Teaching for Social Justice:
Culturally Responsive and Relevant Pedagogy in Urban Schools

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Bring me all your dreams,
You dreamer,
Bring me all your
Heart melodies
That I may wrap them
In a blue-cloud-cloth
Away from the too-rough fingers
Of the world

- Langston Hughes
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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to examine the social and cultural context of urban schools, and the impact it has on educational opportunities for students. In particular, the study examines the systemic factors faced by students living in high-needs communities and the impact that factors such as race, class, and ethnicity, has on their learning experience. Such considerations are important to understand and reflect upon in our practice as teachers. The underlying assumptions of the role of the teacher and their pedagogical practices need to be questioned. Through interviews, this study examines the narratives of teachers that have applied Culturally Responsive and Relevant Pedagogy to their practice in challenging the inequities that they have experienced in their classrooms or schools. In doing so, they have attempted to challenge the common view of education which has focused on students as recipients of knowledge (Freire, 2000). The findings suggest that by acknowledging students’ knowledge and experiences in the curriculum, teachers can provide spaces for students to see themselves as actors, recognizing the assets they bring to the classroom. This study demonstrates through a Culturally Responsive and Relevant approach to education students become empowered in their learning experiences, while recognizing that they can be active and engaged citizens.
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Teaching for Social Justice: 
Culturally Relevant Pedagogy in Urban Schools

Chapter One: INTRODUCTION

The persistent achievement gap between marginalized and racialized students from poor families and their peers, calls for research that examines the factors associated with economic, social and cultural context to gain insight in promoting student learning. New waves of immigration and the changing demographic landscape in Toronto have had implications on the education school systems. The demographics of Toronto continue to evolve, and these changes are reflected in our schools. Schools in Toronto, such as elsewhere in Canada represent a greater range of ethnic groups and socio-economic status than it has ever had in the past. This research study seeks to understand the implications of these changes for student learning. More specifically, I intend to investigate the impact that such factors have on the learning of a child from a socio-economic and cultural context that is overrun with many challenges, such as violence, poverty, lack of resources, access barriers, and so forth. This study is both reflective and empirical. At the centre of the research study will be the narrative of the pedagogical practices of four exemplary teachers that have addressed such challenges in their classroom, and how they worked to promote student learning and achievement.

This qualitative study explores how educators can make learning more meaningful to students by incorporating practices that reflect the diverse cultural, ethical and linguistic make up of our students in urban schools. More specifically, I take a phenomenological approach to the ways that culturally responsive and culturally relevant practices function to provide a space for authentic learning experiences. The narratives of
each of the research participants provided an account of the rich experiences of educators teaching for social justice. When placed in dialogue with the relevant literature, these narratives provide a multifaceted perspective into the successful practices of teaching youth in urban schools.

**Background of the Researcher**

My interest in the topic is multifaceted and informed by my experiences both within and outside the classroom. Over the course of my years as a mentor and community volunteer, I have necessarily been made aware of the plethora of challenges faced by Toronto’s urban youth. Linda Darling-Hammond argues that providing the children of America with a democratic education has been and continues to be a struggle, and notes that “the right to learn in ways that develop both individual competence and a democratic community has been a myth rather than a reality for many Americans” (2006, 13). Through the variety of didactic experiences of which I have been afforded, I have worked closely with a diversity of groups of students. These experiences have greatly shaped my knowledge of the teaching and learning process, and the importance as an educator to be aware of the social and cultural context of the students and their diverse narratives. The role of the educator is therefore to empower students and ensure that their right to learn is not impeded by prevalent socio-economic barriers. The goal of this research study is to uncover methods of teaching that promotes enriched learning experiences for all students. I hope to gain insight through this research study on Culturally Responsive and Relevant Pedagogy which will inform my teaching in ways that will facilitate the academic achievement of students from diverse backgrounds.
Research Questions

In this study I situate my research and analysis around the central question: In what ways can Culturally Responsive and Relevant Pedagogy promote education for social justice within urban schools? Incorporated into this broader topic, I explore the following sub-questions:

- How do teachers honour and validate student culture, knowledge and experiences in the curriculum and classroom?
- In what ways can teachers implement equity pedagogy rooted in social justice aimed to promote student engagement in high-needs neighbourhoods?
- How do teachers acknowledge forms of discrimination and interrogate issues of power and privilege pervasive in the education system?
- In what ways do teachers support students to be engaged actors in their education and as agents of change in their school and community?

Grounded in the perspective that schools should promote political, economic and cultural democracy as part of its mandate, this research question examines the pedagogy of educators who teach students in diverse cultural and low socio-economic neighbourhoods. It is based on a perspective that culturally relevant teaching when implemented in curriculum and instruction can positively impact academic achievement of students. With these questions as a guide and the rich knowledge and experiences of my participants as data, the research study provides a narrative of practices of culturally responsive and relevant teaching in urban schools.

Significance of the Study

My experiences within the classroom have drawn my attention to the unremitting challenges and barriers to education that prevent many students from obtaining rich
learning experiences. The cultural and political landscape of Canada has changed dramatically over recent years reflecting the changes in immigration patterns. These changes have a dramatic impact on schools particularly in urban areas which are culturally and socially diverse. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, states that “the education of all children throughout the world shall be directed to, the development of the child’s personality, talents, and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential” (Ayers, 2008, p.5). We are challenged to examine more deeply the situation of the lives that many students in urban neighbourhoods are faced, and to question what more can be done.

