policy formulation to enactment.
For these reasons, I look to discourse narratives to flesh out the texture, distribution and consumption of policy. There is little ‘reliability’ in the traditional sense; rather, I rely on the possibility of ‘relatability’ where individuals who read the thesis will gain insight into their own experiences. Troyna expresses concerns for micro level policy study, or local level policy research; it falters because individuals have stakes in particular outcomes. He argues macro level research offers greater insight (as cited in Vidovich 2001: 4). To militate against my “pulling a fast one” and omnisciently narrating this research to suit my own interests, I did several things. First, I make efforts to contextualize the conditions surrounding the policy’s creation, I engage in a critical discourse analysis of CSI to clearly outline issues in the text for the reader, I situate in the policy within historical and social contexts to suggest the complexity of policy development and policy enactment at the level I am researching. Finally, I engaged in a detailed literature review to survey the state of theory, to understand the gaps and the tensions developing in CI approaches in mostly North American contexts with minor references to Great Britain and one international study (Torney-Purta et al. 2001).

**Research Process**

Though the conceptual schema guided my initial research effort, that is, the schema enabled me to ask the questions I did, through the interview process, things changed and the findings gathered even more extensive data than I intended. For example, parent and community involvement gained wider prominence than I expected because it emerged in the data. Also, the role of the equity department became an unintended, but significant, finding.
Access of Participants

The thirteen individuals who participated in the research were located through purposeful sampling; I wanted to find individuals who had experience and an opinion on CSI and controversial issues at the secondary level (Glaser & Straus 1967; Patton 1990 as cited in Merriam 1998:61) so that they would lend rich, robust information to the research. I located the initial participants through word-of-mouth at OISE, and then these individuals suggested candidates for referral. I phoned or emailed potential candidates to review the research focus and to outline my interview process and the stipulation that I was seeking individuals who were knowledgeable about controversial issues. As a result, participants came from different schools. Employment in the TDSB was not a research requirement, but often employment in the school board was a logical outcome given the research focus on policy.

Data Collection: Interviews

After receiving ethical approval, I began interviewing thirteen participants. Interviews were chosen as the ideal means to access person-to-person encounters. Interviews took place at locations preferred by the interviewee – schools, school boards, cafes, pubs or OISE. Interviews began with signing formal consent forms for the interview and consent to be audio-taped. The interviews were semi-structured. Some individuals requested a copy of the questions ahead of time; these were delivered by email. Two different scripts were used; one for school administrators and another for classroom teachers. Interview questions were descriptive and open-ended. I tried to begin with less sensitive questions related to the individuals’ backgrounds first and move towards more sensitive material as the interview progressed. All participants were

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21 I retain these consent forms.
22 See Appendix
welcome to edit their questions – add questions, delete questions or change them. I also participated in the conversation to probe for information. My concern was to access the depth of their experiences, not to maintain loyalty to the scripts. Interviewing is a means of understanding each other (Fontana & Frey 2005). Researcher participation has helped me understand the reflexive impact of interviewing. I audio taped the interview and took notes to emphasize important points. Interviews lasted 45-90 minutes.

Data Management

Individual names were not used in the data analysis or transcriptions. I conducted the data transcription. Administrators were coded with “A” and teachers with “T.” I then developed a data matrix file where I stored both coded interviews and coded data analyses. I kept consent forms separate from coded interviews which were anonymous after coding. I have not spoken about the research to anyone except my supervisor and my committee in an effort to maintain confidentiality. I endeavoured to maintain confidentiality in writing the thesis, but confidentiality cannot be maintained if readers of the thesis recognize individuals’ narratives.

Data Analysis

The interviews generated a large volume of data. Data analysis was conducted on both electronic and print copies through thematic study, comparative study and identification of shared themes, motifs and discontinuities (Cresswell 1998; Merriam 1998). This analysis was recursive rather than deterministic. I worked from the ground up to interpret what the narratives were saying (Glaser & Straus 1967). I retain the complexity and uncertainty in the data analysis as I believe these views convey important information for policy study and should not be deleted.
“How questions” generate a lot of information about what is going on with CSI policy. Therefore, competing or polarized perspectives are not reconciled but acknowledged as realities. Bourdieu (2004: 53) has long challenged the researcher disposition, which feigns disinterestedness as “scientific fraud.” I counted as important issues that recurred in the narratives; these became themes in the discussion section. These clusters of themes were not forced; they emerged rather effortlessly through the thematic analysis of coding the right side of the transcription for description of the events and the left side (margin notes) for theme or significance. I also highlighted certain narratives that stood out as troubling or interesting. I measured these two strategies against field notes I had taken during the interview, hesitation, anger, certainty, assurance – emotions and attitudes. I then reduced all these analyses into thematic categories as colour-coded topics for discussion.

Identification of internal contradictions in the data (Gubrium & Holstein as cited in Fontana & Frey 2005) – things which did not fit any categories are: some programs unrelated to the topic, anecdotes of unknown individuals unrelated to the policy, and professional details unrelated to the topic. Data analysis did not attempt neutrality; it is shaped by the critical commitments in the theory section.

**Participant Profiles**

**Cassandra** is a central coordinating principal for literacy, numeracy, ESL ELP and K-12 education. Her central focus is curriculum. She has taught at York University in the consecutive education program on secondment from a full-time position as principal in an elementary school in what was previously York region. Self-identifying as a ‘visible minority’, she “has always been particularly attuned to children who do not feel a part of school”. She completed a Masters
degree on successful teaching practices for black children. This raised her consciousness regarding the need for “intentional, authentic and deliberate” [her words] engagement with students.

Kevin is an equity principal with the TDSB who is on secondment from his school position as a principal. He works at the front line of school board equity. He is passionate, almost aggressive about his work. He says, “I don’t just work in education, I live in education and I wear it. It is for my survival. Frankly, if I don’t do this, I will die.” He recalls explicit experiences of racism in his childhood where teachers, who, because of their racism, did not expect him to know the answers, or to be well-educated. As a Black activist educator he is adamant about changing white hegemony in contemporary educational culture. He seeks large-scale cultural change to attitudes and to the educational system. He identifies barriers to the equity agenda as originating in fear rather than other system barriers.

Jenna has been in the field of education for 15 years. Prior to becoming an administrator, she taught in a variety of schools including the alternative school system within the Toronto District School Board. After 8 years in various alternative school contexts, this administrator worked for the TDSB equity department. She says, “I chose to work for the Toronto Board of Education, specifically for its rights policy in dealing with and protecting the gay and lesbian community and kids that belong to that community in our school. I worked for this board and I made the conscious choice.” She has had a chequered relationship with school board equity in terms of feeling like she had to parrot the dominant agenda rather than what she felt was truly equity work. For example, she has felt the Safe Schools Policy has worked to support mostly middle class white children who faced no major danger compared to other student populations such as students identifying as GLQBT.
Katherine worked previously for the Scarborough Board and has been with the TDSB for fifteen years. Both of her parents were educators and she says this influenced her decision to become an educator. She says, “leadership was always important to me and I had a lot of great mentors who kept fostering my ability to lead within the classroom at a school level... they kept guiding me towards leadership and encouraged me to take the vice principal or principal courses.” She has diverse work experience at five different schools as a vice-principal. She is currently the principal of a large urban high school. Katherine is a fairly conservative school administrator who sees leadership as mentorship and providing directions and opportunities. Many personal questions were vetted during this interview and this proved to be a challenge.

Martin is a history teacher in a large urban high school. He has been involved in writing and teaching the new genocide unit (open level). He admired his grade seven teacher so much that he knew right then he wanted to be a teacher. He “fell in love with teaching and never looked back” He has taught Geography, English and history, in the AP and Gifted streams. From 86’ on, he has taught history exclusively. His main interest in controversial issues arises through his work with the genocide unit, but he finds that students erect many barriers to discussion and community members erect even more. He remembers that the writing team/study team began with a feasibility study and he sent course outlines. The TDSB took almost a year to study the feasibility which included assessing potential public response from interest groups and lobby groups. Individuals from the Greek, Turkish, Armenian community all voiced protest to conflicts depicted in the new course.

Jane has been teaching over 20 years. She began teaching in Malaysia at an independent school because there were no jobs in Ontario. After a year and a half teaching the grade 13 history and economics in Malaysia she came back to Canada, there were still no jobs. She took a
job in Northern Ontario in a very small town. When she did move to Toronto, she worked in a Section Nineteen school; special contexts. In this case, she worked with pregnant teens. This highly mobile teacher transited to two more placements. These variable school contexts have given her insight into contexts and curricular possibilities and barriers such as administration and politics. She has taught at OISE in the initial teacher education program.

Alex is a very experienced male, middle-aged educator who has been involved in education for 34 years in the area of social studies and he has been involved in co-ordinating these programs at the school board. He has worn many hats throughout his career in education. He was on the drafting committee for the TDSB’s CSI document. In his view, one rationale for the CSI (2003) policy is to provide teachers with a kind of support they are missing because teachers don’t have tenure and this policy provides them with a kind of “cushion” or “support” to engage with these issues which they wouldn’t otherwise have. He says his experience was informed through twenty years of being with the Toronto Board and active work in the OSSTF. He became conscious of Toronto teachers coming under attack from parents and community groups. His greatest regret is that First Nations curriculum was omitted from CSI.

Jasmine is a young female teacher who began teaching in a collegiate school in urban Toronto in 2003 after supplying in the elementary panel within the TDSB on an LTO. From 2004, she took a long term occasional position teaching English and History. As a traditional collegiate her school is a bit of a hold-over from pre-amalgamation era when there were collegiate, technical institutes, and commerce schools. Her school preserved this institutional status quo until very recently, when it has begun to open up by offering courses at the work place level, open level and the college level recognizing within the larger context of the TDSB, the school cannot really sustain itself by staying an academic school. She comments,
There has been a change over the last five years that I have seen; it has been slow but it has been a change no doubt. Assumptions within the community are that the kids must come from really good homes and this participant validates this assumption but argues that it is not the entire truth; “You’ve also got a pocket of students who live south of the school and some of them live in Metro housing. Some of our students have, live in single parent families and they have to work. So it seems as though we have a huge divide between the haves and have-nots in terms of income and wealth. So I think that adds to the experiences as well in terms of what, in terms of the experience of our students. I am proud of the school and sometimes we don’t, I don’t think, I don’t think we have in terms of conflict, you don’t see racialized conflict as much but that the conflict comes from class, clashes of the class bias.

May is a teacher who works extensively writing curriculum, working with the equity agenda and educating teachers about it. She is very knowledgeable about policy processes and the pitfalls of practical issues like in-servicing. She has directed course work at the faculty of Education at York University. She has been the lead teacher for the ESL department at a prominent Toronto high school. She interpreted her job as an instructional leader as providing resources, strategies and directions to mostly administrators. She in-serviced CSI (2003) many times and continues to do so among many other curriculum policies and guidelines.

Pixie has retired from her position coordinating library and learning resources for the Toronto District School Board since this transcription was completed. She began teaching at the secondary level in Montreal. She taught contemporary, Canadian world history and English. She moved to North York and became the head of the history department head at a secondary school which at that time, the largest secondary school in Ontario. She was one of four people who drafted CSI (2003). She notes that CSI is difficult in part because “we all work with existing things [controversial issues] so our six school boards also on their own had tried to grapple with this”. She says it mostly works to support school principals who were struggling with phone calls to their schools.
Daniel is a young, dynamic male teacher who self identifies as gay and a member from a global majority community. He has worked in what are commonly considered the most challenging urban schools in Toronto. He cites his pre-service education in the Urban Diversity Program as pivotal in developing his pedagogy which is focused on social justice. He says,

I was very fortunate to have gone to teacher’s college at York University where I was a part of the Urban Diversity program. I found it really prepared me as an educator to work with an urban school with the challenges and the rewards that come with working in such an environment and I was really kind of surprised because I thought it was a perfect fit for me at the time because a lot of the visions and a lot of the educational pieces that they spoke about really matched my kind of teaching philosophy of equity.

He expresses concern for his current school’s context:

the things that I was seeing besides the fact that there was some educators who had been there for quite a long while and they were really kind of set in their ways and they weren’t really taking charge or being accountable for the children’s education and there were a lot of individuals who were kind of coasting along.

Because of these “coasting teachers”, Daniel’s activist work is harder and he feels alone. He feels he functions as the figurehead for anti-homophobia education which he finds a heavy burden to bear by himself. He draws on support from colleagues at the board level.

Sharon is a very politically savvy and activist-oriented teacher who seems to be able to identify and evaluate a subtext from most education agendas in her professional life. She has purposefully worked from a counter-hegemonic pedagogy since she began teaching twelve years ago and feels very strongly about supporting the anti-homophobia agenda. Sharon says she is interested in teaching for change and social justice and getting increasingly cynical and partially burned out and [she] vacillate between feeling like change is possible and feeling hopeless about it within the board. She works in a large old tech school downtown which is “somewhat under threat because of enrolment decline like many of the TDSB schools and it’s got a fairly
conservative teaching population. Sharon has taught English, Media, history, politics, law, and civics. She says,

...actually the politics course has just been cut at my school, I think because they found the content “too controversial”. “We go through quite a few new administrators they tend to send us the the ones who want to try things out before moving up, or out and up and there are lots of political struggles in the school. It’s known to be a base for union support. My school has a large special education population, gifted program and a host of issues that arise out of clash of a of a large gifted population along with a substantial working class population and actually largely male, about 75% male.

Sharon says she does not know how much longer she can stay in education with the weariness and wariness she feels right now.

Jacob situates his biography within the context of his working life. He never intended to be a teacher. He wanted to be a film maker or professor. He got a PhD from York University and “kind of fell into teaching”. He says his biggest challenges are maintaining his interests as an activist and coping with large class sizes. He has had many run-ins with the College of Teachers and has been sent home on leave for his work with controversial issues outside of the classroom but known by other educators and the school board and OSSTF. He is often called into the principal’s office because there are complaints lodged against him by students and parents based on speculative evidence or hearsay.
Chapter Five: Historical Policy Relations: The Birth of CSI

This chapter situates CSI (2003) within historical and policy contexts including the key policy pieces mentioned in the text – Equity and Human Rights policy. I interrogate both the assumptions and language of these and other policies and political actions to suggest that contradiction is deeply inscribed in *The Teaching of Controversial and Sensitive Issues Guidelines* (2003). It appears that an approach to dealing with controversial issues (CI) is predicated on historical tensions and long-standing power struggles among school board members, school trustees, the Ontario Secondary Teachers’ Federation (hereafter OSSTF), private interest groups, community members, teachers and students.

The Local-Historical Policy Web

This section reviews the curriculum policy reforms most likely to impact teachers and school administrators in their CI work through drastic changes to working conditions and changes to relations between school administrators and teachers. The policies intended to support CSI – specifically *Equity* and *Human Rights* unfold in a context of change and conflict.

Bill 160 and Bill 74

The discourse of policy in Ontario is both intricate and complex. Policy processes have far-reaching implications for social justice and equity since their inception. *Bill 160* (1997), The Education Quality Improvement Act followed closely by the Education Accountability Act (2000), sought control and regulation of public education. Drastic reforms cut one billion dollars from the education budget and increased teachers’ instructional time, decreased equity staffing and eroded democracy in education (Griffith 2001: 89).
One consequence of Bill 74 was class size changes and principal empowerment to mandate supervision and extra-curricular activities. Because teachers lost a sense of professional agency, some ill will developed between teachers and school administrators (Gidney 1999). The policy allocated authority for school operations (including curricula) to the Ministry of Education as a commitment to centralization. The gap between the site of formal policy production and education activity widened (Griffith 2001).

1. Curriculum Policy

Under the auspices of provincial control, *Secondary School Reform* implemented sweeping reforms that changed the aim of instruction and assessment (Anderson & Ben Jafaar 2006; Gidney 1999). From 1990 onwards, provincial policy relayed an outcomes-based focus (Gidney 1999) (e.g. *The Common Curriculum K-9*). High school education was collapsed to four years, a standardized report card was put in place, and the province mandated a common core curriculum. Subject learning outcomes, grade level outcomes and criteria for streaming created conditions were put in place with little thought about students’ responses (Griffith 2001; Murphy 2001). An accountability discourse pervasive during these reforms (Vibert 2005) denied parents and other citizens the opportunity to communicate about these changes as a democratic activity. Rather, the discourse made policy the center of the stage. As a result, school administrators were made the task masters responsible for transferring volumes of policy reform information to teachers and parents (Anderson & Ben Jafaar 2006).

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23 Under a Liberal Government, support (i.e. funding) for student learning was intensified. The formation of the *Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat* (2004) conducted multi-year review and revision to curricula spending 820 million dollars by 2005. *Student Success*, in particular, addresses technology, apprenticeship programs, student at-risk initiatives, locally developed courses, addressed income-related inequity, and continued to uphold EQAO and other accountability measures (Anderson & Ben Jafaar 2006).
Impact on Equity

Standardization of student learning through curricular and assessment practices spilled over into other policy and program areas. The equity discourse became diffuse and littered with a new neoliberal ideology: ‘all students must meet core expectations’. Race, class, gender and cultural differences were obliterated so that the discourse could appear to uphold the same standards for everyone (Gidney 1999). ‘Resourcing’ became the new catch-phrase of equity support to ensure short-term material gains (Dei & Karumanchery 2001). Student marginalization as a result of programming was a not a genuine policy consideration such that Popkewitz and Linblad (2000) express concern for an “equity problematic” in policy. Finally, equity was diffused at the practical level; curriculum reforms policy provided explicit learning outcomes but little was offered in the way of support or information about how to accomplish reform goals (Kincheloe 2005).

2. Human Rights Policy (P.031)

The foundation policy of the school board is The Human Rights Policy of the TDSB. Its primary purpose is to communicate the board’s core values. Written in 2000 and revised in 2004, this policy ostensibly lays the foundation for a values position that frames actions and interactions among all community members and school board employees. Key questions for this work are; ‘To what extent does this policy pave the way for CSI?’ ‘What context does it create?’ ‘What expectations does it raise?’

The policy outlines values and commitments which the school board takes as responsibilities:

- Valuing each and every student
- A strong public education system
- A partnership of students, schools, family and community
• The uniqueness and diversity of our students and our community
• The commitment and skills of our staff to equity, innovation, accountability and access
• Learning environments that are safe, nurturing, positive and respectful (Policy P.031: EMP:1 2004)

Information about the provision of explicit support or an explication of how these values translate into practices and actions in schools is missing in the communication of values. Commitment to uniqueness and diversity are values, but what what does valuing mean? It might involve something as substantive as addressing teachers’ and school administrators’ dispositions, or it might simply reinforce existing norms in ‘soft’ liberalism that fail to critique institutional or systemic power relations and social practices (Andreotti et al. 2008). For instance, there is reason to question whether ‘valuing’ implies ‘tolerating’, ‘assimilating’, ‘marginalizing,’ or simply identifying others as ‘different’. The policy’s tone is simply too ambiguous to form a solid foundation responsive to the needs of different students who may want different kinds of things.

The language continues to be vexing: “The Board recognizes the value of a strong public education system” and later it states, “the TDSB programs, curriculum, teaching methods and management practices support the values embodied in this policy (P.03EMP:1, 2004:3). The linguistic sleight of hand suggests that public education is intrinsically part of the public good without explaining. In its second use, the policy asks only that individuals act in congruence with what is stated in the policy. There is no clear position on values, no sense of where rights come from except through compliance. Without qualification, the democratic foundation of human rights is vague and this fact is troubling given the policy concerns itself with human rights.
Under-theorizing of the concept of values is problematic as the concept is central to the foundation statement.

Another, less obvious, critique is that claims may conflict internally. *Innovation*, *accountability*, *equity*, and *accessibility* are four policy strands, yet there are many ways in which accountability conflict with the provision of truly equitable education for students (Vibert 2005). Though discriminatory practices (cited as “vexatious comments”, “poisoned environments”) are targeted as often unintended, does the policy perceive its own capacity to perpetuate them? The vitriolic tone of the policy ironically masks its very weakness which is the aversion to naming explicit oppressions and how education is implicated in producing them. A discourse of human rights centered on students does not adequately conceptualize the genuine complexity and implications of a more critical interrogation of power and social systems. The *Human Rights Policy* does not identify specific human rights barriers; homophobia, white privilege, classism as unintended human rights violations. Lack of explicitness undermines the sense of policy commitment to different others and knowledge diversity.

To conclude, the discourse of the policy is neoliberal in the sense that it views human rights as “goods” not as a struggle against oppression (Young 1990). Human rights violations are discussed as losses in productivity:”such behavior must be addressed not only for its cost in individual, human terms, but also for its cost to our economic and civic future” (Policy P.031EMP:2004).
3. Equity Foundations Policy: Discourse Analysis

Since the era of the Harris reforms, school boards have been endeavouring to rebuild the education system. The Equity Foundation Statement and Commitment to Equity Policy Implementation (2005) is heralded as a cornerstone policy reaffirming the profile of equity in education. The policy is also viewed as a core text for CSI. Equity communicates three central themes: the removal of barriers (racism, homophobia and bias); procedures enact equity; and equity relies on institutional compliance and administrative leadership to administer its agenda. Themes are communicated through repeated words, phrases and procedural language such as: “eliminating barriers, assessing effectiveness, establishing accountability, and allocating resources” (6-7).

What is important in the discourse of equity is the ideology of liberalism that is evident through its efforts to provide goods and services (Apple 1989). In a very rudimentary way, equity is conflated with ‘removing barriers.’ Though barrier do need to be removed, there is little in the discourse which acknowledges that all else is not neutral and equitable. The system itself, may be inequitable, consider learning resources. Equity policy attempts to ‘level the playing field’ when the field itself is not equitable or worth playing on. The equity discourse does not offer tools or theory regarding the case for differences or the justifications for changes to education.

In summary, these policies combined with the equity discourse are important to a policy study on CI for several reasons. First, these policies signal the contextual thermostat “setting” for

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subsequent policy work. Secondly, policies (both local and provincial) reveal ongoing power
dynamics and barriers to: interpersonal relations; financial support; staffing; and policy
direction. Teachers and school administrators accumulate their own policy histories/ experiences
over time. Therefore, the context of a particular policy includes consideration of this larger
historical policy context.

The Birth of CSI

In 1986, Toronto schools found themselves caught in a controversial issues cross-fire. At
that time, the school board chose to deny the distribution of pamphlets\(^{25}\) by the International
Year of Peace Committee in Toronto schools. These pamphlets spoke out against arms
development and profiled alternate conflict resolution mechanisms such as dialogue for peace
education. The Federal Defense Department countered with its own response: it sent pamphlets
on NATO, cruise missiles and nuclear weapons to every high school on Canada “in the interest
of providing balance.”\(^{26}\)

To mediate the ensuing uproar, the school board appointed a Critical Issues Committee to
create new program guidelines for the Toronto School Board. These guidelines make explicit
commitments to focusing on difference of opinion, promoting open-mindedness, and exploring
the implications and applications of science education for society. Then School Public Trustee,
Fiona Nelson, commented, “if schools don’t deal with intellectual and cultural issues that allow

\(^{26}\) Ibid. The Toronto Star, December 30, 1986.
children to see the biases in society and the results are, that’s not education…Besides, there is no way anyone is going to control what is happening in classrooms. We have to trust teachers.”

The OSSTF became a central player in CSI policy. It made recommendations directly to school boards which included the provision of school programs on nuclear disarmament. By December 1986, tensions among OSSTF, Trustees, school boards, the Federal government and teachers ran so high, one Trustee commented that there were so many global conflicts if school boards dropped world issues, international conflict, resource distribution, environmental pollution and technology impacts “into a hole for the next ten years, the school wouldn’t even notice… [CI] have an enormous life of their own.”

A ripple effect resulted from these initial CI conflicts; individuals within the school system took different positions that were never resolved and these polarized positions left school boards feeling vulnerable to outside interest groups. The conflicts were viewed by the public as a Pandora’s Box which opened new possibilities to question public claims on the education agenda. As expected, these upheavals made one truth inconvenient to curriculum policy makers: public education must contend with education as a political act. On one hand, policy makers had to contend with public concern for students engaging with ‘threatening material’, and on the other hand, they had to protect teachers’ rights to make professional decisions about resources and curricula. Wrestling control over the education agenda had begun in earnest.

Following 1986, CI policy and education did appear to drop into a hole; school cuts to equity, multiculturalism and social justice programs stalled any CI development. Post-amalgamation, the TDSB has been an industrious policy producer.

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Controversial and Sensitive Issues Guidelines (2003) develops years later; however, my contention is that CSI is derived from the same culture of contestation and uncertainty, power and control.

TDSB in Context

With 270,000 students, and 558 schools, the Toronto District School Board is the largest in Canada, and the fourth largest in North America. There are 10,000 elementary and 5,800 secondary school teachers well-versed on the school board’s mission statement: “to enable all students to reach high levels of achievement and to acquire the knowledge, skills, values they need to become members of a democratic society” (Wapedia 2009). Twenty-two publicly elected trustees oversee the board as “advocates for education, and they are the voice of the public, ensuring all concerns are addressed” and “to ensure that all of our students realize their potential and success.” Trustees are (TDSB 2001). The school board is regarded by many people as a progressive school board because it highlights equity, innovation, accessibility and accountability in its mission statement (Wapedia 2009). However, school boards are also influenced by national educational change and the repercussions of policy issues occurring elsewhere in Ontario and in Canada.

Alberta provincial policy activity, for instance, has altered the educational landscape of that province and sent subsequent shock waves towards Ontario and its CI policy activity. The provincial legislature approved Bill 44 (approving parents’ right to withdraw their children from classes on controversial topics) that formally recognizes gay and lesbian rights, but paradoxically gives parents the right to withdraw their children from classes dealing with sex education, sexual orientation, or even multiculturalism. The Alberta policy communicates a qualified stance on
controversial issues as certain ones are deemed by politicians as being ‘too controversial to handle.’

Ironically, Alberta already had a progressive CI policy\(^{29}\) (1.7.1), which it repealed in order to replace it with the more conservative *Bill 44*. Like its fore-runner *Bill 208*\(^{30}\), *Bill 44* does not support teachers who are legally required to teach the program of studies and, in the course of their teaching, address topics such as sexual orientation and same-sex marriage as they emerge in a manner that recognizes and respects social diversity. Human rights education becomes re-packaged under the new policy formulations as a “parental choice”, signaling that CI is dependent on political discretion.

The lesson learned from the Alberta government is that policy is no guarantee of long-standing commitment and that, in fact, policy statements can contradict, or at least weaken other long-standing federal policies such as human rights legislation. The Janus-face of Alberta’s policy actions on CI education foregrounds the need for attention to education policy as it demonstrates considerable capacity to enable contradictory agendas.

To summarize, the origins of CI education coincide with increased public participation in the education agenda. Early CI initiatives were direct conflicts: arms development versus peace education. CI initiatives proved that public schools were porous; private interests could lay claim

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\(^{29}\) Bill 208, introduced by Ted Morton (MLA for Foothills–Rocky View), and received first reading on April 6, 2006. The bill proposes that "No student shall be required to attend and no teacher shall be required to teach that part of a course that has in its curriculum that marriage may be a union between persons of the same sex." Further, the bill stipulates that teachers must inform parents of such lessons prior to their being taught, that students can choose not to attend such lessons on the basis of their religious convictions and that teachers can refuse to teach about same-sex marriage if it conflicts with their own moral and religious beliefs. Other provisions in the bill would permit members of the clergy or marriage commissioners to refuse to solemnize same-sex marriages and protects them from any potential legal action that might result.

\(^{30}\) Policy 1.7.1 on controversial issues in education: "studying controversial issues is important in preparing students to participate responsibly in a democratic and pluralistic society. Such study provides opportunities to develop students’ capacities to think clearly, to reason logically, to open-mindedly and respectfully examine different points of view, and to reach sound judgments."
to the education agenda and public outcry could challenge them. However, much has changed since 1986; intensification of the role of parents in setting the CI education agenda continue on issues such as religion in education, sex education, and homophobia. Schools have become sites for public participation and contestation as curricula marks a space for continued debate about what matters in public education.
Chapter Six: Critical Discourse Analysis of CSI Policy Text

*Originality belongs to the soil not the seed.* -Wittgenstein

I have previously outlined the background and context shaping the formulation of CSI (2003) as a web of political and policy interactions and effects (Joshee & Johnson 2005). Here I situate CSI as a text within institutional and discourse practices (Fairclough 1995: 9). My intention in using CDA is to interrogate, to interrupt or to rupture meanings which are presented in the text as neutral and non-rhetorical (MacLure 2003), and to point out power and social practices which establish a particular perspective (Fairclough 1995:14). My aim is draw out the social and institutional dimensions of discourse (Fairclough 1995; Kress 1990) as practices of production and consumption.

**Authority, Hierarchy and Responsibilities**

Institutional authority permeates the text of CSI through a systematic discussion of roles and responsibilities called “the approach.” The approach asserts the following framework: the school board maintains responsibility for professional dialogue, concepts training, and professional judgment needed to apply the guidelines in all aspects of the curriculum. Schools claim responsibility for providing professional CSI support to teachers, and they are responsible for communicating and explaining the approach to parents and the community. Attendant to such responsibility is, of course, control. Citing the *Education Act*, CSI outlines explicit administrative
procedures which are explicit and value-laden. Justification for the policy’s commitment to equity, inclusion and the critical examination of controversial issues rests with the authority of the Superintendent of Schools and the local Trustees (80). Power resides in a construct of hierarchy and procedures achieved through constant repetition of roles and responsibilities to instill control. That this is supposed to be a teaching guideline is hard to keep in one’s mind because the focus is so much on administrational responsibility. This implies, to me, a sense of danger or guardedness; as though, everyone must be very clear about roles because the issue is like a potent chemical - volatile.

Selection of appropriate reference material and databases also are named as school board responsibilities, and this process, while not fleshed out in a substantive fashion, also signals institutional authority. Furthermore, instances of a discourse of authority occur in tone of the text which requires the school board to support the “successful application of the approach” and “assist in the development of self-confidence by teachers and administrators in respect to their own judgment and efficacy” (CSI 2003: 4). Without attendant resource lists or references, it is impossible to know what the school board has in mind as appropriate, but curricular authority rests with the school board.

Authority, not pedagogy, appears to drive the curricular agenda. For instance, “the system provides the framework for dealing with controversial and sensitive issues” (8, emphasis original) and the system controls the “procedure for selecting and approving learning resources, handling concerns about resources, and screening guidelines for supplementary resources” (8). The document assures the reader that all CI activity will “support the curriculum as outlined by the Ministry, Board and school documents” (76). The ‘approach’ taken by the ‘system’ is more concerned with curriculum alignment and inducing policy compliance than defining
controversial issues. The authoritarian discourse validates CSI as part of the policy web – The
Education Act, Ministry of Education policies and curriculum expectations, as well as Equity
Foundations and Human Rights policies – but compatibility does not confer legitimacy. In effect,
these rationalizations constitute a discourse of avoidance because conceptual approaches to
controversy are ignored.

The approach to values presents an interesting, if not ambiguous, segue. CSI says
teachers should “teach secular values consistent with the Board’s equity and human rights
policies and encourage students to further discuss such issues with their parent/guardians” (9).
Here is one sticky point: teaching secular values should not be tantamount to rejecting or
denying the religious commitments of students. How does the text deal with the possibility that
some individuals might view this statement as exactly that, and seize the perceived violation (of,
say, the right to religious freedom) as an opportunity to ‘opt out’ of CI education altogether?
Why is sex education awarded special status as a ‘private matter’? What is the policy’s position
on diversity on issues other than sex education and religion? The document fails to address these
kinds of ideas, and it fails to consider other related questions: Who will inspire educators to
engage with CI and deliver these supports and services? What happens if supports, and thus CI
education, does not occur in schools? What checks are in place to ensure follow-up and follow
through of “the approach”? In addition to avoidance on all these matters, the discourse
demonstrates limited conceptualizations of difference and diversity.

Thus the relation between policy authority and teacher/school administrator agency form
develops in systematic ways; embedded in the chain are assumptions about CI, and about the
roles of individuals.
Rhetorical devices such as ‘responsibility’ and ‘expectation’ are repeated for emphasis; controversial issues are permitted, but they are heavily administered in a value-neutral discourse. An underlying assumption appears to be that CI are emotional, dangerous, or at least unpredictable, and that this volatility needs to be contained and controlled by careful selection of teaching material to manage the controversy. Thus asymmetrical relations are created between ‘user’ and ‘text.’

Shortcomings of this approach besides its authority, power and hierarchy are that controversial issues become highly-regulated fact clarification exercises devoid of social justice potential. Clarifying values means that acknowledging different opinions is a sufficient end to CI activity. For example, the resource does not mention racism or sexual orientation so that control of curricula appears to protect the public good. Meanwhile, there is no appreciation of its own use of power, no mention of the importance of emotion or recognition of the undertaking as political. While the document supposedly endorses the use of controversy, the content communicates trepidation toward genuine differences by denying them.

**Use of ‘Democratic Citizenship’**

Another instance of textual authority is the choice of audience; the text is very specifically directed at teachers, school administrators and school board officials. This focus excludes other ‘stakeholders’, such as students, parents, and the general public. Despite this selective exclusion of citizens, the rationale for the guidelines cites democratic citizenship; “the purpose of controversial issues is to prepare students for daily and future living as democratic citizens in a pluralistic society” because “freedom to learn and think is essential to democracy” (4-5). Using democracy this way works either to justify the policy’s claims as automatically
democratic, or it functions as a catch-phrase and invites cynicism. Conceptually, there is the root problem of what rationale for democracy? What kind of democracy does this policy endorse? Arguably, democracy is employed as a master term or slogan to sanction the narrative authority of the text as if invoking democracy provides immunity against closer examination of contradictions and intentions, responsibility and ideology. Invoking ‘democracy’ silences questions the public might have about this policy, because democracy is almost never questioned as an ideal for society. Democracy becomes a catch-phrase.

**Parent, Student and Community Exclusion**

CSI extends some power to students: “Students together with their teachers will be free to investigate, in a responsible manner, issues that affect them, their peers and others” (4). Immediately, one wonder what ‘responsible manner’ means, and what kinds of issues are thought to affect students. The latter is especially problematic considering that students have not been involved in setting a CI agenda. On one hand, the policy attempts to control curricula, and on the other hand, it expects teachers and students to select issues important to them using this source?

It is also curious that parents and communities receive very little attention in the policy; they are mentioned mostly in the context of lodging complaints. Regarded as barriers rather than as valuable knowledge resources, parents never contribute to knowledge production. To ward off legal repercussions, parents are viewed as legal dissenters: “any citizen living in the school board has the right to challenge the resource on the basis of appropriateness”31 (2003: 79). These issues

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31 The appendices of CSI (2003) supply forms for processing parental complaints for submission to the Review Committee.
are directed primarily to school administrators as though principals have no stake in pedagogy, only confrontation. School administrators are called on to be peace-makers and policy gate-keeper.

