EXPLORING CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE AND RELEVANT PEDAGOGY IN INITIAL TEACHER EDUCATION:
A CRITICAL PRACTITIONER RESEARCH STUDY

by

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DISSENYATION ABSTRACT

This thesis is a critical practitioner research study of an innovative teacher education initiative: the Diverse Schools (DS) Initiative. The DS Initiative fuses two pedagogical approaches - culturally relevant pedagogy and culturally responsive teaching - into an approach they call Culturally Responsive and Relevant Pedagogy (CRRP). The DS Initiative uses CRRP as a theoretical framework for equity-based work in a university-school based partnership. This research considers the impact of the DS Initiative on teacher candidates’ and associate teachers’ practicum experiences. The twenty research participants (teacher candidates, associate teachers and administrators) interviewed reveal a spectrum of understanding of the DS Initiative, CRRP, and their overall implications for teacher education programs that extend beyond the DS Initiative. The research found that participants’ identities and practicum contexts greatly shaped their understandings and uses of CRRP. Many participants were unaware that the purpose of the DS Initiative was to create a shared theoretical understanding of CRRP among associate teachers and teacher candidates. However, most participants recognized the merits of an equity-

1 Diverse Schools (DS) Initiative is a pseudonym used to protect the identity of the program.
focused university-school partnership for practicum, but believed it could be more effective if they were involved in developing the content of the DS Initiative.

The participants’ narratives suggest that there is great value in creating a space to build on existing teacher candidate/associate teacher identities in equity-based initiatives. Participants emphasize the importance of delivering a university-school partnership program that is fluid and open to changing content, direction and goals to reflect the diversity of the participants. This study demonstrates the value and effectiveness of engaging participants in critical inquiry reflection to provide insight into content, goals, and clarity on teacher education initiatives. This research will be of interest to university faculty, administrators, and school staff wishing to examine practicum concerns in Initial Teacher Education (ITE) programs and seeking to address them using a collaborative university-school partnership model. Finally, this study contributes to the greater scholarly practitioner research conversations about equity and critical pedagogy, teacher identity, and the challenges stakeholders in teacher education need to note, reflect upon, and respond to in order to address the needs of our increasingly diverse students.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation was made possible because of the great internal strength given to me by the all-knowing and compassionate God. Jai Shri Krishna. There were some extremely challenging situations that emerged alongside my academic journey which allowed me to question and reflect deeply on the importance of this work and allowed me to remember how it originated from a genuine hope to improve the schooling experiences of all inner city diverse learners. As a result of God’s will, I was able to gain an introspective perspective on reaching my inner soul and often reconnecting and re-stabilizing myself in my core values of compassion and patience, especially during difficult times. I humbly thank God for this wisdom and the path that my life is destined to explore!

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Dedications

To my loving parents
Tirath Ram Sharma and Sureshta Kumari Sharma

To my encouraging and aspiring siblings
Gaurav, Seema, Kanchan, Rajnesh, and Parveen

For all the beautiful children, teacher candidates, and fellow educators
that inspire, surprise, and teach me each and every day!
TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION, POSITIONALITY, AND OUTLINE OF THE STUDY .................................1

  Contextualizing Myself in this Study..........................................................................................6

  Purpose, Rationale and Significance of this Critical Practitioner Research Study .......................16

  My Argument.............................................................................................................................18

  Outline of the Chapters .............................................................................................................19

CHAPTER TWO: THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF CRRP AND TWO LITERATURE REVIEWS IN
  THE FIELD OF INITIAL TEACHER EDUCATION........................................................................22

  Pedagogical Theoretical Framework of CRRP..........................................................................22

  Culturally Relevant Pedagogy vs. Culturally Responsive Pedagogy .........................................50

  Understanding Key Terminology in Initial Teacher Education Literature..............................52

  Literature Review 2: Current Practicum Approaches...............................................................71

CHAPTER THREE: PRACTITIONER RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND METHODS .....................84

  Qualitative Methods ................................................................................................................91

  Data Analysis ..........................................................................................................................101

  Approach to Interpretation.......................................................................................................105

CHAPTER FOUR: INTRODUCTION OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS AND DETAILED CONTEXT OF THE
  DIVERSE SCHOOLS INITIATIVE ...............................................................................................107

  Research Participants’ Biographies ........................................................................................108

  Attendance of Research Participants.......................................................................................120

  Structure of School and Society Classes and Seminar Series on CRRP .................................123

CHAPTER FIVE: FINDINGS PART ONE: HEARING WHAT PARTICIPANTS HAD TO SAY ................128

  Challenges with the Diverse Schools Initiative from the Perspectives of Teacher Candidates ..........................................................129
Teacher Candidates’ Insights and Growth-Based Narratives................................................. 157
Challenges with the Diverse Schools Initiative: Perspectives of Associate Teachers and Administrators .......................................................................................................................... 164
Associate Teachers’ and Administrators’ Insights and Growth-Based Narratives .......... 183
The DS Initiative and Relationship between Teacher Candidate and Associate Teacher .... 186
CHAPTER SIX: FINDINGS PART TWO: PERPETUAL CHALLENGES IN TEACHER EDUCATION........ 202
Perpetual Concerns that were voiced during Interviews ......................................................... 203
Potential Responses to the Gaps in the Literature Reviews .................................................. 225
In Response to Preliminary Data Analysis Findings: Thoughts from Lina and Ryan .......... 233
CHAPTER SEVEN: RE-VISITING CRRP IN DIALOGUE WITH PARTICIPANTS’ NARRATIVES.......... 244
Perspectives on CRRP ........................................................................................................... 245
Different Ways of “Implementing” CRRP ............................................................................. 251
CHAPTER EIGHT: IMPLICATIONS OF THIS STUDY .................................................................. 272
Possibilities and Recommendations Offered by Participants ............................................... 277
Reflections and Future Directions from Initiative Developers ............................................. 286
Reflection on the Growth of the Equity Option and this Study ............................................ 293
Implications for Initial Teacher Education Programs ............................................................ 297
Works Cited .......................................................................................................................... 305
CHAPTER ONE:
INTRODUCTION, POSITIONALITY, AND OUTLINE OF THE STUDY

The following reflection is a personal narrative about what shapes my commitment to equity work as an educator, as a researcher, and as a compassionate human being. Currently, I am a special education teacher with the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) and have been teaching with the TDSB for six years. I have a passion for creating equitable schooling experiences for all students, and from my teaching experience, it is apparent that inner city school students, and more particularly, special education students, are often excluded from participating in critical thinking conversations, arts-based schedules, school trips, high academic expectations, extra-curricular activities, community events, and generally from the public school culture. Thus, to set the stage for this dissertation, I invite you to engage in reading the following reflection presenting some of my concerns about the public schooling system, which in turn is what inspired me to do my graduate studies.

Reflection: Children Disengaged, Displaced And Silent Yet No One Is Left Behind!

It is an unfortunate and often undocumented shame that stains many children’s minds, hearts and souls, when they are unseen, misunderstood, mis-identified, and often mislabelled because of deficit beliefs and assumptions, hasty decisions, and “oversights” in the education system. The problems are not in our students, but in the way our system of schooling functions and the way stakeholders in education often unconsciously re-create a status quo; establishing a social divide between the rich and the poor. This gap is evident in classrooms where disengaging pedagogy is at play, where deep-seated biases contaminate the air, and where a child is often the last to be considered.
The gap is apparent within the inner city and middle and upper class schools where the wealth of resources, expertise, and opportunity are not equitably divided. Such disparities are reflected in inner city schools, especially in special education programs where the “coloured” diversity of students speaks volumes. These inequities send a negative message to the racialized and marginalized students who experience it most deeply. They begin to believe they are not worthy of good schooling experiences. Our students, who are not able to advocate for themselves because of the vastness of the system, face serious consequences. This system and its stakeholders keep failing them academically and personally, while they are suffering in silence.

Is the continuing rise in the number of inner city schools and special education classes a blessing or a dream snatcher? For whom are these schools and classes created, or should I ask who is being placed in them, how and why? Upon closer inspection, I wonder about how and whether— the children in inner city schools or in behavioural, learning disabilities, or mild intellectual disability special education classes are students who are racialized and marginalized in our school systems?

Ironically, the same students are often disengaged in “regular” classes and known to disrupt the learning of others and get sent home, drop out of school, or remain sitting in the school’s office all day long. There is a pattern here and I want to know why it exists.

Surely, this “coincidence” is one that cannot be missed, yet it is often overlooked and thus claimed to be unintentional. Is it inadvertent, or is it really the plan to maintain a divide between white and the racialized students?
Standardized testing continues to be used by schools today to identify the “intelligence” levels of students, even as new pedagogies encourage new ways of learning and understanding beyond conventional testing. Homeroom teachers may declare a student’s behaviour to be unruly or disruptive, and then, after receiving quick approval from a special education consultant, it is done; the child is labeled as “special needs.” Life moves on for the teacher, while the child’s life has drastically changed. The sad truth of this process of labeling and removing a child from a “regular” class to a special education one is that children are absent and their voices are made silent, yet their lives are altered dramatically.

As for parents, they are told “it is for the benefit of your child to be identified” and then they are asked to comply and sign the papers prepared by the “experts” in the field. It is an unfortunate situation for immigrant parents, as they are new to the country and may have limited knowledge of the dominant language, and are not always familiar with their rights with respect to such schooling procedures. It is difficult for those parents to protest what the school does when they put their complete faith and trust into the system. And, what is most disheartening is the left out voice of the child for whom all these decisions are made!

The degree to which this child feels isolated, embarrassed, “not normal,” and/or stigmatized by others, no one will ever know. But who will ask them in this process that is the discretion of grown-ups? What does this child learn — that stickers are shiny and free time is the equivalent of school time? In their schooling experience, there is no homework for them, only two or three questions of math and possibly four sentences of writing a day. Is this the level of work in a day for a student in grade eight?
Moreover, the “Retention Policy” rarely allows students to be retained in their grade whether or not they have met the requirements of that grade level. They graduate without being able to read, write or do basic mathematics. They are pushed out of this schooling system and then asked to re-join society by performing at a job. I ask you, what then will their options be? How will they interact socially after being segregated during their developing years? Will they continue to feel marginalized and racialized by society? How will they even have a chance at any professional or trades position when they have not been valued as people who have something to offer, who were not taught how to read, write, or do basic math?

Simply put, this is injustice. What can we, as stakeholders in education do to undo the damaging cyclical and oppressive effects of misidentifying, mislabelling, and misunderstanding our children? The choice is ours and since it affects the future of our people let us not be hasty with our decision.

With this reflection in mind, my dissertation calls upon stakeholders in education to reflect upon, question, and challenge the disheartening conditions and policies of inner city public schools that touch the lives of their diverse student populations. This doctoral research is informed by my own and my family’s lived experiences, my work experiences and my educational experiences, as well as by my sincere commitment to improving the schooling experiences of marginalized students. I undertook this critical practitioner research study in hopes of creating a passage into some complicated, messy, and difficult situations in inner city schools. While, this dissertation does not and cannot address all the questions and concerns raised in the reflection, it explores how initial teacher
education university-school partnerships can affect practicum placement experiences, which are pivotal in developing teacher candidates’ perspectives on public education.

This critical practitioner research study examined a unique initiative – the Diverse Schools (DS) Initiative\(^2\), which encouraged a university-school partnership approach in hopes of creating a common equity-based dialogue between associate teachers and their teacher candidates on culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy (CRRP). My examination of this study was based on six research questions\(^3\), namely:

1. How did teacher candidates and associate teachers involved in it understand the purpose of the DS Initiative?
2. What were the challenges, insights and possibilities that teacher candidates and associate teachers experienced during their practicum placements after having been exposed to the DS Initiative?
3. How did teacher candidates and associate teachers use CRRP in their teaching practices?
4. In what ways did the DS Initiative address equity-based concerns in inner city schools?
5. How is the relationship between teacher candidate and their associate teacher influenced by the DS Initiative?

\(^2\) Diverse Schools (DS) Initiative is a pseudonym being used to protect the identity of the program.

\(^3\) I revised my original research questions after hearing what participants were saying during their interviews and recognizing the themes that emerged from the data analysis. I realized that the questions needed to position the perspective of participant narrative as the primary focus rather than the DS Initiative. I will elaborate on this further in my methodology section in Chapter Three.
6. How can these findings be further taken up in the pursuit of equity in inner city practicum placements in Toronto inner city public schools?

This critical practitioner research study examines the narratives shared by teacher candidates, associate teachers, and administrators involved in the DS Initiative and focuses on how they responded to the goals of the DS Initiative and their concerns regarding the initiative. Through the analysis of the research participants’ narratives, this study creates a dynamic space to uncover and discover the complexity involved in Initial Teacher Education initiatives. In particular, this critical practitioner research study suggests that there is need for a more nuanced approach to understanding teacher identity, teacher experiences, and university-school based partnerships. This critical practitioner research study also shows how these nuances are significant in the process of responding to the equity-based concerns around the needs of diverse student populations.

**Contextualizing Myself in this Study**

**At First Glance: Educator-Graduate Student**

I have been an educator for six years with the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) and have taught overseas in Japan, Germany, and Antigua. In the TDSB, I have taught Health and Physical Education for two years, Special Education classes for three years, and a Grade 7 homeroom class. I have also been a Health and Physical Education Instructor in an initial teacher education program at a Canadian university\(^4\) for the past two years. Internationally, I taught Language Arts, Health and Physical Education, Leadership and Creating Global Peace and Friendship, and History.

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\(^4\) I have used a pseudonym for the name of the university I attended for the protection of the identity of my participants with whom I worked with there and wish to stay anonymous.
I have always worked part-time in Toronto and studied full-time at a Canadian university while completing the following degrees: Honours Undergraduate Degree Specializing in Philosophy; Bachelor of Education Degree in Primary and Junior Education; Masters of Arts in Theory and Policy Studies in Education; and a Doctorate in Curriculum, Teaching and Learning with a focus on Initial Teacher Education.

My reasons for working and studying simultaneously can be understood as follows. First, on a biographical note, I do not come from a wealthy home and would not be able to support myself financially without working. As a result, I connect deeply with the financial struggles that many first-generation immigrant families encounter, and I appreciate the impact that this can have on their life and schooling experiences.

Secondly, I understand the tremendous academic expectations many immigrant parents have for first-generation children and the family pressure these children face to attain professional jobs. For many immigrants (including myself), working becomes a necessary component of daily life. It is by working and obtaining a formal education at the same time, that I have become aware of my constant code switching\(^5\) required to learn how to navigate the Ontario curriculum in public schools which was not reflective of my cultural values, while living in a “traditional cultured first-generation family”. As a result I encountered clashing values, traditions, and ideas from these very different cultural contexts in which I had to operate.

Thus, in retrospect, I have come to believe that being a part-time teacher, and full-time graduate student, has been the best way to learn and engage in graduate studies

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\(^5\) Code switching here is used to place an emphasis between two cultures, the school and the home which are in contrast to one another. As a result, I found myself having to switch “codes” or culture I would participate in depending on my immediate context.
which focus on teacher education. This allows me to use what I am learning at the university to teach in a public school setting, and inversely, bring the challenges of teaching in a public school to my university research.

*Upon Deeper Reflection: A Complicated Positionality (Multiple Identities)*

My religious and cultural background is first-generation Hindu Indian-Canadian. As a first-generation Indian-Canadian child, I witnessed my family enduring a great deal of cultural and economic hardship over the years. Nevertheless, to this day, my father reminds each of his six children that education is essential to any form of success in life. He believes that once knowledge is acquired, it remains with you forever, aiding in creating opportunities in life that otherwise may not have existed. As a result of this wisdom, I have always put forth my best effort in my schooling experiences over the course of twenty-six years.

Unfortunately, most of my schooling experiences were not reflective of my identity or cultural values; the content of my studies was not relevant with respect to my lived experiences. In retrospect, the gap between who I am and what I learned is apparent to me, especially during elementary school, during which I experienced a great deal of cultural and racial discrimination. In high school, the same negative schooling experiences continued, compounded by the issue of figuring out how to juggle part-time work, beginning at the age of fourteen.

As a result of working in different capacities for the City of Toronto Parks and Recreation over ten years, I had the opportunity to interact and work with diverse groups of first-generation people who came from low socio-economic backgrounds. Through these work experiences, I became aware of how my schooling and general life
experiences were similar to many other first-generation Canadians and recognized how their parents were going through a great deal of economic and cultural hardship as well. The parents of the children I worked with shared deeply moving narratives and expressed their concerns about their children failing in schools and losing their cultural identities. I empathized with the stories and anxieties they shared and carried these concerns in my heart throughout my university studies.

During my undergraduate years I specialized in philosophy. I learned how important it was to question the “common sense” beliefs and practices that surrounded me on a daily basis. My love for working with children grew and my desire to share what I had learned and what I could continue to learn from them increased. After teaching internationally in Japan for a year, I pursued my Bachelor in Education degree in a new programme at a Canadian university called the Equity Option (EO)\(^6\) while serving as a youth worker with the City of Toronto Parks and Recreation Department. However, by the end of the program, I did not understand the dichotomy between teaching practices and “theoretical knowledge” that I witnessed in the classroom.

I decided to apply for my Master’s degree in Philosophy of Education and accepted a part-time position as a teacher with the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) in a model inner city school (i.e., is one of the 126 lowest schools identified by the TDSB based on the Learning Opportunity Index (definition as stated on www.tdsb.on).

During my Master’s studies, I learned about the history of schooling, about the underlying structures and systems that sustain inequities in schools, about the role of

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\(^6\) The Equity Option (EO) is a pseudonym being used to protect the identity of the program that my participants were a part of and it happens to be the same program I graduated from. Thus as per my participants request I have used a pseudonym for the name of the program.
teachers and about the assumptions that are embedded in school culture and their effects on diverse students. I was able to discuss the practical situations I encountered at the model inner city school in which I taught in my Master’s courses. During this time, I learned about the deeply troubling effects the current public school system was having on many diverse first-generation students in my classroom, and as a result, I wrote my Master’s thesis on the conceptualization of deficit thinking and its impact on inner city students.

The unpacking of my study on deficit thinking and the recognition of the dilemmas I experienced as a beginning teacher propelled my passion for learning how to resolve and/or work with the current tensions in the school system. Thus, I applied for my doctoral degree in the Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning and continued my part-time teaching job with the TDSB.

In my doctoral studies, I began exploring the potential impact curriculum studies and initial teacher education can have on creating more equitable schools. I reasoned that if the ability to create change can be directly routed through teachers, the most effective way to reach teachers is through the initial teacher education programs. As a result, in the second year of my doctoral studies I decided to get involved with the Initial Teacher Education program in which I was formerly enrolled as a teacher candidate: the Equity Option (EO).

I was blessed with the opportunity to be a Teacher Education Program Assistant (TEPA) while conducting my graduate studies research with the EO one of the Centre for

7 During my Master’s program I was taught that there was a difference between theory and practice; however as I undertook my doctoral studies, I have come to believe there is no dichotomy between theory and practice. I elaborate on this insight extensively throughout this dissertation.
Equity\textsuperscript{8} initiatives. In my third year of doctoral studies, I began to explore what it was like being an Instructor for the EO. These experiences working with the EO were critical learning opportunities that deepened my understanding of the dynamics at play in Initial Teacher Education Programs.

The unique and challenging component of my positionality while doing research within the EO was the balancing and stretching of the multiple identities I inhabit: those of graduate student, researcher, former teacher candidate from the EO, and current teacher with the School Board. These intersecting and sometimes contradictory roles provide me with an “insider-outsider” identity (Cochran-Smith and Lytle 1993). Herr and Anderson (2005) explain this insider-outsider positionality by claiming:

\ldots each of us as researchers occupies multiple positions that intersect and may bring us into conflicting allegiances or alliances within our research sites. We may occupy positions where we are included as insiders while simultaneously, in some dimensions, we identify as outsiders (2005:44).

Throughout this process, I found myself holding multiple identities that in some contexts positioned me to be an insider while in other contexts, positioned me as an outsider. Each of my identities allowed me to be part of the group (an insider) and as a result enabled me to have conversations and develop meaningful relationships with the participants in my study. However, my outsider identity as researcher separated me from all the participants in my study. As a graduate researcher, I was looking in on an initiative, into a community that I was invested in as teaching assistant and as a former student. This sense of “investment” in this community and the work it was doing made it difficult for me to

\textsuperscript{8} The Centre for Equity (CE) is a pseudonym used to protect the identity of the key informants who were the directors in that Centre.
analyze and observe the DS Initiative and the community as a complete outsider. Lytle (2000) articulates this tension as follows:

[t]aking the dual stance of teacher and researcher has indeterminate and sometimes problematic implications for the role of teacher researcher as teacher, raising issues about what it really means to attempt to embed research in practice (Lytle 2000:697).

As a result of this “dual stance” which can entail occupying multiple identity roles simultaneously, it becomes difficult to predict when these multiple roles will be conflicting or when they will be compatible. In this sense, Lytle (2000) would consider me to be a practitioner researcher who has interrupted the “…easy distinctions often made between “insider” and “outsider” and [has] destabilized the boundaries of research and practice—creating a space where a radical realignment and redefinition may be possible” (Lytle 2000:699).

In retrospect, I recognize that the struggle I had and that I still have at times as a graduate researcher was about my desire for an identity associated with the university, while at the same time wanting to acknowledge my insider identity as a student and a former EO teacher candidate that connected me with the teacher candidates. As a result of these identities, I was able to empathize with and understand teacher candidates’ feelings when they experienced challenges in the program or practicum placements. In addition, when some of EO’s associate teachers participated in seminars, I was able to connect with the case studies they provided from their teaching experience as I was also a colleague. Furthermore, knowing Ryan⁹ initially as the Executive Director of the Centre for Equity (CE), and then while researching and observing his shared visions of equitable

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⁹ Ryan is the pseudonym used for the Director of the Centre for Equity to protect his identity and the identity of the Centre in which he worked.
schools in the Diverse Schools (DS) Initiative complicated the power dynamics of our relationship. It was uncomfortable at times to do research on an initiative created by someone I knew and admired as my teacher. My fear was overstepping my privilege of studying the DS Initiative and jeopardizing my relationship with Ryan.

I respect Ryan’s work and his belief in striving for equitable schools. Knowing this, I tried my best to be aware of my potential biases when taking critical field notes, doing interviews for this study, and while writing up my thesis. Ryan’s co-teaching partner, Lina\textsuperscript{10} was new to me when I was doing my research in the EO; however as I became more acquainted with her, I developed respect for her work and the passion she brought to the CE. As a result, I became aware of the impact my relationship with her would have on the research I was doing on the DS Initiative, which they had created and delivered together. I knew that “…power relations in a setting operate even when insiders think they are being collaborative” (Herr and Anderson 2005: 36). I regarded Ryan and Lina as insiders and allies with similar equity visions, but at the same time, as a doctoral student, I experienced moments of anxiety around the power dynamics of their position of authority as CE directors. Hence, the power relations were in constant flux, present on an invisible level, and as result caused a great deal of anxiety for me at times; especially when presenting the final draft of this dissertation to them and being asked to blind it because they felt vulnerable.

As a graduate researcher, the process of collecting, analyzing, and sharing the data, as well as the implications of the project with all the participants created inner turmoil and tension for me. I wanted to preserve relationships, and simultaneously do

\textsuperscript{10} Lina is the pseudonym used for the Co-Director of the Centre for Equity to protect her identity and the identity of the Centre in which she worked.
justice to insider-outsider identities. As Herr and Anderson (2005) highlight “[p]ositionality occurs not only in terms of inside/outside, but also in terms of one’s position in the organizational or social hierarchy, and one’s position of power vis-à-vis other stakeholders inside and outside the setting” (2005:41). Being aware of this, I consciously attended to word choice and actions during formal or informal meetings/interviews. Nevertheless, I appreciated the opportunity to be in dialogue with the participants’ suggestions and critiques while collating, reformulating, and bringing this dissertation together.

This study aimed to access knowledge on how to improve, sustain, and deepen a common vision for equitable schools that provides impactful inclusive schooling practices to benefit inner city students and their communities. To gain a deeper understanding of what shaped this study and its findings, in the next section, I highlight the main research questions.

**My Research Questions**

I developed my research questions at the outset of my proposal for this critical study, and provided them to all who were interested in participating. This allowed me to ensure transparency of my intentions and the study for my participants and beyond, to the data analysis and the emergence and to ensure validity in this study.

Over the course of doing this research, the research questions changed after the interviewing and data analysis was done: first, after my data analysis, I realized the focus of this dissertation was the Diverse Schools Initiative practitioners not just the initiative developers—thus a larger audience. Second, after reviewing my interview data, it became clear to me that this study needed to recognize and value the lived experiences that
practitioners bring to their practice. Finally, in order to have an impact on educational practices, the study needed to be localized to reach the students in their respective inner city school communities in Toronto, as context influences the understanding of the findings.

As a result of sharing the change in my questions, in keeping with Jacobson’s philosophy: “[i]f I am continually mindful of demonstrating the integrity of my [research questions], data, and of my actions based on the data, then others can readily critique the quality of my work, whether to challenge, build on, or borrow from it” (Jacobson 1998:137). Self-critique, self-reflection, and openness to new insights provides new knowledge to practitioners interested in this work. Moreover, it is with this notion of being transparent to practitioners that I present the complexity of the positionalities I embodied during this research study because it is pertinent to recognize the complexities involved in this work. Furthermore, with Herr and Anderson (2005) I claim that:

…our obligation as researchers is to interrogate our multiple positionalities in relationship to the question(s) under study…in making explicit the tensions we experience as researchers in our varying roles and statuses, we have the possibility of crafting uniquely complex understanding of the research question(s) (2005:44).

In light of this, I believe that all practitioners have the ability and the need to “…seek a more distanced perspective on what is closest, perhaps taken for granted in their own practice (Lytle 2000:697)” to uncover their own biases in an effort to provide more equitable schooling experiences to their students.

The Diverse Schools Initiative

This research study examines a teacher education initiative developed by the Centre for Equity (CE) in a Canadian University, which emphasizes an equity education approach known as culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy (CRRP). CRRP is
heavily influenced by the works of Gloria Ladson-Billings (1994, 1995) and Geneva Gay (2002). The Diverse Schools (DS) Initiative was created by the Executive Director of the CE (Ryan) and the Director of School Services with the CE (Lina). Lessons on the DS Initiative including Culturally Relevant and Responsive Pedagogy (CRRP) were presented to approximately seventy elementary school teacher candidates. These teacher candidates were enrolled in the Equity Option (EO) and throughout their year of study during their School and Society classes, learned about CRRP from Ryan and Lina. The teacher candidates pursued a selected set of critical readings, reflections and assignments designed by Ryan and Lina. Lina and Ryan suggest that the unique angle to the DS Initiative included sharing similar teaching about CRRP (informal discussion 2010) with the associate teachers working with some teacher candidates during their practicum. Bringing the associate teachers to the university setting and sharing CRRP teachings was unique. This is not the practice of any other programs in this Canadian Initial Teacher Education (ITE) program and it was designed to provide an opportunity for collaborative discussion and teaching among teacher candidates, associate teachers and DS initiative developers based on CRRP. The associate teachers received release time from their schools for professional development in an abbreviated version of the CRRP lessons (eight classes, three hours in length throughout the academic year). In addition, the associate teachers who participated in the eight professional development sessions met with their teacher candidates for two joint three-hour sessions at the mid-point of each practicum experience.

**Purpose, Rationale and Significance of this Critical Practitioner Research Study**

The purpose and rationale of this critical practitioner research study is to explore culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy (CRRP) in initial teacher education,
beginning with an examination of the Diverse Schools (DS) Initiative. Moreover, this exploration aids in identifying and addressing the needs of new teachers, teacher candidates and associate teachers working with economically and racially marginalized student populations in the TDSB. The population of marginalized students being served by Toronto District School Board (TDSB) is accelerating. A study conducted by the TDSB found that 80% of the growing population of marginalized students are from an ethnic racial background and twenty percent are European students (i.e. considered to be part of the dominant group of people). As a result, there has been a great deal of questioning by the TDSB on how best to teach such a diverse student population in an inner city context.

This study intends to address some of the TDSB’s current concerns. Specifically, I examine the DS Initiative to identify how it affects, influences, and/or challenges equity-based dialogue between teacher candidates and their associate teachers. In addition, this study investigates how shared knowledge of CRRP informs and influences the practicum experience for both teacher candidates and their associate teachers with respect to pedagogical approaches used in the diverse classroom.

This critical practitioner study also attempts to create a space in which to hear the associate teachers’ and their teacher candidates’ views on CRRP and their narratives about the practicum experience beyond the DS Initiative, in hopes of informing effective ways to do equity work that addresses the current needs of students in the TDSB. Thus, this study aims to highlight the emergent themes and connections that associate teachers and teacher candidates have made in light of their own lived experiences of working with

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11 For the purposes of this dissertation, by racially marginalized I am referring to students who are not Caucasian and do not come from middle/upper class homes.
the DS Initiative, with CRRP as a pedagogical approach, and with ongoing questions of how to make equity-based work happen.

The findings will be useful to scholars interested in practitioner research, teacher education, and equity-based initiatives. The significance of this critical study lies in its analysis of the narratives told by research participants, which will serve to inform teacher educators about the challenges, insights and growth-based experiences that teacher candidates and their associate teachers had while participating in the DS Initiative. Teacher educators, teacher candidates, and associate teachers will gain insight into how to make connections between the realities of inner city classrooms and the teaching offered in Initial Teacher Education programs, all with the aim of creating more equitable schooling experiences for all students. Thus, this critical practitioner research study contributes to broader conversations about how to create more equitable schooling experiences for all students using critical pedagogy and equity-based initiatives in Initial Teacher Education programs.

My Argument

The DS Initiative promotes culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy (CRRP) to initiate and engage in discussions of equity-based work among associate teachers and teacher candidates. The findings based on interviews and field experience data collected from teacher candidates, associate teachers, and administrators provide an overview of the many challenges, insights, and possibilities participants. As stated earlier, the DS Initiative aims to address what the designers of this initiative believe to be one of the most pressing concerns reflected in Toronto-based inner city schools using CRRP. This study has found that the DS Initiative does indeed begin a dialogue around CRRP between teacher candidates, associate teachers, and administrators. However, it is
apparent that a lot more work needs to be done in order for inner city students to receive an equitable schooling experience. In relation to the DS Initiative itself, many participants articulate several concerns about the DS Initiative and how sometimes there was a disconnect between how CRRP work was understood and taken up in the Initial Teacher Education program; and how it was understood and taken up in the participant’s teaching experiences during practicum. Furthermore, the study reveals that there needs be a more nuanced way of approaching equity-based dialogues and recognizing the location and positionality of teacher candidates and associate teachers.

**Outline of the Chapters**

This first chapter has identified how this study emerged, my multiple positionalities within it, and what the intentions and rationale were for conducting this critical practitioner research study. Then, I briefly introduced the DS Initiative and its use of a pedagogical approach called Culturally Relevant and Responsive Pedagogy (CRRP) to engage elementary teacher candidates and their associate teachers in hopes of creating a common dialogue which creates a space for equity-driven teaching.

Chapter Two presents a critical understanding and analysis of the pedagogical theoretical framework (CRRP) based on current literature on Culturally Relevant Pedagogy and Culturally Responsive Teaching. Two thorough literature reviews are then presented on (1) General Practicum Concerns (Structural and Relational Concerns), and (2) Current Practicum Designs. With respect to the two literature reviews, I challenge the ideological and theoretical categorization of ‘theory and practice’ as two distinct concepts, and argue that in fact, they are co-dependent and co-exist. I challenge the idea of ‘implementing theory into practice’ because it distorts the co-determining relationship that exists between theory and practice. Moreover, I question the value attached to the
titles of ‘associate teacher’ and ‘teacher candidate’ in contrast to other labels given to these roles.

Chapter Three examines the main methodology used in this dissertation, namely, Practitioner Research, and how its key components are reflected in this study. Here, I present an understanding of positionality, university-based practitioner research, and Patti Lather’s (1986) concept of catalytic validity. Finally, I provide insight on which ethnographic and qualitative methods were used in this study and why they were chosen.

Chapter Four provides an in-depth description of the DS Initiative and introduces the teacher candidates, associate teachers, administrators and the co-instructors who developed the DS Initiative. The short biographies and pseudonyms presented in this chapter were chosen and created by the participants in the study.

Chapters Five, Six and Seven analyze the data which emerged from fieldwork observations and interviews. In particular, Chapter Five explores the challenges, insights, and growth-based experiences that teacher candidates and associate teachers respectively experienced with the DS Initiative.

Chapter Six examines the persistent external challenges that impact several ITE programs; focusing on the demands on teacher identity, on resources, and the intense emotional commitment required of teachers. After presenting the literature review gaps and participant narrative concerns around equity-based work, I present the responses that Ryan and Lina provide in light of the aforementioned gaps and concerns; which demonstrates the act of member checking.\(^{12}\)

\(^{12}\) “Member checking” is a key component in face validity (Lather, 1986) that provides insight on the genuine dialogue that took place in the midst of any given study; thus providing it with validity as a qualitative study.
Chapter Seven uses research questions three and four (How did teacher candidates and associate teachers use CRRP in their teaching practices?; In what ways does the DS Initiative begin equity-based conversations in inner city schools?) to explore how CRRP was used in the DS Initiative, and practiced in an elementary inner city school context.

Chapter Eight explores research question number six (How can these findings be further taken up with regards to the pursuit of equity in inner city practicum placements in Toronto inner city public schools?) with respect to the data analysis of teachers’ narratives. The audiences for the possibilities and recommendations of innovative teacher education programs are teacher educators, teachers, and researchers who have an interest in creating equitable schooling practices.
CHAPTER TWO: THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF CRRP AND TWO LITERATURE REVIEWS IN THE FIELD OF INITIAL TEACHER EDUCATION

Educators have struggled to build bridges across the contrasting experiences of diverse inner city students and their teachers by introducing various discourses, pedagogies and teaching frameworks. These have been based predominantly on discourses of anti-racism education, multicultural and inclusive education, culturally relevant pedagogy, and cultural responsive teaching frameworks. As all of these pedagogies share a common goal of closing the gap between teachers and their students to create an equitable and high quality educational experiences, there is a tremendous amount of overlap among them.

For the purposes of this dissertation, the theoretical framework on culturally relevant pedagogy and culturally responsive pedagogy (CRRP) presents an overview of the literature on culturally relevant pedagogy and culturally responsive pedagogy. In order to gain a deeper understanding of culturally relevant pedagogy and culturally responsive pedagogy, I contrast and compare them by, providing an overview of the original literature and secondary literature on culturally relevant pedagogy and culturally responsive pedagogy. In presenting this literature as the pedagogical theoretical framework of this study, I critically question and challenge the content in it. Then, I briefly provide my insights on the comparison of the two pedagogies, and later explain why the DS Initiative had chosen to fuse culturally relevant pedagogy and culturally responsive pedagogy together.

Pedagogical Theoretical Framework of CRRP

Gloria Ladson-Billings (1994, 1995) and Geneva Gay (2002) are understood to be the first scholars to coin the terms “culturally relevant pedagogy” (Ladson-Billings 1995)
and “culturally responsive pedagogy” (Gay 2002)\textsuperscript{13}. In addition, several secondary literature pieces on culturally relevant pedagogy and culturally responsive teaching are presented in this review. Most of the secondary literature draws upon Gay’s work on culturally responsive teaching and Ladson-Billings’ work on culturally relevant pedagogy. While reading and reflecting upon these scholarly articles, I observed that the terms culturally responsive and culturally relevant pedagogy were used interchangeably by many of the authors. Indeed, very often when scholars argued a perspective on making teaching more relevant to the students’ lives they would quote both Ladson-Billings and Gay to support their claims. Thus, for many scholars it seems that both culturally responsive teaching and culturally relevant pedagogy have the same prospective goals, audiences, and as a result can be used interchangeably and in union.

*Culturally Relevant Pedagogy*

Ladson-Billings’ (1994, 1995) work recognized the gap in teacher practices being able to engage racial minority students. She explained how different phrases were coined to bridge this gap but none of them truly challenged the inequities built within the school structure and culture. For example, “culturally appropriate” was the pedagogy used by Hawaiian teachers who allowed the home cultural language and communication styles into the classroom (Au and Jordan as quoted by Ladson-Billings 1995:466). Hawaiian teachers used language interaction patterns that approximated the students’ home culture patterns to teach to the standardized tests, instead of questioning the tests (Ladson-
Another phrase that was introduced to integrate students into the school culture was culturally responsive pedagogy.

Culturally responsive pedagogy was a term created to “describe similar language interactions of teachers with linguistically diverse and Native American students” (Cazden and Leggett, Erickson and Mohatt as quoted by Ladson-Billings 1995:467). Ladson-Billings (1995) questioned teachers’ rights to utilize a home language that was foreign to them in their classrooms without being insulting to that community of learners. Moreover, she claimed that culturally responsive and other phrases such as culturally compatible, and culturally appropriate were being used in unethical ways to connect racially marginalized students with white teachers. In all these phrases, the onus was on the marginalized student to bridge the gap as they were foreign and therefore they were the ‘other’ from the white teacher’s perspective.

According to Ladson-Billings, both culturally appropriate and culturally responsive pedagogies blame students’ failures on the fact that they speak a different dialect and communicate in a different way (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Therefore it was important to note for Ladson-Billings that speaking another language at home or coming from a different culture does not inhibit or cause a deficit in the student’s ability to learn at school. Moreover, both culturally appropriate and culturally compatible pedagogies assume that once the cultural appropriation is made that success will be achieved (Ladson-Billings, 1995):

14 I choose to use “racially marginalized” because it is more accurate than “racial minority” in the Toronto context. However it is important to note that immigrants who identify with being White (e.g. Roma, Irish, Portuguese and others) can also be marginalized, but for the purposes of this study, I am mostly referring to non-White marginalized people.
Thus, the goal of education becomes how to “fit” students constructed as the “other” by virtue of their race/ethnicity, language, or social class into a hierarchical structure (i.e. schools) that is defined as a meritocracy (Ladson-Billings 1995:467).

Moreover, culturally responsive pedagogy relies on a dynamic relationship between home/community culture and school culture. However, Ladson-Billings notes that unfortunately, in most cases, culturally responsive pedagogy is not dynamic but describes a one-way path that characterizes a dominating school culture. As a result, racially marginalized students fail and are often conflicted by the significant differences between school culture and home culture. The cultural mismatch that occurs between home and school culture often causes social inequities. For example, if a student can communicate well in their home language but is not able to speak English as a first language speaker would, discrimination often occurs. Moreover, discrimination at the school level could have the child inappropriately placed in a special education program. Such school programming then becomes a social identity marker that carries negative connotations when students apply from middle school to high school or to a job. Thus, cultural differences cannot be ignored, nor can the political power schools have on the identity of a child be ignored, or social inequities will remain (Ladson-Billings, 1995). It should be noted that there are different conceptions of culturally responsive pedagogies and Ladson-Billings critique is only one of them. Others will be discussed in the next section of this chapter on culturally responsive teaching.

Ladson-Billings draws on the work of Jacqueline Irvine (1988) in coining the term “cultural synchronization” to address the matter of the cultural mismatch between the home and school environments of racially marginalized students. Irvine’s work provides a basis for criticizing deficit attitudes towards racially marginalized students’
culture. However, unfortunately, while Irvine asserts the significance of affirming cultural mores, doing so does not necessarily address gaps in student achievement or affirm marginalized student identities. As a result, the terms culturally responsive, culturally appropriate, and cultural synchronization do not bridge the gaps for racially marginalized students between their culture, school culture and their level of achievement (Ladson-Billings, 1995: 160).

After addressing the work that had been done by the above educators, Ladson-Billings presented the term “culturally relevant pedagogy” which she defined as a pedagogy that “not only addresses student achievement but also helps students to accept and affirm their cultural identity while developing critical perspectives that challenge inequities that schools (and other institutions) perpetuate” (1995:469). Moreover, Ladson-Billings (1994, 1995) encourages teachers to recognize the internalization of deficit thinking that is prominent in the lives of many marginalized students.

There are many negative experiences that racially marginalized students encounter at school in different ways, such as being ostracized by their own peer community when they excel at school. Deficit attitudes, actions and beliefs\(^{15}\) are often based on the internalized deficit thinking marginalized students have accepted as their norm. In other words, they believe that as a racially marginalized student they cannot be intelligent, thus they consider their peers who excel academically as “acting White” (Ladson-Billings 1995). As a result, most racially marginalized students who excel academically are isolated and often abandon their cultural roots (Ladson-Billings 1995).

\(^{15}\) My understanding is that deficit attitudes, actions and beliefs are cyclical and are derived from three major frameworks; pseudo-scientific, sociological-cultural, and socio-economic as described in my Master’s thesis (Sharma 2009).
It is important to note that Ladson-Billings’ study in 1994 was mostly based on African-American students and thus when referencing marginalized students she is referring to African-American students. Using her findings to address the needs of the diverse student population in Toronto is not a simple or direct process. The student population of Toronto is more diverse and entails more cultural backgrounds than the ostensibly less heterogeneous student populations she used in her study. It is essential to recognize that Ladson-Billings work is American-based and that the implications of her study on the Toronto context would be different. In the U.S., standardized testing and privatization of schools continue to be reinforced in American schools. By contrast, Canadian schools are still grappling with understanding the relevance of standardized testing, and for the majority, the Canadian school system is a public one, with few private options.

Thus, while being sensitive to the internal dynamics of racially marginalized student bodies and external national tests as a reality in the United States of America, Ladson-Billings claims that all teachers need to demonstrate an “ethic of personal accountability” (1994: 191). If they want to be ethically accountable to their students, then the pedagogy of culturally relevant pedagogy needs to be used.

Ladson-Billings argues that using culturally relevant pedagogy would help in achieving three goals (which are known as the three main tenets of her work): it will “produce students who can achieve academically [by setting high expectations], produce students who demonstrate cultural competence [creating cultural competency in students], and develop students who can both understand and critique the existing social

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16 Ryan and Lina acknowledge the Toronto context while using Ladson-Billings (1994) work to help inform their DS Initiative.
order [developing a political consciousness in students]” (Ladson-Billings 1995:474). Teachers must set out to achieve all three of the aforementioned goals of culturally relevant pedagogy. In order to do this, teachers themselves must recognize the inequities within the social order and their causes (Ladson-Billings 1994, 1995).

In addition, to use culturally relevant pedagogy, three themes need to be addressed by the teacher. First their conceptions of self and others which recognize the power and privilege different identity markers create in a classroom environment. Second, their social relations with students and the power that is invested in them and the interactions they have with students. Finally, how they understand knowledge beyond the confines of curriculum and how they communicate this with children (Ladson-Billings, 1995). All three themes should be assessed in a multifaceted and flexible way. Once the teacher addresses these three themes and follows through on the three goals of culturally relevant pedagogy for students, there becomes a “critical hope”\(^{17}\) for addressing the inequities in schools and the gap between teachers and racially marginalized students.

In agreement with Ladson-Billings’ understanding of culturally relevant pedagogy, Kristen Morrison, Holly Robbins, and Dana Gregory Rose (2008) did a practice-based study on classroom teachers who implemented this pedagogy. Morrison, Robbins, and Rose’s study looked at forty-five classrooms using Ladson-Billings’ framework on culturally relevant pedagogy. It examines how the pedagogy was implemented and enacted. They root the theoretical framework of their study in a multi-cultural discourse: “multi-cultural educators suggest that teachers who embrace this

\[^{17}\text{Critical hope is a term that Ladson-Billings refers to in her talk on youtube, for more information here is the link www.youtube.com/watch?v=251Uc05SjqE}\]
social justice challenge of providing a democratic and equitable education must teach in culturally relevant/responsive ways…” (Morrison, Robbins & Rose 2008:433). The interesting question that remains is who determines how to teach in culturally responsive ways and is there any accountability for teaching this way? It is also important to note how these scholars state that the pedagogy needs to be “implemented,” which makes me wonder if they divide theory and practice instead of recognizing them as co-determining?

The main concern that arose from their study was that many teacher candidates lacked the ability to translate theory to pedagogy in their field experiences18 (Morrison, Robbins & Rose 2008). The recommendations they make in their study are based on this concern. Their three adopted tenets of culturally relevant pedagogy from Ladson-Billings (1994, 1995) framework were high expectations, cultural competence and critical consciousness. High expectations for minority students were to be presented through modeling, scaffolding, and clarification of the challenging curriculum, using student’s strengths as instructional starting points, investing in and taking personal responsibility for students’ success, creating and nurturing cooperative environments and having high behavioural expectations (Morrison, Robbins & Rose 2008). Whereas, cultural competence would be demonstrated by teachers through reshaping the prescribed curriculum (making it more multi-cultural, reflecting the diversity of the students)—asking them to be the experts to teach an artifacts museum, building on students’ funds of knowledge (prior knowledge), using students’ home languages and styles of communication in the classroom, encouraging relationships between school and

18 Again, “translating theory into practice” claims to make them into two different entities when in reality they are mutually dependent on one another (Cochran-Smith and Lytle 2009).
communities (Morrison, Robbins, and Rose, 2008). The third tenet of critical consciousness would be implemented by teachers by using critical literacy (asking questions, providing, allowing time to discuss controversial issues, asking students to take a political stance (e.g. looking at textbooks and their content), engaging students in social justice work (i.e. math or literacy-based lessons that show the different treatment/privilege in the world using prices), making explicit the power dynamics of mainstream society (i.e. culture of power – asking students to think about whose language is more powerful; an immigrants’ home language or English?), and sharing power in the classroom (Morrison, Robbins, and Rose, 2008). Despite these three tenets being outlined in such detail Morrison, Robbins, and Rose (2008) noted that there were many challenges in implementing culturally relevant pedagogy in classrooms due to inequities within the school structure (e.g. funding, lack of training for associate teachers, diverse classrooms that could not be taught in the same ‘cultural’ way). According to Evelyn Young (2010), another challenge to “implementing” culturally relevant pedagogy is how it has been misunderstood and incorrectly practiced by educators and administrators.

Young’s study uses the perspectives of administrators and teachers to help define, implement, and assess culturally relevant pedagogy. The study itself is a smaller study that came out of a larger project on critical race theory rather than out of multicultural education theory. The study is rooted in an anti-racism discourse from which she examined culturally relevant pedagogy. As a result, one of the assumptions of Young’s

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19 It is interesting to note that these scholars have decided to create a distinction between theory and practice by using “implementing” here. It is a prominent pattern that brings forth the question, how do these scholars understand who teachers are and what they do?
study is that racism and the hegemonic relations that sustain inequities are at the core of schools (Young 2010).

Young believes that thus far in the twenty-first century culturally relevant pedagogy has been taught in teacher education programs as the best method of teaching diverse students. However, unfortunately, many teachers still do not know how to implement culturally relevant pedagogy in the classroom. Young concludes that one of the reasons why culturally relevant pedagogy has not been successfully implemented is that it has been misunderstood by teachers as a theory that focuses on culture rather than on the three tenets that Ladson-Billings outlined.

Again, it is clear by her use of the word “implementing” that Young (2010), like the previous scholars mentioned in this section also dichotomizes theory and practice as she refers to “implementing” culturally relevant pedagogy instead of recognizing how the work that teachers do requires creative and critical thought. In my opinion, it sounds as though “implementing” is a type of training that teacher candidates need to receive to be “taught” how to do their job and this is highly problematic as it gives no value to teacher identity and to teachers’ lived experiences as informing their classroom practice. Moreover, making pedagogy into “theory” and then separating it from “practice” (i.e. teaching) negates the gentle and fluid relationship between how theory and practice inform one another, and thus co-determine one another.

Young (2010) used the three tenets of Ladson-Billings (academic success, cultural competence, socio-political consciousness) when analyzing her research data. She also utilized policy documents she retrieved from the Achievement Gap Committee at Centralia School District (CSD) which was responsible for the policy documents on what
teachers’ expectations and responsibilities were towards students. She found that academic success as defined by Ladson-Billings was not addressed with any particular emphasis in the policy documents. Two references were made to academic success; high expectations and keeping the same standards for all students (Young, 2010). In the category of cultural competence, Young found three dominant themes: know your students, build relationships with your students, and affirm their identities (by celebrating holidays and reading multicultural books). I wonder if this understanding of cultural competence is sufficient and valuable enough to constitute an accurate understanding of one’s culture. How do classroom conversations about cultural competence emerge, get facilitated, and what impact do they have on students’ lives? On another note, with respect to creating a socio-political consciousness amongst students, Young found that the data which was collected in her study did not mention creating this consciousness anywhere in the policy documents.

As a result, Young concluded that the teachers in her study placed an emphasis on academic success and cultural competence and often minimized the process of creating a socio-political consciousness (Young, 2010). Most of these teachers claimed the reason that they never got to the third tenet of Ladson-Billings work was due to the competing demands of curriculum expectations and special education expectations (Young, 2010). One participant in Young’s study claimed that students in primary grades were not ready to become aware of racial and social injustices, and thus she did not need to teach to Ladson-Billings third tenet (Young, 2010: 255).

With these findings in mind, Young (2010) claimed there were three major challenges that needed to be undertaken if culturally relevant pedagogy was to be enacted
successfully. These challenges would include: (1) raising the consciousness of educators and encouraging them to confront their own cultural biases; (2) addressing the systemic roots of racism in school practices and policies; and (3) preparing in-service and pre-service teachers with the knowledge of how to implement\textsuperscript{20} theories into practice (Young, 2010). Again, here it sounds as if teachers are empty vessels that need knowledge poured into them, much like gasoline in a car tank in order for it to operate. This is a rather inaccurate perspective on what teachers bring with them into the teaching profession and the complexities involved in teaching. Nevertheless, moving forward, Tyrone C. Howard (2003), another educational scholar, believed that critical reflection was necessary to ensure a positive implementation of culturally relevant pedagogy.

Howard (2003) argues that critical reflection about race, ethnicity and the culture of teachers and their students is the prerequisite to engaging with culturally relevant pedagogy. According to Howard (2003) critical reflection means “to attempt to look at reflection within the moral, political, and ethical contexts of teaching [and] issues pertaining to equity, access, and social justice” (Howard 2003:197). He contends that it was only after such critical reflection on these issues that teachers can “construct pedagogical practices that have relevance and meaning to students’ social and cultural realities” (Howard 2003:195). In order to recognize and understand their students, teachers must critically reflect on their own biases towards different cultures, ethnicities

\textsuperscript{20} Here again the assumption is that teachers need to be told what is culturally relevant and how to “implement” it, suggesting that teaching to teach is a direct input and output process, which, clearly, it is not.
and races\textsuperscript{21} (Howard 2003). He emphasizes three important steps in the process of critically reflecting with respect to culturally relevant pedagogy: (1) to recognize the impact race and culture have on teaching, (2) to recognize how critical teacher reflection is important in developing culturally relevant pedagogy teachers, and (3) to undertake different approaches to critical reflection (Howard 2003: 198). Before, continuing on with the details on each step, it is important to stop and think about how this scholar views teaching critical reflection as a three-part step process instead of an ongoing fluid process that is constantly challenging all thoughts and behaviours.

Howard (2003) explains how the first step encourages teachers to understand “that racially diverse students frequently bring cultural capital to the classroom that is often drastically different from the mainstream norms and worldviews” (2003:197). After engaging in this process of understanding their students, teachers must demonstrate teaching practices that are culturally relevant, socially meaningful and affirming for their students (Howard 2003). Moreover, teachers must be cognizant of traditional schooling practices that “reflect middle-class, European/American cultural values” and as result should use an array of practices that validate other cultures (2003:198). To maintain culturally relevant practices in the classroom and a school culture that serves all students and acknowledges that school is not neutral, it is essential to have prospective teachers

\textsuperscript{21} Howard’s argument about the importance of teachers developing reflective practices about their own biases makes me uncomfortable as it is hard to “reflect” on one’s own biases unless examples are provided about deficit assumptions and actions or prompting questions are provided. Also, he uses “critical reflection” without defining how this emerges or how one goes through this process.
learn about this matter\textsuperscript{22} (Howard, 2003). To further support the critical reflection process that Howard (2003) promotes, A. Barry Osborne’s (1996) work presents a compelling case for making educators accountable for their actions.

Osborne’s (1996) study on cross-cultural and interethnic classrooms claims that there are nine assertions about culturally relevant pedagogy. After stating each assertion he provides literature that validates that claim or disagrees with each claim. The purpose of his paper is to demonstrate that the nine assertions are supported more than discouraged by scholars.

It is important to note that Osborne (1996) quotes several times from Ladson-Billings’ work, but contends that her work on culturally relevant pedagogy does not extend to all the different cultures that students may have in their lives (e.g. peer, school, sporting, street etc.), but remains restricted to “natal” culture (Osborne, 1996). I believe that Osborne’s (1996) nine assertions provide insight into some key factors that influence how culturally relevant pedagogy is used and understood by teachers. At the same time, his work makes me wonder what level of influence and impact teachers can have on their students despite historical-socio-political contexts of schooling. Similarly, Shelly Brown-Jeffy and Jewell E. Cooper (2011) critique Ladson-Billings work for not emphasizing the important discussion about race and ethnicity and its historical impact on schooling.

Brown-Jeffy and Cooper’s (2011) literature review on culturally relevant pedagogy finds its roots in multicultural studies, in which various scholars (for example, Kathryn Au and Cathie Jordan (1981), Gerald Mohatt and Frederick Erickson (1981),

\textsuperscript{22} I appreciate how Howard (2003) directly states that education is not neutral and that it is something that all teacher candidates should engage in critical discussion of and reflect upon, as he questions the normative lens of school culture being safe and inclusive.
José Macias (1987), Courtney Cazden and Allen Legget (1981)) have similar visions for schooling practices but do not name these practices culturally relevant pedagogy. Brown-Jeffy and Cooper claim that culturally relevant pedagogy “maintains that teachers need to be non-judgmental and inclusive of the cultural backgrounds of their students in order to be effective facilitators of learning in the classroom” (2011:66). However, they argue that culturally relevant pedagogy “does not focus on race and racism as they relate to the socio-historical pattern of schooling in the United States” and thus requires the addition of critical race theory (CRT). They quote Ladson-Billings’ three tenets of culturally relevant pedagogy and further support it with references to Gay’s work on culturally responsive teaching, but concur that these do not do enough to present the race and racism perspective that is rooted in the school system. In response to these findings, Kevin Kumashiro (2000, 2002) and Mica Polluck’s (2008) work provide exemplary insights on how racism and anti-oppressive discourses are embodied in schools and school structures and need to be challenged.