Toronto is one of the most ethnically diverse cities in North America, and this diversity is reflected in the Toronto District School Board (TDSB), the largest school board in Canada. In the TDSB, the four largest self-identified “racialized groups” are White (29%), South Asian (24%), East Asian (15%), and Black (12%). “Mixed,” Middle Eastern, Southeast Asian, Latin American, and Aboriginal, make up the remaining population (TDSB Census Fact Sheet, 2013). Furthermore, the majority of students within the TDSB are from immigrant families with both of their parents born outside Canada. The TDSB understands a racialized group as:

A group of people who may experience social inequalities on the basis of their perceived common racial background, colour and/or ethnicity, and who may be subjected to differential treatment in the society and its institutions (TDSB Achievement Gap Task Force, 2010, p.3).

Racialized students represent a large majority of the TDSB student population, and their families make up the lowest level of income. Furthermore, these students are “more likely to live in the most socio-economically disadvantaged areas of the city” (TDSB, 2010, p.3). The data demonstrates the changing demographics within Toronto that is
reflected in the classrooms. It remains, however, a pervasive challenge to ensure high levels of success for these students, as there continues to be an achievement gap among these groups of students. John Portelli, in his critical reflection of the impact of neoliberalism in education, notes that there continues to be “ongoing incidents of discrimination in our society that require our continuing attention,” furthermore that “racism, religious intolerance, homophobia and gender-based violence are still evident in our communities and schools” (Portelli, Shields, Vibert, 2007, p.7).

In understanding the meaning of education for social justice, Patrick Solomon and Jordan Singer make note in *Brave New Teachers*, what they consider an “ethical dilemma,” that has resulted from the “marketization” of education. They contend that:

State-mandated curriculum standards, the dignity and implementation of standardized testing, and the “marketization” of education...have created an ethical dilemma for those committed to the principles and practices of social justice, curriculum diversity, anti-oppressive education, and democratic schooling. Ultimately, school environments have increasingly become arenas of conflict as equity-based curricula that integrate issues of diversity and social justice are forced into a contradictory and tumultuous relationship with standards-based, test-driven, and pre-packaged curricula (Solomon, Singer, Campbell, Allen, & Portelli, 2011,p.1).

In considering how teachers can make significant contribution in resolving this perceived dilemma and provide a more equitable future, Solomon and Singer suggest that teachers need to become more aware of the diverse experiences of the students and their classrooms. With greater empathy of the needs and experiences of their students, “teachers become increasingly attuned to alternative ways of empowering their students and[...]learn to engage in advocacy work aimed at helping to ameliorate the widening distributional disparities between the privileged and disenfranchised” (2011, p. 5). This understanding points to a wider scope of education that sees the impact of the pedagogies
and practices of teachers as a central part of supporting the development of “human potential and democratic citizenship” (2011, p.5).

It is imperative that we consider these pervasive challenges that remain unremitting in our schools when teaching for equity and rooted in social justice. The Ontario Ministry of Education, in response to these concerns has provided policy documents that attempts to find solutions. Ontario’s Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy (2009), provides a framework for building an inclusive education system aimed at providing equitable learning opportunities for all students. The Ministry document provides a strategy that identifies ways to remove “discriminatory biases and barriers to student achievement and well-being that relate to ethnicity and race, faith, family, structure and socio-economic status” (Capacity Building Series, 2013). Furthermore, the Capacity Building Series has published a report on culturally responsive and culturally relevant teaching practices, which suggests that a “broad notion of culture that considers how ethnicity and race is reflected in our students multiple social identities and their ways of knowing and of being in the world,” should be reflected in our ways of teaching (Capacity Building Series, 2013). It is recommended that inclusive teaching practices should be responsive to the diverse needs of the students.

The purpose of this study is to examine the social and cultural context of urban schools, with particular attention to the Toronto perspective, and what impact it has on the educational opportunities for students living in high-needs neighbourhoods. Such considerations are important to understand, and reflect upon in our practice as teachers. The underlying assumptions of the role of the teacher, and the pedagogical practices need to be questioned. Through a phenomenological approach, this study seeks to understand
the phenomena of Culturally Responsive and Relevant Pedagogy$^1$ in the urban classroom and how it has reflected the cultural diversity of students and created more equitable and inclusive learning opportunities. Through the narratives of the teachers interviewed, the study explores the ways in which teachers purport a program aimed at education for social justice and it is imperative in creating an education program that meets the needs of urban youth.

Overview

This research study is organized into five chapters. Chapter one provides an introduction to the study, including the purpose of the study, research questions, as well as the background information on the research. Chapter two offers an extensive review of the literature related to the central themes of the study, including critical pedagogy (e.g. Freire, 2000), multicultural education (e.g. Banks, 2001, 2006), and culturally responsive and culturally relevant pedagogy (e.g. Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1995; Gay, 1994, 2000). In chapter three, I outline my research methods and methodology. In chapter four, I identify the participants in the study and provided an in-depth analysis of the findings of the data collected. Finally, chapter five explores the connections to these findings with current theories of culturally responsive and cultural relevant pedagogies. These five chapters contribute to understanding how to best support diversity of the students in urban schools.