**CSI and Pedagogy**

Contradiction is deeply embedded in the resource; not only does it reveal undercurrents of authoritarianism with undue emphases on proceduralism, the policy theorizes pedagogy through a rhetoric which alternates between ambiguous and dangerous. Examining language is especially important to critical theory as inequity emerges through contradiction (Darling-Hammond 1997; Fairclough 1995; Henze & Arriaza 2006).

The policy’s language imparts an ideology infused with fear. The text says, “Controversial issues are situations and ideas from which divergent beliefs lead to divergent individual and social behaviours.” It cites “hostility, confusion, uncertainty and loss of trust” as the cost of disagreement (CSI 2003: 68). Value conflicts are also threatening because they can “become violent” (70). The notion that controversial issues are potentially destructive or violent confers a stereotype, which raises the stakes for educators who may think the work is already risky.

Bias detection is a central strategy in CSI; it provides the policy rationale. However, its intentions are ambiguous: [teachers] “must interpret bias from competing perspectives” (CSI 2003: 67). Competition does not cultivate open-mindedness and the necessary condition of doubt in our own thinking and histories (Hare 1985). CSI bias works in either *positive* or *negative* ways toward a resolution (interestingly it is never distinguished from prejudice, perspective or
Bias is steeped in cultural dominance, assumptions and historical legacies; however, CSI treats bias as a neutral mechanism of instruction benefiting students mostly at the level of individual reflection. For example, the bias exemplar treats news media and the manipulation of images and events. Students are asked to consider “what are my biases in news sources? Do I prefer to get my news from print, television, radio, the Internet or other sources?” (CSI 2003: 26) Though students clarify their own media preferences, they learn little else about the construction of meaning in popular media consumption.

The guidelines also say “controversial material must be treated in a fair manner that is thorough, balanced, and free of unfair biases” (4). Each one of these terms is open to interpretation and contestation. Is CSI distinguishing between ‘fair biases’ and ‘unfair ones’ to argue bias is affected by our values? Which ones? Who decides what constitutes a ‘fair’ bias? Also, are there issues where balance should be avoided? For example, in instances of racism, homophobia, bullying, sexism, should the teacher attempt to balance these controversies?

Considerable ambiguity resides in the rhetoric surrounding the term balance; is balance a teaching performance controlling emotions and privileging objectivity or binary points of view? Finally, what is the determining quality of “thorough” treatment? Is the policy saying that CI material should teach students to share opinions, or to acknowledge contrary points of view, or should students take what they have learned and apply it ‘neutrally’?

Other Demonstration Lessons are equally ‘neutral’ (CSI 2003:15). Erasing prejudice for good (K-8); Bias in the news (4-8); HIV/AIDS (Grade 8); Environmental Issues- Toxic Waste (8-12); Using the Internet (7-12); and the role of perspective in novel study (9-12) (CSI 2003: 26-32

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32 Neutrality is not a criterion of open-mindedness (Hare 1979:41-42). Hare contends one may make up her mind and still be open-minded (not neutral and open-minded). She may not have made up her mind for lack of evidence but she does not want to explore the controversy further (Neutral and not open-minded). The two conditions may relate, but are not contingent.
56) are not considerable controversies. Indeed, these topics can be found elsewhere in the curriculum. In effect, CSI covers already established curricular interests and foci, and so it does not probe contemporary CI issues such as migration without documentation, or responses to present day ‘terrorism.’

In conclusion, the strategy undertaken by the guidelines is to frame CI pedagogy as the provision of different learning resources to develop students’ respect for differences of opinion – a procedural approach. The discourse fails to account for the very real possibility of no consensus (Irish & Pashby 2010) and therefore, sustained conflict, ideological and interpersonal tension. What might have been helpful here are less procedural instruction and a more critical conception of controversial issues. hooks calls attention to the dangerous effects of procedural education: “Students are encouraged to doubt themselves, their capacity to know, to think and to act. Learned helplessness is necessary for the maintenance of dominator culture” (2003:130). If CSI presents a procedural discourse and this is connected to power relation and the maintenance of oppressive systems or operations in education, then what role are teachers called on to play in perpetuating these conditions?

**Teaching Strategy and Teachers’ Role**

According to the *Role of the Reader Strategy* (CSI 2003:10-12), teachers are responsible for implementing the guidelines, teaching students to address bias in text with pre-reading, reading, and post-reading experiences. Teachers are asked to recognize their own biases, to identify bias in texts, to select teaching material that deals with controversial and sensitive issues, to select appropriate strategies for analyzing text, to use professional judgment in addressing issues, and to state expectations for student learning and assessment. The preservation of culture
and tradition are embedded in the discourse as so little is required of teachers in the CI activity that is not strategy-based.

Their roles require “requisite skills” for “evaluating and making decisions about controversial and sensitive issues in relation to development of individual values and belief systems” (6). Teachers are “responsible for implementing the guidelines by teaching students to address bias in the text through the following process as they plan for instruction…” (CSI 2003: 9). The CI teacher appears to be administering the policy through neutrality; she or he is more influenced by the style of instruction than a deep conception of CI.

In addition, the policy requires the teaching of “sensitive” topics to be considered in relation to the potential sensitivity of individual students, who have different understandings of concepts due to their different life experiences and situations. Sensitivity as a term refers to the capacity to be emotionally hurt or damaged (negative options only). Therefore, some concepts may not be controversial in themselves, but they may trigger unpleasant emotions because of students’ experiences, contexts or dispositions. To mitigate these student sensitivities, teachers are led through CI instruction in discrete phases: self-knowledge, assessing the classroom environment, knowledge of students, preparation for dealing with text, teaching the text: before, during and after (CSI 2003: 10-12).

Additional constraints are embedded in the policy through the “facilitator” role. CSI states that teachers and school administrators should inform parents about CI lessons. Teachers

33 L. Stenhouse (1969) coined the phrase “neutral chairman” to describe one role of the CI teacher. He advocates neutrality not as an absolute stance (an impossibility in my opinion) but as a technique, or practice, to give students full airing of their views. Open-minded teaching. New Society, July 24, 1 26-28.
are urged to balance CI lessons with supplementary texts (CSI 2003:11). Notification of school principals in advance of community members and guest speakers is also required (11). Teacher professionalism, then, comes from compliance with rules and procedures which truncate the teacher’s capacity to maintain control over pedagogy. Balancing texts is a juggling act or teacher hyper-vigilance. The strategy de-skills teachers; it diverts their energy away from the hard and real work that would be required to teach CI well including resourcing, time to develop discussions and activities, and collaboration with others. Teacher de-skilling is furthered by the absence of deep CI conceptions to build educators’ understanding. School administrators again appear to play the ‘heavy’ because there is under-theorizing of CI and so their role in enforcing policy compliance.

**Maturity Scale**

One of the most interesting pieces in the policy to me is the maturity scale – framed as “developing awareness” (12). The policy cautions, “keep in mind the developmental and maturity level of students” (9). Cursory descriptions of childhood psychological development outline the ages at which children notice disabilities, cultural accents, and begin to understand the concept of *fair* versus *unfair* (age 5-6). Pages 12-13 discuss the age at which children begin to notice differences such as skin colour, gender and language. Page 14 links concepts like shame, pride, empathy, and a unique sense of self with specific ages on a simplistic chart. The document asserts that awareness of difference in human beings does not develop suddenly, and that our conception of the child may itself be shaped by bias and cultural assumptions (12), but ironically, the policy provides its own contribution to the problem with its normative maturity and child development scale.
While children at age two show “awareness of gender and can learn the names of body parts, children’s attitudes to racial differences do not change after age nine unless they experience major events or significant life changes” (CSI 2003: 12-13). The table’s upper age group states that children being able to feel empathy at age 7-9. On this spurious and limited data, educators are expected to develop their work on CI. A developmental scale which ends at age nine also forecloses on all intermediate and secondary school students.

The biggest problem with the table is the idea that it is allocated any authority; its nod to medical authority is misguided and spurious. Developmental maturity is simply too complex to table on one page and present to teachers as a legitimate index of childhood development. The gesture speaks to the perceived need to have a governing authority, even if the authority is a cursory table. Seeking legitimization through medicalization is one discourse thread.

The danger of this approach is that teachers and school administrators may be inclined to underplay or ignore genuine conflicts and controversies in their classrooms and schools because they rationalize that students lack the maturity to handle different perspectives. Secondly, fear of indoctrination lurks under the surface of a conversation that frames students as unformed and vulnerable; teachers and administrators fear that students are at risk of being manipulated/indoctrinated unless they are developmentally ready. Thirdly, because the table ends (without explanation) at age 9, it ignores the development of older students who clearly can deal with complex material, so the omission seems facile and troubling.

Philosopher Gareth Matthews (1994: 31) criticizes experts who standardize child development, because the insertion of expert opinion makes our children and students strangers to us. Matthews questions general assumptions of what it is to be a child and how his or her
thinking is different from an adult’s thinking. He argues the notion of intellectual limitations according to age, are over-stated within the confines of Western culture. The maturity scale invokes a psycho-social boundary around childhood which implies that there is no point in dealing with CI with young children, as they lack the cognitive maturity needed to engage with the material. There is, however, little evidence beyond the scale itself to actually support this idea. Ironically, CI education remains tethered to de-contextualized and weak theories of child development. No mention is ever made of what children deal with in their lives at home.

Moreover, the maturity scale in CSI (2003) contradicts the approach to develop democratic citizenship outlined (albeit in a cursory fashion) in the introduction. Two conceptions are suggested: education is child-centred and geared to psychological development on one hand, and then on the other hand, CI education is presented as content-driven, evidenced by the subject-specific exemplars (59-70). Such a binary not only oversimplifies the case of CI education, but it also puts the teacher in the position of gearing instruction to spurious standards of psychological development:

The trouble is that both perspectives assume what we have serious reason to doubt, that there are empirically discernible teaching strategies- somehow neutral between different normative conceptions of human development and flourishing- appropriate to the promotion of de-contextualized processes of human learning (Carr 1984:141).

CI do not simply provide new “topics” for discussion tacked onto age-appropriate (normative) instructional material. They provide critical lenses for engaging, constructing, deconstructing and critiquing many aspects of lived reality, including what was previously unquestioned and considered uncontroversial. Knowledge and ways of knowing are both positioning and positioned; disciplines, subjectivities and positioning of the knowledge occur, which privilege
one form of knowledge in lieu of another kind of knowledge (Heilman & Segal 2006). In this way, CI education is a reflexive practice locating self and the process of cultural reproduction. The next section expands on the political nature of CI policy.

**Concluding Comments, Competing Voices**

The over-arching story on CSI policy is that it claims (and perhaps desires) to be a supportive curriculum guideline and a procedural policy for teachers and school administrators. The policy is troubling because it makes awkward moves without resolving the tensions it presents. For instance, its definition ensures a conflict-based perspective; “...an issue becomes sensitive or controversial when it evokes a clash between two or more conflicting belief systems.” The definition is offset by the call to treat conflicts “in a fair manner that is thorough, balanced, and free of unfair biases” (4). Placing these two extracts side by side reveals an epistemological paradox: one version sees CI as a binary clash of conflicting ideas; the other version shies away from conflict and adopts a banquet approach – CI are seen to be a sampling of ideas which reveal our tastes, or preferences to ourselves as a values clarification exercise. I argue neither of these perspectives is critical. Both of these perspectives endorse a liberalist view because issues are addressed at the level of individual ‘comfort’. Neither position supports a social justice agenda, as ‘clarification of positions’ is simply not sufficient as a condition for social and institutional equity, especially for the inclusion of students who are already marginalized or heavily silenced by normative talk (Young 2000).

Bias detection often accomplishes little more than surveying our preferences and predilections, and is a questionable learning outcome for controversial issues – or any – education. Democratic citizens can be ‘cultivated’ in ways other than through analytical activity;
there no substantive treatment of emotion other than in the form of conflict. Emotions are so central to CI, one wonder why their importance has been ignored, except that perhaps easy rationalizations are difficult to accomplish with individual emotions, though we seem more comfortable manipulating curricula – the ‘facts.’

There is also an equity voice sounding throughout the policy as a subtext. In the introduction, the equity voice says, “a classroom that is relevant to students’ lives cannot help but include sensitive issues about work, family and society. Controversy is a natural part of the process of knowing” (5). The language of the policy supports this uneven or perhaps contradictory aspect of the policy; it does not know what it wants to be or say. For instance, the policy states that any subject “can harbour” controversial issues (5), and this language promotes a view of CI as dark, dangerous material which lurks beyond the light of clear instruction.

To bring this chapter to a close, voices compete for authority in the discourse of the policy text. There are tones of proceduralism, socio-psychological authority, democratic citizenship, institutional control, as well as teacher as facilitator and purveyor of balance and bias detection. The policy eschews a critical approach, which would involve: engaging school administrators and teachers in identifying their respective privileges, rendering their lives more public and knowable, and becoming more inclusive of diversity in their engagement with CI (Visano & Jakubowski 2002:15). A critical approach would develop student engagement setting a CI agenda. One need only recall that CSI was initially distributed as an internal document for administrators and teachers to recognize its democratic and critical limits as only select individuals had access to it. The irony is rich, given that the topic is “controversial issues.”
Chapter Seven: Participants’ Views

We are educated to associate virtue with submission to textual authorities, rather than with an exploration of the volumes daily transcribed within ourselves...“What have we got to say? What judgments do we have to make? What are we doing? A parrot could talk as well as we do.”

-de Botton

This chapter analyzes the research data asking how teachers and school administrators understand the impact of “The Teaching of Controversial Issues” (2003). Emerging themes are partially predicated on the structure of interview questions and will be discussed under these categories: 1) the rationale and context for CSI 2) limitations of the policy 3) barriers to the policy, 4) challenges to the policy and 5) policy use and usefulness (policy impacts). Chapter Eight analyzes teachers’ engagement in teaching CI, issues arising in relation to leadership and CI, and finally, the role fear plays in the discourse. The data indicate there is lack of clarity in understanding CSI rationale and impacts on practice. A general finding from the research is that the policy is not useful except as a tool for discipline and providing procedures. Moreover, research participants reveal different perspectives on policy; some individuals observe explicit cause-effect relations between policy and its impacts, while others describe more discursive kinds of relations and these perspectives also influence their understanding of CSI effects.

1. Rationale and Context for Creating CSI

Teachers and school administrators’ provide an array of responses to questions about why CSI exists. Their responses emphasize different things in the policy:

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34 Alain de Botton. The Consolation of Philosophy 2001:165
35 The terms guidelines and policy are used interchangeably by individuals in the research but they perceive the terms differently. ‘Guidelines’ is the official document name given to CSI. Some participants in the research maintain this reference throughout the research as a way of framing it as a minor piece of policy. Other participants maintain that the distinction is
newly-amalgamated school board; curriculum regulation; anti-censorship policy; a strategy for bias detection; a document granting permission to teach CSI; and a response to pressure from powerful special interest groups. When clustered into thematic categories, the rationale for CSI is two-pronged; it functions as both a pedagogical support and a procedural guideline with a range of responses within each category.

i) **CSI is a Response to Amalgamation: Political Rationale and Context**

One interesting response from individuals closely connected to drafting CSI say was made to solidify the school board following school board amalgamation. According to Pixie, CSI (2003) is a “desperate measure” taken by the school board to bridge the gap between growing student diversity\(^{36}\) combined with amalgamation and cuts to curricula. The argument goes that amalgamation stressed the capacity of the education system. Student diversity brought attention to what was being taught and how it was being taught; “the board had to do something fast” (Pixie). Pixie\(^ {37}\) says the philosophy behind CSI addresses diversity with a curriculum policy: “I think that CSI comes from being a big city, multi-ethnic, multi-culture, multi-lifestyle school board.” Cassandra concurs, “...our primary purpose in having CSI was ‘we have got six different equity guidelines here. We are a new school board, we have to take the best of all of them...’”

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\(^{36}\) Over 200 visible minority groups entered Canada to comprise the 5,068,100 individuals making visible minorities 16.2% of the population during the 2006 census\(^ {36}\).

\(^{37}\) The drafting committee had direct input from physical education, English, world issues, library and equity departments. The committee was overseen by the library coordinator for the newly amalgamated school board.
[previous policies] and produce a new guideline so that our school board has a policy, procedure, whatever you want to call it.”

If CSI has a political rationale, it seems pragmatic. The school board wanted to reassure the expanded service area post-amalgamation of their responsiveness and their equity profile. Putting CSI forward suggests the school board’s interest in building a cohesive school community. A unity-building policy may be little more than a gesture toward students’ social and cultural differences. A political rationale explains the timing of CSI, and perhaps the gesture, but not the content.

ii) CSI Provides Curricular Support: Pedagogical Rationale

Linked to a political rationale, is of course, CSI’s pedagogical rationale. Pixie says, “(t)he document is two different things.” First, it is “a philosophy of what education should be about and I feel very strongly about that, and maybe it’s also the ideology of the school board.” May believes CSI is a practical CI document that clarifies “abstract concepts.” She says,

People had a lot of questions about what would happen if they were teaching CI as they should, as they are mandated to do for equity, and I think they didn’t understand what controversial issues would look like.

For May, the impetus and rationale for CSI is practice-based;

and one of the things that we saw was there needed to be a consistent approach to handling controversial issues and a consistent approach to dealing with problems as they arose and so that’s the impetus for writing the document.”

May believes the policy enables her to engage students in critical thinking:
CSI talks about what you would do in the classroom in preparing to address the text and ways in which one proceeds. The goal is, in addition to airing the kinds of issues, is to move ultimately not to knowledge for the purposes of recall but real mental cognition, when the kids understand what we have done, why we have done it, why there might be differences of opinion and that differences of opinion are normal, and need to be defended and justified on grounds…they can’t just be defended.

In framing “how teachers should proceed”, the policy is both directive and instructional. Such an interpretation can also imply conceptual constraints; controversial issues are permitted in classrooms as long as educators comply with the instructional strategy provided:

The controversial issues policy gives teachers the kind of support they need so that they can talk about controversial issues. And as long as they are aware of, and follow both steps, they can have an informed discussion in class. Knowing the board has taken a stand and this curriculum has been approved by the Ministry, there is nothing to gray the issue (Cassandra).

Indeed, there may be reasons or possible pressures incurring proceduralism that are not made explicit through the narratives. Was there a hidden context necessitating procedures? School administrators in particular, felt the procedures were necessary. There may be other factors because the variation of rationales suggests multiples realities. School administrators also observed that it was possible to work around the policy if the relationships in the school were good. The next rationale suggests historical or social pressures were influences of some sort.

iii) Censorship Rationale and Defense of CI Content

Prior to CSI, Pixie dealt with numerous threats in her role as a teacher-librarian. Principals called weekly to discuss book censorship or ones chosen by the Trillium List38. She had to decide whether these resources are suitable for use in the class. For her, fighting

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38 The Trillium List records textbooks chosen by the Ministry for use in schools. Texts stay in circulation for five years and school boards are responsible for their removal after “purchase period expiration”.

censorship is a policy rationale; “We were against book banning. We were against saying, ‘no, we can’t talk about that’ in a whole variety of things.” Though freedom to engage with resources ranks highly as a rationale for her, the exchange is rather conservatively framed as providing permission:

I think on a more practical level what we really attempted to do was to produce something that was thoughtful but allowed teachers to honestly grapple with the important things in the classroom, that allowed teacher librarians to stock a wide variety of books and electronic materials that students could have free access to, that allowed English teachers and other teachers to use novels and other pieces of literature and non-fiction to enrich the classroom experience without worry and to allow free discussion in classrooms in the idealistic practical sense. In a sense we were providing permission to do that within an open and respectful context.

CSI also supports course development with controversial content. Martin teaches the Genocide course and he says the policy laid a foundation for course development, but that the terrain is still contested. The fact that the “board took almost a year to study the feasibility and from that, not just what we would teach, but of the Genocide course, the response from the public” indicates the pressure schools encounter with CI pedagogy (Martin). Martin uses CSI as a reference during his lessons; he keeps a copy of it in his class to show to students to provide them the rationale for learning about global conflicts and genocides.

iv) CSI as a Procedural Framework: Two Functions

For the most part, participants say CSI was created to provide structure or guidance to teachers and school administrators. The term procedure takes two dominant forms: regulation of CI in curricula and administrative procedures. Through its “how-to” framework, curricular procedures outline bias detection and bias awareness strategies that essentially tells teachers what
they can do. School administrators are detached from pedagogy and they receive instructions for dealing with complaints and community relations.\textsuperscript{39}

Jenna does not see any contradiction in the fact that one arm of the CSI policy (procedures) could hinder the other (curricular areas). She says,

\begin{quote}
[CSI] is two things: a curricular guidelines/approach using certain specific procedures for lay people in the community, for people in the school and for teachers regarding what happens if somebody launches a complaint. It is also a document supporting specific curricular areas where controversy and conflict are prominent.
\end{quote}

According to Alex, CSI does offer an ideal for inquiry into issues, but it does so with an emphasis on policy. Alex says policy is necessary because teachers work in an educational climate where they are encouraged to shy away from them:

\begin{quote}
[CSI] makes it explicit. It’s a procedure. It’s a policy and procedure that validates. It says, of course controversial and sensitive issues should be at the core of education and we expect this to be happening in our classrooms. They can’t be avoided, they shouldn’t be avoided. Here is how you can proceed.
\end{quote}

Kevin supports the policy’s bias detection strategy; “all they [CSI] can be are guidelines...they are trying to promote a standard for bias detection and bias awareness in students.” With these standards, Kevin hopes more equitable conversations will occur. Like Kevin, Alex who helped draft CSI, believes the policy “allowed something that was kind of abstract and out there to be put on paper with examples.” Providing a standard strategy to promote students’ skills in bias detection is a central CSI (2003) rationale as stated in the policy itself: “In the broad perspective of curricular activities, controversial material must be treated in a fair manner that is thorough, balanced, and free of unfair biases” (2).

\textsuperscript{39} Appendices to the policy outline forms which direct complaints processes to the school administrator.
According to Jasmine, the policy supports teachers’ self-reflection and bias recognition: “CSI’s more of a frame of reference as opposed to directives. So the policy is mostly a framework to kind of guide us so we are aware of it, so we don’t forget it, so we recognize our own biases and prejudices.” The question is; can a framework inspire meaningful self-reflection?

Bias detection is an ambiguous and perhaps narrow rationale for the policy. A CI policy conceived as setting standards and a strategy bias detection has limited transformative possibility. Remembering her thoughts at the time the committee drafted the policy, Pixie maintains that the procedural aspects go hand-in-hand with curricular aims:

We were looking at all kinds of things. The physical education people were a key element to CSI because the whole element of teaching human sexuality usually falls to Phys. Ed.; one of the most contentious things come about in terms of their whole approach and what happens with parental objections... So there are all kinds of things that we took a look at in terms of all of this when we looked at creating a document that tried to cover the bases while giving principals and superintendents a procedure to follow when there were problems that tried to purvey a philosophy that indicated the classroom and the school were a “safe area” for discussion, examination, and listening to all points of view.

A mish-mash of influences to “cover the bases” and “listening to all points of view” sounds like liberal notions of inclusion. The open-endedness of this kind of stance placates many interested parties, but it does not satisfy a critical theoretical orientation.

There are distinct differences in the language used by school administrators compared to the language used by teachers. Most of the school administrators identify CSI as a something bridging the school board and school relations – a procedural policy – because that is what was fore grounded to them in the discourse of their in-servicing. They used expressions like Pixie’s: “being consistent”, “following procedures” and “making mistakes.” This language seems to support liberal ideology with phrases such as providing an “open and respectful context”:
One of the things we saw [writing team] was *there needed to be a consistent approach* to dealing with problems as they arose. I could say a cynical way the document serves is as a good way for superintendents and principals to cover their backsides so they follow procedures and don’t make mistakes in dealing with parents, students and teachers when controversies arise—back to a cynical approach. So in a practical sense, *we were providing permission to do that* within an open context, an open and respectful context [italics mine] (Pixie).

Fear of repercussions – covering one’s backside – also lead to scripted interactions, boundaries drawn as procedures and roles defined between administrators, parents, teachers, and students. Cassandra’s administrator perspective endorses CSI as a management document in dealing with parents:

> It [CSI] gives you a quick framework and then it gives you some of the “how-tos”: how do you speak to students prior to addressing the issue; what kinds of issues do you engage with; how do you support the post-conversation. The whole issue, it also gives you a basis for our conversation with parents because I feel that issues become controversial because they are controversial in the community.

Therefore, procedural discourses in administrator interviews are both liberal and procedural – procedures direct actions but proffer catch-phrases and slogans of CI.

**CSI: A Tool for Teacher Discipline or Protection**

What do school administrators and teachers experience in dealing with CSI? More activist-oriented teachers⁴⁰ understand their working conditions as increasingly politicized by a controlling ideology. According to Jacob, CSI increases demands on teachers for “procedural policy, legal protection, professional standards which are not mandatory but the basis of your

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⁴⁰ Activism takes many forms in the research. Some individuals work against homophobia, some are critical pedagogues and tackle even wider ranges of oppressions including ones related to curricula, others view art as an activist engagement, and still another views all educational activity as political. Students are encouraged to take action against specific actions such as the presence of police in schools, drug dogs, the role of Tamil flags and others.
defense.” He argues that the guidelines are “something else that just supports the equity document”, and “the equity document is already poorly managed.”

Jacob was disciplined for his support of boycotts against Israel in support of Palestine. Jacob knows activist Jewish organizations, and he is adamant that the Canadian Jewish Congress coerced the school board to institute CSI so that they could control text selection. CSI was formed shortly after Deborah Ellis’ *Three Wishes* (2003) was withdrawn from school shelves because certain community members argued the book was anti-Semitic. The extent of the connections between book censorship, the CJC and CSI is difficult to prove; however, the introduction of CSI aligns neatly with the public controversy over *Three Wishes*. Jacob argues,

I did some research a couple of years ago into this policy [CSI] and according to a 2002 Canadian Jewish news article, this policy was designed at the request of The Canadian Jewish Congress as a result of complaints from a secondary school.

He cites another example of a “hidden agenda” politicizing education toward normative ideals:

Back in 2001, or maybe it was early 2002, it was after 9/11 anyways. There was an assembly... and a Palestinian poet was invited as part of this assembly and read a poem I guess about being a Palestinian and some teachers and students flipped out over this poem, reported it to the board who reported it to the Canadian Jewish Congress. The board is newly formed, newly amalgamated was under tremendous pressure from these outside groups to respond to these concerns and the Canadian Jewish congress was working closely with the board according to the equity reps to devise a policy. I had a friend who was working in the equity department at the time who said that the first draft of this policy was really, like the equity department balked at the plan. They said it was really something that was quite explicitly designed to basically shun criticism of Israel and the policy went through quite a bit of revision before coming out to its present form.

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41 These activist activities occurred outside of school time.
Alex takes an opposing view; he does not think the guidelines enforce censorship or procedures to control teachers. He believes the guidelines protect teachers’ professionalism. Because they lack professional tenure, teachers are vulnerable to discipline/critique of their pedagogy, especially lessons dealing with CI. He argues that without the protection tenure affords, teachers need supportive documents and guidelines to *cushion* or *protect* them as they engage with CI. Alex uses his union position to advocate for a formal provincial policy position on CI education. Working with the Executive Director of the Ontario University Faculties Association and a panel with several district members, Alex argues a CI policy is required at the school level to protect teachers:

...we should have a policy in place before a controversy sweeps a teacher right up in a confrontation... I had thought about this a fair bit in my career and eventually documents were produced at the board level separate from the federation and I happened to end up in a program position to be able to sit on a committee.

Jacob says CSI is a “sham” and the schools do not need a CI policy – they need an effective equity policy. He says, “This kind of support document is for instituting equity into the schools. But then, of course, the whole design of discourse around equity has completely reframed CI so that criticism is not allowed.” Equity work is the area that needs development in his mind.

To summarize, school board regulation of curricula and teachers’ work appear to be a rationale taken for granted in CSI, or perhaps, implied or embedded. Some teachers and school administrators note the irony; a curriculum policy that purports to provide support can, in fact, restrict and discipline teachers. It does this through its regulatory emphasis which burdens teachers and hamstrings them from further, deeper kinds of CI inquiry. Endemic to this “conservatizing” school culture is compromising teacher professionalism to mediate pressure
from other educational ‘stakeholders’ (Carr 2007a). Sharon comments, “right now teachers are being policed and patrolled at every point.”

2. CSI Interpretations and Contexts

The research participants reveal a large gap between CSI as a text and the policy in the practical contexts of the school. It is difficult to imagine the same conversation and same text are being explained in the narratives. Yet, the variations demonstrate how they make choices, develop interpretations and respond to contexts. The participants are also shaped by the policy information they receive; whether it is well-communicated or a partial story. As May comments, how CSI work in school depends on community politics and the school’s response:

When we talk about controversial and sensitive issues, politics is always a part of it; it has absolutely nothing to do with furthering curricular knowledge or empathy in students. Eventually it has and can be everything about the politics of individuals and groups of people outside the school.

Alex also understands CSI as heavily influenced by school context. In the following example, communities with diverse educational opinions and interests challenge curricula:

There are always far more complaints through the English curriculum because of specific loop holes, and they have people of various religious beliefs challenge individual pieces through elementary and secondary and they get dealt with. There is a big controversy this year around The Handmaid’s Tale.

Kevin’s perspective on how CSI works in context emphasizes a procedural aspect as a response to the kinds of concerns raised by Alex and May. For Kevin, CSI is a “safety net” providing ‘how-to’ control sensitive CI:
When the issue is really, really contentious or someone doesn’t know how to broach an issue because it is so hot, CSI gives them a guideline, gives them steps to go by. This gives them a process in which to get engaged in a conversation.

Does a procedures-oriented perspective using “steps” actually support teachers, or is the “safety net” a trap that actually stifles the exploration of CI? The “process” instruct teachers to avoid expressing their own opinions. In response, Michael often over-steps the policy altogether. He relies instead on the human rights and equity policy:

Talking about the Armenian genocide, I may have some Turkish kids in the class that may object to that, but that is not a violation to their human rights and if it’s not a violation to the human rights, then it’s legitimate to talk about. So discussing political issues within the framework of international law could be always legitimate regardless of who it makes uncomfortable. You know we don’t say that talking about gay rights is going to make students feel uncomfortable; we have an equity policy that specifically addresses that.

Martin has another understanding of CI education in context; rather than the prophylactic logic of the procedural perspective, he opts to use the sunnier tones of ‘common-sense strategies’ for the classroom. His programming choices do not rely on the policy provisions except as rationales:

To me, in essence that whole CI is really about common sense. I think, again, I sound like I’m just bragging, if you are confident in what you are doing, if you know what you are talking about and you are compassionate, you can get around just about any topic. If you are laid up properly and explain the context of the reason for studying it, warn beforehand and most important as I have said to these kids in this class, if you ever have an issue that upset you in particular, leave if you are that upset.

He says the next stage in understanding CSI is recognizing the inevitably of confronting CI in the classroom:
...it is a fact; that is you can’t avoid the big controversies of history, these things happened whether you like it or not. Now the question is how do we delve into them? How do we make an understanding of what took place and has it worked?

**CSI Procedures and Complaints from the Community**

According to Kevin and Cassandra some school administrators should let the procedures of the policy determine how they respond to equity crises. The equity department receives continuous complaints from special interest groups, parents, community members and students over topics such as the situation in Sri Lanka, the Genocide course (especially the Armenian genocide), sex education and books such as *The Handmaid’s Tale* (Margaret Atwood), the *Life of Jackie Robinson*, *To Kill a Mockingbird* (Harper Lee), and *The Merchant of Venice* (Shakespeare). Equity is responsible for programming responses to crises:

In my last job- almost weekly- I would get a call from principals telling me that a parent had come in and demanded that a book be removed from the shelves of the school. And I would talk the principal through what needed to be done, I would provide them with assistance, sometimes I do some direct work in the school. I would get the media calling me when there would be book challenges in other school boards, asking me for my help. (Pixie)

Pressure from highly visible and powerful urban special interest groups is mentioned not only as one impetus for the policy, but teachers and school administrators also name continued lobbying by these groups against the Genocide course and some texts as policy impetus. The political tenor of special interest groups make CI appear to be delicate and difficult to manage due to offence taken to specific curricula (e.g. Martin said members of the Turkish community boycotted the inclusion of the Armenian genocide in the course curricula in the Genocide Course; Jewish students resist talking about Gaza).
Several teachers are certain that special interest groups continue to influence CI education and CI policy. Martin is blocked from showing a video after school hours (which students initiated and he supported) on The Jenin refugee camp in Palestine. A powerful parent in the community literally puts another film (pro-Israel) in his hands and tells Martin, “...this will not happen”. CSI’s capacity to mediate the teacher’s role in pushing for critical curricula is weak. This parent disregards Martin’s defense. Martin receives no administrative support.

In conclusion, teachers and school administrators interpret the guidelines differently depending on what they deal with in schools. Contexts influence their practices and understandings revealing policy complexity. These interpretations of CSI include supporting teachers and school administrators, supervising/regulating teachers in the classroom, and implementing a mechanism for community complaints processes. Most all interviewees agree that parents and community members exert substantial pressure on schools regarding CI. There was little understanding or sense of clarity on policy direction. Teachers and school administrators are not clear on, or do not agree on whether a procedural agenda is more important or whether curricular impacts are the focus. Activist teachers said the guidelines lent themselves to censorship. The discussion section will evaluate whether or not these are compatible policy aims.

3. Limitations in Working with CSI Policy

This section of the findings depicts two major kinds of policy limitations as the participants understand CSI: internal/conceptual, and programmatic/procedural. Both of these limitations affect how individuals work with and interpret the policy. Internal, conceptual limitations in the policy refer to the way policy ideas or principles are laid out in the policy.
Programmatic and procedural limitations come from policy applications and they include aspects of education such as: in-servicing; communication; department handling; and resourcing. The “Challenges” section will describe situations, including classrooms incidents that appear to expose policy’s failure to meet the challenges of circumstances. Policy limitations are grouped under two categories:

A) Internal/Conceptual Limitations

- Understanding what constitutes a controversial issue
- CSI procedures
- Role of the Reader Strategy
- Balance and bias detection
- Maturity Scale (see CDA pp.118-121 for analysis)

B) Procedural-Programmatic Limitations

- In-service
- Equity procedures
- Professional Development

i) Understanding what Constitutes a Controversial Issue

Several teachers and school administrators say they do not really understand the concept of a “controversial issue.” They struggle to distinguish CI from human rights issues, specific programs such as anti-homophobia, and the Safe Schools Agenda. Nor could individuals identify the difference between a ‘controversial’ and ‘sensitive’ issue. Classroom understanding was mostly viewed as teaching strategies from the guidelines (pro-con debates, bias and stereotype
One prominent view among some equity educators is that there is really little that is controversial in education if teachers are responsive (or dutiful) in following the existing policies. From this perspective, limiting CSI to curricular applications, and avoiding conceptualizing CI, is unjustly justified:

Controversial and sensitive issues may only tangentially be involved with a human rights education but it is already a given that if we are going to talk about gender identity, what’s so controversial about that, right? It’s human rights education. Sexual orientation is already a given because it is human rights education. However, when we start talking about let’s say... the role of fashion as expression of faith then maybe, we are talking about a controversial and sensitive issue. You can’t really say that in fact it is a human rights issue, it’s not because a human rights issue is creed or faith or religious (May).