Brown-Jeffy and Cooper (2011) contend that Irvine’s work on the racial aspect of culture should be a central feature of culturally relevant pedagogy as it addresses race. Thus, their study concludes:

….culturally relevant pedagogy like critical race theory, recognizes the value of lived experience by marginalized groups in understanding and making meaning of the world… nonetheless, culturally relevant pedagogy does not question or critically examine the structures that feed into the cultural incongruence perspective [and so it needs critical race theory to support it] (2011:71)

23 It is interesting to note how race and racism are a central component of culturally relevant pedagogy in the United States however, when introducing the same pedagogy in the Canadian context, it expands to encompass critical race theory that goes beyond race and racism. This leaves me wondering if culturally relevant teaching practices are not transferable but rather contextualized respectively.
They offer a vision of culturally relevant pedagogy that is based on the inclusion of critical race theory (which argues that race is not neutral and cannot be ignored) and as a result is made up of five principles. The five principles of their culturally relevant pedagogy vision are: (1) identity and achievement, (2) equity and excellence, (3) developmental appropriateness, (4) teaching the whole child, and (5) student teacher relationships (Brown-Jeffy and Cooper 2011:71).

In contrast to Brown-Jeffy’s and Cooper’s (2011) critique of Ladson-Billings work, Bena R. Hefflin (2002) supports Ladson-Billings (1995) and Gay’s (2002) perspective on the cultural integration of students’ identities into the classroom. Hefflin (2002) claims that in order to begin undertaking culturally relevant pedagogy, teachers need to customize instruction to fit the textual, social, cultural, and personal lives of their students. These culturally relevant instructions should be developed by teachers through the norms and practices of their students’ lives (Hefflin 2002:248).

Hefflin’s study examines how a teacher incorporates multicultural children’s literature into her culturally diverse classroom. The author emphasizes the importance for diverse students to “see clear, authentic representations of their culture throughout the curriculum and experience a strong sense of affirmation” (Hefflin 2002:232). Some key components of creating a culturally relevant classroom for Hefflin are: the literature must represent the students’ culture, the pedagogy used in the classroom must “tap into the home and community interaction patterns” (2002:232), and the materials must connect with the pedagogy used in class is essential. By creating a culturally relevant classroom the author believes it will achieve the goal of increasing the academic performance of all students. I do not think that Hefflin’s work is in line with Ladson-Billings’ work even
though it attempts to diversify the books used in the classroom, because this does not ensure high expectations, cultural competence (maybe exposure to a limited view of culture at best), and critical consciousness.

I will discuss how the Diverse Schools (DS) Initiative uses culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy when working with associate teachers and teacher candidates as the DS Initiative does not see culturally relevant pedagogy and culturally responsive teaching as two different approaches but rather as one (West-Burns and Kugler 2011). It will be interesting to acknowledge how the DS Initiative describes teacher candidates, associate teacher, practicum, and the “divide between theory and practice” especially with the previous scholarly work in mind. However, before diving into details about the DS Initiative and its use of CRRP, it is essential for this study to provide an overview of the current literature on culturally responsive pedagogy.

*Culturally Responsive Pedagogy*

Gay’s (2002) term culturally responsive teaching was also designed to address a challenge that many teachers were facing during the twentieth century, when demographics were changing rapidly and the achievement gap between racialized and non-racialized students was increasing. According to Gay (2002) learning how to teach diverse students was a real challenge and required a shift in the way teachers taught and what they taught. Gay claimed that in order to teach to diverse students, teachers would need to use students’ personal frames of reference as the starting point of meaningful and deep education. Gay believed if the education was personalized to each student they would be engaged in learning and thus, would improve academically. Before going into detail on Gay’s conception of culturally responsive teaching, I wonder what she would
explain to be the role and influence of teacher identity and how this teacher identity complicates, interrupts, alters, and influences how the teacher understands students’ personal frames of reference. In Gay’s account, it seems as though the teacher becomes a separate identity from their teaching pedagogy; how can a teacher’s own personal frames of reference not be looked at when trying to understand their students’ personal frames of reference? Nevertheless, let us understand Gay’s theory on culturally responsive teaching in more detail.

Gay (2002) explains culturally responsive teaching as having five essential components. These are:

(1) developing a knowledge base about cultural diversity;
(2) including ethnic and cultural diversity content in the curriculum;
(3) demonstrating caring and building learning communities;
(4) communicating effectively with ethnically diverse students; and
(5) responding to ethnic diversity in the delivery of instruction (Gay 2002:106).

Gay describes explicit knowledge about cultural diversity as knowing the cultural characteristics and contributions that particular ethnic groups have made. She contends that teachers should have detailed factual knowledge about the particularities of ethnic groups, such as achievements and contributions that each ethnic group has made to different disciplines. After gaining this explicit knowledge of the cultures present in their classroom, teachers have a responsibility to visually display this knowledge, which is the second component of culturally responsive teaching (Gay 2002:108). In my opinion, while the strategies that Gay offers do provide cultural exposure and a surface level understanding of inclusion, they do not go deep enough to reach students or to do justice to cultural understanding.
In the classroom, visual representations of cultural diversity should be hung up (e.g. posters in different languages, images of people from different ethnic, social and cultural backgrounds) (Gay, 2002). Gay terms this visual display the “symbolic curriculum” (108). On a curriculum development level, Gay advocates for teachers to “determine the multicultural strengths and weaknesses of curriculum designs and instructional materials and make the changes necessary to improve their overall quality” (2002:108). In order to accomplish this curriculum transformation, teacher candidates should be taught how to do analysis of textbooks (Gay 2002).

Beyond the symbolic curriculum and transformative curriculum designs and instructional material, Gay claims teachers need to cover a societal curriculum. She encourages culturally responsive teachers to use the media to build such a curriculum, using the media to look at how different ethnicities are described and understood by the larger society. Gay cautions that media portrayals are often inaccurate and thus need to be explored and critically discussed. Once all of these curriculum designs are in active play in the classroom, teachers will be engaged in culturally responsive teaching. However, Gay emphasizes that there is a difference between culturally responsive teaching and the atmosphere of the classroom, which is the third component of culturally responsive teaching.

Gay suggests that teachers should not only be culturally responsive in their teaching instruction, but also in creating a caring learning atmosphere. She believes that teachers should have an “…ethical, emotional, and academic partnership with their students, rooted in respect, honour, integrity, resource sharing, and a deep belief in the possibility of transcendence” (Gay 2002:109). Moreover, she places high importance on
creating group approaches through establishing learning communities rather than using an individualistic one, as the group model of learning is comparable to the home culture of most diverse students, which constitutes the fourth element of culturally responsive teaching.

Finally, as the fifth component of culturally responsive teaching, teachers must recognize the cultural communication patterns ethnic students have and invite them into conversation with learning in the classroom setting. These learning styles can then become a linking bridge between academic success and student engagement. The different learning styles should be accommodated in each of the subject areas (i.e. multiculturalize each subject area). This process of multiculturalizing subjects and applying culturally responsive teaching in the classroom should be taught in teacher education programs. Personally, I am not very comfortable with the notion of “multiculturalizing” subjects because it seems very superficial and does not provide an accurate portrayal of culture or ethnicity. While Gay’s intention in formulating this concept may be good, the approach seems to me not to go far enough in that it celebrates multiculturalism without providing a deep understanding of other cultures and/or ethnicities. Consequently, students and teachers may learn of celebrations connected with a particular culture while remaining ignorant of political histories, strife, and individual traditions associated with non-mainstream cultures.

Gay contends that is absolutely necessary if educators are to reach these diverse students; “[t]he answer is not denial or evasion but direct confrontation and thorough, critical knowledge of the interactive relationships between culture, ethnicity, communication, and learning and between individuals and groups” (Gay 2002:111)
Monica R. Brown (2007) echoes a similar perspective and builds on Gay’s five elements framework in her work that also strives to reach and engage diverse students. In her work Brown uses Gay’s framework of five important areas that are necessary in order to implement culturally responsive teaching (i.e. developing a culturally diverse knowledge base, designing a culturally relevant curricula, demonstrating cultural caring and building a learning community, building effective cross-cultural communications, and delivering culturally responsive instruction). However, Brown stresses that teachers need to have attitudes that reflect an appreciation of the cultural, linguistic, and social characteristics of each of their students (Sparks as quoted by Brown, 2007:58). Brown believes that these attitudes and understandings of culturally and linguistically diverse students need to be taught in teacher education programs (Brown, 2007).

Brown notes that most educators are resistant to change because change requires them to do a lot of work in order to keep up-to-date with the cultural and linguistic contexts of their students. However, Brown attributes the irrelevance of dominant curricula and lessons to students’ lived realities and identities to the disengagement of marginalized students and their increasing rates of failure (Brown, 2007). For Brown, teachers’ attitudes to learning about the cultural and linguistic contexts of their students are harmful and unfair to the culturally and linguistically different student. Hence, for Brown, “placing a teacher in the classroom who is unable (or unwilling) to change his or

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24 Brown (2007) seems to be blaming educators for being unwilling to change because they are being lazy. Although this assumption may be correct, there are other plausible reasons why educators do not change their pedagogies, such as the greater institutional pressures placed on them by administrators, personal level of discomfort, and/or other societal pressures. Fundamentally, I believe that change is a process that we must have continued faith in and never give up on because without it, the chances of improving are none.
her teaching style and classroom to facilitate students’ mastery of the curriculum” (Brown 2007:61) will only broaden and deepen the gap of student achievement.

Much like Brown, Winifred Montgomery (2001) believes in student-centred instruction and encourages culturally responsive classrooms. Montgomery (2001) defines culturally responsive classrooms as places that “specifically acknowledge the presence of culturally diverse students and the need for these students to find connections among themselves and with the subject matter and the tasks the teacher asks them to perform” (Montgomery 2001:4). Montgomery’s five essential guidelines for teachers who desire to be culturally responsive toward their students are as follows:

1) conduct a self-assessment to determine the knowledge base of self and others’ cultures,
2) use varied culturally responsive methods and materials in the classroom,
3) establish classroom environments that respect individuals and their cultures,
4) establish interactive classroom learning environments, and
5) employ ongoing and culturally aware assessments (ibid).

These five guidelines are similar to the content in Gay (2002) and Brown’s (2007) frameworks for culturally responsive teaching.

Ana M. Villegas and Tamara Lucas (2002), Steven P. Chamberlain (2005), and Barbara Bazron, David Osher, and Steve Fleischman (2005) also share the same key themes that have been articulated by above-mentioned scholars in the field of culturally responsive teaching.

However, in their 2007 study on culturally responsive classroom management, Elizabeth Bondy, Dorene D. Ross, Caitlin Gallingane, and Elyse Hambacher. (2007) further develop the concept of culturally responsive teaching by fusing it with their understanding of what exemplary classroom management might look like. Bondy et al.’s
study was based on an analysis of what occurs during the first two hours on the first day of school in culturally responsive classrooms. Their study revealed that culturally responsive classroom management (CRCM) was essential in implementing culturally responsive teaching, concluding that “CRCM makes it explicit that classroom management is grounded in teachers’ judgments about appropriate behaviour and that these judgments are informed by cultural assumptions” (Bondy et al. 2007:328).

As a result of their findings, Bondy et al. (2007) urge teachers to reflect on their own behaviours and biases in conjunction with their students’ behaviour from multi-perspectives before misjudging or mislabelling students. After reflecting on these behaviours and biases with open communication, Bondy et al. argue, teachers can begin to build a caring community in their classroom. In advocating open communication, Bondy et al. (2007) mean “[a]llowing students to vent frustrations and disagree with school-or teacher- imposed constraints [to] build[s] a community that works together to find a solution acceptable to all rather than an authoritarian atmosphere of ‘because I said so’ ” (Bondy et al. 2007:329). Thus, for Bondy et al., one of the key elements of culturally responsive classroom management is the capacity to nurture student resilience that empowers their learning journey to question facts or lessons being presented to them.  

A display of resilience can only happen if the relationship between the teacher and the student is a trusting and open one. The second element was establishing high expectations for student achievement and student behaviour (Bondy et al., 2007). Then 

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25 It is important to build resilience in students in the hope that they will learn to be critical thinkers, but simultaneously it must be ensured that a mutual understanding of respect towards different people and perspectives is present at all times, creating a safe and inclusive environment for all (including the teacher perspectives!).
to reinforce elements one and two, Bondy et al. (2007) recommend that teachers be insistent but kind in their communication when keeping students accountable for meeting high expectations. The communication style the teacher uses should incorporate familiar expressions and words that connect with their students (Bondy et al., 2007:343). Bondy et al. conclude that when these two elements are taken up seriously by teachers, diverse students can and will begin to excel academically: “CRCM seems to further and create a psychologically supportive environment where students develop and strengthen their entering resilience-related strengths (Bondy et al. 2007:345),” which is essential for twenty-first century classrooms.

Helen M. Kress (2005) in “Math as a Civil Right: Social and Cultural Perspectives on Teaching and Teacher Education” notes that too often in math, students who are not passing are considered to have a deficit of some kind, and teaching practices often went unquestioned. Kress (2005) claims that culturally responsive instruction allows for a social and cultural perspective that connects students’ home lives to school culture. She uses the “Algebra Project” which was developed by Robert Moses and Charles Cobb in 2001 as an example of culturally responsive instruction. The project is based on two main principles; (1) that students are people who bring a great wealth of knowledge to school and teachers build on this knowledge to foster understanding of mathematics, and (2) that math lessons need to “revolve around connecting the familiar experience of riding the subway to mathematical analyses of these points as the language of algebra” (Kress 2005:51). Kress notes that many people have contributed to culturally responsive teaching:

Researchers bring theories from abstract math and social movements to frame learning. Community organizers and professors highlight the strengths of parents
and their children as they help mobilize a school campus; local organizers serve as intermediaries to soothe teacher and parent relations, which can be or become strained during major organizational change. Administrators publicize goals and ease the way for changes in school relationships and curriculum. Teachers listen more closely to kids’ concerns and make the math and the adolescent networking come alive in the classrooms. Teens teach each other and tell their future teachers and their friends how mathematical literacy changed their lives for the better (Kress 2005:52).

Kress encourages everyone to contribute to making math education more accessible and to offer students a stronger support system for learning math. With respect to mobilizing each of the above discourses Kress (2005) does not provide any detail however, by stating that such discourses happen, she creates hope that more spaces and support for such discourses will emerge.

In contrast to Kress’s (2005) work which focuses primarily on the students, Ana M. Villegas and Tamara Lucas (2002) focus on teacher education and teacher educators who they believe are responsible for creating more culturally responsive teachers. To counter the fragmented sense of diversity in the teacher education field, Villegas and Lucas (2002) advocate for culturally responsive teachers. Their conception of culturally responsive is influenced by Ladson-Billings’ and Gay’s work and builds on the concept of multi-cultural education. The six components to Villegas and Lucas’ conceptualization of a culturally responsive teacher are as follows. Culturally responsive educators:

(a) are socioculturally conscious, (b) have affirming views of students from diverse backgrounds, (c) see themselves as responsible for and capable of bringing about change to make schools more equitable, (d) understand how learners construct knowledge and are capable of promoting knowledge construction, (e) know about the lives of their students, and (f) design instruction that builds on what their students already know while stretching them beyond the familiar26 (Villegas and Lucas 2002:20).

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26 In this last component Villegas and Lucas (2002) reinforce the importance of building on what students already know. Yet, ironically their conception of teacher candidates’
Each of these components must be interwoven in teacher education preparation programs in order to ensure success, however Villegas and Lucas caution that such a vision for culturally responsive teachers cannot be imposed, but must come out of “ongoing dialogue and negotiation among colleagues”\textsuperscript{27} (Villegas and Lucas 2002:21). The first component is necessary because there is a lack of preparation for the diversity many current teacher candidates encounter:

> [S]tudents can complete their teacher education programs without receiving any preparation whatsoever in issues of diversity…prospective teachers are not apt to embrace [ideas on diversity] as their own, particularly if those ideas clash with the views they bring into teacher education (Villegas and Lucas 2002:20).

In particular, diversity with respect to race, ethnicity, social class, and language is often overlooked by teachers in their own lives and with respect to their students’ lives. The second component demands that teachers acknowledge and accept multiple ways of thinking, talking, behaving and learning with respect to their students’ diverse life experiences\textsuperscript{28} (Villegas and Lucas, 2002). Simultaneously, teachers must teach students ways to deal with mainstream blindness to ensure their ability to navigate them. The third component asks that culturally responsive teachers be committed to being agents of change for their students. This will entail taking risks with developing new curriculum and expanding diversity in knowledge bases to promote student validation and input in

\textsuperscript{27} I completely agree with the process of negotiating co-constructively when exposing new pedagogies or ways of thought to teacher candidates.

\textsuperscript{28} Again, the use of terminology in this study conveys a certain understanding of teacher candidates; “demand” articulates a deficit assumption regarding the capabilities or the willingness of teachers - is this fair?
schooling experiences inside and outside of the school community (Villegas and Lucas, 2002:24). The next component encourages teachers to develop a constructivist view of learning in which all students are seen to be capable learners who strive to make sense of new ideas and have the ability to engage in “critical thinking, problem solving, collaboration, and the recognition of multiple perspectives” (Villegas and Lucas 2002:25). In order to engage all students in this constructivist learning approach, teachers must make it a priority to get to know their students as much as possible. As the final component, Villegas and Lucas (2002) suggest that culturally responsive teachers must “use what they know about their students to give them access to learning” (Villegas and Lucas 2002:27). To successfully implement teachers’ knowledge about their students Villegas and Lucas (2002) promote the following practices:

…involving all students in the construction of knowledge, building on students’ personal and cultural strengths, helping students examine the curriculum from multiple perspectives, using varied assessment practices that promote learning, and making the culture of the classroom inclusive of all students (Villegas and Lucas 2002:27).

From the standpoint of tapping into teachers’ experiences and critical thoughts on culturally responsive practices, Bette S. Bergeron (2008) contends it is imperative that novice teachers\textsuperscript{29} be given the appropriate preparation necessary in teachers’ college in order to meet the needs of the diverse students currently in the schooling system.

Bergeron assumes that “novice teachers lack the preparation necessary to be successful in today’s urban classrooms, particularly when the experiences of those

\textsuperscript{29}Novice teacher is another reference to teacher candidate. In the field of education there is a wide range of terms used to describe teacher candidates, and each has its own value. This concern will be considered more deeply in the next section of this chapter.
novices are vastly different from their students” (Bergeron 2008:4). She argues that the difference in the experiences between teacher and student lie deeply in “cultural disequilibrium” because they came from different backgrounds (Bergeron 2008:5).

Bergeron explains the concept of cultural disequilibrium as follows:

…cultural disequilibrium describes not only the cultural mismatch that may occur between teachers and their students but also the sense of imbalance or confusion that can result when an individual attempts to grapple with situations or experiences for which he or she is not fully prepared (Bergeron 2008:5).

To counter this cultural disequilibrium, she proposes using culturally responsive practices and offering support systems for novice teachers, administrator aid, and professional development opportunities since “the capacity to take risks contributed to his or her effectiveness in the classroom” (Bergeron 2008:4). For Bergeron, culturally responsive instruction “validates students for who they are by allowing students to learn and respect other cultural groups’ heritage and history” (Bergeron 2008:7). As a result, culturally responsive teaching would benefit all students and supports a curriculum that builds on student knowledge and experience. Culturally responsive teachers “…adapt instruction to meet the learning needs of all students and providing consistency with the values of students’ own cultures” (Bergeron 2008:7). To provide a clear understanding of culturally responsive pedagogy Bergeron shares her study’s findings.

The main finding in Bergeron’s work was that there are four foundational components for culturally responsive pedagogy: (1) building community was essential in

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30 Bergeron (2008) seems to hold a deficit ideology toward teacher candidates as well, stating that they “lack the preparation necessary” to be teachers (on which basis she makes this claim is questionable). Also, if teacher candidates need “preparation” what does this imply about the learning style she attributes to them?

31 I wonder about the cultural mismatch within each culture, the idea that all South East Asians would have a cultural equilibrium is not true because my personal experience has taught me this lesson. Thus, I wonder if this generalized claim is valid.
developing an effective classroom, (2) accessible linguistic support that promoted oral language opportunities and conversational interactions between children, (3) student choice in reading materials and a hands-on approach to teaching, and (4) use of the students’ native language in the classroom (Bergeron 2008:14). She concludes that “cultural responsiveness is a celebration of possibilities and of individual potential…[which] includes the significance of language and the value of multiliteracies” (Bergeron 2008:25).

The subject matter of multiliteracies and the use of native languages in the classroom is a very important area of concern in Toronto given the wide range of diversity in Toronto’s student population. How are these language issues addressed by culturally responsive teaching in diverse urban classrooms? While this question has not been answered by any of the scholars cited above in their elucidations of culturally responsive teaching, it is important to keep in mind as this resurfaces as a concern by teacher candidates in the DS Initiative as well.

To gain a further understanding of culturally responsive pedagogy and culturally responsive teaching, in the next section of this chapter, I contrast and compare how they were originally defined. After this comparison, I introduce the DS Initiative and explain how it does or does not address each of the structural, relational concerns and practicum design limitations articulated by the scholars whose research I have reviewed, and how the DS Initiative uses culturally relevant pedagogy and culturally responsive pedagogy.

**Culturally Relevant Pedagogy vs. Culturally Responsive Pedagogy**

I believe that both culturally relevant and culturally responsive pedagogies are well-intentioned and share the common goal of creating more positive and equitable schooling experiences for all students. However, I do not believe the terms are
interchangeable as presented in the current literature; when the pedagogies were defined by the scholars who originally coined these pedagogies, the content in them varied. In general, Ladson-Billings’ (1995) work is far more critical and recognizes a larger political agenda in which schooling is submerged, unlike the practical approaches for good classroom teaching that Gay (2002) offers. In the previous section, I questioned the transferability of culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995) to a Toronto context in which diversity looks different, noting that education policies are different here and that the private versus public structuring of schooling brings an added layer of complexity to how this pedagogy might work in Toronto. By contrast, I criticized culturally responsive teaching (Gay 2002) for a lack of criticality in its approach to diversity, as it appears to promote a multicultural showcase more than an in-depth understanding of different cultures. It is these differences and questions that were posed towards the original literature on each of the respective pedagogies that make me wonder about whether the two pedagogies are compatible. Moreover, are these pedagogies useful in the Toronto context? The differences between these pedagogies suggest that there is a different understanding of what multicultural looks like in Toronto than there is in the US. It might be useful to consider how both pedagogies might apply to more heterogeneous student populations in public school settings. Nevertheless, Ladson-Billings’ (1995) three key components: high expectations, cultural competence, and critical consciousness can be applied to any cultural group within a given classroom.

Before continuing to analyze the two theories in more detail, it is important that some of their key terminologies -- equity, critical thinking, associate teacher, teacher candidate, and “theory and practice” are addressed.
Understanding Key Terminology in Initial Teacher Education Literature

After reading the aforementioned literature and reflecting on my life experiences as an educator and graduate student, I believe it is important to acknowledge that critical pedagogy and equity-based pedagogy are different. Critical pedagogy allows one the ability to grapple with questions of inequity, to understand the political dynamics of society and how power and social class affect daily life, and to gain a holistic view of the oppressive cycle that many racialized and marginalized people encounter. I find my definition of critical pedagogy to be most closely aligned with those of Joe Kincheloe (1999), Henry Giroux (1992), and Christine Sleeter, Myriam Torres, and Peggy Laughlin (2004)—all scholars whose work is heavily influenced by the work of Paolo Freire (2001).

In his book “Pedagogy of the Oppressed”, Freire coins the term conscientization to explain how different stakeholders in education (i.e. the participants) are on a journey that allows them to deepen their understanding regardless of where they are on that journey. Sleeter, Torres and Laughlin describe the concept as follows:

Conscientization rarely is a one-time awakening, but rather it is a process with multiple avenues of insightful moments as well as difficult times of denial and pain. This process might be characterized by gradual as well as revolutionary changes at multiple levels ranging from alienation to liberation. Conscientization about one’s actual reality takes place by submersion and intervention in it; hence, the necessity of doing inquiry mediated by reflective dialogue (Sleeter, Torres, and Laughlin 2004:83).

In this iteration of it, critical pedagogy would support an overwhelming and intense process of self-recognition and challenging of the societal inequities may be exhausting, but is necessary for creating change. It is essential that not only educators but their students question the “norm”, “normal”, or the “dominant” discourses those students experience on a daily basis. Here, the role of the “…liberating educator [is to] prepare
materials, frameworks, and the environment to facilitate critical dialogue among students, to decode their reality and unveil the myths about such reality” (Sleeter, Torres, and Laughlin 2004:84). However, in order to become “liberating educators” teacher candidates must be aware of their own investments in teaching and must consciously design how they plan to teach in order to support the students to empower themselves.

According to Sleeter, Torres, and Laughlin (2004) scaffolding, learning to question, modeling, and creating support systems are important steps in using an inquiry-based approach to teacher education. If an inquiry-based approach is informed and framed by critical questions about power, privilege, and race, then it can be claimed that such an inquiry approach is a critical pedagogical approach. Sleeter, Torres, and Laughlin argue that “teachers of historically marginalized students need to teach them the culture of power; they cannot just let the students construct whatever they want without guiding them toward understanding both the culture of power and their own cultural experiences” (2004:92). In other words, critical pedagogical efforts need to ensure that critical questions about the dominant culture are asked which in turn will move students outside their comfort zones to learn and explore questions on their own:

Freire proposed education should help students to achieve a critical understanding of their own reality and to engage in transformative actions. [To achieve this] critical understanding, Freire referred to a deep examination, through dialogue with others, of the legitimacy of the social order in terms of access to socioeconomic resources and opportunities. This examination should start in the immediacy of one’s own reality, and from there identify the structures and ideology of oppression at the local, institutional and societal levels, taking into account the vital needs and interests of the various social groups (Sleeter, Torres, and Laughlin 2004:82).
As a result, the process of critical understanding is simultaneously challenging and hopeful. This research study has been done in hopes of creating a space in which critical understanding can be developed, fostered, and deepened.

By contrast, equity-based pedagogy is about embracing what one knows about inequity through critical thinking and reflection, and allowing it to fuel one’s passion to do something about it. Equity-based pedagogy is providing the necessary cultural and social capital to get access to education, professional jobs and mobility in social class. In addition, while those who practice equity-based pedagogy create concrete ways for navigating the inequitable systems in our society they must also actively advocate change in these inequitable systems. It is not enough to navigate the inequitable system because this is a short-term solution that keeps a deficit-based public schooling system alive; thus active resistance and advocacy for changes in power hierarchies is necessary to change the actual system. The change that equity-driven initiatives wish to accomplish is part of a constant process of development that occurs over time. This change occurs slowly as various structural inequities in our society are challenged and changed from the “inside out” by people who are agents of equity. In the words of Brown-Jeffy and Cooper:

…equity [based pedagogy] involves giving the students what they need, it is not the same as equal opportunity…Giving children what they need means believing (a) difference is good, (b) differentiated instruction is essential for some, and (c) culturally relevant pedagogy practices can enhance learning” (2011:74).

Hence, using an equity-based pedagogy entails going beyond equal opportunity to a point of equitable access to high quality schooling experiences and teaching students how to break down power inequities that are invisible yet strongly dominant in our daily lives. Brown-Jeffy and Cooper (2011) suggest it is the role and privilege of the teacher to value the individuality of students to ensure them equitable access to education. As a result,
associate teachers and teacher candidates share this privileged opportunity to become agents of change.

In light of these explorations of critical pedagogy and equity-based pedagogy, I would argue there is a difference between the two. Critical pedagogy is embedded in culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995) as it requires the teacher to be critically reflective of the socio-political consciousness around school culture, school structures, and the purposes of hidden agendas served by the current schooling system. By contrast, equity-based pedagogy calls for enactment upon knowledge uncovered by critical reflection that helps marginalized people navigate through inequitable school systems and structures, while also being agents of change. I believe that Gay’s intention was to use equity-based pedagogy by offering explicit directions for what teachers can do in their classrooms to ensure students see themselves in the curriculum; however the critical reflection component was missing.

Another set of terms that needs to be clarified after exploring the literature on both pedagogies are the titles given to the key players involved in practicum, namely, the associate teacher and teacher candidate. Associate teachers and teacher candidates are given different titles throughout the literature, and it is important to understand why this is the case. One of the main reasons to pay close attention to the plurality of terms used to describe these roles is that the terms used by scholars reveals their beliefs about teachers and teacher candidates. I believe each of these titles holds a social prestige that highlights them, and some of them are indicative of the responsibility and role the associate teacher is expected to fulfill. For example, when associate teachers are referred to as mentors, their role is to provide guidance and befriend their teacher candidate. I use the term
“associate teacher” in my study for three reasons. First, all of the participants in my study used this term to describe their role in the practicum during our interviews as this is what their ITE program addresses them by, thus it provides consistency in their view of their social location. Second, the term has a professional tone and this is important as there is a constant effort made by most educators to have teachers viewed as professionals. And third, the term creates a space for fulfilling multiple roles while being esteemed as a professional.

Similarly, the term “teacher candidate” has been used in the literature interchangeably with other titles. Teacher candidates are also known as “prospective teachers”, “novice teachers”, “student teachers” and so forth. I believe that these terms each hold a certain social political value because they demonstrate how teacher educators and researchers view teacher candidates. There is not a distinct difference in the terms with respect to the responsibilities that teacher candidates are expected to carry out. Nevertheless, I use the term “teacher candidates” in this study for three reasons. First, the term provides consistency with how the Toronto ITE program addresses my participants context of this study. Second, the participants in my study identified themselves using this term. And finally, I believe that the term “teacher candidate” places great social value on the role and is more refined than “student teacher,” especially considering that there is a deficit perception of what it means to be a student.

Another dichotomy that has presented itself a number of times through the literature is that between theory and practice. As mentioned previously, I do not think there is a divide between theory and practice as they co-depend on each other’s existence. There is no such action as “implementing a theory into practice,” as neither theory nor
practice exists independently (Cochran-Smith and Lytle 2009; Simon, Campano, Broderick & Pantoja 2012). Unfortunately, most of the literature on Initial Teacher Education often dichotomizes theory and practice. Based on the narratives of the participants, the DS Initiative also dichotomized theory and practice\(^\text{32}\); these are further explored later in this study. As an educator and a graduate researcher, I see theory and practice as things that must occur simultaneously in order to be most effective. Theory and practice combined are *praxis* in the words of Paulo Freire (2001). In order to understand theory it has to be informed by practice; I believe that they have an inter-dependent relationship. Theory alone is not valuable in education if not tested and understood through lived experience (Cochran-Smith and Lytle 2009). In the same vein, practice or experience when not informed by critical thought (i.e. theory) is like guessing in the dark and is not an efficient or effective way of learning (Simon, Campano, Broderick & Pantoja 2012). It is only with this understanding of theory and practice being inter-dependent that praxis can operate. The importance of recognizing the inter-dependence of theory and practice lies in breaking down the false dichotomy and often the value that is assigned to “practitioners in the field” doing “practice,” which is not seen to be very valuable and “theorists in the academy/university” doing “theorizing,” which is seen to be powerful and praiseworthy. Moreover, I find it ironic that in faculties of education where teachers become “licenced teachers,” such dichotomies are not being problematized but rather reinforced. What does this indicate about how teacher education programs understand teachers?

\(^{32}\) However, Ryan and Lina stated that the DS Initiative attempts to bridge the gap between theory and practice during the member checking process.
Using a Critical Lens to Examine the Literature

In reviewing the literature for this study, I tried to assume the position of what Phil Carspecken defines as a criticalist: “[one who] assumes that inequalities are deeply embedded in everyday social life in systematic, but often taken-for-granted, ways and they want their research to facilitate change” (as quoted in Korth 2002:381). In this study, inequities in education and society were questioned and contested because the research provided a space for a “dialectical relationship between the social structural constraints on human actors and the relative autonomy of human agency” (Anderson 1989:249). Thus, this research critically explores how teacher candidates and associate teachers in an initial teacher education initiative challenged and addressed (if at all) the social structural constraints that surround inner city schools.

Through the lens of a criticalist, I examine the role of power in school culture and the power various stakeholders in education hold in comparison and in relation with one another. Most of the articles (e.g. Brown-Jeffy, 2002; Hefflin, 2002; Montgomery, 2001; Kress; and Bergeron, 2008) I reviewed reinforce traditional school structures and practices that reify the power inequities amongst different stakeholders in education. I do not agree with the assumptions made in the literature about who a teacher is, what a teacher does, what university-based education is, the divide between theory (often found at university) and practice (often found happening in schools), and how learning occurs. Most of these assumptions are rooted in neoliberal values which undermine genuine equity work. However, before sharing examples of neoliberal based assumptions in the literature, it is important to define neoliberalism.
As Henry Giroux and Susan Giroux (2006) claim in the context of schools and schooling experiences, neoliberalism is the infiltration of “…discourses of privatization and consumerism, the methodologies of standardization and accountability, and new disciplinary techniques of surveillance” (2006:28). For example, these neoliberal values and assumptions have manifested themselves through current standardized testing, special education procedures and strict guidelines, and streaming practices in hopes of benefitting the capitalistic economy. To further this thought, Michael Apple (2006) argues that

[underpinning this [neoliberal] position is a vision of students as human capital. The world is intensely competitive economically, and students—as future workers—must be given the requisite skills and dispositions to compete efficiently and effectively. Furthermore, any money spent on schools that is not directly related to these economic goals is suspect (Apple 32).]

It is apparent that schooling experiences for students are negatively influenced by the neoliberal political agenda for schools in relation to the market economy.

Neoliberalism not only places capital and market relations in a no-man’s-land beyond the reach of compassion, ethics, and decency; it also undermines those basic elements of the social contract and the political and pedagogical relations it presupposes in which self-reliance, confidence in other, and a trust in the longevity of democratic institutions provide the basis for the modes of individual autonomy, social agency, and critical citizenship (Giroux 2008:129).

Given, these neoliberal assumptions and perspectives, it is troubling that much of the literature reviews in the following sections draw on a neoliberal view instead of a more critical perspective. 33 A critical perspective would question and ascertain thoughts about

33 I am using Michael Apple’s understanding of “Neo-liberalism” here, for more detail please see the second edition (2003) of his book entitled, “Educating the ‘right’ way: Markets, Standards, God, and Inequality”.
power, privilege, and capitalistic hierarchies and thus split apart normative understandings of key concepts in this field which otherwise are not examined.

I believe that the lack of discussion about how power manifests and maintains itself in schools and school communities speaks to the enormous lengths to which educators and public education systems have to grow. I understand that it is extremely controversial to work as an employee in a school or school board that maintains power inequities while critically questioning how it reinforces power imbalances when most schools claim to provide inclusive and equitable schooling experiences for students and teachers. However, this questioning is essential if the purpose of schooling is for the benefit of all students and staff. The TDSB has become more open and willing to make small changes within its system by partnering with university-school initiatives (such as the DS Initiative), developing an Equity Office, staffing Instructor Leaders for Equity, and has recently started to provide some professional development opportunities in schools around the “The TDSB Equity Policy Booklet”\(^\text{34}\). Thus, there is recognition of a space in which transformation can occur. In my opinion, we must use this space as much as possible in order to create change, even if it is a small change. The small changes can eventually accumulate to have a substantial effect on classroom practices and teaching values, which in turn will be a catalyst for transforming school culture. However, policy and professional development on equity principles and initiatives does not always ensure

\(^{34}\) The TDSB Equity Policy booklet has been established since 2000, however in my teaching experiences with the board it is rarely brought up or integrated into expectations in the school and in the mandated curriculum. This booklet can be found on www.tdsb.on.ca
that they are being used in schools. Thus, as educators we need to be accountable\textsuperscript{35} to our students and the school system in which we interact every day. It is by continuing to chip away at inequities in the classroom and school culture, and realizing that we need to be accountable to one another that we can create a change that hopefully will ripple into our society.

**Literature Review 1: Teacher Candidates’ and Associate Teachers’ Perspectives on Structural and Relational Practicum Concerns**

*Structural and Relational Concerns in Practicum*

Current literature on associate teachers and teacher candidates’ perspectives on practicum placements are reflective of the same major themes/concerns about practicum placements as in the past. More specifically, after reading the literature on practicum concerns, it is evident that many of the concerns brought forth about practicum placements two decades ago still remain unaddressed. I believe that these concerns remain today because the greater structures and cultures within universities and school boards themselves have not changed.

One theme that recurs in the literature on practicum is structural concerns; a second theme is relational concerns. The structural concern refers to the divide between theory and practice (i.e. university/theoretical knowledge cannot be applied in school-based settings). On the other hand, relational concerns are rooted in the professional dynamics between the associate teacher (current employed teacher) and the teacher candidate (student teacher who is learning how to be a teacher) during the practicum (i.e.

\textsuperscript{35} I am aware there is no real form of accountability that anyone has to abide by as a teacher and in general, as a human being. However philosophically and religiously speaking, I believe that being accountable to one another is at the crux of being a compassionate human being who understands herself as a part of a greater whole.
when teacher candidates do practice teaching in associate teachers’ classrooms). Both of these thematic concerns were highlighted in the literature as concerns that shape practicum experiences. Moreover, in some of this literature there is a strong repetitive undertone of deficit thinking among teacher candidate and associate teachers. To gain a better understanding of both these themes, I will examine each briefly.

**Structural Concerns:**

According to Rita Moore (2003) there was a disconnection between the educational theories introduced and advocated by University of Montana-Western’s initial teacher education (ITE) program and the “procedural” demands of the practicum experience in schools. Moore’s findings collected from associate teachers stated that the university did not prepare teacher candidates on time management skills, planning lessons that are developmentally age-appropriate, and classroom management skills. Teacher candidates in Moore’s (2003) study claimed that the university courses in ITE did not give them enough background knowledge about how to implement theory into practice, and found themselves “creating curriculum in a vacuum and hoping for the best” (Moore 2003:38). Both the associate teachers and the teacher candidates agreed that there was a gap in integrating theory and practice. Glen Rideout and Larry Morton (2010) agree that there is a gap between integrating theory and practice during the practicum but they argue that the gap remains because of the beliefs that teacher candidates hold.

In their study, Rideout and Morton (2010) examined the beliefs teacher candidates had on the philosophical orientations they held prior to entering the practicum site. Their study found that despite the theoretical grounding (mostly teacher-centered and student-centred) that was provided in ITE throughout the program, teacher candidates resorted to
their own traditional (deficit) ways of teaching, which were often supported by their associate teacher and the school’s culture. More specifically, for most teacher candidates “maintaining a well-behaved classroom” became a priority and all the educational theories (learned at university) were pushed out during the practicum placement (Rideout and Morton 2010:66). Thus, there was a gap between theory and practice experienced during practicum.

Although Rideout & Morton’s studies demonstrate that teacher candidates perceive a “gap” between theory and practice, the latter study blames the teacher candidates for this gap. I find the latter argument interesting as it re-raises the following questions for me: (1) Is there a gap between theory and practice or do the two interact co-dependently? (2) If there is a gap between theory and practice, can it only be filled in if the teacher candidates’ beliefs are aligned with them? (3) Is there a hidden assumption that teacher candidates are empty vacuums that need to be filled with thoughts and instructions on how and what to do? (4) Where is the integration of teacher candidates’ lived experiences, values and beliefs in ITE programs and the impact these experiences have on the way in which they interpret what they are being exposed to in teacher education programs? These questions need to be answered before blaming the teacher candidates for the “gap” between the theory and practice. Wan Ng, Howard Nicholas, and Alan Williams’ (2009) work also presented this structural concern about a gap between theory and practice in Initial Teacher Education programs.

Ng, Nicholas, and Williams (2009) suggest that teacher candidates have a predisposition towards being in control (teacher-centered), despite what might be
discussed in their ITE program\textsuperscript{36}. In their study, teacher candidates’ fear of losing control grew greater as the time in their practicum passed. Ng, Nicolas, and Williams (2009) argue that these different control phases demonstrate the anxiety that teacher candidates have during practicum because they are not prepared for applying their expert knowledge in a classroom. There is a gap that emerges between teacher candidates’ using their theoretical knowledge and interacting with the practical/social component of the students during the practicum. Louis Volante (2006) similarly argues that there is a gap between integrating theory and practice and this has come to the attention of ITE program in his study\textsuperscript{37}.

Volante’s (2006) study assessed an ITE program that was aware of the theory and practice gap, and as a result, tried to “bridge” the gap by having teacher candidates do assignments in which they were asked to make deliberate connections between the theory and practice of educational theories. Unfortunately, despite some successfully integrated theory-practice assignments, the majority of teacher candidates expressed a continued disconnection between theory and practice during the practicum placements.

In another study, Volante and Lorna Earl (2002) observed an ITE program that examined how the theory and practice divide remained because of a lack of support from

\textsuperscript{36} The claim that teacher candidates have a “controlling disposition” is questionable when the school culture, societal pressures, and personal lived experiences have an enormous impact on how teachers’ teach. Being aware of this, I do not think it is fair to blame teacher candidates or generalize them as people who are “controlling”.

\textsuperscript{37} Again, it is interesting how all these articles claim a technical ideology on teaching by using terms like “training teacher candidates,” “how to implement theory into practice”, “bridging a gap”, “writing theory-practice assignments” and so on while theory and practice are co-dependent in my mind. Based on my lived teaching experiences, teaching is a cultural and sociological emergent practice, thus both theory and practice are one as they are overlap all the time; they inform and influence one another. I cannot imagine what critical pedagogy would be without action!
the associate teacher. Associate teachers would not encourage implementation of “theory” into what happened in the classroom because the “theory” was not applicable, according to them. Moreover, while most teacher candidates in the study understood that the ITE program was premised on critical/social orientations (i.e. self-reflection, critical thinking, and inquiry-based pedagogy), they reported that translating these equity orientations which they learned through self-reflection into their teaching practices, especially in the subjects of math and science, was not easy (Volante and Earl 2002:434).

According to the developers of the DS Initiative, this gap between theory and practice is addressed by both the teacher candidates and the associate teachers who were exposed to the same theoretical content and application examples of CRRP (Ryan and Lina interview 2010). Interestingly enough, this means that the DS Initiative acknowledges the theory and practice divide concern that is presented across the current literature on structural concerns about practicum. Lina and Ryan believe that with the same CRRP content and application exposure, there is a better opportunity for teacher candidates to use the CRRP framework during their placements and of it being supported by the associate teachers (interview, 2010). Again the concept of applying what was learned in the ITE classes is present in the DS Initiative and the current literature. The question that remains with respect to the above literature and the DS Initiative is: How is the theoretical knowledge applied or implemented by teachers? Is this a transmissive (i.e.

\[ \text{38 Again, in this claim there seems to be a tacit understanding of teacher candidates as uncritical, and ITE programs as critical. This is concerning because it dismisses the value of lived experiences (which can be critical too) that teacher candidates bring with them into ITE programs (that sometimes are not critical, but neoliberal).} \]
direct output and input process that is mechanical) process? I will explore how the DS Initiative addresses structural concerns of the practicum in more depth in Chapter Six.\(^{39}\)

**Relational Concerns:**

There is relatively little literature exploring the relationship dynamic between teacher candidate and associate teacher, which can range from positive to frustrating and fear-filled. The majority of literature on relational concerns claims that the relationship between teacher candidate and associate teacher is founded on fear and frustration. According to Volante (2006), the way in which associate teachers are chosen and how they are paired with teacher candidates needs to be re-examined, in order to understand the trajectory of their relationship.

Currently, most associate teachers volunteer and are not trained to become associate teachers, and they believe they have the “upper hand” in the relationship (Volante, 2006). Volante describes the “upper hand” as the idea of the associate teacher, who has higher authority in the practicum context because s/he is an “experienced” teacher and is the “evaluator,” in contrast to the teacher candidate, who is there to learn from their associate teacher (Volante, 2006)\(^{40}\). With this imbalance in power, associate teachers often make demands on teacher candidates that echo their (desired) beliefs and

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\(^{39}\) I wanted to provide the response of the DS Initiative after presenting the themes that emerged from the participants’ narrations as they are the primary focus of this dissertation. In Chapter Three which is dedicated to the methodology and methods, then in Chapter Four, I introduce the participants and the background of the study, followed by the shared themes that emerge from participant’s data in Chapters Five and Six. In the final section of Chapter Six, I bring the DS Initiative to engage with the findings of this literature and the themes that emerged from the study.

\(^{40}\) Understanding the associate teacher as the evaluator and the teacher candidate as the student speaks volumes to power inequity. In contrast, I believe the relationship between associate teachers and teacher candidates should be based on co-learning, co-constructing, and/or an exchange of ideas without the power dynamics looming overhead.
values about teaching. Moore (2003) examines the desired beliefs which associate teachers have for their teacher candidate to fulfill, in the context of literacy teaching during the practicum.

According to Moore’s (2003) study, associate teachers wanted teacher candidates to implement language lessons that demonstrated a constructivist learning model approach. The associate teachers wanted all the lessons to provide differentiated levels of language learning, but mostly focused on visual aids for students (i.e. concept mapping, journaling that allowed space for reflection over time etc.). Unfortunately, this use of constructivist learning did not reflect what the teacher candidates learned in the university setting. As a result, it was brought to the attention of the teacher candidates that associate teachers were not familiar with current university theories on constructivist learning or inquiry method (Moore, 2003). There was a disconnection between the demands the associate teacher had on teacher candidates and their knowledge about how to help teacher candidates to fulfill these demands (Moore, 2003). Due to associate teachers’ misunderstandings of constructivist theory, teacher candidates were not able to implement what they learned about the theory\(^\text{41}\), instead they aimed at fulfilling the desires of the associate teacher out of a fear of being evaluated poorly\(^\text{42}\). Moore’s study demonstrates that associate teachers need literature on these current university educational theories in order for teacher candidates to implement theories discussed in

\(^{41}\)Moore’s (2003) study indirectly claims that teacher candidates are at fault for not “implementing” theory that was taught to them, without much consideration about why they are expected to “implement” instead of engaging in co-developing practices that they are comfortable using to teach. Also, other social pressures/constraints such as power dynamics in the roles of associate teacher and school culture are not considered by this study.

\(^{42}\)The role fear plays in unequal power relationships can be constraining and impacts the performance of teacher candidates.
their ITE program. Further, the study noted that teacher candidates have a strong fear of being poorly evaluated by their associate teachers, and this prevents teacher candidates from feeling comfortable implementing what they have learned in their ITE program (Moore, 2003). As a result, teacher candidates in Moore’s study often conformed to the pedagogical approaches of their associate teachers. Similarly, Volante and Earl’s (2002) study showed that fear played a large role in the way in which teacher candidates interacted with their associate teachers.

This relational concern is not directly expressed in the DS Initiative as it is in the literature. However, Ryan and Lina (2010) did comment that the common theoretical background on CRRP would allow for a mutual understanding of this pedagogy between the teacher candidate and their associate teacher. In this way, a common understanding of the CRRP theory would allow teacher candidates and associate teachers to have a shared experience. However, the question that remains is: To what degree does the associate teacher being the final evaluator of the teacher candidate impact the interactions between the teacher candidate and their associate teacher? I will explore how the DS Initiative addresses relational concerns of the practicum in more depth later in this chapter.

Volante and Earl (2002) claimed that the interactions between teacher candidates and associate teachers were not open-ended and often involuntary. When the relationship between the associate teacher and teacher candidate is involuntary and it is put in place for a short period of time (three weeks) often it can be uncomfortable for both parties. Teacher candidates were aware of the power that their associate teachers had over them.

43 Interestingly, I felt a strong sense of anxiety around writing up the findings of this study because I had a fear that any finding that did not align with what Centre of Equity envisioned would destroy my relationship with them. Thus, I can identify with the teacher candidates’ fear of evaluation having negative repercussions.
and how this would impact their future prospects in teaching, and thus did not challenge or try different approaches to teaching that were contrary or different from their associate teacher. Thus, teacher candidates were constrained by the power and authority their associate teachers had over them and that is possibly why the “theories” taught in the ITE program were not “implemented”. These findings that highlight the power imbalance between the teacher candidate and associate teacher that were also found to be salient in Rideout and Morton’s (2010) study on interactions between teacher candidates and associate teachers during the practicum.

Rideout and Morton (2010) concur that the power dynamics between the associate teacher and the teacher candidate have a huge impact on what practices they use in the classroom. Because the associate teacher is evaluating the teacher candidates often teacher candidates replicate the teaching style or approach the associate teacher uses, despite it being traditional (Rideout and Morton, 2010). While all these findings from the teacher candidates’ perspective on relational concerns during the practicum have truth to them, the perspective of the associate teacher is not heard. Sanders, Dowson, and Sinclair (2005) provide insight on the perspective of the role of associate teachers.

Marion Sanders, Martin Dowson, and Catherine Sinclair (2005) note that while the professional role of associate teachers has been stated in theory (e.g. evaluator, planner, modeller and so on); it has been stated without consideration of the reality of the practicum context in which the associate teacher and teacher candidate interact. As a result of the incomplete and often unclear description of the associate teacher’s role, miscommunication and practical difficulties often arise (Sanders, Dowson, and Sinclair, 2005). When interviewed about their roles during the practicum placements, the vast
majority of associate teachers (sixty-six percent) claimed that their role could be classified as a planner and modeller for their teacher candidates (Sanders, Dowson, and Sinclair, 2005). However, the remainder of the associate teachers interviewed understood their roles as: evaluator, friend/mentor, and professional peer (Sanders, Dowson, and Sinclair, 2005). With all these different understandings of the role for the associate teacher, as understood based on their interviews, Sanders, Dowson and Sinclair (2005) concluded that associate teachers had multiple conflicting roles that they had to perform during practicum.  

The main criticism associate teachers had of the roles being defined by the university were that they were theoretical and not practical (Sanders, Dowson, and Sinclair, 2005). The theoretical definitions did not take into account the daily interruptions and day-to-day decisions about what to teach and what to leave out, nor did these definitions recognize that associate teachers take on multiple conflicting roles simultaneously (Sanders, Dowson, and Sinclair, 2005).

Another component that the theoretical definitions of multiple roles did not take into account was the time pressure factor present in the practicum/teaching environment. Sanders, Dowson, and Sinclair (2005) claim that in view of these new insights, the tensions between teacher candidates and associate teachers should be reconsidered. Furthermore, sometimes the practical descriptions for multiple roles given to the associate teachers conflicted (i.e. evaluator and mentor) (Sanders, Dowson, and Sinclair, 2005). Whereas the role of an evaluator suggests a high level of power over the teacher.

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44 The reality of any teacher’s job description encompasses multiple roles, just like the associate teacher’s job description does for the practicum placement.
45 It is ironic now it is the associate teachers creating the divide between theory and practice with respect to the interpretation of their role.
candidate, the role of a mentor seems less authority-based; the blurring of the two roles causes a lack of clarity around power politics and dynamics.

Interestingly, this concern around power dynamics from the associate teachers is echoed in the literature review by teacher candidates from their perspective. Could there be something done to fill the gap between the shared concerns about power imbalances/boundaries that associate teachers and teacher candidates have voiced? I will provide more insight on power dynamics during practicum placements with respect to the DS Initiative in Chapter Six. Next, I will give an overview of current practicum models that were designed to address some of the structural and relational concerns mentioned above.

**Literature Review 2: Current Practicum Approaches**

The following literature on current practicum approaches share a common theme of using a cognitive or training-based approach to teacher education programs. Such approaches do not permit space for the lived experiences or the wealth of knowledge a teacher brings with him or her into the profession. None of these practicum approaches uses an inquiry-based critical approach that is concerned with what teacher candidates (and associate teachers) bring to the program. This seems ironic in light of the fact that as educators, so often we claim to be striving to model critical pedagogy for our students. If we are encouraging our students to value their life experiences and bring them into the classroom for discussion, then why are we not open to exploring this in the context of teacher education? Nevertheless, it is important to understand and be aware of current practicum approaches in order to compare and contrast the Diverse Schools (DS) Initiative with them; a closer examination about what were the goals of the DS Initiative including its design will be discussed in Chapter Six.
The most influential and foundational component in any credentialing initial teacher program is the practicum (Cochran-Smith 2005). Much like the mix of terminology used to describe different types of initial teacher education programs (i.e. concurrent, consecutive, a joint masters and ITE program and so on), there are a great number of different terms used to refer to practicum, associate teacher, teacher candidate, and university faculty supervisor. The practicum has also been labeled as the field work experience, field placement, professional development opportunity, and internship. Moreover, different researchers and programs also use different nomenclature for associate teacher such as cooperating teacher, experienced teacher, mentor teacher, and senior teacher. Similarly, a number of terms have been used to describe teacher candidates, who are also known as student teachers, prospective teachers, preservice teachers, preservice candidates, and preservice students. Finally, there are three different terms used for the university faculty supervisor; university supervisor, university instructor, and professional mentor. In my opinion, each of these terms carries a value with them that positions the subject with a greater sense of authority and professionalism (e.g. associate teacher, teacher candidate, practicum) in contrast to less power-based terms (e.g. teacher mentor, student teachers, and field placement). The conceptualization of all the different terminologies is not the central focus of this thesis, but it is noteworthy to recognize the subtle or apparent distinctions terms have and more importantly, who uses them and why. As stated previously, for the purposes of this study I will be using the terms teacher candidate, associate teacher, and practicum when referring to my research and the findings because these are the terms used in the Canadian context and consistent with how my research participants identified themselves. However, throughout the
literature reviews, there will be a mixture in the terminology used that reflects the preference of each respective scholar whose work is being discussed.

Field experiences are the key components of preparation “where prospective teachers learn to bridge theory and practice, with colleagues and families, and develop pedagogical and curricular strategies for meeting the needs of a diverse population” (Hollins and Guzman 2005:493). Due to the wide range of variety in teacher education programs, the design of them and their content varies a great deal based on the priorities of the program. Nevertheless, the current literature on ITE suggests that the greatest area of concern in teacher education programs is the preparation, formation and delivery of field placements.