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$^1$This research study refers to Culturally Responsive and Relevant Pedagogy (Kugler & West-Burns, 2010) throughout as the main framework of reference.
Chapter Two: LITERATURE REVIEW

Organization of the Literature Review

Much has been written about social justice education and the learning process. Some studies focus on multicultural education in response to concerns of marginalization of ethnic and cultural groups (Banks, 2006). Others have focused on the impact of culturally relevant teaching framework on the academic achievement of racialized students (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Darling-Hammond, 1997). The literature selected for the study was reviewed based on its relation to the questions and themes as it is situated within the field. This study intends to bridge the gaps within these fields of research and examine through a culturally responsive pedagogical framework, the impact of a social justice program on student learning.

The following explores the relevant scholarship related to social justice education and the relevant and related theories, including critical pedagogy, equity pedagogy, culturally relevant pedagogy and culturally responsive pedagogy. Through an examination of the central schools of thought, the following provides an examination of the central ideas and assumptions of the framework. As well, it attempts to highlight the opportunities and challenges present when a social justice program is in the classroom.

Education for Social Justice

This research study explores the connection between education for social justice and student learning. It examines how teaching for social justice promotes student learning and engagement, particularly in high-needs, urban communities. The impact that education for social justice has on student learning, schools and communities has
been written about at length along with a variety of associated philosophical assumptions and pedagogical practices (Freire, 2000; Giroux, 2007, 2011; hooks, 2003, 2010, Banks, 2001, 2006, 2007; Darling-Hammond, 1997, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1995; Gay, 1994, 2000). The related theories that are embodied under the overarching goal of teaching for social justice, include, but are not limited to, anti-oppressive education, anti-discriminatory education, anti-racist pedagogy, critical pedagogy, multicultural education, and equity PEDAGogy. These pedagogies are each centered around a shared goal that sees learning that actively challenges forms of oppression and discrimination. These forms of oppression continue to be operable within the education system. In response, anti-oppressive and equity pedagogy seek to provide the conditions of a more equitable, meaningful and active student engagement and learning.

Proponents of teaching for social justice see the goal of education in a democracy one that is directed toward enlightenment and liberation. The purpose of education is for students “to know more and to be more, to see, to understand, to become more capable and more powerful, more courageous and more propulsive in the service of greater participation and more effective engagement in our work, our society, our lives” (Ayers et al, 2009, xiii).

Paulo Freire in Pedagogy of the Oppressed contends that “education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity or it becomes the practice of freedom, the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world” (Freire, 2000, 34). It is the latter, education as “the practice of freedom”, which describes social justice
pedagogy. Teaching for social justice challenges the social and cultural contexts to create equity within the school and community.

Linda Christensen, critical educator and research practitioner, and founding editor of *Rethinking Schools*, a teacher magazine focused on justice and equity, and director of the Oregon Writing Project at Lewis and Clark College, advocates for a culturally relevant curriculum. Christensen purports a curriculum of empathy in which students are taught how to empathize with others. It is through a curriculum of empathy that builds classroom community (Ayers, 2008, p.60). To achieve empathy, Christensen calls for the creation of a space through which assumptions can be examined and student voices acknowledged. In doing so, it becomes necessarily that assumptions begin to be unpacked and that the needs of the students are met in building community in the classroom (Ayers, 2008, p.65). Importantly, Christensen contends that to create social justice classrooms the teacher needs to create curriculum that is rooted in the needs of the students and experiences, that it is “multicultural, anti-racist, and pro-justice.” Students are engaged in participatory and experimental, learning, examine society in a way that empowers students (Golden, 2008).

William Ayers in, *Handbook of Social Justice in Education*, contends that social justice education consists of three main tenants, equity, activism, and social literacy. Ayers sees education as preparing students “to see and understand, and when necessary, to change all that is before them” (2009, xiv). It is gaining an awareness of our own identities, our connections with others in the world and becoming engaged learners and active citizens. Classrooms and schools, therefore, “must become sites where young people envision, enact, and renew democratic life” (Ayers et al, 2009, xiv).
Critical Pedagogy

Critical pedagogy, first described by Paulo Freire (1970, 2000), understands education as the practice of freedom, in which students develop a critical consciousness that allows them to understand the relationship between knowledge and power, and the ability to take constructive action. With a socially just world as a central goal, critical pedagogy insists that teachers take up “discourses of critique and possibility in conjunction with the values of reason, freedom and equality” (Giroux, 2010, p. 717).

Critical pedagogy understands that “education cannot be neutral”:

It is inevitably a deliberate attempt to influence how what knowledge, values, desires, and identities are produced within particular sets of class and social relations. It is always directive in its attempt to teach students to inhabit a particular mode of agency; enable them to understand the larger world and one’s role in a specific way; define their relationship and experience in the classroom some sort of understanding of a more just and democratic life (Giroux, 2011, p.159).

Through a “language of skepticism and possibility, and a culture of openness, debate and engagement,” critical pedagogy allows students to engage in critical thinking and understanding of how power works, and seeks to provide students with the tools necessary to be “informed subjects and social agents” (Giroux, 2010, p.718).

Paulo Freire is an important critical educator and is considered one of the founders of critical pedagogy. Pedagogy of the Oppressed, Paulo Freire’s seminal critique of the dominant “banking model of education,” leads to his proposal of a “problem-posing education” which allows one to understand the world as “a reality in the process of transformation” (Freire, 2000, p. 12). Henry Giroux (2010) captures the essence of Freire’s understanding of critical pedagogy, explaining that:

Pedagogy is not a method or an a priori technique to be imposed on all students but a political and moral practice that provides the knowledge, skills, and social relations that enable students to explore the possibilities of what it means to be
critical citizens while expanding and deepening their participation in the promise of a substantive democracy (Giroux, 2010, p.716).