While May is quite certain about the policy’s being supported by a network or web of existing policy structures, (with the exception of faith accommodation), other teachers demonstrate alternate views. For Jasmine, CSI simply grants permission to ask open-ended questions:

The reason that I like the controversial and sensitive issues document so much is because it gives license for, not just the students but for the teacher to just keep on asking questions, right? And I really do think that one of the best things that we can teach students is that they have the power to ask questions. The more questions they ask, the better the questions... are, right? And that’s, in a nut shell, that’s why I like that document.

Empowering students to ask questions may be a worthy task, but it does not follow that students ask better questions because they ask more, especially if certain students dominate the asking again and again. Nor is it likely that the vocal students would be the ones who need encouragement; therefore, “asking questions” is an insufficient CSI aim.

The impact of CSI’s ambiguity around defining controversial issues is especially hard on teachers. Teachers oriented to activism find the imposition of procedures makes them feel

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43 Role of the Reader Strategy (CSI 2003: 10-12)
vulnerable about what they teach. The policy does not provision for capacity-building or resourcing on complex social issues, so teacher-activists feel at risk of external critique for overstepping the guidelines. Jacob says he was erroneously investigated by the school board and the College of Teachers because any subject is controversial issue if interested parties choose to take it up that way. For Jacob, this indecisive policy message restricts rather than broadens his work. Daniel also finds the CSI approach to CI to be too vague:

...when I looked through that document, what may be controversial to others is not controversial to me in my own experience, and the funny thing is I wonder often… who decides on what makes something controversial or sensitive.

He notes that exemplars identified as ‘controversial’ are straightforward to him;

...that session about grade seven and eight curriculum when you learn about Canada and the whole issue of the Japanese and internment and capture in World War II...and I am thinking ‘that is controversial?’ It’s controversial in a sense that it should have never happened, but it is controversial to talk about it? No it’s not.

Daniel’s argues the exemplars presented in CI are actually not controversial; they are already well-known by most teachers. He objects to the document’s position on what is deemed ‘controversial’ because it does not develop awareness of significant social issues such as same sex parenting and homophobia.

Such policy omissions result in him being told to send letters notifying parents about lessons and asking for parental consent. Paradoxically, letters home reinforce dominant views about same sex parenting and alert the school system to enact more procedures. Sending letters home works against developing students’ open-mindedness because letter-writing campaigns tell students that same-sex parenting is controversial and this perpetuates stereotypes.
Daniel experiences the ‘fall-out’ from weak and ambiguous CSI. He has frequent meetings with parent council and the school principal to justify the controversies he teaches and this is precisely because the policy does not go far enough in conceptualizing CI. Daniel has to experience the same hurdles every time he teaches. Daniel, Jacob and Sharon maintain that fear of parental responses creates restrictions and pressure to reproduce normative ideology. Indeed, Jacob feels managing parental complaints is the defining feature of the document:

There are so many problems with this document. It does not stipulate for example any criteria of what is considered ‘controversial’ and what is ‘sensitive’. So what is controversial and what is sensitive is basically anything that someone in a position of power to deem it to be. So if you get no complaints, it’s not controversial, if you get complaints, it is.

This is not the fault of parents, in my view, by a system error, where it is convenient to maintain ignorance and powerlessness among parents and community.

ii) Role of the Reader Strategy

For Jacob, *The Role of the Reader Strategy* (CSI, 2003: 10-11) creates conceptual problems. The strategy is the fulcrum of the document and the teacher-facilitator delivers the strategy. The strategy ostensibly works when the teacher-facilitator presents information through balance; “the teacher helps the students to focus on the presentation of the text. The teacher models anti-discriminatory attitudes and behaviour” (Alex). According to May, the strategy has an explicit function:

So with the *Role of the Reader Strategy*, the aim is bias awareness, bias detections – the meta-cognitive skills of being able to identify the forming of bias with the media text and then being able to transfer that out of one particular classroom and one particular set of circumstances into other classes, other environments.
How the skill of bias detection transfers across classroom and life remains unclear in this explanation, and the teacher appeared flustered as she made these comments. The strategy’s aim thus formulated is problematic because it presents itself as a neutral skill or set of tools, but it is not. The problem is primarily one of omission – what is left out of the treatment of CI. There is no mention of efforts to deepen the conceptual understanding of individuals who work with it, or stretch the applications of CI to global conflicts.

Many teachers say the strategy is not adequate in for treating controversy and conflict. Martin worries that when students read literature by ‘a Holocaust denier’ there is a chance that students will not be able to recognize the propaganda and hate literature for what it is. He worries that text written by a denier will unintentionally justify the propaganda and influence students in unintended ways. He comments, “I was extremely fearful that our students would not be able to manage it.” Bias detection does not support critical thinking across a continuum of subject areas.

Other teachers who support the guidelines say access to the teaching strategies laid out in Role of the Reade are useful to pedagogy. Supporters say the strategy develops teacher consciousness and self awareness of “attitudes and perspectives, biases, and the nature of your classroom and the students in your classroom” (Katherine). Teachers talked about the approach as beneficial for outlining lesson steps and follow-up discussions. CSI is beneficial to some teachers as a frame of reference because it avoids being overly prescriptive; it works to guide teachers and students in identifying their biases and prejudices. Some teachers make connections

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44 I am thinking of the kind of critical literacy Freire (1998) argues for where schools are more than “nests of gathering students. Students should receive stimulation of what he calls their “epistemological curiosity” for critical literacy and learning. He frames critical literacy as a way of being in the world: “the dialectical relation between a reading of the world and a reading of the word.” Freire resists reducing critical literacy to a strategy or facile definition. Pedagogy and Freedom. Oxford: Rowan & Littlefield, p.79.
between CSI and their subject areas; “We are History teachers right? So we have a certain enthusiasm for history, and we try to frame our pedagogy around that critical piece...” (Jane).

4. Conceptual Weaknesses

Participants understand a primary conceptual weakness in CSI as a poor understanding of what constitutes a CI. This conceptual weakness leads to additional limitations: CSI’s confinement to curricular applications; resistance to dealing with world issues; and problems acknowledging the pervasive and complex reality of social issues. May argues a firm policy position is favourable. Because other policies support legal rights, what is left, a CI ‘slice’ is only a natural consequence of policy relations. Policy provision is better than nothing:

...of course it is a given that in fact controversial and sensitive issues is going to support and reinforce that section of the equity policy because Ontario human rights is affected in the Toronto District School Board through the TDSB human rights policy and because of the statements that have been made by our board itself about human rights education being extremely important, it supplements the whole thing that in fact even though you are looking at two different categories of curricular issues, human rights education and then controversial and sensitive issues that what you apply when teaching human rights issues is exactly the same as you would when you are dealing with controversial and sensitive issues.

Categories of curricular issues convey interest in labeling and not in understanding or supporting.

Kevin acknowledges that the division between curricular and human rights CI is not clear. He says CSI needs revision to be more inclusive of large scale social and world issues:

The way it is set up right now, it’s helping us deal with a lot of these world issues-curriculum material- Jackie Robinson book in the classroom, The Handmaid’s Tale, The Merchant of Venice; it deals very well with that. The media pieces: the movies, the sexual innuendos, the homophobic comments, it needs to deal with that. Sri Lanka right now- we are finding that it doesn’t deal well with that and so yes, it will be revised....it needs to be revised so it can better support for instance, a Civics course, grade 10, how a part of the curriculum requires the teacher to bring in world issues.
He points out the fact that the policy is caught in time-consuming book defense campaigns, at the cost of more expansive kinds of equity support. Kevin frames these limitations regarding world issues by identifying the “next steps”, which include confronting one major question: “how do we help educators in diversity, living in Toronto, with all the different cultures, groups, origins of geography with different feelings, thoughts, religious beliefs, social contexts in one building facilitate a conversation that deals specifically with world issues?” For May, policy amelioration lies in the provision of more policy;

so in the end, if you ask me what are the shortcomings, what are the strengths of controversial and sensitive issues, if I reflect on it in terms of faith, religion and creed, it is exactly going to come down to that and that is sincerely-held beliefs and the system of sincerely held beliefs that are either going to take issue with things that are taught in a secular curriculum or not.

Interview participants were questioned about the extent to which CSI (2003) in its current form is capable of tackling complex issues. While subsequent policies such as faith accommodation attempt to address religious diversity, these policies are created without engaging the diverse community in creating policy. Why keep different cultural groups from staking their democratic claim in making a policy contribution to the issues of a new interaction of CI policy? Though Kevin’s insight is extremely interesting, his agenda to deal with the ‘problem’ is weak, exclusive, and anti-democratic.

Cassandra understands this; “I think that is an expectation that in fact multiple points of view are to be encouraged but CSI doesn’t really go beyond that.” She acknowledges “... the next step in improving CSI is to move beyond the curricular piece. Although the whole thing is

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45 May says her work in equity developing “The days of significance curriculum” resources for interfaith education deals with this.
curriculum, even interactions beyond the classroom are curricular, but we need to deal better with world-wide big pieces.” These pieces “which necessarily have no answer or no end” demand a re-thinking of the aim of CI education from its current view narrowly interpreted as curricular applications (Katherine).

Martin conveys an anecdote which shows the impact of these conceptual limitations. Students made a docudrama called “Washrooms” as part of a series of performances to raise awareness of controversial social issues. It began as a delivery of historical facts on male-female violence. At one point in the play, a rape scene is enacted by a male against a female in the washroom. Three or four boys in the audience call “give it to her.” Several female students confront Martin and demand a conversation about the issue. The conversation starts very well; “they exchange their views and ideas and then violence broke out in a fist fight. The boys said, ‘...she asked for it’. That’s it. It just went downhill from there.” Martin regards CSI as less than adequate; it does not help teachers with students’ strong emotions and dispositions, or where students might take controversial issues in a classroom situation. He feels the document cannot address the real-life contexts of students and teachers in conflict. He does not want the guidelines to provide something more, but rather argues for teachers being politically motivated to work around them.

iii) Balance and Bias Detection Strategies

According to the individual interviews, CSI (2003) is preoccupied with bias detection and balance strategies and this affects its capacity to help them. Balance frames CI as the provision of two points of view or that chance to develop skill in detecting a biased point of view and then stating an alternate or opposing view (pro/con arguments, devil’s advocate). Indeed the strategy is almost a barrier when deal with global issues.
Sharon states that the concept of balance works against critical pedagogy because reasoning appears to be simply a matter of supplying an opposing viewpoint; “...this notion and this obsession with everything having to be balanced; that is basically what it [CSI] comes down to… you cannot balance, you know, certain opinions... with like an antidote, like you can’t balance teaching the Holocaust.”

Sharon goes on to discuss the paradox: mainstream teachers are not truly engaging with anything controversial or sensitive – they are just parroting conventional, mainstream curricula. These teachers must then reinforce the conventional curricula with more examples from it to meet the expectation of providing balance. While social justice educators continue to jump enormous hurdles to teach anything genuinely controversial, they are required to provide an equally weighted counterpoint which, according to Sharon, still ends up reinforcing the mainstream call for ‘balance’:

The idea is that (I’m speaking about media here) students get the mainstream conventional message and so to “present balance” doesn’t make any sense in that context because they are already getting all of it from the mainstream messages. In order to provide any balance, I have to sort of bomb them with the opposite message. Give it enough time and faith, but there is just not support for that and this document doesn’t provide support for this.

Sharon critiques the policy for the contradiction it presents critical educators; she has to represent the norms she is trying to critique. Sharon sees nothing balanced in re-introducing dominant types of thinking – the status quo – into the classroom. Social justice educators simply see more conventional thinking; “they are really not providing a full form of balance and appropriate controversy” (Sharon). The commitment to balance pervasive in CSI belies an underlying antagonism detected by teachers who are particularly committed to social justice activism. It
antagonizes social justice educators to have to re-instate dominant knowledge norms to balance controversial ones because it amounts to knowledge control:

Also my concern about balance is this idea is that you’re equalizing knowledge; there isn’t recognition of the power of a dominant norm. It’s that, well if you have a little this, all you need is a little bit of that and your soup won’t taste so salty. A little bit too salty, add a little bit more pepper rather than a question why is there so much salt in the soup to begin with and that is the educational piece around it. So balance is a correctional measure without looking at what is the preceding ideology that shaped our educational knowledge and norms and expectations to begin with. That is my concern (Sharon).

GLQBT experiences, identities and needs, for example, are always constructed as abnormal, which deepens the divide. Daniel succinctly comments, “I personally wouldn’t like to think that gay and lesbian issues are antagonistic to heterosexuality”. Balance, in effect, reinscribes a binary and suggests there is natural or inherent antagonism.

Jacob views the balance strategy as a means of controlling teachers and their pedagogy.

He receives parent complaints over his views on Israeli-Palestinian issues in his private work and union activism, which often results in interrogation by school administrators:

‘You tell me what I am supposed to provide balance for.’ She [school principal] says, ‘well I don’t know’. I said, ‘well can you ask?’ I asked to meet with the parent to at least let me know what issue she is concerned about so I can address the concern properly. She was like, ‘no, that won’t happen’. I said, ‘...well, you are asking me to provide balance, I don’t know what I am supposed to balance.’ I didn’t know what the hell to do. And so I was called down again. I was asked, ‘Have you done anything?’ [To remediate and provide balance] and I said, ‘I don’t know what to do. I need direction here, I need guidance.’ ‘Well, you are making statements about Israel and Palestine conflict, you need to provide balance.’ I said, ‘But I am not teaching Israel/Palestine conflict.’ She said, ‘...well you made some comments, you have to provide balance.’
Balance has uneven historical representation; the school board issued a statement of sympathy following the Sri Lankan tsunami, but there was no sympathy for families in the community on either side of the Israeli-Palestine conflicts in 2008. Jacob recalls,

> It was just a complete and absolute silencing and I had a couple of students in Civics class that year come up to me after class. They waited around and said, “Can we ask you a question? Can you please tell us what is happening in Gaza?” I just kind of laughed. “I would love to but I can’t” and I showed them the memo and said that as much as I would like to share my thoughts, I can’t - I said that to them.

The effect of uneven historical representation (ambiguity) is that CSI puts pressure on teachers to work in ways that are not pedagogically critical, and hamstrings CI activism. Balance reduces pedagogy to curriculum-matching. Controversial world events are important discussion issues to students. Teachers say that the balance and bias detection are insufficient strategies to support work in global CI.

**Procedural Limitations Section B:**

i) **CSI Professional Development and Awareness**

CSI was initially in-serviced to school administrators, a counter-story that reveals important impacts. The findings explain the patchy awareness among teachers and some administrators of the text’s production. Responses to the question, “how well do you think people know about the policy?” vary from “It’s a big part of the teacher induction or the formal training we do for new teacher/librarians” (Pixie), to “I don’t think people entirely know about it. I mean half of the teachers in this school graduated in the last five years. They weren’t even here when the policy was put into place” (Jasmine), to this response: “I have referred people to it, but I have not actively used it myself” (Jenna). Lack of policy awareness creates obvious impacts:

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46 Memo quoted in introductory chapter.
uneven distribution of policy to staff; doubts about the school board’s commitment to curricular equity; and questions about the prominence of CSI to other policies.

The Director of Education and the Superintendent of Instructions and Programs made the decision to deliver CSI in-services to principals. School administrator received the in-service because they are the ones who engage in “front-line” CI conflicts. There were several in-service sessions with various kinds of subject area applications. One school administrator’s in-service consisted of a power point explaining the policy in terms of principals’ responsibilities, followed by group discussions of problem scenarios, presumably parental complaints regarding text selection or course content. Their in-servicing was a half-day session with two hundred administrators per session:

…they received at least four half day sessions which were mandatory for every principal and superintendent in the TDSB system. The principal training sessions were done on a mass basis – several hundred people at one time. With 570 schools, in-services sessions were scheduled for half days over a one week period. One hundred and fifty to two hundred people attended at a time.

May, who was an equity representative at the time, reflects on the process; “it was a policy with a script with activities in it. It was something to be sent to every administrator so that they would, when the document came out, know how to in-service it. So that is as much as I can tell you. Did it get in-serviced? Did people have that conversation?”

This enactment impacts all participants because communication was not adequate to enough school administrators. In retrospect, the in-service is flawed:

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47 These conflicts were typically parents seek text changes through reviews. A request for review is a formal submission of complaint to the school board by parents or others who object to curricular material and request an alternate mode of instruction or a review of the materials under instruction. Parents have tried, but have not succeeded in complaining about the sexual orientation of a teacher. (GO2 (Procedures) Equity/Admin letter.3376.VL Retrieved www.TDSB policies)
...we missed our big chance. The way that the in-service was structured was for the document to be identified and all the ins and outs of it to the administrators. It was supposed to be mandatory attendance... for the administration and I think that we did get a high rate of attendance but then after the administrators who may or may not be curricular people, right? It was up to the administrator to go back to their schools and in-service it. I know of administrators who had every good intention of doing so therefore had the boxes of the documents sitting in their offices but never got around to it, got transferred or what have you. And so there were lots of teachers, there still are that are not familiar with it (May).

Other participants confirm May’s account that teachers were excluded from an in-service on a curriculum policy. One impact is weak accountability. Jasmine observes there is no administrative follow-up;

...policy is not just a piece of paper. No one is following it and there is no accountability. There is no follow-up to see who is actually administering the policy or using the documents and doing the work in schools.

Moreover, there was no direction surrounding school administrators’ roles in this regard. How were they supposed to relay the in-servicing into meaningful professional development? Jenna contends that teachers do not understand CI policy because school administrators did not in-service them. But, the variation among interpretations suggest something more than this is necessary.

Sharon says who teaches influences CI education. Hiring practices both of school administrators and teachers have become more conservative and policy compliant:

I feel very cynical about it all. I am not sure at this point even this whole training works. I think it has to go back to hiring teachers. I think they have to work on employment equity in hiring and work on the questions they are using when they are hiring candidates - that and policy revitalization.

Katherine contends teachers’ policy capacity is inadequate:
I don’t think that teachers have the kind of skills that they need to be able to use the document properly, right? I am not suggesting that they need to be doing all sorts of workshops but certainly when you survey even the staff; ‘how many of you have heard of this document’, I would say maybe half. It’s not well publicized. It’s not. It’s not something that the majority of people know about or care to read; that in itself is a problem, isn’t it – that there is a document that gives us ideas about how to do this and not many people know about it?

Jasmine claims teachers’ interest drives its use, rather than in-servicing:

I think when it comes to that particular document, people at this school, staff, are aware of the document, some of us are probably a little more in tuned into it than others because that is our interests. Some of us see it as part of our job because it is within our course curriculum, others not so much. So I think it is really departmental based. That is the way it is.

Perhaps CSI has not effectively addressed its initial aims to answer questions such as, “What does a controversial issue look like? What does that feel like and sound like in my classroom?”

Conceptual fragmentation was complicated by initial stakeholders on the drafting committee, who came to view CSI as a combination of competing interests:

Other people presented the kinds of issues that arise in a history or contemporary studies classroom. The English folks did other issues. The Phys Ed. people did some scenarios of what happens in human sexuality studies... And the equity people talked about stereotyping bias. My part of the training for principals was “here is the selection policy for your school library, here is what happens when parents object to library books in the school” (Pixie).

A fragmented policy agenda is evidenced by an itinerary to treat curricular issues, text selection, censorship, and the review process for complaints and lack of conceptual clarity.

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48The questions were posed by Alex during the interviews as impetus questions for CSI. He helped draft the policy.
5. Impact of Equity Department on CSI

Several school administrators and teachers in this research study worked in the equity department over the last decade. They report that certain political reforms altered equity’s capacity to inform and in-service CSI. They note that this department played an important role in shaping the policy.

The equity department budget shrank from pre-Harris budgets of roughly a million dollars to several thousand dollars. After the deep cuts of Secondary School Reform (1998), the equity department found itself without a budget for release time to support schools, and limited funds for publishing materials and training staff. According to Jenna, the equity department withstood obstacles and restrictions:

Post-amalgamation, the equity budget shrank to several thousand dollars; [the equity budget] just kept being stripped as the year went on, stripped and stripped and stripped and it was paying for documents that we had to do, and the writers, and the copies of the things being sent. It is amazing what we were able to get done with no budget; you have no budget, you have no release time. You have no money to release teachers. How do you do that and there is always the idea of you know, trying to train us. It’s an ineffective way to get equity into the schools; it’s not going to change school culture. You can’t change culture with that little support.

The decimation of the equity department impacted its capacity to communicate to teachers and school administrators throughout the school board:

I think most people I know heard about CSI though the equity department. They no longer know about it. The last equity training I went to, this document wasn’t even available. Things have shifted even from the earlier equity meetings; it wasn’t available. I doubt my current admin has even heard of it (Sharon).
The effects of these changes to equity are felt by teachers in the equity agenda’s breadth and depth, evidenced in part by who receives information from the department within the TDSB.

Sharon is articulate in setting the scene:

They are not doing the same kind of training at all. I mean I haven’t heard about in a long time the TDSB, the equity foundations statement or the human rights policy so I think a lot of that material is getting buried, it’s hard to say whether it’s being buried on purpose or whether it’s just because the department has been cut back which is clearly purposeful but it’s hard to know. I think there’s generally “going to move to the white neighbourhood agenda” in the board… so they speak about equity, they speak about social justice, but I haven’t seen it prioritized in any way.

Sharon also goes on to say that she sees a change in the relationships among the equity staff, teachers and school administrators; “I think a lot of the equity people now are closer to administration than they are to the teachers because they are being asked to work like that [with fewer staff].”

May has worked as an equity lead teacher and she puts a tremendous amount of faith in the policy text to accomplish transformative education. She realistically envisions a variety of possible CSI outcomes, but she does not realistically address how equity could or should achieve these outcomes. She implies that any change is better than nothing and is working toward equity:

...if CSI is productive for a student that is great, if it makes teachers more sensitive and aware to students needs, that is wonderful. If it empowers and emboldens teachers to make demands of their administrators to become more caring, more sensitive and more aware of the students needs, that is even better. And if it emboldens and strengthens and reinforces administrators and their position to make demands of their superintendents and of the Ministry of Education for the necessary resources to build up that inclusive classroom environment then that is all the better.
6. Barriers to Teaching CI

Individuals from the research identify significant barriers in their understanding of CI in relation to CSI shortcomings. The barriers include: teacher resistance to equity agendas; fear of institutional surveillance from sites of authority (school administrators, school boards, department heads); anxiety over discipline from OSSTF; lack of support from the Ministry of Education; community resistance; and the barrier of the dominant educational discourse – the hegemony of the white privilege (Razack 1998).

a) Equity’s Encounters with Teachers’ Resistance: Side-Stepping Controversial Issues

Equity workers encounter resistance as a reaction to the equity agenda. For instance, equity educators and school administrators notice some other educators’ side-stepping contact with them – avoiding questions or confrontations about CI equity. This avoidance piece is reflected in a variety of other behaviours. Cassandra has encountered colleagues saying, “Politics do not belong in the classroom.” Some of her colleagues argue the curriculum is “clinically clean”; that is, it is void of ideological inequity (embedded racism, homophobia, classism, sexism among others). She says teachers often prioritize students’ ability to ‘tell text’ in a consistent manner which precludes critical thinking and reasoning on difficult CI. Other trenchant barriers face equity work.

Cassandra hears outright resistance such as; “this is a public system. Religion is not an issue here” and “there is no racism anymore”. Teachers dismiss CI as extraneous, saying, “We don’t have to deal with this controversial issue” because they do not see it as instructionally valuable. This bleak scenario arises in part from some attitudes which hold that “...we are color-
blind and if people would just work hard, they would be fine.” Neoliberal notions of ‘equity as sameness’, bring flatness and irrelevance to education. Claiming ‘color-blindness’ runs counter to understanding and enacting an equity agenda. Further, such comments betray assumptions about students and what they need to learn, which do great disservice to the actual diversity of students’ needs. These kinds of experiences induce trepidation and fear of dealing with CI.

Ironically, in the current educational climate, supporting one’s equity commitments can have negative repercussions. Jenna lost her job renewal for an equity position because during the process, she interpreted the Safe Schools Policy as a document supporting white privilege and the safety of white children at the expense of acknowledging and protecting racialized people and gay and lesbian communities, and the kids who belong to these communities, in the interview. She was not re-hired.

Equity workers say teacher resistance is only part of the problem. Working with CSI is not profiled as an important division to some educators because other policies and agendas supersede it; “There are challenges in a sense that it’s not at the top; it’s not literacy, it’s not numeracy, it is just equity. It is what it is. There are no test scores attached to equity, is there? There is no EQAO on equity, so who cares?” (Jenna) Assessment and accountability policies are privileged as more serious educational policies so they receive more attention.

In summary, equity’s involvement in CSI is a story about funding cuts. Reliance on school administrators to administer CSI in-servicing was not an effective communication approach, but perhaps it was the only one available given the financial constraints. The document fades against the dominating field of accountability, which counts as another limiting factor. Consequently, unanticipated effects (e.g. disagreements, conceptual ambiguity, and teachers’
resistance) are constructed as “a can of worms” – something deleterious to good teaching (Jenna). This perspective can be understood partly as a response to current underfunding, but more likely – and more profoundly – it reveals a troubling dominant ideology.

A final concern arises about the alliance between equity and administration. Katherine observes, “I think that there were always some people within the system that would recognize that students’ needs were a priority, but there were always tendencies too for the decision to be made according to the existing political structures and tendencies of the area.” School administrators were simply flooded with other policies; Safe Schools, School Learning Partnerships, anti-homophobia agenda, and most prominently EQAO and Numeracy testing (Jenna, Katherine, Susan, Jasmine, Jane). This allegiance proves overwhelming to supporting curricular policy as school administrators are inundated with competing policies.

In conclusion, the razor’s edge for equity would appear to be this: given the department’s decreased staff allocation and resources, it seems logical that a target population (e.g. principals) were policy recipients. The other side, equally as sharp and dangerous in its ramifications, is that without working directly with teachers in a full and meaningful way, equity is not working equitably; they are working administratively. Equity is ultimately working strategically perhaps, but not inclusively.

b) Teacher Surveillance

Of the individuals interviewed, five discussed the pressure of disapproval, surveillance or administrative control as a central feature of their understanding. Jenna says “I was excited because I thought CSI gives me an opportunity. I first started teaching, educating and challenging homophobia”, but “the principal was very uncomfortable with it and mentioned to
me at the time that teens weren’t ready to talk about these delicate issues.” Sharon undergoes an investigation because her colleagues speak out against media images depicting stereotypes:

A couple of teachers in the building thought that I was putting pornography up even though we were being critical of the images went to the principal. The principal asked me to take them down, I said, “no this is a teachable moment, why don’t we have a conversation about what this all means?” I think that was the first real moment of shock and you know complete disbelief actually and so when I heard about this document at one of the equity meetings called CSI... I thought it would help.

Pixie acknowledges that there is an element of the policy which enacts authority to protect school administrators. She implies that school administrators focus on procedures in order to maintain parent relations, “I mean I could say in a cynical way that the document serves as a good way for superintendents and principals to cover their backsides.”

Some teachers feel the policy enables teacher surveillance; it specifically intensifies school administrators as policy supervisors and teachers as objects of policy compliance. For example, parents complain about Jacob for discussing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in class, but he is not permitted to talk to the parents to explain his intentions, or what he did. He asks the principal to explain the nature of the complaint, and the principal replies that she had promised the parents ‘confidentiality’:

I was called down to the principal’s office and told that there had been complaints, and, so I suggested, “why don’t you do this: invite the people who have expressed their complaints here for a meeting and I would be happy to talk with you and them to sort this out”. She [the principal] was like, “no, I promised them confidentiality”.

Jacob is often told he is straying; his CI interests are in contravention of the CSI policy:

My principal told me about CSI. She said, “You better know this- you are in violation of this policy.” And I said, “I have never heard about this CSI policy and OSSTF legal counsel has informed me that the precedent in all cases of discipline is that you cannot be
disciplined under a policy that is not promoted in the school. If a principal does not inform staff about a policy, she cannot discipline under it and of course it is a policy that has never been mentioned”. To be honest, I don’t… think my principal had even heard about it until somebody pointed it out to her.

For these reasons, Jacob is very critical about the underlying impetus for the policy; “CSI is there for teachers so they do not stray away too far from what their board would like to see with all these objectives in place for the students.”

On one hand, the creation of the text speaks to a concern (genuine or gestural) for making pedagogical spaces for teachers to discuss controversy, but in its practical application, the document can be interpreted as permitting more comprehensive policing. The authority governing and the forces animating CI pedagogy remain obscure. Again, Jacob is investigated by the school board because he proposed to OSSTF a formal boycott and divestment sanction against Israel, in order to lobby for Palestinian equity;

I have been told [by the school principal] that as a result, we have to launch an investigation. And I said, “An investigation, for what?” She said, “Well, there are concerns so we will investigate.” Okay, well I haven’t done anything so I went back to my classroom, unnerved, but okay there will be an investigation, I don’t know what they are going to find, but whatever. The next day, the next morning, my branch president and principal came to see me, called me down to the office and said, “as a result of the investigation, we have been told that we have to send you home. You are barred from school property until the decision of the investigation. You are being sent home with pay.” I was stunned. Over the course of the next three weeks when I was home, on that little vacation, each one of my students was called down to the office and questioned about me.

According to Jacob, CSI use balance strategies to enforce conformity. Not only does the policy enable interrogation by others, but it hinges on tripping teachers up in themes like the demand for balancing perspectives. Here he relates another dialogue:
I was asked if I had ever taught anything called ‘The Triangle of Oppression’ and I said “yes” and she said “can you explain what that is” and I said “yes sure” and I did not deny teaching it, it is perfectly within the board’s equity policy to teach it. I was asked what other materials I had used to teach that and mentioned Peggy Macintosh’s article which I noted was a suggested article in the policy document Teaching Sensitive and Controversial Issues, so I was working from the policy and she kind of dropped that and then I was asked if I had referred to the Native American genocides and I said “yes. I taught a unit on Native issues” and she said, “Well you used the term genocide. She said did you teach another perspective?” And I said, “What other perspective would that be?” And she said, “I am just asking, did you teach another perspective?” I said, “Well I said under international law under the convention and punishment of genocide, of which Canada is a signatory, transferring children from one group to another is considered an act of genocide under international law, that is something undeniable under the residential schools which is quite well known and under international law, that constitutes genocide so I feel completely legitimate to use that term”. So that was it.

After all these investigations, the union and equity committee find nothing but exemplary teaching. Moreover, the equity department supported his frameworks for pedagogy and rationales for teaching. He never received an apology. Sharon cites her own issues with surveillance and fear of administrative repercussions after meetings with the teachers’ union:

They (OSSTF) talked a lot about protecting teachers because some principals were going after teachers, which is interesting because you know, until last year when it erupted around Israel, you know there were a number of teachers who were sent home on home leave for discussion of Palestine in the classroom. I hadn’t heard of any teachers being seriously reprimanded in the board for discussing controversial and sensitive issues so...There was a teacher at X; he was put on home leave for discussing it, there were two teachers at X sent home. So it’s become very difficult, and I taught politics last year in a state of high anxiety and I pretty well avoided it, so it’s a pretty difficult environment politically around certain issues.

As a group, teacher-activists shifted the discussion away from talk of “learning expectations” or “teacher neutrality” to issues of teacher safety. For them, “balance” entails balancing the criticism of colleagues against their critical pedagogy to establish safe teaching and learning conditions. Sharon feels secure in her classroom even though she “pushes the envelope”
because parents and community members value how active and engaged students are in her class, and this satisfaction keeps her classroom a safe space. Jacob shares this sense of having to balance the reactions of others to ‘not push too much’ so he can keep on working with critical issues; “I push on a number of issues, and sometimes I get reaction and sometimes I get their enthusiastic support. So I kind of position myself that way and I survived two investigations so I also feel a little bit safe, like I have been inoculated.”

In summary, teachers’ narratives reveal direct confrontations with individuals in positions of power and authority; they feel they are being watched. This is obviously a barrier to the policy working effectively or being embraced by teachers. Activist teachers were also inclined to call the equity agenda weak, which left CI education relatively unsupported in both a practical and critical sense. Teachers find CI work risky because they are under greater surveillance than teachers who do not engage with CI pedagogy. Sharon says she and other educators silence themselves because they know if their discussions develop social or political critique, they will be vulnerable to discipline or denied the opportunity to teach these critical courses. Conversely, current political contexts and relations between and among teachers, administrators, superintendents and officials may “colour” the policy in unintended ways, as circumstances draw out certain of its characteristics through unrelated factors such as funding, hiring practices, and competing policies.

e) OSSTF

Teachers talk about a complicated relationship with OSSTF as both a barrier and a support. Teachers interviewed say OSSTF protects their social justice pedagogy as individual teachers, but they argue OSSTF, at times, inserts itself between progressive educational
challenges and teachers in negotiations. For example, some teachers and school administrators say OSSTF often supports teachers who do not want to engage with social justice or equity work because some teachers say it is extra work and not their responsibility. Katherine and Jenna found this distressing as school administrators. Sharon comments,

Like on one side, I see that the union is doing a lot. Like there is always a women’s equity rep, there are always some great things, but then there’s the other side, right? I think sometimes the union can restrict, and I think there’s that blinder of ‘that’s not my job’, ‘I don’t teach that kid’, ‘it’s not in my classroom’, you know, versus when we taught ‘it is my school it’s my responsibility.’

Yet another level of union involvement is troubling for CSI; teacher professionalism is truncated by a possible mandate requiring principal approval before teachers deal with CI in the classroom:

The Vice-President of our union (this is district 12 and was probably around 2006) introduced a motion to have all principals approve discussions of controversial issues in a classroom before they came up. As you can imagine, many of us were absolutely horrified because that would be our daily practice as teachers would be transformed and what would be deemed a controversial issue by a principal, would not be deemed controversial quite possibly those interested in equity and social justice so for instance challenges, homophobia. First of all the vice president of the district at that time argued that it was for the teachers’ protection because if you had pre-approval for discussing these issues in the classroom, then they wouldn’t be forced to defend teachers once the principal complains and many of the people involved in writing this document came to the meeting and actually argued against the motion saying no this document was protection enough for teachers and it was a very close vote but that motion was voted down…(Jacob).