Practicum Models

In “Beyond Traditional Structures of Student Teaching” Ken Zeichner (2002) remarks, “I am struck by how similar the problems are today to when I began as a teacher educator in the 1970s” (Zeichner 2002:63). Zeichner expresses a concern that to this day, the roles of teacher candidates, associate teachers, and university faculty intersect at different levels of power that are conflicting and hierarchical, instead of collaborative. He elaborates on this predicament by stating the same problems of associate teachers, university supervisors and assessment, and the lack of preparation for implementing educational theories into the classroom setting during practicum still exist today:

Student teaching and practicum supervision is treated as an overload by some colleges and universities (something to be done in addition to a full teaching load) and is often carried out by temporary staff...who have little connection to or authority in the rest of the teacher education program (Zeichner 2002:60).

According to Mari Koerner, Frances O’Connell Rust and Frances Baumgartner (2002), it is a shame that cooperating teachers “are first acknowledged as teachers of children and
second as teacher educators” (2002:55) even though they are the most pertinent link between real teaching experience and student teachers.

It is important to note that every stakeholder in the teacher education program brings his or her life experiences and personal goals into the program. Without recognizing the life experiences and personal goals of each stakeholder in education, we miss the opportunity to understand and learn from one another’s perspectives on teaching and education. Each stakeholder has access to different knowledge and skills, yet they talk over one another, without understanding the roles they play and how those link to each other (Cochran-Smith 2005). It is essential to recognize each individual stakeholder, especially the most impressionable one46, the teacher candidate, as s/he navigates the teacher education program (Koerner, Rust, and Baumgartner 2002). “Students enter teacher education programs moving along a certain trajectory, which is acted on by contacts with faculty, peers, cooperating teacher, children, and program materials and tools” (Clift and Brady 2005:331). Thus, it is essential to recognize the roles and entry points of all stakeholders in teacher education programs.

Beyond the power and relationship dynamics, it is important to recognize that many contextual and practical elements affect how practicum placements are experienced by teacher candidates. Across the current literature, there has been evidence of variations in practicum preparation and format. For example, there are different structures that have been created for practicum purposes alone (i.e. university and school-based partnerships such as described by Vassilis Tsafos, 2009 and Patrick Soloman et al., 2011) which have

46 Referring to the teacher candidate as the “most impressionable one” assumes that the teacher candidate is more susceptible to absorbing what other stakeholders say or do than others rather than acknowledging that they should be given a space to contribute their knowledge to the conversation.
been built on different program principles. Also, many practicum formats have experimented by changing the frequency of practicums, by having practice teaching done in teacher candidate pairs, co-teaching with associate teacher, or developing lessons with a university supervisor. The following is a review of the most current designs for practicum preparation and delivery.

The nature of the following practicum designs as described by the literature seems to be a quick fix and prescriptive solution. I recognize that this is problematic because teacher education practices should be considered individually, within their own contexts and on a case by case basis as no one situation is alike in teacher education.

*Alternative Practicum Approaches in Initial Teacher Education*

A 2004 study by Fiona Christie et al. (2004) examined practicum placements in context of a partnership between the postgraduate certificate in education programs staff and the staff on site in the school placements. The guidelines in this program for practicum placements required that “student learning must take place in two very different contexts—the university and the placement schools—with the available course time (thirty-six weeks) split equally between them” (Christie et al. 2004: 110). Ostensibly, this arrangement permits greater collaboration between the university teacher education program’s philosophy and the realities of classroom. Unfortunately, despite the large team and positive approach to collaboration, the study revealed that teacher candidates’ experiences during their practicums were problematic.

Teacher candidates claimed that the regent (a school staff member designated to help teacher candidates) was “being too busy to be any kind of help” (Christie et al. 2004:114). Moreover, they claimed that actual observation, feedback, and assessment of
their practice teaching lessons were often not offered and that when it was provided, it tended to be rushed. Another major concern teacher candidates voiced was their confusion about the hierarchy of the people they were supposed to be assessed by. Teacher candidates were unclear about who would be assessing them and how seriously to take their assessments\(^{47}\). Finally, teacher candidates stated that there was a huge gap between the theory taught at the university setting and how to implement it in the classroom setting. The teacher candidates reported finding educational theories irrelevant in the teaching practice reality, as school staff did not implement those theories. As a result, the study concluded that the partnership approach to setting up and delivering the practicum did not help teacher candidates to gain a positive experience during practicum.

Another partnership approach to practicum was studied by Vassilis Tsafos (2009). This approach placed a stronger emphasis on university classes rather than on field work, which consisted mostly of observation-based training. In this case, the partnership between the university and the school was created to address the “lack of psycho-pedagogic training and a general gap between pedagogical theory and education practice” (Hopf and Xwhellis as quoted in Tsafos 2009:154). The partnership was to bridge these gaps as these were the main problem areas highlighted by previous teacher candidates. The format of the practicum under this partnership was divided and delivered in three parts.

In the first part of Tsafos study, teacher candidates attended seminars on different psycho-pedagogical subjects (e.g. evaluation, theory of curriculum, didactics etc.) In the

\(^{47}\) Why is this not problematized, as it is a common problem that teacher candidates are often are evaluated by people they have never met before? What do such actions and behaviours on behalf of ITE programs mean? Do they value assessment? Do teacher candidates’ concerns get taken up seriously?
second part, teacher candidates were expected to relate the theories they learned to what they saw in the classroom setting during a two-month observation practicum. Then, they were expected to do some practice teaching based on lessons that were created by them and their university supervisors. Finally, teacher candidates were expected to complete a research project based on their experiences in teaching in the form of a mini dissertation.

After collecting data on these three parts of the practicum, Tsafos discovered that the university and tertiary school partnership were not equal in power, but nevertheless were experienced positively by the study’s participants. The only minor setback in this partnership was the disorganization between the university and the schools during the implementation of this approach towards the practicum. The DS Initiative explores this partnership between university and school staff as well. I will discuss this later.

A Mentoring Approach

Clive Beck and Clare Kosnik (2002) explore this partnership approach between university and school staff by re-directing the role of the university supervisor and the associate teacher. They contend that there is a serious difference between an associate teacher who is seen to be an evaluator of teacher candidates and an associate teacher who is seen to be a mentor (Beck and Kosnik 2002). As mentors, associate teachers are not fundamentally characterized as evaluators, but rather as guides and coaches that offer support and advice to the practicing teacher candidates. In addition to preparation for practicum experiences, Beck and Kosnik recommend that teacher candidates be placed in school sites in pairs or clusters to avoid feeling isolated.

Beck and Kosnik’s study revealed that teacher candidates’ experiences of practicum varied from excellent to horrendous. However, they highlighted seven main
themes that arose from their data analysis of teacher candidates’ perspectives on practicum. All seven of the themes were associated with the role of the associate/mentor teacher. These were emotional support from the associate teacher, peer relationship with associate teacher, collaboration with the associate teacher, flexibility in teaching content and method, feedback from the associate teacher, sound approach to teaching and learning on the part of the associate teacher, and heavy but not excessive workload during the practicum (Beck and Kosnik 2002:94). All of these themes put a real emphasis on clarifying the role of the associate teacher as being more supportive and mentor-like than evaluative.

*University Program Principles Directed Approach*

In contrast to the mentorship approach to practicum placements, Vicki Kubler LaBoskey and Anna Ershler Richert (2002) promote a university-based two-year program that enforces its own program expectations and approaches towards education. LaBoskey and Richert (2002) present a tight-knit post-secondary and school community approach towards practice teaching. The teacher candidates in their study did their practicum with associate teachers who were graduates from the same two-year teaching program. Interestingly, the teacher candidates were able to communicate with their associate teacher about their common experience at Mill College. LaBoskey and Richert’s study presents two case studies of experiences of teacher candidates who attended Mill College’s two-year teaching program. During their first year, they completed university-based courses (e.g. teaching, curriculum, research in education etc.) along with teaching placements in classrooms every morning starting from the beginning of the school year until the end of the school year. The teacher candidates did one placement per term, and
thus had the opportunity to teach and learn in two different classroom settings. In addition, the format of the practicum placements required the college supervisors to hold weekly seminars for all teacher candidates, to come and observe teacher candidates bi-weekly, and to ensure that teacher candidates kept a daily reflective journal on their teaching experiences.

Mill College’s teacher program was built on overarching goals of equity and social justice. It had six program principles:

1) teaching is inherently moral work,
2) teaching is reflective work,
3) learning is developmental and constructivist,
4) teaching is connected in deep and important ways to subject matter,
5) teaching is collegial, and
6) teaching is inherently political\(^48\) (LaBoskey and Richert, 2002).

Despite their efforts to offer a cohesive teacher education program, in the final analysis, this model failed. LaBoskey and Richert (2002) conclude that the length of a practicum placement does not matter for teacher candidates, rather the more pertinent component of practicum is whether there is agreement on conceptions of learning and principles for teaching amongst the associate teacher, college supervisor and the teacher candidate. Unfortunately, many of the associate teachers assigned to Mill College teacher candidates did not know of the recent educational pedagogies being explored at the university, and deemed them to be unimportant (LaBoskey and Richert 2002)

\(^{48}\) Interestingly, LaBoskey and Richert’s (2002) study defines teaching as moral work that is collegial which then moves away from the “training” perspective on teacher candidates. However, this leaves the question of whose morals and what morals are used to teach?
LaBoskey and Richert also conclude that more time should be invested in examining the prospective compatibility of the teacher candidate and their associate teacher. Finally, they conclude if the student teacher has one practicum that is possibly going to be weak and one that is likely to be stronger, it is up to the teacher education program to place teacher candidates in the stronger practicum first, and then the weaker one as the influence of the first practicum is far more pronounced than the second experience, even though both impact the trajectory of the teacher candidate (LaBoskey and Richert, 2002).

**Learning Circle Approach**

Along the lines of addressing potential gaps in teaching practices and the relationships developed in the practicum settings, Rosie Cornu and Robyn Ewing (2008) suggest that preservice education should be reframed around the practicum as “framing professional experience around the notion of learning communities” (Cornu and Ewing 2008:1799). They believe that in learning circles, all stakeholders (university staff, teacher candidate, and associate teacher) have an equal voice and a collaborative approach towards constructing knowledge.

This learning circle approach influences the practicum context because it requires that teacher candidates help each other come up with lessons and reflect/critique the lessons collectively; in this way, “there is a commitment to reciprocity and reciprocal learning relationships and a deepening participatory process” that is foundational to the learning circle approach (Cornu and Ewing 2008:1803). Teacher candidates could co-

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49 Predicting which practicum is “strong or weak” is very subjective. How can one simplify such a complex experience? Can the outcome of practicum placements be controlled by the university supervisor?
teach lessons with other teacher candidates or with the associate teachers as this would create a learning reciprocal environment\textsuperscript{50}. This approach requested that associate teacher and university supervisors take on the role of mentorship and co-creating a program in partnership with teacher candidates’ input. Learning circles create social change by allowing teacher candidates to “explore and reconsider their own assumptions, understand the values and practices of families and cultures that are different from their own and construct pedagogy that take these into account in locally appropriate and culturally sensitive ways” (Cochran-Smith as quoted in Cornu and Ewing, 2008:1804). This social change element in the learning circles approach was enacted by holding “learning circle” discussions/seminars at both the school and the university sites in which all stakeholders of education participate.

In the two universities in which Cornu and Ewing piloted some components of the learning circle approach, it was successful in its delivery. However, the problem of balancing the power identities in the structure of the program proved difficult. Moreover, the practical aspect of securing placements for a cluster of teacher candidates at one school and of having the school in question be willing to participate in the learning circle approach was rather challenging. Finally, Cornu and Ewing found that attempting to have teacher candidates truly create a community approach instead of dramatizing it as a ‘pseudo-community’ was be difficult (2008:1809).

\textit{Community Based Approach}

\textsuperscript{50} Cornu and Ewing (2008) have provided an ideology of teacher candidates that is more aligned with my understanding of how their practicum experience allows them to co-teach and co-learn with their associate teachers; unlike the training-based approaches discussed previously.
Ken Zeichner (2002) also encourages a community-based approach for teacher education programs, in particular, he advocates for community field experiences. Zeichner promotes the “need to think more broadly about schools and communities as places for learning to teach and not just about individual classrooms” (2002:62). Using the current literature on “professional development schools,” he contrasts traditional teacher education programs and community-based teacher programs. Zeichner advocates the current trend of professional development schools because it exemplifies elements that contribute to a community and holistic approach to teacher education. He identifies the four main elements in professional development schools as follows. These schools:

1. utilize the whole school by offering different teaching opportunities with multiple staff in one school;
2. have community field placements that help teachers connect to the identity of their students;
3. implement university pedagogies in schools; and
4. have all stakeholders in the teacher education program collaborate (Zeichner 2002:62).

Zeichner argues that what occurs in teacher education programs impacts the lives of many students, communities, and staff and thus needs to be taken seriously. The community is a vital component that needs to be considered and used in the creation of professional development schools for prospective teachers.

The purpose of the pedagogical theoretical framework and the two literature reviews above is to encourage stakeholders in education to develop their own critical understandings about how the literature constructs and presents 1) the role of teacher candidates, 2) who teacher candidates and associate teacher are, 3) practicum, 4) the “divide between theory and practice”, 5) whose understanding of culturally relevant pedagogy and culturally responsive teaching is being heard and understood. Thus,
educators can use their formulated understandings of those key terms and concerns in the literature as a backdrop for their own understanding of current debates in initial teacher education. These understandings can help stakeholders in education better grapple with the findings sections in this study, in which I disclose my own thoughts and present the responses that the developers of the Diverse Schools (DS) Initiative.
CHAPTER THREE: PRACTITIONER RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

This is a critical practitioner research study which is based on a practitioner research methodology described by Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009). As Campano and Simon (2010) state there are multiple versions of practitioner research; in this study, I use a critical version of practitioner research that is also action based.

The main reason practitioner research methodology is used in this study is because, I explore an initiative put forth by an initial teacher education program that involves educators in the context of public school practicums. According to Marilyn Cochran-Smith and Susan Lytle (2009), the two core concepts of practitioner research are:

(1) teaching is a deliberative (not a technical) profession, practitioners generate knowledge for practice, and (2) contextualized questions and uncertainties are brought forward by practitioners which are based on issues of teaching and learning at all levels (2009:20).

This study questions key practices in teacher education; in particular, practices of teachers, associate teachers, theory and practice, equity-based pedagogy, and critical pedagogy. Moreover, this study has been undertaken in an attempt to generate new knowledge for practice that teacher education practitioners can use. The questions that emerge from the content and analysis of the interviews I conducted present several uncertainties and questions for teacher candidates and associate teachers. Furthermore, it is important to note that these questions and uncertainties came from practitioners “...examining their own assumptions, deepening their local knowledge by gathering data, asking questions, and working towards social justice” (Cochran-Smith and Lytle 2009:74). In particular, some practitioners challenge
It is through such a critical process of reflection and questioning that the practitioners (i.e., associate teachers, teacher candidates, administration, developers of the DS Initiative, and me) in this study were able to decipher what was included in world views and what was left out. As a result of these reflections, we were able create a space to have dialogue about the silence of missing voices. Furthermore, this critical practitioner research study has “…interrupted traditional assumptions about knowers, knowing, and what can be known about teaching, it has the potential to redefine the notion of a knowledge base for teaching” (Cochran-Smith and Lytle 1993:xiv).

“[P]ractitioner research is committed to being useful: It calls for reflection-in-action, its values are explicit, it has an interactive approach, and it is intentional in its purpose” (Jacobson 1998: 127). It is with this understanding of what may generally result from a practitioner research study that this project hopes to shed some light on the vital role and identities of practitioners, their ability to deconstruct inequitable practices, and rediscover and create equity-based practices. However, to further contextualize this critical practitioner research study it is important to note that there are many different forms of practitioner research and the one that this study particularly lends itself to is, university-based practitioner research.

Practitioner Research and Variations

According to Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009) there is a wide variation and range of practitioner research approaches which provide richness to the field of practitioner
research. However, this richness in the diversity of practitioner research projects can be seen by some as a weakness because there is inconsistency in their formatting. In response to this critique, Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009) remind us that:

> It is impossible—and, of course, undesirable—to regard practitioner inquiry as a monolith in the face of its widespread and far-flung development. Despite its variety, however, most versions of practitioner inquiry share a sense of practitioner as knower and agent for educational and social change (2009:37).

In other words, it can be argued that practitioner research has an emergent process attached to it and thus cannot be predetermined, even though there are some commonalities amongst practitioner research projects. The ‘Practitioner Inquiry: Issues that Unite and Divide’ diagram created by Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009) offers an insight on different kinds of practitioner research projects, while sharing common characteristics. As illustrated by their diagram, one common feature is often the duality in the roles that the practitioner researcher embodies (i.e. teacher, researcher, and other stakeholder positions in education) (Cochran-Smith and Lytle 2009). Another common theme in practitioner research is the idea of collaboration and community-based learning (Cochran-Smith and Lytle 2009). It is important to recognize that although this practitioner study is not a community inquiry-based one, it does exemplify all of the common characteristics (e.g. professional context, collaboration, blurred boundaries between inquiry and practice, and assumptions about links of knowledge, knowers, and knowing) mentioned in Cochran-Smith and Lytle’s (2009) description of a practitioner study.

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51 Please refer to Figure 2.1 (Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 2009:39) for more details.
In my study, collaboration was undertaken through the process of “member checking” with Ryan and Lina. I used the strategy of “member checking” to ensure that my interpretations of their answers in interviews were accurate, and also to provide them an opportunity to provide their feedback on initial themes and findings that emerged during the data analysis phase of this study. The assumptions about links of knowledge, knowers, and knowing were also articulated by the participants in this study during their interview process and highlighted through the study’s findings. Moreover, these assumptions were significant because they provided insight on the nuances between various participants’ interpretations of the content in the DS Initiative, recognizing whose interpretations count, and how this affected the experience each participant had in the DS Initiative.

The professional context of this practitioner study was the university and school site-based classrooms in which field-notes were taken. In addition, the reflections, statements, questions, and messiness involved in understanding participants’ voices in class observation in contrast to in interviews demonstrated to me the blurred boundaries of inquiry and practice.

Practitioner researchers regard struggle and self-critical questioning as integral parts of their intellectual lives. Going public with questions, seeking help from colleagues, and opening up one’s own practice to others go against the norms of appropriate practice in many places (Cochran-Smith and Lytle 2009:114).

It is because I was able to question/critique while recognizing and acknowledging other perspectives, quandaries, and narratives around similar situations that this format of practitioner research allowed for a greater public audience. The audiences for this study

52 “Member checking” is a phrase coined by Patti Lather (1986) that contributes to a catalytic validity.
are: teacher educators, teachers, teacher candidates, administrators, academic scholars in teacher education research and in equity studies. Furthermore, practitioner research creates a space that “…poses questions that pose problems, identifies discrepancies between theories and practices, challenges common routines, and attempts to make visible much of that which is taken for granted about teaching and learning” (Cochran-Smith and Lytle 2009:114). This study demonstrates critical questioning of teacher and teacher education ideologies, the divide between theory and practice, and interpretation of equity-based initiatives. In addition to all of these common characteristics, the overarching goal of practitioner research and this study

…is to create access for all learners to equitable and stimulating learning opportunities; identify levers for needed change in people, institutions, and systems; and to act in ways that respect and honour the participation of various constituencies whose lives are implicated in the educational practices and policies under consideration (Cochran-Smith and Lytle 2009:142).

It is with this hope of identifying opportunities for needed change in people, institutions, and systems that I chose to do this study at the university/school site where there are multiple entry points for possibilities for change to occur. I believe at the university level where adults see themselves as learners, they are more open to different perspectives and ways of learning and unlearning “expert or foundational knowledge”. I will elaborate on the relationship of practitioner research to the university/school environment in the next section.

**Practitioner Research and the Structure of the University**

Universities are known for longstanding traditions that uphold expertise based on “scholarly” research-based knowledge. According to Cochran-Smith and Lytle, practitioner research aims to “…alter relationships of knowledge, practice, and power in
universities and to rethink hierarchical connections between teaching and research” (2009:29). In other words, practitioner research challenges university’s longstanding traditions that privilege research and deem teaching as a “service” component for faculty to participate in. This is demonstrated by my critical questioning of the theory and practice dichotomy and its implications for public school and university settings. As a result, because of the structure of the university and the power dynamics in it, initial teacher education programs are often left in a blurred haze, unless teacher educators use this opportunity to explore innovative pedagogical approaches to Initial Teacher Education (ITE) as the DS Initiative that is explored in this study. The DS Initiative provides a thread which brings the university and school settings into a dialogue interwoven with equity concerns about power and privilege. Cochran-Smith and Lytle note that “in the university context, blurring boundaries and roles allows for innovative programs of research and new kinds of knowledge as well as new tensions and professional dilemmas” (2009:43). These professional dilemmas and tensions were brought forth in the narratives provided by my research participants during interviews and in field notes.

Practitioners are legitimate knowers and knowledge generators, not just implementers of others’ knowledge; school-university relationships are (or ought to be) reciprocal and symbiotic, not unilateral or top-down; educational practice is relational, theoretical, and political as well as practical—it is not simply a technical or instrumental activity (Cochran-Smith and Lytle 2009:89).

Thus, practitioner research taking place at a university challenges notions of traditional knowledge and who exactly is generating this knowledge. More specifically, when innovative and practitioner research based ITE programs are developed, they challenge the hegemony of expert knowledge that filters through a transmissive and directed way of
knowledge dissemination (Cochran-Smith and Lytle 1993). In this study, my analysis of the DS Initiative invites and creates a space for associate teachers’ and teacher candidates’ voices to be heard and valued. As a result, practitioner research based ITE programs provide a platform for

…making visible the ways that teachers and students co-construct knowledge and curriculum, it has the potential to alter profoundly the ways that teachers use language and literacy to relate to their colleagues and their students, and it can support a more critical and democratic pedagogy (Cochran-Smith and Lytle 1993: xiv).

Allowing practitioner research to be practiced in ITE programs through processes of inquiry, reflection, and questioning creates issues and tensions that are at once productive and disruptive at the university; which, in turn, are essential to interrupt the traditional hierarchy of knowledge. I believe that these disruptive moments create productive tensions and discomfort which help to catalyze change in traditional university structures and school cultures.

In the words of Cochran-Smith and Lytle, “[a]t times, this can make working within the university context difficult; however, it can also be generative—suggesting new questions and prompting further critique about school-university relationships” (2009:97). It is with this understanding of practitioner research bringing about generative questions when being carried out in a university setting and using the insights of the participants of this study, that I re-designed my research questions after completing the data analysis. It was also because of the unique university context that I was able to gain insight into how associate teachers experienced the current learning of CRRP in the teacher education program. Finally, it was because of the nature of the university context, especially in the School and Society and professional development seminars on CRRP
that this ability to critique, question, and inspire new ways of thinking about teacher education came to be. Thus, I believe the difficulties that arose out of conducting this critical practitioner research study at the university were well worth the effort, as the generative knowledge that resulted due to dissonance at times is truly insightful. It is important to note that my dissertation’s validity is based on what Patti Lather (1986) describes as catalytic validity. Lather describes the need for catalytic validity as follows:

[w]ith no ready-made formulae to guarantee valid social knowledge, “we must operate simultaneously at epistemological, theoretical and empirical levels with self-awareness” (Sharp & Green 1975). What we are faced with is a lack of workable procedures or specific rules for analyzing and verifying data. Our best shot at present is to construct research designs that push us toward becoming vigourously self-aware (Lather 1986:66).

It is with Lather’s understanding of catalytic validity do I readily share all my moments of dissonance I had while completing this study with all teacher educators, teachers, and university educators who are interested in practitioner research.

Qualitative Methods

My critical practitioner research study was an eight-month study. During this study, I took field notes and wrote critical reflections for eight School and Society classes that lasted three hours each; for six CRRP seminars with associate teachers (each lasting three hours), and for two joint seminars attended by teacher candidates and their respective associate teachers attended (also lasting three hours each in length). In addition to the field notes and critical reflections, I transcribed interviews and kept reflection notes on eighteen interviews, each interview lasting approximately one hour in length (although some went on for two hours).

To answer my research questions, I used my field notes taken over the course of eight months in the School & Society course and my critical reflections from field work
and participants’ interviews. The interview participants consisted of ten teacher candidates, eight associate teachers, and two administrators, all of whom had participated in the DS Initiative. It is important to note that not everyone in the Equity Option (EO) pre-service programme (which consisted of 70 teacher candidates and 70 associate teachers) participated in the DS Initiative; it was only a random selection of 12 teacher candidates and 12 volunteer associate teachers who participated in the DS Initiative. There were two reasons why there was a limited group of people involved in the initiative: (1) financially providing release time for all associate teachers was not feasible, and (2) it was a pilot initiative to see how the participants would respond (Ryan and Lina, field notes 2010). Nevertheless, the 18 research participants provided ample data in their interviews, and this was further strengthened by field notes and critical reflections, which are all qualitative research methods.

Field Notes and Critical Reflections

The two essential methods of collecting data for this critical practitioner research study are field notes and semi-structured interviews. Field notes are taken by the researcher when they are doing participant observation for their study. LeCompte, Schensul S., and Schensul J., explain participant observation as “… a process of learning through exposure to or involvement in the day-to-day or routine activities of participants in the research setting” (LeCompte, Schensul S., and Schensul J., 1999:vol.2:95). I took field notes in the School and Society classes and the professional seminar series on CRRP offered to the participants of this study. These regularly scheduled classes and sessions provided me with an opportunity to experience and observe the regular routines of my

53 Equity Option (EO) is a pseudonym to protect the identity of the program.
participants and to develop a rapport with them in those settings. By developing a rapport with my participants, I made myself a visible researcher in the environment being researched, which also allowed an opportunity for the participants to become comfortable with me.

In addition, field notes taken during the participant observation phase provides background information on how the participants relate to one another and their social boundaries (LeCompte, Schensul S., and Schensul J., 1999, vol.2). As I took field notes and later wrote critical reflections on them, I realized the patterns and the development in what some participants stated through a number of classes. The interesting finding was that the tone and who was part of the conversation often changed in the seminars in contrast to the School and Society classes. Teacher candidates did not participate as frequently in the discussions during the joint seminar whereas; the same teacher candidates had a lot to say during their weekly classes in School and Society. My field notes captured answers to the following questions: What do you see happening? Who is talking/who is reacting? Where is the conversation taking place? When do the participants speak? Why do you think the participant is acting in this manner? The answers to these questions were not always consistent, especially when following the patterns of opinion offered by any given participant, nevertheless, patterns did emerge and are described in the data analysis chapters, which were heavily influenced by the interviews.

Moreover, I used critical reflections that I wrote after each of my observations with the teacher candidates in their School and Society classes and the monthly CRRP seminars with the associate teachers. LeCompte, Schensul and Schensul (1999, vol.2)
caution that critical reflections and field notes can be inaccurate if the researcher does not recognize their privilege, biases, and power status while writing them. Thus, throughout the writing reflections and data analysis process, I have been mindful of my personal biases (about the importance of being aware of deficit attitudes towards marginalized people, and recognizing the root of scholarly ideas) and have used meetings with my supervisors to check in on how I present my findings in this study. I have also made it a point to emphasize my identity and positionality during this study to ensure that there is transparency of my values, biases, and power dynamics. Finally, I ensured that I provided my preliminary findings to Lina and Ryan for their approval on my interpretation of their interviews.

I recognize that the consequences of not being critically aware of one’s privilege, biases, power status, and interpretive lens can be detrimental to the research study (LeCompte, Schensul S., and Schensul J., 1999, vol.2). Moreover, I know how not being a reflective researcher can affect one’s relations with the participants in the study. More precisely, I know that if the participants feel they are being misunderstood or misjudged by the researcher during informal conversations or interviews, they may not be open to sharing their ideas and opinions with the researcher. As a result of a lack of critical reflection, information gathered from participants could be incomplete. Thus, as a researcher, I strove to be honest to myself, with my research participants and with the readers of this dissertation about my social positionalities and identity factors.

According to LeCompte, Schensul and Schensul (1999, vol.2) it is essential to note the access that a researcher has to a research site and its participants is dependent upon his or her own personal (i.e. ethnicity, race, language etc.) and structural
characteristics (culturally who is allowed to be there - power dynamics). This was very evident in my study. I had access to the research site and my research participants, however the multiple positionalities I held in relation to both the participants and the developers of the DS Initiative definitely created a dissonance in the process of my writing up the findings in this study as I elaborated in Chapter One. My multiple entry points in relationship with my research participants provided positive spaces to create discussions in which they saw me as an insider (a former teacher candidate, a student, a potential colleague in teaching). However, when carrying out interviews with an electronic recording device in between my participants and me, sometimes I felt my research participants saw me as an outsider (graduate researcher from the university) and thus the conversation that emerged was more formal than what I experienced in the informal setting of classes and seminars. On the other hand, I believe I was an insider with Lina and Ryan when having discussions around equity work due to my teaching experience, academic experience, and being a former graduate of the same Equity Option (EO) in which they currently taught. To gain a better understanding of the context of the interviews, let us examine the format and process I used.

*Semi-Structured Interviews*

LeCompte, Schensul and Schensul contend that “semi-structured interviews combine the flexibility of unstructured, open-ended interview with the directionality and agenda of a survey to produce focused qualitative textual data” (1999 vol. 2:149). The questions in a semi-structured interview are pre-determined but can be added to during the interview if further probing is required. This flexibility was apparent in my interviews, especially when participants confided in me that they did not understand what
the Diverse Schools (DS) Initiative was or the purpose of it. Often they would ask for clarification on what the DS Initiative was and the goals it had intended to reach, and thus the conversation in the interview changed course. Thus, the interview questions provided opportunities for the participants to share multiple experiences they had during their practicum and a space for them to reflect out loud about concerns, questions or unsolved puzzles in their minds with respect to the shared theoretical pedagogical exposure they had (School and Society classes/monthly CRRP seminars) and practicum experience. I ensured that the participants were given ample time to answer the interview questions in a comfortable environment. As a result, the interviews ranged from forty-five minutes to two hours in length.

Often in the interview, participants shared narratives of their experiences during practicum which planted a seed for new questions about ways of examining schooling practices, culture in particular. I enjoyed this process because the participants’ narratives gave way to a variety of understandings of what CRRP meant to them based on their own life stories and their insights that connected different pieces together were marvels. Nevertheless, I ensured that the wording of my original questions was open-ended and that even with an open flow of flexibility in conversation throughout the interview, I always asked more questions such as “please tell me more, or can you please clarify…” that were not leading, in hopes of getting accurate and in-depth responses from my participants. LeCompte, Schensul and Schensul (1999, vol. 2) note it is important to look at the design and delivery of the interview questions with a critical lens to ensure the researcher’s biases are not affecting the way participants answer the questions. One way I
did this was by providing a copy of my questions to my thesis supervisor and my participants before using them in a formal interview setting.

I recognize that there must have been some influence from me in the interviews as all research questions and overall research studies have biases as they are developed from the values and lived experiences of the researcher. The story of the question that brought about this dissertation is very personal and thus the questions that fuel this study are representative of my deep investment in equity work for racially marginalized students. I, myself, identify as one and went through and continue to go through several struggles as a result of embracing this identification. In what follows, I provide insight into the interview process in hopes of creating transparency about the entire process.

For this study, I conducted eighteen semi-structured interviews in total, which lasted for different lengths of time between forty-five minutes to two hours each. I interviewed ten teacher candidates and eight of their respective associate teachers (who attended the CRRP seminars). In addition to these key research participants I also conducted interviews with the developers of the initiative (Lina and Ryan), one other university faculty member that was briefly involved in the early stages of brainstorming for programs in the Centre of Equity (CE), and finally two school administrators who volunteered to be interviewed. Both the administrators had attended some of the CRRP seminars because they believed in supporting their staff who were given release time from teaching to attend these seminars. The locations of all interviews were at the university in a seminar room or at the school site of the practicum. The location was determined by the requests of the participants to make the interviews convenient for them. All the interviews were electronically recorded on a digital recorder. I placed the
small recorder in between the interviewee and myself to ensure great sound quality. The recording of each interview remained with me and was stored in a secure location to maintain the confidentiality of the data. After each interview, I wrote a critical reflection from my perspective about any lingering concerns, questions, situations that caught me by surprise. I wrote these reflections to ensure that I processed my own thoughts on what I had learned throughout the interview, any patterns that I saw emerge from the interview content or process, and thus also after writing them, to see how my thoughts interpreted and connected to the interview experience. These analyses of my own reflections after the interview helped me to become more aware of my own biases and sensitivities about race, poverty, and ignorant assumptions. I have this constant battle with myself as to whether to become hardened (like many of my colleagues advise me) to the ignorance or sense of entitlement people have when talking with and about racially marginalized people. The counterargument I provide myself with is that all humans when spoken to with dignity and compassion have the capacity to learn, reason, and change, and thus it is my duty to reach out to them, the best I can.

Nevertheless, after interviewing and writing follow-up critical reflections on each interview, I transcribed the interview. I typed up everything that was said in the interview and stored it in a secure location that only I had access to. I organized my interview data into the following table to keep track of my interviews.
Table 1: An Instrumental Log of Interviews and Transcription

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview Number and Pseudonym-Name of Interviewee</th>
<th>Date of Interview and Place of Interview</th>
<th>Date Transcribed and length of interview</th>
<th>Date of Coding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

(Table based on LeCompte and Schensul J. 1999 vol. 5:39)

I used pseudonyms for all participants in the study to ensure their privacy and to protect the confidentiality of their social identity. After collecting all the data, I began to organize and analyze it. The following table (on the next page) is based on LeCompte and Schensul J., (1999, vol. 1:128) data organizational chart.
Table 2: An organizational chart of methods used in my study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Target</th>
<th>Procedures for Data Collection</th>
<th>Data Content</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Observation-Field Notes</td>
<td>-record situations as they happen</td>
<td>-activities</td>
<td>-written notes</td>
<td>- depiction of physical settings, acts, activities, interaction patterns, meanings, beliefs, and emotions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-record the meaning of these events at the time for study group participants</td>
<td>-events and sequences</td>
<td>-informal discussions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-settings, participation structures</td>
<td>-maps of site</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-behaviours of people and groups</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-conversations and interactions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnographic Interview-Semi-Structured</td>
<td>- in-depth information on selected topics -personal histories -cultural knowledge and beliefs -description of practices</td>
<td>-representative individuals -key informants</td>
<td>-in-depth interviews (semi-structured, elicitation techniques-probing questions)</td>
<td>- answers to open-ended questions -responses to probing questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical Reflections</td>
<td>- to get the researcher’s perspective on what happened that surprised them, if they saw any patterns emerging across the data gathered</td>
<td>- representative of the emergent patterns or missing patterns</td>
<td>- written immediately after field observation and interviews respectively</td>
<td>- depiction of physical settings, acts, activities, interaction patterns, meanings, beliefs, and emotions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I used this organizational table as a guiding framework and acknowledging themes that emerged across the data, to help me begin the process of data analysis. The process of analyzing the collected data was through triangulation, then colour coding themes across the data and critically analyzing them through an anti-neoliberal and critical pedagogy theoretical framework.
Data Analysis

According to LeCompte and Schensul (1999, vol. 1) data analysis begins in the mind of the researcher as an ongoing cognitive and conceptual process. As a practitioner researcher whose study emerges with new questions and information throughout the duration of the entire study, I had to constantly re-conceptualize, re-organize, and re-formulate my thoughts on this study. As a result, the analysis process always went back to the research questions, the conceptual framework of the study and the data collected (LeCompte and Schensul, 1999, vol. 5). Moreover, I recognized that “[t]he overall picture never becomes clear all at once; instead, it slowly emerges from a morass of observations, interviews, and other kinds of information” (LeCompte and Schensul, 1999 vol 1:149).

In this practitioner study, sometimes unanticipated data collection and data analysis occurred. I ended up interviewing administrators, which was not part of the plan, and during the process of writing this dissertation, I realized that my research questions needed to be revised.

Moreover, in my study, I categorized data by re-coding it into items, patterns, and structures using my pedagogical theoretical framework of CRRP (LeCompte and Schensul, 1999, vol. 1:150).

Items

Items that are particularly rich for analysis are events, behaviours, activities, or statements that (1) stand out because they frequently occur, (2) are important to the existence of other items, (3) are one of a kind and are influential, or (4) are absent from the researcher’s expectations (LeCompte and Schensul, 1999, vol.1). As I shifted through
several transcribed interviews, critical reflections, and my field notes, I flagged items that I wanted to analyze and wrote these on flip chart paper. Once I had these items and was deciding on what else would be an item, I did a lot of comparing and contrasting, sorting, matching, sifting, and clumping of items that were similar, recognizing which ones were missing, and separating items that were different (LeCompte and Schensul, 1999, vol. 5). I later learned that what I did on the flip chart paper with the items was a process also known as the constant comparison method.

*Patterns*

The emergence of patterns in my study came from an inductive process. In the inductive thought process, as a practitioner researcher, I was able to clump together individual items at a particular level into more generalized statements about a group of items (by categorizing some items by a larger theme they had in common) (LeCompte and Schensul, 1999, vol. 5). These generalized statements about a group of items “…express a particular theme, or constitute a predictable and consistent set of behaviours” (LeCompte and Schensul, 1999, vol. 1:155). Interestingly, while grouping items into larger themed categories, I noted that some items were left standing alone. These items raised questions for me about why certain themes were missing from my pedagogical theoretical framework for culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy (CRRP). For example, there were incidents that were reported by White teacher candidates as highly impactful during their practicum, around issues of how marginalized youth internalized notions of white (i.e. middle-class Europeans) authority, but these

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54 White is referring to anyone who is from a European background. Although, I do recognize that White immigrants may have experienced hardships but in the context of this study, when I refer to White it is the racial identity marker that denotes power and privilege in the current mainstream society.
issues were not explored in the School and Society classes. Another example was the challenges White teachers faced with not being able to tap into the cultural politics in the life of a marginalized youth as comfortably as a teacher of colour would be able to do.

Both of these stand-alone incidents made me wonder why discussions around how to address the internalized fear or resilience racially marginalized students had towards White teachers did not occur prior to, during, or after the practicum experiences. Why were there no spaces to discuss the paradox of being a White teacher who tried to be an ally for racially marginalized youth, but was not given an easy way in to gain the trust of parents, unlike a teacher who reflected the same culture of the youth? What were the challenges for teacher candidates and associate teachers who came from racially marginalized backgrounds while teaching European middle-class children? There were none among the participants randomly selected for this study.

Considering that the main train of thought in CRRP is that there is a lack of teachers, teacher educators, and teacher candidates that look like the very student populations we are trying to connect with, the fact that nearly all of the student teachers involved in the DS initiative were white was deeply ironic. What does this lack of racial diversity among teacher candidates at this Canadian University say about the university admissions process to Initial Teacher Education (ITE) program, and what does these mean for doing equity-based work in ITE?

In order to make use of all of my data, even the data for which I had not originally identified themes, I identified patterns using both generalized statements about a group of items and cultural statements that were missing or stood out alone. After these grouping processes were conducted, I coded the patterns. While coding the patterns, I looked for
any relationships among the patterns (e.g. who was saying them, what was being said and how often, how much importance and relevance was given to them) that then initiated the process of identifying structural patterns (e.g. understanding teacher identity, teacher knowledge about culture, and the complexity involved in university-school based equity initiatives) in my study. As a result of recognizing the relationships amongst patterns and the structural patterns, I was able to bring them back to the original intentions for which I chose to write my dissertation; that is, how does this study impact the schooling experiences for marginalized students?

*Structural*

After the items and the patterns were identified, a structure from the data collection emerged and provided a new perspective. LeCompte and Schensul define structures as “… larger groups of patterns or relationships among patterns in the data that began to build an overall cultural portrayal or theory explaining a cultural phenomenon” (1999: vol. 5:68). The structures that emerged from the research and the literature reviews had to do with the importance of the lived experiences and social positionalities of teacher candidates and teachers, and the power dynamics at play in the practicum setting. These larger groups of patterns brought forth new questions with respect to the original proposed study and thus I had to change my original research questions, as mentioned in Chapter One. As a result, at the end of data analysis, I found myself having to be open to accepting and embracing how my original ideas and expectations completely transformed. I struggled with re-arranging my original ideas and pre-conceptions/ biases because I had no idea what the finding would be; nevertheless, I did manage to get through it (LeCompte and Schensul, 1999 vol. 5:68).
Happily, this process of being open to changing my original ideas on what my study was researching provided many more wonderful insights than I had expected when I undertook this research and yielded new understandings that required me to be comfortable with not having one answer to my research questions. It is by keeping in mind the above strategies for data analysis that I began thinking about which strategies I should use for interpreting the data.

**Approach to Interpretation**

Interpretation provides the meaning of structures in relation to existing or new theoretical frameworks and paradigms (LeCompte and Schensul 1999: vol. 5). To determine whether a new theoretical framework or paradigm has emerged, the researcher must examine their data analysis section in reference to their original research questions and their formative ethnographic theory (LeCompte and Schensul, 1999: vol. 5). The questions that a researcher needs to consider for the interpretation section are: Does the study enhance, confirm, modify, or disconfirm what is already known about the research questions asked in current literature? If so, how? Do these confirmations, negations, modifications, or clarifications lead the researcher to revise and reformulate the original research questions? Have new questions emerged? As a practitioner researcher, I did consider all of these questions while doing my analysis and beginning my interpretation section. As a result, I had to re-work and re-word my research questions. In fact, I found myself revising the original research questions a few times because after reading and revising the literature reviews and looking at the transcripts from the interviews, I realized through a process of constant comparison that there were bigger gaps that needed to be addressed while addressing my research questions. Some of the bigger gaps that went beyond the interview transcripts and the literature review are the divide between
theory and practice, the questioning of teaching being based on technique alone, and the broad understanding of what culture means. In addition, I had to create a space in my findings in which dynamic events could stand out and be shared outside of patterns that emerged, and furthermore allow for powerful missing questions and voices on what gets included and why in Initial Teacher Education (ITE) programs.

I learned by using the constant comparison method that multiple nuanced perspectives on teacher education programs can emerge from different stakeholders in education despite a mirage of agreement towards greater goals of creating equity-based lessons. Consequently, this study addresses multiple audiences that may be interested in this critical practitioner research study: teacher educators, teacher candidates, administrators, associate teachers, and scholars interested in ITE. As a result of doing the constant comparison process and addressing multiple audiences, I was able to “attach meaning and significance to the patterns, themes, and connections…explaining why they have come to exist; and indicating what implications they might have for further actions” (LeCompte and Schensul, 1999, vol. 5:5). All of the findings from doing the constant comparison method and addressing multiple audiences are presented in Chapters Five, Six, and Seven. In the next chapter, I re-introduce in more detail the context of the study and provide a brief biography on each of the research participants, which will then provide a backdrop for the findings of this study.
CHAPTER FOUR: INTRODUCTION OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS AND DETAILED CONTEXT OF THE DIVERSE SCHOOLS INITIATIVE

This eight-month long study (September 2010 to May 2011) involved teachers from four different inner city schools across Toronto. The following table will show the breakdown of how many associate teachers, teacher candidates and administrators participated in the study at each school site.

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<th>School 1</th>
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In addition, to get further background on the development and understanding of the Diverse Schools (DS) Initiative, I interviewed both instructors who led the monthly CRRP seminar series and the School and Society classes. Finally, I interviewed one faculty member at this Canadian university, who was involved in the preliminary stages of the Centre for Equity developing an understanding for CRRP. The majority of these interviews occurred in December 2010, when the first-term practicum placement was completed.

Amongst the research participants there was a great deal of diversity with respect to their ethnic backgrounds, years of teaching experience, and other life experiences that
impacted their teaching experiences. In order to capture a glimpse of this diversity each participant was asked to choose a pseudonym and write a short biography in which they could reveal and share information about themselves for the purposes of this study. The following paragraphs provide the biographies they wrote. The blinding of the university name and program has been done in the participants’ biographies, to protect the key informants of this dissertation.

**Research Participants’ Biographies**

*Associate Teachers*

“**Sara** is a thirty year-old female teacher, who has been teaching in Toronto District School Board for five years. She has worked exclusively in Toronto’s high priority neighbourhoods and is passionate about teaching students to both identify social barriers, while facilitating the acquisition of tools to break these barriers down. Sara grew up in Calgary, Alberta and prior to becoming a teacher worked in both recreational and residential settings with youth in the margins, namely those with severe disabilities and those involved in the judicial system. It is these experiences that ground her in the teaching profession, recognizing that education, when relevant and engaging, is the most powerful tool of all”.

“**Sam** is a young female who grew up in downtown Toronto. She comes from a divorced family and has four siblings. Her education was in public schools in downtown Toronto and has strongly influenced her passion for teaching. She is a passionate educator in a local board, and has taught primarily in the Special Education realm of schools. In her teaching, she promotes self-advocacy skills and social justice to her students, to ensure they have an active voice and the confidence to speak up for what they think is right and also what is unfair in their lives and in the world.”
“Jane is an Asian female, born in Brazil who immigrated here when she was three years old. She lived in Chinatown until she was six and then moved with her family to North York. Her low middle-class nuclear family consisted of her mom, dad and brother. She has witnessed and encountered different forms of racism both within her family and upon her family and in her own life experiences. Her parents struggled with finances and language during much of her childhood years. Her education was in public schools both in affluent and low-income neighbourhoods. She is now a passionate educator in the Toronto board at an inner city school. As well she is a part-time graduate student pursuing a Master’s degree in education, focusing on sociology and equity studies in urban schools. In everything she does and the conversations with everyone around her, she advocates for a relevant social justice perspective towards teaching, learning and living in hopes of creating a fair and aware school system and world. She aspires to one day win the Nobel Peace Prize and sees teaching as a stepping stone in achieving her dream.

“Janene is an intermediate teacher who grew up in a rural family in Southern Ontario. She is one of eight siblings raised alone with a single mother. Janene embraced education, she was the first to go to university, learn a second language and successfully pursue a teaching career. It was very difficult for Janene to get a teaching job after attaining her degree, so she went abroad to Northern British Colombia and the Republic of Kiribati to teach Spanish to young adults and them. Eventually, she returned to Toronto and found a job at an inner city school where over the course of many years she has taught everything except grade two and eight. At this same school she assumed many leadership roles within the school, such Team Leader, Literacy Tutor, Union Steward,
Member of Principals Advisory Committee, Mentor for New Teachers, and associate teacher to a vast array of teacher candidates from a selection of universities. Janene currently teaches intermediate students Language Arts, Social Sciences, and the Arts. She strives to have an equitable curriculum with a social justice focus for all students. Outside of school, Janene loves to travel and currently has visited thirty-three countries!

“After forty-seven years, Stella finds herself teaching at a Model Inner City School in Toronto. Life began for her in a small Ontario town. Her father was an international scientist and her mother was a visual artist. She has lived in Montreal, Toronto, and Devon, England. She has worked in Schefferville and Colombia, cooking and collecting katydids. Her research areas were insect ecology and evolutionary ecology. Teaching has allowed her to share her passion for math, science, and social justice issues.”

“Mara was born in Ecuador, and came to Canada at the age of one. She and her two sisters were raised in Toronto by both parents. They learned to speak Spanish in their household making them bilingual. Mara grew up in the north-west part of Toronto; she went to a Toronto District Public School for elementary education and then attended a Toronto Catholic high school. As a child, she remembers that her perceptions of race and culture were rarely addressed in school, and particularly were not addressed in curricular connections and in the context of the material she learned from (i.e. textbooks). Issues of culture and race were usually addressed by teachers in an effort to pre-empt racism and prejudice, but were not usually presented as a topic to explore, advocate for, and celebrate. She is now currently a teacher in the TDSB and seeks to integrate issues of social justice, diversity, and equity as much as possible into her programming. She
believes that as a teacher in a public school board, it is essential to stand up for all students in all of the diversity they represent.”

“Saida has been an educator for the past twenty years and has held several leadership positions including equity initiatives. She has won several awards for her dedicated volunteer work in the field of Anti-Oppression work. Some of her volunteer work entailed organizing musical groups, Black Pride events, and various Caribbean events. She also focuses on healthy living for youth in the development of transformative education. Saida is part of a large immigrant family who emigrated from the Caribbean in the late 1980s. She grew up in Toronto and was educated in the Toronto public education system. She has attained three university degrees all of which contribute to her knowledge in education. In both her day job and graduate position she advocates a social justice perspective towards teaching and learning; in hopes of creating more equitable schools and school systems.”

“Nick has been a teacher in an inner city school for ten years. His life experiences have directed his passion for teaching in an inner city setting. He believes that teaching to the student’s background, interests and culture are just a part of good teaching!\textsuperscript{55}"

\textit{Teacher Candidates}

“Drew is a minority teacher who grew up in Mississauga, and lived in Kenya during his high school years. Drew overcame many systemic barriers and developed a passion for education and attended Seneca College, Ryerson University, York University and the University of Toronto, where he earned two diplomas, two honours Bachelor of

\textsuperscript{55} I recognize that “just good teaching” needs to be further contextualized as it is too general. Based on this teacher’s answers in the interview, he seems to ascribe to teaching to the identities of students (racially and ethnically); otherwise they would lose interest in his class.
Arts degrees, a Masters Degree in Disability Studies, and is currently completing his Bachelor of Education Degree. Drew has worked and volunteered in a variety of part-time positions in inner-city after school programs, and has completed his practice teaching in both the TDSB and the Dufferin Peel Catholic Board.”

“Kathleen grew up in a large suburb north of Toronto in a middle-class, overwhelmingly white neighbourhood. By the time she began high school she had already considered herself an active feminist, a passion that has continued to inform the trajectory of her education through the completion of three degrees at the University of Toronto. She has always been looking for ways to bring together her triple passions of food, poetry, and education in ways that would allow her to empower young people and serve as an ally in the fight to make the Ontario public school system more just.”

“Lilly is a white twenty-eight year old female and comes from an upper middle class American background. Previously educated in Texas and Nova Scotia, her first exposure to equity work and true diversity came with her move into Toronto. She recently advanced one step further towards her dream of becoming an inspiring culturally-relevant educator by completing her Bachelor of Education at a Canadian university. Prior to that experience she worked as a yoga teacher and an advertising writer.”

“Alexandra is a young white woman from a mid-size city outside of Toronto. She comes from an upper-middle class family of four. Her parents who were secondary and post-secondary educated in Canada are politically educated immigrants from the English-speaking world. Her education was in public schools where the diversity was far less than she has encountered in Toronto classrooms, however she grew up with a social
justice mindset that was supported by cross-cultural experiences in Canada and overseas. She is passionate about global and local social justice and environmental issues. She is excited to teach about these globally and locally relevant issues in her own class after she has graduated from the faculty of education. Her experiences with the cultural diversity and range of student experiences in Toronto classrooms has made her even more passionate about the importance of positive, inclusive teaching and the potential of her students. She believes that in order to be a good educator she must teach for social justice and make a positive difference for all of her students.”

“Abigail is a twenty-something female from the suburbs of Toronto. She has one sibling and is from a middle-class family. Her love of education was sparked by her travels in Europe, which inspired her to learn about how the past has affected our modern world. In high-school Abigail felt she did not fit into the ‘mainstream population’ of her school and by the age of sixteen she decided to publicly express her queer identity. After high school she moved to Toronto, where she found a community that she began to flourish in. Abigail has completed over six years of post-secondary school and is currently working on her Bachelor of Education. She discovered her passion for social justice and equity work in her part-time job, advocating for health care for members of her community. Her passion has increased with respective to teaching and learning and she wants to inspire students to work towards social change and a more equitable future by beginning locally and then spanning globally.”

“Daniel is a young mixed race male who grew up between the remote Caribbean Island community and the United Kingdom (UK). He comes from a divorced family with six siblings. He was educated in private boarding schools and began working in education
immediately after finishing high school. He returned to his home island to work with a non-profit education out-reach organization operating in several local public schools for a year; before returning to the UK to pursue pursuing a bachelor’s degree in International Development Studies and Social Anthropology. While studying he began to examine questions of power, equity and social justice as they were manifested in his own community. He developed an arts and education program that has run every summer for the past five years. He came to a [Canadian university] to pursue a Bachelor of Education degree in order to augment his knowledge and get certified in the field of teaching. He desires to expand his knowledge and work into the mainstream school system.”

“**Elizabeth** was born in Toronto, and raised in a suburban town just north of Toronto. She is biracial and the oldest of three children in her family. Elizabeth has wanted to be a teacher since she was very young. She hopes to teach in an inner city school where she can infuse social justice throughout her lessons and within the school community.”

“**Danny** is a first-generation immigrant from mainland China. He is an only child who grew up in downtown Toronto and attended school in the public school system. With a background in Aboriginal Studies, Danny is passionate about issues of racism as a part of his social justice advocacy. He hopes to become a teacher with the Toronto District School Board.”

“**Lindsey** is a young female who grew up in North York, Toronto. She comes from a middle-income family and has two sisters. She attended public school and later graduated University with a degree in sciences. She worked for several years in outdoor education and later returned to school to become a teacher. Lindsey is committed to
teaching social justice and environmental issues and is passionate about creating more equitable schools.”

“Neha is a young woman of colour who was born in Toronto to immigrant parents. At a young age Neha was diagnosed with a learning disability. Neha's parents came to Canada to provide education and future opportunities for their three children. Her parents worked very hard to move their family's socio-economic status from lower class to middle-class. Neha grew up in an inner city neighbourhood, her family moved to a middle-income neighbourhood in her late teen years. As a young adult, Neha experienced different forms of oppression (racism, sexism, and ableism). These experiences have influenced Neha's desire to effect social change through her role as a teacher.”

Administrators

“Jimmy has been an inner city teacher for seventeen years and a vice-principal for six years. He grew up in Toronto. Jimmy believes in supporting his staff to gain insight on critical professional development that would benefit the whole school. He believes that in order to have a safe school environment, all teachers and administrators must be on board with an equity agenda in mind!”

“Watson has been a teacher for over fifteen years and a former consultant and administrator in inner city schools for almost five years. He gets tremendous satisfaction from working in schools. Watson feels very fortunate and privileged to be able to have this career doing important work which makes a difference in people’s lives, and he is pretty good at it but believes there is always more to learn. He finds working in an inner city school is always interesting and challenging!”
Course Instructors and Initiative Developers

“Ryan is a white male who grew up in Montreal and has spent most of his life in Toronto. He was brought up culturally as an atheist Jew and has two siblings. He is married and has three children. He has been an inner city teacher and administrator for approximately thirty years in the largest public housing community in Canada. He currently works at this [Canadian university] in the [Centre for Equity] where, among many foci, he co-teaches the School and Society course to the teacher candidates in the [Equity Option] and co-teaches the Culturally Relevant and Responsive seminar series to associate teachers. He is and has always been passionate about issues connected to equity and social justice in society and in the field of education.”