Critical thinking is therefore regarded as a tool for self-determination and civic engagement. It attempts to understand the power relationships that exist and provide students with the tools necessary to become social agents. For Freire, “education as a practice for freedom,” provides students with the basic elements of social change. It is a “tool for self-determination and civic engagement,” providing students with opportunity to “read, write and learn from a position of agency. To engage in a culture of questions that demands far more than competency in rote learning” (Giroux, 2011, p.155).

Moving Away From Banking Model to Problem-Posing Education

Freire in his critique of the current status of the education system contends that “education is suffering from narration sickness” (2000, p.71). He explains that the teacher-student relationship that is modeled upon a “banking” concept of education views the teacher as a narrator that leads the students to memorize the content. In this relationship, the task of the teacher is to “fill” the students with the contents of his narration that is detached from reality. Freire states that the teachers “words are emptied of their concreteness and become a hollow, alienated and alienating verbosity,” supporting the role of the students as “containers,” or “receptacles” to be “filled” by the teacher (2000, p.71).

In his rejection of the “banking concept” of education, Freire contends that the “educational goal of deposit-making [must be] replace[d] with the posing of the problems of human beings in their relations with the world” (Freire, 2000, p.79). Through problem-posing education, students:
…develop their power to perceive critically the way they exist in the world with which and in which they find themselves, they come to see the world not as a static reality, but as a reality in process, in transformation… the teacher-student and the students-teachers reflect simultaneously on themselves and the world without dichotomizing this reflection from action, and thus establish an authentic form of thought and action (2000, p.83).

It is through a problem-posing education, therefore, that students acquire the tools and skills necessary to critically perceive the perpetuated injustices operable within society and to move forward from reflection to a position of action where they can make change.

Henry Giroux, an American scholar and cultural critic, was greatly influenced by the work of Paolo Freire and has since advanced his theory of critical pedagogy applying it to the American education system. For Giroux, critical pedagogy is “a movement and an ongoing struggle taking place in a number of different social formations and places” (Tristan, 2013). In understanding the role of the teacher, through the framework of critical pedagogy, Giroux explains that:

The moral implications of pedagogy suggest that our responsibility as public intellectuals cannot be separated from the consequences of the knowledge we produce, the social relations we legitimate, and the ideologies and identities we offer up to students (2011, p144).

This therefore demands that the teacher examines the responsibility of teaching students which has implications for when students leave school. It is linking “knowing with action, learning with social engagement” (Giroux, 2011, p.148), and providing students with the tools they need to promote a more just democracy. The role of the teacher, therefore, is to engage students in critical examination of democracy and the injustices and inequities that continue to perpetuate and work to “eliminate the conditions that produce it” (Giroux, 2011,
Through this process of critical examination, students become engaged actors, with the tools and skills to challenge these perpetuated injustices.

bell hooks, an American author, feminist and social activist, explores the issues of race, class and gender in education. Influenced by the writings of Paulo Freire, she shares a similar perspective of education and is critical of its current state, particularly the American context. She argues that the classroom is a source of both constraint and potential of liberation, students however often “encounter a world that seeks to educate them for conformity and obedience only” (hooks, 2010, p.22). She describes teaching as a vehicle that calls on students to engage in critical thinking and become more engaged in their learning.

In creating a community of learning, whereby students participate, share, and become empowered critical thinkers, hooks proposes an engaged pedagogy in the classroom where by students can take risks together and learn together. hooks explains that:

Engaged pedagogy makes the classroom a place where wholeness is welcomed and students can be honest, even radically open. They can name their fears, voice their resistance to thinking, speak out, and they can also fully celebrate the moments where everything clicks and collective learning is taking place. Whenever genuine learning is happening the conditions for self-actualization are in place, even when that is not a goal of our teaching process. Because engaged pedagogy highlights the importance of independent thinking and each student finding his or her unique choice, this recognition is usually empowering for students. This is especially important for students who otherwise may not have felt that they were “worthy,” that they have anything of value to contribute (hooks, 2010, p.21).

Students understand that they each have something meaningful and valuable to contribute to the learning community. Furthermore, she argues that the “classroom functions more like a cooperative,” when students are fully engaged, and each student, “contributes to
make sure all resources are being used, to ensure the optimal learning well-being of everyone” (2010, p.21).

For hooks, the goal of education is to allow students to learn and to “see education as a means of self-development and self-actualization” (2010, p.22). In her own words, she explains the role of a critical educator committed to engaged pedagogy:

To educate for freedom, then, we have to challenge and change the way everyone thinks about pedagogical process. This is especially true for students. Engaged pedagogy establishes a mutual relationship between teacher and students that nurtures the growth of both parties, creating an atmosphere of trust and commitment that is always present when genuine learning happens (2010, p.22).

As a community of learners, the teacher with the students engage in a collaborative learning process rooted in critical thinking. Through this process, students become more engaged learners and become active participants in their learning and in the way they interact in the world.

**Equity Pedagogy and Multicultural Education**

James Banks, further acknowledges the need for the implementation of a curriculum that is culturally relevant as part of a multicultural education. There are five dimensions that for Banks are fundamental for multicultural education, which include: content integration, the knowledge construction process, prejudice reduction, an equity pedagogy and an empowering school climate and social structure (Banks, 2001). He advances that “for all citizens to experience political, economic and cultural democracy, teachers need to have knowledge, skills, and attitudes to create democratic classrooms and schools.”