For Sharon too, the union functions as a barrier to teacher agency to speak freely and to voice dissent on public issues:

I am scared of the union but it has more to do with my branch president. There are some issues around here and she is not comfortable with them. She is more of a George Bush style leader. I made the mistake of raising issues independently a couple of times at district meetings and then I found myself in trouble so I stay clear. I actually removed myself from all union committees and I don’t go to any meetings at the school even
though I have been a lifelong union activist. I have removed myself because I am actually more scared of the branch president than anyone but I think it is particularly my school. I don’t think that exists in a lot of schools. The branch president actually has a lot of power, she is on the staffing committee so they can decide which teachers are safe or not and help decide that particularly if you have a new admin coming in who doesn’t know staffing that well. There was one year where a number of us took a public position against the branch president and we were all surplused out of seniority order.

Alex says CSI offers teacher protection against threats to their professionalism; “I was also somewhat active in the OSSTF and we were conscious in Toronto of teachers coming under attack and we at the OSSTF at the district level tried to communicate that provincially. We said we should have a policy in place before a controversy sweeps up a teacher.” Again at issue is whether the policy protects teachers or whether teachers submit to an authority who decides what is controversial. The issue is not worked out fully in the data. The different perspectives do not coalesce in the data; however, more teachers took a negative view of OSSTF than took a positive one. School Administrators all took a dim view of OSST involvement.

d) Lack of Support from the ‘System’: Ministry of Education, School and School Boards

Lack of provincial recognition for CSI policy amounts to a barrier. Teachers and school administrators argue effective CI policy and board equity “...should come from the Ministry. And so that is why when the Ministry comes out with new Inclusive Classroom Strategy, the big hole that is there is that they don’t have anything in place to address the curricular piece49,” (May). In effect, the failure of the Ministry of Education to provide a comprehensive policy on CI leaves CSI (2003) unsupported and vulnerable to rejection:

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49 The Ministry of Education has since issued a new Equity Strategy (2009).
...the one thing that they [The Ministry of Education] have left out is in fact a supportive, reinforced and standard way of looking at controversial and sensitive issues. That is the one thing that they do not have in that policy... they don’t have anything for controversial and sensitive issues and they are going to have to learn that if you are going to have a policy like that, you have opened up a can of worms and you need to have something in place to address all the curricular issues that are going to come out. (May)

CSI gets short shrift in teachers’ in-servicing compared to more mainstream policies and agendas; “I think we had Safe Schools as an agenda item or PD item for every single meeting last year.” (Sharon) Cassandra says school administrators prefer higher profile policies because they get more system support than other policies;

I think it’s difficult to navigate the conversation around controversial issues. I think that it’s much easier and it’s much more widely supported to say I’m working through the Effective Guides for Instruction and Literacy, and when you say that, you are highly supported. That is what I am doing social justice through that lens.

So equity- oriented school administrators use other policies strategically for their equity agendas, but they tend to leave CSI alone; viewing it is dangerous or troublesome. The fear and silence it creates recurs in pre-service teacher education:

I think that people really do worry about anything that is labeled controversial and so you know, when I think about my teacher candidates for example, well I am not going to go there so why am I going to pick this up, right? (Cassandra)

Presented as extraneous “add-ons” that are too troublesome to bother with because they invite potential problems and ambiguous roles, CSI has weak policy traction or engagement. Provincial policy neglect only reinforces fear and avoidance as legitimate responses.

e) Institutional-Community Relations Barriers

Since 9/11, many institutions, including school boards, have become sensitized to cultivating good relations with Muslim communities among other cultural and religious
communities recognizing that different perspectives need to be respected. When a teacher shares an Internet speech (the speaker is the past-president of the national Islamic Women’s Council), the speaker uses a controversial metaphor to describe 9/11. She is reported to have said, “American foreign policy is covered in blood” and “9/11 is the chickens coming home to roost” (Cassandra). The furor over the speech lasts three weeks. Parents wanted withdrawal of the students’ writing response and an apology from the teacher. They said, “...this is hate literature and so forth”. The district wide coordinator of equity, the superintendent and the coordinator of human rights become involved. Of course, community members are not a genuine barrier; they are a barrier to individuals who want to silence dialogue. If the superintendent had provided community-wide CSI information sessions, then such responses could become part of the process, not intrusions. Barriers, in this sense take on a liberal quality of ‘disruptions’ to the status quo.

In fact, poor communication and involvement of the community to build CSI-supported curricula create a barrier to embracing a CI agenda, according to some school administrators. A plethora of complaints by the Toronto District Muslim Education Community regarding withdrawal of students from classes on sex education prompted a letter from the school board (Katherine). The letter responds to complaints from The Toronto District Muslim Education requesting student exemption/accommodation from anti-homophobia education, which was not granted on the grounds that it is human rights education:

...religious accommodation… is carried out within the larger context of the secular public education system. While the board works to create a school system free from religious discrimination, this freedom is not absolute. The board will limit the practices or conduct
in its schools, which may put public safety, health, or human rights and freedoms of others at risk.\textsuperscript{50}

Again, policies are instruments of mediating tensions over differences, but the flow of conversation is usually in the direction of school board to parents and community. The current situation permits students to ‘sit-out’ of sex education classes also. Teachers’ responses to the school board letter vary:

...you know we had a lot of Muslim students who sometimes wanted to opt out, so here is the board’s policy to those kinds of issues... It was interesting to see how the board responded to that issue – differently than in terms of reproduction stuff that they do in schools – different than [with] issues around homophobia and things like that (Jane).

Teachers identify an inconsistency in the board’s approach to the area of sex education which, as suggested, is partially a response to parental concerns. The rationale does not ‘fly’ with Jane:

...so if you were a parent who did not want your child to learn about sex education, you could have them removed from the class for that time period. That is an acceptable reason according to the guidelines. Seems silly to me, but that’s not my choice. The expectation would be the parent would teach those things, I guess, versus anti-homophobia stuff which is about human rights you can’t be shielded from that. You cannot ask your child to be away and go sit in the library during that presentation or whatever. That’s my board’s policy on those issues. I thought that was interesting. I thought they were both equally important, but I guess really, at the end of the day, sex education is the parents’ ultimate responsibility but human rights issues are kind of a board responsibility.

When the TDSB set out to offer the Genocide course, it had to hold public meetings for people to make representations because the course was beyond the scope of existing procedures. Some Turkish communities lodged complaints and questioned whether the course should be offering content on the Armenian genocide. The school board endorsed the course; the Ministry of Education approved the course and so complaints were over-ruled. An academic review

\textsuperscript{50} (GO2 (Procedures)Equity/Adminletter.3376.VL)
committee was struck with History, Politics and Law professors on it to advise the board and the
director about the inclusion of the Armenian massacres as genocide and as a result of that
review, it was upheld and it has been taught this year.

Community relations appear to be a weak link; parents and community do not receive
opportunities to engage their democratic beliefs in the education policy process; however, this
research just touches the edges of this situation. Daniel reflects, “the only time the policy ever
has come into effect is when it’s convenient to silence somebody.” Conceptually, the problem is
deeper. A discourse of privileged knowledge and values is embedded in these relations that pass
in the discourse as a ‘common sense’ kind of education.

f) Community and Policy: Faith-Based Accommodations

According to May, CSI must learn to meet the complex needs of diverse communities
and this includes clarifying a school board’s role/responsibility in legislating the guidelines and
procedures, along with faith accommodation and multi faith education or inter-faith education.
She argues the assumption that education takes place in a secular context is a barrier and in fact,
a source of conflict because students enact their faiths in their in-school lives. To deliver an
inclusive curriculum it is increasingly necessary to consider the faith background and religious
convictions that learners bring to the classroom, because citizenship and identity are closely
linked to religious affiliation for many students; “until public institutions and public legislation
try to clarify for secular institutions the extent to which they are responsible, we will get nowhere
because in the end – controversial and sensitive issues will fail, time and time again.”(May)
According to May, the crux of the issue is that institutions cannot currently support faith
accommodations. Without these accommodations, education does not present “… an opportunity for freedom for all”:

This could be why this is so important to controversial and sensitive issues because this is dealing with an aspect of individual being that is intricately tied to knowing and knowledge that doesn’t emerge in the context of textbook curricular day to day representation and yet it is pivotal but unseen to us – to us in our biased neutralized secular perspective. It is not unseen to individuals who come to school.

From her equity perspective, faith-based accommodations represent the next direction for a re-vamping inclusive CI policy. She supports James Banks’ work on multiculturalism and writes curricula to bring that into schools as a new venue in which pedagogy can be inclusive. I am critical of this position, but this research is not on multiculturalism and citizenship.

g) (White) Privilege

Among teachers and school administrators who self-identify as Global Majority, white privilege is a glaring barrier to enacting an equity agenda inclusive of CI. A fundamental presupposition of the racist mindset is denial of racism. Kevin says education equity is challenged because people are afraid of changing the status quo and losing their power. Cassandra already spoke in the equity section about the neoliberal conflation of colour-blindedness with equality. White privilege is difficult for educators; they often resist awareness of their positions of privilege and the impact this privilege has on the classroom:

I think it goes back to people being not mean-spirited, but I think it goes back to people being ill-equipped; the equipment people need to come with is pretty complex because you know when you are having conversations with people about what privilege means, and how privilege informs your behaviour in the classroom and how it informs your expectations in a classroom, that is the site of significant discomfort (Cassandra).
Moreover, issues of white privilege are not isolated or self-contained; it operates in tandem with other oppressions so that the work of equity is exhausting complex. Some strategic use of policy is necessary in the treatment of controversies to remain ‘safe’ in the context of policy and to do equity work:

So I think that we are socialized to a certain degree to be strategic about when and where and often times, we defer to the safe, right? In my case, I felt fairly safe in my classroom because I felt that for the most part, and for the most part it was true, that I empowered kids in a way that was balanced enough that most parents and most community members felt that, yes she is pushing the envelope but we see how active and engaged and keen and interested our kids are. So it was safe (Cassandra).

According to Cassandra: “I think it was around the Afro-centric school and I felt that there were things that were disallowable and I remember speaking of controversial issues and leadership, a situation where a young man in a grade five classroom said, “...we will look like a bunch of fags if we do that.” And the teacher was upset and sent him to the office and I suspended him and the father was out of his mind. He was in the school in an hour yelling at me and I said, “You know if he had made a racial slur, you would not have been yelling at me like this. In my mind and based on our board policy, it is the same thing.” “Are you calling my son ‘racist’ now?” I said, “No. He made a homophobic remark.” “Wow, we use the word all the time at home, he said.” I use this example to point out how oppressions are interlocking and not discrete. Bias detection is simply a superficial manifestation of complex racial and other asymmetrical power relations. Unacknowledged racism is one among many conversations involving power and conflict. Though policy may avoid these forces or veil them under more ‘neutral’ kinds of talk, the processes of domination are still at work in the policy; the question is; how are they subverted?

Jane acknowledges the progress toward dealing with CI is not good; “People aren’t hearing equity and CSI policies, right? So although you hear “that’s so gay” you also hear sexist
language as well. It’s still a challenge.” One act of subversion or system domination is to say policy is challenged only by *individual actions*. May says, “I think that a lot of people are in fact unwilling to acknowledge that yes they have biases... and their assumption is that bias is a bad thing.” Both development and critique occur at the level of the individual which overlooks larger system functions in the education discourse.

In CSI we see bias recognition as one manifestation of ‘neutrality’. So, white privilege masquerades, in the context of this policy study, as so often in our world, as the commitment to neutrality. Like colour-blindness, neutrality offers *procedural values* such as developing tolerance. Unfortunately, a strategy cannot address the condition of privilege adequately because privilege confers domination within larger social systems and institutions. Our actions and beliefs in relation to institutions and others require interrogation, but offer tremendous possibilities for humility and learning. However, when they are unexamined, white privilege forces other non-dominant positionalities and pedagogies (queer, feminist, critical and anti-racist among others) to climb up the hill of white justification, thus exhausting, and often pre-empting, challenges to it.

7. **Challenges to Policy**

This section deals with teachers and school administrators’ challenges with respect to CSI policy, but also what challenges these educators witness CSI facing in the public discourse of education generally. Policy challenges cover curricular issues such as the Genocide Course, and media press releases forbidding discussion of Hamas actions in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The challenges section conveys the recursive nature of ‘understanding’ as CSI is also entrenched in a culture conditioned by proceduralism, privilege and limits on free speech. Democratic engagement is undertaken seriously as a curriculum policy imperative.
a) Three Wishes: Banned Despite being “Balanced”

*Three Wishes* (2003) by Deborah Ellis provides exactly the sort of balance that CSI calls for; it has an equal balance of Palestinian and Israeli children speaking without any author commentary. Jacob says,

> It was about as balanced as you could be. I mean that pretty much typifies the ‘formula of balance’ and yet the book was removed from schools. So the calls for balance are disingenuous. They don’t mean it. And even though the book had already been approved by the body that governs the libraries in schools, the school board basically overrode them in getting rid of it.

The frustration Jason feels speaks to this reality: books continue to be censored; balance is a weak approach to teaching CI; and the school board can trump existing literacy programs such as the Silver Birch Program, which carefully selects challenging and culturally diverse topics in children’s literature. Among the actors weighing in on the issue was *The Writers Union of Canada*, who boycotted the decision to censor the book. Critical literacy is a weak sister compared to the procedural control issues at the heart of concerns for balance. Book banning reveals the over-arching, albeit hidden, regime of discipline sustaining CSI.

Ambiguity serves this agenda. Without policy clarity, “teaching CI is basically anything that those in a position of power to deem it to be” (Jason). Book-banning continues in primary and secondary schools since *Three Wishes* had so much press. It is clear a democracy in which schools become sites for social transformation is not possible if contradictory activities prevent dissent and discussion about the production of cultural and political knowledge. Asymmetrical relations mean there is little recourse for community members to express alternate viewpoints as the dominant educational discourse frames their responses in negative terms as ‘complaints’.
b) Teacher Resistance and Deficit Thinking

For Cassandra – a teacher from the global majority – resistance is both “strategic” and “socialized.” She says administrators and teachers are selective in their choices of time and place to take risks. Moreover, weak policy does not provide adequate protection for risk-taking. As a result, we choose to “defer to the safe place.” Daniel’s narrative is more critical in his findings colleagues a challenge. He cites deficit thinking (when teachers and others make assumptions which reduce the potential of students to learn and to do things based on observable characteristics such as race, class, or ability or gender) as a major challenge. Students are the victims of deficit thinking:

I think we have a huge deficit mentality amongst the staff. For example, there was a new Canadian, an EL learner coming to the school, and the principal didn’t know how to pronounce the student’s name and instead of pronouncing the student’s name, he declared that she would be ‘Suzie’ from now on and I felt that was very disrespectful. It was that deficit mentality that put the children in a sort of box that they prescribed them...

Working conditions can induce teachers’ resistance to new policy; “teachers are utterly exhausted... I see more burn-out now than when my parents [who were teachers] came home. There is a lot more laid on teachers. I do think also from a community perspective, teachers are under the microscope” (Katherine). But Katherine says from an administrative perspective, it is difficult to challenge teachers on their pedagogy to support equity and CI education:

I think that it [teaching CI] is just being compassionate and understanding, but maybe for people who don’t think that way I would use the term equity and having… to challenge someone on that word. I think people get offended because… people always think they do good things but when you are asking them to do a bit more for equity – I think they take offense to that.
May argues equity work and teaching CI is not an optional extra in teachers’ working lives. She notes, “the message that I think more teachers need to hear, that equity work, social justice work, teaching controversial issues, is not an add-on. It can’t be.” Perhaps pervasive assumptions in education that factual education is more important than values is undermining CI pedagogy and increasing the challenge for teachers. Enacting CI policy entails making judgments that may challenge existing courses of action or curricular program outcomes.

Even if teachers could agree on the need for a consistent conception of CSI, they would never agree (nor should they) on what they must teach to accomplish the policy’s agenda effectively. Antagonisms continue to occur. Jacob explores Aboriginal oppressions as part of the civics program and hears from a colleague that he is teaching students “to hate Canada” and is “anti-Canada”. Not surprisingly, his commitment to equity creates hostility among Jacob’s colleagues. He must constantly justify his activism, but they are not asked to justify their positions:

I justify my doing anti-oppression theories because it’s a way of understanding inequality you know… why do we have inequality, why do we have a city council that is predominantly white in a city that is half not white. Why does the school curriculum work the way it does? Why is wealth concentrated in the hands of white people? How do you understand institutionalized oppression which is the piece that people usually don’t get, they think oppression in terms of saying something bad to somebody or doing something bad to somebody or thinking a bad thing about somebody but most people don’t think about the way in which oppression is embedded into their practices.

One way of dealing with teachers’ resistance is to suggest another possible challenge: the need for professional support and on-going training on conceptual issues such as CI. Professional development may help teachers understand the political nature of education. In turn, PD must hone its relevance to instructional practices and directly challenge privilege among staff members to effect equitable education:
We had a workshop on sexual language which includes sexist language as well as homophobic concepts. I was on the committee to organize it and there was some resistance amongst staff to even have these conversations and things.

To conclude, more work on the reasons for teacher resistance is necessary to consider policy understanding, enactment, teachers’ attitudes and the requirement for professional development. Time constraints were mentioned as an ever-present barrier to teachers and school administrators’ working lives. Making time for resource selection, lesson development, and collaboration opportunities under pressured working conditions is not an insubstantial issue.

c) **Student Resistance and Censorship**

Teachers and school administrators understand CI censorship in multiple forms as a policy challenge. For example, some Jewish students in one urban classroom resist discussions about the Middle East tensions or talk of Palestine. They say to Martin, “we shouldn’t be talking about this. It’s not happening.” This move amounts to censorship. Further, he says, “I try to encourage a level of dialogue where controversial issues are brought up and they certainly have been in the past... but I have found from my experience over the last 7-8 years, that as an issue, Gaza doesn’t go very far. The level of anger rises very quickly.” The Palestine-Israeli conflict demonstrates that CI can be substantively distinct to students in terms of arousing their ideological, political and religious allegiances, and moreover, the interviews suggest the CSI document does little to show teachers how they might engage these emotions in a democratic and open-minded way.

Sometimes racial and cultural prejudices underlie acts of resistance. CI teachers can identify them, but not effectively address them. A policy challenge then is the absence of system
or structural supports for teachers and school administrators to tackle systemic oppression beyond calling the equity department. Because there is no formal policy position on CI at the Ministry level, Jacob calls CSI simply policy “lip service.” Martin’s narrative indicates that there is not adequate enough protection for him to teach the full range of controversies in the Genocide unit; “it was very difficult doing the Genocide unit at a level of acceptance and understanding for the masses, for the common group of students.”

Jacob’s student wants to censor his choice of text. In an International Baccalaureate (IB) anthropology course, he assigns Orientalism by Edward Said “to balance” colonialist readings by Bernard Lewis. In January, he recalls,

…one of my students, Jewish student as it happens, she had brought the book home and her brother was a university student and had a friend over, saw the book and said, “Edward Said, why are you reading this anti-Semite? He’s a terrorist; your teacher is asking you to read a terrorist! He is anti-Israel! You know, he threw stones at Israeli soldiers.”

Unwilling to back down from these attempts to censor him, Jacob perseveres in dealing with “difficult knowledges” (Britzman 1998), even though he is frequently challenged:

Talking about language that you can use and language you couldn’t; about the way in which marginalized communities would sometimes take back a word that’s been used against them – like the word “queer”. I was referring to it and I said only if you are part of this community can you use this word, I said like black people will occasionally use the N word with each other but unless you are black, it’s not your word to use. I said occasionally you know Jewish people may joke with one another and call each other ‘kyke’, you know but that is not a word that you use unless you are Jewish. At any rate… a couple classes after I said this, I was called down to the principal’s office to ask why I was using the work ‘kyke’ in class.

Without support at a deeper structural level, this kind of CI work challenges the policy. Students lack the tools to really deal well with the concept of marginalized communities, and may sadly
miss Jacob’s point entirely. What then ought the teacher to do? Avoid the CI policy altogether? Take cover under mainstream curricula and hope for the best?

8. Policy Use and Policy Impacts

This section reports the judgments of policy users on CSI’s impact. Participants assess the policy’s values in terms of its capacity to live up to the demands of the classroom, school cultures, and the pedagogical commitments of teachers.

Do Administrators and Teachers Know about CSI?

The story of policy use is also a ‘counter-story’ as well; the story of individuals who do not know about CSI, and why they don’t. Jasmine acknowledges, “I don’t think my principal had even heard about it until somebody pointed it out to her.” Jenna agrees that most school administrators are preoccupied with other policy demands, saying, [“I] think if you were to ask ten teachers, three might know about it.” May concurs that most educators do not know about the policy. She cites lack of systemic follow-through as the problem; “there is nothing that is implemented that is kind of putting people accountable for using the policy.” May says that there are other policies vying for administrators’ attention but that teachers should know about CSI regardless.

Gaps in communication, an agenda taken up with competing reforms and policies, and weak commitment to dealing with conflict in diverse learning contexts of urban schools, cobbled together the counter-story of a policy fizzling out, or a policy not fulfilling its potential to support social justice. Teachers explain that most teachers in schools have been hired in the last five years, after the policy was already in place. If they missed a brief in-service at a staff
meeting, they missed the policy. Sharon says, “80% of the teachers in my school have never heard of CSI” even though “my school administrator is 34-36 years old.” Furthermore, physical access to the text is uneven. Some departments retain a copy; most do not. Access no longer appears to be as available through the Equity department. One equity representative comments, “things have shifted even from the earlier equity meetings... I doubt my current admin has even heard of it” (Jasmine). CSI has dwindled in its caché.

**CSI is not useful for Critical Practice**

The majority of teachers and school administrators agree that CSI is not very useful to them, though they cite different reasons for saying this. When *usefulness* is stated simply in terms of the capacity to preserve existing curricula, it is considered useful. As Jasmine commented, the policy “selfishly confirmed” the curriculum she was already teaching. Katherine attests to its usefulness, saying it offers a service, but like all policies it lives through practice. So for Katherine, assessing the policy’s usefulness entails assessing professional development opportunities:

> Is it something that I reference every day? No, but I know it because I have read it. I have dealt with controversial issues, but I think for a new teacher it is still a good resource, someone who is dealing with a controversial issue hopefully it doesn’t always get to be controversial but it depends on who is dealing with the sensitive issue. I think the key element of this too is that it’s a living document in a sense that there needs to be a constant level of professional support and a constant awareness in terms of professional development.

When I pushed Katherine for examples of professional development, she, like most of the other interview respondents, used homophobia and bullying as examples of in-services and
professional development on CI. Jane says her school does not use CSI much because her school favours more practice-based programs:

I think this school works on key issues so right now we’re really working on homophobia issues, some kind of more, I use the word gay friendly support for students and staff and an overall awareness...

For Cassandra, thorough understanding of the policy is useful to prevent ‘policy misuse.’ Though the policy is understood at the administrative level (but not used), the policy is misused by practitioners (because it is not understood):

I think for the people who know of the document, it does make a great deal of difference until they encounter politics because of course, too many times even though we have it on paper in black and white, it has been blessed by the trustees of the board, the ins and outs of it are not known sufficiently to prevent misuse of it, right?

Cassandra says each school must take responsibility for in-servicing CSI. She does not detail how school administrators ought to circulate the policy for better use. For Sharon, CSI is not useful because it is not relevant to teachers’ daily lives and they are not well-supported in policy use:

There is such a gap between the policies that exist. I would argue the equity policy, human rights policy – those policies are probably the strongest that exist in education around the world, but they are not promoted. They are not. Staff is not necessarily encouraged to adhere to the policies. They are not publicized; there is no connection to our daily practice.

A clear gap exists between the policy text and practical working conditions. Even teachers who are interested in CI do not use CSI. The administrative will at many levels of educational institutional practice falters at supporting practitioners.
CSI Useful as an Administrative Tool

Teachers dedicated to activism articulate incisive critiques of CSI’s usefulness on two levels: its function as a tool for teacher control, and its capacity for reproducing normative values through curriculum. Certain teachers suggest that the policy is most used in relation to discipline; they hear about CSI only when superintendents get involved in reviewing complaints:

because you really only see it in play when something flashes and a principal doesn’t feel she can handle the piece or the complainant isn’t satisfied with the response at the school level and with 560 schools, each complaint doesn’t come softly, right? (Kevin)

Katherine agrees with this view about how CSI is used; “I feel like the policies are put in effect to protect the administration more than to protect the teachers.” Some activist teachers who self-identified as belonging to non-dominant groups (gay, lesbian, Global Majority, religious minority) and who spoke of experiencing racism and prejudice against their identities and their activist pedagogy were particularly vocal about the disciplinary reality of CSI. Jacob says, “I think if teachers get into trouble then they find out about CSI pretty quick.”

CSI Not Useful: Eclipsed by Other Policy Agendas

As the ‘policy web’ discussion articulates more fully in that later section, policies connect and entangle with one another, mutually shaping and shifting their relations, establishing new tensions and supplanting agendas as new foci emerge in the policy web’s activity. In such messy and complex contexts, it is easier to default to policies representing dominant values and ministry-driven agendas:

I think that it’s difficult to navigate the conversation around controversial issues. I think that it’s much easier and it’s much more widely supported to say “I’m working through the Effective Guides for Instruction and Literacy and when you say that, you are highly
supported. That is what I am doing social justice through - that lens. I think that people really do worry about anything that is labeled controversial and so you know, when I think about my teacher candidates for example, well I am not going to go there so who am I going to pick this up, right? (Cassandra)

Policy competition and diffusion is apparent in some contexts among school administrators who employ rationalizations such as “I think this school works on key issues so right now we’re really working on homophobia issues, some kind of more, I use the word “gay friendly” issues” (Jane). CSI, unable to compete for serious focus, retains a watered-down identity as a support document for teachers and school administrators to create “an overall awareness” (Jenna). Of interest in this administrator’s comment is the failure to value CI education as a pivotal component of critical pedagogy.

**Equity Weighs in on CSI Use**

As the findings suggest, the equity department constitutes a barrier to effective engagement with the guidelines, but equity’s on-going control of the policy agenda on teaching CSI suggests it maintains an important role in shaping the policy’s impact. Current equity training sessions do not include the policy, it is logical to assume there are problems. Is CSI too problematic to be profiled? Are its weaknesses too clear? Is it being considered for revision? According to Kevin, there are many complaints to the equity department so CSI cannot be irrelevant. Jacob says CSI would not even be necessary if the equity department was critical in its mandate and consistent in exercising its agenda; “I think it is fine already because we have an equity policy and I don’t really see a need to save this document [CSI].”

To conclude, CSI is not very useful because it adopts a “one size fits all” approach to CI. It does not deal well with classroom practices that push beyond the curricular boundaries already
mapped out by existing curricula. Less critical teachers found CSI useful for protecting them in the work they were already doing. Most school administrators did not find it very useful beyond using the procedural forms in the policy appendix to process parental complaints.

9. Role of the Teacher in Dealing with Controversial Issues

The policy is explicit about the teacher’s instructional role; she is a “facilitator” (CSI 2003). In this role, the teacher employs specific strategies (bias detection, balance and Role of the Reader) to foster democratic citizens. Some teachers agree that they should not feel pressured to answer questions or to indicate their own preferences to students. Proponents of teacher neutrality want to maintain the focus on developing students’ skills. May endorses the facilitator role; “thinking about that aspect of the question and therefore it is not really deflecting but, or avoiding, but it’s not my role. I am only the facilitator, my facilitation role is to get the students to focus and get the students to think about it even if the conflict generates some conflicting opinions”. As a former equity program leader, May defends the “facilitator” role because she feels the centerpiece of CI education is the lesson, so that a neutral, or hands-off approach that proceduralism generates, is desirable:

My facilitation role is to get the students to focus and get the students to think about CI, even if there is conflict, and because of course opening the parameters of it, it is a fact that you are going to have some conflicting opinions, right? My opinions make conflict with every single person in that room, but so what? I am not the person who has to deal with the issue at hand, right? It is a learning expectation.

Cassandra concurs on the teacher-facilitator role and she teaches this to teacher-candidates:

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I remember when I was at York and one of our candidates asked us, “Well do you tell the kids your position on a particular issue first?” And my answer and still is my answer, the answer is ‘no’, but my role is to facilitate an opportunity to have the conversation, because my opinion, what does my opinion matter? My opinion doesn’t matter. My role is to make sure that you have an opinion and that you explore that opinion and that you are questioned about the opinion and you are informed about your opinion because you might have kids who come from two different realities. How do you ensure that you share and explore and talk about your opinions in a safe place that you can walk away with your opinion, maybe unchanged, but that the conversation demonstrated respect for the fact that you can defend your opinion.

This view holds fast to the belief that first and foremost, students should take a position independent of any kind of external (e.g. teacher) influence. But, where should students get their ideas for complex discussions? Is education, or teaching, ever undertaken in a ‘neutral’ or apolitical context? How can a human teacher resist being human, contextualized, influenced by history and her life experiences and emotions? Thus a challenge to the teacher as facilitator role is to value genuine student engagement:

I think the role of the educator is to help deconstruct and be thoughtful because, you just can’t leave it; you think of the way you can’t leave a child in front of a television and not guide them through what is going on, what’s going on in the processes. You can’t get them to come up with these ideas being told what to believe. They have their opinions and their feelings and they need to be acknowledged, and we need to kind of share that deconstruction with them and give them that guidance of talking about how they feel when they see such images, such powerful images (Jenna).

Attempts to preserve CI as safe deliberation between two alternating points of view and by removing the variable of the teacher’s perspective may not only prove ineffective, but such attempts may do little to help students navigate the complexity of what they are learning. Ultimately, the goal of CI education remains stultified, having been made too simple – too safe.

Sharon felt reassured that using the strategy of bias detection from CSI would give her protection – a “crutch” – but then, she was criticized later for CI in her media classes:
A couple of teachers in the building thought that I was putting pornography up even though we were being critical of the images went to the principal. The principal asked me to take them down, I said, “no this is a teachable moment, why don’t we have a conversation about what this all means?” And I think that was the first real moment of shock…

The justification through critical media literacy is particularly apt as media often require deconstruction and decoding. Interesting then, that CI should remain a kind of “hot potato” to some educators who resist seeing similar value in deconstructing and engaging with difficult social issues and ideas. Such resistance reveals a negative regard for CI that undermines the pedagogical and social importance of controversial issues. As a result, educators become complaints-handlers. The colleague of one teacher-participant who coordinates English literacy is currently dealing with complaints around Margaret Atwood’s novel, *The Handmaid’s Tale*. Her role then becomes administrative; she is setting up a review committee and writing a report – practical activities that are both procedural and ‘neutral’.

In my mind, endorsing a neutral facilitator role is not the same as teaching neutrally. One may attempt to engage in a questioning activity ‘neutrally’ (for as long as the desired ends are met I would argue), but no teacher can ever truly teach neutrally. Consider the professional discretion teaching involves; the nature and kind of questions a teacher asks, the amount of time she permits students to respond, the amount of deliberation she encourages, the selection of discussion topics, whom she selects to speak publicly (the same students? ), and when she considers a controversial issue to be ‘well covered’. These are all highly discretionary decisions – never neutral ones. Of course, I have not even mentioned choice of what to teach (routine versus reflective curricula), philosophy of education, the relation of facts and values and so on.
The constraints the facilitator role places on teachers mentioned throughout the thesis, call into question the impact of usefulness of CSI.

10. Why Take on the Work of Controversial Issues?

“Why am I going to invite trouble into my classroom? I have enough things to do.” –Cassandra

Critical Thinking Perspectives

Even though some administrator-respondents consider CI almost unavoidable, they say teachers’ intentions must be clear. Some reasons teachers give for engaging in CI are: they address issues in the students’ lives; they engage students in authentic learning; they teach students about the responsibilities of citizenship; they teach critical thinking; and they promote social justice. Other individuals, especially administrators, emphasize learning outcomes, and the need to develop achievement in critical thinking. These comments represent a variety of perspectives on the importance of CI in education. Mostly, narratives describe what teachers do with CI in class and why:

- “I think that you need to have a clear, strategic understanding, why am I doing this? Just to stir the waters, or is this to get the kids to think about issues ...We are saying that we want particular outcomes. We have particular expectations. One of the expectations we have in reading is critical thinking, critical literacy. Well, how do you do critical literacy if you pick things that are bland that just have no depth to them? Because in my view everything that has any depth will come with a level of controversy.” (Cassandra-principal)

- “Controversial issues make the course interesting, kids like them because kids love to argue and they like to debate. They don’t like the work but they like to debate and controversial issues provoke debate and they get into that. So they are great in the classroom…” (Jacob)
• “...when we talk about controversial issues, it’s talking about sort of the real stuff that is going on in our own lives, the lives of our students and the world around us, in whatever context whether it is Math, Physics, History, whatever. By not talking about these issues, whether its racism, whatever it is, we are cheating our students, we are cheating ourselves out of a real conversation. I can teach about contemporary theories on law but what does that mean in the context of today? They can memorize all that if they want. But how does that link to today? What does that mean?” (Daniel)

• “I think that kids really should learn what it means to be a member of the community, a feeling of being able to be part of a community and being able to understand what their roles are, to be critical thinkers, to be thinking about things in a whole bunch of different ways, to be active listeners who can respectfully disagree or you know be open to different ways of thinking about things. I think when all that happens, you will have kids who learn in meaningful ways and who can make meaningful contributions.” (Jasmine)

Learning about world issues as they relate to contemporary contexts provides a rationale, as do fostering citizenship, critical thinking, student interest and engagement and critical literacy. All of these rationales connect clearly to the existing curricula.

Social Justice Agenda and CI

Helping students to identify oppressions in society constitutes one dominant finding among the reasons for working with CI. Sharon says her own social justice agenda is not reflected in the document, but it does rely on CI.