“Lina, Ph.D. is an educator committed to equitable experiences and outcomes for all youth in their formal schooling. She has worked in teacher professional development in the United States for many years and within the Canadian context since 2008. Her work relates to issues of race and other social identity factors in helping teachers to understand and engage in culturally responsive and relevant teaching, and practices which promote and support equitable educational outcomes in schools. Lina’s doctoral work focused on Afro-centric education, components of parental engagement, and countering hegemonic discourses. Lina believes that teachers do in fact have the power to change the world.”

Contextualizing the Diverse Schools (DS) Initiative

The DS Initiative and TDSB Context

The Centre for Equity (CE) developed the Diverse Schools (DS) Initiative for teacher education in response to concerns that often arise out of the disconnect between
teacher candidates and associate teachers around issues of equity during practicum. The DS Initiative provided a common equity-based language that promoted culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy (CRRP) for associate teachers and teacher candidates. As a result of providing CRRP as a common language base, the hope of the DS Initiative was to create a more inclusive curriculum for students in those classrooms (Ryan and Lina, informal discussion, 2011). The DS Initiative happened to come at a critical time at the Toronto District School Board (TDSB), as the Board had recently put out a draft report (Achievement Gap Task Force Report, 2010) in hopes of closing the achievement gap. It was in this context that the DS Initiative operated, although it was not designed specifically in response to it.

The TDSB data about the demographics in elementary schools was one important example of why the student community was important to keep in mind when teaching in Toronto schools:

The TDSB data makes it clear that who sits in the classrooms has changed dramatically over the last twenty years. Of all TDSB elementary students, 29% are White, 27% are South Asian, 15% are East Asian, 10% are black, 9% are biracial, 4% are Middle Eastern, 4% are South East Asian, 2% are Latin American, and 0.1% are Aboriginal (based on a “Understanding TDSB Students and Their Needs” 2009 from www.tdsb.on.ca).

The statistic that revealed that only 29% of the elementary school student population is White was very noteworthy when one considers how the curriculum was founded on White values and culture, which do not accurately reflect the students in the school! This was a very problematic set-up based on my teaching experiences with the TDSB, because

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56 Elementary school statistics are used in this study, as I currently work with those grades and see the statistics as accurately reflecting who is in my student community in an inner city school.
it sets up an irrelevant, disengaging and devaluing approach (which provides ideal conditions for deficit thinking to perpetuate) when teaching for the majority of the student population (which is not White). Another statistic that I would like to highlight, as reported from the TDSB data above, was the percentage of students who dropped out of school because they were disengaged in the Euro-centric curriculum and deficit thinking influenced schools.

Ryan and Lina (2009) contend that the drop-rate for racialized students is the highest because they are being “pushed-out” of schools. It is important to note the difference between “drop-out rate” used in statistical reports on schools in contrast to the “push-out” rate which puts an emphasis on stakeholders in education as being responsible for students leaving the school system. In other words, the problem was not the students who were disengaged by the irrelevant and devaluing school curriculum and culture; rather it was how we as educators were teaching them and how we understood them which was problematic.

The Framework for the DS Initiative

Ryan, Lina (2009) and their colleagues at the Centre for Equity (CE) have created a seven component culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy (CRRP) framework that can be utilized by teacher educators and teachers to think about what CRRP would look like across a school. “The theoretical framework for CRRP is based on the influential work by (but not limited to) Gloria Ladson-Billings, Geneva Gay, Jacqueline Irvine, Ana

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57 It is important to note, because Ryan and Lina requested to remain anonymous; to remain consistent any reference to their 2009 article has been used anonymously. This has been done to respect their feelings of vulnerability as key informants in this study.

58 “Push-out rate” is a term coined by George Dei, for more information please see his 2009 book entitled, “Power, knowledge and anti-racism education: A critical reader.”
Maria Villegas and Tamara Lucas” (Ryan and Lina, 2009). According to Lina and Ryan, the CRRP theoretical framework fuses culturally relevant pedagogy with culturally responsive pedagogy because both these pedagogies support one another and are connected. In the words of Lina “culturally relevant pedagogy is grounded in theory and culturally responsive pedagogy attempts to demonstrate some strategies and speaks to teacher dispositions and thinking that support some of the framework provided by Ladson-Billings’ (1994, 1995) work” (Lina 2011). Lina adds that “since both the pedagogies can lend their strengths to one another to fill their limitations, it is useful to merge the two pedagogies” (Lina 2011). “As educators we constantly feel it is appropriate to pull ideas from different theoretical work, and that is what we are doing in this initiative by putting the two pedagogies together” (Lina Interview 1:November, 2010). The theoretical framework of the DS Initiative was based upon the tenets of the CRRP framework (Lina, Interview 1, November, 2010).

The seven components of the Centre for Equity (CE) framework for CRRP are: (1) classroom climate and instruction; (2) school climate; (3) student voice and space; (4) family/caregiver-school relations; (5) school leadership; (6) community connection; and (7) professional development (Ryan and Lina 2009). These seven components have, in turn, informed and influenced Ryan and Lina’s teaching experiences within the initial teacher education program for the Equity Option (EO)\(^{59}\). The EO CRRP work emerged out of Ryan’s advocacy for a cohort specializing in equity-work for inner city schools educators. In addition Ryan and Lina’s professional development workshops for teachers and administrators informed their teaching in the EO.

\(^{59}\) The EO (which is a pseudonym) is one of the seven programs offered in the consecutive initial teacher education program at this Canadian University.
The DS Initiative based on CRRP supports teachers in their understanding of culturally responsive and relevant classroom instruction tied to broader systemic issues identified in the School and Society classes. In 2010-2011 lessons on CRRP were delivered to approximately seventy elementary school teacher candidates who were enrolled in the EO throughout their year of study in the Bachelor of Education’s School and Society course. The teacher candidates read a pre-selected set of critical readings, reflections, and assignments designed by Ryan and Lina (who were the instructors of the course).

According to Ryan “the unique angle to the [DS] Initiative was that the associate teachers who are working with some teacher candidates during their practicum underwent similar teachings of CRRP by us (the same course instructors who taught the teacher candidates)” (Ryan 2011). The associate teachers from the first practicum site received release time from their schools to share in an abbreviated version of the CRRP lessons (two classes, three hours in length) (Lina 2011). In addition, the trained associate teachers met with their teacher candidates together for a joint three-hour session at the mid-point of the practicum experience (Lina 2011). Thus, according to Ryan “the practicum provided a pivotal opportunity for associate teachers and teacher candidates to “implement” CRRP in the classroom setting” which would help create a collaborative equity-based approach to teaching racially marginalized students (Ryan and Lina 2011).

**Attendance of Research Participants**

It is important to mention at this point that in the Diverse Schools (DS) Initiative, there were approximately twelve associate teachers who were invited to participate in this unique experience. Ten of these associate teachers came frequently to the monthly CRRP seminar series and decided to participate in this voluntary research study. Unfortunately,
two of these associate teachers decided to drop out of the study for personal reasons. In contrast, there were approximately sixty teacher candidates, but only twelve of them were randomly chosen to be connected to the DS Initiative.

These twelve teacher candidates were to complete their first practicum experience with the associate teachers who participated in the CRRP seminars. Ten of these teacher candidates who were part of the initiative and attended almost all the School and Society classes in addition to the joint seminar session volunteered to participate in this study. The following tables (on the next page) illustrate the attendance of each of the key participants in the study. The reason why the attendance figures are important to share is that I believe it brings transparency to the readers of this study when they are reflecting on what claims are made by whom in the findings I present.
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<th>Course Instructors</th>
<th>Attendance at School and Society Classes and CRRP Seminars (17 in total)</th>
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These attendance records could have been influenced by a number of factors; personal illness, lack of supply coverage at their school, lack of interest, lack of need, and so forth. Nevertheless, the attendance records are necessary to note because they provide an insight on the degree to which key participants were exposed to the DS Initiative, which
should be kept in mind when reading their observations and remarks offered during their interviews.

**Structure of School and Society Classes and Seminar Series on CRRP**

In addition to the background information on the participants of the study, it is essential to give a structural overview of the School and Society classes and the seminar series on CRRP. Both the School and Society classes and monthly CRRP seminar series were co-instructed and co-developed by Ryan and Lina (2011). There were thirteen School and Society classes throughout the year, and there were eight monthly CRRP seminars. This study is based on eight School and Society classes and eight CRRP seminar sessions in addition to the interviews done (which were based only on Term One of the academic year) and critical reflections.

The School and Society classes were three hours in length, with one fifteen-minute break, and took place off-site of the university in an inner city community school. The classroom was not an ideal space for 70 teacher candidates due to space limitations in the public school being used. However, this school site was important because it was situated in an inner city community and allowed teacher candidates to spend time in that community. The School and Society classes’ attendance was evaluated. The teacher candidates were held accountable for reviewing academic readings for each class from their course reader; they presented on them to their colleagues and were peer graded on them in small presentation groups. The content in both the School and Society classes and the monthly seminar series on CRRP sometimes overlapped but not always. The School and Society classes went into more theory and had more time to discuss ideas in relation to how individuals understood them. The readings were an indirect reflection of the seven components in the CRRP framework because the main focus was on providing teacher
candidates with readings on critical social issues that then could be used to facilitate equity-based discussion (Lina, Interview Part One, 2011). Ryan (2011) claimed that there were some direct connections between the readings and CRRP framework:

For example, Gorski and Ruby Payne talk about how social class and deficit thinking totally fits into the component of care-giver relations, community connections and so on. So, the framework is something that helps you better understand/see the whole picture of how schools are now and how schools can be different. All of those readings are a part of that, they are not directly related to a point on the framework, but they support making schools more equitable (Ryan Interview Part One 2011:6).

After hearing Ryan’s explanation, Lina added: “[t]hat makes sense to me…if we focus on the critical social issues then we can make those links. Instead of the other way around, which we found that it was ineffective last year (an article for each component of the framework)” (Lina Interview Part One 2011:6). Thus, teacher candidates were expected to read these articles that focused on a critical issue, and then examine which components of the framework they related to. The daily routine of the teacher candidates I observed in the School and Society classes included reading the articles for that day, presenting their thoughts on the article in relation to the CRRP framework (directly or indirectly) to a small group, then sharing these ideas in a larger class group. In the large group, they reported back on different presenting styles, activities done in their smaller groups which they felt would work well with children at schools. Then shortly after sharing these pedagogical insights, there were intense equity-based conversations about the critical issues such as social class, race, sexism, aboriginal studies and so on. Discussions on special education and social hierarchies in schools (i.e. experienced teachers, administration, school boards) were often questioned and left for the teacher candidates to reflect upon.
The monthly CRRP seminar series classes were three hours in length with one fifteen minute break and took place at the university in spacious rooms with snacks to create an aura of professional development at the university. The seminars classes’ attendance was voluntary because it was a professional development opportunity for teachers. The associate teachers also did one or two readings for the year within the seminar session time frame. The opportunities to discuss readings were limited to fifteen minutes on average in small groups, with and additional fifteen minutes to report back to the big group due to the infrequency of seminars. The seminar series had several presentations, and some guest speakers who provided resources to associate teachers. For example, the first term joint seminar was a session that looked at ways to make Shakespeare more accessible to inner city students through an arts-based (visual and dramatic arts) approach. The guest speakers provided many resources to associate teachers to help them re-create this approach to Shakespeare in their classrooms.

The first two CRRP sessions provided information on the statistics of the Toronto District School Board and screened a video called “Eye of the Storm” for the associate teachers. Critical questions and activities were given to follow up on these activities. The content and activities in the first two seminars were replicated from the School and Society classes with teacher candidates. Nevertheless, varied discussions occurred in both the School and Society course and the CRRP seminar series due to power dynamics being different with a new audience and the tight time limits on conversations. In terms of equity-based projects throughout the year, there were many different projects assigned to the teacher candidates (e.g. presentations on equity concerns in their practicum schools, reflections on their journeys of this school year, equity project reports that required
identifying and explaining how to address equity issues, article presentations etc.). In the monthly CRRP sessions, the main assignment was a presentation through which associate teachers could address a school-based concern.

What is interesting to note about these two different contexts in which the Diverse Schools (DS) Initiative occurred is the difference in the power dynamics with respect to who was in the room (i.e. the associate teachers, teacher candidates, administrators, and teacher educators; also what was the racial identity makeup of the participants in either context also impacted the flow of discussion) impacted the level of comfort in the space and then the flow of conversation. I believe there were more power dynamics at play and thus greater discomfort\(^60\) for participants in the CRRP seminar series. The component that created an unspoken discomfort was the power difference carried by the professional titles of “associate teacher” and “administrator” in contrast to “teacher candidate” during the seminar series (field observations, 2011). The other piece was the context behind how participants were brought together in this DS Initiative. More precisely, while the seminar series was being offered to teachers who were being paid to be there and participate, the teacher candidates were paying tuition to go to their School and Society classes and attended joint seminars on a voluntary basis. As a result, the power hierarchy was clear in the seminar series as the discussion revealed more “air time” and attention given first to the seminar instructors, associate teachers, administrators, and then teacher candidates (Field observations, 2011). I wonder if this had to do with the evaluation piece that was connected to the associate teacher and the teacher candidate as the same teacher

\(^{60}\) The discomfort here is not intended to be negative, rather to hint at how power was challenged and did not remain stagnant in the hold of the instructors. Sometimes this discomfort was left lingering, and sometimes it brought about a generative tension which made participants reflect more deeply.
candidates who said little in the seminar series were very vocal about their opinions and thoughts among their peers in their School and Society class.

My further question about this discomfort and power dynamic that was invisible to participants who were more privileged by dominant norm but very present in both contexts for racially marginalized participants is: How did this discomfort impact the content of the conversations? The only contrasting perspective I had was when I interviewed each participant individually and heard their tensions, concerns, and insights on an individual level and what they revealed in detail was not the same as what they shared in the shared context of the seminars or classes. Thus, I am aware that power and the comfort level affected the flow and content of conversation, but I am unable to directly single it out as it is deeply embedded in non-verbal communications and a lack of communication. In light of having these general understandings revealed about the associate teachers, teacher candidates, and administrators; it is important to go into greater detail on their direct experiences in the practicum. In the following chapter, I will summarize the findings of the teacher candidates’ data and in Chapter Six, I will share the findings based on the associate teachers and administrators’ data collected.

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To gain further insight on what I mean by feelings of power and emotion and how they impact teaching and learning experiences, please see Megan Boler’s (1999) work entitled, “Feeling Power: Emotions and Education”.
CHAPTER FIVE: FINDINGS PART ONE: HEARING WHAT PARTICIPANTS HAD TO SAY

My member checks were done twice with Ryan and Lina (the developers of the Diverse Schools (DS) Initiative) as they were the key informants of this study. The findings that emerged out of the analysis are presented in the following three chapters. It is important to note that there was a general and genuine undertone to all the data that is everyone (regardless of their positionality and role) expressed an earnest interest in working towards making changes happen (to what extent is based on context and individual) but everyone is working. However, before presenting the findings it is pertinent to be clear about what the DS Initiative is with respect to its relational identity with the Equity Option (EO).

The term “initiative” was used to describe this project because the founders (Lina and Ryan) felt it was an appropriate label for something that is being used to initiate and facilitate change in schools through the initial teacher education programme. One of the reasons why the DS Initiative was carried out in the EO was because the EO was created by the Centre for Equity (CE). Interestingly, Ryan was the first director of EO when it was established six years ago. This initiative promotes an equity-based pedagogy (CRRP) which was grounded in connecting with disengaged inner city students, thus EO was a good fit.

In this chapter, I present the findings on the challenges teacher candidates had with the DS Initiative. Next, I share teacher candidates’ insights and growth-based narratives that were discussed during our interview. In the third section, I present the challenges that associate teachers and administrators had with the DS Initiative. Then in
the fourth section, I share the associate teachers and administrators’ insights and growth-based narratives. Lastly, in section five, I discuss how the DS Initiative influenced the teacher candidate and associate teacher relationship from the perspective of teacher candidates and associate teachers. Thus, this chapter is dedicated to hear the often silenced or missing voices of participant’s personal accounts of their experience.

**Challenges with the Diverse Schools Initiative from the Perspectives of Teacher Candidates**

As the Diverse Schools (DS) Initiative was in its first year, there were many learning opportunities for everyone involved in it. The DS Initiative had great intentions for creating equitable schools and was led by very passionate instructors. Both Ryan and Lina have an admirable ability to lead, encourage growth in their students and in their own work. There were a number of challenges that overlapped with respect to the DS Initiative and its purpose, expectations, and goals, the interpretation of culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy (CRRP), the content of the seminars, the new factor in the initiative, the implementation of CRRP, the limited reach of CRRP (not reaching special education learners and English Language Learners (ELL), the inclusion of self-identity in the initiative and so on. As a result, each of these challenges presented in this chapter has been shared with Lina and Ryan as opportunities for learning.

The first set of challenges that will be examined is in reference to the purpose, expectation, and goals of the DS Initiative, and how CRRP was interpreted by the teacher candidates who were research participants. The data used to articulate these findings are based on the interviews conducted with teacher candidates and associate teachers upon completion of the first term, which included their practicum time spent together.
Understanding the Purpose of the DS Initiative

According to the data, many research participants were not clear on what the DS Initiative was about due to some miscommunication or lack of communication from various parties\textsuperscript{62} (i.e. their fellow peers in the program, the course instructors, their associate teachers etc.). Moreover, some of the teacher candidates were not aware of there being an initiative because they said it was not mentioned to them during their School and Society class.\textsuperscript{63} For example, Daniel stated:

Well, I didn’t know there was an initiative and that our associate teachers came to the university, it was only when my associate teacher told me I had to come to the seminar the day before the seminar, I learned about it. I didn’t get any email but my associate teacher got it and she read it to me. And maybe they did tell the teacher candidates but we had so much stuff thrown at us that I don’t remember (Daniel interview 2010:7).

With this perception of the initiative in mind, Daniel perhaps predictably claimed that it did not influence his practicum experience; “[the initiative] was useless because I didn’t know about it, so I didn’t make any connections to it” (Daniel, interview 2010:9). This statement took me by surprise as it was strong, and the implications that emerge from it are stronger as they question the value of the existence and the influence of the DS Initiative. However, despite not knowing about the DS Initiative this teacher candidate was content because his associate teacher already had an “equity lens” on when teaching (Daniel interview 2010:9). Two other teacher candidates expressed the same lack of

\textsuperscript{62} This finding of not knowing what the DS Initiative is can be understood from the perspective of not being familiar with the term “initiative” or not being aware that this project was happening. Based on the interviews, I believe the latter is what the participants were stating because many of them later stated that deliberate collaboration on equity-based dialogue between the associate teacher and teacher candidate did not happen.

\textsuperscript{63} According to Ryan and Lina, this piece of missing information about the DS Initiative could have happened because the teacher candidates were overwhelmed with too much information in their ITE program; however it was mentioned.
awareness that there was an initiative; “I didn’t know about those associate teacher seminars until we came to just that one that was done together (i.e. the joint seminar). We (i.e. my associate teacher and I) never spoke about those seminars” (Alexandra interview 2011:7). Furthermore, Danny claimed, “No, I wasn’t aware of the initiative. I thought it was a one-time thing. So was that Shakespeare thing a lesson on how to make Shakespeare more Culturally Relevant?” (Danny interview 2010:4). So, it was evident that there was confusion for teacher candidates around the existence of and information on the DS Initiative and the role teacher candidates had in it.

Beyond the above four teacher candidates who were unaware of the existence of the DS Initiative, two other teacher candidates expressed a limited understanding of the purpose of the DS Initiative. Elizabeth stated,

I don’t know too much of the initiative. What I did know was that it was our associate teacher’s responsibility to attend monthly seminars. I was not aware that our School and Society classes were in line with their seminars (Elizabeth interview 2011:5).

The question that lingers from Elizabeth’s response is: Does this imply the influence of the DS Initiative did not present itself during the practicum placement or was it a smooth practicum because the associate teacher already had/or recently was developing their CRRP based lens? Ironically, another teacher candidate who was unaware of the DS Initiative stated that nevertheless, it worked out, as she and her associate teacher had great equity-based pedagogy conversations (Neha 2010). The following excerpt from our interview expresses Neha’s understanding of the DS Initiative:

Manu: What do you understand the initiative to mean?
N: I didn’t know there was an initiative. I thought it was just good practice
Manu: (Explained the initiative and how it was structured)
N: My associate teacher did not tell me about the seminars, but my associate teacher called it professional development.
Manu: (Continued telling about the initiative and how it aimed to develop a common theoretical ground between the associate teacher and their teacher candidate in hopes to create space for equity-based conversations in schools and their communities…)  
N: (Laughter). Oh, and I thought my associate teacher was just so cool. (Laughter) Those conversations were there, but I did not know they were connected to an initiative and that I was a part of the initiative! (Neha interview 2010: 6)

In other words, Neha learned “after the fact” that the conversations which she was having with her associate teacher were developed because of the DS Initiative. The irony, I find here, as the researcher who has inside information available is that Neha’s associate teacher did not attend half of the seminar series on CRRP, nor did he find the Initiative useful. This leaves me wondering if the equity-based discussions were present during practicum because of the DS Initiative, or was it because the associate teachers involved in it shared a pre-existing common interest in equity-based work based on their past lived experiences?

Another teacher candidate, Kathleen maintained that “[she] don’t know much about it [the initiative], beyond the fact that there were seminars that associate teachers attended. I did not know that beyond those seminars that there was an initiative” (Kathleen interview 2011:9). Thus, my data shows that some of the teacher candidates had no or limited understanding of the purpose of the initiative.

By contrast, there was a teacher candidate who upon my telling him about the DS Initiative’s purpose and goals (as stated in the interview) claimed that the initiative did not meet those goals or purpose. Daniel was shocked to learn about the initiative as he did not know it existed and thought maybe it could have been effective had it been introduced to the teacher candidates in advance. The following dialogue comes out of an interview done with Daniel after the completion of his first term at teacher’s college.
Manu: So with this understanding of the initiative, as described by me, what do you think the purpose of it is?
D: [The purpose of the initiative was] so that there is no disconnect between what the associate teacher and teacher candidate know about educational pedagogy that we are currently learning at [this Canadian university]. So there was a common ground, but that was not necessary with my associate teacher because we already had that outlook from the starting point.
Manu: If you knew about your associate teacher attending the seminars would there be a difference?
D: Did the seminars correspond with our School and Society classes?
Manu: Yes, there were some similar activities and lessons done such as the achievement gap presentation and the brown/blue eyed video followed by the same activity etc.
D: Had I known that, we would have had a conversation about it.
Manu: Would that influence your practicum?
D: Maybe, because she is a recent graduate…we had conversations about privilege, equity because she was already there. If I was in a class where the teacher didn’t think about these things, then I would be very grateful of the initiative because it provides that common ground for this discussion and understanding. I would have loved to know her opinion on the achievement gap and positionality of race and gender. We talked about the flower activity but that was by chance. I guess she knew that is why we had those conversations (Daniel interview 2010:9).

Thus upon reflecting on the above teacher candidate participants’ interview responses to what the purpose of the initiative was, it is clear that there was confusion, even though some participants benefitted from the initiative without being aware of it. The next section will present findings from teacher candidates who were aware of the DS Initiative, but unclear about its expectations and goals, who decided to provide their own hypothetical suggestions for why there was and needed to be an initiative.

Goals and Expectations of the DS Initiative

Abigail stated that the DS Initiative focused more on the inner city students. As a result, she suggested the goals and expectations of the Initiative were to deepen the

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64 Daniel states that both his associate teacher and he already had the “equity-based pedagogy” understanding from the onset of their practicum, and thus he did not feel the DS Initiative provided anything new. The question then becomes does the DS Initiative presume teacher candidates and associate teachers’ lack knowledge about “CRRP”?
thinking of the students while teaching them. She used the following example to explain her thinking:

A: I would question the students and put it on the floor and encourage them to build on it. I would require them to have deeper thinking and argue their point (Why is this the answer?). I didn’t tell them the answers, rather the students would take sides, debating and support their answers. Then we would sum it up and see if we could come to a common ground or agree to disagree. I was trying to pull information from them, I would find out what they knew. That was the hardest part - telling them the background information on what you were talking about. Is that a good enough definition for you? (Nervous laughter) (Abigail interview 2010:2).

In other words, the goal of the DS Initiative from Abigail’s perspective was getting the students to think deeply about “why” they thought their answer was correct. By contrast, Lindsey believed that it was not the deep thinking the DS Initiative was primarily concerned with but that “getting to know your students” was the main goal:

L: Getting to know your students (who they are? What their interests are? What is relevant to them?) that was what I really learned…otherwise the information will bounce off of them…they won’t care…and showing these students that I care…when they understood that I was looking for their best interests, that was when they opened up to me….it was an ‘ah-ha’ moment the [Equity Option] prepared me for that….some cues to look for…I hope this makes sense (Lindsey interview 2010:5).

Thus, two of the teacher candidates believed the initiative was built around the diverse students that they interacted with during practicum.

Professional Development and School and Society Course

The seminar series on CRRP was delivered primarily to associate teachers, with the exception of some administrators who attended, and the joint seminars, which were held with teacher candidates present. Nevertheless, one of the teacher candidates felt the

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65 Thinking more “deeply” could mean elaborating on how they got the answer; however does it mean that it is more critical and thinking deeply generates thinking about power and privilege?
content in the one joint session that was given on teaching Shakespeare in an accessible way in all classrooms was not contextualized with anything they had learned in their School and Society classes:

D: That seminar was unlike any class I have had at [this Canadian university]. It didn’t fit the pattern of what we learned in the School and Society classes. I don’t think it was something that would ever happen in our School and Society class, especially in our last class we talked about white privilege.
Manu: Please tell me more.
D: There was nothing about equity. It was just professional development on how to make the language curriculum more accessible to students. It was on Shakespeare and how to teach it in grade six. The seminar was useful (tap, tap) but it just didn’t fit (Daniel interview 2010:9).

It is important to flag that Daniel’s understanding of equity does not seem to align with the “equity”-themed joint session on making Shakespeare accessible or with his perceptions of the equity content provided in the School and Society course.

Alexandra (2011) thought that her School and Society classes were “just perfect”, because she was interested in social justice, and these classes reinforced the importance of social justice for students they would encounter. Lilly (2010) also found School and Society to be very relevant and useful. By having discussions around race and identity, she felt “empowered by that dialogue and brought it into [her] teaching” (Lilly interview 2010:2). Her interview echoed the strong connection and sense of professional development she experienced in the School and Society classes.

I come from a completely homogenous background, Texas and Nova Scotia…it was pretty much all white. In Nova Scotia it wasn’t all white, but very segregated. Most of the groups I interacted with were white. If I hadn’t had that background information on culturally relevant pedagogy, then I would not have even felt comfortable going there. In terms of my lesson plans, I did go there, in my lessons I used literature that was relevant. If I didn’t have the training with the [Equity

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66 The question this raises for me is: does this mean professional development is useful when there is no equity-based dialogue in it? Could this not then be argued about the “useful” Ontario curriculum?
Option], then I would not have been comfortable to talk to students about many things (Lilly interview 2010:2).

With this feeling of deep connection to the Equity Option (EQ) curriculum and growth expressed by Lilly, it was apparent there was a need for this work to be shared with teacher candidates who had not interacted with diverse students. In light of this narrative, I wonder what the role of Whiteness and White privilege is especially when people who have it, are able to be unconscious of other socially inscribed identities (Dei, Karumanchery, and Karumanchery-Luik 2004). George Dei, Leeno Karumanchery and Nisha Karumanchery-Luik (2004) explain this further,

[s]o, for the most part, while the racially privileged may recognize the existence of oppression, they often do so without perceiving the relational tissue that runs between that oppression and their power. Importantly, however, we must also take care to remember that the ability ignore the implications discussed here arises out of that privilege (Dei, Karumunchery, Karumanchery-Luik, 2004:83).

Thus, for Lilly to state she is being exposed to how to teach diverse students for the first time via the DS initiative, exemplifies her White privilege she has in being able to have unconsciously ignore or not notice race. Simultaneously, Lilly is to encouraged to continue reflecting on her privilege and its effects, as this helps the equity dialogue to move forward. Like Dei, Karumanchery, and Karumanchery-Luik state “[r]ecognizing White privilege and understanding its connections within the larger social relations of power is a basic step toward understanding racism and other forms of oppression” (2004:83). In other words, unpacking these notions of Whiteness, White privilege and White power would be necessary in order to being to do equity work in Initial Teacher Education program settings.

As a result, to gain insight on teacher candidates’ lived experiences (including their backgrounds), it would be useful and interesting to have them unpack and
complicate them. I think this would have allowed for the equity-based conversations to become more meaningful and provide a greater learning experience for all the teacher candidates and associate teachers.

**Interpretations of Culturally Relevant and Responsive Pedagogy (CRRP)**

The responses to how each teacher candidate understood CRRP varied; however, they can be grouped under three main categories: (1) they were emerging from a personal life experience, and thus they were able to make a connection to equity-based work, (2) an academic theory they learned about during their post-secondary education, and (3) how they see it “in action” in a classroom setting. Neha (2010) a young teacher candidate explains how her childhood schooling experience left a lasting impression on her:

Manu: Where does your definition of CRRP come from?
N: I gained that through my life experiences. I grew up in inner city, I am an ethnic female minority with a learning disability. (Laughter). Just growing up in that public system, and being on the inside of it...how much of a difference it makes when teachers address these issues. When I was diagnosed as dyslexic and dis-graphic in grade three, I was moved from the slow kids table to the regular class table. The teacher told the class that kids learn differently and that is how I was reintegrated into the group. So, kids didn’t say, don’t ask her she is stupid anymore, they understood that I had a different learning style and that is at a grade three level. So if they know, they can understand.

Manu: So the understanding of CRRP comes from your own life experiences?
N: Yes and a fire for it!

Manu: May I ask you how you interpret CRRP?
N: It means being responsible as a teacher to address the differences and celebrate those differences in the classroom.

Manu: May you please give me some examples?
N: I blanket it all together- race, religion, or ability. Everyone has different strengths and we should use that to make a community by sharing them; instead of looking at people negatively. If everyone knows about what is going on, they will reject or fear [or] they will embrace the difference.

Manu: Why do you think you have this interpretation, where does it come from?

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67 Again, the distinction between academic theory and how to use it in action in the classroom echoes the theory and practice dichotomy described earlier.
N: With anything, when people understand something they are more willing to accept it. (Neha interview 2010:5).

Thus, Neha (2010) used her experiences of elementary school to gain an understanding that when people understood her learning disability, she could be accommodated and not excluded. This is where her understanding of CRRP comes from. In other words, if stakeholders in education could understand the learning needs of children, then they could accommodate them and everyone would be included. In this particular case, does accommodating dyslexia mean that a teacher is using CRRP? Moreover, in the above interview excerpt Neha states “…as a teacher to address the differences and celebrate differences…” (Neha interview 2010:5) which is an interesting choice of words; why are differences celebrated as opposed to “regular” learning abilities? Does celebrating differences have certain implications on the student being celebrated? Does it create a label or stigma?

By contrast, Danny (2010) was able to understand and define CRRP but did not incorporate it into his practicum placement. Danny understood CRRP as doing “things related to student’s identity, culture, subjects that are related to that. Things that [students] can relate to more” (Danny, interview 2010:4). He claimed that the closest thing he had done with this definition in mind was “when [he] taught them about perimeter in math for measuring their house (how big a rug in their house) other than that I taught the origins of native people in Canada…I couldn’t see anything connect” (Danny interview 2010:4). As a result, Danny was able to define CRRP, but in terms of explaining how he gained his understanding of CRRP, he remained unclear.

Drew’s interpretation of CRRP has a focused approach on literacy texts and students. Drew said, “I think [CRRP] is to make teacher candidates engage with an
objective to make the teaching material relevant to the students, in particular with inner
city communities. The textbook is the example of classic troubles” (Drew interview
2010:8). However, Drew commented that the DS Initiative explains that racially
marginalized students are disengaged at school because they are not reflected in the
material used in schools, and as a result, CRRP is a way to create material and teaching
strategies that draw from students (Drew interview 2010). Interestingly, Drew’s
interpretation of CRRP (making teaching material relevant) is different from what he
understands to be the DS Initiative’s understanding of CRRP (making teaching material
reflective of students).

Elizabeth, another teacher candidate, built on Drew’s understanding of CRRP
(literacy and materials used in class reflecting your students) by extending it to visuals in
the classroom and the examples provided while teaching.

E: To me CRRP means (pause) diversity in all aspects, the way that you teach in a
multiple ways, the different ways you set up your classroom, the examples and
resources you use are representative of all different types of cultures, the people in
the text can be related to by a variety of students, everything you teach and talk
about should be relatable to all the students in your class (Elizabeth interview
2010:4).

Manu: Do you think there is a need to know this information on CRRP?
E: I think so, because it comes from being critical. Teachers don’t have to make
it so hard for themselves, they just need to be critical about the textbooks they use.
Also, it is good to know if they are able to address their students’ cultures, then
the likelihood of the students bringing up other cultures, races, classes is better. It
would be a growing conversation (Elizabeth interview 2010:5).

Within Elizabeth’s interpretation, it is pertinent to be aware of her explanation about how
CRRP emerges from being critical. What “critical” means to her is exemplified as being
aware of textbooks, content, and visuals in the room. Can “critical” be taken beyond this
definition?
Similar to Elizabeth (2010), Kathleen (2010), another teacher candidate understood CRRP as the content of teaching and pedagogy used in the classroom, which is “informed by a consciousness of what is going to be relevant and meaningful to those students. Really investigating the kinds of content and pedagogy they are experiencing at home and in their neighbourhood, and be conscious of that when setting up the dynamics of your classroom” (Kathleen interview 2010:8). She emphasized a constant connection between what is introduced in the classroom and the knowledge students brought to class (Kathleen interview 2010). When Kathleen was asked about where her interpretation of CRRP came from she responded:

K: A large part of it comes from our classes in the [Equity Option] - in particular, in our School and Society class, also from readings we have done from our class. We talk a lot about it in class, but I think it is one of those terms that if you ask different people in our class, you would get different answers. Because I am not sure it is super well-defined. I think for me, my understanding of it comes from the classes and the workshop my associate teacher and I attended. Also, my own reflections about how I see that fits with what I see in the classroom (Kathleen interview 2010:8).

As the interview continued, Kathleen disclosed that CRRP required teachers to embrace their students’ knowledge of “music, books, and speaking about their culture, language, neighbourhood [was included]…but then also give them experience about things outside of what they know…” (Kathleen interview 2010:7). I concur with this addition of adding new content for students to be exposed to other cultures and understanding of values because it is essential for creating connections across the diversity of all students (in the classroom and beyond) in the public education system. Without the extra exposure, students may have difficulty bridging gaps between different cultures and values and may not understand the importance of acknowledging difference and how to converse and learn while accepting difference.
Another teacher candidate, Lilly, was still developing and articulating what CRRP was, and this was a challenge for her:

Manu: How do you define or understand CRRP?
L: A...Umm....that is a hard question. I don’t know if I can sum it up, it is such a big topic. It is so immersed kind of like a lens, and I know it is not easy to establish that lens and it takes time to do that (Lilly interview 2010:2).
Manu: Ok. When you talk about Culturally Relevant Pedagogy, you talked about it as a lens- can you clarify this for me?
L: Yes. It’s kind of like (pause), I feel, I have a greater sense of the inequity that lies in a text or piece of writing, or even the way the lesson is designed...I am not sure how to alter the lesson design. However, in the other classes I am taking at [this Canadian university], I am looking for the inequities and where they exist. For example, I am taking a reading class and there was an article about a marginalized student (Hispanic) who was a struggling reader. They did a test on her about common title identification from a list they had and determined that she did not read enough because she did not do well on the test. The lens allowed me to look at that situation and think does this struggling student have access to these titles, with both her parents not being English-speakers, would she have been able to see those titles...so in this way the test was flawed (Lilly interview 2010:3).

Lilly’s (2010) example demonstrates that CRRP could refer to a lens through which interactions and society are looked upon. While I agree that CRRP is in constant re-development and emerging through different contextual situations, I believe it is necessary to articulate this and share personal experiences that shed light on what CRRP may look like.

It is important to note that in almost all the interviews quoted above, culturally relevant pedagogy was more frequently referred to instead of culturally responsive teaching or CRRP. This observation can be taken up to mean that the participants knew what culturally relevant pedagogy was (but then again, they did not use it as explained in the original works by Ladson-Billings) or it could be that the terminology for CRRP was not that important as their focus was more on what they were doing. I believe the latter
was true for the teacher candidates based on the premise that most of them did not know that the DS Initiative existed or what the purpose of it was.

This raises questions about who determines cultural relevance and relevant pedagogy, and from what context they are determining the definitions and understandings of these key concepts. Furthermore, if context (i.e. one’s lived experiences) creates the lens from which teachers understand these concepts, what happens if their context is based on deficit thinking about other cultures? This becomes dangerous and detrimental to students’ experiences in school and later in life as they encounter people from various cultures. Interestingly, these questions that were emerging in my mind were expressed with frustration by another teacher candidate.

At first, Daniel described CRRP as “planning and delivering lessons and activities that your students would perceive as relevant to their lives and that would be culturally relevant. And culturally responsive was taking a close look at what your students are interested in and responding to it” (Daniel, interview 2010:5). After offering this explanation, he quickly added:

This term CRRP has been thrown at us, along with other terms such as social justice and equity. Umm....I don’t think a clear definition of what this is meant to be was given to us, however, it is possible that it was intentional because they wanted us to figure out what CRRP meant for ourselves. However if we are all constructing what this concept is in sixty-six different ways (i.e. that is how many people are in our option), then we can get lost in our own thoughts and interpretations. So clarification about what this may be is important. What do they mean? What is the expectation of CRRP? (Daniel interview 2010:7)

These words spoken by Daniel provide great insight on the challenge that some of the participants were struggling with, but may have not been able to articulate. In retrospect, thinking about all the School and Society classes and CRRP seminars I attended over the course of a year, CRRP was never quite defined or explained. Could be that Daniel was
correct in assuming people were expected to understand it themselves? I am not sure in the end, according to the initiative, whose version of CRRP counts. In my mind, it is possible that CRRP was not distinctly defined because it may have been perceived as: (1) too prescriptive, (2) not acknowledging the different context of teaching environments, (3) leaving out the teacher’s personal life experiences and abilities they bring to the job, and (4) risking essentializing the group of students they aim to do this work with. By essentializing, I am referring to the possibility of defining a group of students by a cultural identity that may not be taken up in the same way by every student in that group. For example, if the educator believes all East Indian students are obedient, submissive, hard-working, family-oriented, frugal, and not into sports, these aforementioned beliefs/values may not be true for all students who are East Indian, even though their cultural identity is the same. Thus, stating a defined notion of any particular group of people by their “cultural or racial identity” may not provide an accurate understanding or portrayal of those people. I will discuss this argument on essentializing marginalized groups at the end of the chapter.

Inconsistent Content of Seminars

Daniel (2010) reported feeling confused about the inconsistency between the equity-based content in School and Society classes in contrast to what he experienced in the joint seminar on Shakespeare:

D: It was good because it gave you ideas of how to make Shakespeare accessible to everyone. It didn’t so much touch on equity, except when one associate teacher spoke out at the end and said it was interesting to see how a black teacher was chosen to play the fighting part and why that happened. I thought that was a very interesting point made. Also another black individual was asked to be the maid in the scene and that was also problematic, as that individual questioned the fairness and equity in that. When my associate teacher and I got back to teaching the next day we talked about these equity issues and concerns that were brought forth by
the role play. It was disturbing, and my associate teacher said these things do operate in people even on a sub-conscious level (Daniel interview 2010:9).

It is important to recognize that Daniel did not believe that his understanding of equity was demonstrated by this joint seminar on Shakespeare. Moreover, it is clear according to Daniel that the dramatic acting and role assignments in the seminar reinforced negative stereotypes that operated on a “sub-conscious level”. Daniel questioned the lack of consistency between his School and Society classes and the joint seminar.

As an observer in the joint seminar, I felt this would have been a good opportunity to discuss different understandings and interpretations of Shakespeare by the diverse audience in the room. Moreover, a discussion about the connections or non-connections between equity, cultural relevance, culturally responsive pedagogy and Shakespeare could have happened, even though it may have been uncomfortable. It would have been an interesting discussion. Furthermore, the particular incident of role assignment that brought forth a tension in the room would have been a wonderful opportunity to discuss how deficit thinking can operate even in the most critical or well-intentioned educator. Unfortunately, none of these learning opportunities were taken up, but they were noted during the member check in I had with Lina and Ryan after sharing preliminary findings.

Interestingly, during that seminar, many teacher candidates were baffled by this contrast in teaching pedagogy and also shared concerns of the inconsistency in the equity message. Some teacher candidates spoke to me about the drama activity as being deeply racist and others asked why teachers have to teach Shakespeare if their students were not European and were not engaged by this material (Field Notes 2011). As a result, I made a brief comment on the side to Lina during the break about the lack of equity in the
presentation, as I knew the atmosphere in the room was not supportive of the presentation.

At the end of the session, an announcement was made by Lina (2011) declaring that this seminar hosted by guest speakers did not go as they thought it would however, she thought it was a good professional session on Shakespeare given the imperatives of an Euro-centric curriculum. This open announcement helped rectify some of the buzzing whispers in the room and demonstrated the importance of reflection (Field Notes 2011).

*The Diverse Schools Initiative and Inclusion of Special Education*

One of the teacher candidates, Alexandra, was concerned about how CRRP did not directly address children with special education needs. She stated, “I felt like my lessons were not being understood by [the English Language Learners (ELL) or the Home School Program Students (HSP)]. The way I was doing it and when I was doing it - I didn’t see a way to accommodate these learners” (Alexandra interview 2011:4). Alexandra’s frustration was with how to modify the CRRP-driven lessons to a level in which ELL could participate and excel. She had attempted to “…implement differentiated instruction in class, but because she didn’t learn about it (and had only talked briefly about it in university), she was lost. It was a constant struggle to keep up with the kids who were bored because they caught on quickly and the kids who didn’t understand (Alexandra, interview 2011:4). It is important to note that at the end of the year on feedback forms from teacher candidates, some teacher candidates claimed that there was a lack of focus on special education needs, disability education, and First Nations People (Field Notes 2011). Although I acknowledge that the initial teacher education programme is only one year in length and it is very difficult to encompass all
the topics that teacher candidates would want to cover, there is space to question what gets prioritized in the teaching. Also, it is interesting to think about what CRRP looks like for ELL and HSP students: is it the process in which they are taught i.e. making the teaching accessible and/or is it the content of what they are learning? In other words, could educators teach HSP and ELL equity-based lessons and cater to their language and learning needs?

**Difficulties Implementing CRRP in all Subjects**

Another difficulty that teacher candidates spoke of in interviews and commented on feedback forms was the lack of concrete examples that linked CRRP to subjects beyond English and History/Geography. Alexandra claimed, “…it is easy to be culturally responsive in English and History/Geography but not for Math and Science⁶⁸. Our biggest lessons in Math were about a book or incorporating music in it. The people teaching it are more Language based” (Alexandra interview 2011:6). During her practicum, she was expected to teach Introduction to Early Foundations of Physics and Systems, which was heavily influenced by mathematics, and she didn’t know how to incorporate CRRP into math, except for in graphs:

> It is difficult to say that nothing can be done with Math…I guess I know it makes it easy to incorporate CRRP data into a data graph or talking about percentages. You can base it on failing rates that would be interesting to do and culturally responsive. But I’m not that great at CRRP to know how to apply it to teaching surface area and when it comes to that then, I think accessing prior knowledge is a good way of getting students on board (Alexandra interview 2011:6).

Alexandra desired more direction and guidance to be provided for incorporating CRRP into math-based teaching. Towards the end of her interview she added:

⁶⁸ This critical observation of there being a lack of CRRP-based examples for science and math is common and will only be addressed as more resources are developed for math and science, but should be made transparent in any ITE program.
I also wanted to do more in science. I guess I could have done something on First Nations people in relation to eco-system...and that would be indigenous ways of knowing, but I am not sure if that counts as culturally relevant because none of the students were indigenous people (Alexandra interview 2011:6).

Alexandra was finding it challenging to connect math-based and science lessons to CRRP. I recognize that every teacher is different, however if she felt that these examples were not provided to her in the Equity Option (EO), then I wonder how the other teacher candidates felt about it? Moreover, I appreciated Alexandra’s second comment on whether she should and could teach another equity perspective on a subject matter that did not reflect the identity of one of her students. This question is telling of her reflective practice and her desire to assist all the students in her class. As a result, she had a recommendation for the initiative:

> for the purposes of the practicum to show us how CRRP can be connected to Math and Science, and not the obvious ones like percentages and data management (nervous laughter). Or just clearly tell us that if you are teaching basic surface area of a rectangle maybe you just teach it and on the test incorporate different ethnic names of people. If that is all I have to do then I would it and not feel guilty about it (Alexandra interview 2011:6).

It was evident that Alexandra had the positive intention to completely infuse CRRP into her teaching, but she needed further assistance to determine how to do this.

**Direct Direction and Instruction for CRRP Desired**

Another teacher candidate had difficulty incorporating CRRP in general. He wanted explicit directions and instructions as to how to do this. Danny said that CRRP was great, “[b]ut you need to add concrete examples of these things, specifically to the lessons I am teaching. I am drawing blanks…my lesson was on Native Peoples origins…none of my students were Native Indians…so maybe more examples and yeah, I need it to be spelled out for me (Danny interview 2010:4). Furthermore, he said
classroom management was very distracting and needed full attention, consequently he was not able to give too much thought to CRRP and lessons (Danny 2010). Again, what is interesting to note is that the teacher candidates’ had their own learning styles and needs to be met while trying to understand and engage in CRRP. The missing piece for me is that in order to understand and use CRRP as a lens, it is important to understand one’s own lived experiences (including teaching and learning style). Thus using CRRP on the very teacher candidates one is teaching is essential when teaching and promoting CRRP to be used in the practicum setting.

_Hypothesizing CRRP_

Some teacher candidates did not claim they needed direct definitions of CRRP, but at the same time, expressed confusion as to when it could be “implemented”. Again, this concept of “implementing” CRRP into lessons was a theme that was present throughout the literature reviews, interviews, classes, seminars, and in conversation amongst the research participants in this study. The idea of implementing a theory conceptualizes theory as separate from practice, and it claims that theory is stable regardless of context. Both of these assumptions are problematic.

More precisely, theory and practice inform one another and teaching and learning in itself demonstrates this interdependent relationship. Without practice, theory is not informed and thus would be useless, especially in the realm of education where teachers want “new knowledge” to be relevant to their daily experience in the classroom (this can only happen if both theory and practice work together). I have explained why separating theory and practice does not make sense to me and I have explained in the interpretations
section on CRRP how the lived experiences of teacher candidates impact and define their understanding of CRRP.

Nevertheless, there was a question asked about whether a teacher should teach to a nationality that was not present in the classroom or if teaching about that absent nationality was a part of CRRP (Field Notes 2011). In response to this question, I have previously mentioned the importance of creating bridging between all diversities that may or may not be in your classroom, as the larger society (in which we all live) shows no limitations on diversity. However, I do understand the limitations of time in an Initial Teacher Education (ITE) program, thus I would suggest inviting the teacher candidates to use their interest to help guide and shape the program (in this case, the School and Society class).

Another teacher candidate stated that in his lessons he did the following when confronted by the racially stereotyped responses made by students to his lesson:

I showed them the history of social housing and how the people didn’t want these built, and they connected this to racism a lot. They used the word “coloured” a lot which I didn’t correct them about. I was not sure if it was associated with a negative or a positive term. I was not sure how to interpret this term. I pushed this further by asking them to look in their textbooks and count how many minorities they see in it? Of course there were almost none. Then, I asked them to look at a picture of the railroad when it was constructed and how white men were shown beside it. We later talked about with the history of the Canadian railway system (which was not built by the White folks). We always touched on these kinds of points every day, but I am not sure if this was considered to be CRRP (Drew interview 2010:4)?

Drew’s example demonstrated the difficulty he had with knowing whether or not his lessons had CRRP in them, and moreover how “coloured” should be interpreted. In my opinion, recognizing and collaborating with the natural discussion that emerged from a group of diverse students around racism and acknowledging the tension around defining
“coloured” is definitely equity-based work. Whether or not it qualifies as being CRRP is another question.

_The Process of Delivering CRRP Interrupted_

One of the challenges that Kathleen (2011) had was trying to cope with “implementing” the “CRRP values” she learned at teacher’s college while physically protecting herself. Moreover, Kathleen wondered if these CRRP-based lessons impacted her students. The following brief conversation conveys her concerns:

K: [One of the challenges I had was] trying to put into play the values we talk about in [Equity Option] about equity and not having a deficit attitude towards students, and at the same time, deal with the real and physical moments. How do those big ideas impact the student who was running out the classroom or hitting me? He was strangling another kid…then do we respond and how does that happen in the moment? (Kathleen interview 2011:4)

This excerpt stands out from all the data I collected as it brings forth the concrete struggles that teachers face every day while trying to teach the agenda of equity and the reality of violence (in this case physical violence) has on equity-based work. As a teacher, I do recall incidents of physical, emotional, and mental violence that were pushed on me, and I had no support system in place to deal with them. Unfortunately, I always felt isolated, despite my administrators being aware of the situation. Simultaneously, I always knew that the violence being projected on me was a fragment of violence that child or individual was going through. This insight always made me try and reach out to the child, providing them every support I could think of, despite the recurring violence because I knew it was a cry for help. Unfortunately, sometimes, despite my best efforts, I had to allow the student to sit with their anger or disappointment and work through it on their own; and I would pray that things would sort themselves out. I admit this is the most difficult thing for me to do: to sit by and wait for someone to help
themselves, but it is necessary in these situations as in my own life I have experienced this myself.

Thus, in hearing Kathleen’s case, I wonder where the anger or the violent outbursts come from and if it has a connection to the child’s life at home or to the child’s perceptions of themselves via the deficit lens that society views them from. Have they internalized deficit attitudes about their culture and self-identified with them? I worry about this because that means the individual is not defined by themselves rather through society or others (parents at home) who have a misunderstanding of them. Moreover, is it possible to use such violent outbursts as an opportunity to discuss the uncomfortable topic of the deeper repressed roots of negative experiences (which may be connected to deficit thinking)? Moreover, if you calm the child down by isolating them or taking them on a walk, how does this impact what the child feels or the problems he may be experiencing? How does this situation relate or come into conversation with CRRP? What can educators do to initiate a bridge between how we teach equity-based dialogue and who is in front of us, while accounting for all the unique needs and supports they need? The questions and reflections above with respect to Kathleen’s incident are ones that I constantly struggle with. I have not fully come to accept the role of having patience for self-struggle, but recognize that it is what needs to be done.

In addition to this example which explored the immediacy of Kathleen’s safety concerns, Kathleen (2011) pondered how race impacted her lessons and the delivery of them. As a white woman who was teaching predominantly Caribbean children, she questioned whether the physical aggression was related to race and power:
Manu: Could you please expand on the situation in which, your Caribbean students were asking you about being white, or questioning your authority and other students that were privileging you. Can you tell me more about this?
K: Yeah, it was interesting. I think sometimes the way they responded to my race depended on the situation and the student. Often it was raised as a point of interest or just odd. I am not really sure I understood of what that boy thought when he was questioning me and it was hard to get him to explain this to me as he was a four years old (Kathleen interview 2011:6).

Kathleen later expressed that she was worried about how impactful CRRP could be if race was such a huge obstacle. I wonder how issues of race cannot be a part of CRRP, since they are one of the main identity pieces in understanding students and how they come to understand themselves. Hence, I do not understand how race is a hindrance in equity work because I recognize it as a good place to start the dialogue, in a manner that works in the context of the class you are working in.

Kathleen also felt challenged by what she saw as a stark divide between the theory focus during her School and Society classes and the focus on the practical reality of the classroom during the practicum:

This [reflection] reminded me of the joke the teacher candidates had in our School in Society class which was heavy in theory…the divorce between theory and practice. Then the opposite happens when it was practicum and it was all practical and no theory (Kathleen interview 2011:10).

Again, it is unfortunate but this common view on the divide between theory and practice seems to have deep roots in the university and in the minds of many stakeholders in education, and it is problematic. One way to address this strong concern around theory and practice being divided is by acknowledging it and then discussing how and why this divide is or is not problematic from various perspectives.
Uncomfortable Moments: Struggling with Identity

One of the teacher candidates reported feeling uncomfortable being who they were in the Equity Option (in the teacher education seminars and sometimes in School and Society classes):

One other issue...challenge I had was trying to place myself (we have been having this conversation in the teacher education seminars) in the classroom. I mean being a young white woman, and their teacher is an older white woman, and both of us are white women. I wanted to have conversations about race and racism but it has been hard for me not only in the practicum, but also in teacher education seminars. It has been hard to say that I have a perspective that is different and it can be valuable because there are so many people from marginalized backgrounds that have such dominant voices that I don’t feel that I have the right to speak. They have more of a platform to talk about it, and so they do (Lilly interview 2010:5).

This is an interesting challenge. It articulates the recognition that one’s racial and ethnic identity can be read by people through deficit assumptions or stereotypes that may be used to essentialize a group. In this particular case, the concern raised by the teacher candidate claims that her racialized peers and students from marginalized backgrounds made her feel uncomfortable being “White” 69. While I recognize that this discomfort is disturbing 70 and it can be asked what are the complexities within holding a “White ethnicity/culture” (linguistic, lived experiences, class etc.) I wonder if it is generative of mobilizing a desire to redistribute White power.