This, Banks purports to be central of a multicultural education in which students from diverse racial, ethnic and social groups will experience educational equity. Furthermore,
Banks notes that when “teachers use knowledge about the social and cultural context of their students when planning and implementing instruction, the academic achievement of students increase” (Ladson-Billings et al., 2006, 143). This is a central tenant of equity pedagogy, which Banks purports to exist when “teachers modify their teaching in ways that will facilitate the academic achievement of students from diverse racial, cultural and gender groups” (2001, 13). He argues that teachers that alter their instruction to reflect the cultural and linguistic strengths of their students both increase participation and achievement of students from diverse cultural groups, Furthermore, Banks proposes that students must be made aware of their social, political and economic worlds, and “understand knowledge as a social construction,” consequently students must be provided the “data, skills and values [they] need to participate in civic action and social change” (Banks, 2001, p197). When students are empowered they become more reflective and critical citizens and have the ability to be active in their worlds.

Linda Darling-Hammond is the Charles E. Ducommun Professor of Education at the Stanford University School of Education. Her work focuses on school restructuring, teacher education, and educational equity. Darling-Hammond, in her research, examines how public education can be reinvented to ensure the right to learn for all students. She argues for education reform that allows for all students an equally opportunity, and reflects the changes of contemporary society. Darling-Hammond contents that two elements are required of schools, teaching for understand and teaching for diversity. To teach for understanding, means “to teach all students, to understand ideas deeply and perform proficiently.” While to teach for diversity, means “to teach in ways that help different kinds of learners find productive paths to knowledge as they also learn to live constructively together” (Darling-Hammond, 1997, p.5). She argues that with growing
immigration and awareness of student differences, student diversity in schools is the reality in urban schools, which requires teachers to understand diversity and to develop an equity pedagogy. As part of a multicultural approach to education, it therefore becomes imperative that we “find away to express and locate our own experiences […] in order to be validated as learners and human beings.” This Darling-Hammond explains, “allows us to then connect with new knowledge and with the experiences of others” (2002, p.3). Teachers need to actively embrace and understand the diversity of their students to build a community within the classroom. Furthermore, Darling-Hammond notes that teachers need to embark an equity pedagogy that:

> [Confront] injustices that shape students’ self-esteem and opportunities to learn in both society and schools. Teachers unaware of the structure and substances of inequality will find it difficult to understand students whose experiences do not resemble what they remember from their own necessarily limited experiences (Darling-Hammond et al., 2002, p.10).

Therefore knowing your students to be an effective teacher, and understand the experiences that our students come with in order to help them learn in a more meaningful way. In teaching for social justice, teachers need to understand how they relate to others, as well as develop an understanding of the social context within which schools operate and students learn. Darling-Hammond explains:

> It is important for teachers to have the opportunity to investigate the social context that produces inequities and to understand how opportunities to learn are constructed and distributed in schools. [Additionally, it is important to appreciate] the cultural contexts within which students develop and learn, and understanding how those contexts are tapped or ignored within schools and classrooms as well as how they influence students’ experiences in society and school (2002, p.206).
With a greater awareness of the discriminatory barriers to student learning, teachers are better able to develop anti-oppressive teaching practices that enable more equitable learning opportunities for their students.

**Culturally Responsive and Relevant Pedagogy**

The various approaches of education for social justice, each purport at its core the need to find ways of linking students, school, and community, providing students with the critical awareness they need to be active citizens. These approaches, that find links between student culture, and address the need for educators to develop the knowledge and skills to teach students from diverse cultural backgrounds, has been taken up at length and described with a variety of different terms including: culturally sensitive, culturally appropriate, culturally responsive, and culturally relevant, each with the goal of examining the impact of culturally responsive and relevant approaches on students learning and engagement. The following examines culturally relevant teaching (Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1995, 2005), culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 1994, 2000), and Culturally Responsive and Relevant Pedagogy (Kugler and West-Burns, 2010).

* Culturally Relevant Teaching

Gloria Ladson-Billings, American pedagogical theorist and professor in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Wisconsin, Madison is known for her groundbreaking work in the field of multicultural and inclusive education. Ladson-Billings coined the term *culturally relevant teaching*, defined as teaching that “empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impact knowledge, skills and attitudes” (1994, p.20). In *The Dreamkeepers: Successful Teachers of African-American Children*, Ladson-Billings notes the importance
of an educator to be aware of the social context and the larger social purposes of their work. Ladson-Billings contends that through a culturally relevant lens teachers move from a position of sympathy to one of informed empathy. Informed empathy requires the teacher to feel with the students rather than feel for them and builds solidarity between the teacher and the student (Ayers et al., 2008, 170). Culturally relevant teaching allows teachers to reflect on what they teach, and how they can help students recognize their diverse cultures in a way that empowers students to make informed decisions.

Culturally relevant pedagogy shares a similar theoretical foundation of critical pedagogy with a commitment to student empowerment. Ladson-Billings advances three main criteria for culturally relevant teaching, and she contends that:

- Students must experience academic success; students must develop and/or maintain cultural competence; and students must develop a critical consciousness through which they challenge the status quo of the current social order (1995b, p.160).