…inclusion right, so all kinds of students are left out when a number of those issues [CI] are not talked about… The second reason is that they are not getting the full range of ideas. They are not getting exposure. We are narrowing the field, the perspectives they are hearing about and from and we are replicating the social order. We are part and parcel of that and that’s a problem… I think the issues now come up, so the controversial issues come out, so for me… I am thinking very clearly about the progressive perspective, social justice left perspective that gets increasingly left out of the classroom.
The range of activities and ideas teachers develop is staggering, but these activities are not necessarily undertaken with any administrative, parental or community approval. Teachers speak about their work in courses such as Civics and the material they teach (which is considered controversial). Their vignettes of curricular CI fall under the umbrella of human rights and equity education. (It is important to note that none of these strategies or activities is developed in CSI):

- “As a teacher addressing the interests and the needs and the authentic realities of the kids, you are going to hit controversial issues. If you have the position of keeping a “clinically clean classroom” where there are none, then I think you are not teaching. I think you are side-stepping your responsibility. I think you are essentially lying to the kids about the realities they face.” (Cassandra)

- On anti-oppression training in a Civics course: “I teach questioning the embedded nature of inequality in social practices by doing anti-oppression theories (Triangle of Oppression) – Why do we have a city council that is predominantly white in a city that is half not white? Why does the school curriculum work the way it does? Why is wealth concentrated in the hands of white people? Who set up those institutions, how do they operate and how do we understand the cycle of oppression?” [The Triangle of Oppression has three poles, the ideological, the individual and the institutional] (Jacob)

- On the cycle of oppression: “girls are not good at math so you know – how is this idea translated into individual actions? Well maybe you have a guidance counsellor who encourages female students to not to take the enriched level math but to take the arts options and then the way in which on an individual level, women internalize these ideas and then consequently you have the institutional reality of very few women in sciences which reinforces the idea that women must not be good at it which reinforces individual behaviour.” (Jacob)

- “I teach how the Canadian political system operates, but I also offer a critique of it. I see the limits of representational democracy. Democracy leads me into a unit on Native issues in Canada. We look at Canada as a colonial settlers’ society, a racist colonial settler society, and we look at the Indian Act and Indian policy over the decades in my civics course.” (Jacob)

- “I started a social justice club at my school to provide me a forum discussing things that I can’t discuss in the class and it’s quite explicit. First of all it’s a… voluntary club that appeals to kids who are interested in these issues. I can’t be cited for not providing
balance because the nature of the social justice club by nature is that we are concerned with issues of injustice and equity. We pick the side of the underdog, that is what we do, we are a social justice club, you know we are not a social issues club, we are not a debating club, we are a social justice club and so, so far anyways he has given me a little bit of space to do some critical conversations but we are still voluntary. But still you know it’s in educational forum.” (Jasmine)

Social justice lessons take a different path from other curricula insofar as teachers say they do not have to provide balance, because they are “picking the side of the underdog” (Sharon). There is less pressure to represent all aspects of a social issue in the name of balance, so social justice lessons and clubs give students and teachers some freedom to explore advocacy and activism and issues of genuine interests to them. In the after school social justice club, Jasmine says she finds the most rewarding confrontation with political and social CI, connecting them with activism.

Social justice perspectives in the teacher and administrator narratives also require further theorizing and analysis in the discussion section. One issue these narratives raise is the fact that the frequent recourse of administrators in the face of parental complaint is to offer “another reading option.” To what extent can parents’ requests for a “second option” effectively undermine equity and social justice agendas? To what extent is it equitable for school principals to endorse alternate text selection, do they have a choice? Are there conditions when students should not be offered a second option; what are the ramifications of these accommodations? Equity ultimately decides, as do administration, what the answers to these questions will be; however, parents sometimes locate “hate literature” in unlikely places such as allegation, hearsay and word-of-mouth. The pressure on school administrators is intense in these instances. In addition, the empirical or moral terms for navigating the response to parental backlash/response
demand discussion, lest school administrators and school board personnel fall into the business of countering threats of litigation. Beneath the surface of teaching, there is deep seated fear of CI education.

**Anti-homophobia**

This sub-section certainly connects to social justice and equity, but it merits its own section due to the sheer volume of references it garnered in the interviews. The TDSB has highlighted anti-homophobia education as a separate agenda supported by the equity agenda and anti-homophobia initiatives like TEACH (teens educating and confronting homophobia). What is interesting in the tonal quality of the narratives is the sense of teachers working hard to dig students out of negatives spaces where they are assumed to harbour stereotypes and prejudices. Teachers and school administrators who were interviewed (the less critical ones) often assumed that these dispositions were shaped by pre-existing conditions experienced by students long before they entered the classroom. School administrators especially registered feelings of desperation in the exchanges, as though the work is tenuous and held together by a few, rather than strongly bound together by a large network of committed educators or the majority of school board staff. This speaks to the question of teacher disposition and capacity to do the work of dealing with controversial issues. Teachers speak of their commitment to take on anti-homophobia education:

- “I had three TEACH presentations to the Anthropology/Psychology/Sociology class ‘cause I have a lot of expectations around discrimination and all those issues so admin was very supportive. Guidance came in and sat in on some of the presentations so they could be aware of some the issues and the kids were quite accepting. I was surprised actually, cause you hear lots of “that’s so gay” in the hallways so that’s why we took this issue on as a staff, we want to do a bit more, we slowed down a teeny bit because we were rushing too fast in trying to get all these things in a row.” (Jane)
• “One of the most rewarding things was actually doing a lot of anti-homophobia work in the class and having a student come up to me afterwards with all the students around saying, “thank you for doing that because I have a gay uncle and that means a lot to me”. There is a reason why our children choose not to speak out having a gay family member.” (Daniel)

• “I always get from the kids, “oh Mr...., you seemed to be the only one who cares about us, no one else, seems to, be teaching the material”... It’s really important to have that consistency and give that workshop [anti-homophobia] about “stop it, name it and claim it”. It was really important because we want everybody to be on the same level, on being on board with this because it is so inconsistent when one teacher stops it and names it and claims it whereas someone else lets it slide...” (Daniel)

• “I had TEACH come into my class. At the end of the class, a student said, “We’re not talking about human beings, we are talking about homosexuals.” It pretty much summed up the whole class. I was mortified. I thought, ‘why am I doing this? But what I realized was... any students had been silent in the conversation because of these few really homophobic students and the comments, most comments said, “I was embarrassed, or I wished I could speak up and say something”... and I thought that was a really interesting learning experience for me... cause I was never going to do this again because it was, like, to have this horrific response... but because of the response of my students in writing privately, told me that a) I should always do that and b) that I shouldn’t judge the whole class with one or two.” (Jane)

• “We would do public announcements about homophobia and so we had some examples that we gave them that we had from a site called Teacher TubeSite. There was this whole public announcement saying you know, things like ‘that’s so gay’, we had to think about how to knock it off and so we took that catch phrase and we implemented it. So I got my kids into their tribes and they were to come up with a skit where they used that phrase, ‘that’s so gay’ and how to deconstruct it and, basically they will be in a situation where they will be in the playground, we know that homophobia is really happening and the kids understood that from all the work that we did in the class and they made these brilliant skits where they are sort of playing certain games or certain, I guess games that people would be in binary; rules of certain sports. Like you know ‘basketball is for boys’ and ‘skipping is for girls’ and we used that in the context with stuff and they made some wonderful skits where they acted out where someone would say ‘oh that’s so gay’ and someone else would say, “well, why are you saying that?” and they kind of deconstructed it.” (Jacob)
The anti-homophobia policy and program agenda is very strong among the teachers’ working lives. It is presented to students frequently in many integrated forms.52

**Critical Pedagogy**

Critical pedagogy concerns itself with the wider social relations informing life in schools. As Ellsworth’s critique argues (1994), a liability of critical pedagogy is that it can strip discussions of historical contexts and political position. This was not the case for the educators in this section; the interviewees took great pains to make explicit the “isms” in their critical pedagogy. Teachers and school administrators also talked openly about making explicit the possible interpretations of texts, their impact on others and the care needed to deal with sensitive material. These comments reveal teachers’ thinking on critical pedagogy and CI:

- “...teachers have to be sensitive to their own biases in their classrooms and the equity issues and the conflict issues that come up in any classroom. No matter what you are teaching, even if you are teaching Math, right? Let alone if you are teaching as I do History, Social sciences, and even Economics...But it is what you select, right? It’s how you interact with the ideas and materials and things.”(Jane)

- “I mean, there is something to be said about being objective I suppose when it comes to marking and stuff like that, but at the end of the day is that really possible, right? Is that truly only an ideal rather than a reality? If we are objective then what is it that we are really doing? At the end of the day, we make choices all the time… every day we make hundreds of choices in terms of our classrooms and in terms of our, what we are going to teach today versus not teach and things like that. So and what I try to do is when I do say okay here are my thoughts but… I always say to my students, I come with a bias and this is my bias. And so you take that the way you want. And I think as long as we try to be honest with our students, this is all they want. They don’t want to see that there is a hidden agenda you know at the end of the day.” (Jasmine)

52 Nonetheless, homophobia education has become it seems somewhat stilted as the “go to” issue. I question whether or not it is still more comfortable for the dominant group to deal with than confronting white privilege and other issues related to racial oppression.
“It is exhilarating. I love the give and take. I love teaching about conflict not because I like to provoke anger or upset them. I want people to think and I enjoy being in the middle of sharing ideas which might provoke more conversation...make them, you know, speak out eloquently in their point of view and make them respect other people’s point of view which they normally wouldn’t listen to. If I have done that well, I have done a good job that day and it usually works.” (Michael)

“A couple of years ago, this is a teacher at my school... I don’t know what he was teaching. Somehow the topic of suicide bombers came up and you know it was a cliché at the time to talk about these 9/11 bombers as cowards, this is like one of the no, they are the cowards. So he was addressing this word and said you know suicide bombers, he was saying you know created by the desperation of their circumstances and that you know whatever else you want to call them, you can’t call them cowards, there is a certain level an act of courage that comes when people sacrifice themselves.” (Jacob)

“So last year when I was teaching Careers Civics and one of the things that we are encouraged to do in Careers which is another one of these ‘loosey-goosey’ kind of courses is teach financial management. So I said to myself, I think that is good. Kids should know financial management but in order to understand financial management, they should understand how the economic system works and I happen to be fortunate enough to be teaching during the time of the economic collapse last year which got us into a nice discussion about the nature of capitalism and market economies and um you know the impact of trade agreements and so forth, you know outsourcing, and all those kinds of issues. So I was able to bring that in my Careers course last year.” (Jacob)

“I think of how Remembrance Day is handled in schools. I no longer do anything about Remembrance Day in my school because it was deemed too controversial. Remembrance Day when I did it involved a discussion of the students reading stories about conflicts. We have a large immigrant population; students from Somalia, the middle east who have experienced conflict. I have them write stories about that conflict and talk about why they might not want to see that conflict or war again. That was deemed too controversial. I was given a letter that outlines why war veterans might be upset if they heard about what happened in our school.” (Sharon)

The incidents in these narratives were the ones which were usually met with comments, visits to the office, letters and complaints. The teachers who taught to these issues also have social justice interests, but their focus here is unpacking embedded assumptions – the “hidden curriculum.”
Teachers challenge taken-for-granted practices such as Remembrance Day Assemblies, and push for broader and more critical understandings of the nature of conflict.

11. Administration of CSI

Leadership is not deeply theorized anywhere in relation to policy. The kind of inclusive approach outlined in the theoretical framework stands in stark contrast to the policy administration processes in this discussion. While, what follows could be subject to a critical leadership critique, my intention is to present the issues in the narratives. In-services and procedural issues like the complaints procedure are, in fact, not leadership issues, but administrative enactments of policy. However, school administrators do make some decisions depending on what is happening in the school and community contexts. Silences and omissions count as choices also. For example, there is no account of judging CSI policy relevance and taking action on it as a subjective act; administrators ‘respond’ to policy mostly. Moreover, as indicated throughout this discussion, CSI states an explicit administrator role in gate-keeping the complaints processes, so pedagogical considerations would indeed constitute a ‘leadership’ move transgressing the expected role.

In-Servicing of Administrators

Pixie, who took part in the in-servicing of school administrators, outlines school administrators’ responsibilities: handling complaints, and managing curriculum resources, and approving library texts. She in-services principals on resources:

My part of the training for principals was ‘here is the selection policy for your school library, here is what happens when parents object to library books in the school and here
is how you need to handle, you know go about handling it’ but we need to take a look at what is in school libraries first and we need to do a major exercise in pulling materials that don’t conform to current standards.

School principals and vice-principals are likely to take a narrow view of CSI after an in-service focusing on dealing with complaints and defending certain texts. Pixie is sympathetic to the conflicts that school administrators have to deal with, but this perpetuates a negative view of conflict:

I would say that principals in the larger school boards are quite well trained in terms of their support system and among other principals in terms of the way they get professional development. In the larger school boards, they do deal with this because one of the most contentious things principals have to deal with is what happens when parents object to what is going on in a classroom. What happens when a kid brings home a novel they don’t want the child to read or they have discussed something political in a classroom and so on and so forth.

Rather than view objections as a process of social change and growth, the issue sounds like a burden. The large in-servicing (discussed on pp.146-147) certainly led to impoverished CI experiences and understanding. Jane attended the session and comments that attention to the policy was not meaningful; “I was the entire deposition from our school and then I had to come back and do a presentation to the school on CSI” (Jane). Her allotted time for the presentation was a portion of the regular staff meeting; this is not much time and it is after school when teachers are tired. Katherine says, “I was given a copy because I was the equity rep at the school. So everything came filtered through me so it was shared at the staff meeting, which I liked and the equity committee really got to unpack it and look at what was there.” After looking, what did Katherine do? She cannot remember.
May’s and Pixie’s accounts both reinforce the central role school administrators were asked to play in knowing about the policy and in-servicing staff on CSI:

The way that the in-service was structured was for the document to be identified and all the ins and outs of it to the administrators. It was supposed to be mandatory attendance or compulsory attendance for the administration and I think that we did get a high rate of attendance but then after the administrators… may or may not be curricular people, right? (May)

While practical factors are evident as May states, “There is nothing that is implemented that is making people accountable for using the policy and I think that’s an issue.” Certainly other factors may also be at work in affecting administrators’ failure to embrace CSI with staff. It may be the case that teachers and school administrators know about CSI but resist it because they view it as a tool of professional de-skilling and discipline. Two principals said as much to me when the tape was turned off after the interview.

**School Administrators and Controversial Issues**

Sometimes school principals feel they ought to reign in teachers. Cassandra believes there are situations when teachers should not deal with CI if they are not well-equipped; “don’t pick up a book and address it with a group, with three Jewish students in the class and you’re going to do *The Merchant of Venice* and you’re not going to go into some of the issues that are underlying it” (Cassandra). Cassandra’s narrative also seems to imply a correct procedure or method that would erase differences that are undesirable because they threaten assimilation or social cohesion discourses in curricular policy. Kevin says the role of the administrator is to enforce a template with acceptable and unacceptable regulation of curricula, to diffuse threats:
I guess primarily the role of the administrator is to use the controversial and sensitive issues document to create a template for response, a support for field administrators when dealing with issues within the community, media with their staff. The biggest thing is to give them viable options and speak to them about the things that people have to know; the “musts, cans and should dos.”

Again, there is a sense of a management agenda in his narrative; ‘what people have to know’ is not curricular but is guided by the necessities of ‘dealing with people and the community’. Jenna argues teachers’ capacity and comfort with CI are important administrative issues in CI education:

There are huge issues with teachers who don’t feel comfortable using language, who don’t know language, who don’t have the background or for whatever reason don’t feel comfortable having those conversations. For people to really begin to see things from alternative viewpoints I think that is the biggest thing. Once you get over why this is an ‘add-on’ and ‘this is one more thing that you are asking me to do’ in this time when teachers feel tremendous pressure to do everything, cause everything trickles down right? Then you have to get over that feeling of like, this is one more thing that you have to do, especially for people who it doesn’t come naturally to. Once you get over that, then you have to do with that whole PD piece. And that can also make it, besides being scary, if you go into a place where they are not ready to go yet, it can be disastrous.

Exactly what teachers and others are supposed to know is framed in again in terms of setting boundaries and establishing consistent procedures:

I think it is really important that leadership right from the curriculum leader that the teacher works with, whether it be an assistant curriculum leader or curriculum leader, it’s secondary or maybe a division chair in elementary – has a perspective right up through the school principal to superintendents, executive superintendents, and director. (Jane)

This equity principal reinforces the permission/restriction template when he in-services school administrators about the Sri Lankan conflict:

The most recent situation in Sri Lanka that is happening right now within our students, some of their principals are wondering what it is that they can do within the schools to
support… with regards to the Tamil students coming into the school. Must and cannot. You can allow students to fundraise within the school, different bake sales or whatever it is, but they cannot raise the money to go towards the Tamil Tigers. They can raise the money that is managed by the school to go towards humanitarian concerns and issues for the Tamil victims in this particular situation. Can, can’t. You can have students come into the school and have sessions and discussions and talk about the atrocities, what they are coining to be genocide but they cannot come to school and put their flags and their banners up on their lockers ETTL flag with the bullets and the tiger in the middle because you can’t bring any other flag in the school representing those pieces. Those kind of pieces… principals are trying to navigate: how much compensation do I allow, what can I allow and how do I manage the situation when it is happening within the school. So those are some very simple straightforward can and can’ts (Kevin).

Administration on CI in this context entails unilaterally navigating the students’ identity, nationalism and ideology. Is this justified or sustainable? Who decides? I sense some element of structural or systemic racism at work. Individuals with privilege such as Kevin are not comfortable sharing their privilege.

In addition to major cultural conflicts, school administrators say they have a lot of difficulty with parents regarding sex education in the classroom. Some parents want to withdraw their children from classes where the teacher is known to be LGBQT. Other times, parents reject lessons about same-sex parenting or human sexual development. Under these conditions, school administrators say they rely heavily on the policy to keep students in the class:

I am going to go back to sexual orientation because that is what, in my experience has created significant controversial issues in their grade 3 classroom and you know, parents get up in arms and so forth, I reviewed the book but the group book is an appropriate book, I must allow the teacher to use that book. That is a must, right? And parents have been informed that no, you are not permitted to withdraw your child from a classroom because you have learned that the teacher is gay or because you don’t like what the teacher is using, that I must allow that person to do what they are doing as it falls within the parameters of the Ministry’s expectations and the guidelines, straight up from the human rights code right down to our own local equity position (Katherine).
If school administrators feel they are responsible for informing parents and teachers, they take on the role of educator and knowledge provider. What complicates the picture is a lack of money – a huge barrier and its own act of power in support of a leadership process. Jenna worries, “You know a PD day – that takes a supply teacher. How can we build in the time to do that kind of stuff? And then, in a bigger sense get to everybody on board collectively on some issues?” School administrators say financial considerations affect their ability to fund support to teachers and parents. Again, I question this conservative perspective. There appears to be little valuing of difference or respect for students and their families’ knowledge.

**Teachers and System Support**

Activist-oriented teachers are the most critical of school administrators’ handling and treatment of their work with controversial issues, and specifically, their use of CSI as a support. However, their critique addresses more than the lack of administrative support. Teachers say they feel under attack and that their jobs are insecure because they work in an atmosphere of mistrust and oversight. For example, CSI supports CI instruction in principle, but it does not advance or protect either teacher pedagogy or professionalism. As a consequence, teachers disagree with more conservative teaching practices. The situation sets up the ideal conditions to de-skill teachers in their professional practice making them vulnerable to all complaints:

There are so many problems with this document. It does not stipulate for example any criteria of what is considered controversial and what is sensitive. So what is controversial and what is sensitive is basically ‘anything that goes’ to someone in a position of power, what they deem it to be. So if you get complaints, it’s not controversial, if you get complaints, it is. That is basically what it comes down to. (Jacob)
Teachers are de-skilled in a climate where individuals with more power can interpret and evaluate their work; values discontinuities can be cast aside by more powerful others. According to school administrators, teachers have the “choice” to discuss controversial issues, but the caveat is that power asymmetries ensure that policy procedures are seldom challenged:

I would say that some teachers are reluctant to address certain topics, certain topics that they are comfortable with, and this varies person to person. It’s a function of your background, your formal education, so I think sure, people do make choices. When you look at the curriculum expectations…and if you look at the history ones in the world history course, you can go anywhere. And teachers cannot do it all, we would counsel them please don’t even try, so they will naturally make choices. (Alex)

Sharon sees the distribution of power in the current administrative system as working against equity and social justice in general and this policy specifically:

The curriculum leaders who have been hired are really hired as managers so they are not hired to provide assistance like when I first started teaching, it’s really changed. They manage our absences. They manage where you are at with the curriculum. They manage actually what you can do about setting up the final exam to the textbooks you use. She’s got a lot of power. In fact, I think department heads have the main power over us and the school because they are the ones who set up the timetable. So everyone is always kissing someone else’s ass and it’s really contrary to promoting social justice and equity in my mind.

Jasmine also perceives lead teachers in the department as having a great deal of power to set the education agenda and as having influence in ways school administrators do not. For example, lead teachers set time-tables, they select resources, and they decide key assignments for courses and manage departmental meetings. One school administrator laments the control over schooling and teacher in-servicing; “there are particular things that you can or cannot say and I think teachers are guarded about how to broach topics …that’s the changing nature of school…” (Katherine). Referring to racist and homophobic comments that most staff recognizes are
injustices, Katherine maintains that the conversations around those topics still prove difficult.

Certainly, a neoliberal tone around ‘CI as choice’ creates a degree of ambiguity. Such conservative responses to differences among students must be held accountable as one reason CI lessons do not work; they fail to interrupt systemic racist practices. Moreover, CI does not work when behavioural or institutional aspects of pedagogy are ignored in pedagogical activities.

12. The Role of Fear

Fear takes multiple forms in the interviews for this research; it has interpersonal, institutional and pedagogical faces. Teachers are afraid of the Union, of the College of Teachers, of parents, of principals and of the school board. Teachers imply that CI is harder to work with than to leave out. Some teachers resist intimidation and a few teachers challenge the conditions which make them fearful, and other teachers experience explicit and implicit forms of coercion.

I referred earlier to the letter circulated among school board staff regarding the violence in Gaza in January 2009 as one example where teachers may have felt fearful. Jacob interprets these events:

We just came back from vacation and were greeted with this memo from the equity department telling us not to bring up [Gaza] in our classrooms, that if it did come up, we were to address it only non-political general vague, non-political language. Now you know this memo, this person from the equity department obviously takes no consideration for the fact that they [students] have family that are being affected by this, where is the kind of sympathy that came for example when Sri Lanka was hit by the Tsunami and the TDSB issued a statement of sympathy, where is that? Or even something bland in general, the TDSB acknowledges the pain on both sides, if it wants to play that kind of balancing, like where was that? But they didn’t do that. It was just a complete and absolute silencing.

Jacob interprets silence as a cover-up for policy subtexts of fear. He believes the school board reacted to a special interest group defending its own political position;
This policy was designed at the request of The Canadian Jewish Congress as a result of complaints from a secondary school [over the public performance of a poem] The board was newly formed, newly amalgamated and under tremendous pressure from these outside groups to respond to these concerns and the Canadian Jewish Congress was working closely with the board according to equity reps to devise a policy.

What the policy could ‘enable’ or ‘disable’ under this influence in not clear; however, it is not inconceivable that such influence did occur as media is available on the issue. Sharon reports that fear spreads throughout her school; and that the policy intensifies the culture of fear in the school;

When you look at that document, I think that it basically stays ‘the status quo’ because it reaffirms to those individuals who already had fears about bringing these subjects into the classroom. They are even more isolated…it is controversial after all so ‘I might as well not bring it up because it is going to get me into trouble’ and that is the main thing.

Martin comments that fear made the course he was teaching “intense” for everyone involved in programming it; “I think the controversy around the Armenian genocide just is perhaps a bit more intense because of the nature of there being a course and it being approved. And so it is very political.” According to Jacob, Martin and Sharon, politically-oriented controversial issues are substantively different from curricular controversies. Namely, the nature of systemic racism and other power relations emerge in the context of identifying political forms of oppression.

Cassandra agrees that there is more support in the system for “safer” agendas such as Safe Schools, or Effective Guides for Instruction and Literacy. She says, “I think it’s difficult to navigate the conversation around controversial issues. I think that people really do worry about anything that is labeled controversial… often times, unwittingly they are, you know, going into a controversial issue or that by closing down a conversation because it could be controversial, they close the door on a learning opportunity. So I think that there is a lot of fear” [italics, mine].
When asked where this fear comes from, Cassandra identifies it embedded in culture; “I think that we are all socialized, there are certain things that you talk about and there are certain things you don’t.”

Teachers feel the impact of this culture of fear in education differently. Jane normalizes a rather Orwellian scenario. She received telephone calls from the Director of Education to confirm whether a resource a teacher was using was ‘approved’:

We were having the inter-history committees and social sciences consultants and the Teachers’ Association conference. I believe it was in the spring and it was at York University and I received a phone call from the I think it was from the Director’s office asking about a resource that said did we recommended it in any of our curriculum documents. A teacher had gotten that off the internet and I can’t honestly remember now whether it was around nuclear war and peace (Jane).

She sees no problem in the curriculum check or her use of power in this context. Such is the culture of fear, that regulation of resources engenders this degree of control because authority must safeguard against a violation of policy. Are there genuine concerns that the information is really dangerous to students if the resource related to peace education or nuclear war? In any case, the action has implications; it both calls into question the professional capacity of the teacher to choose his or her own resources, and it reinforces the right to check on those choices from an ideology of privilege and power at odds with inquiry and deliberation.

Hence, political ideologies are embedded within the conversations about teachers’ pedagogies. The former sections reveal multiple challenges to doing CI work and the reasons educators continue to do it. It is interesting that individuals interpret CI in ways which best suit their teaching, education, or administrative agenda. Are differences only the result of natural differences in pedagogy, or are they also the result of fear, political vulnerability and/or school
contexts? Themes such as the capacity of the policy to develop a full CI conception and the narratives’ undercurrents of reprisal and discipline for CI teachers recur in the following sections.

**How Teachers’ Avoidant Behaviour Relates to Fear**

The findings on fear are not limited to interactions between school administrators and teachers. Teachers say fear develops between colleagues, within the school department, and in relation to curricular expectations. Daniel confides that when one of his colleagues admitted she was afraid of his curriculum, it was “at least a positive step”; “I did two short activities on talking about sexuality. The English department teachers said ‘I don’t know if I am comfortable reading the story – you know about homosexuality or relationships’. I mean, that’s a fair comment in the sense that they are admitting that they are uncomfortable.” Such discomfort speaks to the issue of teacher preparation for teaching CI. How inclusive and comprehensive is teacher training and professional development?

May says fear was really evident during in-services she led over the years; “a lot of teachers are even afraid, cause they are afraid that parents would come down on them or, or that something negative would happen to them [if they taught controversy] and they would have all these fears and concerns” [italics mine]. She recalls a new teacher questioning whether his choice to NOT teach CI because he was afraid was the right choice:

In doing the grade 12 world history classes or contemporary issues, a teacher had 12 kids in his class, they were grade 12. They had gotten to the point of the year where they could have taken a look at the Middle East or not because they had not much time left. Okay so, very logistical issues that all teachers have to deal with, and so he brought it to a vote, he said, I just let them decide so we took a vote whether we were going to do it. It was a tie, it was six-six and so it was up to him to you know, break the tie. So he broke the tie, he voted not to look at it. So in the course, with Ministry expectations and the curriculum stated, he decided not to take a look at current Middle East issues and so then he asked,
did I do the right thing? To not look at an issue because, number one you think it is going
to be time consuming, number two you think you are going to end up in a lot of
controversy, you may not know how to guide or contain or facilitate, right? It’s the wrong
way.

Alex discusses the variable responses he sees among teachers in dealing with CI. He maintains
the difference comes from the individual teaching styles and comfort with CI material. As
teacher-professionals, he defends teachers’ right to choose to not engage with material which
they cannot handle professionally:

I would say that some teachers are reluctant to address certain topics, and others are not
comfortable; it varies person to person. It’s a function of your background, your formal
education. So I think people do make choices. And teachers cannot do it all, we would
counsel them please don’t even try. For example, some teachers would feel very
uncomfortable and would not volunteer to teach let’s say the history of Africa course or
even the genocide crimes against humanities course, I mean we get two reactions as we
say in my workshop on the genocide course that I have given a number of times at the
Holocaust centre in Toronto and we get two reactions. Teachers either say, ‘my God, why
would you want to teach that, let alone why would any students want to take that?’ And
the other people say, ‘oh wow, isn’t this fantastic. I can hardly wait. My students will
love it.’

Fear in this sense is connected to the privilege of being able to choose to deal with CI or not and
who is making the choice. What about the representation of difference such that school
administrators and teachers are prepared to work with diverse students? The discourse is filled
with rationalizations of CI as non-essential, confrontational, and fear inducing. Sharon says CI
activism makes her afraid of confrontation; she has to appease her principal and OSSTF. She is
“scared of the union”, especially her branch president, and had removed herself, “a lifelong
activist”, “from all union committees” because more powerful individuals could affect her work
life (course load, course selection, chances for promotion, reputation).
In summary, teachers report a range of feelings: vulnerability with CI material; expectations to conform to controlling powerful discourse norms surrounding the curricula; and they feel afraid when they transgress these expectations and engage with unsanctioned CI. The theme of fear requires closer analysis of power, coercion and institutional relations stemming from policy relations. In particular, the existing policy arrangement for CI education does not appear to benefit teachers. The next chapter develops a discussion from these interview narratives with the intention of theorizing what kinds of forces are at work, from the perspective of critical democratic policy and social justice commitments.
Chapter Eight: Discussing CSI Implications

What brings them together is a shared passion for exploring the ways in which these concepts may affect the social environment in which we live. And what you have as a result is this space of many voices where, if you close your eyes, you may still hear the rustle of arguments and the shaping of imagination to clarify commitment. -Breytenbach 2008: 43

According to Ball (1990:1), “the task of social policy study is to evaluate the distribution and impact of existing policies and the rationales underlying them.” The work of narrative discourse analyses presents several broad implications for understanding CSI policy as a textual compromise between what claims to be CI education, what CI education is, and what accounts for the CI realities teachers and school administrators face. Real-life practice presents different kinds of influences such as competing or contradictory policies, administrative pressures to enact reform agendas, ideological pressure to conform to curricular practices, and resistance within the system. This work attempted to determine the CSI policy content and processes understood as effects on teachers’ and school administrators’ working lives. Here are the research questions guiding my dissertation:

- How do school administrators and teachers understand CSI policy? (major research question)
- How do teachers’ and school administrators’ views regarding controversial issues policy inform their specific choices of roles and CSI agendas?
- What challenges and barriers do the teachers and school administrators face with respect to CSI?
- What is the impact of CSI?

I have made explicit theoretical commitments to critical democracy and social justice earlier in the dissertation to make myself accountable ideologically and to contextualize my analysis of the policy findings and their implications. Henley and Young (2001) defend the
inclusion of previously excluded individuals from participation – students, community members, public citizen among others. Inclusion demands that all students are educated to know themselves fully, not just students from privileged or chosen positions in society. Education must support the development of students’ potential, knowledge, skills and critical dispositions consistent with the requirements of citizenship in a democratic and global society (Henley & Young 2001: 301). To ensure equity in educational participation, all unfair practices must be challenged if they limit students’ capacity to be educated equitably. This requirement for equity applies to policy texts (broadly conceived) and the resources devoted to them. Thus assessing CSI’s usefulness is contingent on assumptions or beliefs about the purpose of education. This assessment includes many factors and influences.

**CSI and the Policy Web**

Several interview respondents indicated that The TDSB produces more policies than any other school board. This begs the question: ‘What happens to all of these policies?’ The concept of a policy web illustrates what happens to policies. Joshee and Johnson (2005) note that new policies are influenced by the effects of prior policies and the workings of multiple policy agendas. Policy study attending to the policy web reveals how local level influences and the multiplicity of policy agendas introduce tension into the working lives of teachers and school administrators. These tensions take many forms: difficulty navigating contradictory and competing policies; competition over resources; and uncertainty about their roles in the classrooms. While new policies confer new professional responsibilities for teachers and school administrators, narratives express the opinion than many policies have questionable benefits.
EQAO and other assessment-based policies require teachers to take on different roles compared to their roles in a CI agenda. Sharon feels confused by the policy-practice gap in her working life;

There is such a gap between the policies that exist. I would argue the equity policy, and human rights policy are probably the strongest policies that exists in education around the world but they are not promoted, they are not. Staff is not necessarily encouraged to adhere to the policies. They are not publicized. There is no connection to our daily practice.

The question of whose interests are served by the web of policy relationships deserves examination, particularly in light of communication, access, and policy effects.

Communication is a central feature in making policies complex for users. CSI narratives identify other policies as impediments to engaging with CSI. Competing agendas from *Safe Schools, Student Success* and *Professional Learning Communities* vie for attention from policy users. For instance, Sharon says, “Right now everybody is talking about student success.” Sharon perceives the irony of working with an equity agenda while having all her professional development time devoted to “Safe Schools”; “I think we had Safe Schools as an agenda item or PD item for every single meeting last year”. Vanessa comments, “The staff equity PLC, the professional learning community – that everybody is talking about now – the equity PLC has done a workshop based on that topic.” Narratives disagree, however, on whether substantive action results from this policy communication. Whereas school administrators mostly believe policies enact an agenda, many teachers argue not much happens after communication. There appears to be a fair degree of *policy skepticism*. This skepticism is equally matched by comments about feeling uncertain about whether there is an appropriate role for teachers that is not too ‘top-down’.
Perhaps the skepticism is warranted. It appears as if the politics of visibility are at play in the CSI policy. Poised to make a political statement post-amalgamation, CSI was created in for goodwill – *zeitgeist*\(^53\) – not function. Institutional control through policy is hardly unpredictable as teacher narratives repeatedly state that CI pedagogy is risky and unpredictable without support. AS it currently stands, CSI conflicts with other policies, which sends contradictory messages about the aims of education and the roles of teachers. Indeed, communication about policy is a powerful force in school administrators and teachers’ professional lives. Though competing policies are powerful throughout the system, the system cannot mandate *what matters* to teachers (McLaughlin 1987). Nevertheless, the circulation of myriad policies seems to induce a kind of policy nausea among the teachers and school administrators I interviewed.

When the ministry does take a position on equity, some teachers feel it lacks ‘teeth’. Jasmine says, “The Ministry appears to endorse the educational status quo in term of the current equity agenda, but one wonders whether the Ministry has a complete grasp of the equity agenda.” She comments:

> So the Ministry of Education just came out with their equity plan for the next four years... I know that when I went to a conference recently, Kathleen Winn said the way they see it is that this is a policy that gives permission for those of us who have already been doing this work to do the work.

While this statement validates the professional work of teachers, it does little to mediate or ameliorate ambiguous or unsupported equity work. No wonder teachers tend to engage directly with policies they know (Gallucci 2003).

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\(^53\) I discovered Joe Kincheloe’s (2005) use of the term, which valorizes zeitgeist as a legitimate cultural condition, but I prefer my interpretation derived from literary theory. In this view, zeitgeist is an act of performativity that is superficial; it is a fashion, a fad, intended to match actions to the mood or feeling of the public for commercial purposes or other inauthentic aims.
Additional support for a complex and controlling discourse accounts for the withering profile of CSI. Knowing that the Ministry of Education did not organize a leading policy position indicates lack of support for CSI; “they have some spaces about controversial and sensitive issues that students can support an opinion” – ensured that the school board would not be disciplined for its handling of controversial issues (Sharon). Teachers who were interviewed sense the distribution of policies often function as procedures to control them to prevent what Foucault (1981:53) called “the unpredictable event.” Of particular interest is the use of power and coercion:

In any society the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organized and redistributed according to a number of procedures whose role it is to avert its power and its dangers, to master the unpredictable event (Foucault 1981:53).