I think unpacking the power dynamics implicit in being White is important and a discussion about “white privilege” (McIntosh 1988) is necessary to begin to build the

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69 Lilly is White, but I am South East Asian. I wonder did my cultural identity have no impact on her responses during the interview? If not, why?
70 Discomfort can be disturbing, but in my opinion, that is the point. It is at moments of discomfort that we grow, challenge, and reflect on next steps in life. As a woman of colour, I have lived in discomfort a great deal of my life, but have tirelessly tried to rise up to the challenge, whether it be to people in the same culture as me or from other cultural groups.
bridges between recognizing one’s power and privilege and being mindful of how one uses it, especially when working in context of marginalized students (a very vulnerable group of people). After unpacking and recognizing the power and privilege, it is pertinent that people with more power and privilege aid in developing partnerships with marginalized communities, thus making them allies in the struggle against inequities.

In the context of Initial Teacher Education programs, teacher candidates concerned about their power and privilege working against them while wishing to support students who come from marginalized backgrounds, should voice this concern. Moreover, such concerns should be encouraged and supported by teacher educators; otherwise it may create a tension and a feeling of guilt which is unproductive and harmful to all parties involved. I believe that speaking about these guilt-based feelings can bring about an impetus for building alliances in equity-based work, which would be the most productive action to result.

This experience of guilt and “not having the right to speak” in the Equity Option was experienced by Lilly during her practicum. She witnessed how an associate teacher of colour carried “more weight” in equity issues, and thus caused her to feel pressure to be perfect and not make any mistakes:

I’m sure you know that teacher across the hall from where I taught. I also worked with that associate teacher across the hall, and I used the book you read to us the first day “The Stories about Boys” because I loved it. I was using that in a lesson and I was reading, and the associate teacher was in the room on the computer and I was very aware of her strength as a teacher - she is such a radical teacher, passionate, and knows so much about culturally relevant pedagogy. I was worried about tripping up in front of this associate teacher, and so there was some pressure. However, I handled it okay because at the end of my lesson she did come over and tell me that she liked my lesson because of the literature I used and the perspectives I brought in (Lilly interview 2010:5).
Beyond this sense of pressure, Lilly believed that as a “young White woman” she did not have the same “pull” (ability to speak) on educational matters that involved diverse students as she would have had if she was a woman of colour. The following example demonstrates how Lilly and her associate teacher (another white woman) were not able to assist a marginalized student, but a marginalized associate teacher was able to help the student:

One thing she [the minority associate teacher] said that exemplified further thought was in relation to when my associate teacher and I talked about a black student whose mother didn’t want her child to be identified for special education, who was disengaged in class and was functioning at a grade three level. This student gave a lot of attitude to my associate teacher, but not to me, because I took a non-confrontational approach. So my associate teacher said we will have to get the other associate teacher across the hall to get this child identified. When this matter was brought to the attention of the other associate teacher, she said that you watch and see how I get this child identified during parent-teacher interviews. I asked her why she thought she could do this and she replied that she was a black woman, and she would use the traditional EID greeting when she met the student’s mom and that would create a trust between the parent and her. She further said that she is going to take this step because it will show that she understands this woman’s culture (Lilly interview 2010:5).

This experience frustrated Lilly a lot and made her feel that she was at a disadvantage as a white woman teaching diverse students. While I understand this perspective, I wonder how she could move beyond her frustration and develop a connection with the students based on creating safe and open spaces for dialogue on these sensitive and controversial topics. Would it be possible to talk to her associate teacher or Equity Option (EO) instructors about this matter? As the interview went on, it seemed as though Lilly self-reflected a lot on her concerns of white privilege and her interaction with marginalized communities:

I totally understand this [that scenario mentioned above] but I was kinda like…where does that leave me? She was telling me that it was not that difficult to
look up a traditional greeting to create that trust. However, at the same time, she had talked about her race as a way in, and I thought to myself, where does that leave me as a White woman? This was probably true and valid, but then I came away thinking am I at a disadvantage for being White? (Lilly interview 2010:5)

I empathize with Lilly’s frustration and desire to help in creating more equitable experiences for marginalized students and I wish that she could have openly discussed these frustrations at the university and with her associate teacher; as that could have provided a beautiful opportunity to develop alliances. Nevertheless, taking her own reflections to heart, Lilly commented that she was aware of her childhood experience being privileged and coming from a mostly homogeneously white community in which she only had one brief encounter with a minority person. However, she had a desire to connect with people of colour, and thus went into the Equity Option program to reach out and connect with her students. Passionately she told me:

I am aware that my understandings are rooted in my childhood experiences, but that is not very productive to think that way. I also, want to feel relevant to my students. I know that it is not all about race, but there is something about a teacher who can reflect the values and background of the students and I get that. Going into this profession when there are no jobs, knowing this bears into how people get hired is a huge challenge (Lilly interview 2010:6).

These reflections shared by Lilly echo the challenges that many young white women who wish to be allies for and with marginalized communities. The question that remains with me is: How can this gap be filled, knowing that it is important to have as many allies as possible in this struggle to create equitable schools for all students? These complex challenges shared by some teacher candidates provide a wonderful opportunity to learn about what we as stakeholders in education need to keep in mind while doing our daily work.
On another note, there were also some learning and growth-based narratives shared by teacher candidates, that may be used to fuel stakeholders in education to continue to persevere in enacting and promoting the equity based pedagogy work we do!

**Teacher Candidates’ Insights and Growth-Based Narratives**

One of the main themes that emerged from many teacher candidates’ interviews is that they found that the greatest insight and growth occurred for them while creating and delivering lessons. In particular, the growth narratives came from: how teacher candidates used their personal life experiences to build trust and bonds with students and how teacher candidates made lessons engaging for the students. In addition to the sharing of these narratives in this section, I will offer some questions and comments that emerged for me while analyzing them.

**Using Personal Life Experiences to Build Trust and Bonds with Students**

To connect with his students, Drew believed it was important to share his personal life experiences with them in order to gain their trust. He explained that his classroom was full of non-white minorities (mostly East African, some Caribbean, and a few Asian students) and since he identified with them, he was able to have conversations about prejudice with them. In particular, Drew spoke about age-ism and how this had the students engaged, as they could identify with many incidents in their lives where they experienced age-ism:

> I explained to them about my life. I spoke of my own difficult times but I never presumed to tell them about their own neighbourhood. In the second class, I told them I did not live in their neighbourhood. I thought bringing those human experiences to them, it was helpful. I was not mindful of my ego and they took me sincerely, and that worked out (Drew interview 2010:4).

In this interview excerpt, Drew explained how he was opening up to students about his personal experiences of how it feels to be discriminated against being young, and how his
knowledge was limited with respect to their communities. Drew recognized that by confiding in his students, he could help to make their relationship closer and more open even though this may have left his ego vulnerable if the students did not respect him and his honesty. Moreover, Drew believed in not imposing his experiences as a way into their lives, but rather sharing them with students in hopes that they would feel trust in him. He emphasized that caring for the students’ was very important in order to have the trust which he felt was crucial to teaching. As a teacher, I share Drew’s views on sharing personal stories with the students to build trust with them, however, more importantly; I believe these narratives help students recognize that everyone in their life has hardships and shortcomings. My intention behind telling my students these narratives is hopefully inspiring them to keep persevering and to have hope against hope!

*Engaging Lessons for Students during Practicum*

Lindsey reported that one of her greatest insights came from the units she planned for practicum on “persuasive writing…how to get your thoughts out in meaningful and sensitive way…teaching them the right tone…and learning from them what was important for them…who did they want to write to and what they wanted to write about” (Lindsey interview 2010:1). The most interesting part of the lesson was brainstorming what the students wanted to write about. After doing this brainstorming with her students, Lindsey said, “I got everything from government to taking up homelessness to whale concerns…one student said health was an issue, because of her mother was sick and they wanted free health care…lots of students jumped on board (Lindsey interview 2010:1). With such engagement and thoughtful responses, Lindsey thought they should go with the frequent suggestion on health care and write the government a letter about it:
We wrote a letter to the government together about health care...this was powerful for the class and I think the student felt supported by the class. We used a lot of examples of other famous people who used their words to effect change...stand by the pen over the sword...we showed visuals about this...individuals from their own different backgrounds, Gandhi, Martin Luther Kings (Lindsey interview 2010:2).

Thus, the incorporation of students’ initial ideas on what to write to the government allowed an opening onto different historical figures that students identified with, bringing the culturally relevant piece of theory alive (Lindsey 2010). The questions that linger in my mind are: Could these visuals have been accompanied by deeper discussions on why it is important to create change (even if it is only one person) and how did these individuals make change in their communities? Could change agents have come from the immediate student community?

Another teacher candidate, Alexandra (2010) used the current youth culture around technology, because many of them have computer skills and use the internet for socializing and attaining information. She based her lessons around technology to help keep her students engaged.

According to Drew, his greatest growth opportunity came from the Language Arts unit on global citizenship, which addressed equity, equality, and stereotypes. He provided his class with examples of his life experiences with prejudices and stereotypes, and as a result, his students shared their stories. After having this shared and open dialogue with the students, some critical reflections about “the origin of some of these stereotypes and how they have been influential” came about (Drew interview 2010:2). As a result of these critical reflections, the media, newspapers and talks about global citizenship were questioned and further inquired about. In response to these inquires, Drew asked his students “what can we do as global citizens on our own to make a difference in problems
of equity and stereotyping” (Drew interview 2010:2)? The following is Drew’s summary of the exchange of thoughts that this brought about among students in his class:

One student said, what can I do, I am only one person? I really liked this response because it gave me the opportunity to name historical figures who did make a difference by doing work on their work. I gave the example of Rosa Parks, Martin Luther King, Mahatma Gandhi and so forth, who made a change. I gave them these examples to think about. Then we talked about sweatshops, consumer power and how that affects how things are done. If we all, as consumers, decided stopped buying products produced from sweatshops and Walmart…and thus making the companies change their ways if they wanted to remain in businesses. I came out of this class believing that my students could make a change (Drew interview 2010:3).

By making the problems of equity and stereotyping concrete and alive in real-world examples and historical references, Drew was able to initiate the process of students grappling with the greater societal problems and how to affect them in a positive way. This example demonstrated equity principles of CRRP in action. It is very inspiring to hear that students believed they could make a change, despite the difficulties they face in their lives and schooling experiences. Moreover, it is amazing to hear how many educators provide students with a safe and encouraging space that motivates them to find their own strength and will power to create change! However, one quandary I am left with is how inspired were the students who did this project, and what did they learn from it? I know these interpretations are not available, but I believe it can be assumed that the students were empowered by recognizing people from their own culture as defining figures in the world.

Elizabeth’s (2011) lesson was on categorizing images of living and non-living things. Her students were given lots of images, and they were instructed to discover the two categorizes on their own and then explain why they grouped them this way, thus calling for higher level thinking: “This was successful because it involved more student
collaboration, co-knowledge construction, and the students were engaged and more of them talking and less of me - which is was what we have learned from the Equity Option as a useful tactic to get students engaged (Elizabeth interview 2011:2). However, I wonder how successful this was with respect to demonstrating CRRP as an equity-based lesson. I believe this lesson speaks to student engagement and interest, but does not go towards creating a consciousness around equity concerns.

Kathleen (2011) highlighted her kindergarten theme of shapes and colours, and how she took it to an equity level, by discussing race. She used the black book of colour and explored braille, and how to use all of our senses recognizing different abilities (Kathleen, interview 2011:4). In addition, Kathleen stated that her class:

...did a science experiment to show the colours blending, and I referred to each of them as scientists, and that was social justice-based. This was important because I wanted them to see themselves as capable of pursuing this career. We made coloured water, then we made it into play dough...during that time, I called them chefs. I wanted them to feel able to do anything and be anyone they wanted to be (Kathleen interview 2011:4).

Thus, Kathleen made a conscious effort to take her theoretical knowledge and engage with it while planning her lessons for the practicum, she said that this “helped [her] to be reflective and keep a state of mind to put the two aspects of theory and practice together (Kathleen interview 2011:10). Again, the theory and practice divide is apparent in this example, but at the same time, this example demonstrates the high level of consciousness this teacher candidate had and the high expectations she created for her students. Neha took a similar approach to planning her lessons and felt it was very successful as she too connected with many students.

In her interview, Neha (2010) described one of her biggest successes as a series of lessons she did on being a responsible citizen, which integrated literacy and arts. She
used images that were rich in meaning and reflected upon why we should be responsible citizens:

For example, an image of a child at a desk with thought bubbles that alluded to the hunger of their empty stomach (which had a bubble in it). This was to show the connection between hunger and education. It was up to the students to unpack the images. Some of the ads from United Way, where it is addressing senior citizens or new immigrants ripping out of their skin to deal with problems. Also, there were ads addressing the homelessness issue (Neha interview 2010:2).

All these images addressed some kind of inequity that was being experienced in the world. To solidify her lesson, Neha “hid the images but played the Oxfam clips, they were addressing different ways of representing deaths due to poverty after every three seconds. They had celebrities snap their fingers for every time someone died” (Neha interview 2010:2). To take what the students learned to the next level, Neha had the class “create a visual ad for the food drive that was happening in their school and then the second part was that they needed to write an article for a food drive. Both assignments allowed them to create a relationship between hunger and poverty” (Neha interview 2010:2). These lessons were engaging and meaningful to the students because they occurred in a continuous series (they were not a drop-in session), they were themed around hunger and what a global citizen could do to help fight against it. At the end, of all the lessons, Neha cut her waist-long hair in front of the class to demonstrate what an individual can do to help others who are in need (in this case, it was to donate the hair to “wigs for kids” who have lost their hair to cancer or alopecia). As a result, her students really understood that money was not the only way to give back. This was another

71 Part of the United Way commercials was this theme that senior citizens who often get neglected or disregarded will receive the opportunity to make their lives active and better with the public’s donations to United Way. Thus, there was an image where a senior citizen was sitting on a couch in a dark living room and then suddenly a more vibrant version of them comes out of the senior citizen, leaving old skin behind.
example of amazing and inspiring lessons that demonstrated the great strengths that lie in all of us waiting to be activated. This narrative provides me with a great deal of hope and inspiration as an educator, human being, and a life-long learner. I believe that the passion and inspiration in doing equity-work is personal. Thus, I do hope that all stakeholders in education are personally invested in equity work, and gain absolute delight in the small changes that they are able to make.

Lilly used her culminating activity, a poetry slam based on the theme of self-identity to help her draw out the diversity of the students. She scaffolded the whole unit: a lesson on rhythm, images, and writing a series of poems (Lilly, 2010). The students wrote amazing sonnets about themselves from another perspective, they wrote “Where I am From” poems, originally designed by Christensen (2000), and for their art lesson, they had to do a self-portrait, using charcoal:

The ideas they chose were so in line with social justice that it blew my mind. One girl wrote about homelessness, one boy who was in Home School Program (HSP) was struggling with writing, so he wrote an amazing poem on being labelled because he was in HSP. He said “they call you a cripple and pull out a wheelchair for you.” Another boy from HSP teamed up with him and they performed that in front of the class. Other topics were about the future and technology. Other girls talked about bullying and maybe racism, they talked a lot about stereotypes (Lilly interview 2010:4).

Lilly believed that these poems were a huge success because it got them “to understand the empathy and eloquence of their own classmates” (Lilly interview 2010:4). It is amazing that this narrative recognizes the powerful impact that a well-scaffolded and meaningful unit can have on students. It makes me wonder if her earlier concern about being “White” was a hindrance to her connecting to the students.

An interesting point to note is that although empathy is a necessary initial step to understand anyone (regardless of their ethnic or cultural background), it was not a
component of the CRRP framework. However, it was an activity that was shared with the Equity Option. Christensen’s (2000) work emphasizes a “curriculum of empathy” and she offers several empathy-building activities which I would recommend as a crucial part of creating safe spaces in any classroom. Without empathy, there would be a lack of compassion and understanding for different perspectives, if not a non-existent ability to embrace and appreciate diversity.

A lot of the lessons shared with me by teacher candidates provide a glimpse of hope and excitement into how much impact teachers can have on their students’ lives. I appreciate the honesty of all the teacher candidates who shared their learning and growth-based narratives with me. In hindsight, I wonder if these insights and growth-based narratives resulted from the Initial Teacher Education program, Diverse Schools (DS) Initiative, if they came from the lived experiences of the teacher candidates, or if it was a mixture of all of these elements. I hope that all of these variables have some impact and influence on how the participants experienced and learned about the deep relationships between teaching and learning.

Challenges with the Diverse Schools Initiative: Perspectives of Associate Teachers and Administrators

In this section, I present findings based on the individual interviews of eight associate teachers and two administrators. The findings are categorized into challenges that associate teachers and administrators had with the Diverse Schools (DS) Initiative and the insights and growth-based narratives that they shared. After discussing these findings, I present all participants’ perspectives on what the relationship between the associate teacher and teacher candidate was like for them and how, if at all, the initiative assisted and influenced these relationships.
Understanding the Purpose of the Initiative

One associate teacher articulated that teachers were sometimes “volun-told” to be associate teachers by their administrators without knowing they had been signed up:

…a bit of confusion about what this was, when it was, and I don’t know on what level this confusion was… a couple of people were asked by the principal to come to his office, and then some of us were told that we are going to represent the school, and then all of us ended up going…it was a jumble, we had people there who did not have teacher candidates that time around….I didn’t know it was connected (Janene interview 2010:6).

Janene’s statement of there being confusion demonstrates a lack of clear communication between principal and information on the DS Initiative, thus causing an initial state of not being aware of the purpose of it. With this in mind, I am left wondering: What power dynamics were at work when the administrator was “choosing” the teachers who would participate in this initiative and was the criteria for this choice making equitable?

Another associate teacher stated there was a lack of cohesion between the teacher candidates and associate teachers in the DS Initiative because she did not know what the others were doing. As a result, she offered a potential solution:

I think it is important for teacher candidates and associate teachers to know what the initiative is and what the goals are. There needs to be more cohesion between associate teachers and teacher candidates because my teacher candidate didn’t know anything about the seminars. I know one of the goals is to have cohesion using the resources and topics from the Wednesday seminars, but this was not happening. I think it would be more beneficial if the teacher candidate and associate teacher learned together in those seminars so they could bring it into the classroom (Sam interview 2011:4).

Sam’s interview excerpt highlights that there were valuable resources being shared in the seminars, but to make the resources more effective and help build cohesion between her and her teacher candidate, both parties should have attended the seminars.

Sara, an associate teacher, described that her experience with the initiative was
not helpful, despite the good intentions of the programs and the wonderful instructors.

She did not understand the “CRRP programme” and felt that it was disorganized:

S: I like it and I like the people, they are smart and knowledgeable, and I am happy to learn from them. I heard from my teacher candidate that same criticism about the programme being disorganized. Is there like a programme called CRRP or is this separate? I am totally confused. What is the [Equity Option’s] relationship to this programme? And I know the instructors who teach the School and Society class…but then, the person who came to watch my teacher candidate was not even a person from the option. She was brought in at the last minute to replace someone. The teacher candidates at our school were confused, so like…

Manu: So, I hear you saying that there is great deal of disorganization and confusion?

S: Yeah, but that was the same when I was there at [this Canadian university] doing the Masters of Teaching programme. I guess it hasn’t changed much. But I just thought this was so cool to have the teacher candidate and associate teacher learn side by side…work on a project or something together…we were going to do a project with the TC…but then we did Shakespeare and that was cool, but that was not said (Sara interview 2010:4).

Manu: So, how did the information from the seminars help you with the collaboration process between yourself and your teacher candidate.

S: It didn’t (spoken loudly). (LONG PAUSE)

I think there is potential in this initiative. When I got the initial letter that asked if I wanted to do this, I was a 100% on board. But the reality is that we went to three sessions before this interview, one with my teacher candidate, and it was all this literacy stuff and three hours of that, and my teacher candidate and I left thinking what was the point of that…I teach drama and that was not necessary…in terms of facilitating conversations and discussions on this pedagogy and issues, those workshops did nothing…but we had those conversations because of my interest and passion and clearly his as well, and so because of our nature we could have those conversations on teaching practice, classroom management, and why we do what we do…but was it because of those workshops we had those conversations? I don’t think so (said quietly) (Sara interview 2010:8).

Sara’s interview excerpt highlights the importance of recognizing what educators bring to the teaching field. She contends that she and her teacher candidate had good conversations on equity-based pedagogy and teaching in general because they had similar interests in social justice work and shared a passion for teaching. Interestingly, if this concern was raised in the seminar, and this became the beginning point for this associate teacher and the teacher candidate, what would be the new goals for them? Maybe
providing time to co-create a new resource that demonstrates an equity-based pedagogy or sharing challenges that have come up in their lived experiences while teaching? What would an inquiry-based pedagogy look like if it framed the DS Initiative?

**Goals and Expectations of the Initiative**

One of the associate teachers claimed that the purpose of the DS Initiative was in line with what they understood was the mission of the current education director of the TDSB (Dr. Chris Spence):

To me it seems to be all falling out of Chris Spence’s [i.e. the current TDSB director, 2011] pitch on kids need to see themselves in the classroom and schools. For example, it’s about giving kids context to the lesson…there really is no point of me saying how far is Disneyland, or how we can plan a trip to there because that is not reflective of them…so I use local things that are happening or things they know about in lessons, for example: you and your family get free passes to go to Wonderland and you have to get there by this time, how do you do that? In math, we use this approach to solve problems. So for me, culturally relevant pedagogy is making things fresh for the kids, making it practical, something they could see a purpose for (Stella interview 2010:5).

Stella’s comment demonstrates an associate teacher making connections between the current areas of focus for the TDSB and university initiatives. This would be an interesting relationship to explore more to see if the DS Initiative could be branched out to more associate teachers in the board. Moreover, it makes me wonder if this teacher who has worked for the board for many years finds the DS Initiative to be “making things fresh for the kids,” then would other experienced teachers (they need not be associate teachers) have a similar experience?

Another concern raised by one of the associate teachers was that the DS Initiative did not provide any new information to the associate teacher and the teacher candidate, but rather reinforced what they knew. Nick (2010) understood his role of associate teacher as being responsible for evaluating and hosting a teacher candidate. The monthly
seminars he attended were not providing any new insights to him, thus he asked in the interview what was different about this initiative, in particular what were the goals and expectations the initiative had for associate teachers? Moreover, the problem according to Nick was that teacher candidates had no idea what associate teachers were doing in these seminars. Thus, more communication and possibly having an opportunity to co-create the seminars would have been more beneficial (Nick, 2010).

Another concern with the content of the seminars in general was that they did not deliver what the overview outlined at the beginning of the academic year. Sara stated “in the first session, we were asked to share about problems or issues we might face, and I shared that like there is this idea that [teacher candidates] are in the Equity Option, they have low expectations, but they need and should have high expectations for the kids” (Sara interview 2010:5). Unfortunately, after attending three seminars (the completion of the first term), Sara felt as though that the problem she shared was not taken up but rather left alone. In addition, she claimed that the Shakespeare seminar was nothing new, she already thinks in this manner (making any text accessible) and questioned why she was in the DS Initiative (Sara, 2010).

Sharing similar sentiments, one of the administrators commented informally on the goals, expectations and purpose of the DS Initiative by stating that it did not teach them anything new, but it was good review of what kind of pedagogy teachers should be striving for to engage students. In particular, Watson (2011) had difficulty understanding the goals and expectations of the DS Initiative because no outline was provided and no opportunity to create collective goals was given:

I would like to know that the time is well spent at these seminars, that I am releasing my teachers for. Currently, I don’t think time is well spent with respect
to the two out of three sessions I attended. I want to see better outlines for what is expected from my teachers and what they are working towards. I would like to see the long-term plan of this initiative. Also, I want my teachers to have more input into the initiative’s goals. I don’t think my staffs’ needs are being addressed or their talented pedagogy is being utilized appropriately (Watson interview 2011:1).

It is important to recognize Watson’s emphasis on recognizing what teachers bring to the dialogue based on their knowledge and lived teaching experiences, instead of carrying out a series of CRRP seminars that have been pre-designed and pre-determined without any direct input from participants. Moreover, Watson expressed his frustration over the lack of organization and clarity in the DS Initiative because he felt valuable teachers were leaving his school and not learning much. Most of his teachers already were doing “CRRP”-based work that he was proud of and felt should have been shared, but there was no platform for this sharing or furthering the knowledge base of his teachers in the seminar series. In light of this sharing, I believe a peer-to-peer professional development design (e.g. The National Writing Project in the U.S.\textsuperscript{72}) or inquiry community (i.e. Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009) discuss this design) would help facilitate deepening the insights of participants.

Watson wanted someone to be accountable for ensuring that his staff would be using their time and skills in an effective manner while attending the CRRP seminars:

From a school perspective, I lose five of my teachers to attend these seminars and thus their high needs students are faced with supply teachers who are not well-acquainted with them. The school becomes chaotic because of the increase in supply teachers. To think that I send those five teachers away for almost ten afternoons - that is quite a lot of time they are away from their students. Then, there is the fact that teachers also need days off when they are sick, have doctor appointments and so forth. So, the point is that this initiative has to be very

\textsuperscript{72}For more information on this project please use the following link: \url{http://www.nwp.org/cs/public/print/doc/about.csp}
meaningful, time well spent in order for my staff to continue with it (Watson interview 2011:1).

In other words, Watson was not satisfied with what occurred during the two out of three seminars he attended. However, he did mention in his interview that the joint seminar on Shakespeare had nice ideas, but it was unfortunately not necessary professional development for his staff, as they were already doing this in their classes. Although I recognize the “nice ideas” in the professional development on Shakespeare, I wonder if it was in line with the idea of CRRP and equity principles. Alternatively, I wonder if these nice ideas are the stepping stones required before getting into analyzing power, privilege, and culture dynamics.

Short Professional Development Seminars

In relation to the seminar series on CRRP, many participants thought they were professional development seminars in short presentation sessions that were not interconnected or connected back to what they thought the initiative was about. In particular, Mara, an associate teacher, used the term “professional development seminars” to explain her understanding of the monthly CRRP seminars. She described them as being on their own and separate from any idea of an initiative:

Manu: You said that the professional seminars were good. Can you explain your experiences?
MA: Yes, we had the opportunity to theoretically discuss the need of culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy. It was an opportunity for teachers in different schools to engage in a dialogue that sometimes challenges us to (long pause) to look at the norms, and question what we do in the classroom. Where we are moving our students to and what our expectations are for them. How are we supporting our students, how we are accessing their skills and knowledge. For me it is always an opportunity to collaborate and engage in learning new ways. To challenge myself and my thinking (Mara interview 2010:5).
Evidently, Mara’s interpretation of the seminars being individual professional development sessions did not hinder her learning opportunities for collaborating with other teachers regarding the theory being discussed. However, I wonder from the standpoint of the DS Initiative, does Mara’s experience echo the goal and intentions of it?

Another associate teacher stated that the language around CRRP had always been around her, maybe not exactly termed the same way, but the meaning of it was shared in her teaching (i.e. having teaching strategies for diverse students that were consistent with an equity approach). In her own words:

[These sessions reminded me that the reasons why the students are in inner city schools may be different, but our expectations for them should be high regardless. I think this message was the one that stood out the most, this was helpful and we succeeded in doing this. If I was not reminded about the deficit perspective and my teacher candidate was not mindful of it, we may have fed off of one another and fallen into deficit thinking about our students. So, I was thankful we didn’t because of the reminders we had received in our prospective classes at [this Canadian University] and in this initiative. It was a good reminder (Jane interview 2011:6).

Again, according to Jane, these professional development sessions were “a good reminder” but did they further her knowledge or challenge her thinking? It is an excellent observation and insight not to have deficit assumptions about the capabilities inner city students have because of their social identity. How could the DS Initiative further this excellent insight to make it more meaningful to teachers?

Similar to the professional development understanding described by the above associate teachers, one of the administrators, Jimmy felt that the CRRP seminar series was like a set of individual professional development sessions, but he had wished that they would have offered a more continual flow of learning that was attached to theoretical learning:
As for the content in these seminars, I have attended all of them this year, October to May 2011, and I have noticed that there is an assumption about schools participating in this initiative, which is that they are not doing equity-based teaching already. Also, this initiative seems to be more professional development not research-based; there is no continuum in which ideas are built upon. I thought it would be learning on a continuum, not one-off professional development sessions that are different each time. In our school, we have continuous planning for book choice, curriculum development-based activities, and afterschool programs. I provided weekly release time for all of my teachers, to meet in grade groups to discuss literacy and numeracy and cross curriculum ideas/practices for the class – this, to me, is equity in action (Jimmy interview 2011:1).

Jimmy believed that these individual professional development sessions were great starting points for “…staff from schools that have not started equity-based initiatives in their curriculum delivery, unlike [his] staff who already had a lot of equity initiatives underway at our school” (Jimmy interview 2011:1). Jimmy felt his staff already did “equity in action” and had an expectation for the DS Initiative to provide a research-based initiative that was delivered in a series of seminars that built on one another. Thus, it seems as though both administrators had different expectations and understandings of the DS Initiative and felt frustrated with how their staff were being used in the “professional development” seminars as they knew their staff were already doing equity-based work. Again, I wonder if the seminar series allowed for peer-to-peer professional development or an inquiry-based approach that allowed the participants to co-construct the direction and agenda of the DS Initiative, would allow these concerns addressed by administrators be met.

Already doing “CRRP” work

Some associate teachers were comfortable teaching diverse students and were successful in doing the CRRP work already. How does the Diverse Schools (DS) Initiative address this important point on how to accommodate and facilitate the learning
of teacher candidates who already have background knowledge on equity-based pedagogy and consider themselves already to be doing CRRP work?

When I asked Mara what she had learned from the initiative she said:

MA: (Laughter) The initiative … (deep breath)…first of all, the initiative was about teaching a student from the [Equity Option] and [for me it was] attending the PD sessions… and that was a part of my learning opportunities. But, I have always engaged students by accessing their prior knowledge (pause), accessing their life experiences, (pause), bringing all of that into the program, and making the program engaging and relevant to them well before attending these sessions. Everything we do in the classroom has a theme of social justice, especially in Social Studies and Language Arts. There is always a lesson about making a change in the world where injustice exists. Also, we worked with global citizenship teaching students about knowledge, skills, and understanding how that one person can make a difference to empower them. (Mara interview 2010:5)

Again, it is interesting to note that Mara was aware that she was already using equity-based pedagogy in her classroom. The question that remains for me is: whose theories on equity-based pedagogy count? Is it all up to the teacher in her/his classroom, based on their own preferences and lived experiences? Or is it influenced by external initiatives, or a combination of both? To gain a deeper understanding of these questions, I asked Mara where her understanding of CRRP (in the examples of classroom teaching that she provided above) came from. She claimed that she had prior knowledge about it from the Urban Diversity Program at York (her teacher education program, which was all about social justice, equity and diversity). However, she said the seminars were “a good reminder” of what she already knew.

Another associate teacher also reported that she learned nothing new about teaching diverse students, but had hoped to learn about how to infuse CRRP into science and math. Sadia (2010) stated that she was aware that there was a clear theoretical component to the DS Initiative around CRRP. However, “when it came to practice, there
were not many or set descriptions or examples for any school, so we were a work in progress\textsuperscript{73} (Sadia interview 2010:1). Moreover, she stated that there was a comfort level maintained by the DS Initiative while introducing CRRP, but this was not necessary for her, as she needed no introduction to this work\textsuperscript{74}. The only thing that was new was that her teacher candidate was getting knowledge about CRRP and both of them were aware of it:

My impressions of this [CRRP], is that it is new work for us (teacher candidate and me) but not in my classroom, as I already practice it. [What I would like to know is] [h]ow does [CRRP] work with math and science, which are dry subjects? What does it look like? What does it mean? We need to think about how to engage young people? What does culture mean? What is relevant? Our perception of what young people believe is culturally relevant may not be the same as what they think. What do they need to stay engaged in learning? But it was a good start of the term (Sadia interview 2010:1).

Sadia’s perspective of wanting to learn how to apply CRRP to more subject areas helped provide insight on where she was on her journey with CRRP. It is clear by her questions in the excerpt above that she was ready to go deeper into the discussions of CRRP on a critical level, examining CRRP as a theory and as a practice. Again, this highlights the interesting consistency between how there was a theory and practice divide in the literature reviews, and also in the research participants interviews.

On the other hand, Janene appreciated learning about ways to make Shakespeare accessible to all students. When Janene was asked where her understanding of CRRP came from, she stated the following:

\textsuperscript{73} Sadia seems to echo the theory and practice divide in her narrative. As a result, I wonder how this impacts her way of using CRRP.

\textsuperscript{74} I find this notion of creating discomfort interesting and necessary in any equity-based work because the root of equity work is personal and analyzing personal thoughts, beliefs, and assumptions is difficult work.
[u]m…(silence)…uhh, I don’t know…I think it is part of who I am…the issues of social justice are things I incorporate in my teaching, a lot of things I learned and saw at the seminars…I missed one, the second one…it kind of reinforced what I do, and it is encouraging to hear that. Um … (silence)…I did like that um…one session with the teacher candidate and myself, when we went together, this was helpful to go over it and discussion…the last one they did the Shakespeare thing, and I have done my drama specialist and I do a lot of that in the classroom in all subjects, I see the value of that, it brings all students to life. But I haven’t used this, but I intend to, nothing else really jumps out (Janene interview 2010:5).

In other words, Janene had used different strategies which she already knew in conjunction with the reinforcing tools she got from the CRRP seminars to teach diverse students. The question that has already been raised by two other associate teachers was: Why are we learning things we already know? Mara (2010), Sara (2010), and Nick (2010) suggested that this was an issue, even though they all believed in the seminars as being a good reminder for why the work they do is important.

Mara claimed “the seminars have been in line with my expectations and how I see the learning process happening. Just lots of opportunity for dialogue and discussion” (Mara interview 2010:6). However, because she already had a background in social justice work she stated, “I am not sure if I am the teacher that needs to be in those workshops” (Mara interview 2010:6). Upon reflection on Mara’s questions about the purpose and the audience of this initiative, I would ask if the approach of the DS Initiative was inquiry-based (allowing the teachers to follow their own interests and create pathways for their learning) what would the initiative look like, sound like, and who could benefit from it? I think the audience could be the same and the conversation and learning could have been different if there was more space for inquiry-based learning to occur.
Another associate teacher stated the same concern about being the wrong audience member for the DS Initiative:

I don’t know if there is a way to communicate who they really want…it is like indoctrinating the indoctrinated…I thought it would be good for my administration to be there because it needs to be there….but to be away from my kids…to sacrifice….for a day for something that is lukewarm [because I know it already], yeah, not so much worth the time…. (Sara interview 2010:4).

In agreement with Sara, Nick stated that all the Wednesday sessions were interesting, “but they don’t help me in the classroom” (Nick interview 2010:2). When I asked him to expand his thoughts on this matter the following dialogue ensued:

N: A….they have interesting activities, but they almost pre-suppose that we are not thinking about those issues already…um…I thought initially, it was going to be about getting information from us, instead of those activities which are good reminders but… (Nick interview 2010:2).
Manu: Okay, so what are the pre-assumptions about?
N: Just the activities. I’m not sure why they are doing those activities unless there is some kind of lacking going on in schools. The teachers that come from our school … are solid teachers that are working well in this school, for this programme that would be a good resource to tap into, instead of doing activities that make us aware of race and poverty. You know I’m not always consciously thinking about it all the time, but I don’t think I neglect it (Nick interview 2010:3).

Nick (2010) felt that the seminar series did not provide any new insights on teaching diverse students in his classroom, and recognized CRRP theory as something he already does in his classroom:

N: I don’t think about that in terms of that acronym [CRRP] if I didn’t do those things in the classroom, I would be a horrible teacher…it’s important to do these things…
Manu: Anything else? From my understanding of what you said, your knowledge of CRRP comes from your own previous teaching and the seminars provoked questions for you?
N: Oh yeah, yeah. Anybody has to have it. It depends on what information and ideas you are presenting. Also, at the same time, thinking about your teaching all the time is important, to recognize when students are disengaged and why. And that one of the reasons might be lack of cultural relevance.
M: So you think CRRP, not that acronym particularly, but the work it does is part of engaging students?
N: It is that teaching has to be appropriate and fair (Nick interview 2010:4).

The seminars were not as beneficial to Nick as he believed that good teaching was made up of intellectual and relational work, and did not see it as “theory” per say. As a result, he stated that he would have preferred teaching in school with his students who really needed him (Nick, 2010). The next section builds on Nick’s response to what CRRP means, because it reveals how some participants defined CRRP in their own words.

Interpreting CRRP

Watson (2011) claimed his definition of CRRP was: “what was relevant to the student population, social justice in action, making cultural backgrounds more prominent” (Watson interview 2011:1). He believed because most of his staff was not White and the ones who were did not bring middle class values with them, and thus, there was already a strong CRRP feeling in the school\(^5\) (Watson, 2011). Similarly, Jimmy (2011) claimed CRRP was already practiced at his school as well.

Jimmy (2011) argued that he would define social justice and CRRP to be similar in their goals. He stated that “social justice was about issues that people had to overcome (i.e. Holocaust) but shared in the goal of struggling with inequities such as gender, race, sex, sexual orientation etc. like equity does” (Jimmy interview 2011:1). As a result, at his school they have an equity initiative named the “Pyramid of Hate” which has been established to deconstruct these inequities (Jimmy, 2011). Moreover, Jimmy argued that:

\(^5\) I am not sure how well anyone is able to decipher if someone else embraces equity values wholeheartedly; and I am uncomfortable with the idea that there is no space for improvement or deepening one’s understanding of equity work. I believe people and equity work are constantly a master-piece in progress!
CRRP is an approach that addressed the social justice issues and historical events as well, but with current ways of addressing them. So, pedagogy that is informed by CRRP is to provide access to things that are relevant to the lives of people of colour, and discussions of race, gender, ableism and so forth. CRRP is access to this current information and provides curriculum delivery approaches (i.e. textbook selection, activities in the classroom) and addresses the climate of the school. It also provides students with an avenue of asking questions that link to broader social issues (allowing them to develop their own social justice thinking). It encourages administration support. The understanding of CRRP is constantly open to discussion because it runs on a continuum (Jimmy interview 2011:1).

In other words Jimmy (2011) explained that CRRP was a pedagogy that was designed for marginalized and racialized groups to allow them access to relevant content, textbooks, activities, critical thinking, and discussions in school. In closing, he stated that his school and teachers are conscious of the CRRP approach because they already practice it, however they may not name it CRRP, but good teaching practice instead (Jimmy, 2011). It is important to acknowledge that Nick and Jimmy, along with some teacher candidates during their interviews referred to CRRP as “just good teaching” – which, ironically, is what one of the early pieces of Ladson-Billings work was entitled “But that is just good Teaching”. This leaves me wondering does the term CRRP have to be used to describe this equity-based pedagogy? What does CRRP really stand for, if most participants in this study believe it to be just good teaching?

Another associate teacher, Janene (2011) found it very difficult to give a precise definition of CRRP because according to her, it was so deeply intertwined with her everyday teaching practices:

Manu: What I would like to clarify is what do you understand CRRP to be, how do you interpret it?
J: Maybe that is just it and why I am having a hard time answering that question. I can interpret the words…but in the beginning meeting, we had the background stats of TDSB students, and I see that all the time in my classroom and me, and I often think what am I doing to make them feel, that you don’t have to be like myself to be important and relevant…it is all about the books we use, the movies
we show, the examples we use, and I think a lot about that, the students I pick, the books I put out, and the holidays we talk about...that is what I mean by using more of it. I think my teaching is always guided by that to filter out where I grew up where everyone looked, talked and acted the same in a small town rural area. I talk about how much I learned at this school, how rich the learning has been for me and how much I love teaching here. I have conversations with the kids... I have a friend who celebrates Eid and my students tell me more about it and we talk about this. Again, not just holidays to learn about their countries and their background. Even at the beginning of the year I have them make a bulletin board with an image of yourself to create this into your space. I use books with all cultures to reflect my students (Janene interview 2010:6).

In other words, Janene found a way to praise the community in which her students grew up and felt enriched by it. In addition, Janene contended that putting her diverse students at the centre of her teaching was the best way to make her teaching reflective and relevant to their lives. Using CRRP as a filter for teaching practices and the content used in classes seemed to be connected to her own desire to learn about different cultures. Her lived experience and how she grew up has a great impact on her outlook. I wonder if CRRP helps name what she would do naturally in the classroom environment due to her lived experience. Similarly, Mara shared sentiments about her students’ identities being the focus of her teaching due to her schooling experiences as a child in the public school system.

Mara acknowledged that CRRP was about honouring different cultures in the classroom, and bringing them into the classroom material and practices. However, she felt her joint seminar experience went against this understanding of CRRP. The following was her comment on her understanding of the joint session:

MA: The joint session [on making Shakespeare accessible] … was very specific, we could take the idea and apply it to any literary figure. I appreciated the idea of it, but I felt it was not one of the most informative or practical sessions.
Manu: Can you explain your thoughts a bit more please?
MA: It is philosophical for me. The idea of pushing the canon, getting the students to learn something no matter what. The idea that the canon is important
and needs to be perpetuated. I think we should question the canon and look for ways to re-invent that. Not to say that it needs to be toppled or re-structured, but I think it almost felt like this is important, no matter how they learn it, they need to. So to me it was sending a message that it was always important to teach such Eurocentric figures in literature.

Manu: To clarify, what do you mean by the canon?
MA: Eurocentric authors (Mara interview 2010:6).

Interestingly, some teacher candidates and associate teachers found this joint seminar to be a good form of professional development, but a few participants questioned its use for understanding equity in a diverse classroom. As previously mentioned, if the joint seminars created a space for educators to lead their own inquiry-based learning about the challenges and understandings they had about equity-based pedagogy perhaps the dialogue would be different and might possibly provide insight on questions or challenges that the participants had.

Jane understood CRRP as follows:

teaching that emerges from the students in your class, learning with them, using connections they are able to make, working with families and learning about their cultures before you can teach to them or about them. Knowledge that students bring with them into the class, values of family, ethnic and race culture, and how their families are made up” (Jane interview 2011:4).

In addition, Jane stated that her personal understanding of CRRP in the practices of her classroom has changed:

J: My understanding of CRRP has changed…last year it meant around students’ ethnic background and the foods that they ate. I find that the definition is more superficial. So this year, I am focusing on culture, to extend to the culture of the class, the ways in which we carry ourselves. Instead of anchoring it on countries and backgrounds. I am more focused on the responsive and relevant part than the culture part this year.

Manu: Can you please explain a bit more about the change in your definition?
J: I am not defining culture as ethnicity, rather about knowledge that they come with (values of their families). For example, we had read about sharing everything in the classroom, in the end of a story I read, the boy and the girl shared clothes. One of my students took that learning home and talked to their mother about that and she came back and asked me about this learning. She questioned this and
explained that gender differences are big in the Rasta culture, and then I had to
tell her the culture in my classroom is not supportive of gendered differences. I
told her that I had a responsibility to teach to that lens. I find that this year, parents
are more homophobic and that this example of questions was also rooted in
homophobia. Because it was asking for “girl” versus “boy” culture. This gendered
culture is brought forth through home values, television and media…which I can’t
control but I do deconstruct it when it gets into the class (Jane interview 2011:4).

With this new understanding of CRRP that Jane developed earlier on her own, she
encouraged her students to bring their “culture” into the classroom when they worked on
building castles (Jane, 2011). Moreover, Jane encouraged her teacher candidate to take
this approach to teaching in a culturally responsive and relevant way because it centred
around the child (Jane, 2011). The biggest challenge Jane had with this new
understanding of CRRP was seen in the example of trying to get parents on board and in
addition getting more experienced teachers to implement CRRP in their classrooms:

   It was harder to get the older teachers to follow this mentality because their ideas
   are not similar or not open to change, they are resistant to it. So it is easier to work
   with practicum teachers who are like minded (Jane interview 2011:1).

Thus, the DS Initiative provided Jane with the support she wanted to implement equity-
driven projects in her classroom. An interesting point to acknowledge is this age-old
concern about how to get traditional teachers to embrace new ideas and pedagogies when
they are too comfortable with the ways in which they teach and have taught for many
years.

Some Teachers Who Have Been in Public Schools for a While and CRRP

   The dichotomy between theory and practice was sometimes apparent in how
   “theory” was regarded by teachers. Jane, a young associate teacher, found it very
   challenging to “implement” CRRP in her classroom because she had to have her grade
group teachers (who had been at the school for many years) commit to it as well if it was
to be deeply entrenched in the grade curriculum. Nevertheless, she was able to maintain a strong equity focus by bringing topics on different family structures and the implications of skin colour into her daily teaching. Nevertheless, she expressed deep concern about how difficult it was to “implement” CRRP when there was not a lot of support or resources available for teaching in this way:

[s]ome older teachers don’t let go of old ways of photocopying worksheets or doing the calendar. Whereas I brought in social-justice minded read-a-louds. I tried to choose read-a-louds that have the big ideas of being relevant and being about social justice. It was hard, because older teachers used out-dated books like the “Gingerbread Man” and I chose a book that was not the same. I chose books that dealt with war, peace, and difference. The teachers were resistant to using these new books because they had not read them, or had not made follow-up lessons for them like they already have for older books (Jane interview 2011:1).

So, while Jane wanted to “implement” CRRP (since she saw it as aligned to equity-based pedagogy), the grade group she worked with did not this caused her a great deal of difficulty. She was thankful when she had a practicum student because then she had enough support to try her equity-based projects and ideas while dealing with the expectations of the grade group. Jane had a full kindergarten classroom of children, with several children who had challenging needs that would take up most of her time, and thus prepping and convincing the other experienced teachers became laborious for her.

Similar to Jane’s concern with some experienced teachers, many teacher candidates found themselves faced with the same problem, however this was with respect to instructors at the university and their associate teachers. This leaves me wondering about how to create a change in the way “things are done” by experienced teachers or instructors. How can their pedagogy be interrupted, challenged, and changed? I believe that creating awareness around new pedagogies and explaining what is particularly
helpful in them is important, as is modeling the new pedagogy and finally, providing support in as many ways as one can is essential in order to aid the process of change.

**Associate Teachers’ and Administrators’ Insights and Growth-Based Narratives**

Another interesting finding that emerged is that when associate teachers gave examples of their insights related to the Diverse Schools (DS) Initiative, they were mostly concerned with stories of their teacher candidate’s teaching practice as opposed to their own learning process or challenges. This made me wonder how the DS Initiative helped or influenced how the associate teacher’s way of teaching or understanding equity-based pedagogy? Furthermore, I wonder if the associate teachers reflected upon their insights from the view point of an evaluator of the teacher candidate, and thus did not examine their own actions.

**Associate Teachers Knew How to Deal with Difficult Behaviours**

Stella, an associate teacher, stated that one of the greatest moments she had encountered during the practicum was when her teacher candidate included one of the most difficult (in behaviour) students in her lesson. Stella was amazed at how engaged that student became and how easy it was to regain his attention by referring back to his past participation with the teacher candidate’s lesson. The following is a recap of this success in the words of Stella:

[y]es, well the students are really needy, they have a lot of social needs….it is hard to have a professional connection with them….often teacher candidates come in try to be the friends of the behavioural child, and this works during recess, but then when they come back into the class, the students don’t see them as professionals…and so it doesn’t work. She was able to negotiate this with the children, I will give you an example. One of the students who spoke about poverty and the question she raised was that “Should animals be kept in zoos?” And then one of my challenging students said, “Well, yeah, except not the whales”. So when it came to model writing, she used his idea, and reflected it in her lessons…she wrote on why whales should not be kept in zoos. So for the student, this was very powerful because he realized that something he said was
powerful to her, and he had become the focus of the lesson. So for me, you can be my friend and talk but that would not get you a lesson in the classroom, so what she did was far more than that (Stella interview 2010:3).

By using the student’s idea during the lesson on model writing, the teacher candidate demonstrated success, according to Stella. It was interesting that in this interview excerpt, Stella talks about students being socially needy, and in particular, a student in a general way of being “difficult.” Is this a common conception and how can this be problematized? Moreover, is this pedagogical approach of integrating and valuing a “difficult” child’s suggestion a form of good teaching, or deficit assumptions, or perhaps a bit of both?

Engaging Lessons and Activities

Janene reported that her teacher candidate delivered a wonderful and engaging activity that helped the students learn about international trade connections:

On the last day, she did an activity called “banana split”….there were banana workers that were shippers, traders, marketers, and they were to role play and decide who gets what from thirty cents…there was a discussion based on exactly who should get how much money. I wish it was videotaped, it was so dynamic…high level thinking, discussing, and arguing (Janene interview 2010:1).

This lesson was amazing because, according to Janene, her teacher candidate took her Janene’s constructive feedback on her previous lessons seriously. She had told her to make sure students had choices in doing activities in order to ensure that they had input in the lesson. Thus:

[s]he had provided them with different options for their presentations, and they all choose to the do the history of agriculture…the beginning of time to now, in an era of technology. Some of the kids did a song, a rap, we had presentations and we had a geography consultant in the building that day, and he came to watch along with the vice-principal of our school (Janene interview 2010:2).
The associate teacher was very pleased to see how this equity-based lesson on how money works in international trading engaged everyone. Moreover, Janene stated that her teacher candidate had a wonderful rapport, particularly with the English Language Learners (ELL) students, because she was interested in helping them. The success in planning, delivering such lessons in Janene’s opinion was because:

…the focus of social justice is in her teaching, I do a lot of that, and that is really important for students…but it is not something that I can teach the teacher candidate…but it was inherent that it was in her teaching, and that, for me, was very successful, and it really helped the students to think…we taught about bananas and fair trade, it really opened up the students’ minds (Janene interview 2010:3).

According to Janene, the dialogue was rich and deep among the students when her teacher candidate adopted a social justice lens while teaching. Janene’s comment that “…[social justice] is not something I can teach the teacher candidate” makes me wonder, if this is the case, then why is CRRP (which is heavily based in social justice equity studies according to the DS Initiative developers) being taught at the university? Further, did Janene’s teacher candidate adopt a social justice framework and an interest in teaching ELL students because of the DS Initiative, or was it her own lived experiences promoting this teaching?

Mara commented on her teacher candidate’s lessons on creating a utopian society and how to go about that in current times as giving her significant insights. Mara explained that her teacher candidate’s unit on utopian society brought about excellent discussions around the idea of democracy and how we collectively create a utopian society:

The idea was to get the students to understand that we all want our rights and needs to be met, we were doing a global citizenship unit, and we discussed how people don’t have rights everywhere, and that there are social challenges that
existed. Also, to have the students recognize that the rights they have today, people fought for them, and they are privileged to enjoy them. This process needs to continue happen in order to achieve a utopian society (Mara interview 2010:2).

Mara said the students in the class engaged in voting and creating a ballot system, and they understood the process of democracy and how difficult it can be, even with a few students. This makes me wonder if having everyone in the class participate in the activity provides an opportunity for all voices to be heard, even if the voices may be silent. Is further questioning or problematizing done in response? Do equity-based lessons assume that there will be a higher level of student engagement? If all students are engaged, is this a success in itself, if so, how does this reflect CRRP? Nevertheless, it is important to recognize that associate teachers were impressed by the level of student engagement in equity-based lessons that some of their teacher candidates prepared for the class.

The DS Initiative and Relationship between Teacher Candidate and Associate Teacher

This section describes the multiple ways teacher candidates and associate teachers understood their relationships. While doing the analysis, it became apparent to me that despite the one interview question which asked how the DS Initiative impacted the relationship between associate teacher and teacher candidate, many participants articulated what the relationship meant, without mentioning the DS Initiative - with the exception of one interviewee. Nevertheless, the main themes that emerged with respect to describing the relationship between teacher candidates and associate teachers were: collaborative effort, teacher candidates’ learning curves, different teaching styles, freedom given to teacher candidate because of a common theory understanding, and recognition of the value of teaching with humour.

Collaborative and Cooperative Effort
Five participants out of eighteen claimed that, to some extent, they had a collaborative relationship with their teacher candidate or associate teacher. Interestingly, not every teacher candidate or associate teacher felt that “collaborative” was mutually applicable. Also, it is important to note that “collaborative” was not the term used by all of the participants, but there seemed to be fluidity in the relationship.

Stella said that her interactions with the teacher candidate were collaborative because she understood the “practicum as not a time to teach the teacher candidate to do what I do, but to give the prospective teacher an opportunity to experience what teaching is like, to have the opportunity to ask questions and really, it is about me opening the doors to allow them to spread their wings” (Stella interview 2010:1). Stella and her teacher candidate took planning for each day one day at a time, despite the fact that the teacher candidate had every lesson on persuasive writing planned out in advance:

With her, we decided to take it as it came. We modified and adapted the program/unit she did on persuasive writing to accommodate it to what the students needed because there were behavioural problems amongst the students, there was cruelty amongst the students…and it is a difficult class to manage and so, we were able to take that unit to look at the idea of “paying it forward, empathy, and tying it together with the [Canadian School Board] character traits”. Initially, that was not where we were going with it, so we were able to adapt it instead of sticking to the pre-planned lessons….this was extremely beneficial for me because I was able to have my goals aligned with hers and her teaching practice (Stella interview 2010:1).

Thus, with the mutual agreement on taking the lessons one day at a time, the students benefitted, and the associate teacher was happy to see her class come together. Being flexible was essential in Stella’s classroom, and her relationship with the teacher candidate demonstrated this understanding. Moreover, the collaboration of the initial plans took place throughout the practicum, where thoughts and resources were
exchanged. In addition, classroom management went smoothly with two adults in the room: “It was like I didn’t have to worry about my teacher candidate when she was dealing with students” (Stella interview 2010:2). As a result, according to Stella, a collaborative and cooperative energy was present in the interactions with her teacher candidate. Upon reflection, I wonder if devising and engaging in discussion about the big ideas for lessons and team teaching of lessons would be a different form of collaboration that would have had an impact on the relationship? Sara had similar views to Stella’s conception of collaboration with her teacher candidate.

Sara had taken a teacher candidate from the Equity Option a few times prior to this Diverse Schools Initiative and she was proud to say they were all successful and collaborative. “We were able to plan collaboratively and engage the students” due to my teacher candidate’s willingness and eagerness to teach (Sara interview 2010:1). Another factor that made Sara and her teacher candidate’s relationship effortless was that they “…were politically on the same page, and so [they] hit the ground running, [they] had a similar pedagogical framework. It was evident from the very first moment we talked that we had both high expectations for the kids (Sara interview 2010:1). One example that illustrates this relationship follows:

On the first or second day there was homophobia in the drama class and I addressed it, and my teacher candidate gave me positive feedback on how I handled the situation…and that propelled a discussion on social justice in teaching and equity work in teaching, and how that looks in curriculum and classroom management. Keeping ideas of equity at the forefront…so I knew we were akin in that way (Sara interview 2010:1).