Culturally relevant teaching engages students in learning that fosters academic achievement, while allowing students the opportunities to “develop a broader sociopolitical consciousness that allows them to critique the cultural norms, values, mores, and institutions that produce and maintain social inequalities” (Ladson-Billings, 1995b, p.162). In order that students are prepared to engage critically with the world and engage in active citizenry, they must be provided with the tools and skills necessary to critically understand the inequalities and injustices pervasive in cultural values and norms that are reproduced within the education system.

* Culturally Responsive Teaching

Culturally responsive teaching addresses the need for educators to respond to and reflect the diverse culture, racial, ethnic and social class backgrounds of their students in
the classroom, while teaching them the knowledge and skills they need to reach their academic goals. Geneva Gay in *Culturally Responsive Teaching. Theory, Research and Practice* (2000), proposes a program that improves the success of ethnically diverse students, and that validates and honours the cultural backgrounds of students and is “culturally responsive.” The priorities of culturally responsive teaching are recognizing “race, culture, and ethnicity as they relate to underachieving students of colour and marginalized groups,” (Gay, 2000, p.52) within the education system. She explains that culturally responsive teaching is:

> The behavioral expressions of knowledge, beliefs, and values that recognize the importance of racial and culturally diversity in learning, based on seeing cultural differences as assets; creating caring learning communities where culturally different individuals and heritages are valued; using cultural knowledge of ethnically diverse cultures, families and communities to guide curriculum development, classroom climates, instructional strategies, and relationships with students (Gay, 2000, p.50).

In being responsive to cultural diversity, teachers simultaneously hold an important position in challenging the racial and cultural stereotypes and “other forms of intolerance, injustice and oppression,” (Gay, 2000, p.50) pervasive within the education system. Gay outlines five essential elements of Culturally Responsive teaching:

> Developing a knowledge base about cultural diversity, including ethnic and cultural diversity content in the curriculum, demonstrating caring and building learning communities, communicating with diverse students, and responding to ethnic diversity in the delivery of instruction (2001, p. 23).

Culturally responsive teaching therefore uses the cultural perspectives of the diverse students in the classroom to teach them effectively. This Gay notes, is based on the understanding that when “academic knowledge and skills are situated within the lived experiences and frames of reference of students, they are more personally meaningful, have higher interest appeal, and are learned more easily and thoroughly” (2001, p.23).
Curriculum that is decontextualized from the cultures of students hinders students ability to feel fully apart of the learning experience, it can therefore be argued that the academic achievement of these students will improve by teaching and using their cultural referents.

In preparing for cultural responsive teaching, educators need to have “explicit knowledge about cultural diversity” (Gay, 2001, p.23) which is an imperative in meeting the educational needs of ethnically diverse students.

**Culturally Responsive and Relevant Pedagogy as a Framework for Social Justice**

**Education**

Culturally relevant teaching (Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1995) and culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 1994, 2000) are both used to describe an approach that recognizes student diversity as an asset and uses student culture as a vehicle for learning. The frameworks developed by Geneva Gay and Gloria Ladson-Billings were both in response to the particular experience of diversity situated in the United States. This was predominantly in response to the prevalent achievement gap witnessed among Black American and Latino youth. Much can be learned from the research purported by both Gay and Ladson-Billings, however, the diversity in Toronto varies considerably from our American counterpart. These variances need to be acknowledged when we are considering culturally responsive and relevant teaching practices in our urban schools.

The Ontario Ministry of Education Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat, acknowledges culturally responsive pedagogy as part of a framework for building an inclusive education system (Capacity Building Series, 2013). Additionally, In the *Ontario’s Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy*, the Ministry of Education outlines its understanding for an inclusive and equitable education system, defining inclusive education as, “education that
is based on the principles of acceptance and inclusion of all students” (2009). The ethnic and cultural identities and the experiences of the students are reflected and honoured in the curriculum and classroom practices. The document acknowledges culture as a resource for learning and argues that student diversity should be viewed as student strengths:

Culturally responsive pedagogy is not about “cultural celebrations,” not is it aligned with traditional ideas around multiculturalism. It involves careful acknowledgment, respect and an understanding of difference and its complexities (Capacity Building Series, 2013, p2).

The provincial document draws on the conceptual frameworks of both Geneva Gay and Gloria Ladson-Billings, while also considering approaches adapted from the work of Jeff Kugler and Nicole West-Burns (2010), academic scholars at the Centre for Urban Schools, within the Ontario Institute for Student in Education at the University of Toronto. Kugler and West-Burns purports a framework that draws from the understandings of Gay, Ladson-Billings and others that have contributed to multicultural education, and adapt it to incorporate an understanding of the research and practice within urban schools in Toronto. Culturally Responsive and Relevant Pedagogy, a pedagogical and philosophical lens that takes into consideration the complexities of the Toronto urban landscape, Canada’s largest metropolitan city, and seeks to address the particular needs of the students and their communities (Kugler & West-Burns, 2010). In response to the issues of inequity pervasive in Toronto urban schools, Kugler and West-Burns examined data from the TDSB to identify ways “toward more equitable outcomes for all students,” which they argue are not all “being provided with the same level of success” (2010, p. 215). Culturally Responsive and Relevant Pedagogy attempts to
create a “connection between a broadly defined culture and the classroom teaching and learning” (2010, p.215). At its core, Culturally Responsive and Relevant Pedagogy:

Connects pedagogical practice to high expectations regardless of issues of social identity; it infuses issues of a broadly defined culture and cultural components within the classroom teaching and environment; and engages students in developing questioning of the status quo and critical consciousness (Kugler &West-Burns, 2010, p.216).