This policy effect is compounded by the nature of CSI in-servicing: teachers received negligible in-servicing and access to the guidelines following the policy’s production.

Intended or unintended, policy access, communication impacted teachers and school administrators in numerous ways. First, the lack of resources point to either lack of commitment to CSI, or uncertainty about its function. Quite apart from a critique of whether the policy is substantive in democratic terms, there is lack of administrative will or resources at several levels to enact and implement the guidelines (ministry, equity and school board). Other policies took precedence in the minds of the individuals I interviewed.

**CSI and Policy Complexity**

Policy diffusion is evident throughout the interviews and within the CSI guidelines. Teachers and school administrators who work for the equity department or as equity
representatives tend to be optimistic about CSI; they say it provides curricular support and protective procedures to teachers and school administrators. On the flipside, teacher-activists are critical of CSI saying it lacks a social justice agenda and pedals liberal aims of “speaking eloquently in sharing their point of view” or “respecting other people’s point of view.” Though all of the rationales for CSI cited in the literature (Critical, Citizenship and Activist) emerge in the narrative accounts, by far, the dominant narrative identifies CSI as a permission-procedural discourse. Therefore, CSI attempts to structure a restricted CI conception without making users fully aware of their complicity. This occurs through the denial of difference (e.g. student and teachers’ dispositions). This is consistent with the findings in the literature that suggests weak conceptions lead teachers to create flimsy lessons that lose their intended relevance to democracy, citizenship or social justice (Hess 2002; Torney-Purta et al., 2001).

According to Lynn Davies (2004:15), policy diffusion develops when “there is a lack of feedback, use of information, and willingness to benefit from diversity.” Diffusion increases policy complexity and this leads to a variety of policy outcomes – none of which is predictable at the outset. CSI present CI as generic skills separated from subject matter. The result is lack of a clear CI conception and a sense that dealing with social issues and conflict is merely technicism (Fischer & Forester 1993). These alienate teachers because both ideas contradict the values of many teachers (Kincheloe 2005). In response, teachers and some school administrators disengage from CSI, or they ‘do their own thing’ and take risks with reprisals and complaints (Kelly 2001).

Galluci (2003) argues teachers form strong communities inside and outside of schools, and they are not likely to conform to a policy that disrupts their communities. This seems to be the case, especially when CSI supports are marginal. Even when teachers do endorse the policy,
they enact it in substantively different ways that may not build community among colleagues (Gallucci 2003). For these reasons, CSI may continue to frighten some educators away, while others may take half-measures and employ a narrow view of CSI so that students and teachers can sympathetically assess the merits of issues (Hare 2001). This is clearly another kind of response to policy complexity and not a professional choice among educators.

Schools are complex institutions, and teachers and school administrators work in unique contexts. It is understandable that their responses to policy are varied. Sharon, Jenna and Jasmine all say that Jacob’s dismissal for teaching CI had an emotional impact on them. They became more fearful and less eager to teach CI in the current political climate without support from colleagues or school administration (Kincheloe 2005; Visano & Jakubowski 2002). Jacob’s case is well-known and it reveals why some teachers remain hesitant to embrace CSI. Davies (2004) argues emotional resistance to policy develops when conceptual clarity and policy complexity challenge teachers’ community and interpersonal dynamics (Davies 2004). This appears to be the case with CSI.

According to May, a deficit in CSI is that the policy does not deal effectively with identity issues – specifically, it does not consider students’ cultural and religious affiliations:

The Ontario Human Rights Code and their definition of creed it all hinges on the definition of sincerely held beliefs and so in the end, if you ask me what are the shortcomings [of CSI], what are the strengths of controversial and sensitive issues, if I reflect on it in terms of faith, religion and creed, it is exactly going to come down to that and that is sincerely- held beliefs and the system of sincerely held beliefs that are either going to take issue with things that are taught in a secular curriculum or not.

May believes that CSI does not address student diversity and difference. Students’ subjectivity matters to education. Policy neutrality, a one-size-fits-all approach to CI, fails because it makes
false assumptions about students. Teacher and administrator narratives uncover these discontinuities, contradictions and the conceptual ambiguity of CSI in their working lives. Students react to school subject material through active resistance, knowledge challenges, and dissent or protest (Martin). Foremost among participants’ concerns is the subtext of authority running beneath the policy which ironically attempts to downplay this political aspect of CI pedagogy. Denial of the political nature of CI pedagogy means teachers are not given access to support for the work because the policy is itself downplayed and neutralized as simply a ‘curricular guide.’ Such a move enables control on two ways; individuals’ voices can be silenced because there are no major issues put forth to trouble anyone in CSI, but then, when an individual transgresses the system, CSI can emerge as a tool for discipline. As Young (2001) contends, our identities are constituted and upheld within an educational hierarchy sustained by power asymmetries which play out in oppressions, especially when we attempt to deny their existence through neutrality and policy provisioned as ‘facts.’ In this sense, teachers are also oppressed by the institutional conditions denying them access to support (resources and professional in-servicing on conflict and CI). Ironically, CSI reduces the complexity of the teaching context at a time when teachers and school administrators are feeling its challenges the most.

**CSI Impacts: Understanding and Enactment**

Because CSI is not speaking directly to the social problems currently facing society, many narratives default to a very instrumental understanding of CSI; that is, they view CSI as strategies, procedures, lessons, strategies and provisions of text. Responses typically identified singular CSI enactment effects such as: procedural tool to prevent censorship or book banning; a
lesson guide; a plan for opinion-sharing and debates; a strategy for bias detection and ‘balancing’ controversies; and as a procedure for handling community complaints. Some teachers support CSI while others develop resistance to its content (Davies 2004). Without a full and critical CI conception which provides a basis for understanding CI as form of cultural production rather than the transmission of a particular skill, teachers continue to be ill-prepared to deal with CI pedagogy (Lockwood 1999; Oulton et al., 2004a; 2004b; Werner 1998).

The existing CSI policy proves to be an ineffective framework for informing teachers and school administrators who work with issues of conflict. For instance, students who want to raise money for Sri Lanka are labeled as “supporting terrorists” regardless of their affiliations (Kevin). The school board responds with a memo listing the “cans” and “cants” from flags, to fundraising. Listing rules is a disciplinary action; it ignores pedagogy as the representation of the relations between school and life outside of school. The management of the Sri Lanka event demonstrates how the procedural response imposes restrictions. The equity position did not endeavor to probe students’ feelings. Subordinating students and teachers by making them merely policy ‘recipients’, transgresses the aims of critical policy. This display of procedural authority is itself an indication of conceptual weakness.

R. S. Peters (1966: 262) forges a critical distinction between being “an authority” and “being an authority in something.” The first kind of authority exercises power for its own sake – applying rules and enforcing them absolutely. This kind of authority adds little value to CI education; to be an authority means holding power over others does. Being the authority cannot engage pedagogy and it verges on authoritarianism. On the other hand, ‘to be and authority in something’ is another matter. To be ‘a CI authority’ is to claim some expertise in the area which makes sharing one’s knowledge worthwhile. Unfortunately, in many instances, CSI relies on
procedural authority as a default position – a gate-keeping role to provide protection. This unintended authoritarian exercise may be a result of the weak conceptualization the breadth of controversial issues. CSI It does not cultivate enough of the latter kind of authority where teachers and others (community members, students) can exercise their expertise and knowledge authority in CI in a respectful manner. This comprises both an enactment and use weakness affecting teachers’ roles and critical CI pedagogy.

School administrators tend to associate their roles with institutional power rather than with knowledge authority as policy users. Not surprisingly, teacher narratives demonstrate resistance to authoritarianism in the policy agenda. Some teachers resist privileging procedures like balance, or bias detection in their teaching activity. These teachers draw extensively on their own resources (ones not cited in CSI) and they acknowledge that another teacher could not teach the classes necessarily because the risk of being disciplined for transgressing curricular regulation is high. A few teachers work with authority because they agree with the policy and like the strategies.

From a critical perspective, CSI is not progressive; it does not facilitate teachers’ capacity to inquire with students into the deconstruction of what is presented as knowledge and curricula, nor does it politicize the role of knower as someone who is implicated in its production (Bai 2005). These critical interests are not made explicit in CSI. Students are thus hampered from examining the politics of education. More troubling, students are not the focus as they ought to be. The policy is understood as an “internal document” made for the eyes of school administrators and teachers. Some teachers (e.g. Martin and Jane) report placing copies of CSI in their classrooms to show students what CSI is, and what the restrictions/allowances are, but this was a minority action among the findings.
Censorship of texts also reveals a conceptual weakness. Protests by parents or communities are not met with a systemic examination of critical issues related to curricula; no substantive discussion about the reasons underlying parents’ positions or contestations takes place. The conflicts are viewed as problematic by the equity department; they use the term “putting out fires.” The narratives indicate that the complaints committee allows parents to substitute another text, but this action merely preserves the authority of the existing system to determine the direction and process around responses. Dialogue in this sense, is only a procedural interaction; it is not supportive of critical democracy where education has emancipation as an aim and teachers commit to creating the conditions for students to learn the skills, dispositions, knowledge and values that support a critical inquiry into the role society plays in shaping them. The subtext of the complaints procedure discourse is managerialism, not mutual understanding or respect. Social facts cannot be isolated from values and their ideological production. There is no willingness to alter curriculum to reflect student diversity or to sustain the conflict of differing viewpoints so important to a thriving democracy (Mouffe 2000; Young 1990). CSI simply does not support teaching curricular issues beyond topics already sanctioned:

...the problem with it is not, like with many documents, that it tries to be too prescriptive because I think it acknowledges that there are different ways of interpreting CI depending on the contexts. So, I think that is a good thing. But, at the end of the day, it’s pretty vague. (Jane)

Finally, teachers who are really passionate about their work with CI may be interpreted by others as lacking serious academic rigor precisely because they work unsupported (hooks 2003: 44).

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54 The Trillium List circulates a list for use by teachers, school administrators which states which texts are approved for use within the school board. Even so, this past year, the Handmaid’s Tale (Atwood) and Shakespeare’s The Merchant of Venice were brought before the TDSB in 2009 in the complaints process. Critics say the List imposes restrictions on teaching and learning and makes teachers fearful about what they can and cannot teach. Advocates of the List argue teachers can offset restrictions with their own materials; stories, photocopies, and novel excerpts.
a) **The Teachers’ Role and CSI**

Bacchi (2000) notes there are tensions in critical conceptions of policy-as-discourse approaches that exact a toll on individuals in the education system. For example, these approaches may underplay attempts at ‘policy-centricity’, that is, the institutional use of power in policy. Acknowledging the effects of institutional-centricity is important because institutions can control/regulate educators through the control and production of policy.

In the case of CSI, teachers are indeed regulated by textual authority. Teachers are de-skilled workers as they evidently require a maturity scale, a role of the reader strategy, a complaints process, and procedures telling them how to deal with CI as step-by-step lessons. Moreover, teachers appear unable to deal with robust theory regarding conceptions of controversial issues or global tensions in contemporary contexts such as peace and conflict education (Bickmore, 2007; Davies 2003) because these ideas form a background context, if at all in CSI. But the findings are not consistent on the role of the teacher. May states,

I agree with the document. Teachers feel too often that they should indicate their own preferences and they should be able to answer students every question and I don’t think that is the case. I think that we feel so much of a pressure to provide an answer that in fact, “okay a student wants to know my opinion”… It’s not my role. I am only the facilitator, my facilitation role is to get the students to focus and get the students to think about it. My opinion may conflict with every single person’s in that room, but so what? I am not the person who has to deal with the issue at hand, right? It is a learning expectation. Hopefully CSI has something to do with an identified expectation from the ministry of education guidelines.

Solidly buttressed by her faith in policy’s regulatory processes, May de-centers the teacher from active engagement. The role of the teacher is the deliverer of a policy program. Other teachers struggle with transgressing conventional regulations. The findings show a variety of disciplinarian actions taken against teachers who transgress neutrality, or who do not provide
balance in the role of facilitator. Teachers and school administrators receive many complaints for controversial topics including: same-sex parenting videos; pro-Palestinian video; an internet speech on 9/11; and books on a variety of topics.

Parents, councils, and community groups are not to blame for this state of affairs. At the core, the school board endorses the teacher-facilitator role and this position is undemocratic. Teachers themselves have a strong desire for knowledge (Hare 2001) and restricting their access to it and their professional discretion in using it to gain certainty and control over the curricula is misguided. It is disingenuous to even talk about the role of the teacher without discussing the rights of the student in democratic education. Imposing any role on teachers and students without their participation in identifying the course of education is undemocratic;

An initiative that is likely to diminish teacher professional judgment and narrow the range of educational possibilities within schools, and that defines “students’ needs” without engaging them in their identification, is not at its core, democratic (Mackinnon 2001:117-118).

One thing that is not democratic about the facilitator role is that it dehumanizes teachers and students and permits the authority for learning to rest in curricular outcomes or standards. Ellsworth (1994: 302-303) argues teachers and students find emancipation in their roles when they engage in critical reflection and “moral deliberation in the full range of views present.” She also argues the role of teacher, is to set specific goals to address specific oppressions. Ellsworth does not map out the strategy for these engagements, but as CSI stands, such a critical role is not possible when strategy is so heavily privileged. Teachers interpret the policy as hindering their agency with a procedural discourse.
b) **School Board Responsibility**

Some responsibility for CSI’s conceptual weakness rests squarely with the school board. As May discussed in page two hundred and nine, the school board has failed to provide support for CI beyond the provision of the guidelines. Without clear conceptions of controversial issues, the school board has indeed opened a “can of worms” (May) because social controversial cannot be suppressed by silence or neglect. Control over the situation will not be maintained by memos that treat CI as “hot issues” in need of management, rather than legitimate topics for education. The school board appears to be unprepared to handle the diversity and difference as a fact of social issues and school life. May comments:

…the one thing that the school board has left out us in fact a supportive and reinforced and standard way of looking at controversial and sensitive issues. That is the one thing that they do not have in that policy. They have verbatim, the Equity Policy and Commitments to Equity plus guidelines and procedures have been included. Human rights are taken care of by the Human Rights Commission and it is also mentioned in the Ontario Ministry of Education Resource strategies document. However, the school board does not have any clear definition for controversial and sensitive issues and they are going to have to learn….

Students’ identities, values, and knowledge are not taken in account. Students’ learning is expected to coincide with the institutional agenda. Ryan (1998: 36) contends that “efforts to represent groups in ways some believe to be accurate are pointless.” It becomes reproductive and reductive to identify what makes students ‘different’ from the perceived ‘norm.’ May’s observation penetrates to the core of the ambiguity of CSI; it claims to support democratic values, but without a clear explanation about what approach to democracy CSI envisions, the concept rings hollow. On the other hand, how can a guideline encapsulate student diversity in the way May envisions? Personally - held creeds may enrich students’ critical consciousness, but meaningful accommodation given the nature of diversity is difficult to conceptualize –
particularly a response that does not essentialize students. Provision of more programs and policies promise little hope to the progressive pedagogue.

c) **CSI Access and Administrative Leadership**

Another reason CSI is conceptually weak has to do with the school board’s failure to provision professional in-servicing and administrative support for teachers. In Fairclough’s theory of critical discourse analysis (1995), the concept of text encompasses spoken language. I would add the dialogic relations of in-services constitute a text also. So how text is consumed forms a genre of this ‘text.’ For example, the narratives can be understood as ‘text producers’ who draw upon resources (both deliberately and negligently) to create another genre of controversial issues.

The very fact that many teachers and some principals never read the actual text is a problem; it is a ‘non-story.’ What can individuals do without access to text and therefore no impetus for dealing with CI? Certainly the non-story is that the guidelines could not be useful because they never even existed for some teachers; they were never real to their practice. “Lip service” was paid to CI education by providing a policy, but no in-service took place (Jacob). Enacting the policy is the policy non-story. The actual emphases of professional development for teachers were competing policies (Safe-Schools, Numeracy and EQAO). These policies present contradictory expectations and roles for teachers and students compared to CI. This accounts for the policy as a kind of ‘sham’ and why some participants say the policy contradicted its own stated democratic aims (Jacob). It is simply difficult to maintain vastly different policy agendas.
At the same time, school administrators appear to endure a similar policy cacophony. They appear to hedge their actions and ideology between outcomes-based policies and equity-oriented agendas. This shackles the CSI discourse under the service of two masters:

I mean the gate keeper is administration, and what administration values, is what you see in school. So, you know, I am hard pressed to say that too many administrators will say that they don’t value equity but you can say that and that might not always come across, so policy would have to be what you believe in, and that will come across. CSI is optional and that has always been the argument about it. There is this fantastic CSI document and it’s just what it is. It’s a document. (Jenna)

Sharon despairs of the in-servicing problem, but she points to the problem of hiring and administrator selection as an even greater problem;

I am not sure at this point even this whole training, I think it has to go back to hiring. I think they have to work on employment equity in hiring and work on the questions they are using when they are hiring candidates and policy revitalization.

To conclude, the procedural discourse is the dominant story. Conflict, parent and community challenges are pressing issues in school life not just for school administrators, but they also stress the school board system. Jenna reveals this stress when she says school administrators feel “responsible” and “accountable.” School administrators did not deal with CI in any systemic way; their ideological commitments were usually carried out in interpersonal relations and this is what comprises the fractured narrative or ‘non-story’, as Roe (1994) calls it.

CSI and Democracy

Policy content and the form of democratic education cannot be isolated from each other. The means by which a school board, or any democratic institution, attempts to enshrine freedom
for its citizen is central to the process of democracy. Therefore, it is a contentious idea whenPixie’s says the rationale for CSI is to “Provides freedom to…” It is contentious for inferring a(neoliberal) worldview where an institutional system provisions for freedom by controlling theactions of individuals constituted by the education system. Pixie reflects this ethos when shestates the rationale for CSI is the institutional system granting permission “to do this work [CI]”and “having freedom to discuss controversial issues.” The CSI guidelines affirm presentingcontroversial issues in a “fair a balanced manner”; it requires a “broad perspective of curricularactivities that is thorough, balanced, and free of unfair biases” (CSI 2003: 7). Such treatment isthought to “prepare students for future and daily living as democratic citizens in a pluralisticsociety” (4).

Democratic freedom for students entails opportunities for discussion and recognizing therights of others to express their opinions (CSI 2003). Philosophically, students are required toview the content of discussion as ‘neutral’ because everyone’s opinion is recognized as “fair”; allstudent opinions are ‘equal’ is the stated view in CSI. Adopting such a universal value, but then situating it within a context which presupposes there are no universal values (no opinion can bebetter than another), creates an odd contradiction at the core of CSI. Acknowledging “we allhave biases” not only smacks of philosophical relativism, but this kind of thinking also haspotentially damaging social effects. There is a risk of teacher and students legitimizing racist,homophobic, classist and other oppressive positions as legitimate opinions or views. Bysupporting neutrality, the school board embeds a controlling ideology buttressed byphilosophical relativism.

Students are the ‘losers’ in CSI. They are supposed to benefit from policy without theirhaving been consulted in any way; they are spectators to their own ‘democratic’ education.
Conditions for education in a democracy (claimed in the discourse of CSI introduction) are not sustained. Genuine conditions include: the teaching of mutual respect and working through differences and oppositional points of view; placing equity at the fore of pedagogy and practice; and collaborating with government, community, family and teachers (Gutmann 1987 as cited in Karumanchery & Portelli 2005: 334). CSI treats difference as something to be tolerated and ‘balanced’; this neutralizes critical democracy’s capacity to be fluid and responsive to student differences. Because of the CSI’s tepid notion of democracy, students do not receive either a democratic CSI education or CSI to cultivate their dispositions for democratic life.

**Influence of Equity Department on CSI**

Many educators evaluate equity as an educational “add-on”, not intentionally, but as an unintended consequence of its diminished capacity. For teachers leading on equity in their schools, the CSI document was available through equity and social justice instructional leaders. Teachers involved in equity said, “...these documents came our way, but there was an in-service and it was our job to take these documents and share them with the rest of the staff and give an in-service about what we know.” This was seen by many teachers as a tokenistic venture with minimal substance.

Equity lead teachers who were interviewed also say they feel exhausted; they try to straddle curricular demands and social justice issues in their working lives. Extensive cuts to the school board’s equity department during Secondary School Reform (1998) left the equity department understaffed which reduced the available resources for schools. Equity lead teachers argue that without some kind of guidelines to support classroom teachers, there was no hope.
Narratives suggest even with CSI “equity mandates had no teeth” (Sharon). A very strong CSI rationale views it as a partial substitute for the loss of equity manpower.

May is hopeful about equity work; “I know that everybody approaches equity and human rights education through one door but hopefully they realize that there is a whole hallway of doors, eventually. But it takes time for people to get there.” The question is; did educators arrive given these conditions?

Narratives suggest that equity is isolated and not effective in instilling social justice values. One narrative comments that all documents are “reviewed for equity”; the responsibility for equity lies elsewhere, outside of teachers’ responsibility. Like CSI, equity operates with considerable ambiguity. Equity becomes the work of others who are hired to do the work because they have equity training; individuals are pigeon-holed to “do equity” and the remaining educators are not responsible for equity work except when others intervene. Equity representatives say teachers were struggling to understand what controversial issues would look like in the classroom, but in-service sessions and professional development were not feasible with reduced staff. Thus CSI guidelines work as a stop-gap measure to support teachers and administrators.

The stop-gap measure of provisional support fails however, partly because CSI lacks a coherent framework on ‘difference.’ Conceptualizing its theory of difference through strategies such as ‘bias detection’ and ‘teaching tolerance’ amounts to neglect- the neglect of racism and discrimination. Without direct treatment of these issues in a guideline dealing with CI, the conditions for equity are missing. For instance, as CSI currently stands, students are supposed to reconcile their differences through neutralized and neutralizing strategies. Arguably, these ideas
of student equality demonstrate disregard for students’ differences in any number of ways and thereby reflect liberalism at work.

Indeed, a subsequent policy on *Days of Significance* perpetuates such a conflation of ethnic multiculturalism as difference and the basis for investigating knowledge conflicts. It fails to interrogate difference as social production. Implicit in this failure, is the reproduction of asymmetry: the colonial knowledge-provider disseminates to the “ethnic” learner-student. The student is constantly “othered” as the object of festivals and significant holidays and thereby always different from dominant norms (Faulks 2006).

To be effective, the equity department must support CI education by developing a framework that supports and addresses a fluid conception of student identity that is dynamic in character. It must wrestle with a policy landscape bifurcated between student achievement and student identity:

A lot of equity is as it relates to achievement which is an issue for me because I think that achievement and how a positive school experience sometimes go together but you can have a positive school environment, and a positive school experience that promotes feelings of self-confidence and self-value, value who you are and where you come from and who your family is and all of that that isn’t necessarily isn’t tied to achievement. So I think that we have to look at achievement in more holistic ways. So where do I think the push is? I think the push is student achievement. That is all I hear; ‘where are the kids, how are they doing, how can our kids be doing better?’ And I think that is incredibly important, I mean that is my job. That is my job. A piece of my job is that my kids are learning and kids can’t learn if they are not feeling safe, if they don’t feel valued. So there is most definitely that connection to student achievement and that is your business, right, teaching. (Jenna)

Without a “grounded discussion of the inherent tensions and contradictions of an equity position” on CSI and its relation to other policies, equity does not support student difference (Dei & Karumanchery 1999:116).
While the equity department is fully cognizant of current policies and the equity challenges these policies create, the department does not take a critical position on inequitable policies. Equity does not challenge any of the assumptions within the guidelines such as the *Maturity Scale*, nor does it challenge the nature of the in-service program that privileges top-down information sharing. Indeed Sharon and Jenna both commented that equity is working more closely with school administrators than in the past.

Equity is not responsible for the turbulence of the unpredictable policy sphere. Nor can we criticize the equity department because schools are also inherently turbulent in their responses to policy interventions (Davies 2004). However, equity did play a role in setting the parameters on CSI information sharing, on intervening in school-based conflicts such as the Tamil conflict and the Tsunami. Equity is responsible for not engaging students in public issues of interest to youth and this reproduces a long-standing CI problem (Hahn 2001). Equity did not characterize its agenda through a democratic discourse despite its mandate to support democratic citizenship. These outcomes have cut all but the rhetoric of equity out of the department.

For their part, teachers received enough information to create doubt about CSI. Teachers with activist commitments realized they could mobilize their own energies to structure alternate possibilities to the guidelines that better served their social justice values, democratic commitments and service to marginalized students. Specifically, activist teachers develop their own lessons deliberately examining conflict because they do not feel conflict develops adequately in the document.

The equity department was also part of a team of writers who drafted CSI. What is to be made of this organization and equity? Henley and Young (2001) have noted curriculum-writing teams are vulnerable to reproducing inequitable policies. While writing teams select for subject
representation (as in the case of CSI 2003), the extent to which writing teams “truly understand
the significance of diversity, and are grounded in principles of inclusion, would seem from the
outset fraught with conceptual and practical problems” (316). While CSI is not technically a
‘top-down’ policy text, representation from library, equity, physical education, English and
social studies does not automatically render CSI equitable. Rather, the mash-up of rationales are
attributable, in part, to this bifurcated vision and the multiple interests of the writing team,
which, from the beginning, lacked clarity regarding the purpose of CSI in relation to democracy
and the purpose of education.

**Neoliberalism Hinders CI in CSI**

As the narratives on policy usefulness indicate, school administrators and teachers view
CSI as a weak policy for users. They cite a host of reasons for its weakness: limited access to it
and use by colleagues; its lack of conceptual clarity; its poor implementation (in-servicing); and
weak relations with the equity department. One important ideological barrier to effective
implementation and development of the guidelines can be understood from the narratives as the
effects of a pervasive neoliberal discourse within CSI. Its failure also rests on ideological
contradictions and tensions such as whether the guidelines can promote critical thinking while
presenting procedures for dealing with parental complaint.

Liberalism – the precursor to neoliberalism – gives birth to a powerful ethos which
originates in E.M. Forster’s aphorism “only connect”\(^55\) a romantic sentiment from the Edwardian
era. A seemingly benign desire masks blindness and privilege asserting ‘we are all the same’
despite differences and the sins imposed by colonialism. Liberalism ignores the injustices it

creates in the world (colonization, poverty, inequity, environmental degradation) by maintaining ignorance as a virtue. The discomfort of experiencing possible differences must always escape through ‘connection’ – both denial and transcendence.

Martha Nussbaum (2003) also locates freedom in liberal sentiment and individualism. She theorizes freedom of choice, religion, or education as a “capability” that individuals can mobilize with the necessary opportunities. Liberal theorists believe paying attention to capabilities benefits everyone equally, from one individual student to the many individuals affected by large-scale political decision-making. For Nussbaum, liberalism means individuals are ends in themselves. A weakness of some liberal positions seems to be the denial of identity as complex and constituted in groups, language, culture, and other pluralities.

Andreotti (2008) probes liberalism further. She distinguishes between ‘soft’ and ‘critical’ approaches in the context of CI education. The ‘soft’ approach emphasizes liberal individualism and ‘choices’ as meritocratic. Soft liberals use description and generalizations to frame the conditions of problems with the goal of consensus: ‘everyone achieves development, harmony tolerance and equality.’ She critiques soft liberalism as an approach that not only lacks development, it leads to a weak justification of liberal privilege; ‘we are better organized, work harder.’ In effect, the soft approach reaffirms dominant cultural norms, reasserts the workings of colonial assumptions, and makes these privileges universal – as though they belong to everyone.

Bias detection is a major strategy in CSI used to locate one’s opinion and in doing so, render a liberal response to difference. Bias awareness strategies keep tight regulate the CI discourse and thereby regulate the expression of emotion. Skill replaces cultivating emotion and dispositions. Social cohesion prevails because, at the end of the day, ‘we all have biases.’ To
keep this ethos, bias is almost always conflated with ‘preference’; “what are my biases in news sources?” (CSI 2003:26) Liberalism uses such strategies to keep individuals from exploring differences deeply so they cannot fray the fabric of our hypothetical common cultural weave.

In contrast, a ‘critical’ approach to liberalism views citizenship and education as political activities where the ‘West’ is implicated in the construction of what things mean and how controversial issues are framed. Critical approaches to CI interrogate ‘us/them’ subject-object identities in diametric opposition to neoliberal CI positions which equate providing students’ access to different viewpoints and opinions as the neutral provision of goods deliverable to everyone. This position is critical of attempts to explore crises such as HIV/AIDS, sex trade work, drug trade and human trafficking as ‘Third World’ problems.

The discourse of the CSI policy is aligned with soft liberalism (Andreotti: 2008). CSI takes up controversial issues as strategies; it uses a discourse of instrumentalism (‘bias detection’ and ‘balance’) to strategically avoid individual and group differences. As a result, teachers gain little theoretical understanding about what constitutes a controversial or sensitive issue from CSI. Teachers do not gain information or resources on the social construction and oppression of gender, race and class through text, instructional practices, or pedagogy.

Further exacerbating the situation, the Maturity Scale (CSI 2003: 12-14) gives different justifications for CSI using spurious authority to do so. On one hand, education is framed as child-centred and geared to psychological development. On the other hand, CI education must focus on curriculum delivery and the expected curricular outcomes. Paradoxically, CI attempt to be child-centred and contextualized through specific curricula. This is confusing for teachers. Teachers who were interviewed variously interpreted CI as:
• a response to school board amalgamation
• a guide to what CI should look like in the classroom
• a ploy to reassure the public that the amalgamated school board was cohesive
• A procedure for teaching CI and for processing parental complaints
• A defense against book censorship

Moreover, the exemplars are already lessons used in many classroom settings on well-known topics such as WWII, media preferences, and novel themes. The exemplars are hardly critical; they provide insufficient contexts (depth and breadth) to represent contemporary CI. By conflating all controversial issues under pre-approved issues, there is no explicit attention to more pressing and personal issues which marginalize students or, are particularly relevant to specific school or classroom contexts. Essentially, the CI guidelines serve as a justification for pre-existing interests and curricular foci and do not adequately guide the implementation of work towards engaging in critical pedagogy.

The second major piece of evidence for a neoliberal ethos is found in CSI document’s glaring denial of social differences. CSI shies away from this fact because it yearns for social cohesion. As the discourse analysis of the guidelines argue, the Maturity Scale standardizes students’ capacities’ for dealing with controversial issues with a pseudo-scientific justification. Invoking spurious data on child development, it makes claims about what kinds of understandings children develop and when they do so. This protectionist action guards against stepping over a line of protocol or appropriate universal standards, however poorly conceived. The guidelines themselves merely support providing different knowledge sources to students, and calling for a respect for differences of opinion. It fails to account for some very real possibilities: that there is no universal standard for child development (Matthews 1994); that curricula will not lead to social cohesion; or that students do not want to work towards consensus
through debate (Irish & Pashby 2010). The problem runs deeper than the provision of a weak strategy. There is no framework to support the very real risks and resistances involved in non-traditional critical approaches.

Theorists of critical pedagogy oppose liberalism and neoliberal ideologies because neoliberalism pits individual fulfillment juxtaposed against the history of human inequality (Lakoff 1964 as cited in Visano & Jakubowski 2002: 143). Neoliberal theory imposes barriers to critical pedagogy, and thus a framework for CI:

In contrast to the competing neoliberal view of skills training, critical pedagogy maintains that education is practical, in that it provides practical knowledge for living dynamically, critically and creatively. Moreover, a more critical and emancipatory education provides us with roots in historical consciousness. A critical pedagogy rejects liberal assumptions about education, artificial claims about merit and the benefits of competition (Visano & Jakubowski 2002:143).

The research demonstrates that even seemingly critical narratives take a fairly narrow view of the potential for CSI. Kevin says, as it currently stands, the policy deals well with challenges to texts like *The Handmaid’s Tale* and *The Merchant of Venice,* but he acknowledges that it also falls short:

The media pieces: the movies, the sexual innuendos, the homophobic comments, it needs to deal with that. Sri Lanka now- we are finding that it doesn’t deal well with that so yes, it will be revised… so it can better support a civics course…

The solution, according to Kevin, is the provision of more policy. By adding on to CSI, the guidelines only perpetuate more site-based bureaucracy and control. No attention is given to the weakness of the framework regarding what constitutes a critical or world issue. His position does
not demonstrate concern for including teachers, students or others in developing a framework based on broader kinds of knowledge.

CSI simply does not promote “analysis and critique of the relationships among perspectives, language, power, social groups and social practices by learners” (Andreotti 2006: 7, emphasis original) – a position consistent with critical literacy and critical pedagogy.

Thus, the findings suggest a lack of attention to the role of students in terms of defining and challenging what controversial issues are brought into classrooms. There is a noticeable silence regarding their role in setting a CI agenda or framework; their voices are simply not heard. It is not possible to support a critical democratic notion of CI policy without inclusion of students in problem-posing and curriculum generation. In particular, understanding the emotions and responses of students to CI would be helpful because CSI strategies tend to emphasize the regulation of emotion, not the expression of emotion and this reproduces liberal assumptions that all students think the same way about the same things.

**CSI and Critical Pedagogy**

Individual who undertake critical pedagogy contest the notion of ‘adding on’ or ‘making some space’ for non-dominant knowledge. Critical pedagogues attempt to recognize their own privilege and accept that pressure from communities regarding fundamental social inequalities develop the education conversation. Further, critical pedagogy confronts the general nervousness in education about making decisions that depend on judgments, intuition or metaphor as they represent imprecise and immeasurable forms of knowing.
For activist-oriented teachers, CSI restricts the kinds of social issues they would like to address: LGQBT experiences, environmental issues, world politics, terrorism, war, systemic classism, and violence. Jacob, Sharon and Daniel, say CSI is too conceptually ambiguous to be useful, and when it is not ambiguous, it is dangerous. Teachers resent letter home campaigns notifying parents of CI because the topics they choose are well within the equity mandate (e.g. same sex parenting, anti-homophobia). They say letters home reproduce dominant norms by signaling anxiety. CSI ambiguity is not creative or metaphoric, but narrow and restrictive. While teacher-activists say they constantly face challenges to their pedagogy, they also say no similar defence is required of the education status quo. For instance, assessment and accountability discourses are not required to make similar defences of their claims on education – they are the mainstream.