Beyond this fluid back-and-forth dialogue they had on equity concerns, Sara was able to help her teacher candidate further develop organization skills. Sara shared her lesson binders and assessment tips with her teacher candidate to offer ideas and resources on
how to organize, as she felt the teacher candidate would benefit from this skill. Sara’s ability to receive feedback and her teacher candidate’s ability to give her feedback is amazing as it demonstrates a break in power boundaries, an openness to learning from one another, and the safe space that both parties have created.

Another associate teacher, Jane, had a great time with her teacher candidate as well; however, she felt there was a shortage of time to mentor. Jane described the wonderful unit on shapes and colours her teacher candidate delivered and how it had a social justice theme threaded through it. Jane explained how she also taught with the theme of community throughout the year, and not as one unit. They made lessons relevant to the students’ lives because “we took the students outside to look at buildings to talk about their shapes, functions and connections they had with the community in which they live” (Jane interview 2011:2). They used books with a focus on equity concerns, for example, books that discussed biracial identities were used to enrich a discussion around race and inclusion. Jane mentioned how the class had a number of challenging students that made her teacher candidate’s days very difficult, but she advised “her not to take it personally because they were only four years-old” (Jane interview 2011:3). The “planning was collaborative and I shared my notes from the CRRP seminars I attended with her. Unfortunately, most of these interactions had happened after school, or through email” (ibidem). In Mara’s case, she claimed that both her and her teacher candidate reflected by providing feedback to one another on teaching practices and thus created future lessons together.

Mara stated that “ideas are generated better when there is collaboration between teacher candidate and associate teacher especially when the background and identities are
different. This process of collaboration in planning provides richer planning and lessons” (Mara interview 2010:1). She added that she appreciated teacher candidates coming into the classroom because they bring the latest in pedagogy and educational studies with them, which improves her practice. Mara noted that her teacher candidate brought history in as a hook into the lessons of equity being taught, and she thought that would be an interesting way to engage her students as well. There was a great deal of communication between Mara and her teacher candidate:

Manu: So was there a lot of communication about the lessons between you and your teacher candidate? 
MA: Yes, every day we would talk, I would provide feedback on each listen. I would write notes on my teacher candidate’s lessons and then my teacher candidate would always make notes, as well. We would discuss goals for the next lessons. 
Manu: Did you see your teacher candidate implement your suggestions? 
MA: Not really. I would see my teacher candidate try but whether or not it was successful is a different story (Mara interview 2010:3).

Therefore, due to the nature of open communication that took place on a daily basis both Mara and her teacher candidate were able to collaborate and incorporate their shared focus on equity into the lesson plans. In particular, the shared focus on equity in their lesson plans meant recognizing different perspectives on a common topic (in this case, it was based on historical events) and being aware of the power dynamics in the room and around the topic. Thus, the process of collaboration in itself was a demonstration of equity work in progress, as it blurred and challenged the hierarchy that often exists between the associate teacher and teacher candidate.

The following participant was a teacher candidate who provided her perspective on how she defined her relationship with the associate teacher as collaborative and cooperative. Kathleen (2010) was worried at first about working with an associate teacher
who had been teaching for three years because she thought someone with more experience might have provided more insight on teaching. However, she stated that she recognized how equity-driven her associate teacher was almost immediately:

At first, I thought I would appreciate someone with more experience, but then I realized she had a deep understanding of the scholarship (in academy) and that she saw teaching as an intellectual and professional was insightful. At the same time, she was doing her Master’s degree, she knew the same values of equity and social justice approaches. By the end, I saw this as an asset because I saw her struggle and knew I would have a similar one. She was engaged through different educational models and programs. However, she didn’t have enough time to reflect on balancing her life (Kathleen interview 2010:2).

The equity-driven teaching allowed Kathleen and her associate teacher to plan the lessons smoothly. Kathleen noted that sometimes her associate teacher even prompted her around equity dialogue in response to discussions of race: “Most of our conversations around equity emerged from other equity-driven projects she was involved in [i.e. The Student Engagement and Experience Development (SEED) at York University76], not from the DS Initiative.” (Kathleen interview 2010:3). Unfortunately, time was always a challenge to find to have these conversations, but nevertheless the planning was collaborative (Kathleen, 2010). It is important to recognize that Kathleen noted that most of her conversations about equity work and teaching were rooted in her associate teacher’s own lived experiences through the work she was doing outside of teaching. Finding the time to have equity-based conversations was difficult. The second way in which the associate teacher and teacher candidate relationship was described placed an emphasis on the learning curve teacher candidates underwent.

76 For more information on SEED please use this link http://www.yorku.ca/scl/d/organizations/services/seed-policy.html
**Teacher Candidates’ Learning Curve**

There were four participants who stated that the relationship between the associate teacher and teacher candidate was more focused on the teacher candidate. Three of these participants were teacher candidates and one was an associate teacher. It is important to note that the learning curve in all three cases had to do with improving on their communication and classroom management skills. What is interesting about these larger patterns is that the teacher candidate is portrayed as the learner, but what of the associate teacher? Moreover, this learning was in relation to classroom management. I wonder if equity looks like a quiet classroom, or a well-“managed” class.

Janene described her teacher candidate as “too shy,” but as a person, interested in learning how to teach. She remembered that her teacher candidate wrote down everything she said at the beginning, but by the end she became confident and did well:

I’m just saying, not to be hurtful…from the shy person to this confident person leading discussion was fabulous. There was a lot of gradual learning…and she would send me her lesson plan a few days early and I would make some suggestions to her over email…and then some days, we taught one lesson to two classes and I would suggest some changes to it before the next time did it…a huge transition (Janene interview 2010:1).

Thus, as a beginning teacher, her teacher candidate grew a lot because she listened to the feedback and used it in her next lesson. This supportive environment was also felt by Lindsey.

Lindsey said her associate teacher was “very supportive, kind, and generous with time, and stayed back with me after school” (Lindsey interview 2010:1). Providing time to Lindsey meant a lot. It gave her the opportunity to have her questions heard and “get things off my chest …she gave me freedom to run with whatever I wanted to do, and
gave me space” (Lindsey interview 2010:1). Thus, Lindsey enjoyed the freedom and support she received, and learned a lot from her associate teacher. Unfortunately, not all teacher candidates were provided the support and freedom to experiment in the classroom space that Lindsey was. One of the teacher candidates’ reported feeling intimidated by her associate teacher when it came time to try different classroom management techniques.

Abigail was paired with a very experienced teacher who had worked in the TDSB for numerous years. She believed her associate teacher was very committed to social justice, and thus they were able to speak freely about how to bring equity into the curriculum together. The only challenge Abigail had with her associate teacher was a lack of freedom in trying different forms of classroom management, but she understood that practicum was a temporary period of time and thus she needed to follow routines already in place:

I had to follow what the associate teacher did for classroom management… I was unclear….then she turned off the light….at first I spoke firm and louder….but she said to be firm. Me, coming in as a teacher in a classroom in which the teacher had established a community, trust, create routines with them, so I was more like sliding in and [recognizing] I can’t do whatever I want (Abigail interview 2010:1).

Abigail had attempted to ask her associate teacher if she could “initiate my own behaviour management” techniques but she said no, so that is why I understood and felt as though I was only ‘sliding in’ (Abigail interview 2010:1). Nevertheless, when it came to lesson planning, Abigail’s associate teacher provided a lot of constructive feedback:

77 The term “behavioural management” may be problematic because it assumes that children’s behaviours need to be controlled, as this was the prevalent insight I received in the interview with Abigail. My worry is that not all students express their ideas and learn in what can be described as a quiet and organized classroom. It almost seems as though there are some deficit thinking assumptions happening with regard to the students.
She would give me feedback. We would email back and forth. I would send her lessons and she would bold/italics feedback. She recommended to change closed-ended questions to open-ended ones. Also we would debrief at the end of the lesson. I would tell her what I didn’t do well and she would say no one knew but me, so I did a great job. She was very supportive, I don’t know what I would have done if my associate teacher was not supportive (Abigail interview 2010:3).

In addition to all this constructive feedback, Abigail stated that her associate teacher also inspired her. Abigail’s associate teacher “worked on Free the Children, and she helped students apply for scholarships because she saw the potential in them” (Abigail interview 2010:5).

Similar to Abigail’s associate teacher, Danny’s associate teacher provided a great deal of support around student behaviour and classroom management. Danny’s associate teacher helped him learn about certain behavioural students and how to deal with them by showing their IEPs to him. Sometimes she provided Danny with comments that criticized his work, and Danny “took her criticisms to heart and implemented them the next day” (Danny interview 2010:2). As a result, he learned “how important her routines were, when [he] adopted her advice and realized that the class worked better and this made [his] teaching better (Danny interview 2010:2). Thus, according to Danny, in this situation, the associate teacher’s methods for classroom management were provided to be replicated and the opportunities for taking risks were few due to several behavioural students in the room. For example, “she had bins for homework, and had bins for each class, and she had bins for forms. She also had lots of classroom rules. She had washroom passes and so on” (Danny interview 2010:2).

I wonder if associate teachers are too afraid to let teacher candidates attempt new classroom management styles because they believe their method is best, or that they know more, or if they are not comfortable allowing someone else to have that much
power over “their” class? What happens if the “real” teacher’s pedagogy is contaminated with deficit beliefs, values and assumptions?

Nevertheless, towards the end of this interview question, Danny stated that the most awkward situation he was in with his associate teacher was when she told him that “she did not want me to sit in on the parent-teacher interviews,” but to his knowledge most parents and students did want him there (Danny interview 2010:3). This last instance makes one question the authority an associate teacher has over a teacher candidate and the amount of pressure they can place on them. Moreover, it makes me wonder if associate teachers are insecure with their own teaching styles and connections to students’ families, and if so, then how does this demonstrate good role modeling for teacher candidates? Another insight about this particular case is that the associate teacher of this teacher candidate withdrew from the project and did not disclose why. This question of power and way of teaching is also discussed in the next subsection.

**Different Teaching Styles**

Lilly had a difficult time getting her associate teacher to embrace the constructivist approach and dialogue that she used in her lessons. She said her associate teacher didn’t take the same approach, rather “she read from the textbook, and used overheads often” (Lilly interview 2010:4). However, Lilly knew that her style of teaching was very engaging as the students participated in discussions a lot more and welcomed the change in their lessons. Lilly explained how she believed her associate teacher’s pedagogy was founded on deficit assumptions about marginalized students:

Another challenge was, at times, seeing how my AT reacted to certain situations. There was a black boy in the class who had a lot of energy and could not sit still. His classmates had learned to ignore him. It was extremely difficult to keep him on task. He was not a bad kid, he was a nice kid; he just really had trouble
focusing. His mother didn’t want him to be identified, so he wasn’t. He was definitely behind grade level, and my AT blamed his mother and his cultural upbringing for this (Lilly interview 2010:4).

Thus, Lilly had a challenging practicum experience with respect to classroom management and teaching style differences. Again, what is interesting and perhaps telling is that Lilly’s associate teacher refused to participate in the project due to personal reasons, hence no different perspective was offered on this point of collaborative and constructivist learning.

Similarly, Alexandra had difficulty with her associate teacher because of her personality being so strong that it intimidated Alexandra to a point where she did not feel comfortable asking questions. Alexandra related that, “[n]o, I wasn’t really great at communicating with my associate teacher. We talked and got along…it was challenging to me to communicate with her because of the power dynamics” (Alexandra interview 2010:2). By “power dynamics” Alexandra meant the amount of teaching expertise her associate teacher had and how she was very actively engaged in her profession, thus making her inaccessible and intimidating at times. Moreover, Alexandra had a difficult time finding any downtime during practicum because she was teaching all classes alone by the third and fourth week of practicum. The work was already determined for her by the first “step day” (i.e. initial observing day). She was handed the unit she was expected to teach, there was no discussion (Alexandra 2010). The unit given to her made her feel “overwhelmed and stressed out” because she was expected to cover it and also, use a “robot machine78” that the associate teacher had in the class (Alexandra, 2010). However, because Alexandra could not figure out a way in which to use the robot, she did not. She

78 The “robot machine” was not well understood by the teacher candidate and thus no further elaboration can be provided.
was unable to communicate her level of stress to her associate teacher because “she was a very direct person and I was not really a direct person. I didn’t know how to communicate with her, so I didn’t” (Alexandra interview 2010:2).

I wonder if the inaccessible associate teacher (according to Alexandra’s narrative) had expectations that were unrealistic. Or did she not have the time to explain how to go about actualizing these expectations, or a combination of both these reasons? Also, the fact that there was no real choice on the content that needed to be covered - was this symbolic of equity-based work? Moreover, there seemed to be an ongoing pressure to please the associate teacher, compounded because Alexandra was intimidated by the experience her associate brought. This last point was crystalized by the following dialogue:

Manu: Do you know why you felt that you couldn’t communicate with your associate teacher?
A: She is so passionate as a person. I saw her in small conflicts with other teachers often, and some things she confided in me because we were okay like that… but basically… I was thinking the whole time about my future job, and the evaluation and how the letter appears when you apply for jobs. Also, you know you don’t want to appear as you don’t know things so you try to be confident (Alexandra interview 2010:2).

Despite these challenges, Alexandra admired her associate teacher for her dedication to school clubs, infusing equity and CRRP into everything she did, and their passionate dialogues about race and ethnicity.

In the following cases, the associate teacher described how they recognized that the teacher candidate’s teaching style was different than their own.

Sam encouraged her teacher candidate not to read all the time, but to do more hands-on activities. For example, Sam suggested “…doing like three activity centres like
a learning circuit, using video and technology instead of keeping it dry with paper and pen”:

I wanted my teacher candidate to do more hands-on activities that were relevant to the students. This was my first time teaching science on rotary…it can be dry. For example, learning about the water system in the city or water system in their buildings would have been more relevant. Drawing connections and having students make inferences. I encouraged this way of thought (Sam interview 2011: 1).

Sam desired her teacher candidate to engage the students through ways that were relevant to their lives. Moreover, the associate teacher explained when it came time to follow through by collecting completed projects, the teacher candidate did not pursue students to hand in the work. The following describes how the associate teacher provided teaching suggestions to the teacher candidate, but they were not implemented:

S: Well, my teacher candidate had taken it on as her project. I was there to support her. There were not a lot of reminders or follow-through on the completion of the tasks.

Manu: In response to how did the teacher candidate take your suggestions, and how did you respond?

S: I told her in class “we can work on the survey in class so it is done during the school day and not on their own time.” Also, scaffolding the learning experience by modeling it to the students. Also, provide a chunking timeline for smaller parts of completions, so by the end of day one, this part should be done, and so on. For students who hadn’t done anything, I told her to write in their agenda, maybe provide them some afterschool assistance to make sure they understood the task (Sam interview 2011: 2).

Thus, although feedback on how to teach in a way that was more engaging was given, Sam’s teacher candidate did not implement it. This caused an unsuccessful practicum experience (Sam, 2011). It is important to note that the associate teacher tried to provide many learning opportunities for their teacher candidate, but the candidate did not use them. However why this was the case is undisclosed. Unlike this associate teacher’s experience, Nick had a teacher candidate ready to learn and take up his feedback.
Nick described his teacher candidate as “very energetic and very eager to hear my perspective…open to feedback…which was great” (Nick interview 2010:1). The concern that Nick had with his teacher candidate was that she was too quiet and needed to find her “teacher presence” and “walk the room” as she delivered lessons:

When teachers come at the beginning of the year, I try to make sure they learn to find their teacher voice, teacher presence, what you are comfortable with, how to keep kids on board, and how to get them back on board when you lose them (Nick interview 2010:1).

According to Nick, his teacher candidate did not have a strong or loud “teacher voice,” which was a part of his teaching style; however, he recognized that she was still learning. There was an associate teacher who believed that she provided complete freedom to her teacher candidate due to the DS Initiative’s common theoretical experience (i.e. CRRP).

*Freedom given to Teacher Candidate because of Common Exposure to CRRP*

Sadia stated that she had given a lot of freedom to her teacher candidate to teach in whatever way she desired because she trusted that CRRP would ground her lessons. She explained that she did not “spoon feed” her teacher candidate because she had confidence in her ability to teach. However, the only question left unanswered for Sadia was: What did CRRP mean to her teacher candidate? Upon reflection, Sadia felt she should have asked her teacher candidate about this because it would have made her feel more comfortable “…to allow someone to find their own niche in CRRP” (Sadia interview 2011:6). I think this is a crucial question because if Sadia’s teacher candidate didn’t understand CRRP or interpreted it differently from Sadia, then more discussion should have taken place. Moreover, Sadia’s thoughts demonstrate that her understanding of CRRP is that it is a theory which emerges from one’s own particular equity-focused niche, such as gender issues or race issues (Sadia, 2011). The last perspective on teacher
candidates and associate teacher relationships was given by a teacher candidate who believed humour made the relationship relaxed.

*Teaching and Learning With Humour*

The theme of teaching and learning with humour was only presented in one outlier case described by a teacher candidate. This is interesting to note because working with humour is offered by Christensen (2000) as a way to build rapport with all students, regardless of their racial or ethnic identities as it relaxes the power dynamics in the classroom. I believe that in this case, a shared sense of humour between associate teacher and teacher candidate who had different racial identities was helpful in building their teaching and learning relationship with one another. However, it is essential to note that while the teacher candidate reported this use of humour, her respective associate teacher did not mention it. On another note, it is essential to recognize that not all “outlier” cases were reported and this could be because of the difference in power dynamics.

Neha enjoyed working with her associate teacher because they had the same sense of humour; that is, sarcasm. She believed that “[b]ecause [her] associate teacher’s and [her] personality and organization skills were in sync [they] had a great practicum. It was a good relationship that folded into teaching very well and had a positive effect on teaching” (Neha interview 2010:1). According to Neha, the impact on teaching was positive because:

We had that banter between us (light-heartedness). I felt comfortable approaching my associate teacher about any teaching question. I felt that my associate teacher had gone through the Bachelor of Education program in our option because my associate teacher’s thoughts were very equity-minded and open-minded (Neha interview 2010:1).
Neha had a wonderful experience during practicum working with her associate teacher whom she described as like-minded. Humour was the crucial component to her ability to take risks in her lessons and learn from her mistakes (Neha, 2010).

In Chapter Five, it becomes clear that there are different understandings of the Diverse Schools (DS) Initiative from the perspective of teacher candidates and associate teachers. Also, it is apparent that there were some challenges and insights that emerged from this experience, which ranged from gaining perspectives on power dynamics, classroom management, defining equity-based pedagogy, and the complexity of teaching diverse students and the role and influence of teacher identity. The following chapter discusses the challenges that were beyond the scope of the DS Initiative, but greatly affect schooling experiences for diverse students.
CHAPTER SIX: FINDINGS PART TWO: PERPETUAL CHALLENGES IN TEACHER EDUCATION

According to participants’ responses about the perpetual challenges they experienced throughout the Initial Teacher Education program, many of them stated that the tight program structuring constrained their learning opportunities. In particular, the most common challenge discussed by teacher candidates was about the difficulty they had with the reality of the classroom and being in a teacher position for the first time. The data suggests that teacher candidates wanted longer practicum placements to gain a better insight on the flow of teaching. If teaching and learning is on an ongoing continuum that is organic, then I wonder, would it matter how much exposure or practice teaching is provided? Also, recognizing that all individuals are different; would it be possible to come up with a one-size-fits-all teacher education program, especially if it is one that promotes differentiated learning needs?

On another note, associate teachers only provided insight on perpetual challenges they had with respect to their teacher candidate. There was explicit no mention of the school structures, their own experience, or equity concerns, but there was indirect mention of lack of resources by associate teachers. Nevertheless, each of the themes that categorized the ongoing challenges are brought forth under the following sub-headings: lesson planning, behaviour and classroom management, personal struggles, lack of time, lack of human and physical resources in the classroom, power dynamics, and getting used to the classroom.
Perpetual Concerns that were voiced during Interviews

Lesson Planning

Lilly stated that planning for rotary classes was difficult because the class dynamics shifted and activities that worked well in one class did not necessarily work well in the other class. In addition, the numbers were different in the classes, thus this made group activities difficult to deliver if they were designed for a larger class size but needed to be implemented in a smaller class (Lilly, 2010). However, the greatest concern Lilly had was:

…the participation was uneven in both classes…there were strong students in both classes, but the smaller class didn’t participate a lot (only two students did). So, I decided to ask the question and have them think about it, and then maybe share their answer in hopes that they would participate (Lilly interview 2010:2).

Thus, it was challenging to deal with the constant flux in student participation, dynamics in the classroom and class size. This is an important observation to make about teaching and how flexible and adaptable a teacher needs to be, as the students in their class have great diversity in their learning styles. Lilly said she felt unprepared for this style of rotary teaching and lesson planning in general, explaining that “…I learned how to do a one-off lesson, but nothing about delivering a unit to rotary classes” and thus was frustrated (Lilly interview 2010:2). Lilly acknowledged her interest in the Diverse Schools Initiative, but also spoke about her anxiety working with CRRP:

I really like CRRP and the stuff we learned, but I also really needed the basic outline of how to lesson plan. Hands-on and tactical skills about lesson plans. I experienced a lot of anxiety (Lilly interview 2010:1).

It is important to note that this anxiety about not knowing “how to do” lessons and unit plans is endemic to teacher education, as “knowing and doing” deeply inform one
another, but are not one and the same. This anxiety felt by Lilly was also felt by Mara, an associate teacher, regarding her teacher candidate’s lack of understanding on how to assess and prepare lessons that met the students in the class at their level.

Mara stressed the importance of knowing where students are and planning a goal for them to meet, before planning a lesson:

The difficulty was that my teacher candidate had challenges remembering the process of assessment. The teacher candidate had the lesson plans, but it was not clear where the teacher candidate got the idea of where the students were at. Maybe it was my teacher candidate’s own understanding of where students ought to be (Mara interview 2010:3).

In other words, Mara was concerned about the teacher candidate not knowing the readiness level of the students; as result her teacher candidate had some students disengaged, despite the good intentions in the lesson planning they created. She stated it was unfortunate to learn that the lessons the teacher candidate was delivering were not consolidated because it was apparent that a lot of effort was put into them (Mara, 2010).

I think it is important to take a moment and step back and recognize different conceptions and values of assessment. There is a multitude of ways to do assessment for student learning, and stakeholders in education have different values they attach to assessment. In light of this, I wonder if Mara’s understanding and values about assessment are being used as the lens through which she is analyzing the practices of the teacher candidate. Moreover, if this is the case, I question the role of autonomy given to the teacher candidate and the missing dialogue around assessment. Knowing this insight, what could be done to address this concern? I would suggest more opportunities for collaboration between the associate teacher and teacher candidate may help; providing more examples of unit planning for rotary classes in the Initial Teacher Education
program in general, and possibly providing guidance to teacher candidates in small
groups to collaboratively build and practice delivering their unit plans. The other
significant challenge many teacher candidates had was with student behaviour and
“classroom management”.79

Student Behaviour and Classroom Management

Many teacher candidates in this study reported on the challenges of attempting to
deliver culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy (CRRP) lessons yet still observing
and having to deal with many difficult behaviours that existed prior to and during the
practicum. It is essential to note that “classroom management” skills and strategies were
the terms used by the participants in the study. Are these terms questionable with respect
to equity-based pedagogy? How does an equity-based pedagogy interact with power
hierarchies that maintain “order” in the class? Does the power always have to be top-
down from teacher to students? These questions are important to keep in mind when
reading the following narratives from the participants in this study.

Entering TDSB classrooms for the first time, many teacher candidates encounter
the challenges of learning how to implement pre-determined classroom management
routines or have to struggle through creating their own classroom management strategies.
The following are the perspectives voiced by teacher candidates on teacher candidate’s
classroom management strategies which were discussed by their associate teachers.

Daniel remembered when his associate teacher said it was important for him not
to raise his voice, but rather wait until the class was ready to listen. However, Daniel was

79I think “classroom management” is a term that gives the power to the teacher and
reinforces a mainstream rule that equates quietness as symbolic of a good classroom. This
is problematic because not all learners learn to the best of their abilities in quiet
classrooms.
frustrated because some of the students were not cooperating with him, and he wanted to get through the carefully planned lessons he had prepared for them. Daniel felt disheartened by the students who were disrupting the lessons and not letting the others who were engaged to learn. Danny had similar concerns, but acknowledged that in his class, about fifty percent of his students were on Individual Education Plans (IEPs).

IEPs are individualized education plans for students who have special needs and cannot function to their highest potential without the supports offered by the IEP. I wonder, if the IEP is designed to assist a student to work at their best potential, should one not be devised for every student in the classroom? On the flip side, I am also aware as a public school teacher that IEPs are not always used in the above mentioned ways (which is the way they are supposed to be used). Unfortunately, IEPs are sometimes created not in the best interests of the student, and have been used for other reasons, such as a punishment for bad behaviour, or a way to reinforce deficit thinking about a certain culture of students, or not dealing with deeper mental and emotional needs of a student. As a result of bringing awareness around misusing IEPs, the following narrative is one that makes me question the use of IEPs.

Danny was unsure of whether his class was the exception to the norm or if it was a regular class, with several students on IEPS. Danny was able to read the IEPS half-way through the practicum, and was given rules by the associate teacher about which students could and could not be paired together. Having all these rules binding him, Danny felt anxiety about how his lesson impacted these IEP students:

My associate teacher told me, that you have to remember these things [i.e. who goes with who] because you wouldn’t want to do something that would have a negative impact on the kids...so I wanted to be very careful...so it was not until the last week, I was not worried about the IEP students receiving my
lessons…throughout the whole time, I was afraid of how my mistakes would have a negative impact on the students…so I was not willing to try new things for the first couple of weeks (Danny interview 2010:1).

As a result of not feeling comfortable taking risks, Danny did not attempt to implement CRRP that much because he was in a constant state of unease. Again, are the authority and instructions provided by the associate teacher always in the best interests of the students or teacher candidate? This sense of instilling fear in a teacher candidate not only puts their autonomy in chains, but demonstrates how an associate teacher can impose their views and values without allowing space for discussion. Alternatively, I think there could be a dialogue on why certain directions have been provided for students in the class by the associate teacher, thus creating less apprehensiveness and conflict. Perhaps an open-minded dialogue during CRRP seminars that invites the teacher candidate’s perspective based on the experiences they have had with the students would be beneficial to both the associate teacher and the teacher candidate. Such a dialogue would offer different insights on the matter and problematize any deficit assumptions or misuses of IEPs.

Alexandra, another teacher candidate, had difficulties encouraging her class to complete work because students withdrew from completing classwork and participating in class discussion, despite her efforts to offer extra help. Alexandra claimed that there were few students with behavioural issues in her class, but they made her job sometimes very difficult, even when she tried to help them after school. The question that emerges from such an observation is: How does equity-based pedagogy address “behavioural” students? If CRRP does not address “difficult” students, then how can it benefit the
diverse needs of students? How does an educator interject with CRRP-based lessons when the students are not listening to the teacher or hearing the lesson?\(^{80}\)

Alexandra reported that she did not have the training for dealing with this lack of motivation to do work that some students displayed. Moreover, when Alexandra got to know the students better, she realized the potential of one particular boy whom she advocated against getting a behavioural label. Unfortunately, the administration at that school did not provide a time or a date to meet with the classroom teacher and herself with regard to the student’s behaviour; rather the child was spoken about as a “behavioural minority boy” that needed an IEP. If there is no communication between administration and the classroom teachers, then based on what variables is the student being “identified” as behavioural?

Drew, another teacher candidate, was bothered by the IEP system in place at schools as well. Drew complained that “so many students were getting IEPs when they didn’t need them with respect to their learning abilities, but rather it seemed to be that they were being judged by: disengaged attitudes, personality differences with their teachers, or it was just a question of their relationship with their teacher” (Drew interview 2010:2). He did not understand why the IEP system was being misused to deal with students who were disengaged. From his personal practicum experience with respect to dealing with classroom management, Drew notes:

I found there is a way to do classroom management and keep the class in line, but I realized that you could be very strict about it, meaning you would have to be really hard on some students who did not engage or tend not to focus in the way that class management is set out. Unfortunately, those students then would be...

\(^{80}\) It is important to note, these are inquiries of mine that go beyond the DS Initiative and are meant to call attention to concerns in ITE programs focused on equity.
secluded and as a result, start to resent you, and so this idea of an ideal classroom management routine was not going to work (Drew interview 2010:5).

Thus, Drew struggled with how to discipline and maintain a classroom in which everyone could learn. This excerpt makes me wonder what Drew’s definition of a student who needs an IEP would be, and what are criteria or definitions set out by the institutions about IEPs? Again, the lingering question is: How does “discipline” and “classroom management” work in alignment with equity-based work? Is there a place for consequences, and should there be? What about in incidents of violence in which the safety of the teacher and other students is at risk? The next narrative provides insight on this last question.

Kathleen was exhausted every day from practicum placement because she dealt with “daily episodes of behaviour which were very emotional and exhausting” (Kathleen interview 2011:1). She struggled with her emotional state of exhaustion and frustration on a regular basis, and did not feel equipped to handle this pressure by her teaching programme: “Dealing with students who had big issues of violence and anger management often derailed the teaching of the day” (Kathleen interview 2010:1). Again, the reality of classroom behaviours impacts and interrupts the daily teaching and learning opportunities. So, how can violent behaviours be addressed while providing equity-based lessons? I would venture to say more human resources in the room, and possibly creating a space where some community-building can take place with the support of the student’s family.

Stella, an associate teacher, empathized with her teacher candidate as she felt her class was exceptionally difficult. She had made it a point to get her principal’s attention
on the matter of placing so many behavioural children together in one class. She describes her classroom as follows:

I have extreme challenges in my room, things I can’t call them, but really challenging students in my classroom…there are three students that are extremely behavioural, and then there are another three that are borderline…and half of the other students that have learning disabilities...so that is fifty percent of the class, twenty-five percent pose behavioural problems, so it is very difficult to work in here (Stella interview 2010:3).

Thus, Stella acknowledged in her interview that if her teacher candidate had difficulties with the classroom management it was definitely understandable. However, it is important to pay close attention to how Stella sees her class as being exceptionally difficult, the terms she uses to describe her students (“borderline”), and how she believes that the administrator should have dispersed her students and balanced the classes out. I am not sure that I completely understand what “borderline” means, but I do understand that a “stacked” class of several high-needs students in one room can be a teaching struggle. Recognizing these observations highlights power politics, teacher perception, and teacher understanding towards students who require a great deal of assistance. By contrast, Mara stated that she had many classroom management strategies implemented in the classroom and they worked well, but her teacher candidate did not implement them.

Mara (2010) stated that her teacher candidate lacked the differentiated teaching strategies in addition to classroom management strategies she had shared with her teacher candidate. “For example the rain stick, as an ambient sound … whereas my teacher candidate would use it as a negative sign of the class being so loud or becoming disengaged. Like “I need to use this right now”…so it lost its purpose of bringing everyone together peacefully” (Mara interview 2010:4). Thus, Mara contended that “[her]
teacher candidate’s interpretation of her strategies was reactive, instead of a proactive approach” (Mara interview 2010:4). What is essential to point out here is that the values and views of the associate teacher are given preference without any dialogue on how and why the teacher candidate may use the classroom management strategies differently, especially since there may be several ways in which to use a rain stick.

Another example that Mara provided follows, regarding:

…a behavioural chart in the classroom [which she] modelled for [her] teacher candidate. A green check mark was given if the student was creating learning opportunities in the classroom and red check marks were for when students need to be reminded not be rude, or disruptive to the learning opportunities of others (Mara interview 2010:4).

Unfortunately, Mara explained, her teacher candidate did not use these visuals to help with the classroom management, and thus often had several disengaged behaviours occurring during the lessons. Interesting to note that behavioural charts and ambient sounds are used to create a safe and quiet classroom atmosphere; but who are they monitored by, and how again are these methods in line with equity-based pedagogy? How does observation of students’ external behaviour provide enough content to judge them by?

A Personal Struggle

Two teacher candidates in the study presented their most vulnerable experiences during practicum to me during the interview phase of this critical practitioner research study. They described the degree of emotional intensity this practicum required of them, and how it personally affected them to a point of internal crisis. In the first case, the teacher candidate took the associate teacher’s criticisms to heart and struggled to meet her high expectations (Daniel 2010). In the second case, Kathleen (2010) struggled with
personal growth because of interactions with her students and their comments on her race. Both of these personal struggles were huge challenges for the teacher candidates and thus are being shared. As I heard their accounts of these struggles, I could connect and understand why there was a high level of emotion involved. Simultaneously, as I wrote their accounts, my belief with respect to teaching being a profession that requires and demands a high level of emotional investment was reaffirmed because a teacher who is committed to his or her students recognizes and upholds him or herself as accountable to them in their daily work.

Daniel (2010) took his associate teacher’s feedback about his practicum teaching to heart, causing “the classroom community to take a hit” (Daniel interview 2010:3). He took this very seriously because he wanted to enhance the community of the classroom, not make it regress (Daniel, 2010). After much reflection, Daniel decided “what my associate teacher meant was that I was not holding the students accountable at the same level she does. But it is frankly impossible because the students just met me” (Daniel interview 2010:3). “The level of frustration was difficult to deal with and her expectations with respect to the students, who were constantly disruptive, was very difficult” (Daniel interview 2010:3). Daniel felt most of the pressure coming from his associate teacher and his own personal expectations:

I wanted the students to love every class, and they inevitably were bored. One time, I planned a round robin trapezoid activity. They were in groups, decomposing a trapezoid to find the area. It was a double period at the end of the day, and the students were not into it. After that I was just dead tired. Especially, because the feedback I was getting was “give explicit instructions”. At the beginning, I used to be so excited, and spoke fast, but then I realized I had to calm down, slow down and give explicit instructions (as this was recommended to me as well by my observing teacher). The next group activity I did was another round robin activity, and it didn’t work. I don’t like math, and I didn’t want to be the double period math teacher. So the challenge was that I wanted students to love
every class I gave and they didn’t, and that disappointed me. Well, I thought my job was to reach these kids and I didn’t today, s**t (Daniel interview 2010:4).

It was difficult for Daniel to come to terms with not being to reach all of his students and knowing that he was not meeting the standards of keeping a healthy class community. Daniel’s remark: “…I thought my job was to reach these kids and I didn’t today s**t” (p. 4) demonstrates his deep passion for connecting with the students and making his lessons meaningful for them. However, feeling unable to reach every student is in my teacher opinion questionable, as I recognize that sometimes students understand or relate to things that they may not demonstrate visually or verbally to teachers or students sometimes take time to process pieces of information, thus we should be patient with ourselves.

Unfortunately, Daniel continued with this feeling of distress throughout the practicum, but he did the best he could and wished to continue to strive for more. Based on the narratives given in the interviews, there is a high level of enthusiasm and idealism that many educators (who choose to teach because it is their passion) bring with them into the profession (and need to bring into it). However, it is essential to the mental and emotional health of an educator to be aware of the long process of transformation and the differences they can make (bell hooks, 2003; Lisa Delpit, 1988; and Paulo Freire, 1970). For example, sometimes teachers help a student and don’t see the impact of their teaching until ten years later, when they learn that student has become a professional and is doing good work for the community. I believe that the impact a teacher’s work has on his or her students may not shine through at the very beginning, but it does come through in some way in the long run.
Similar to Daniel, Kathleen experienced a crisis that she took with her after her placement ended. Kathleen expressed that her students’ behaviours impacted how each day flowed and that all those emotions went home with her every night:

…the student with the most extreme behaviour only came during the morning...so, I tried to create a situation in which they could succeed. The kids were expected to come in and put their coats away and have a seat on their section of the carpet. Progressively, this routine for that particular child became challenging; there was nowhere to put him on the carpet without putting other kids at risk. So we started putting him at the back of the classroom. The challenge of balancing other students’ safety and learning with the student’s right to be in the class was very difficult. I really valued the transparency of my associate teacher about this particular student’s situation (Kathleen interview 2011:4).

Kathleen recognized that she was in a challenging situation in which she did not wish to fall into the trap of deficit thinking and labeling a child, but she needed to address the violent behaviours the child displaced. Asking for advice on the matter, Kathleen was told that she had to be more firm; however she felt she was “being as firm as [she] could be without picking up a child or yelling” (Kathleen interview 2011:5). She wanted the child to understand that she was there with no intent to punish him, but rather to teach him and she wished he could trust her. Unfortunately, one day, the child physically attacked her, and as a result, he was brought to her to apologize, but he chose not to and responded negatively instead:

At one point the student had physically attacked me and he was brought by my associate teacher to me to apologize. She reminded him that I was an adult and I needed to be respected. But the student responded and said, “Yeah, but she is not really the same.” And then my associate teacher said “Just because she is a student teacher … she is still an adult.” Then he said, “No that is not what I mean, it is because she is white” (Kathleen interview 2011:5).

81 What does putting a student at the back of the classroom symbolize? How does the student interpret this action by the teacher? Do the intentions of the educator count or does the action speak louder? Is there any discussion between the educator and the student? These are the few questions that come to mind when reading this narrative.
The kindergarten student’s comments deeply affected Kathleen as she realized the impact of race and power the child was struggling with (i.e. he was very young, had no authority in the situation, and came from a racialized and marginalized background).

It is interesting to note that the kindergarten student recognized and felt the impact of white privilege. Whether or not he could describe it as such is another question. However, the mere fact that the student was able to indirectly challenge the socially-inscribed identity based on his race is incredible. Many students have difficulty stating that we are not going to blend in with the socially-inscribed identity assigned to us by our own culture, mainstream thinking, race, religion or socio-economic status because there is no space for this dialogue or reality. I also find that the level of fear and insecurity is very high. If and when such an encounter occurs, however, I think it is pertinent that we rise up to overcome these insecurities and fears as the cost of what we are losing when we do not is exponentially high.

Returning to Kathleen’s narrative, the complexities of the moment with the child confronting her authority in contrast to his socially-inscribed racial identity must be acknowledged as poignant. In response to this situation, Kathleen’s associate teacher urged her to be firm with him, but at the same time, she managed to respect the child while talking to him. In addition to this experience with race and power dynamics, Kathleen was surrounded by students who wished that she was their mother because she had white skin. For Kathleen, dealing with race on this level was very disheartening:

One girl told me that she wished that she was White, she was fascinated with my hair and eye/skin colour. Then another student asked me what was underneath my skin. This was an interesting teaching moment. I told them that underneath my skin we look the same. There were great moments and there were moments that broke my heart, in which students would ask me to be their mom because they
wanted a white mom. This was a very reflective opportunity, but also very hard to deal with (Kathleen interview 2011:6).

This excerpt highlights Kathleen’s becoming aware of how her marginalized students recognize whiteness as privileged and desirable due to the power associated with being white. It also demonstrates Kathleen’s hope to unpack race, racial categories and race relations in the classroom setting. A critical race theorist, Pearl Rosenberg (2004) addresses this point of White privilege,

> [t]hose who favor a colour-blind society fail to see that race, especially skin color, has consequences for a person’s status and well-being. That blindness to skin color and race remains a “privilege” available exclusively to White people highlights the reality that color blindness only serves to perpetuate and institutionalize the very divisions between people that it seeks to overcome (Rosenberg 2004:257).

Thus, Kathleen’s narrative connects with the concept of colour-blind society, as she states “…underneath the skin we all look the same” but simultaneously her narrative above brings to surface these hidden dimensions of race and race relations in the classroom (Kathleen interview 2011:6). It is astonishing to note that the student who saw and recognized the value and privilege of race and skin colour was in kindergarten; this exemplifies how deeply troubling and rooted socially inscribed identities have become. This matter of White privilege needs to be further interrogated. How can we, as educators, make a conscious effort to break down such power and underlying deficit based and socially constructed ideologies that exist?

*Lack of Time*

Another challenge that many associate teachers and teacher candidates encountered was the lack of time to do things together or get things done based on the proposed timetable outline for the lesson. One teacher candidate felt that “the greatest
difficulty was in trying to predict how much time was going to be wasted trying to control the class” (Danny interview 2010:3). Danny realized by the last week of his practicum that while he designed the lesson plans, he should always be aware of “what things could be cut out and how much time should be accounted for behaviour management” (Danny interview 2010:3). Another teacher candidate, Alexandra felt that time was insufficient to cover the amount of material the associate teacher set out for her.

Alexandra spent a great deal of time during her practicum teaching the theory behind the big idea in her unit. Unfortunately, Alexandra did not find teaching that component very engaging, but knew it was necessary to do in order for students to understand the next “hands-on” part of building machines. Alexandra stated that there was a constant struggle between trying to teach the textbook and using hands-on activities that the students were engaged in:

Because my associate teacher wanted more hands-on activities and the way the textbook was designed with the physics at the beginning and the systems at the end…I decided to follow the physics part first. I could have done more with it now that I reflect back at it. I had them do a cool, fun activity at the end by building their own machines (Alexandra interview 2011:1). Alexandra was overwhelmed with the amount of work she was given to cover in the short time span she had. Thus, it made her feel “disorganized [her]self… I didn’t want my associate teacher to know that, but at the same time I was overwhelmed because I never knew what she expected because we never had the time to talk about it. So I was planning the lessons the day before (Alexandra interview 2011:2). Keeping up with the high demands of lesson planning, learning how to deliver lessons, and ensuring students were following them was a difficult uphill challenge for Alexandra. The pressure of covering all content as outlined in a lesson in a limited amount of time is definitely a reality in the
teaching profession. However, as a teacher myself, I do believe the quality of engagement and learning is more important than the completion of a set amount of content.

*Lack of Human and Physical Resources in the Classroom*

Five participants stated that the school was in need of more staff and school supplies to make it a safe and ready-to-learn environment for students. However, due to budget cuts and these schools all being model schools, there was a lack of funding, and thus there was a lack in resources. I believe it is a matter of fact that access to better technology, more support staff, and more school supplies positively affects the learning experiences and engagement level of students. The following narratives share some insights on the concerns around the lack of human and physical resources in schools.

According to Stella, “resources are limited and the students don’t have anything. They can’t even log on to the computer because they don’t have the password; it is kind of a mommy thing that they have to ask every time they want to go on the computer” (Stella interview 2010:4). Moreover, Stella explained that this is an era of technology, and yet students do not have access to a basic computer, when by now, there is access to laptops, smartboards, e-readers and so on in other schools. Yet in this school, these students were expected to learn and excel “sharing the one data projector that has the right cables with every teacher across the entire school” (Stella interview 2010:4). Another teacher candidate had similar views to Stella.

Lindsey stated that her associate teacher told her that the reason why there were limited resources was because they had a classroom budget for one hundred dollars a year. As a result, many teachers who teach at this inner city school reached into their own

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82 I wonder if Stella’s use of a “mommy thing” to describe her students asking for her permission to go on to the computer provides insight into views of a teacher’s role?
pockets to provide for the students. Lindsey mentioned the technology problem as well: “technology was a problem. There was one smartboard for all of the grade eights to share, and one projector for all the juniors…and internet access and teaching was limited (Lindsey interview 2010:2).

In Kathleen’s situation, she described that the school lacked the human resources to function fairly for students to learn in. Kathleen felt “the administration had me there because there were not enough resources for this very difficult class and they weren’t sure what to do about it” (Kathleen interview 2011:10). Kathleen believed she “was a stop-gap measure” (ibidem). Another associate teacher had similar concerns about the lack of resources in the school for a crowded class.

Jane explained that the physical classroom size was not equipped for all the students she had. They had doubled the number of students in her class this year, and many of them required a lot of individual attention and support, which was not feasible under these physical conditions. She explained how there were incidents of murder and separation going on in the homes of her students, and thus when they were not given the attention they needed, it often resulted in outbursts that were violent:

I think these behaviours come about when they don’t get enough teacher attention, and also because of the lack of space that they have. So they fight for it to get it. For some students, they cope and adjust well. However, for some students, it is overwhelming. The aggression and defiance comes out when I haven’t connected with them throughout the day or worked with them (Jane interview 2011:3).

Jane was in a difficult bind wanting to help the students, but not having the right resources in place to help them most effectively. She tried to connect with the parent community, but it was too hard to access them, because several of them worked many

83 Is asking inner city educators to “reach into their own pockets” a fair expectation?
jobs due to financial need. Moreover, she did not have continuous communication with the parents at the time of her students being dismissed at the end of the day because parents had different people picking up their children from school as they were at work. Unfortunately, as an inner city educator, I have had some similar experiences to Jane’s in terms of home communication, however I always asked students to take letters home and bring them back signed to ensure that parents received the note, whenever it was possible. This strategy of mine only worked sometimes, and phone contact was usually very rare, due to lack of telephone access, especially for some of my neediest students.

*Power Dynamics between Staff Members*

The power dynamics among different staff members in every school seemed to vary; many participants did not mention them, and the few who did claimed that they were frustrated by them. Abigail claimed that the principal was rude to all women during an after school meeting, and felt that nothing could be said in response. According to Abigail, “[i]t was hard to make a relationship with the principal as assumptions were prematurely made about us, teacher candidates. There was a clear divide between the principal and the other teachers” (Abigail interview 2010:4). Although this was not directly an issue that the Diverse School (DS) Initiative set out to address, it deeply impacted the collaborative work that the associate teacher and teacher candidate could do, which was a central part of the DS Initiative. More precisely, if a new initiative was to be proposed by the teacher candidate and the associate teacher agreed, the principal needed to sign off and provide funding for it. Without the principal’s support, the initiative comes to a standstill.
The unequal distribution of power in schools has a significant impact on what initiatives can take place within a classroom. What happens when the administrator does not communicate or work with the staff? How is an uncooperative or unhealthy structure within the staff community going to impact the daily experiences of the staff, teacher candidates, and the students who live in this school culture? Other teacher candidates had similar experiences with staff in their schools.

Drew explained that he examined “the relationships between the teachers in the staffroom, everyone was getting along. But when teachers had to provide prep to someone’s class there were tensions there; it was not perfect” (Drew interview 2010:2). Unfortunately, Drew had the experience of witnessing this in person when he was interrupted in the middle of his lesson by another teacher coming in to deliver a prep period for his associate teacher:

In the middle of my teaching, another teacher came in and started taking over my lesson and my associate teacher had to interfere and get the lesson re-focused. That taught me classroom politics within the school system, which I was not aware of (Drew interview 2010:2).

As a result, Drew realized that all the teachers were not always in agreement and had conflicts despite appearances:

When they are in their own classroom and are in charge, there was no problem, but when they have to collaborate or give the other teacher a prep… that doesn’t work as well. I saw the tension in their movement and style. Also, some teachers were taking up most of the space in meetings in terms of conversation. Everyone seemed to assume that they would do what they wanted in their own classroom, it was like they all “agreed to disagree” (Drew interview 2010:2).

Drew quickly learned that despite the good intentions of every teacher and the same common goal of assisting the students to succeed, teachers had political agendas of their own in their classrooms.
This lack of communication between staff makes it difficult to do cohesive collaboration at a school level, which is what one of assignments was for participants in the DS Initiative. More specifically, they were expected to get all staff on board with understanding an equity concern relevant to their school and how they collectively could address it. In light of the above narrative, it is difficult to imagine the ability to do a collective initiative with all the school staff if there are already tensions on a teacher-to-teacher level.

Kathleen also felt there was a lack of community amongst the teachers in the school, which was reinforced by the physical structure of the classroom allocations for teachers. She was surprised with the lack of interaction between the teachers in her school as it was a small school. She noticed that her associate teacher spent “most of her lunch hours and after/before school hours were spent in preparation for the class (trying to keep our heads above water)…so there was no time to talk with other teachers in the staffroom” (Kathleen interview 2010:1). This isolated teacher community had many different teachers in each grade group, and it seemed as though they did not work together as no one helped my associate teacher when she planned. Beyond these greater staff power dynamics, three teacher candidates experienced tension with their own associate teacher, which demonstrates the complexity of the relationship between associate teacher and their teacher candidate.

*Power Dynamics between Associate Teacher and Teacher Candidate*

Drew reported to me that he desired to teach a lesson on Shakespeare towards the end of the practicum, but his associate teacher would not allow it. The reason his associate teacher gave for refusing his idea was that it “was above the students’ level”
Drew did not agree with his associate teacher, but chose not to address the matter further because of evaluation risks that could jeopardize his future teaching applications. This issue of not being able to clearly communicate with the associate teacher was experienced by Alexandra as well.

Alexandra felt uncomfortable speaking with her associate teacher as it seemed she was always too busy to talk. Unfortunately, Alexandra admits that she does not think that her associate teacher would be aware of this communication problem because she was never able to bring it up. Alexandra was very conscious of her associate teacher being her evaluator, and thus did not want to upset her and kept quiet.

**Getting Used to the Toronto Classroom**

Danny had a very difficult time re-adjusting to the Canadian school setting. He had not been in a school environment since he was a student, which was a while back because he chose to work in a different field before entering teaching. Teaching was his second career. He suggested that the observation days should take place closer to the actual practicum and that the practicum should be extended by one week, to enable a better understanding of the schooling process. He explained that if these recommendations took place then:

> [t]his would have helped with issues of lesson plans…I don’t know how to say this…long pause…work on creative elements to go beyond classroom management, a greater rapport with students…and you will gain confidence to work with the students and try new things…trying all your ideas requires that you know the students better…for me, personally, I couldn’t walk in there and try all my ideas because I would want to know the students…(Danny interview 2010:1).

Thus, Danny advocated for more time to get used to the classroom setting again and all the dynamics that were at play.
Kathleen also felt shocked by the state of current schooling because her mother’s profession was teaching, and the stories she told about it never seemed to compare to the hardships she experienced during practicum. In particular, the troubles she had with the lack of human and physical resources available in schools took a great deal of time to get used to. She felt that the public school system had become a difficult and complicated space to work that demanded more than a positive attitude of wanting to teach young children.

Neha described going back into a classroom during current times as very linear and procedural, and not in line with who she was anymore. She learned on a daily basis because the content of the work was heavy. Neha explained that the workload during the practicum was very intense for her:

Yeah, the workload was really intense. Everyone says it, but you don’t know until you are in it. We were told not to plan a unit. But as a teacher candidate, I think it would have been more helpful to have planned a unit before practicum, or learned how to do that. This way, I could have focused on my teaching and not worry so much about what my lesson was going to look like. (Neha interview 2010:2)

Thus, Neha felt the challenge of getting used to the workload, while not feeling prepared in terms of having a unit plan done was very difficult.

Despite all these challenges that participants experienced throughout the practicum phase, there were opportunities to learn and recognize the complexities of teaching and teacher identity with respect to Initial Teacher Education program. I gave the Ryan and Lina, the developers of the DS Initiative, my preliminary findings of the themes that emerged from my data analysis and the literature review. As a result, the developers of the DS Initiative and I had several interviews to unpack their thoughts on the findings of the study and any other thoughts they had on this research study. The
following section articulates the views of Ryan and Lina after they had read the preliminary findings and had been debriefed on the literature review analysis.

**Potential Responses to the Gaps in the Literature Reviews**

According to Ryan and Lina, the DS Initiative encourages teacher candidates to be reflective practitioners (informal discussion, September 2010). Ryan and Lina (2010) contend that teacher candidates and associate teachers should be introspective and reflect on their practices (or the history of teaching practices) and look for emerging patterns in pedagogy. As the reflection process happens, Ryan and Lina believe it is important to connect practitioners’ reflections to theory that further unveils equity concerns. Ryan and Lina have an ideology of teacher candidates as reflective practitioners whom they believe should be encouraged to connect their reflections with theory to understand inequity issues. One structural concern, I have with this ideology is that it creates a divide between theory and practice, which underlies the DS Initiative. Secondly, I am not sure how being a reflective practitioner was interpreted by the participants in the study, based on the above data analysis that suggests there was a lack of teacher identity discussion. However, in what follows, I will work with my understanding of the developers’ intentions. More precisely, I will analyze the concerns that are left unaddressed by the literature reviews by putting them in conversation with the DS Initiative, in hopes of addressing those concerns and unearthing the gaps that remain even after this engaged conversation.

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During the member check, Lina stated that the intention of the DS Initiative was to create a bridge between theory and practice. However my understanding of the dichotomy between theory and practice emerges from Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009) work who offer the practitioner research as an alternative approach to thinking about pedagogy.
Potential Responses to Structural Concerns

Rideout and Mortons’ (2010) study claims that teacher candidates utilize a custodial way of teaching (i.e. rote work) because it is easier to disseminate more knowledge to students using this approach. To address this concern, I would claim that the DS Initiative upholds Ladson-Billings (1995) high expectations for all students and a critical consciousness around power differences, which would not be met through rote work. After reflecting on the history of bad teaching practices (such as rote work) and working class children, teacher candidates in the Equity Option (EO) would be aware of the inequities that lie beneath such practices. The DS Initiative indirectly questions why rote work perpetuates inequities and why it is considered bad pedagogy by offering CRRP as the main pedagogy.

Ng, Nicholas, and Williams’ (2009) work suggests that there is a theory and practice divide during practicum. Moreover, Ng, Nicholas, and Williams (2009) stated in their study, teachers resort to traditional beliefs about “expert knowledge” which emerges from their own schooling experiences, instead of what they learned in their teacher’s college program. Thus, there is a lack of smooth transitioning between the what future teachers learn at the university and what they use to inform their teaching in the schools (Ng, Nicholas, and Williams’ 2009). The narratives of the participants contend that the DS Initiative does not directly address the smooth transition between the theory taught in the School and Society course and the actions that occur during the practicum. Moreover, I contend that the DS Initiative seems to uphold an ideology of teacher candidates that is based on practice and theory divide because the strong encouragement and emphasis placed on the “implementation of CRRP”. However, the DS Initiative did provide
“practical examples” to learn from initially for teacher candidates, and then encouraged them to apply the appropriate theory to understand the complexities of the example. As a result of the lack of clarity in explaining the transition or relationship between theory and practice, it is difficult to state that the DS Initiative addressed Ng, Nicholas, and Williams’ (2009) concern.