In its approach, Culturally Responsive and Relevant Pedagogy provides marginalized and racialized students the skills and tools necessary to find success within a system that has largely perpetuated oppressive practices. The focus on the deficits of students, their school and community is shifted toward a focus on their strengths and assets, presenting important opportunities for enhancing learning.

**Concluding Thoughts**

Culturally relevant teaching is an important element in social justice curriculum. The teaching and learning approaches should embrace a diverse student background. Social justice curriculum allows us to examine the situation of the lives that many students in urban neighbourhoods are face d and to questions what more can be done. By embracing different perspectives students become empowered in their learning. Student learning, as defined by Ladson-Billings “what it is that students actually know and are able to do as a result of pedagogical interactions with skilled teachers” (Ayers, et al., 2008, 167). The role becomes one that necessarily provides the conditions that empower students and ensure that their right to learn is not impeded by prevalent socio-economic barriers. The literature review explored the pedagogical implications of a culturally responsive and relevant framework, and its impact on the teaching and learning
experience. Teachers committed to an inclusive approach to education, directed at making change, prepare their students to be engaged learners and global citizens. This research refers to this understanding of inclusive education, and uses the Culturally Responsive and Relevant Pedagogy (Kugler & West-Burns, 2010), throughout the study.
Chapter Three: METHODOLOGY

Research Procedure

This is a qualitative research project that focused on a review of the literature surrounding culturally responsive and culturally relevant pedagogy and teaching for social justice, and interviews of four educators that have each had experience teaching in urban schools. This research study was conducted for the purpose of obtaining qualitative research on the subjects of education for social justice and student learning. The purpose of this research is to answer the question: In what ways can Culturally Responsive and Relevant Pedagogy promote education for social justice within urban schools? The research study followed a qualitative research design and included a literature review and face-to-face interviews with four teachers as participants. The study included a review of the central literary works and authors that have made substantial contributions to the field, including Paulo Freire (2000); Henry Giroux (2007, 2011); bell hooks (2003, 2010); Linda Darling-Hammond (1994, 1995); James Banks (2001, 2006, 2007); Gloria Ladson-Billings (1994, 1995); and Geneva Gay (1994, 2000). The purpose of the literature review was to gain knowledge and understanding of the prominent scholarly works within the field of study. This understanding of the main assumptions and issues of culturally responsive and culturally relevant pedagogy and teaching for social justice provided a lens by which the experiences of the teachers in the study could be analyzed. Various approaches to education for social justice was researched, compared and contrasted in an effort to gain a more encompassing perspective and insight into the theory, approach, and practice of education for social justice. The literature that was reviewed provided a point of reference for the research study and for developing the
questions used for the interviews of the empirical study, as well as the predetermined themes that were used in analyzing the data gathered from the research interviews.

In addition to a literature review, I composed a series of questions used for conducting standardized semi open-ended interviews with participants who have experiences in teaching for social justice. The interviews were audio-taped recorded and transcribed. Each of the transcriptions were analyzed and identified for common themes and ideas. The data gathered from the interviews was used to gain a deeper understanding of the predominant issues pertinent in the research study.

**Theoretical Framework and Analysis**

This research study was approached from a phenomenological standpoint which seeks to describe the experiences of the different individuals interviewed. The phenomenological framework informs the work of the research study and how the data from the interviews has been analyzed. The research aims at better understand the approach of Culturally Responsive and Relevant Pedagogy to addressing the diversity present in urban schools.

A phenomenological study begins with an approach that focuses “on describing what all participants have in common as they experience a phenomenon” (Creswell, 2007, p58). A common condition is highlighted through an analysis of the diverse perspectives of each of the participant narratives. In *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*, John Creswell (2007) outlines that “a phenomenology provides a deep understanding of a phenomenon as experienced by several individuals” (p.62). A phenomenological approach to the research study examines the phenomena thorough the lived experiences of each of the participants, and offers an opportunity to examine the
cumulative experiences as they relate to the phenomenon. Knowing the common experiences that teachers have encountered with implementing a social justice approach is valuable for future programming as we look to meeting the needs of students, particularly those that have diverse cultural, ethnic and linguistic backgrounds living in high-needs neighbourhoods.

**Data Collection and Participant Selection**

*Data Collection*

The data for the research study was collected from semi-structured, open–ended interviews with four educators. A list of open-ended interview questions was created reviewed and approved by my research supervisor (Appendix A). The interview questions were divided into three broad categories: general information, culture and practice, and urban diversity, which were used as a guide for the interviews. In the standardized open-ended interviews, the “participants [were] always asked identical questions,” however these “questions [were] worded so that responses [were] open-ended” (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2003 cited in Turner, 2010, p.756). The “open-endedness [allowed] the participants to contribute as much detailed information as they desire” (Turner, 2010, p.756), simultaneously providing myself as researcher the flexibility to probe further certain questions as a follow-up, and drawing deeper connections to the subject of study. The interview questions were open-ended to provided participants the opportunity to respond to the questions, however with flexibility to elaborate on the issues in ways that reflect their own experience and teaching practice. The interview questions were centred directly around the issue of teaching for social justice and
approaches that teachers took to support student learning and engagement of students from diverse urban communities.

The interviews were each conducted by the researcher, audio-recorded, and fully transcribed and analyzed. Additional field notes were taken during the interviews to provide details and contextual information.