In a critical perspective, civic engagement is acts of courage and resistance. As Martin Luther King, Jr. claimed during the black civil rights movement in the US (1963:20), “the ultimate measure of a man [woman] is not where [s]he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where[<s>] he stands at times of challenge and controversy.” Civic responsibility and teaching merge explicitly in the teaching of controversial issues and in opposition to neoliberal ideology of passive adaptation to existing norms. Traditionally marginalized voices are particularly important to re-shaping alternatives in education and to developing the scope of a CI agenda because silenced students have often endured violence in education. Apple (1975:187) observes,

What is intriguing is the nearly complete lack of treatment of or even reference to conflict as a social concern or as a category of thought in most available social studies curricula or in most classrooms observed.
The openness to engage in this critical pedagogy is quite distinct from the strategies-based approach put forward in CSI. Thus critical pedagogy is not prescriptive, but always continuous and cognizant of the fact that through conflict we challenge the habitual and the dominant:

To live in openness towards others and to have an open-ended curiosity toward life and its challenges is essential to educational practice. To live this openness towards others respectfully… ought to be an essential part of the adventure of teaching (Freire 1998:120).

Leadership responsive to critical pedagogy is inclusive of coalition forming and partnerships. The narrative discourse on leadership suggest such an approach to leadership might be necessary from innovative leaders to activate the consciousness of institutional personnel to issues such as student difference regarding learning and the kinds of contributions communities can make to critical pedagogy.

In summary, CSI bears the hallmarks of neo-liberalism. CI education distilled and reduced to a ‘knowledge buffet’ of strategies: pro-con debate, opinion sharing, bias detection and balancing perspectives that do not furnish conditions necessary for critical thinking (e.g. dialectical activity. Rather, diversity is interpreted as grasping for more information, while teachers are encouraged to view neutrality as ideal because it provides the widest assortment of ideas. Approaching knowledge as neutral falsely conflates relativism with open-mindedness which is not the case, nor the aim of CI pedagogy. Neutrality is also akin to control as it masks emotions and suggests ‘anything goes.’ Students act like automatons in response; they select positions amongst the CI buffet under the teacher’s neutral eye. Freire (2000:101) comments that the teacher-facilitator role does not cultivate critical thinking; “If their [teachers’] action is merely that of extending elaborated “knowledge” to those who do not possess it, they kill in them the critical capacity for possessing it.” This is evidenced in Jasmine’s understanding of CSI
as “the opportunity to ask questions” and May’s belief that the more questions students ask the better the questions get.

Portelli and Vibert (2001) suggest the importance of students’ living knowledge and experiences as necessary to vital educational pedagogy:

Teachers are telling us that the curriculum of life—the actual, immediate and urgent experiences, issues and questions of children in schools—is becoming more and more the irresistible content of the classroom (79).

As long as students’ feelings are suppressed, genuine disagreements arising from students’ own experiences are stilted and controlled. The effect of emotional suppression is that CSI remains a tool for containing the nature of conflict and a device for achieving social cohesion.

**CSI: Control, Surveillance and Fear**

The section on control and surveillance requires careful consideration of the atmosphere or ideology creating the conditions surrounding teacher surveillance and feelings of being controlled. Examples of surveillance occurred in the context of pushing against the norms and by broaching political and social controversies considered “too hot” (Kevin) such as Israel-Palestine, Armenian Genocide, industrialization as a complex for oppression, gender stereotypes in popular media, and non-dominant cultural and family structures. It would be convenient to allocate blame to parents, school administrators or students; however, the root cause of surveillance – a misuse of power – has fear as its origins.

Teachers’ narratives talked at length about confrontations which led to them being monitored for their CI teaching. Jacob is under surveillance for indeterminate amounts of time;
Martin finds himself being marshaled by a counter-discourse embodied in a parent-lawyer opposed to a film’s content. All the examples reveal fear of the ‘other’ and of ‘difference’; conditions of our education system and our society. Police patrol the school halls at Sharon’s school and alter the atmosphere for free speech.

CSI imposes control by intentionally avoiding “hot topics” (Kevin). Teachers are very vulnerable when they over-step the liberal ethos. Teachers find they are subject to interrogation and discipline because what is offensive curriculum is a matter of opinion. Sharon receives a reprimand from her principal stating her peace activism on Remembrance Day is too offensive to war veterans and therefore radical. Her activism is not really radical; however, in the public context of an assembly it represents a transgression of the dominant culture.

The question of why some teachers put themselves at risk of surveillance in the context of controversial issues requires explanation. Teacher-activist struggle constantly against oppression to stay humanly engaged and committed to their work compared to teachers who in the case of CI would be content with the role of “facilitator” simply because it is stated as such in the guidelines. Freire (2000: 4) characterizes such a distinction in terms of “adaptation” versus “integration”. Relations with the world can either be reproductive and “adaptive” (a passive stance) or relations can be “integrated through a struggle of adaptation plus the critical capacity to make choices and to transform reality.” Integrated individuals act as ‘subjects’ in educational contexts as they attempt to change reality and therefore they challenge policies and practices. Adaptive teachers are ‘objects’ and they merely go along with the status quo whether that is policy or politics.
Applying this characterization to other individuals in the education context of CSI, and I believe that many of them were content to be objects of the policy; they let the policy write or inscribe their realities so CSI amounted to very little. For the teacher-subjects, the policy also amounted to very little also but for different reasons. They engaged students beyond the prescribed scope of the guidelines and because of this activism they invited surveillance from the “gate-keepers” (Katherine).

Arguing against this, Alex believes CSI provides protection for teachers in the face of challenges by the community. He argues that without tenure, teachers require a policy outlining procedures to protect them professionally as a kind of defense. Thus Alex believes the political climate is so dangerous for educators, that the procedures offer sanctuary. Interestingly, even Alex’s position admits to a culture of surveillance. It is also important to ask how much CSI adds to the culture of surveillance. Again, narratives divide into activists who feel at risk most of the time and teachers and school administrators who feel rather content with the guidelines because it supports the opportunity for questioning. Are these educators also facing stringent, but unacknowledged, control such that questioning is an important provision for them?

**Policy Challenge: Liberal Uses of Positive and Negative Freedom**

Teacher narratives communicate a sense of apprehension in relation to both local and internal policy contexts (e.g. what the policy says, school administrators, parents) as well as external policy influences such as the school board and OSSTF. The policy narratives say that the policy has competing and contradictory aims: political action, procedural control, curricular regulation, pedagogical ideology, and a tool for bias detection, a gesture from a newly-amalgamated school board to create social cohesion, a permission granting document, and a
response to pressure from special interest groups. Participants ask how CSI serves their interests and the interests of their students. If the policy does not serve as a curricular support for exploring CI, then what principles govern CSI? What embedded rationales are at work?

Because the narratives reflect much “to-and-fro” movement between accounts of making space for liberty and the institutional restriction of liberty, CSI rationales can be theorized in terms of Berlin’s (2002) liberal views of “positive” and “negative” liberty. Of particular interest, is applying Berlin’s argument to CSI and educational freedom.

Without belaboring Berlin’s complex philosophy, “negative freedom” sees freedom to engage in activity in accordance with the individual’s will. “Positive freedom” is freedom to choose and act on political life. However well-intentioned, positive freedom conflicts eventually with individual freedom for the sake of democratic governance, consensus, spiritual harmony, or any number of social ideals. Thus there are concession and trade-offs in democratic life, the argument goes. Evaluations of the necessity or ultimate value of positive freedom form a vast, rich area of study, and I cannot do justice to that work. What is of particular interest here is that threads of negative and positive can be traced in the narratives. Weighing the specific implications of these threads and the tensions they bring to the narratives is worthwhile.

The abuse of positive liberty occurs when the state or institutions make decisions on our behalf based on ‘rationales’ as they formulate them. Pixie expresses the tone of governance and oversight, the need to control a situation, when she says,

And one of the things that we saw was there needed to be a consistent approach to handling controversial issues and a consistent approach to dealing with problems as they arose and so that’s the impetus for writing the document.
The institutionalization of controversial issues frames them as procedural problems arising from the public space. Therefore, reducing public freedom appears to be an acceptable measure to ensure procedural consistency. Consistency is a kind of values pluralism that works against the liberty or negative freedom of the individual; it imparts exclusion. But CSI, by its very nature was exclusive as Pixie says; “it was purely an internal document.” She says she is aware of the controlling aspect of the policy:

I could say a cynical way that the document serves as a good way for superintendents and principals to cover their backsides, so that they follow procedures and don’t make mistakes in dealing with parents, students, teachers when controversies arise.

Even if she recognizes this as the cynical view, it is certain that many others have adopted it.

Deferral to institutional authority occurs elsewhere. May waits for the Ministry to engage or acknowledge a more diverse conception of CI. She demonstrates little “negative freedom” or self-determination to direct her actions:

I think that is an expectation that in fact multiple points of view are to be encouraged but it [CSI] doesn’t really go beyond that. If in fact this is going to be a policy, a policy would not be a singular board’s policy; it should come from the Ministry. And so that is why when the Ministry comes out with new inclusive classroom strategy or if this is a school strategy, the big hole that is there is that they don’t have anything in place to address the curricular piece…. what we are waiting for is the guidelines for implementation and as well as the program policy memorandum.

These liberal views support positive freedom and they feature implicitly rational decisions exclusive of larger society. The individual takes a view so narrow in its justification that it is hard to imagine what the rest of her education society looks like, but it is not a diverse one.

Authority is assumed to rest with the institution and this not questioned by either Pixie or May. Indeed, Pixie says as a draft writer, “we were providing permission to do that [select texts]
within an open context...” Her comment echoes Fichte’s educational philosophy; “compulsion is
justified by education for future insight” (as cited in Berlin 2003:196). Pluralism is viewed as a
greater social good than coercion for the individual’s own good;

To assume that all values can be graded on one scale, so that it is a mere matter of
inspection to determine the highest, seems to falsify our knowledge that men [women]
are free agents to represent moral decisions as an operation which a slide-rule could, in
principle, perform. To say that in some ultimate, all reconciling yet realizable synthesis
duty is interest, or individual interest is pure democracy or an authoritarian State, is to
throw a metaphysical blanket over either self-deceit or deliberate hypocrisy (Berlin 2003:
216).

Pluralism makes a distinct claim to engagement, the achievement of which requires budgeting,
commitment, and communication whereas diversity is simply a fact of being different;

Pluralism is not diversity. Diversity is a fact of modern life. Diversity suggests the fact of
such differences. Pluralism, on the other hand, is a response to the fact of diversity. In
pluralism, we commit to engage with the other person or the other community. Pluralism
is a commitment to communicate with and relate to the larger world- with a very different
neighbor, or a distant community (hooks 2003: 47).

The topic of pedagogy introduces the question of supporting resources. Here is revealed
some contradictions and darker aspects of the policy discourse as the school board alone
continues to approve all resource allocation and use. For example, both the policy the school
board supports controversial issues in principle, but publishes The Trillium List of approved texts
for study. Other books are presumed to be banned or disallowed, unless approval is given in
writing by the school board. Jane’s story confirmed this; she was phoned by the Director of
Education’s office to check whether a media resource was ‘sanctioned’. It is Orwellian to
present the idea of engaging in controversial material as policy ideal, but simultaneously to
restrict choice in, and narrow access to resources. The theme of control involves these constraints of freedom on one side; the other side is the controlling of emotions.

Excluding controversial subject content because it is passionate and emotional in the responses it draws from students, teachers, administrators and the community is in fact patriarchal because most of the public domains of our institutional life are hierarchical and stratified (Braidotti 2003). What we presume to be ‘neutral’ and noncontroversial is typically constructed along masculinity notions of ‘rationality’ what counts as knowledge (Pateman & Gross 1987). Therefore, student engagement with CI is a component of feminist resistance to this construction of knowledge which can shape our ideologies and epistemologies. The activity is resistance owing to the enormous pressure exerted by the ideology of conformity. Engagement with CI constitutes an aspect of feminist critical praxis because radical self transformation is also possible through actions such as the de-codification and interrogation of the status quo and creation of the pedagogical conditions for dialogue, deliberation and critical consciousness (Freire 2000; hooks 2003).

Therefore reclaiming texts and other kinds of knowledge relegated to the margins of even controversial issues is transformative work against silences constructed against diversity, difference, or freedom. Feminist critical practice also critiques efforts throughout the findings to build architecture of neutrality regarding knowledge creating artificial conditions for education detached from a life of emotion and embodied experiences (Eagleton 2003; Martin 2001; Portelli & Vibert 2001). As Mouffe (2000) contends, suppression of emotion affects many levels of the democratic discourse including the political sphere of decision-making, the construction of individual identities and the articulation of public knowledge; “political practice in a democratic
society does not consist in defending the rights of pre-constituted identities, but rather in constituting those identities themselves in a precarious and always vulnerable field” (149).

**CSI Strategies: Balance and Bias Detection Embed White Privilege**

The policy narratives do not support an engagement with pluralism and the balance strategy is perhaps the most damaging example of its breach. If procedures are the privileged policy discourse shaping CI education in schools, what accounts for it? Who benefits from adopting this view? What does a focus to procedures oppose or appear to suppress?

According to Edward Said, the dominant culture surrounding policy production is white (political, often imperialist or colonialist) culture (1994: 41). It is characterized by mind/body dualisms and the ‘othering’ of ‘non-Westerners’. In *The Culture of Imperialism* (1994), Said argues the ‘customary boundaries’ and ‘systems of regularities’ constructed by policy systems are tools of exclusion employed by the dominant white culture (41). Endemic to policy is what Said calls “the consolidated walls of denial that had been built around policy studies passing themselves off as uncontroversial, essentially pragmatic enterprises” (41). As such, policies discourses thread narratives of subject-object positions supporting a cleavage of emotions, mind and body. For Said subject-object positions include constituting the roles of ‘the oppressor’ and ‘the oppressed.’ This construct is manifested through the populist polemic about the superiority of Western civilization over others (1994: 17).

hooks takes up the theme of our obsession with the objective view as ‘othering’ when she comments, “dominator culture promotes a calculated objectivism that is dehumanizing (2003:131). Laclau speaks to the same issue:
The unresolved tension between universalism and particularism allows movement away from Western Eurocentrism, through what we would call a systematic decentering of the West...Eurocentrism was a result of a discourse that did not differentiate between the universal values that the West was advocating and the concrete historical actors that were incarnating them (Laclau as cited in Mouffe 2000:38).

The idea of universalizing white Western culture and its dualistic thinking also applies to the classroom texts (hooks 2003:38-39):

The either/or thinking that is at the heart of the white-supremacist-based metaphysical dualism teaches people they must like either black images or white images or see books written by white people as written for everybody and books written by black people for black people. The assumption that “whiteness” encompasses” that which is universal, and therefore for everybody, while “blackness” is specific, and therefore “for colored only”, is white-supremist thought.

The CSI strategy developed which focuses on teachers providing balance and students detecting bias functions very much as an agent of cultural assimilation. CSI foregrounds “providing a protocol or process for dialogue and resolution of controversial issues related to a specific text or situation” (4). It controls the selection of learning materials and develops a binary- “pro-con” approach to knowing. What bias detection does is impose a way of viewing the world onto students who are required to cast away their linguistic and cultural heritages to learn about bias, which is a deficit discourse problematizing their thinking without knowing anything about who they are to begin with. In essence, the balance detection strategy frames ‘difference’ within a very conservative lens as it always returns to the reinforcing the dominant values. It never seems to examine more substantive differences between and among teachers and students, school and society. More troubling, balance detection and bias ignore systemic sources of inequality derived from treating the Global Majority and others in marginal ways. For
example, identifying our biases or preferences is sufficient; they are never inadequate biases or prejudices.

Therefore, bias detection strategies form a weak justification for CI education. Balance, as the narratives indicate, are especially difficult for activist teachers who feel they have to re-apply dominant values to acts of resistance to provide the required ‘balance.’ Re-stating dominant norms reproduces them.

What do students gain by co-operating in the activity if it is not a comprehensive understanding of CI? The “carrot” as Williamson, Rhodes and Dunson (2007: 206) call it is “the promise of assimilation.” Student co-operate because schools are educational authorities and they guide students towards enculturation with the promise of White privilege, citizenship and upward mobility. However, assimilation denies other historical way of being in the world. Bias detection becomes a skill of insight or detection, rather than a condition of all our beings. Freire rejects theories or strategies which promise the fruits of assimilation by denying history:

What is fundamental is that theoretical reflection should not degenerate into empty verbalism, nor into a mere explanation of a reality thought to be permanently untouchable. In other words, not reflection in which reflection of the world signifies accepting it as it is, thus transforming the world into an instrument for adapting men and women to the world (2000: 100).

Bias detection also connects to white privilege because the strategy suggests that knowledge and our perception of knowledge are without history. A discourse of white privilege disguises cultural hegemony as a common culture – embedding strategy and skill (bias detection), precisely because the hegemonic ethos seeks a kind of color-blind certainty.
For these reasons, bias detection weakens our democratic and social justice potential. It is not supportive of a critical democratic position. It girds liberal, assimilationist positions. Balance and bias detection do not encompass difficult material beyond direct instruction (e.g. the origins of the kinds of thinking in systemic forms of white privilege; issues of concern to students; possible critiques of political and educational systems). The view that is given promotes a specific agenda: teaching CI as the transmission of known and therefore controlled; using the strategies of balance and bias detection; and treating students as singular. Barred from this agenda then, is education in schools as socially transformative.

So, white privilege masquerades in the context of this policy study as the penchant for neutrality. Through neutrality, bias becomes simply a detection activity, not a condition of our beings and our actions which requires interrogation. White privilege makes non-dominant pedagogies (queer, feminist, critical and anti-racist) climb up the hill of white justification thus exhausting challenges to it.

In conclusion, Carr (2007b) contends there is controversy at the heart of policy making itself because *whiteness* as a means of defining power and setting the education agenda leads to marginalization of minority groups (I argue the global majority) and perpetuates racism. Though CSI states a commitment to: “ensuring representation and participation of constituent groups in the process of defining, reviewing, and revising policies and programs related to equity education” and “assisting in the development of self-confidence by teachers and administrators in respect to their own judgment and efficacy” (CSI 2003: 8-10), there is no evidence in the narratives that these activities occurred or that they were inclusive of non-dominant groups. Freire correctly asserts, “How can I dialogue with others if I always project ignorance onto others and never perceive my own?” (2001: 90)
Chapter Nine: Conclusion and Recommendations

The narrative and critical discourse analyses enrich our understanding of the principles pursued in CSI, the policy’s interpretations of educational values, and its project for conveying these values through text and action. Compared to policy analysis (Cibulka 1994), policy study is less inclined to be a prescriptive exercise (Hogwood & Gunn 1984: 28-29). Policy study is more concerned with the integrity of descriptive accounts of policy content and processes to provide insight. This policy study has commented on the policy content, processes and effects of CSI (2003) guidelines in the context of teachers’ and school administrators’ working lives.

Recommendations provided here are nevertheless somewhat prescriptive, not in the sense that one size will fit all, but the recommendations contribute to a CI framework informed by CI policy.

To encapsulate the CSI story, I set out to understand how teachers and school administrators understand a curriculum policy (guidelines) through research questions. I endeavored to capture both professional development kinds of interactions (workshops, meetings, in-services, professional development and equity training sessions) and the less formal, but equally important, kinds of interactions such as relations between and among colleagues, parents, community, formal institutional structures and students.

The findings drawn from an analysis of the narratives and the critical discourse analysis of the document locate contradictions and ironies which serve to persuade and control the policy discourse. The most prominent voice in the text invokes CSI as a procedural tool which has a sharp edge. The procedural voice tells teachers to follow the Trillium List (a list of prescribed texts). It also manufactures a complaints procedure for those who challenge or resist texts outside of this resource. Yet, many individuals in the education system do not identify curricular issues
as especially ‘political’ or in need of administrative leadership or genuine social justice leadership challenges. CSI is not able to breach the constraints imposed on texts by the Trillium List. Thus, the school administrative leadership on CSI is not pedagogically inclusive in a formal manner. There is the possibility that such activity occurs in small ways untapped by my research.

There are good reasons why school administrators struggle to work inclusively. First, CSI was a policy constructed by a writing team. Administrators were not consulted directly in its development so they did not fully understand the importance of CI; they did not ‘buy in’ to the policy. Secondly, school administrators received superficial policy in-servicing from an equity department hamstrung by manpower and budgetary cutbacks. Thirdly, school administrators struggled to communicate with staff about inequity and CI because personal confrontation is uncomfortable.

Moreover, the findings indicate that the document itself is muddled; the purpose of the document is unclear to policy users. For example, CSI conceptualizes learning as both student-centered but contingent on an external measure – the Maturity Scale. Also, democracy is the chosen lens for the entire document; however, the notion of democracy guiding the document is not strong or clearly communicated. It appears to be a token concept rationalizing a superficial discourse. Weak CI conceptualization continues to run throughout the document making the policy unsupportive. As a result, individuals (parents, students, communities, teachers and school administrators) cannot use CSI in a meaningful way, but it is difficult for these same individuals to take an active stand against it because it is so ambiguous.
The Centrality of Democracy in Education and Education for Democracy to CSI

The revolutionary spirit, so characteristic of our democratic ideals, flourishes through spontaneity and responsiveness to change. Barber (1996: 350) says the current conditions necessary for participatory democracy entail: individual autonomy, commitment to engagement, participation, and empowerment. Therefore, the absence of cultural harmony, or social cohesion, is not a cause for distress; “it is the guarantee that democracy is alive and inhabited by pluralism” (Mouffe 2000:149). For this reason, we ought to be concerned about any efforts to control or to coerce individuals towards a decided norm by preventing individuals from seeking social change, from voicing their opinions, or from seeking power in situations where this is denied them. The task of a CI framework then, is to make the operations of power, marginalization, and oppression visible to students, teachers, and others so that they can enter the terrain of educational contestation as a never-ending process of social engagement.

Participation in democratic education requires social inclusion and it ought to result in social change. If not, then “either it [democracy] remains a private value masquerading as a public norm or it denotes a prior consensus that has been revealed by the political process” (Barber 1984 as cited in Taylor 2002:183). Participation is not a cliché; it is a system-wide form of social engagement in processes including policy processes (formation, enactment, responses). We must be cautious; however, to consider that participation is no guarantee of inclusion. Reproductive patterns of exclusion may still continue despite inclusive policy processes through what hooks calls “authority and dominator status” (hooks 2003). For example, participation is still capable of masking exclusion in universal concepts of democratic inclusion such as ‘participation by voting’ (Pateman 1988).

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56 There different conceptions of the relation between democracy and education develop depending on whether democracy is the end of educational activity, or whether education activity should itself be democratic.
My research indicates that CSI effected exclusion; the guidelines were intended to be used internally and they were in-serviced to school administrators. As a result, CSI allocates power to traditional administrative positions. Such control over the discourse of inclusion/exclusion suggests that CSI authenticates a conservative, culturally transmitted notion of the ‘good citizen’ which reproduces institutional perspectives in a top-down administrative fashion (Vidovich 2001).

Doubtless, policy is a social activity (Ball 1990; Ball 1993; Vidovich 2001), though teachers and students can alter policies and interpret policies (in formal and informal ways) (Ozga 2000). My narrative discourse analysis of the role of the teacher in the school workplace suggests that neither inclusion nor participation were CSI’s aims. Rather, coercion was evident in the discourse analysis. The institutional culture appears to have created a culture of fear in some contexts thereby constituting a discourse of exclusion and oppression. Indeed, neither the ‘readerly’ nor the ‘writerly’ texts are notable for their engagement of teachers and students (Bowe, Ball & Gold 1992). As a cultural artifact, created within the contexts and historical conditions of curriculum reform and a culture of fear, CSI perpetuates a managerial rationale through strategies which do not translate effectively into democratic participation and inclusion.

The literature review confirms that we are witnessing the disfiguring of CI pedagogy as democratic education; students are increasingly limited in opportunities to reflect critically on what citizenship means, or what it means to be an educated citizen (Heilman & Segall 2006). While most narratives in this study refer to homophobia and racism, only Jacob, Sharon and

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57 The point I want to make is that for the most part, teachers invite outside groups like TEACH into their classes and they discuss a painful session of silence, discomfort and then homophobic comments following the presentations, which increase their regret at inviting the guests in the first place. Parent council, the school board, and school administrators disciplined Jacob and Daniel who transgressed the norm and dealt with homophobia and white privilege. They were required to justify their lessons weekly.
Daniel’s work mentions or discusses the assumptions which underpin the existing curricula such as heteronormativity or white privilege. As a result, issues of sexual orientation (and I would suggest ableism) ‘float’ as signifiers, or unstable concepts, in a normative educational construct. In this way, CI remain additive to education and this is not an acceptable pedagogy, morally or practically. As Young (1999:155) opines, “it is important to make principles of inclusion explicit because contemporary democracies do so badly on this score.” By default, democratic CI education tends to be “just a paper preparation for citizenship” (Dewey 1924/1983:160); that is, CI education does not actively and fully engage students; it continues to exclude what it perceives as marginal from representation.

Neoliberal forces impose stress on education by imposing risks to educators who transgress its socio-economic formations and occupational culture (Apple 2001). CI challenges neoliberal or other collective ideologies to confront their norms and curricular inertia. Curricula are now radically separated between programs for job training and those developing critical reflection on social issues (Shor & Freire 1987:47; Visano & Jakubowski 2003). To improve CI policy towards democratic and social justice aims, it must engage excluded students, teachers and communities in setting a CI agenda and developing a framework which is responsive to social and global issues, receptive to conflict and representative of individuals in danger of erasure from the dominant discourses- GLQTB, disabled, ELL, non-white, and others. Finally, to be more democratic, CI education must value the everyday work of teachers and students and relinquish the ‘politics of zeitgeist.’
Critical Pedagogy Necessary for CI Framework and CSI Policy

Exposing an important contradiction within the current education system, CSI sets a mandate for student success (based on very questionable notions of success such as standardization) while assuring the public that education is also committed to meeting students’ needs (through activities such as standardized testing and course cutting). CI pedagogy leads us to ask the important question once more: ‘What are the aims of education?’ CI pedagogy exposes the effects of neoliberalism’s service to the market economy; the discourse’s restrictive critical democratic aims for education and institutional constraints. When CI education employs critical pedagogy, CI becomes capable of excavating the rhetorical constructions of texts as cultural narratives. Students can learn to pay attention to the marginalizing effects of well-known texts and other cultural artifacts.

The absence of critical pedagogy enables neoliberal education to assert other misconceptions such as meritocracy. The narrative findings from my research show that although the curricula do not seem to contextualize students as different and therefore individual, students are always validated for having a different opinion. The myth of meritocracy tells us that hard work pays off and that every student has equal access to opportunity and to success. Meritocracy is popular educational currency because its ideology provides a usable yardstick to measure and assess all students as the same and to assume they fail through their own choices. Though the current practice of meritocracy appears neutral, it conceals realities about inequalities in society such as white privilege, which, like patriarchy, is one of many hegemonic educational norms. Neoliberalism denies its function as a tool for promoting advantages to some and for valuing certain kinds of talk, dispositions and learning styles. Rather, neoliberalism attributes students’ lack of material circumstances to their own decisions and choices (Dei & Karuman cher 2001;
Such unstated norms in neoliberal thought are the antithesis to open-mindedness – a requirement of critical thinking and critical pedagogy. Such norms work against critical thinking and CI pedagogy because they are the ends to which we reason, sometimes without justification: “choice is illusory to the degree it represents the expectations of others” (Freire 2000:7). At the same time, our ability to assume common values is unfounded in these ever-changing contemporary educational contexts where there is little or no agreement over what knowledge matters (Barber 1984).

Faced with structural liberalism, even teachers and students committed to critical pedagogy can feel threatened by these dominant structures, and afraid of challenging them especially in discussion laced with conflict:

Students and sometimes teachers, especially in the diverse classroom, tend to see the presence of conflict as threatening to the continuance of critical exchange and as an indication that community is not possible when there is difference (hooks 2003:135).

Young (1996:130) contends, “in a discussion situation in which different people with different aims, values and interests seek to solve collective problems justly, it is not enough to make assertions or to give reasons. One must also be heard.” Knowing they are being heard is one form of participation, among others, which students are not privy to in CSI.

Critical thinking has long been considered dangerous in spaces such as school classrooms which require students to cohere to exiting knowledge norms (Passmore 1967). Because our schools are so swathed in the ideology of transmission teaching and the banking concept of learning (Freire 1998), we have become inured to fragmentary knowledge rather than to education which mirrors the oppressive society as a whole. On the other hand, critical pedagogy is subversive because it questions privilege and examines the ways privilege silences different
ideas and emotions. For Freire, critical pedagogy in education is a dialogic process which humanizes the teacher and the student: knowledge emerges only through “the invention and re-invention in the world, with the world and with each other” (1993: 53). The findings indicate that teachers and school administrators are working with CI without a comprehensive CI framework inclusive of critical pedagogy, or a conception which considers dispositions and values consistent with critical pedagogy.

Textual fundamentalism is perceived as a clear danger in CI education and it too, remains a barrier to CI education because texts not sanctioned by the Trillium List are deemed inappropriate for students. Scholes (1989) argues “we must open the way between the literary or verbal (or social scientific) text and the social text in which we live...Our job is not to produce readings for our students but to give them the tools for producing their own” (as cited in Cherryholmes 2008: 441). The Trillium List which approves texts for use in schools imposes a disciplining discourse. Text control like the ‘writerly’ discourse of CSI reveals a lack of conceptual complexity – an inability to grasp the idea that the world is more complicated than we think. Karl Popper laments this situation regarding selection of texts calling it “textual fundamentalism” as it seeks to avoid errors in transmitting knowledge:

The best way of avoiding error is to remain entirely passive and receptive...I usually call it the "bucket theory of the mind." Excluded from text are socially, politically and economically marginalized ideas. They break fundamentalism into text and knowledge representation (1962: 213).

Kincheloe (2006: 213) calls for critical pedagogy to explore such complexity beyond textual fundamentalism including the tensions between “chaos and order, determinacy and randomness, and synthesis and analysis.” In this sense, CI embraces uncertainty as an historical reality and as power dynamic shaping the politics of students and teachers’ daily lives. In turn,
students will need access to the ‘political’ nature if education. A CI framework must acknowledge how education can perpetuate oppressions (Young 1990); it must critique the status quo in its multiple forms (classism, Euro-centrism, heterosexism, colonialism and rationalism among others). The caveat to the CI recommendation for acknowledging oppression is that policy work must also seek to engage teachers and students’ as cultural workers who have the power to make valuable contributions to policy study (Ball 1990).

**Leadership, Policy and Social Justice**

CSI didn’t go to all trustees. It went to two or three trustees and that was it. And you know, that is politics and so when we talk about controversial and sensitive issues, politics are always a part of it. It has absolutely nothing to do with furthering curricular knowledge or empathy in students. Eventually it has and can be everything about the politics of individuals and groups of people outside the school. (May speaking about an incident of book censorship)

Teachers and school administrators who looked to CSI for coherent social justice curricula found the policy to be unsupportive. Many teachers responded to this situation by subverting the guidelines and teaching their own social justice agendas; however, school administrators reported this kind of teaching intensified the pressure on them from parents, other teachers and the administrative culture. Some school administrators determined the usefulness of CSI based on interactions with parent groups or perceived lack of support; however, all administrators in the research said they valued CI pedagogy. Also, school administrators appear content to wait for more policy, different cultures to emerge or other authorities to take control to improve policy weakness. I feel these rationalizations compromise their roles as potential school leaders on controversial issues. I feel educational leadership is central to mediating the culture of fear teachers describe as their CI working conditions and as their emotional responses to CI
policy. Adding to the policy confusion, many administrators appear to be hobbled by lack of informed discussion about the purpose(s) of education – a problem reflected already in the literature (Hare 1993; Kincheloe 2005). Teachers rely on administrative direction regarding CSI policy because they fear being perceived as indoctrinating students into a particular perspective.

Vincent (2003) urges school administrators to consider identity as an access point to social justice work in all relations, but Razack (1998) warns dwelling on identity can obscure how we are all implicated in the construction of racism and other oppressions. Thus inclusive leadership consistent with social justice requires sustained attention to power and privilege, the role of society in constructing lived experience, and the intersection of all of these to produce knowledge hierarchies, binaries and norms (Ryan 1999; 2006). The perspective proposed here represents a departure from the school administrators’ narratives where power and privilege were not unveiled. Rather, school administrators mostly viewed their power as constituted by the role they occupied; it is a disembodied view, but at the same time, these individuals embraced these positions to act for what they believed in. School administrators did not see their roles as neutral, rather they cited context as a major factor shaping their roles.

School Administrators and Pedagogy

School administrators who endeavor to deal with a re-conceptualization, or more critical conception of CI policy in schools might take on the task of de-constructing the controversies underpinning CI and all curricular policies as social justice commitments because inequity develops through normative curricular processes. For instance, school administrators might consider how intensely political the institutionalizing of CI education is; how value judgments are made about its usefulness relative to other policy initiatives (Carr 2007b). Democracy
demands this kind of critical reflexivity. Without this kind of reflection, school administrators and others risk privileging certain policy ideas which can perpetuate social exclusion among students and teachers and other potential school administrators. Lack of critical reflection can even lead to authoritarianism –a condition antithetical to critical democratic engagement and inclusive leadership (Peters 1966).

Policy engagement ought to be subject to consideration, reconsideration and contestation in the shift from ‘administrator’ to ‘leader’ as progressive processes mean reframing the roles and responsibilities of educational administrators for social justice. Assumptions of ‘apolitical’ or ‘neutral’ administrative positions regarding policy statements must be tossed aside. School administrators must make explicit connections between the requirement for administrative leadership and cultivating critical pedagogy. School administrators must grapple with judging policy explicitly to support or advocate for equity-oriented policies despite competing policy agendas based on narrow notions of literacy and numeracy.

**School Administrators and Staff**

School administrators occupy strategic dialogic spaces in education because they have access to policy and therefore power structures throughout school board. I include Andreotti and Warwick’s dialogic approach (2008) to CI education here because I think it is useful for school administrators and staff to engage in this process during staff meetings, discussions with parents and students. I cannot envision deep change in the classroom without transformation within the school culture supportive of CI. Activities central to Andreotti and Warwick’s dialogic approach to CI (2008) to bridge this classroom- school culture gulf include:
• Consultation about existing interests/concerns
• Establishing knowledge gaps/ presuppositions/ values and topics for inquiry
• Creating a safe space for discussion; listening, inclusion of others
• Engaging with different logical perspectives
• Identifying mainstream and non-mainstream perspectives
• Engaging in group dialogue: critical exploration as groups, whole staff, teams on specific questions encouraging everyone to make very specific judgments
• Committing to further inquiry: identifying subsequent questions/issues arising from the investigation
• Closing the open space: reflection

This approach is valuable when it is applied to staff relations and in-servicing because it accomplishes several important things. First, the approach places pedagogy closer to the heart of school administration and the culture of the school as a whole. It acknowledges that conditions such as dialogue and open-mindedness cannot flourish in the classroom if similar conditions are not cultivated in the school culture. Secondly, this approach makes explicit attempts to locate mainstream and non-mainstream perspectives so that procedural agenda can be investigated in terms of who benefits; a positive move towards social justice interests. Though this approach is not a panacea, nor is it perceived as an ideal, it points to the kinds of critical engagements I believe are often suggested for classrooms, but seldom suggested for staff meetings and other kinds of school relations. I believe they become more beneficial through more applications.