Another study that demonstrates a structural concern between theory and practice with respect to assignments is Volante’s (2006) study. To address this concern, the DS Initiative provides an opportunity to not only reflect on how to integrate theory and practice in assignments, but to implement and carry out these assignments during the practicum. Again, although the DS Initiative separates theory and practice as well, it attempts to provide a bridge between the university classes and the practicum placement by “implementing” assignments that provide examples of bringing theory into practice. For example, the DS Initiative requires that all teacher candidates do an action-based research project that takes the CRRP theory into a practical form during the practicum. Moreover, the DS Initiative research assignment addresses the problem of lack of support from the associate teacher to integrate theory and practice together (Volante and Earl 2002) as it requires cooperative participation from the associate teacher and the teacher candidate to carry out the project. Although the purpose of the action-based research assignment is clear, how the teacher candidates and associate teachers understand and “implement” it is very important because that would be essential in understanding if this assignment addressed Volante’s (2006) concern. In the next section I analyze how I think the DS Initiative addresses relational concerns.
Potential Responses to Relational Concerns

Volante’s (2006) study was concerned with the way in which associate teachers were chosen and how they were paired with teacher candidates. He believed it was essential to find out how the pairing process occurred in order to understand the roots of the relationship (Volante 2006). This concern was not directly addressed by the DS Initiative or discussed by it. Associate teachers who volunteered (mostly on the basis of their principal’s recommendation) to participate in the DS Initiative were randomly paired with teacher candidates from the EO. It was also interesting to note that some teachers from schools participated in the initiative, but never had a teacher candidate work with them during the first practicum. However, if the pairing of the associate teacher with the teacher candidate did not suit or work well with either one of them (this would have to be an extreme case) then a re-assignment of the pairing would take place through the coordinators of the EO. Thus, the DS Initiative does not demonstrate any stated purpose for why the pairing was done in this way.

A further interesting question that arises from the literature on relational concerns is how cooperative the relationship is between the associate teacher and teacher candidate. Moore’s (2003) research examined the complexities of the desired beliefs associate teachers have for their teacher candidate to fulfill, in the context of literacy teaching during practicum. The DS Initiative assumed that because both the associate teacher and teacher candidate have been exposed to the same lessons and strategies for CRRP, there should be no complications or at least less of them. Again, the purpose of the shared lessons on CRRP behind the design of the DS Initiative was clear to me (but was not clear to many of the research participants in this study): it assumed a smooth
relationship between the associate teacher and the teacher candidate, which unfortunately, based on the findings, was not the case.

Another relational concern that surfaced in the literature was from Rideout and Morton’s (2010) study. Their research revealed that because associate teachers were evaluating teacher candidates, often teacher candidates replicated the teaching style or approaches of their associate teacher, despite it being traditional (Rideout and Morton 2010). As a result, new educational pedagogies that were critical often did not get implemented by teacher candidates during the practicum. The DS Initiative indirectly addressed this concern by assuming and hoping that through the professional seminar series on CRRP offered to associate teachers that they would be supportive of CRRP-based lessons that teacher candidates developed for practicum and furthermore, that associate teachers themselves use CRRP-based lessons in their classrooms. Thus, with this assumption in mind, the DS Initiative indirectly addressed the concern around teacher candidates’ fear of being poorly evaluated by associate teachers.

Another issue that emerged from the literature on relational concerns was the concern of the associate teacher being an evaluator while needing to fulfill other roles that conflict with one another (i.e. friend, mentor and evaluator etc.) (Sanders, Dowson, and Sinclair 2005). According to Sanders, Dowson, and Sinclair’s (2005) research study, the conflicting multiple roles that associate teachers were expected to fulfill (without being trained in them, or provided with a clear definition of them) negatively affected the relationship between associate teacher and teacher candidate. Although the DS Initiative did not directly address the multiple roles an associate teacher was expected to fulfill, it had an unspoken expectation that the associate teacher would be supportive of the teacher
candidate because of the shared understanding and exposure they had to CRRP. However, this assumption was idealistic; based on research participants’ interview responses, this supportive component in the associate teacher was not always present for the teacher candidate.

It is important to note that most equity-based initiatives (such as the DS Initiative) are well-intentioned and have a positive idealistic view for creating a shared understanding and a cooperative relationship. Unfortunately though, sometimes these ideals are not met with respect to structural and relational concerns, and thus it is important to have direct and clear discussions about what to do in situations where things do not go smoothly or positively. Good intentions and brave assumptions provide a positive outlook; however, the messiness of reality impacts those intentions and assumptions. It is when things don’t go smoothly that there is tension. As educators, we need to do our best to help teacher candidates and associate teachers to navigate unknown and unexpected difficult situations. This piece of discussion is crucial and needs to find a home in every initial teacher education program. At the same time, it is important to recognize that some tensions in practicum settings are beyond the structural and relational concerns of teacher candidates and associate teachers. The problems of practicum can be as broad as how the practicum was designed, and for what purposes it was designed. The following sub-section briefly recaps different practicum approaches that were designed to take up many of the above-mentioned structural and relational concerns, but were limited in their success. After a brief description of the practicum approaches and their limitations, I explain how I think the DS Initiative addresses these limitations.
Potential Responses to Different Practicum Approaches

One of the general themes that each of the previously mentioned practicum approaches touched upon was the lack of fluidity in the power and communication between all the stakeholders involved in the practicum. I briefly examine a few of the practicum approaches and the concerns brought forth by them because they are similar in nature.

Zeichner (2002) remarked that the roles of teacher candidates, associate teachers, and university faculty intersect at different levels of power that are conflicting and hierarchical, instead of collaborative. Moreover, Cochran-Smith (2005) stated each of these stakeholders has access to different knowledge and skill sets, yet they talk over one another, without understanding the roles they play and how those link to each other. In response to these general issues, the DS Initiative approaches the practicum experience with the intention of providing a space of discussion based on collaboration between teacher candidates and their associate teachers.

Ryan and Lina invited the associate teachers to become familiar with the university, to get to know more about the CRRP, while being engaged in the DS Initiative. During the professional seminars with the associate teachers, Ryan and Lina provided opportunities to engage in collaborating ideas and practices focused on the subject they were presenting on any given day. In the joint seminar, associate teachers were accompanied by their teacher candidates to reflect and collaborate on what was presented during the CRRP seminar. Thus, there were some collaboration and discussion opportunities that the DS Initiative provided to attempt to break down power hierarchies. However, it is important to note that the discussions in the seminar series were based on
the teaching that Ryan and Lina did, and not collaboratively created by participants. It would be interesting to see how input from the teacher candidates’ and associate teachers’ lived experiences would guide and define different subjects with respect to CRRP.

Another study that demonstrated power differences that were in constant interaction during the practicum was Tsafos’ (2009) study. Tsafos argued that a university-school partnership practicum approach brought about tension when the partnership was disorganized. Power was not equally distributed between the university and the tertiary school. The university faculty checked-in and ensured that the practicum followed the outlines and goals that the university had set out. Associate teachers were left out of the planning stages, were expected to report to university faculty, and to evaluate the teacher candidates (who had no say in what happened during the practicum). These limitations of not being organized and distributing power more equally were indirectly addressed by the structure of the DS Initiative, which encouraged conversations between the associate teacher and the teacher candidate prior to the practicum (in the CRRP seminar settings and in the School and Society course).

The third practicum approach articulated by Beck and Kosnik (2002) looked more intensely at the relationship between the associate teacher/university faculty and teacher candidate. Again, the DS Initiative seemed to have the expectation (as it was never explicitly stated) that there would be a mentorship approach between teacher candidates and associate teachers during the practicum.

It is important to note again, that all of the above responses to the literature gaps and concerns that I have presented are based on my understanding of what Ryan and Lina described as the DS Initiative. I did this because I wanted the literature to be in discussion
with the DS Initiative, as I find the relationship and complexities between them to be fascinating. Nevertheless, it is important to give space to the voices of the DS Initiative developers with respect to all of the above data analysis and literature review analysis. Thus, the next section provides a direct insight from Ryan and Lina with respect to presenting their views on the above data analysis of participant narrative themes and literature review themes.

**In Response to Preliminary Data Analysis Findings: Thoughts from Lina and Ryan**

In light of what Lather (1986) describes as member checking, both Ryan and Lina eagerly shared some of the beliefs and assumptions they had when creating the DS Initiative in response to the preliminary data analysis shared with them. They believed that it was necessary for the DS Initiative, at the university level, to have been developed in response to some of the equity concerns they have about the current schooling system and experiences students have in it and how they could be addressed by the Initial Teacher Education program. Ryan explained:

> [w]e believe in many things, but some of the important ones in this project are: faculties of education have a responsibility to ensure that the experience student teachers get helps them become equity-minded teachers. To gain practice in doing that, also, the university has a responsibility to give back to the community. (Ryan interview part one 2011:1).

In other words, Ryan used his position in the university to fulfill a two-fold goal: (1) to aid in the process of developing teacher candidates who would become equity-minded teachers; and (2) to support marginalized and racialized students. He set out to accomplish these goals by co-creating the DS Initiative to hopefully, service both equity-minded teachers and to benefit racialized and marginalized students. He further drew out this connection between the two goals as follows:
We believe in pedagogical components, we believe kids can learn and it is the responsibility of teachers and schools to assure the best outcomes for all kids. We believe in all of that Ladson-Billings stuff. It is our job to encourage teachers to engage in, further develop the ways in which they work with kids who are not engaged by the current system (Ryan interview part one 2011:1).

Here, Ryan highlighted why he holds these goals, which is, as he claimed, to have the teacher candidates work to engage disengaged students. In other words, he believed the level of disengagement in the current school system was leaving out many racialized and marginalized students, who eventually decided to drop out. In addition, Lina claimed:

I want to echo that, a change needs to happen in our educational system. We do this work because there needs to be a change because the system is not working for many students. It is not the fault of the students, but it is the fault of how we do things and the system. The problem of racism, sexism, ableism and all these problems that are part and parcel of the world we live in, and they infiltrate our schools and guide how we enter into those spaces. And when we don’t counter that directly as it comes in our path, then we are perpetuating the status quo and dominant ideologies. We have a fundamental responsibility to address those situations and in my mind, that is what CRRP is about (Lina interview part one 2011:1).

Lina stressed the need for educational change to address the greater inequities that infiltrate the education system, such as racism, sexism, classism, and ableism because these inequities are at the roots of disengagement that many racialized and marginalized students experience.

I appreciated her passion and clarity on how it is not the students’ fault, but rather how educators interact with them and the strong influences that society has on reinforcing a school culture that disengages racially marginalized students. Although I agree that students are not one hundred percent at fault, I wonder if students can demonstrate resilience by advocating for themselves, by naming the inequitable barriers that often disengage them in schools. Is there a way in which this cultural capital and way of communication can be created? I believe this addition of students’ resilience would
empower students to have their own voices represented when educators are not meeting their needs. More precisely, I wonder if there is space for students asking teachers and other stakeholders in education to be accountable for their behaviours, dispositions, and actions. I envision a day when students speak up rather than fall into the cracks of internalizing deficit attitudes, assumptions and fulfilling low expectations that educators and society thrust upon them. Everyone has a part in this messiness of inequitable schooling, and thus, in my opinion, everyone needs to be accountable to do something about it.

I believe that Lina and Ryan would agree that it is important for racially marginalized students to build resiliency and that is part of the reason why they do the equity work they do with stakeholders in education. The hope is to have teachers who have understood the need for equity-based teaching, help build resilience in their racially marginalized students.

_The Background on the CRRP Framework: How Was the DS Initiative Created?_

Ryan and Lina stated that several of the initiatives created by the Centre for Equity (CE) were premised on the CRRP framework. This CRRP framework was created based on their own and some colleagues’ understandings of “… equity, anti-racism, anti-oppressive, social justice and how they work together to support the most marginalized and racialized kids” (Ryan and Lina interview part one 2011:4). According to Ryan, “CRRP teaching had a focus on the most marginalized and racialized kids, unlike social justice work, which can be about any issue and this is important work, but our initiative was created to support the most marginalized and racialized students” (Ryan interview
part one 2011:5). Thus, the DS Initiative was founded on what they imagined CRRP could look like in schools:

If this framework of CRRP was placed in schools, what would it look like? What components would be put into action? In such a place like a school as a whole, you would be working clearly to close the achievement gap and support those marginalized kids. So it was with this in mind we developed the seven component framework that became the CRRP framework (Ryan interview part one 2011:4).

As a result, both instructors took their understanding of what they perceived to be different literatures (i.e. anti-racism, equity, anti-oppressive and social justice) and applied them to a school setting and teaching practices to create the seven component CRRP framework. In addition, Lina commented that the CRRP framework was also influenced by their life experiences85 (West-Burns interview part one 2011:4).

According to Ryan, prior to the Centre of Equity creating and broadly sharing the CRRP framework, this terminology (CRRP) was not actively taken up and explored in local schools (Ryan informal discussion 2011). More specifically, Ryan said “[a]s a result of providing professional development to staff and administrators in schools on CRRP and its success, Lina and myself have expanded our work to include teacher candidates and associate teachers86” (Ryan interview part one 2011:4). The DS Initiative hoped to meet the needs of new groups such as teacher candidates and associate teachers with the CRRP framework.

The DS Initiative was created to provide an opportunity to work with teacher candidates and associate teachers with the notion of building a common understanding

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85 I think it would have been interesting to know a bit more about the personal life narratives of Lina and Ryan to better understand their investment in the CRRP framework they created and how they influenced each other in the process of its creation.

86 I wonder what conception of “success” is being used by Ryan here and how is it measured. To me, success is more subjective and comes in different degrees, which are never fulfilled, in contrast to it being attained.
about issues of equity tied to schools (Ryan interview part one 2011:4). The uniqueness of this initiative was that the seminar series on CRRP allowed associate teachers to come into this Canadian university and learn about the CRRP that their respective teacher candidates were learning in the School and Society class. This opportunity for professional development for the associate teachers was attached to the teacher candidates only within the Equity Option (EO), unlike any other initial teacher cohort or option (Ryan interview part one 2011).

Teacher Candidates and Associate Teachers in the DS Initiative

In part three of the interview with Ryan and Lina, we discussed how the initiative understood teacher candidates and associate teachers. Ryan noted that “In our School and Society class, a lot of what we do are activities that engage them in exploring who they are and who their colleagues…in relation to what we want to do as teachers” (Ryan interview part three 2011:1). Lina stated that there was a “…lack of time to get into learning about the teacher candidates themselves in depth,” but next year they would experiment with a variety of activities to learn more about their students (Lina, interview part three 2011:1). Moreover, Lina emphasized the following:

I think one thing we do is that we are who we are with them. Even if we are not intentionally putting in activities for getting to know one another. But because of who we are and how we are in the class with them, it creates that space. They bring in whatever they want to bring into the conversation (Lina interview part three 2011:1).

Here, Lina claimed that a space that was inviting and open was available to teacher candidates because both Ryan and she were open with students about their perspectives.

87 I would definitely agree that the informal and open communication style Ryan and Lina exuded in the School and Society class was inviting.
Ryan added that because of his “…past experiences as a teacher and an administrator, the teacher candidates would want his input on applications and ways to handle classroom situations, and this, too, was an example of an open space for teacher candidates” (Ryan interview part three 2011:1). As a result, both instructors emphasized the importance of keeping a learning environment that is open and inviting by contributing themselves fully into teaching. They both stated that to do the aforementioned it was necessary to “put themselves out there” because “[w]hat your fundamental beliefs are as a person is how you look at everything that happens in the world - including teaching, and so, you can’t all of a sudden become this in your classroom if you’re not that in your life. I really mean that” (Ryan interview part three 2011:2).

Moreover, according to Ryan, the way in which teacher candidates participated in the DS Initiative was by attending their School and Society classes, which is a part of the EO program. The CRRP framework was used in their class. Over the course of the year, Ryan and Lina hoped that teacher candidates would “begin to develop some aspects of the framework by developing a lens, or continuing to develop a lens” (Lina interview part three 2011:3). Lina claimed that it was important to acknowledge that they (as instructors) “work with the teacher candidates to develop and encourage their thinking such that their thinking and acting reflect the components of CRRP that are pertinent in creating more equitable school experiences” (Lina interview part three 2011:3).

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88 Again, the sincerity and passion bursts out of this statement made by Ryan. However, it is important to note that this statement applies to all kinds of people and thus, to all kinds of teachers, leaving the question: What is to be done when we come across teachers who (un)consciously promote inequitable practices?
The main difference between the ten teacher candidates in this DS Initiative in comparison to the other sixty teacher candidates in the general cohort program was that their associate teacher was exposed to seminars on CRRP that informed them prior to and during the practicum placement:

Providing the teacher candidates’ associate teachers with the same CRRP content and common language and understanding [that was given to teacher candidates in their School and Society classes] will hopefully help them grow professionally and [would] influence experiences in the practicum (West-Burns interview part three 2011:3).

The associate teachers were provided with release time from their school (payment for a supply teacher to cover their class) to attend monthly CRRP seminars. In terms of engaging the associate teachers in developing the initiative, that was not a part of the program directly. According to Ryan:

… the seminar was limited in continuity and impact due to time restrictions. However, because they did self-select to participate in the program, they are people who are open to thinking about these ideas. This provided a more fertile ground for discussion. Also, in the activities that occurred in the seminars, they involved a lot of interaction when associate teachers brought up their own experiences. (Ryan interview part three 2011:3).

Moreover, Lina noted that associate teachers were there for professional development sessions that allowed space for professional dialogue between educators (Lina 2011). There was a goal to develop CRRP-based practices that responded to the community in which the associate teacher’s school was located. Ryan believed that CRRP was a pedagogy designed to support marginalized and racialized students, and the point of these seminars with respect to associated teachers was to encourage inquiry about issues that impacted students who are not doing well in school (Ryan 2011).

Ryan and Lina believed that associate teachers’ social identity informed their responses to activities during the seminars. Also, during the joint seminars, when the
associate teachers and their respective teacher candidates were present, there was a professional development approach taken (Ryan and Lina 2011). From the joint seminars, both parties were to use the theory to implement and create practical activities/teaching strategies that would better reach the marginalized and racialized students (Ryan and Lina 2011). Thus, associate teachers would be deepening their relationships with their teacher candidates outside of the school context, and both would benefit from the CRRP seminars.

*The Initiative Used an Inquiry-based Approach*

According to the co-instructors, the DS Initiative was an “inquiry-based project because it was a change-based project rooted in equity values” (Ryan and Lina 2011). In other words, it was an inquiry-based project because it aimed to create change through using an equity-based initiative (i.e. the DS Initiative). Moreover, the DS Initiative provided a process of inquiry in which the teacher candidates were beginning to build their equity lens and this was demonstrated by their presentations at the end of term one. Lina described the DS Initiative as an:

…equity change project in which we are all working towards changes. Even the schools that are good have something to work on...the idea is that we are all working. Part of the seminar’s goal is to provide some equity insight to the associate teachers that can be brought back to their schools to create some change (Lina interview part two 2011:7).

To realize the goal of creating change in the schools, associate teachers were asked to reflect upon the particular needs of their home school (e.g. addressing homophobia, the effects of poverty). Then, associate teachers were asked to give a presentation on the issue of concern they chose (Lina 2011). The assignment was an example of an inquiry-based project that required mutual learning to occur amongst the associate teachers (Lina
In addition, the inquiry-based assignment led to mutual learning through the sharing of resources around an issue that may not get a lot of attention at other schools (Lina 2011). Thus, because of the inquiry-based assignment, there was an opportunity to create change on an individual level and on a school level at the same time (Lina 2011).

Teacher candidates were given a similar equity change assignment after their first practicum. They were assigned an equity poster/presentation on an issue they saw in their practicum school site (Lina 2011). The project required them to identify an issue and figure out how to present this issue to the staff at the school (Lina 2011). To clarify, the teacher candidates were expected to present to their fellow classmates during the School and Society classes and were not required to present to the teaching staff at the practicum site (Ryan 2011). In the second practicum setting, teacher candidates were required to do another equity project in which they identified an issue or a problem in the school and then had to take practical action to improve that issue (Ryan 2011). The practical action was shared with their immediate associate teacher and implemented in their school classroom:

An example from last year, I had one teacher candidate who had noticed that the associate teacher they were assigned to stuck to the ministry curriculum and never went outside of it. It was Euro-centric and it was not connecting with the cultural identities of students. So, this teacher candidate used a unit on Medieval Times and what happened on a global scale in different places. Places where the students were from, so it was not only about “the civilized place” and that the rest of the world was crazy (Lina interview part two 2011:8).

The ultimate goal for the inquiry-based assignments given to the teacher candidates and associate teachers was that some practical application would reach the students they teach (Ryan 2011). In addition, Lina stated that the learning for the teachers was important to
deepen their understanding of information that affects their students (Lina interview part two 2011:8).

**Goals for the DS Initiative to Achieve**

Lina realistically believed that within the given time they had with the associate teachers she hoped the following would transpire:

I think the understanding is that it would create common language, common activity amongst the teacher candidates and associate teachers. Because we did speak about oppression in both spaces. Are there issues that associate teachers and teacher candidates can talk about? …Is there language there that maybe wasn’t there before that has created space for discussion to take place more readily? By participating, does it create more of a space for teacher candidates to talk to their associate teachers and share resources (books, lessons) and ideas with the theme of CRRP? (Lina interview part one 2011:5)

In addition to her hope of a creating a space for a common CRRP dialogue to take place between the associate teacher and teacher candidate, she wanted to support both parties within this shared space with resources and “things that would help them become committed or stay committed to doing this kind of work” (Lina interview part one 2011:5). Over the course of the year, Lina stated that a goal of the DS Initiative was to get the associate teachers and the teacher candidates to “build the critical eye, ask the questions, create the space and get support to do this work in their classrooms regularly” (Lina interview part one 2011:5). Ryan agreed with these statements made by Lina in regards to the goals of the DS Initiative, and added that the ultimate goal of this DS Initiative was “the impact that all of this is for the kids and engage teachers in these conversations so they may do things differently in the classroom. [He] hoped that this would allow students to be connected to school” (Ryan interview part one 2011:6). Moreover, Lina passionately contended that she wanted the achievement gap to change: “I want the black kids to graduate at a proportional rate; I don’t want any disproportionate
rates and kids dropping out. I want every child who enters the system to have the same opportunity to learn without being affected by social identity factors” (Lina interview part one 2011:6).

From the perspective of the teacher candidates and associate teachers and the goals of the DS Initiative, Ryan and Lina claimed that they “…hoped their practicum experience was more fruitful”:

I think the student teachers in the School and Society class and the [Equity Option] are fortunate to have one of the most equity-focused teacher education programs in Canada. All the student teachers benefit from having the CRRP framework as part of the teacher education program, some of them were fortunate to have a practicum experience with an associate teacher that has similar exposure to current CRRP theoretical ideas and discussions. This kind of experience will then hopefully provide a more fruitful experience during their practicum (Ryan interview part one 2011:6).

Lina claimed that when this CRRP framework is used by teacher candidates and associate teachers, it attains the goal of including the voice of the community and parents, which is often overlooked (Lina interview part one 2011). Thus, the various goals of the DS Initiative included teacher candidates, associate teachers, parents, community members and students, and aimed to create more equitable conditions in schooling practices and experiences.
CHAPTER SEVEN: RE-VISITING CRRP IN DIALOGUE WITH PARTICIPANTS’ NARRATIVES

Every participant in this study had positive intentions to reach out and teach each of their students to the best of their abilities. In light of the data analysis provided in Chapters Five and Six, on how participants understood culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy (CRRP) and some of the challenges they had with the Diverse Schools (DS) Initiative, it is apparent that each participant has interpreted CRRP differently and thus has gone in a different direction with this pedagogy. For some participants, CRRP was being introduced, for others it was re-introduced, and finally for some participants, they were familiar with CRRP whether it was named this or not; they were engaged with it. Being individuals who bring their own life and teaching experiences with them into the classroom, teacher’s college, or professional seminars, they each had their own unique interpretation filters and lenses they brought with them to the DS Initiative.

There was no direct definition of CRRP provided by Ryan and Lina, however they based their classes on two central pieces by Ladson-Billings (1995) and Gay (2002). It is important to note that both these central pieces provided some practical and concrete examples based on student and teacher interactions and experience. Nevertheless, I believe Lina and Ryan did not provide a direct definition of CRRP because they wanted to ensure that teacher candidates and associate teachers were able to take away what they wished and adapt it to the context of their classroom. This chapter will bring together thoughts that participants had about CRRP with respect to: (1) Perspectives on CRRP and (2) Different Ways in which CRRP was “implemented”.
**Perspectives on CRRP**

There were three main distinct CRRP perspectives offered by two associate teachers and one teacher candidate respectively. It is important to note that not every participant was comfortable providing a perspective on CRRP; some preferred to provide examples of how it was used. This will be discussed in the next section. Nevertheless, the three main views on CRRP were: (1) that you cannot define it in only one way, (2) it ensures meaningfulness for the students by having their input in the lessons, and (3) it runs the risk of essentializing a group of minority students while trying to make their schooling experiences more equitable. The following sections elaborate on each of these views/definitions of CRRP.

*Associate Teachers’ Perspectives on CRRP*

Sam, an associate teacher, explained “I think culturally responsive teaching is what it means. You are…it’s hard to explain…a…there is no cultural superiority in the framework of your classroom” (Sam interview 2011:3). In other words, Sam believed that there should be no cultural hierarchy in the classroom which would influence teaching practices. She provided the following example:

> When you are learning about living things, you can have pictures of diverse humans (races, genders, other images)…I think that not only is that culturally responsive, but it is a way of engagement for the students. The students can care and identify more with such images. I think to be culturally responsive, the teacher needs to allow kids to be critical thinkers, question the class, and the society. They need to recognize that their neighbourhood is a piece of the bigger picture. So, I don’t have one definition of it (Sam interview 2011:4).

Thus, Sam believed that CRRP involved critical thinking, engagement, diversity and depended on the subject matter that was being taught in the classroom. It almost seemed as though there was no set definition of CRRP because it could be diluted into
everything. My question is: Is the dilution of CRRP helpful or does it not provide a stark enough message for teacher’s to take notice and start challenging their own pedagogy?

Unlike Sam, Sara claimed that for her, CRRP simply put was making teaching meaningful to her students. Sara suggested that CRRP helps make the material meaningful, accessible and successful and when she was asked to further elaborate on this view she said the following:

Meaningful…um…that it matters to them, it is not just my great idea, but that they like it too, is it always possible, I try…I ask them for their opinion, so if we are doing biographies on activists and agents of change, I introduce them to a few and then I ask them, do you know anyone who has overcome obstacles and persevered? They wrote about their parents and they wrote biographies about them and then linked it to what we have covered in class, or connecting it to familiar activists like Martin Luther King or Malcolm X…they don’t have a huge bank to pull from…so they are able to make connections between their parents, grandparents and some activists…so just asking them (Sara, interview 2010:3).

Thus, Sara believed that CRRP meant the inclusion of student voices and relevant materials being used as discussions point in lessons. I wonder, if the students do “not have a huge bank to pull from” with respect to activists from their own communities: Is it not the responsibility of a teacher to provide resources on this matter in order for students to empower themselves with their own culture? Moreover, I would argue that because the content of public schooling reflects the mainstream values and ideas of White middle class people, racially marginalized students have not been able to explore or deepen their knowledge about other cultures, including their own. Thus, I call upon educators to acknowledge this link and question its roots, and then encourage their students to plant a new seed for knowledge about their students’ communities and heritages.
Teacher Candidate Perspectives on CRRP

In contrast to the views of both aforementioned by associate teachers, Daniel, a teacher candidate, struggled with possibility that CRRP may be essentializing these racialized and marginalized students further. Daniel described how the entire Equity Option (EO) was struggling with how to define CRRP and brought this up in one of their teacher education seminar classes:

….one of our instructors broke this down for us last week. We had a debate in our option about how people have this idea that I walk into a classroom and I see twenty-six individual students who have dreams and beliefs…and I aim to teach those individuals. And the other school of thought (I’m sure you have theorized about this before), which claims I see a mosaic of different groups according to race (Chinese, Jamaican, Asian etc.). So…because my classroom looks like this I will infuse what I know about these cultures into my lesson to engage my students based on what I think their interests are based on their culture (Daniel interview 2010:6).

Thus, according to Daniel, the entire class had two trains of thought on the matter, and they seemed to be divided. I wonder if this idea of seeing the class as a mosaic is a Torontonian multicultural view that has been taken up by teacher candidates or if this a dominant view in the current school system. Also, how do the teacher’s values and abilities to distinguish different cultures affect their interpretations of the students they teach? More importantly, seeing this mosaic culture and then working with it with respect to what you (as educator) know about different cultures can be problematic. If educators’ perspectives are based on deficit thinking about the cultures, or based on incomplete knowledge about certain cultures, their teaching would potentially reinforce deficit assumptions and stereotypes about certain cultures. As a result, such unintentional but deficit-based teaching would compromise equity-based values in teaching and potentially create negative schooling experiences for “at-risk” students (Portelli, Shields, and Vibert
By contrast, recognizing the mosaic of cultures through the students’ lived experiences, needs, and building on the interests that they voice would redirect the dialogue and provide an opportunity to use a collaborative inquiry-based model for teaching. This would create less pressure on the educator to know and represent all the cultures in the classroom and would create less discomfort for students who may have felt that their culture was being stereotyped or wrongly described if the educator based their lessons solely on what they know. It is amazing to see how rich the information, knowledge, and dialogue can become when students’ participant in the creation and direction of it.

Later on in the interview, Daniel stated that his understanding of “a good teacher is to superimpose the two views (i.e. treating your class as a group of individual students and seeing them as a mosaic) of these sides in a way” (Daniel interview 2010:6). He felt that there needed to be a balance between recognizing the cultural groups in the class and the individual child within the group, because every child in the cultural group was not the same. Furthermore, Daniel suggested that [this Canadian university] needs be more sensitive to the audience of teacher candidates that they are teaching, because not everyone feels comfortable teaching in a CRRP approach\textsuperscript{89}. In particular, if one’s understanding of CRRP is based upon the instructors’ definition or someone else’s definition that denotes only one way of teaching with CRRP they may be uncomfortable with it:

For example white people from middle-class homes, who grew up in small white towns and are really anxious about going into these classrooms full of students of

\textsuperscript{89} Although this was a single perspective on how other teacher candidates may have felt about using CRRP, it is important to acknowledge the mere fact that this opinion was voiced and stated.
colour…and they don’t feel they are ready to teach them. I have heard this several times in my classes, and then it becomes a discussion around white guilt and tons of fear about having white privilege while there are coloured teacher candidates in the same cohort (Daniel interview 2010:6).

Daniel was unsure about how to deal with this problem of white guilt and fear, but recognized it as a severe problem that had taken up most classes but never resolved. The question that these narratives leave behind for me is: Does CRRP create a sense of guilt and fear in people (in particular White people) while it tries to create equitable schooling experiences for marginalized and racialized students? If it does create this guilt, fear, and tension, does it provide enough motivation to mobilize change? If it does not provide enough momentum to create change, how can we promote CRRP as a method of change?

Christensen’s (2009) work on literacy and social justice promotes the idea of using writing narratives to move from outrage to action by asking students’ peers and teachers to take notice of who they are and what concerns they bring into the classroom. I believe to make such big changes in education or in general, tension is inevitable and difficult dialogue needs to happen and thus such a process should be expected and not feared.

Beyond these concerns, Daniel expressed his frustration with CRRP:

[This term CRRP has been thrown at us, along with other terms such as social justice and equity. Umm....I don’t think a clear definition of what this is meant to be was given to us; however it is possible that it was intentional because they wanted us to figure out what CRRP meant for ourselves (Daniel interview 2010: 7).]

Daniel (2010) was puzzled by this notion of figuring out CRRP individually because he pondered that if everyone conceived their own understanding of CRRP that would be approximately seventy different schools of interpretation. Thus, he wished for clarification on the matter and asked one further stimulating question about how can one avoid “essentializing” a group of people while using CRRP? This is interesting because
Daniel previously stated he was unclear as to how to define CRRP, but the aforementioned question seems to imply that the understanding he has of CRRP is one that he is uncomfortable and in disagreement with, as it potentially is essentializing cultural groupings. Nevertheless, as a follow-up to Daniel’s interview, I asked about this concept of essentializing with respect to the Diverse Schools Initiative in an interview with Ryan and Lina.

“Essentializing” means to single a group out by isolating its general characteristics (e.g. racialized students, inner city schools, low income backgrounds) and applying it to everyone in that group (Ryan 2011). Furthermore, this group can be divided into cultural groups based on ethnicity, which also may be seen as essentializing, since it characterizes one ethnic background with the same characteristics (e.g. All African students learn best in a direct instruction way because that is how African mothers raise their children) (Lina 2011). Thus, it can be assumed that this way of teaching CRRP could also be damaging for teachers to implement because it would mean that they treat each child the same in that ethnic group when not everyone learns best in that manner.

However, what Daniel recommended for teachers to do was to recognize the difficulties and needs of the ethnic group, and at the same time cater to the individual student. He exemplified this conclusion with the following example:

So, thinking about (long pause). I am trying to avoid saying that “because I have Somali students I should do everything about Somali” because until you know the individual, you don’t really know. Because your perception and understanding of that culture may not be shared by the student themselves. Also, if you are outside that background yourself, then you are in risky territory if you don’t know what you are talking about. You need to see them individuals, and seeing what community they are from and then balance those two things. You teach to the individual and you teach to the collective…you try to guess what might be appropriate, and see how the students react, and I could’ve done that by claiming that all my students were from that neighbourhood. However, the students may
not be into that. So, to be a responsive teacher you have to think about what the students want to explore as well...maybe they want to learn about other countries. It is a balance about knowing their interests and also inferring what their interests are, while keeping in mind their culture and ethnicity (Daniel interview 2010:6).

Thus, Daniel’s reflections on what CRRP means and how it affects teachers and students was very telling of the level of complexity involved in equity-based pedagogy. In particular, he stresses the importance of a responsive teacher to understand his or her students’ lives, needs, and interests. Again, something that stands out in his narrative is his use of the term “cultural responsiveness” and not “cultural relevance,” yet he refers to what he is describing as CRRP. Subconsciously, does this mean that teacher candidates are “responding” to cultural identities, or does it mean that the term CRRP does not have a great deal of value, rather it is the teaching practice that is highly valued. The following section will examine how teacher candidates and associate teachers used CRRP during the practicum.

**Different Ways of “Implementing” CRRP**

Many teacher candidates and associate teachers provide examples of how teacher candidates “implemented” their insights and perspectives on CRRP into their lessons. It is important to note that the term “implemented” is put in quotes, because it flags how many research participants view CRRP as a theory that is separate and exists on its own, separate from practice. Moreover, this dichotomy between theory and practice is also embedded in the DS Initiative, along with the broader literature discourse in teacher education and policy documents. I think the understanding that I provided throughout this study about how theory and practice are not separate but inform one another and share an interdependent relationship allows one to recognize how there is a stark contrast in the literature and participants’ narratives.
The assumptions that many associate teachers responses had were based on the fact that they already do this “CRRP” work, and the DS Initiative was an opportunity to discuss their teacher candidate’s work. Interestingly, many of the teacher candidates’ and associate teachers’ responses were similar with respect to “implementing CRRP,” yet there were varied understanding of what was considered to be an example of CRRP. This then begs the question: Can there be a common understanding of CRRP that unifies teacher candidates and their respective associate teachers? Or does there need to be common understanding of CRRP? Can it have multiple perspectives and understandings?

The responses to: “How, if at all, was CRRP “implemented” during practicum?” were categorized under four headings: (1) Were not able to use CRRP, but aimed for student engagement, (2) Material selection for classes, and discussion was CRRP-based, (3) Activities that led to CRRP-based discussions, and (4) Conscious effort made to include CRRP in lessons.

*Teachers Candidates Who Aimed for Student Engagement*

Some teacher candidates desired to implement CRRP into their lessons, but for various reasons, could not (e.g. not enough time, the subject content was difficult to address from a CRRP point of view, classroom management overtook lesson planning). Some teacher candidates aimed for anything different from using paper and pencil to teach, and considered it to be engaging as the students were active in the process of learning, but did not have any social justice component to their lesson. Other teacher candidates reflected back upon the practicum and realized that they had opportunities to implement CRRP into the lessons and regret not having done it.

Neha (2010) explained:
[p]ost practicum, I realized I had a lot of opportunities to use CRRP, so I felt disappointed about this (LONG PAUSE). I think that I didn’t talk about anything precisely, but in math, I spoke about the pyramids in Egypt when teaching angles. Why are triangles important, because you need them for architectural structures (Neha, interview 2010:5).

In light of this example, I wonder if Neha equates bringing the level of student engagement up with introducing different cultures in lessons as a part of CRRP work. She further stated that she could have used CRRP for addressing how the school sent home report cards on Eid when the majority of the school population was Muslim and not present at school (Neha 2010). She felt she could have used this uncomfortable situation that did not take Eid into account as a shared learning opportunity to discuss issues of equity with staff and students who were not Muslim (Neha 2010).

Furthermore, Neha recalled that she did address smaller incidents (comments made in class such as “faggot”) as she saw these as an equity concern around sexuality, but she never based her lessons around them. As well, she remembered how she spoke about her nationality and how people should not be judged by what they look like as it may not be who they are (Neha, 2010). Thus, she did have smaller learning moments with the students about CRRP, but no lessons based on it. It seems to me that Neha sees that CRRP can be part of starting to notice sexually discriminatory comments and racism as something real. I think this is a small part of a deeper conversation that does require lessons around inequitable comments and deeper understanding of social identities.

Alexandra had difficulty “implementing” CRRP, which she thought was to help create more engaging lessons, and thus, decided to try to engage students in other ways instead, because she felt this was the next best thing she could do. In particular, she had

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90 Eid is a Muslim celebration that takes place after a religious observance called Ramadan that requires fasting for a month.
difficulty creating lessons using CRRP around an introductory unit on forces. She used current popular culture figures (e.g. Justin Bieber) and she knew that this was not culturally relevant, but claimed that it did keep the students engaged:

I tried to use examples of popular people they knew. I also tried to do more hands-on activities for differentiated learning, which is part of that pedagogy but maybe that is not all it is (Alexandra interview 2010:5).

In addition to trying to keep the students engaged, she also asked her students about their prior knowledge on forces before lecturing (Alexandra, 2010). She said that part of CRRP was accessing prior knowledge, and she did that whenever she could, but she juggled between trying to accommodate everyone in the class and engaging the students: “I was really busy with trying to differentiate the lesson and accommodate the lower students by helping them after class. During class time it was hard for me to do it all” (Alexandra interview 2010:5). Recognizing this constant struggle between accommodating students and trying to come up with innovative ways to connect math and science with CRRP was a draining process for Alexandra. Alexandra’s narrative demonstrates that student input on what popular culture and prior knowledge they bring is an important piece, but she alludes to the fact that CRRP is greater than this, but she did not have the time to further plan her lessons. I wonder if CRRP is seen to be an add-on, and thus something that creates tension and stress for teachers. If this is the case, which I think is demonstrated by Alexandra’s narrative above, then how can we create resources in a user-friendly format to assist in this process? In my humble opinion, as a teacher educator, having an ITE program that focuses on pooling together such equity-based resources would be phenomenal, as the impact and reach would be stronger and further in equity practices than a program that does not provide space to collaborate on such a project.
Another teacher candidate, Danny expressed his frustration with classroom management concerns that took up all of his time and left no space to think too deeply about lesson planning. When he was asked about examples in which he implemented CRRP into his lessons, he responded:

You know I can’t really think of any examples... if I did it or used it...it is not to my own awareness...so, no...culturally responsive... (there was silence)... I can’t think of any right now (Danny interview 2010:4).

Danny had a difficult time remembering his practicum because he felt overwhelmed by it, and as mentioned previously, was trying to cope with the reality of the classroom again. I wonder if the situation would have been different had the cohort designed multiple CRRP-based lessons and units and/or a list of equity resources prior to entering into a practicum setting.

Elizabeth, another teacher candidate, claimed that she was not sure if she did or did not use CRRP, but was sure she kept her students engaged. Elizabeth provided two examples of instances in which she was unsure of whether she had implemented CRRP in her lessons or not. The first example she shared was about a cell unit she did in which she had chosen a variety of pictures of what the students liked, such as x-boxes, hockey players, etc. (Elizabeth, 2010). As a result of using popular culture, her lessons resonated with students with respect to their interests. Her culminating task was to create different graphs using questions students selected that related to something they liked (e.g. how many times you play x-box in correlation to how many games you own?) (Elizabeth, 2010). Elizabeth explained how this unit reflected CRRP by stating: “To me, this was CRRP because it had the students engaged and their interests were leading the activity. It was more their choice to learn the material and learn it in an interesting way” (Elizabeth
What is interesting here is that Elizabeth’s explanation brings forth a number of provocative questions. For example: What counts as relevance? What is relevance? And what is culture?

Furthermore, she claimed that “it was important to use examples and materials that tied to the individual student and their own life experience. By class, I mean that, knowing individuals in the class so you frame things to them” (Elizabeth interview 2010:4). To illustrate this point further she presented another example.

Elizabeth offered her lesson on how the United States can distinguish poverty-filled areas by postal code. As an extension of this lesson, Elizabeth stated was the CRRP component of the lesson because it asked about the Regent Park area in Toronto. “It made sense that we talked about this neighbourhood because it was close by, my associate teacher’s team teacher did this lesson” (Elizabeth interview 2010:4). Thus the rich conversations that emerged from that extended lesson provided “an opportunity for students to make a direct connection between themselves and the example” (Elizabeth interview 2010:5). Elizabeth’s two examples provide insight on how she understood CRRP and the ways in which she connected it to student engagement and local neighbourhood discussions.

The wide range and variety of lessons that demonstrate what teacher candidates named and identified as CRRP underscores the diversity of understandings of CRRP. The potential problem that emerges out of this plurality is that the critical component of culturally relevant pedagogy could be missing. Another question that lingers is this: If student engagement is produced by social media interests that reinforce and portray dominant class images (e.g. Justin Bieber), then how does this demonstrate equity-based
lessons? On the flip side, are students more interested in learning about the popular culture they live in because they are comfortable with that as it brings a homogeneous commonality to the diversity of culture in any urban classroom? Or is learning about students’ cultural identity essential in public schools. Delpit (1988) and hooks (2003) that a student’s cultural identity needs to be a central focus for stakeholders in education, for a strong sense of self is essential as we navigate a society that erects barriers based on our social identities. Student engagement and building community is a good component of teaching, but the content used to create engagement also reinforces what educators privilege and how their (un)conscious decisions affect how students navigate realities beyond the classroom (hooks, 2003; Soloman et Al., 2011; and Portelli, 2007).

An Associate Teacher Who Aimed for Student Engagement

In contrast with the teacher candidates’ narratives above, an associate teacher stated that it was more important to maintain student engagement as a central piece to teaching, instead of focusing on CRRP. Stella said, “[t]o be honest, I don’t think I applied anything directly from the seminars we have gone to yet…it is also something I have used for a long time, that is using resources that reflect my students” (Stella interview 2010:4). Moreover, she stated that as “a white female, I am the minority in the classroom, as I don’t reflect the population. I don’t buy books that talk about spending summers at the cottages, or going on trips to Paris, or have pictures with all Caucasian people on the cover” (Stella interview 2010:4). As a result of this perspective, it can be assumed that Stella ensured that she used books that represented the majority of her classroom.

She also made it a point to use international stories, current events such as paying kids to go to school in my class, challenges in poverty that the students find engaging
(Stella, 2010). Particularly, Stella claimed that the work she does with her class must always reflect the popular culture in which they live, but also the community culture:

Our school is X on the LOI because of the challenges of socio-economic factors, single parent families, and other challenges they face at home...that are so real for them...so for me it is about what is relevant to the popular culture, but also bringing in the community culture which is quite specific...every student in my class has probably heard a gunshot go off, that is not something one can gloss over...and the student next door lost her brother because he was shot in the head...I still have a student is affected by that, you can’t just gloss over things like that and say let’s look at...instead, you need to tailor it to their needs, and talk about gun violence, December sixth Montreal massacre they weren’t around then, but they do understand, the gun violence...there is a connection there, you will really need to understand but I will never understand what it is like to live in this community (Stella interview 2010:4).

Thus, although Stella never took any new ideas away from Diverse Schools (DS) Initiative’s seminars, she already practiced CRRP in her own way in the classroom. It is interesting to note that only one associate teacher commented on student engagement as an alternative focus to their pedagogy. Moreover, Stella’s statement about “bringing in the community culture which is quite specific...every student in my class has probably heard a gunshot go off...” from the above excerpt, although well-intentioned, as she is trying to bring the “community culture” into the class, reinforces, generalizes and essentializes her students as belonging to and identifying with that “community culture”. I wonder if Stella felt emotionally overwhelmed by the “community culture” and if this was compounded by media views and values which thus had implications for and effects on her pedagogy. I recognize as a human being that it is very difficult to analyze our own thinking and recognize where we get our values from, however, I think this critical self-reflection is necessary to do when working with children since our students may be deeply impacted by teachers’ perspectives, as teachers are usually seen as authority figures that need to be listened to and respected.
Material Selection and Discussion was CRRP-Based

Lindsey understood CRRP as using the appropriate texts to connect with the students and then used that as a springboard for discussion during her time in practicum. She planned a unit on heroes and while she delivered this unit, she ensured that the heroes represented the backgrounds of the students (e.g. Gandhi and Martin Luther). In light of the lessons on heroes, Lindsey shared that the students took the initiative to start a project called “the penny jar” (Lindsey, 2010). The idea for the project came from the students who suggested after all pennies were collected throughout the year they would collectively agree to donate them to a charity or a family in need (Lindsey, 2010). Lindsey claimed this lesson demonstrated CRRP because:

… instead of me inflicting my views, I wanted them to decide what was more important for them…and they picked homelessness, this topic struck home for them…they all saw homeless people in their community…they all knew wherever you walked, which homeless person was being talked about and they wanted to do something in return, and so there was the penny jar project (Lindsey interview 2010:3).

I recognize that multicultural representations of heroes provide a sense of empowering marginalized students to believe in their community, however this is in the early stages of what some educators know as the James Bank model91 which then needs to be built on. However, I am not sure I understand how the penny jar project demonstrates equity principles that are not modeled on a charity approach in contrast to one that is critical to why homelessness exists and persists in today’s society?

91 To learn more about the James Bank Model, please visit the following website address: http://www.tdsb.on.ca/_site/viewitem.asp?siteid=15&menuid=8797&pageid=7697
Associate Teachers’ Activities Which Led to CRRP-Based Discussions

Three associate teachers’ perspectives on how their teacher candidates implemented CRRP were described in the format of activities that created critical and relevant discussion around the lives of the students. Sara believed that the purpose of CRRP was to ask critical questions around how a teacher teaches:

…what I take away from this CRRP discourse is making the material meaningful for kids so they can access it and be successful… how are we going to make it accessible? These were ongoing questions. How are we going to make it matter? How are we going to hold high expectations? (Sara interview 2010:3)

Sara believed it was with these questions in mind that her teacher candidate planned wonderful activities that created a space for CRRP-based dialogue with the students. For example, Sara’s teacher candidate:

…used Google maps to show students their school and neighbourhood for a math lesson on perimeter and area…he made worksheets with images of that…I had never done that, so I asked if I could keep one, that felt like a real resource sharing… he did word problems about measurement…Mitsubishi has a rhombus for its sign….the kids talked about cars, their neighbourhood, the environment all in math (Sara interview 2010:3).

The associate teacher was very pleased with the way her teacher candidate embedded CRRP into the lessons indirectly, making it very “natural” in the classroom (Sara, 2010).

What is interesting to note is that the first example is about the students; neighbourhood drawing, but no debrief on why the layout of the neighbourhood and community was designed as such occurred. Moreover, the Mitsubishi example does not protest the symbolism of wealth and economic status and what impact that has on students’ perceptions. I believe these questions would have brought a critical dimension to what I understand to be student engagement-focused lessons which are not critical in themselves.
Nevertheless, Sara expressed satisfaction with her teacher candidate’s drama lessons as well because he embedded culturally relevant work/text in his lessons:

In Drama he used “And Still I Rise” by Maya Angelou…but before he did the poem, I showed him some strategies about graffiti in which the kids write thoughts, opinions, and ideas to ground them …and make it matter…so we did a lot of planning, for what might need to be there to hook the kids and be relevant…yeah. (Sara interview 2010:3).

Thus, with some guidance from the associate teacher and with his own creative ideas, the activities used in the lesson were excellent for sparking CRRP discussions in a natural way (without making it obvious). I wonder why these CRRP moments should not be made obvious, as I think the impact of them would be twice as strong if they were named and discussions around equity were blatant.

Another associate teacher, Janene, was also very proud of the activities that her teacher candidate used during practicum to elicit critical conversation around issues that were culturally relevant to the students. Janene claimed that “there was a unit on agriculture that examined: fair trade versus free trade, students’ buying power - what they do with their money; our school went to Free the Children “We Day”, so our children were familiar with some issues” (Janene interview 2010:3). Thus, this brought the students directly into dialogue about how much money students spent on what clothes and how much they truly cost (Janene, 2010). These conversations made students conscious of sweatshops and impacted how students made informed decisions about shopping (Janene, 2010).

Beyond this, the teacher candidate had a similar social justice-based discussion around how produce - in particular bananas - reached grocery stores (Janene, 2010). She
had students think about: Who were the farmers? How much did the farmers get paid? Which companies were involved? And, then how much did consumers pay for bananas?:

...the fact those issues came out about bananas, about who is getting paid what for them and how we get them and whose getting the money for them...for example, well, if they are refugees, they get paid lower...and then I said “well what if they were in Canada, would it be the same, would it still be okay?”...the discussion just broadened and I was so happy about this...I think our teaching needs to reflect a lot of that because we are creating citizens of the future...(Janene interview 2010:3).

Janene was impressed by the critical and social justice questions of equitable pay and mistreatment of marginalized people that students brought forth (Janene interview 2010:3). She believed that having students formulate their own thoughts on the matter of child labour was empowering for them and allowed them to find their voices (Janene, 2010). It is important to note that Janene’s teacher candidate spoke of her lessons in the same manner that Janene explained, thus there was a clear understanding between both of them, in terms of what culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy (CRRP) in dialogue looked like. Acknowledging the critical questions and equity-based discussions that emerged from the lesson activities that Janene described is important. It is essential to recognize that dissonance in perspectives of how to “implement” CRRP can still be beneficial as they provide multiple entry points into the equity dialogue. I wonder if the common ethnic and cultural identity of the associate teacher and teacher candidate had an impact on their understanding of CRRP; nevertheless, I do think these examples are critically thought-provoking.

**Conscious Effort Made to Include CRRP in Lessons**

There were eight participants, a mixture of three associate teachers and five teacher candidates, who claimed to have implemented CRRP into the lessons. Each
participant provided examples of their lessons that demonstrated CRRP. These examples demonstrated a wide array of social justice concepts that enabled students to develop a critical consciousness about their personal context embedded within the larger societal framework.

Teacher Candidates’ Conscious Effort to include CRRP

Abigail presented geography lessons that were integrated with where produce and food items came from around the world. The students examined where different cultural food items came from. The goals of her lessons were two-fold: (1) to create awareness of different places in the world, and (2) to learn about a range of cultural foods (Abigail, 2010). The teacher candidate aimed:

…to span everywhere, so that everyone could use their knowledge about different places. I asked students to expand on their knowledge…by asking why don’t we grow oranges here?…so if students knew, they would talk about this, for example, it was hot and we are near the equator…if the students knew other places where it grew they would talk about it… (Abigail interview 2010:4).

Abigail had the students bring their knowledge of places and cultural produce into the lessons, allowing them to teach each other. The final summative assignment she designed for students was “…a storyboard for their poem, rap, song and use drama to demonstrate their understanding of the unit on food and geographical places (Abigail interview 2010:4). Students were able to show their interests and what they liked in their chosen genre of music (Abigail interview 2010:4).

Drew, another teacher candidate, based one of his lessons on the revitalization of the school neighbourhood, and he had the students reflect upon their communities and the impact this process would have on them. “I downloaded images from the City of Toronto website. A lot of them didn’t even know that revitalization was going to happen. Then I
asked them about what they thought about the plan” (Drew interview 2010:3). The students used the visuals to stimulate their thoughts about feelings they had regarding the revitalization of the area. Drew quickly learned that:

[s]ome of the reflections on the feeling showed a deficit attitude towards their own community. For example, some of them wrote it is a good thing they are cleaning this place up, it is a bad neighbourhood. This provided me with a lot of insight. I asked them to elaborate, and they said that it was unsafe to walk in the neighbourhood at night. Then I asked them if this could be said about other neighbourhoods at night (being unsafe to walk around), and they said yes. Then I asked about gun violence in other neighbourhoods, and they agreed it was present in different places (Drew interview 2010:3).

Drew concluded that “it was interesting to note that a lot of them externalized their neighbourhood and used ‘they and them’ instead of saying our neighbourhood” while doing these insightful reflections (Drew interview 2010:3). The next component of the lesson consciously made students aware of equity-based concerns in regards to what each student could do to make a change in the revitalization process (Drew, 2010). The students suggested talking to:

…politicians and getting them to hear our message or getting them voted out of office. Then we discussed protests, design art that talks to this matter. This was reflected in their culminating assignment that asked them to show how they would make change occur through the media of dance, music, art, writing and so forth. Then to write a paragraph on how this reflects us as global citizens (Drew interview 2010:3).

Thus, students learned that “…no one was too young for making a change in the community,” and what they did as a collective makes a difference (Drew interview 2010:3). To further solidify this experience, Drew had his students watch a movie called “Road to Glory” and then do reflections on how they related to it, and why the prejudices shown in the movie exist even today. Beyond these two activities in the lessons that Drew led, in the class there were many other lessons on being a global citizen, media and power, and
how students were change agents in the world, which he felt directly placed equity concerns in the forefront. Each lesson was carefully planned and carried out the theme of social justice, in particular, examining the power dynamics in the society and how they affect individual people (Drew, 2010).

Kathleen tried to ensure she got to know the habits and behaviours of every child in her practicum classroom to deepen her relationship with each student and understand their local context. She took notes about each child over the duration of the practicum in order for her to develop a good rapport with her students:

Knowing the students helped build trust - which affected them listening to me when there were classroom management issues, and this helped me get to know them. It helped me to recognize I was dealing with highly complex individuals (i.e. who are highly academically capable, but have different social behaviours) and not a group of people. This reminded me not to generalize, and not take their behaviour personally. Also, just recognizing that the behaviour was separate from the person was important (Kathleen interview 2010:3).