School Boards’ Use of Power

School boards have not traditionally received much attention as a focus of discussion for democratic education (Henley & Young 2001) nevertheless; they exert powerful discourses through day-to-day policy activity. School boards contain structures and organizations that are less obvious sites for policy study that require further research regarding their critical function: writing teams, parent councils and trustees. In theory, parent councils represent independent
community voices. Research by Henley and Young (2001) finds that parent councils model inclusive aims and practices at a superficial level. Parent councils tend to capitulate to the authority of school officials or others who dictate policy direction. Henley and Young (2001) conclude that parent councils are not reliable sites for democratic decision-making or policy activity in the current system as they are subject to coercion and persuasion to accommodate the desired policy positions. School systems warrant examination in terms of the claims they make regarding democratic education and social justice in their organizational structure and in their influence on policy decision-making.

Post 9/11 education continues to challenge school boards with the reality of student pluralism, interpersonal conflict, and curricular dissent. How school boards choose to frame policies on controversial issues, who is invited to write them, and how the beneficiaries of policy are represented are critical questions. School boards can no longer make weak CI policy gestures because students are ethnically, culturally, sexually and linguistically diverse – they will inevitably challenge the existing knowledge norms. Social justice work as thirty hours of community service will no longer balm the itchy questions of what to do about social education:

If the policy development process does not cater to the needs and concerns of teachers and students in providing the resources, tools, structure and support, then the effectiveness of the actual curriculum and related service learning may be limited (Carr 2007b: 21).

Educational authorities are seldom interrogated or monitored for the congruence of their social justice claims and their policies (Taylor et al. 1997). Solidification, or even reconciliation, of relations between the school board and policy users is not only a respectful and democratic gesture, it would result in more effective policy as users provide valuable information which is otherwise unavailable – local level policy activity.
Indeed curriculum policy is manufactured, manipulated, directed and controlled. What counts as a controversial issue is determined within a larger agenda of educational policy. Carr (2007b:16) observes a paradox; if educational policy has not fully internalized social justice in its agenda, how could it develop curricula that addresses social justice concerns? CSI policy cannot support controversial issues pedagogy within a discourse preoccupied with balance, teacher neutrality and bias detection.

The CSI policy never really develops the scope and theoretical breadth CI deserve. The policy constrains the teachers in two ways; lack of breadth and depth in developing the policy leads to narrow conflatations of controversial issues with lessons and skill development. Further, the school board and schools let CSI wither intentionally or unintentionally as it attends to more pressing policies on accountability:

They are not doing the same kind of training at all. I mean I haven’t heard about in a long time the board, the equity foundations statement or the human rights policy so I think a lot of that material is getting buried, it’s hard to say whether it’s being buried on purpose or whether it’s just because the department has been cut back which is clearly purposeful but it’s hard to know. I think there’s generally “going to move to the white neighbourhood agenda” in the board in education so they speak about equity, they speak about social justice, but I haven’t seen it prioritized in any way (Sharon).

Apple (2001) argues neoliberal market allegiances and conservative education policies are trenchant barrier to socially just education. Student differences strikes at the very heart of standardization and the assumption that education is the provision of knowledge as neutral goods. As argued in the previous section, the CSI policy approach creates conceptual ambiguity around what constitutes a controversial issue because the definition appears to be contingent on the lesson application. However, my thesis argues that how teachers understood CSI depends
also on the larger system – the competing policies and the attention given to them. Davies (2002: 25) argues the direction of curriculum policy is never unintentional, but it is highly regulated and anti-democratic:

It is indeed interesting that while we have health education, peace education and human rights education, we do not directly have wealth education. Yet implicitly, education is supposed to be about wealth creation, both nationally and for individuals. If there were a wealth education curriculum, it would seem important that this were not just another set of economics lessons, nor capitalist maths on profit and loss, but an acceptance of the links between democratic schooling, social democracy and poverty reduction. Wealth education would be about critical pedagogy, critical thinking and emancipation from authoritarian or closed ways of thinking. It might well include analysis of expenditure on arms, or of so-called democratic governments selling unnecessary arms to poor countries.

As a policy study, it is not the province of this work to suggest curricula for CI education; however, I agree with Davies that current CI education is restrictive and intentionally so.

**Recommendations**

Critical democratic and feminist theorists attempt to deal with the tensions arising from narratives of oppression (Marshall 1999; Mouffe 1996; Weedon 2003; Young 1986) in everyday life and they acknowledge that more than one thing can be true at one time. Using critical consciousness theorists endeavour to probe the ambiguity, complexity and layers of human experience as the human project (Freire 1998). No one is exempt from the project of building relations and forming critiques of the stories we tell and the stories we hear. Indeed, we can all claim to stand as oppressor and oppressed in relation to someone else (Razack 1998: 47). Beyond exposing the power relations between and among social injustices, institutional oppressions, local practices, the critical discourse methodology attempts to generate some knowledge about how to change these processes and relations. As I stated, I am not providing recommendations in
a deterministic sense, but as a hopeful alternative based on the narratives to challenging oppression in support of critical democratic education and social justice while acknowledging that our knowledge is always partial.

1. CI Policy Must Address Exclusion

A CI framework for education cannot develop without a fuller understanding of how power and ideology operate in pedagogy:

Ideology is defined as a broad interlocked set of ideas and beliefs about the world held by a group of people that they demonstrate in both behavior and conversation... (Meighan & Siraj-Blatchford as cited in Claire & Holden 2007:70).

Current CSI content is remarkable for its social injustice. The pedagogical content does not deal with issues of whiteness, privilege, patriarchy, disability and racism. According to Essed, oppressive ideology such as racism operates at two levels: the level of daily practice and the interpretation of daily life in which denial and refusal to take responsibility for oppressive ideology are manifested (as cited in Razack 1998: 60). Therefore whiteness is not embodied as much as it represents a dominant ideology; and this has policy implications. Individuals who ascribe to dominant ideologies are not required to explain their choices of texts; how they decided what to leave in and what to leave out and the authority guiding these decisions. In the operation of white privilege, learning is ‘neutral’; all students have the same opportunity to voice their opinions about controversial issues, and a silent student is someone who is not trying hard enough or does not know enough about issue.58

58 Note that educators are notorious at identifying what constitutes engagement among racialized/minoritized students. A comprehensive research study by Pattie and others concludes that “students have not contracted out of politics, but rather are engaged in a multiplicity of political activities beyond the traditional ones” (Pattie et al. 2004: 266) from which they have been excluded. Their research suggests the need for more consultation with students in order to create a workable CI curriculum by drawing upon students’ own conceptions of the political.
Western styles of debate and bias detection, assumed within the policy guidelines, weaken CI education because CI conceptualization has been chronically conflated with technique and skills which lack a clear rationale and fail to develop critical thinking. Western culture often assumes that critical thinking is a universal skill and this assumption intensifies expectations for students who are new to this discourse – students who must also master the hidden discourse of what topics are acceptable in schools, with classmates, and with teachers. For example, Davies (2005) points out that potential subordination through curricula in not considered so that topics such as wealth education and its impact on democracy are not optional topic, yet the dominant culture seldom questions its omissions with students.

Individuals within institutions also resist CI because they have erected intrapersonal barriers. Kevin argues teachers and school administrators resist equity agenda because they “fear giving up power, because things are changing in society” away from white-dominance and this makes the dominant culture uncomfortable. Cassandra states that our fear and prejudices remain buried and unconscious – a product of “emotional unconscious imprinting” – the result of living with our assumptions unchallenged. We develop attitudes, beliefs about prejudices about different others and these impose “an emotional block for change” (Kevin). It is unclear what measures will inspire commitments to inclusive CI pedagogy in school administration. I argue school administrators must forge a dialectical relation between administration and CI pedagogy to accomplish inclusion. CI pedagogy cannot be held as a distance concern for educational administration if administrators value school communities and inclusion of students in school life.

Teachers remain unsupported in two ways; text provision and professional development. Thus the omissions or “leaving out” not only occur in teacher-student interactions, they are
systemic and pervasive. Silences remain in substantive areas of social conflict. For example, how do schools in post-conflict zones teach about difference? Do they ignore it, deny it or normalize it? How do they teach about rights or justice? Teacher narratives from this research note that K-12 curricula overlook discussion of current issues such as anti-immigrant racism, racial stereotyping and social justice in a time of war.

Teaching controversial issues means much more than the provision of ‘reasons’ and ‘appropriate evidence.’ Indeed, teaching controversial issues is informed by educational, political and ideological issues (whiteness, democratic racism, sexism, and neoliberalism) which shape our sense of their purpose and what CI can accomplish. Deconstruction of the conceptualization of CI is necessary – what factors limit its policy potential (Carr 2007b). In addition to conceptual deconstruction, there is the need for critical reflection; determining ‘what is controversial’ is not just the result of more evidence, but rather, it is a result of one’s deeply held, acknowledged and unacknowledged ideological beliefs (May). Only through these kinds of engagements can CI effectively begin to address exclusion, but it must also be said that these engagements are not geared towards social cohesion or conflict-resolution. Inclusion of different voices in the deliberation (students, community members and parents) might be helpful.

2. Recommendations for Leadership

Power relations emerge as knowledge asymmetries throughout the data analysis (Young 1986; 2000). Findings from school administrators suggest that their role in policy relations is primarily a managerial one. School administrators still function largely through textually-

59 Davies (2005:369) says, “We know, in the Balkans for example, that countries are trying to ‘harmonize’ curriculum and remove hostile references to previous ‘enemies’; but how do they then present this complicated history and set of identities? How do Rwandan teachers teach about the genocide?”
mediated relations – the texts of restructuring – that link government policy to the everyday work of teachers, students and parents (Griffiths 2001). Policy expectations combined with administrative styles of leadership retrench ideological differences between administrators and teachers and enforce the notion that teachers and parents maintain distinct worldviews from the institutional perspective and that only one perspective is sustainable. According to Griffith (2001:83), textually-mediated relations are central to transforming school administration from provisional activity to agency and leadership. Therefore, school administrators must engage directly with policies to challenge how policies affect their roles; they restricted to bureaucratic-managerial roles rather than emancipatory or critical ones.

On the other hand, many school administrators’ approach to policy could be called “winging-it” (Jenna). School administrators are often uncertain about how to mobilize policy effectively. Administrators often wait for direction, they wait to see where power lies, and they wait to reproduce institutional policy perspectives within the school context. Hence school administrators speak of being caught up in a complex system where they experience change as a theme in itself and they feel their role is to immediately enact policies. They say change is the real theme because “something else will be coming down the pipeline” (Jenna).

To ameliorate the power asymmetries, school administrators must develop sensitivity to challenges teachers face. Professional training on difficult social issues such as the treatment of terrorism, war, and the relation between global and local CI should be championed as central professional goals for in-servicing. Another way leadership could further a CI agenda would be through the development and provision of a critical CI framework which makes explicit: conceptions of CI; the challenges and barriers educators face regarding CI pedagogy; components of a criticality (reasoning, open-mindedness, considering alternate viewpoints,
accepting that one’s view should change and lead to action); and consideration of supports needed for the CI teacher.

The research suggests that educational administrators oriented towards inclusion and social justice must pay attention to a wide range of activities constituting the education culture including: curriculum development, policy response, and the cultivation of citizenship as part of democratic education. Narratives speak to the effects of a complex educational system where information is often partial and provisional which makes leadership throughout the educational system feel tentative.

An important recommendation for improving CI leadership then, is for school administrators to acknowledge the dialectical relation of leadership and critical pedagogy. Supporting critical pedagogy from a critical leadership perspective means more than teacher regulation or surveillance; support means providing access to resources and curricula that are rich, responsive and varied. Access and control of resources and texts is a crucial issue. Constituent communities often demand alternate curricula (Tanner 1999; Williams 2002). School administrators must acknowledge the social capital students, parents, community and teachers bring to curricular policy processes and conflict in education needs to be viewed as educative. In summary the following conditions are ongoing and essential understandings for democracy in education that: educational leadership is a dialectical relation with others; critical pedagogy is a pre-condition for social justice and equity education; and that resources are value-laden and subject to public scrutiny and influence.

Cambron-McCabe and McCarthy (2005) assert that a social justice agenda is embedded in critical pedagogy and leadership. If we acknowledge that an administrator’s role entails developing and maintaining student learning and that leadership means engaging directly in the improvement of teaching and learning, it is reasonable to posit that expertise in instructional practices and curriculum content must be central in our selection of leaders (p. 209).
Leadership on educational policy (including CI) would benefit from school administrators taking more robust positions on administrative policy activism that works to energize local level engagement with policy and to harness support when formal support for initiatives is lacking. Moreover, school administrators should intervene when policies do not serve the students’ needs (Clune 1990; Davies 2005b). Another recommendation includes supporting community responses to dealing with CI through the provision of opportunities such as: grassroots or ad hoc committees of interested citizens that meet to discuss political and social issues of interest (see Archon Fung’s theory of “mini-publics” for a more formal discussion of this kind of idea).⁶¹ Policy processes are generally understood to be incremental (McLaughlin 1987; Ozga 2000) and incremental change provides school community leadership opportunities as ‘mini-publics’ for planning, resisting, advocating, altering, re-shaping, or mediating policy (Clune 1990; Ryan 2006).

Finally, in its best conception, CI pedagogy is concerned with social justice. School administrators supportive of CI needs to confront instances of injustice. Equity personnel were explicit in stating that white power and privilege were dominant barriers to equitable education mandates; however, staff are afraid to confront attitudes of prejudice or resistance to equity for fear of causing offence, or because “teachers are not there yet” in terms of their professional roles.

3. Recommendations for Teacher Education

Above all, teachers are professional educators who are engaged in a political act when they teach (Freire 1998). The teacher- student relationship is synergistic when it is oriented to

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social transformation. The democratic transformation of schools and society require that we develop a highly qualified, theoretically sophisticated, creative and professional body of teachers who can tackle racism, violence, and gender discrimination among other forms of discrimination (Gay 2002). This raises the question of the adequacy of teacher preparation in shaping such diverse and critical perspectives. Teacher education and development are central in any process of critical educational change (Hargreaves 1996; Solomon & Allen 2001). However, policy reforms in Ontario over the past decade have reinterpreted the role of many teachers to be “efficiency experts” to deal with issues such as the achievement gap, outcomes-based curricula and standardized testing (Carr 2007a; Wien & Dudley-Marling 2001:105). If teachers are, for example, to teach democratically, then they are better placed to do this if they have experienced a democratic teacher education for themselves.

Concern for the content of Initial Teacher Education programs and teacher development in relation to policy is necessary to extend teachers’ roles beyond facilitator, mediator and impartial observer, devil’s advocate as found in the literature review and CSI. A move towards developing critical consciousness begins by intentionally challenging deterministic policies, curricula and other learning expectations. This recommendation cannot be accomplished unless the organization of schools is called into question. Finally, leadership as a collective and collaborative process (Ryan 2006) must be foregrounded if teacher education is to vanquish instrumental views of teachers.

Examining the role of the CI teacher is recommended; in particular, the teacher’s authority. As Peters (1966) suggests, authority is neither ultimate nor authoritarian in its expertise; it provides knowledge worth sharing. Secondly, teachers deserve greater control over the education agenda: curricula, education policy, and leadership in educational change. Ryan
(2006:69-70) has identified some of the risks associated with teacher leadership in educational change, namely increased teacher workload and ambiguity surrounding role definition; however, the degree to which these risks are a product of sustained conservative institutional structures and lack of support requires consideration.

Critical pedagogy will continue to serve teachers as a means of unraveling assumptions about their prescribed roles as neutral facilitator and policy recipient. Ryan (1999), Oulton (2004) and others have indicated that teachers who bring controversial texts and material into the class risk indoctrinating students unless these teachers also provide adequate strategies to deconstruct and interpret CI material. Without critical consciousness, CI education simply reproduces inequity when it attempts to challenge oppressive practices. Secondly, teacher education must acknowledge and discuss how teachers and students from dominant cultural positions usually benefit from existing CI textual material. Sensitivity to a text varies. As Jasmine comments,

I think also context is a really important issue: what students’ contexts are- what the contexts of the courses are- that often goes missing. If the texts are not renewed, and then a new controversial issue comes up in the media and you are trying to bring the two together… I can see that being a possible tension for a classroom teacher. And for me, as a teacher to say, “I don’t want to deal with that- that’s the hot potato”, even though it could be a great opportunity for equitable education for my students. That’s the problem.

Thirdly, teacher education must be explicit and realistic in navigating the current realities of CI education where there is often little institutional resourcing or professional support and CI pedagogy is viewed as an “add-on.”

Pre-service programs often dull the critical edge of inquiry: teachers who challenge policy’s justification, or point out internal inconsistencies and contradictions in policy, or even the
capacity of policy to deliver what it claims, are considered ‘trouble-makers.’ A system recommendation is that teacher education must position new educators not as policy recipients who are not passively compliance with government policies, but as critical users and shapers of policy. This critical reconstruction of what it is to be a ‘good teacher’ is essential to improving CI curriculum policy. Often, the disposition which is valued, though unspoken, is practical, applied and attuned to consumption of the material as neutral. A preferred dispositional frame would engage teachers in confronting the realities of conflict in education, the ongoing nature of uncertainty in education and the importance of decision-making, especially in the context of curricular policies. Most difficult of all, might be the challenge of accepting that privilege confers dominance (Applebaum 2003). Our complicity in the systemic production of white privilege is necessary and it underscores why social justice work is imperative in CI policy and CI curricula. Specifically, CI policy needs to support teachers and school administrators in making visible the oppressive system racist practices visible through policy change.

4. Towards a CI Framework

The research findings indicate that a more substantive framework is necessary if CI pedagogy is going to support education that “informs, reforms, and transforms” (Talbert 2005: 53). My work contends, in line with Davies (2006: 18), that critical engagement with cultural conflicts and sensitive issues is integral to this educational agenda and that it thrives in an environment that “enables comfort with uncertainty and fluidity.” Yet much is at stake when we look towards a democratic education that provokes critical considerations of controversial issues. Indeed, it is important to recognize the potential for sustained conflict and unintended effects such as alienation, anger and misunderstanding. Banks (2004: 11) reminds us that “citizenship

62 It is my observation that policy still functions in teacher education as an authoritative text.
education within any social and political context is likely to have complex and contradictory consequences that educators and decision makers are not always able to envision or predict.”

The issue then, of how to provide a framework of support which does not condone a passive or transmission style approach to CI pedagogy (teaching only ‘safe’ topics such as media preferences, or literary points of view) is a central task of democratic education.

A framework for CI pedagogy must address fundamental aspects of the task such as embracing, not shying away from, the reality that education is political, and CI pedagogy means enacting the democratic commitments we claim as citizens in a democracy. A CI framework for education cannot develop without a fuller understanding of how power and ideology operate in pedagogy by recognizing that ideology is beliefs and ideas held by groups of people which are broadly enacted through all social practices.

Hicks (2007) attends to students’ worldviews by refining a student-centred perspective aimed at expanding the student’s worldview. Hicks develops a broader context for CI pedagogy than CSI by drawing attention to students and their potential responses to CI. Opportunity for students’ personal growth is possible if the existential dimension is handled well during class interactions. It is not an ideal framework however, because it does not address the implications and limitations of one’s own positionality. Because this framework focuses on students’ responses, it could reproduce and validate oppressive practices such as white privilege. Though the action dimension is suggestive of potential transformative practices, it does not make them explicit. The following list outlines the features developed in Hicks approach to CI as well as a means of assessing the issues itself:

1. *Cognitive dimension* - learning new skills and ideas about global issues, ideas, subject knowledge
2. **Affective dimension** - emotional response - hopelessness, fear, shock, horror, helplessness

3. **Existential dimension** - reflection on being in the world

4. **Empowerment dimension** - the question of whether the individual or collective could solve the problem

5. **Action dimension** - informed social, personal and political action

6. **Cognitive dimension** - learning new skills and ideas about global issues, ideas, subject knowledge

I do not find her framework sufficient for addressing issues such as marginalization, surveillance and democratic *agonism* as a condition of society. Hicks emphasizes transformation at the individual level and for this, I appreciate her framework, but for its lack of system interrogation and engagement, and for its lack of focus on social transformation in general, I find it insufficient as it reinforces liberal individualism and individual responsiveness.

The Partnership for 21st Century Skills (2004) sells curricula to school boards throughout the United States. The school board of Ohio has profiled this approach to CI. The approach list CI skills as “additional” to mainstream ones that students should demonstrate in a discussion of controversial issues, such as:

- Critical Thinking & Systems Thinking: Exercising sound reasoning in understanding and making complex choices, understanding the interconnections among systems.
- Problem Identification, Formulation and Solution: Ability to frame, analyze and solve problems

63 Skills include: *Red herrings* – any time an irrelevant premise is introduced as an argument for the purpose of distraction. *Post hoc ergo propter hoc* – the suggestion that there is a causal relationship between two or more events without demonstrating anything beyond correlation. *Argumentum ad hominem* – a personal attack on the opposition that is not based in the discussion. *Straw man* – an argument made against a weaker or corrupted version of the opponent’s argument, rather than addressing the actual position of the opponent. *Circular reasoning* – a form of argument that has the conclusion as one of the premises. *Argument of example* – Turning the discussion to a dispute about an example given, rather than focusing on the central issue. These are good skills, but what are the issues?
- Creativity and Intellectual Curiosity: Developing, implementing and communicating new ideas to others, staying open and responsive to new and diverse perspectives.

Though values have long been associated with controversial issues, they have been appreciated primarily as expressions of feeling or the means of building social cohesion. A CI framework must support the values of deliberation, free speech, sharing feelings, and giving reasons, not as ends in themselves – not simply to state them – but with an eye to locating their limitations and oppressive capacities as well. Dispositions such as open-mindedness, the ability to give reasons and to express feelings should not be ends in themselves; they are meaningful inasmuch as they help students understand themselves, their own positions in society and how they constrain or support social oppressions.

The complex historical and often taken-for-granted discourses shaping CI cannot be enclosed within a single prescriptive CI framework. Hughes and Sears (2008) contend that CI must address the messy issues of democracy. CI inherently represent the contested ideas that have shaped democracy across historical and social contexts. Hughes and Sears (2008: 84) call this approach to support CI teachers “taking the crisis out of controversy.” By establishing the historical and social contexts which intentionally present complexity and ambiguity, this approach pushes for examination of the ideologies shaping learning activities. Teachers who take up this approach are guided by attributes for selecting “episodes” as CI: authentic, vividly rendered, succinct, multi-dimensional, deliberately ambiguous, and representative (Hughes & Sears 2008: 87). These theorists advocate articulation so that what is implicit becomes “explicit and subject to scrutiny” (91) rendering the taken-for-granted content of lessons less opaque and thus open to more democratic inquiry.
A CI framework acknowledging dispositional and values aspects further develops individuals’ access to the political heart of education and this connection deepens the relevance of CI education to democratic well-being in society. However, the framework must be useful to teachers; they must understand the complexity and richness of CI, why they should bother with this kind of work, and how they may begin to think about CI in relation to their own educational philosophies. While lesson plans and strategies may be helpful to teachers, certain pitfalls need to be avoided: the creation of binaries – ‘this or that’ solutions/pro-con debates, balancing issues; essentialism for the sake of consensus; validating viewpoints as an end without considering action on issues; and detecting bias as though neutrality is attainable or desirable.

A CI framework must also consider significant systemic-institutional barriers (identified in the literature review and the findings). These barriers include: CI increases teacher workload especially in terms of policy knowledge but not access to making policy. Moreover, CI pedagogy is not adequately funded in terms of professional support or resources (e.g. texts, media). Because texts are subject to Trillium approval, books supportive of CI pedagogy often invokes a sense of risk or danger. When individuals become afraid they resort to rules and regulation.

Another barrier inCSI is the limitations it places on teachers; they are told little about CI in theory or as a full conception, yet teachers are expected to teach lessons from strategies and bias detection. As a result, teachers’ are professionally de-skilled to facilitator roles. Teachers report an atmosphere of surveillance where policy compliance is expected despite the reality of competing and contradictory policy narratives. The research respondents feel many of these barriers are not easily addressed in an explicit manner.
Finally, a CI framework must put forward a CI conception that is philosophically sensitive to conflict, that represents a range of specific issues, and that acknowledges the capacity for difference among individual responses to issues. Thus resolving such tensions by seeking consensus though tempting, is false. A conception of CI must take into account that they are complex dialogic interactions between the learner, the teacher, and the subject matter where inquiry sustains tension, ambiguity or conflict. The process of inquiry is complicated, contextual and often affected by the worldviews of those engaged with the issue. As such, a CI is not a always a matter of supplying more information, or controlling students’ emotions, a CI approach requires thinking differently, thinking outside of one’s own worldview with the aims of penetrating dimensions of problem(s) and sometimes deciding on course(s) of action or activism.

Concluding Remarks

Researching CSI (2003) confirms to me that CI education is still viewed by many teachers and school administrators as a negative, risky, and challenging experience, though the reasons they feel this way varies. Some teachers said student diversity is itself a challenge and teachers struggle with making curricula relevant to the contexts of their students’ lives. A couple of school administrators said CI education was such a challenge because other policies (such as Literacy, Numeracy, Family of Schools) were touted as more important; thus social justice education and other professional goals were broad-sided by the perceived requirement for compliance with these other policies. Some teachers said CI is hard to understand; it is a vague,

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64 ‘Dimensions of the problem’ are complicated; I am thinking of aspects of our own consciousness as well as external conditions. Aspects of our consciousness include embedded privilege, centrism, colonial assumptions, democratic racism, heterosexism, cultural knowledge canons, our prior knowledge and contexts among others. External dimensions of the problem could entail the marginalization of individuals, limited access to information, global perspectives – in other words, what is it we do not know, and why is this the case? What do others know?
relativistic concept which confuses them and students and the CSI document does little to clarify how to work with controversial issues. I feel that attending to CI in a substantive manner entails identifying the working of structural and systemic oppressions and that this makes educators feel uncomfortable as it calls on them to identify how they are implicated in these processes.

It is clear to me that indeed the discursive processes of policy turn the text into educator realities; constructing positions, knowledge rationales, power and privilege. It is glaringly obvious that CSI did not ask or attempt to support truly controversial issues. This explains why issues of institutional racism, classism, gender and sexual orientation are pushed out of sight in the policy. Embedded within the questions not asked is the denial of the connection between power and knowledge and how practices such as policy mediate both. For example, I would expect a CSI policy to be open to compiling a diverse resource base, to supporting dialogue among pedagogues, students, communities and practitioners, and to invite other educators into the field to share the challenges of teaching controversial issues. Teachers and program administrators require clear conceptions of controversial issues as part of this framework. They do not need ‘cast-in stone’ definitions; there is room for responsiveness to students’ contexts. But without drawing their attention to the need for conceptions, teachers and others will not know how to approach their work with CI. Without these changes, what is left? CSI remains a rather conventional narrative where knowledge is bland and white. Students are taken for granted as one lump of homogeneity. In both instances, thinly veiled assumptions of objectivity and universality float underneath and CSI appears to be a benign policy.

At its core, education yearns for certainty despite its commitment to democracy. Education must chisel a lens deeply etched with the political and the critical aspects of daily life to see schools as public spaces worthy of participation, contestation and complexity. If this new lens
seems blurry under current conditions (e.g. masculinist notions of controlled knowledge binaries, lack of open-mindedness about the possibilities of teachers as policy shapers, homogenous notions of students) we must wrestle to clarify these conditions also in the ongoing, messy work of education, policy and democracy.

**Future Research**

CI curriculum policies are under-research precisely because they are slippery and complicated; researchers grapple with the intentions of these policies and ways to determine their effects (Davies 2006; Heilman & Segall 2006). This research has not asked students their own opinions, nor has it observed the dynamics of CI classroom practices. These are important steps toward clarifying policy on controversial issues. Future research might consider a comparative analysis of the aims and effects of CI policy in Great Britain and Canada, or Ontario compared to Alberta and Ontario.

Another area for research development is the much needed work on conceptualizing a CI framework. Comparative analysis is of little value if research adopts the current normative perspectives on controversial issues. Thus researchers who engage with very unique conceptual lens ought to be encouraged to push this work into novel contexts. For example, I would be interested in applying a CI approach to prison schools, learning how CI education is taken up in areas experiencing war and conflict, in Jewish day schools, and in Afro-centric classrooms. I would like to research how teachers speak to the following issues and how they do so in a way that engages a critical pedagogy of democracy and citizenship education: reasonable accommodation, terrorism, Sharia Law, environmental taxation, the electoral system, and family violence. I contend that tracing the selection and use of textbooks throughout a school board, or
family of schools, and conducting an analysis of this process according to a CI framework would add insight on the coherence of policy. Finally, this research interviewed secondary teachers and school administrators. It would be very worthwhile to conduct research in an elementary setting. Certainly there are many more areas for future research because CI education is so central to education’s purpose – the development of students’ capacity for critical thinking and concern about issues in their world, the development of their capacity to participate fully in society as democratic citizens not in the future, but now.

To conclude this dissertation, I would like to go back to its beginning and the equity department memo on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Texts such as the memo and CSI policy are, in many ways, loveless languages. They fail us in so many ways. Without love, policy will continue to fail us in the desired transformation toward critical democracy and social justice. Love, as I invoke it here, is not a saccharine cozy embrace to warm you as you leave my work. Dispositional love is a powerhouse of critical, feminist political capacity that illuminates issues and helps to provide both the insight and endurance to wrestle unjust material conditions; white privilege and dominance, normative knowledge assumptions working through controversial issues curricula, policy that ignores praxis, and the embodiment of all of these in oppressions (Young 1990). I do not expect love among teachers, students, school administrators and community members to cure these social ills, but I believe this disposition is necessary to imagining and engaging in the work of social transformation for democratic education. Policy processes are no exception to the invocation to find a loving disposition; CSI is no exception. Indeed, through hope and love we may construct a new approach to CI inclusive of diverse perspectives yet critical enough to change oppression in society.
Appendix 1: Semi-Structured Interview Guide for Administrators

*Interviews will be audiotaped at locations preferred by participants. Photocopies of the TDSB policy will be available for educators who wish to review it prior to or during the interview.

Interview Questions:

[General orientation; school context, educational history and introduction to CI policy]

1. Tell me about yourself as an administrator. How long you have been an educator, and how long have you been at this school in this particular context?

2. How would you describe this school? What conditions/contexts describe this school community? What challenges/pleasures are there for you as an administrator in this school?

3. You have indicated that you are familiar with controversial issues policy that the TDSB put forward in 2003. When did you learn about the policy? Was there a context for introducing this policy text for you?

4. What was your initial reaction to the TDSB CI policy?

5. Prior to this policy, had you encountered any documents or policies dealing with controversial issues?

6. Are there any other recent controversial issues policies, or documents, that you are currently working with? Tell me about them?

Leadership, power and policy

7. Why is administrative leadership important in enacting this policy?

8. What is your role as an administrator in shaping this policy?

9. Does the policy affect your own work as an administrator? For example, have you had any interactions with parents or the community with regards to the policy?

10. What impact(s) does the CI policy have on your leadership or work as a principal? Can you share some examples?
Enacting CI policy and Its Impacts:

11. Is the CI policy beneficial to students’ learning in this school? Why?

12. How do you use your power as an administrator to support the policy?

13. Are there any unanticipated consequences to working with CI policy?

14. Have you had access to any formal and/or informal supports for working with CI policy in the school? (Probes: professional development, resources, workshops, curriculum development, consultants)

15. Do you encounter any barriers to supporting CI as an administrator? (Probes: In-service support, finances, texts, other resources, interpersonal factors, other pressures)

16. How do you understand other levels of the education system in terms of supporting or not supporting your efforts to enact this policy?

Assessing CI Policy:

17. What is your opinion about the scope of CI policy? Is there anything you would change or add to the existing document or text? (Probes: explicitness, comprehensiveness, treatment of CI)

18. Do you think the policy conveys a robust idea of controversial issues which supports educators’ work?

19. What barriers, if any, have you as a school community encountered as you work with the controversial issues policy? Are there any anecdotes you can share?

20. As we conclude the interview, we have to acknowledge that there are always tensions in education policy and I am wondering if you feel there are other education policies that influence and shape CSI. (E.g. contradict / support/ undermine it?)

*This is the end of my questions, are there things I have left out or things you would like to add to the discussion that I have not addressed?*

*Thank you*
Appendix 2: Semi-Structured Interview Guide for Teachers

*Interviews will be audio-taped at locations preferred by participants. Copies of the CI policy will be made available in advance and during the interviews.

Interview Questions:

General orientation to CI and educational history

1. Tell me about yourself as an educator. How long you have been an educator and what grades/subjects you have taught, what has influenced your decision to teach?

2. How would you describe the school you work in? (What makes it unique, exciting or challenging for an educator.)

3. You have indicated that you are familiar with controversial issues policy that the TDSB put forward in 2003. Can you tell me how you first learned about the policy and in what context it was introduced to you?

4. What was your reaction to this CI policy?

5. Have you encountered other controversial issues documents or policies in your teaching? Can you tell me about them and their effect on your teaching?

6. Are there any recent controversial issues policies, or documents, that you are currently working with? Please tell me about their impact.

Enacting CI Policy and Its Impacts:

7. How do you see your role as an educator in dealing with this CI policy?

8. Does the policy offer substantive professional support over the work that you might do with controversial issues without a policy to refer to?

9. What in your pedagogy and practice has changed through your work with the CI policy?

10. How do you support the policy through your pedagogy?
11. Are there consequences to working with CI policy that you did not anticipate? Are they negative or positive, or both? Tell me more.

12. What formal and informal supports exist for CI policy implementation within your school board? (Professional development, resources, personnel/consultants)

13. What is your opinion about the scope of CI policy? Is there anything you would change/add? (E.g.-explicitness, comprehensive, treatment)

14. Do you encounter any barriers to working with CI policy? (E.g. pre-service education; in-service support; texts; other resources; interpersonal factors; other pressures)

15. How does your school administration support your working with CI? Is leadership an issue? If so, how?

Conceptions of Policy:

16. How do you think other educators (principals and teachers’) think about CI and work with the policy?

18. What barriers do educators like you encounter in implementing CI policies?

19. Do other existing policies affect CI policy? (contradict / support/ undermine?)

*This is the end of my questions, are there things I have left out or things you would like to add to the discussion that I have not addressed?

*Thank you*
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