By learning about each student, Kathleen “learned how to help them feel at home in the class by helping them with social skills - have a relationship with other students,” and as a result, she avoided many classroom management challenges. The lessons that Kathleen did focused on bi-racial identities (which was connected to teaching colours). She chose to take the bi-racial identity concept because it allowed her to implement the “windows and mirrors” approach she had learned in teacher’s college:

Well, I tried to keep in mind the model that our instructors told us about “windows and mirrors” when I did my lesson planning, choosing books, vocabulary that would reflect their own interests and what they would be engaged by. Something that would re-affirm the value of who they were, I balanced that by exposing them to new ways of talking and thinking (Kathleen interview 2010:7).

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Emily Styles coined this analogy of curriculum as window and mirror. The curriculum is a mirror that reflects the realities and lived experiences of our students, as well as a window that teaches students about the world and communities different from their own.
Kathleen took the “windows and mirrors” approach because it permitted her to understand her students better and thus to improve the delivery of her lessons to fit students’ life concerns and challenges.

Lilly used her strength and comfort with poetry to engage the students in using poetry to express themselves. She ensured that texts she used during this poetry unit (with a theme of self-identity) were reflective of the students in the classroom and their lives (Lilly, 2011). In addition to poetry, Lilly (2010) did a lesson on gender inequity in the media and had students reflect on the impact media has on their gender and racial identity:

I also did a lesson on media literacy. I use to work in advertising, and my husband still does, and so he has all these old ads from the fifties, and I brought those in to get students to identify target audience and perspective. They were a great example of “who is missing from the ads?” There was one ad that showed a blond lady making a 7-up float for four boys and it said “boys love it when girls make soda floats.” So, I asked my students “what is the problem?” They said it was sexist. However the race thing (there were only white people in all the ads) was not brought up until I teased it out of them. I felt like I had to give them a license to say that those pictures were racist and that those perspectives were missing from the ads. So, I thought that was interesting, once I brought that up, then they exploded and talked about it. I felt though originally they were scared to say that initially (Lilly interview 2010:7).

As a result of this lesson, students learned their own biases and became more cognizant about hidden messages in advertisements (Lilly, 2010). Lilly believed that hidden messages behind ads only reinforced deficit assumptions about marginalized communities. Thus, she used different ads to provide many different perspectives on gender and race which nevertheless had inequities embedded in them. It is interesting to note that Lilly sees herself as having to give them a license to say that those ads were racist, and recognizing that Lilly is a Caucasian teacher candidate, I wonder if she feels compelled to perpetuate the notion of white privilege and power. On the other hand, I
wonder if the students did not say anything about the races present in the ads because Lilly with her ethnic identity stood before them as a figure of authority.

Daniel demonstrated equity principles in math by using geographical locations that were familiar to the students. In Drama, Daniel (2010) used poetry and visuals that were representative of the students. The students were thoroughly engaged and excited by these lessons that helped create a space of self-identify in education (Daniel, 2010). It is important to note that each of these CRRP-influenced lessons has been described at length by his associate teacher, and thus will not be repeated here.

*Associate Teachers’ Conscious Efforts to Include CRRP*

Saida, an associate teacher, commended her students on a hands-on lab-based activity they conducted with her before practicum had begun. “The students were given the opportunity to choose their own songs to make raps about cells. This was relevant because it connected with their personal little lives and makes school as enjoyable as possible” (Sadia interview 2011:1). She also provided another example of conducting a CRRP-based excursion to a conference:

The conference was on media. The students understand the power of media, this was the goal of the conference. Media refers to not only news, but in music they listen to hip hop...we did some deconstructing of the artists’ names, the false images and livelihood they displayed...they correlated this to their own houses/communities and the false images that the media makes about them...the kids want to stop this brainwashing and reclaim the goodness of living in their communities...so to try and prevent internalizing negative messages they say about their community (Sadia interview 2011:4).

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93 I wonder if there were any unconscious biases at play when Sadia stated “their personal little lives” about the depth of their lives or if it was a “carefree” comment that she felt entitled to speak about as she was a person who identified with the racially marginalized identity.
After the students attended the conference they were able to acknowledge that messages in rap music were not always truthful about their lives and don’t accurately represent the present or the future: “…the media portrayed that all of the youth in their neighbourhood were involved in violence because they wanted a story…but they knew that was not true” (Sadia interview 2011:4). As a result of this reflection, students were asked to write poetry about the role of media, its influence in their lives, and how they planned to combat this powerful discourse (Sadia interview 2011:4). Thus this trip and assignment demonstrated CRRP because the students became aware of the conflicting messages of media and their identity.

Jane used her notes from the DS Initiative seminars to inform some of her lessons in class. In particular, the Shakespeare joint seminar was used as a template for a text she had already read to the students, but then applied drama and visuals to it (Jane, 2011). As a result of using the Shakespeare lesson template, the students seemed to be more engaged and enjoyed learning (Jane, 2011). Is there a space for making activities fun while maintaining roots in equity pedagogy? I wonder how reinforcing Shakespeare through drama allows students to think about the equity concerns involved with it.

Another project Jane consciously designed to deal with lack of resources in her classroom was the “castle project”. This project was designed to have students advocate to the ministry about the physical conditions of their classroom (Jane, 2011). The castle project was a response to a ministry-supported commercial that did not promote the truth about new full-day kindergarten classroom experiences (Jane, 2011). Thus, the project demonstrated CRRP because the students became aware of the conflicting messages of media and their identity.

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94 It is important to note that Sadia shared an account of a lesson experience that did not involve the teacher candidate or the DS Initiative. It occurred prior to the practicum in the observation days. In light of this, I wonder if the DS Initiative impacted her teaching, or perhaps even reinforced it.
required students in the classroom to speak out against the commercial by creating a counter commercial:

In contrast to the full-day kindergarten commercial that made all the students look like they had enough space and materials to enjoy building castles, my students claimed that in their experience, they did not have enough space, didn’t have that many blocks or those blocks. Then I told them we would make castles and see what happens. I wanted to film them and then show them how full-day kindergarten really looks like. They were very excited about this. We brainstormed ways to work with what we do have...so we used boxes. I filmed it. Now I need to show it to them; there were big differences. In terms of class size, arguments and not having enough materials. Then I want to bring in the footage and talk about team work and cooperation. Also for them to recognize that things are not fair (Jane interview 2011:4).

Thus, the students learned about false images of the media and learned to empower themselves through creating this commercial that was a response to inequitable conditions in their classroom (Jane 2011). Jane’s activity also demonstrates her desire to show the young students in her class the inequities that directly impact their schooling experience (e.g. lack of resources). Again, what is unique about this example is that Jane shared her own project and how it demonstrated equity-based pedagogy instead of commenting on her teacher candidates’ lessons. Are associate teachers more comfortable claiming they are practicing equity-based pedagogy and do they reserve their critical lens for their teacher candidates?

Nick stated that his teacher candidate provided lessons that were equity-driven, focusing on the social responsibility of a good citizen. She used Oxfam advertisements and was committed to getting students to consciously become more globally aware of events and circumstances that reinforced or sustained inequitable practise (e.g. girls not being able to attend schools or children being malnourished). It is important to note that these lessons were mentioned in the interview with the teacher candidate, but she did not
claim them to be fully social justice-based. However, Nick believed that his teacher candidate’s lessons were thoroughly embedded with social justice themes. For example, his teacher candidate had students analyze public service announcements done for the food bank (Nick 2010). She modelled the message of how everyone could help despite the strong pull of poverty with different representational texts that students were able to relate to (Nick 2010). Moreover, Nick claimed that his teacher candidate did a second unit on –isms during which a lot of CRRP-based discussions took place and students self-reflected:

…we did –isms, stereotypes and what people need to be conscious of, be aware of it in media literature, in things we read, the whole point of the unit comes out of being responsive and how that is presented in the work that we do, for example homophobia…you can’t talk about that off the cuff because the students in this school come from different perspectives on this topic, and what they are told at home is different from the school…so it can be a dicey issue…but that shouldn’t be avoided (Nick interview 2010:4).

Thus, there were controversial discussions that students participated in and gained different insights about how others in the classroom understood homophobia amongst other –isms (Nick 2010). In light of these teachings that the teacher candidate did, Nick believed that culturally responsive pedagogy (not CRRP) was implemented. Again, according to the above narrative excerpts and ones mentioned earlier in this study, it seems as though Nick does not believe it is important to label CRRP work, as to him, it is good teaching.

In this chapter a multiplicity of understandings of CRRP were shared and many examples were offered to demonstrate different ways in which CRRP was “implemented” by teacher candidates or associate teachers. It is important to recognize that the “implementation” of CRRP was never a joint effort or co-taught - which would have
provided insight on how all participants had made sense of the knowledge they gained about CRRP. I wonder what those collaborative joint lessons would look like and what the discussions when planning them would sound like. The following final chapter will provide participants’ discussions on future possibilities for the DS Initiative, next steps for the DS Initiative, my personal reflection on this practitioner study and next steps in this work, and then what may be the broader lessons learned by teacher education programs from this study.
CHAPTER EIGHT: IMPLICATIONS OF THIS STUDY

Chapters Five, Six, and Seven have provided an in-depth understanding of how the study’s participants understood and interacted with the Diverse Schools (DS) Initiative. More precisely, Chapter Five and Six presented participants’ thoughts and reflections on the challenges and growth-based insights they experienced in the DS Initiative. Also, it is important to note that the analysis of participants’ experiences brought forth perpetual challenges beyond the scope of the goals Ryan and Lina had envisioned for the DS Initiative; however these are essential concerns that need to be considered by teacher educators in ITE programs which use an equity-based approach.

The literature reviews in relation to the findings based on participant narratives demonstrate that there is a consistent theme in both the literature and the narratives which separates theory and practice. This study challenges this traditional conception of a theory and practice divide by using the practitioner research methodology as described by Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009). Moreover, the literature also provides insight on why there is confusion around what culturally relevant pedagogy is and what culturally responsive teaching is; due to many secondary articles using these teaching approaches interchangeably; despite the differences highlighted in the original work done by Ladson-Billings (1994, 1995a, 1995b) and Gay (2002). I wonder if the participants’ narratives which often demonstrated a lack of difference between the two approaches or understanding that there were two different approaches was related to the confusion found in the literature. Finally, the literature on current different practicum approaches and participants’ narratives present some similarities with respect to the perpetual challenges found in ITE programs and innovative initiatives. It is interesting to note, that
although the DS Initiative did begin to address some of these literature review concerns, the process of unpacking and responding to all these structural, relational, practicum approaches, and equity concerns is very complicated and goes beyond the scope of any one equity-based initiative. In the words of Tania Ferfolja (2011):

   Schools, teaching and classrooms do not operate in a socio-cultural or political vacuum. They are microcosms of society, constituting and constituted by socio-cultural discourses that construct particular understandings of identity (33)

Thus, in light of recognizing the greater societal structures (i.e. the way in which school function in society) and the impact neoliberal political agendas have on individual identity, institutional experiences, and thus lived experiences makes this a highly complicated process to unpack each concern outlined in the literature.

   Chapter Seven offered participants reflections on how there can be multiple understandings and uses of culturally relevant responsive pedagogy (CRRP) depending on the social and political context constructed by the teacher’s lived experiences and identity. It is pertinent, as educators to recognize the values, way of thinking, and interpretive lens that all stakeholders in education (i.e. teacher educators, administrators, teacher candidates, associate teachers, faculty researchers) bring with them into their teaching/learning pedagogy; as who they are impacts how they teach.

   In the Urban Diversity Program\(^{95}\) which like the DS Initiative promotes an equity-based approach to teaching. However, it directly examines the complexity and messiness of teacher identity and conflict it may have with the political and social identity of institutions and school culture. Moreover, this program discusses the importance of how

teacher identity impacts how we understand ourselves as “equity educators” in school spaces, especially during neoliberal times. Thus, in light of narratives shared in the Urban Diversity program, it is possible and necessary to incorporate and engage in discussions of teacher identity when doing equity-based work.

As teacher educators we must practice ourselves to embrace the pedagogies we share with our associate teachers and teacher candidates by using them in our daily teaching. Moreover, the participants’ narratives reveal the importance and significance of acknowledging, embracing, and using their lived experiences and identity when engaging in equity initiatives that require participants to construct their understanding of equity-based pedagogy. It is only after teacher identity and lived experiences are taken into consideration that a deeper understanding of how and why each participant understood CRRP differently, and more importantly, why it is essential to have a space for multiple and fluid interpretations of an equity-based pedagogy can be understood.

Thus, it is with all these significant findings and acknowledging the complexities involved in doing equity-based work that this final chapter discusses the implications of this study for the broader audience of ITE, administrators, teachers, and scholars who are interested in equity work studies. Specifically, this chapter explains the possibilities for where we go from here with CRRP and equity initiatives in inner city schools from the following standpoints: (1) participants’ discussions on future possibilities and next steps for the DS Initiative, (2) my personal reflections on what I learned through this practitioner study and, (3) what the next steps are in this work in the context of teacher education more broadly.
One of the goals of the DS Initiative was to increase dialogue around equitable schooling practices and thus decrease the kinds of inequitable schooling experiences that many marginalized and racialized students experience navigating the current inequitable structure of education in Ontario’s urban public schools. According to Arnold, Rick, et. al (1991) a liberal political approach to education:

[e]mphasizes individualism and some measure of social reform, focuses on attitudes rather than structures, focuses on the individual rather than collectivity, [and] focuses on personal growth rather than political transformation, and education. Education is not neutral; stress is on the need to look at both sides of an issue. [Moreover] within curriculum, differences of gender, race, and class are respected, but there is no attempt to tackle the associated power inequities (Arnold, Rick et al. 1991:241).

The DS Initiative fits the above description to the end of the first sentence; it recognizes that schools, school culture, and the content of curriculum are not neutral. This recognition is significant in itself, since the implicit narrative of the public schooling system (one vocalized by many teachers) is that if one works hard enough and gets an education, everything will work out, but marginalized students learn early that this is not the case:

From childhood, we have been socialized to believe that schools are the great equalizers in American and [Canadian] society. We are told that schools “level the playing field,” providing opportunity for all, regardless of social background, by serving as the impartial ground on which individuals freely prove their merit…This ideological formulation is deeply ingrained in the everyday consciousness of most people in this country, validating social inequality…(Villegas and Lucas 2002:22).

Having recognized the differential treatment that exists in schools and the power dynamics that are embedded in the structure of schooling, the DS Initiative tried to create a space to provide equitable schooling practices. However, this barely scratches the surface of the larger structural problem with schooling. Public schooling tends “…to
reproduce existing social inequalities while giving the illusion that such inequalities are natural and fair” (Villegas and Lucas 2002:23). Unfortunately, because the structure of schooling and school culture has not changed, the reproduction of inequities has not been interrupted. Although, the DS Initiative tried to unveil the truth about schooling practices, it serves at best to provide an alternative short-term approach to assisting marginalized and racialized students.

I believe, the DS Initiative utilized CRRP as an “…intervention for reversing the perennial underachievement that has become commonplace for an increasing number of students” (Howard 2003:201). The hope of using CRRP was similar to Hefflin’s vision for culturally relevant pedagogy:

We needed a pedagogy that was relevant to our students’ culture. The effect of this pedagogy not only created a milieu for greater participation, understanding, and tolerance, but it also signaled to students that we were not a segregated community of learners, but one that was integrated into and reaching beyond the lives they know and live” (Hefflin 2002:248).

Thus, along with Hefflin, I believe that Ryan and Lina, the developers of the DS Initiative, desired to re-engage and inform the disengaged students by having teachers and teacher candidates embracing and using their own interpretation of CRRP in teaching. The teachers were to provide support and tailor their teaching to their students while maintaining high standards of excellence by developing a critical consciousness that empowered their students.

Although, this work was very challenging for teachers, I believe it must be done to chip away at the inequities in classroom practices. At the same time, it must go beyond this classroom level and challenge the structural inequities in schools. It is only “[b]y actively working for greater equity in education, teachers can increase access and
can challenge the prevailing perception that differences among students are problems rather than resources” (Villegas and Lucas 2002:24). In light of this collaborative approach to working towards more equitable schools, it has been important to include the voices of the participants in this study.

There were four themes that emerged from the suggestions provided by study participants with respect to how each participant felt they would have been able to deepen their understanding of CRRP and the DS Initiative. These four categories included: (1) the need to develop case studies and have heart-to-heart discussions, (2) the need to have ongoing discussions about teacher identity, (3) the need for better clarity and focus about the purposes and scope of the DS Initiative, and (4) the need to connect teacher candidates and associate teachers to their shared goals.

Possibilities and Recommendations Offered by Participants

Case Studies and Heart-to-Heart Discussions about Teaching Experiences

Many participants informally told me outside of classes and seminars that they desired more heart-to-heart conversations about teaching and real experiences in the classroom. I believe that by “heart-to-heart” conversations, they meant discussions for exploring and sharing difficult and challenging teaching scenarios and experiences they had or their peers had; discussions that would allow them to gain different perspectives on a situation. Many study participants suggested that case studies could be drawn up to initiate conversation and allow all participants to offer their own expertise on the case studies in small groups. One of the main suggestions was to discuss different teaching styles and why there was a preference of one over another:

I want to learn more about particular teaching styles for certain groups, but I also know that can be problematic since not all the students in one grouping are the same. However, the associate teacher across the hall had a very direct, in-your-
face way of teaching style and so during my step days, I was terrified by her. Later I heard from someone that same associate teacher across the hall had a teaching style that was aggressive with the students…but that this particularly worked well with Black students in the class. And she took a particular interest in the Black students in the class, even though they were not the largest group there. Maybe twenty or less of her students were Black (Lilly interview 2010:8).

In other words, there were questions and reflections around teaching to a specific cultural group, to individual behaviours, or to bring a particular focus to the curriculum that were lingering problems in Lilly’s mind. Similarly Lindsey suggested, “[i]t would be nice to have more case studies to study these topics and how to have sensitive conversations with students…how teachers have had these conversations…and how to manage a controversial discussion with a student (Lindsey interview 2010:4).

Doing more case studies would offer two new learning opportunities: (1) offer various models for how to approach different controversial issues, and (2) expose the DS Initiative participants to a broad range different teaching styles they might draw from. I think providing case studies would be helpful as they would provide an opportunity for teacher candidates and associate teachers to lead the path of their learning. If the DS Initiative participants were to share and explore case studies together, there would be a variety of perspectives brought forth and more peer-to-peer learning opportunities available, which may help set the stage for equity-based pedagogy in Initial Teacher Education programs.

Alexandra suggested that discussions around how to work with associate teachers or staff who do not believe in CRRP, or who were not interested in learning about it needed to be addressed by the DS Initiative [and initial teacher education programs in general] (Alexandra interview 2010). This would be helpful as sometimes the most passionate and dedicated teacher candidate who has an equity-focused pedagogy is paired
with an associate teacher who does not share the same passion for equity work, and in this case, it becomes difficult for the teacher candidate to use this focus due to fear of evaluation and cooperation.

Another subject that needed discussion was how to treat special education students in a way that was culturally sensitive: “I was wondering about how to treat students from special education backgrounds differently with cultural sensitivity. Behaviour management and knowing how to apply CRRP at the same time would be interesting to learn about” (Alexandra interview 2010:10). This would be a great topic to have case studies on because many special education programs (with the exception of the gifted program) have an over representation of racially marginalized students. To discuss why and who we find enrolled in special education programs would assist in recognizing the necessity for equity work being done in schools.

Finally, a discussion about how to accommodate English Language Learners (ELL) while delivering CRRP based lessons would be an asset to the DS Initiative (Alexandra 2010). Concrete examples would be beneficial to beginning teachers, to understand how to engage with these situations. The majority of first-generation students or immigrant students that make up the core urban student population in the TDSB 51.1%, do not speak English as their first language (based on the statistics from their website)\(^96\). Thus, it is imperative as educators to discuss how we can teach to the majority of our students whose first language is not English.

\(^96\) For more information please follow this link: http://www.tdsb.on.ca/_site/ViewItem.asp?siteid=309&menuid=4369&pageid=3705
Furthermore, Alexandra (2010) suggested that there should be more concrete examples of how to use CRRP in physics (i.e. forces) or math (i.e. algebra, geometry etc.). There was confusion about how exactly to apply CRRP to subject material beyond Language Arts, Social Studies, and Graphing, based on what was taught in School and Society. Moreover, if there were no ways in which to apply CRRP to the sciences and math, then clarity on whether or not differentiated instruction was sufficient to meet the expectations of CRRP would have been appreciated (Alexandra 2010). At times, it seemed that CRRP was grasping at straws to be “implemented” into everything. Should this be the case? Moreover, CRRP seems to generally inform dialogue and attitudes within the class, but not necessarily address every content curriculum piece, and if this is the case, it should be stated bluntly in order to avoid confusion.

From an associate teacher perspective, Sadia (2010) suggested that it may have surprised all the participants in the study to be given the opportunity to discuss what we already do in our classrooms to reach marginalized and racialized students:

…prior to naming the theoretical piece CRRP, some teachers already did this without calling it this, by the nature of their politics, and the way they see teaching…so long as teachers see their students as conscious participants in their learning then it comes close to the theory (Sadia interview 2010:2).

By initiating and encouraging this type of open, interactive dialogue, there could have been a wonderful sharing that took place with the human resources we had collectively, especially during the joint seminars (Sadia 2010). These conversations around who we are as individuals would have helped immensely to gain ground on what resources we already have, and how to further build upon them (Sadia 2010). Such conversations would also contribute to the relationships developed out of the DS Initiative, which would be a positive benefit to all participants involved (Sadia 2010). Using the DS
Initiative to network socially and professionally and build alliances is another fundamental piece in doing equity-work. Thus, providing a space for dialogue for what the participants already do in their classrooms in response to equity concerns would be a great conversation starter, which would eventually morph into its own natural inquiry.

Discussing Teacher Identity

Sadia (2010) claimed that there was missing information on the culture and identity of teacher candidates in the DS Initiative. This can also be said about associate teachers; nevertheless Sadia wanted more discussion around how teacher candidates were expected “to deal with the consequences of the systemic level of discrimination” (Sadia interview 2010:7). Teacher candidates are not protected by any union, and they are expected to go into schools and deal with discrimination of all sorts (Sadia 2010). Understanding what the teacher candidate goes through with respect to their identity during practicum is essential because this would shed light on what was culturally relevant to them (Sadia 2010). As a result of learning about a teacher candidate’s struggles, discussions around how to make CRRP more accessible in classes could be deepened (Sadia 2010).

Recognizing that teacher candidates’ have different anxieties and knowledge beyond what the university program is teaching them is essential as this translates into their teaching. The desire that the associate teacher has described to uncover the teacher candidate identity provides an opportunity to think about how this piece of information could help in deepening and creating a more meaningful relationship between both of them. This sounds exactly like being culturally responsive to your teacher candidate. The further interesting point brought forth by Sadia her recognition that associate teachers,
unlike teacher candidates, have their rights protected by a union. This leaves me wondering: if teacher candidates provided a controversial lesson that alarmed the students’ parents and community, how would they be treated? Recognizing the importance of this question, I wonder how the lessons they plan daily with an equity-based pedagogy affect their sense of safety. Do fears about being penalized by school administrators or students’ parents impede them from developing important lessons supporting social justice?

Returning to Sadia’s thoughts on how the DS Initiative could enhance the relationship and increase the amount of equity-based dialogue between the associate teacher and teacher candidate, she suggests that we, as educators, need to model CRRP ourselves:

Where is the culturally relevant piece for teacher candidates? My thought has not been there before, but now I am there…I am not only talking sexual orientation but race and class…now in school communities there is an expectation that teacher candidates are ‘supposed’ to have certain resources, like a car, (things that denote physical wealth). Our understanding of CRRP delivery is missing some pieces…when they talk about CRRP in terms of curriculum, do they have CRRP in their own classrooms at [this Canadian university]? (Sadia interview 2010:7)

Thus, Sadia raises interesting questions about what CRRP teacher education looks like and CRRP might be used to gain insight into the cultural identities of teacher candidates and associate teachers and their needs (Sadia 2010). I find this suggestion very insightful. When I began writing this dissertation, I struggled with how I would share my perspectives or the interpretive lens through which I would analyze the data. It was not until I was able to deeply reflect upon and recognize my positionality and the lived experiences that had brought me to this work that I was able to begin writing about it. Thus, without understanding my positionality and the multiple identities I held during this
research study, I would not have been able to understand the messiness and complexity of how an educator’s identity affects and influences his or her teaching pedagogy and way of interpreting CRRP.

As a result of recognizing one’s own identity and lived experiences, a more textured understanding about what engaged pedagogy looks like for that individual and what it means to be an educator can emerge. In light of this, finding a space for teacher candidates and associate teachers to articulate their teacher identities, values and lived experiences is critical to equity-based work, as it starts in the individual and then expands. Finally, from the perspective of a teacher educator, it is important to embrace the multiplicity of understandings that arise out of sharing interpretations on what engaged pedagogy (e.g. CRRP) looks like. In light of this, if teacher educators, associate teachers, and teacher candidates are exposed to multiple different understandings of CRRP, this would potentially replicate how students in classrooms may understand CRRP. Upon providing space for divergent views, as educators, we can recognize and collaborate on how to move forward pedagogically; just as in our classrooms we would create a safe space for all voices. The concern that I have is if there only the teacher voice present without any other perspectives available, what happens if the teacher voice is rooted in deficit assumptions?

Clarity and Focus about the DS Initiative

Many participants were confused about the purpose of the DS Initiative. An in-depth examination of the lack of clarity in the DS Initiative was discussed previously as a challenge in the Chapter Five. However, there was an overlap between the challenges and the recommendations that participants made.
Elizabeth (2010) suggested it would be very helpful if “… both the teacher candidate and associate teacher were aware of the two-way participation in the DS Initiative” (Elizabeth interview 2011:6). Hopefully, this would allow for more conversation about classroom practices and the theory that was learned in the School and Society classes (Elizabeth 2011). “I mean, the associate teachers would have a lot more experience and insight into what happens in a classroom, and that would be helpful to hear (how to bridge the gap between theory and practice)” (Elizabeth interview 2011:6). Thus, it would be beneficial to the all participants to know and acknowledge their role in the DS Initiative (Elizabeth 2011).

As a teacher educator, I believe that making teacher candidates and associate teachers aware of the shared exposure to equity-based pedagogy classes and seminars would have helped to create a space to have deeper conversations that otherwise may not have occurred. As a result of making both parties aware of the shared pedagogy approach, a common goal/vision on teaching could have been created, which would have benefitted the students and deepened the relationship between teacher candidates, associate teachers, and university-based initiatives.

In addition to Elizabeth’s concerns, Jane suggested there should be consistency between what was put forth at the beginning of the DS Initiative (i.e. equity projects) and what occurred in them (i.e. a presentation on Shakespeare) (Jane 2011). I recognize teacher education programs are short in length, and thus cannot fit all the content desired. However, as teacher educators, if we are going to do equity-based work, and ask professionals to join us in conversation, we have a responsibility to follow through on what we have promised them, especially if the seminars were not designed to be organic.
Connecting Teacher Candidates and Associate Teachers

Several participants commented that there should have been some time built into the DS Initiative for the associate teachers and teacher candidates (who worked at the same school) to connect. A further suggestion would be to exchange ideas around an equity project on a school-based level instead of within individual classrooms, with a mixture of teacher candidates and associate teachers from different schools working together, to get a broader range of perspectives on a particular shared equity concern. Nevertheless, Elizabeth recommended “[t]o have discussions about things we learned in School and Society classes at the schools during practicum or have the associate teachers come to the School and Society classes. This would connect teachers’ practical knowledge with our theory base” (Elizabeth interview 2011:6). Along the same line of thought, Jane, an associate teacher, suggested that if seminars were to be useful to her, it would have been beneficial to have other staff from her school participate. She recommended this extension for participants because school-wide change requires more than one or a few teachers on board (Jane 2011).

I recognize equity-based pedagogy as a part of the discussion when addressing equity concerns, however, as mentioned previously, structural schooling concerns that perpetuate inequities must be addressed simultaneously. This can happen when staff work collectively at a school work to foster change.

Another associate teacher, Nick, felt there was a disconnect between the teacher candidate and his learning experiences during the seminars (Nick 2010). He suggested that the initiative could develop an evaluation sheet that inquired about participants’ collaborative experience of the initiative and how it impacted the classroom experience
(Nick 2010). In particular, “[o]ne of the sheets that the associate teacher and teacher candidate do together could be focused on the CRRP initiative and what we are doing could be included in the sheet, like a small one” (Nick interview 2010:6). Nick also emphasized the importance of cross-connecting the seminars and the School and Society classes with the practicum experience, which would result in a better connection between the associate teacher and teacher candidate (Nick 2010).

Creating a firm connection between Initial Teacher Education classes/seminars with the practicum teaching opportunities would help create a shared opportunity for the associate teacher and the teacher candidate to co-teach and co-learn. Also, a direct connection could be made between what the participants learned in the School and Society classes and CRRP seminars by initiating a lesson plan that had to be used during practicum to demonstrate their interpretation of CRRP. Moreover, another connection may be made between associate teacher and teacher candidate by co-developing an inquiry assignment for teacher candidates and associate teachers through school-based equity initiatives.

**Reflections and Future Directions from Initiative Developers**

**The Process of the Study**

Ryan and Lina (2011) were grateful for the opportunity to participate in the study because it allowed them to slow down, focus, and reflect in the process of delivering the DS Initiative. Ryan stated that he was happy “to have the chance to sit down and talk about what they were doing because that was helpful. I appreciated it for allowing us to reflect and focus in on what was happening” (Ryan interview four 2011:1). Lina shared the same sentiments as Ryan, but added that the important part of this process was “to provide some improvements and make the [initiative] better” (Lina interview four
She also realized while reflecting during the process, that “[m]aking changes to practicum experiences so that they would benefit teacher candidates and associate teachers more, and so building critical thinking faster or at least have it in development” earlier would have been helpful (Lina interview four 2011:1). Finally, Lina claimed that “…the process of ongoing reflection and [the researcher’s] presence throughout the teaching sessions and classes made me feel vulnerable and exposed” (Lina interview four 2011:1). However, she believed that exposure was worth it, if there was some learning to be discovered in making the DS Initiative better for associate teachers, teacher candidates and the students (Lina 2011).

It is important to recognize what the greater context of improving the DS Initiative means for equity-based work in teacher education programs. There is a need for teacher identity to be a part of equity-based work, moreover there needs to be an acknowledgement of the artificial divide between theory and practice exists when doing school and university partnerships, and a realization that culturally responsive pedagogy and culturally relevant pedagogy come from different schools of thought and thus they cannot be used interchangeably or fused together (without recognizing this difference).

Equity work is always in progress and as stakeholders in education attempt new bold initiatives or programs it is important to keep sight of the overall intention and purpose of this work. Thus, improving equity-based initiatives or programs is part and parcel of doing equity work in education. Equity programs are highly contextual and address very complicated personal and political matters, as they work with people and genuinely attempt to understand the multiple perspectives on controversial and sensitive topics.
Lessons Learned from the Initiative

Prior to reading the analysis chapters in this study, the following reflections were provided by Ryan and Lina on how they believed the DS Initiative went. Lina (2011) stated that she learned that associate teachers and teacher candidates who were involved with the DS Initiative wanted to see “the action earlier (i.e. in terms of equity projects/initiatives), and learn the identity of the [Equity Option (EO)] sooner” (Lina interview four 2011:2). In response to the preliminary findings, that demonstrated some participants’ desire for pedagogical resources, Lina suggested that next year they would focus on building resources. Thus, moving faster through the theory and getting into the application of CRRP was a learning opportunity (Lina 2011). However, this is not reflective of what all the findings stated in Chapters Five, Six, and Seven, which indicated a desire among DS Initiative participants to unpack teacher identity and knowledge to understand CRRP before proceeding with any other dialogue.

Another learning that Lina shared was that there needed to be more careful selection of guest speakers to ensure that they were focused and in line with the equity principles that DS had established. In particular, the joint sessions (particularly, the one held in the first term) were concerning since they did not turn out the way they had envisioned. Ryan (2011) acknowledged this same learning, and suggested that it was worth spending time to understand what the workshop entailed prior to its delivery, even if it was being delivered by professional educators. This insight on the joint seminar as not being representative of equity-based work, was echoed by some of the teacher candidates and associate teachers. Thus, when teacher educators invite guest speakers they must review the content of the presentation prior to it being presented.
The third concern Lina (2011) recognized was that in classes and seminars the “comfortable issues in CRRP were discussed, but not the critical consciousness piece which needs to be pushed” and would have served to empower educators (Lina interview four 2011:2). In particular, “comfortable issues” meant using culturally relevant texts and recognizing diversity, whereas talking about race, power, privilege were uncomfortable issues that many teacher candidates had difficulty discussing. She suggested that power dynamics, inequitable structures, and the lens in which the dominant world gazes at you, need to be challenged and pushed (Lina 2011). Passionately, she explained that students need to question the things that still circulate in the air that we breathe, in particular, “…navigating the racism, sexism, classism, anti-everything” (Lina interview four 2011:2). As a result, Lina (2011) recommended that the theoretical work must be practically translated into a reality that students live and can navigate on a daily basis.

It is important to recognize as mentioned previously in the literature reviews and throughout the analysis chapters that according to Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009) there is no divide between theory and practice. When looking at issues of classism, racism, sexism and other controversial issues, it must be acknowledged that these are embodied together and are co-implicated/co-implied in everyday incidents. However, this concern about theory and practice does not devalue the pertinence of learning how to develop equity-based pedagogies that work with and through these inequitable schooling experiences. As teacher educators, we must work with equity-based pedagogies that are fluid and constantly emerging to address different social contexts. Being more direct about critical consciousness pieces around uncomfortable notions in equity-based pedagogy is necessary in order to get shifts in thinking paradigms to occur; if we cannot
re-imagine and analyze our thoughts critically, then how are we supposed to ask our students to do this? If it seems that self-critical reflection does not happen, does the value or meaningfulness of providing culturally relevant books and culturally responsive posters become shallow?

Ryan (2011) agreed with all of Lina’s suggestions and added that on a more structural level, the programming for the DS Initiative needed a stronger link with the Equity Option (EO). He said if a stronger partnership had been developed, the connection with EO and the Centre for Equity (CE) would have been deeper (Ryan 2011). More clear and consistent communication between the university and the teacher education program partnership is essential to help maintain everyone on board and ultimately direct all the energy towards working towards a common goal.

Moreover, Ryan (2011) learned that there needed to be a more careful selection of schools that participated in the DS Initiative in order to provide more representation of schools. He also stated that the associate teacher and teacher candidate pairings should have not been left up to random choice but careful selection (Ryan 2011). With these structural learnings in mind, Ryan (2011) stated that the DS Initiative would have greatly improved.

The selection processes of schools participating in the DS Initiative and the pairing of teacher candidates and associate teachers are vital as they set the foundation of who counts and why people are participating. Both these decisions are in the hands of teacher educators when they design any initiative, and thus it is important to be mindful of these decisions (who is the audience and what is the diversity within it) as they impact the narratives which emerge from them. In the case of the DS Initiative, the narratives of
the participants did provide some diversity and because it was a context-specific initiative that was examining inner city schools, it made sense to use only inner city schools.

The DS Initiative Moves in a New Direction

Ryan and Lina disclosed with great sadness that they will not be teaching the School and Society classes in the Equity Option (EO) during the 2012 academic year due to administrative policies and regulations (Ryan and Lina 2011). As a result, their primary visions for next year would not fully materialize in next year’s plans. However, Ryan and Lina (2011) both would like a partnership to continue between Centre for Equity (CE) and EO aligning the equity principles behind CE and the EO. Such a partnership would allow both founders of the Diverse Schools (DS) Initiative to partake in EO as professional guest speakers for next year (2011-2012).

As guest speakers, Ryan and Lina would maintain the goal of developing a strong equity-based relationship between associate teachers and teacher candidate. This relationship would offer consistency in which pedagogical approaches are used in the classroom and provide all students with a space to discuss social justice-based concerns at least twice a year (during practicum) (Ryan 2011). Lina and Ryan wish to accomplish the aforementioned goal by hosting four evening events throughout the upcoming year (Lina and Ryan 2011).

The four evenings will be spaced strategically before practicum one, after practicum one, before practicum two, and after practicum two (Lina and Ryan 2011). The evening event will be mandatory for all teacher candidates to attend as a part of their teacher education program, and will offer a cordial invitation to all associate teachers involved with the EO (Lina and Ryan 2011). To ensure accessibility for everyone to
attend, there will be childcare available and dinner will be served in the evening programs (Lina and Ryan 2011). Thus, the reach of next year’s evening programs will be greater because they will be open to approximately seventy teacher candidates and seventy associate teachers.

The content of the four evening programs will be derived from all those who are attending (Lina and Ryan 2011). The idea is to have associate teachers pair up with their respective teacher candidates to discuss an equity-based project/lesson they would like to do, and then collaborate on planning it in the evening before the practicum (Lina and Ryan 2011). These ideas for the lesson plan or project can come from a variety of places: student-developed and initiated, school-based concern, curriculum content concern, a bubbling issue in the community of the school, and so forth (it does not have to be teacher-driven) (Lina and Ryan 2011). The evening programme after practicum will be used to share approximately seventy different equity-based lesson/project plans with all who attend that evening (Ryan and Lina 2011). This would be repeated then for the second practicum, with new associate teacher and teacher candidate pairs, thus, creating a database of one-hundred and forty different equity lessons/projects, which would be a tremendous resource for educators who are interested in doing social justice-based work (Ryan and Lina 2011).

As a result of hosting these four evening programs and helping in the preliminary planning for the EO this upcoming year, Ryan and Lina hope to strengthen the unity across the EO and with the Centre of Equity (CE). In addition, they look forward to creating a strong resource for educators interested in using CRRP lessons to address the
concerns of marginalized and racialized students. It is with these hopes and plans in mind Ryan and Lina (2011) begin the following year.

While Ryan and Lina plan to make their teachings more accessible to a larger audience of teacher candidates and associate teachers, I plan to deepen my inquiries and further explore what the findings mean. I want to engage in another study that brings research related to deficit thinking practices into dialogue with culturally relevant pedagogy and culturally responsive teaching respectively. More particularly, I wish to gain insight into how teacher candidates’ and their associate teachers’ identities and lived experiences shape their deficit thinking assumptions and their interpretations of culturally relevant pedagogy and culturally responsive teaching. Finally, I wish to explore how the participants’ interpretations demonstrate (if at all) that theory and practice are co-dependent. This future study would add to the critical dialogue on supporting more equitable schooling experiences for students in inner city school communities by recognizing how the tremendous impact of teacher identity is on marginalized students’ schooling experiences.

Reflection on the Growth of the Equity Option and this Study

I remember seven years ago when I was a teacher candidate in the first year that the Equity Option (EO) was formed; I was anxious and passionate about this buzz around “equity work,” as I knew was going to learn a lot. Understanding that equity and social justice work were key components of the EO, I was eager to learn how to use such understandings in my teaching. My experience in the EO was not what I observed this past year, where the conversations about controversial issues and the preliminary discussions of a pedagogy (now named CRRP) were beginning. Rather, my experience was unfortunately that the EO was disorganized and School and Society class was
“theory and philosophy”. I had learned a lot that year in terms of “theory” and about the inequities that existed, but never quite understood their impact on teaching, let alone what to do about them as a marginalized classroom teacher. As for the associate teachers being involved with my university-based learning, there was no initiative, and it was by complete “luck of the draw” that I had been paired with two progressive associate teachers.

In contrast to my personal experiences with the EO, this year while I conducted research with the EO (seven years later) I was surprised to see the growth in the EO. I took a back seat, observing and attentively listening to what was happening in the School and Society classes, and how the monthly CRRP seminars were grappling with what was being discussed and by whom. It was amazing to see the bluntness in conversation about problems that occurred in the classroom (behaviour/classroom management, white guilt, gender/class concerns etc.). In the words of the instructors, two perspectives had been provided: one that was more theoretical, and another that was practical. However, this dichotomy between theory and practice did not correlate with my constantly emerging beliefs about teaching or about graduate studies. Further, I felt that the overwhelming response to controversial equity discussions about structural inequities was more questions and heightened emotions of anxiety. This I expected. However, the new finding that re-directed and made my own thinking blossom was that there is a need for a multiplicity of approaches to and understandings of equity-based pedagogy, and these are highly contextualized. There is absolutely no need to have one understanding to “implement” because it would never work with all educators, simply because (1) educator’s embody different lived experiences and are unique, and (2) every social and
physical context of the classroom and its students is different. Thus, if teaching is meant to meet the needs of the students and is influenced by the teacher’s beliefs and values (as I believe no teaching is neutral) then there need to be several understandings and approaches to equity-based pedagogy.

In the monthly CRRP seminars, it was interesting to note first, that they were happening and second, that there was private funding for the Diverse Schools (DS) Initiative. I recognized that there was a completely different environment set up for the associate teachers (it was much more relaxed). There was food and beverages, a bigger room, flexibility with the beginning and the ending time of the seminar. It seemed there was great pressure on ensuring the comfort of the associate teachers. The idea of having experienced teachers in [this Canadian university] learning about CRRP was amazing, and learning about the complexities involved in the process of working with different stakeholders in education with a goal of creating stronger partnerships through discussions of equity was phenomenal.

In addition to the insights I have mentioned throughout this study, I recognize it is important for me to acknowledge my new appreciation and understanding of practitioner research in the context of situating my practitioner identities in this study. In the words of Campano and Simon:

[p]ractitioner researchers theorize from the thick of things, from actual educational contexts that they shape daily. These pedagogical acts help create the conditions to think about the world—and the people in it—anew; which in turn informs new educational possibilities for students (2010:223).

97 I would particularly like to thank Professor Robert Simon again for the knowledge and insight on practitioner research that he shared with me.
In the context of this study, when I was recording my data and collecting my field notes, I was immersed in the “thick of things”; I could feel the reflective intensity of doing this work through my interactions with the participants of this study. Throughout the data analysis and the process of disseminating the preliminary data to the developers of the DS Initiative and my thesis supervisors, I found myself full of anxiety and worry because I did not want to create tension in my professional and personal relationships with the developers of the DS Initiative. I agree with Cochran-Smith and Lytle’s articulation of the character of practitioner research at the university:

...taking practitioner research seriously at the university creates issues and tensions that are at once disruptive and productive. These have to do with dilemmas and contradictions about positions and relationships, about research conventions and practices, and about the broader meanings of scholarly activity. At times, this can make working within the university context difficult; however, it can also be generative—suggesting new questions and prompting further critique about school-university relationships (Cochran-Smith and Lytle 2009: 97).

In light of this understanding of practitioner research, and in hindsight on this study, I believe that this project has brought forth new questions about how to create partnerships between different stakeholders in education in the demanding context of Initial Teacher Education (ITE). Also, I believe that this study has brought about a new understanding and appreciation for the multiplicity of interpretations of equity-based pedagogy and how and why they are valuable. Recognizing the value of the multiple interpretations of equity-based pedagogy coming that emerged from teachers’ and teacher candidates’ rich narratives about their challenges with it helps to provide a ripple effect on other stakeholders in education:

...practitioner research has the potential to collide with the longstanding tradition of universities to privilege research while holding teaching and service in relatively low regard and with the tendency of universities to call for changes in
schools without altering the cultures of their own institutions (Cochran-Smith and Lytle 2009:29).

When certain voices are more dominant then others in ITE, an automatic devaluing of those not heard is often assumed or felt as revealed by the narratives shared in previous chapters. From the perspective of the participants in this study, the DS Initiative did not completely uphold what it promoted with respect to “getting to know your students” and adapting the content to meeting their specific needs, and this was problematic. Finally, through using a critical practitioner research methodology, I have come realize the deeply problematic binary between theory and practice as something deeply rooted in teacher education literature. I concur with Cochran-Smith and Lytle’s thoughts:

… to privilege either scholarship or practice … [demonstrates] a desire to locate [practitioner research] at the intersection of two worlds deeply informed and continuously called into question our perspectives on collaboration and power, voice and representation, culture and difference, the purposes of teaching and teacher education in terms of social change and social justice, and the interrelationships of inquiry, knowledge, and practice (2009:90).

I acknowledge that this concern is one that many educators would be uncomfortable with however, I believe it is important that this clarification be made that theory and practice are co-dependent and co-existent. Doing so values “practitioners” and “academics” equally, and recognizes the work done by both to be essential and equally valuable (instead of seeing it as practice in contrast to theory - which is given more value). To honour and uphold the many efforts and good work that has been done and continues to be done in hopes of creating equitable schooling experiences for marginalized students by all stakeholders in education, it is important to state this clarification and shift in thinking.

**Implications for Initial Teacher Education Programs**

In reflecting on how participants interacted with and interpreted the DS Initiative, I recognize that there is still much work to be done. I believe that in order to transform
the current inequitable experiences students are having and begin this journey of change in ITE programs that:

…what is required in both preservice and inservice teacher education programs are processes that prompt teachers and teacher educators to construct their own questions and then begin to develop courses of action that are valid in their local contexts and communities (Cochran-Smith and Lytle 2009:63).

It is through this process of asking questions that stakeholders in education can help one another to develop their own deeper understandings of equity-based pedagogy for their local classrooms. Thus, I wonder how CRRP would be understood, enacted, or challenged if it were rooted in an inquiry-based consensus approach. I understand that what I am advocating for on behalf of all stakeholders in education is a difficult undertaking as “[t]he sociology of education has long been concerned with uncovering processes by which only specific groups’ knowledge becomes official knowledge” (Apple quoted in Sleeter 2002:9). However, it must be recognized and taught that:

[k]nowledge in democratic societies generally is not produced through a conspiracy, but rather by actors within shared spaces of power, drawing on shared funds of knowledge and experiences…Power is always contested, but dominant groups mask their collective power by promulgating their worldview as if it were everyone’s” (Sleeter 2002:9).

Associate teachers and teacher candidates in conjunction with teacher educators have the power and influence to decide what counts as knowledge and how knowledge is disseminated, and it is when they work in “shared spaces of power” that they have a greater capacity to create change for marginalized students. Simultaneously, it is unfortunate but a true reality that:

[o]pressed groups share minority positioning relative to the dominant society, which is a political rather than cultural issue, and thus share ‘the effects of economic exploitation, political disenfranchisement, social manipulation, and ideological domination on the cultural formation of minority subjects and discourses” (Sleeter 2002:13).
As a result of such shared injustices, it is important to recognize how and why marginalized and racialized groups need to work together in effort of transforming the dominant gaze on their positionality. According to Sleeter, the following analytic concepts need to be addressed, as they are common to the intellectual work of historically oppressed people: “centring narratives, social construction of theory, colonialism, liberation from subjugation, social construction of identities, voice through the Arts, and strengths of oppressed communities” (Sleeter 2002:13). Sleeter’s suggestion offers one way in which to blatantly expose the roots of inequities that marginalized and racialized groups experience. Although I agree with the power of a collective marginalized voice to challenge societal power hierarchies, I believe it is essential to recognize and not gloss over the individual cultural differences of each marginalized and racialized group. In the following paragraphs, insights on the (1) limitations of knowing racialized and marginalized group identities, (2) constraints of teaching, teachers and teacher education, and (3) possibilities and future directions in respect to teacher education are presented.

Limitations of Knowing Racialized and Marginalized Group Identities

One cannot deny that “[i]t is common knowledge that the great majority of preservice teachers are White while the student population is becoming increasingly diverse” (Sleeter, Torres, and Laughlin 2004:81). As a result, teacher educators “…have wrestled with using multicultural critical pedagogy [and other pedagogies such as CRRP] to prepare such preservice students both to teach culturally and linguistically diverse students well, and to use multicultural critical pedagogy as teachers” (ibid.). Unfortunately, it is essential to recognize the limitations of any pedagogy in teacher
education programs that attempt to address the diverse needs of all marginalized and racialized groups. One of the main limitations of any pedagogy is:

...because individual differences exist within any single group and because culture is constantly evolving as it adapts to changing social, economic, political, and environmental conditions, it is impossible for prospective teachers to learn enough about their future students while in programs of preservice preparation (Villegas and Lucas 2002:27).

Nevertheless, such pedagogies are helpful and well-intentioned if they bring to the surface the roots of inequity and build a foundation for dialogue across and within each marginalized group. The philosophical challenge that remains is: understanding the individual cultural group and the individuals within it while also attempting to address the common inequitable experiences among all marginalized groups. In addition to this philosophical challenge, there is a practical challenge that lies in the physical and contextual constraints in teaching.

*Constraints of Teaching and Teacher Education*

The constraints of teaching in inner city schools that mainly service marginalized and racialized students are: the challenges of acquiring sufficient and suitable teaching resources (i.e. textbooks, classroom materials and supplies), physical space, and human resources (i.e. teachers who are willing and able to challenge students to meet high expectations and encourage them to become critical thinkers) for their needs. Beyond this, there are the structural constraints of schooling that are shared by all schools namely: timetabling space, power imbalances, provincial standardized testing and curriculum standards (Osborne 1996). Hence, the pedagogies that attempt to address marginalized and racialized groups with respect to classroom practices and “…processes are not meant to be prescriptive or reductionist, and so they avoid a top-down imposition of the correct
way. Rather, they should be read as informed starting points for action, starting points that might be extended and be refined over time” (Osborne 1996:289). The other limitation that is shared by all teacher education programs is the image of the teacher being the ‘saviour of the children’:

/some policymakers are positing teachers as the determining factor in students’ success while ignoring other complex variables: school resources, leadership, and investments in teachers’ capacity building and professional development, not to mention such student-related factors as family structure, economic status, housing, health, and employment. But the problems of schools are much bigger than teacher quality, and the problems of society are much bigger than imperfect schools” (Cochran-Smith 2006:24)

Teachers do make a difference in the lives of their students but cannot “fix” or address every component of inequity they suffer because teachers are confronted with some of them as well, especially if they are teachers from marginalized backgrounds. Teacher identity plays a role in power dynamics that are deeply embedded in schooling processes, policies, and structures:

…teaching and teacher education are political in the sense that schooling has to do with issues of power and access to learning opportunities. Therefore, teacher and teacher educators are a part of the larger political struggle. The work of teachers does have an impact on children’s lives. We should be actively working to challenge the inequity of opportunity that exists in our society and our system of schooling and education. If we are not challenging those inequities, then we are, in a certain way, supporting the status quo. When we are talking about improving schools and improving achievement…it means to challenge and change (Wilson 2008:749).

As teachers and teacher educators, it is our duty and moral obligation to the students we teach to challenge and change the inequities that our students endure while recognizing the complexity and depth of the greater inequitable societal framework in which schools (mal)function.
Possibilities and Future Directions in Initial Teacher Education

Despite the hard work, determination, challenges and limitations that stakeholders in education face while designing and delivering new initiatives or forms of teacher education (i.e. different practicum set-ups) it is critical that all stakeholders continue to strive, persevere, and maintain hope. To give up is to disregard the vulnerability of marginalized students and to avoid our social responsibility as stakeholders in education. It is important to remember “[t]o put our beliefs on hold is to see ourselves in another’s gaze so that we can learn to be vulnerable enough to allow our world to turn upside down in order to allow the realities of others to edge themselves into our consciousness” (Lisa Delpit as quoted by Hefflin, 2002:234). With this greater idea in mind and a deep feeling of compassion in heart, it is essential that all stakeholders in education continue to aspire to create equitable schooling experiences for all students, and see themselves as practitioner researchers who are constantly working to improve their practice in light of this goal:

The improved practice that emerges from practitioner research may take several forms: professional development of teachers as they gain insight from outcomes of research and processes of undertaking it; curriculum development as teacher researchers implement new courses of action and make their actions known to others; and potentially, development of the profession as a whole as teacher researchers take upon themselves to make this sort of research a normal, rather than exceptional, approach to practice (Jacobson 1998:129).

It is through these different forms of creating and re-creating improved teaching practices that stakeholders in education can unite in advocating for equitable schooling experiences for all students.

As a critical practitioner researcher myself, I recognize that sometimes the effects of participating in or designing projects that advocate for equitable schooling experiences
for all students may seem like they are not working because there are no direct effects which can be observed. This can be disheartening. However, I believe what we see and feel sometimes may not be an accurate depiction of the work we have done because the process of change is ongoing and will always continue to unfold, reformulate, and constantly change over time; change occurs slowly and will eventually emerge on its own. Thus, it is important not to be too hasty in our desire to see the “fruits of our labour” as change takes time, hence we must be patient. The irony lies in the fact that we as members of the greater society also have consciously or unconsciously have contributed to the oppressive nature of marginalized students’ schooling experiences. Unfortunately, when educators are not part of vocalizing the inequities that marginalized students experience on a daily basis, they have become part of the process of normalizing and non-verbally accepting oppressive public schooling experiences. Thus, in order to do our part as stakeholders in education, we must critically be aware of being self-reflective about our own thoughts, (in)action, and intentions when expecting to bring about transformative change (even if it is incremental) in schooling experiences and structures:

[a]s a society, we pushed these people to the margins and came to see that as their normal condition. I believe it is crucial to acknowledge such realities as an essential foundation for re-conceptualizing teaching and our classroom practices. The dilemma is not benign [rather it] is a sad outcome of our history. It is intensely political, and while rooted in the past, its politics are worked out daily in our classrooms and in our wider societies. So the dilemma needs tackling (Osborne 1996:288).

The messiness of the neoliberal politics behind and inherent in the education system is deeply rooted, but it must not deter educators from continuing “…to improve their programs and partnerships to provide new teachers with tools, knowledge, and
experiences that they will need to be successful with all the children whom they teach” (Bergeron 2008:7).

All stakeholders in education play a vital part in initiating and contributing to the slow but essential process of change. I believe the roots of change are watered and grown by all stakeholders in education that dig deep into the messiness of weeds (the deficit assumptions and troubling thoughts) that surround the identities of marginalized students, and upon the removal of these weeds create a rich and healthy environment for the identities and experiences of marginalized students to flourish in. It is with this belief in change and compassion in my heart that I continue in my pursuit for equitable schooling experiences for all students.
Works Cited


Websites Used:

Achievement Gap Task Force Report (2010) as found on [www.tdsb.on.ca](http://www.tdsb.on.ca)