Participants

The research participants that were selected for the purpose of this study were teachers that each had diverse backgrounds and were at different stages of their careers. The participants that were selected were based on the following criteria: a willingness to participate, experience teaching in the primary, junior, intermediate and/or senior level, and experience incorporating teaching practice aimed toward achieving social justice, while meeting the learning needs of culturally diverse students from high-priority neighbourhoods.

The participants were either current or former teachers of urban schools and who identified themselves as incorporating culturally responsive and culturally relevant pedagogy into their practice. The majority of my participants hold a graduate degree in the field education and have used it to further inform their practice. One of the participants has had extensive experience in school administration as well as pre-service education programs. The participants each worked in urban schools that serviced students from high-needs communities. The schools in which the participants had worked were located across the Toronto urban area as well as an urban community in Washington, D.C. The range of experience in the classroom that the participants share ran from five to thirty-five years. Each of the participants were “willing to openly and honestly share information,” which Turner points to as essential when choosing participants for an
The narratives of the participants provided an authentic response to the phenomena of Culturally Responsive and Relevant Pedagogy, which they each related to, and were regarded with the utmost importance throughout the process of transcription and analysis of the findings.

**Data Analysis**

The interviews were each transcribed in full by the research and were read thoroughly to ensure accuracy of the information. Each transcription was coded for both pre-determined and emerging themes. The aspects that were closely investigated during the coding of the transcriptions were related to approaches to teaching for social justice, its impact on student learning and student engagement. Each of these aspects are directly linked to the central research question: In what ways can Culturally Responsive and Relevant Pedagogy promote education for social justice within urban schools? The narratives were each sorted to fully and accurately reflect the overall perspective of all the interview response through the coding process. These codes were organized into broad themes and sub-themes in order to understand the phenomena of Culturally Responsive and Relevant Pedagogy, researched across the experiences of the various participants. The analysis of the findings was presented through the lens of a phenomenological framework, to gain an understanding of the experiences of my participants in relationship the phenomena of Culturally Responsive and Relevant Pedagogy.
Ethical Review Procedures

In accordance with the Ethical Review Procedures of the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto, consent forms were provided to each participant prior to beginning of the interview. Each participant was required to read and sign the consent form (Appendix B) that was reviewed and discussed with the participants ahead of time, along with the research topic to ensure clarity and full understanding of the purpose of the study. The participants were advised of the interview process that their experiences would be recorded and transcribed. They were each assured that their names and schools would remain confidential, with their anonymity assured through the use of pseudonyms for the names or titles of personal projects that the participants were involved in. Participation in the research study is voluntary and the participants were welcomed to opt-out of individual questions or the study at any time without consequence. The participants will be offered access to completed transcripts and to the final research study to ensure accuracy.

Qualifications and Limitations

The research study lends itself to a few potential limitations including, selection of literature reviewed, small sample size and participant experience, interview questions, and the limited time of the study.

First, the literature selected for the purpose of the study was chosen to provide an understanding of social justice for education, culturally responsive and relevant teaching, and related themes. The scholarly work of Ladson-Billings and Gay provided much of the direction to my research on related scholarship in the field. Furthermore, the framework developed by Kugler and West-Burns of Culturally Responsive and Relevant
Pedagogy was used as a lens through which to view the research on the topic of this study.

Second, I was limited to interviewing only four participants, and as such the research study should not be understood as providing a generalization, but rather as an exploration of the individual experiences of these teachers, and the exceptional practices they foster in teaching diverse learners. The narratives of the research participants provide a rich composite of how Culturally Responsive and Relevant Pedagogy can be used in schools, particularly across an urban landscape. The narratives of the four participants should not considered a limitation, since it allowed the opportunity to tap into different experiences, and gain insights from their individual stories. Rather than a limitation, the rich experience of each of the participants provided an unique perspective of the landscape for teaching for social justice.

A third limitation of this research study was the design of the interviews. Open-ended interviewing “can be quiet difficult for researchers to extract similar themes or codes from the interview transcripts as they would with less open-ended response” (Turner, 2010, 756). The data analyzed was therefore influenced by the subjectivity of the researcher and to the overall goal of the research study.

Finally, the research study was restricted by a limited time period. There is much that could be researched and examined in the discussion of education for social justice which cannot be covered in the scope of this research study.
Chapter Four: FINDINGS

Introduction

This chapter includes the interpretation of the data collected during the in-person, audio-recorded, semi-structured interviews that explored the experiences of four educators who have taught diverse learners in urban schools. In an effort to better conceptualize and synthesize the material, I have coded the data into four central themes: Understanding Culturally Responsive and Relevant Teaching in Achieving Social Justice Education, Developing an Inclusive Curriculum, Power Structures and Barriers to Learning, and Empowerment of the Learner. The themes are further divided into sub-themes to allow for a more nuanced analysis of the central question of the research study: In what ways can Culturally Responsive and Relevant Pedagogy promote education for social justice within urban schools? It is to be noted that these themes are neither all-inclusive nor mutually exclusive. The reader is encouraged to view these themes as part of an ongoing and interconnected dialogue. In this chapter, I first provide an introduction to the research participants in order to provide the reader with insight into their knowledge and experience. I then explore themes that emerged from my analysis of data provided during the interview process.

The Participants

The four participants in this study have extensive experience in teaching in urban schools, ranging from five to thirty-five years of experience. All four teachers identify as teaching for social justice education, and incorporating culturally responsive and culturally relevant pedagogy into their practice. The participants each strived to reflect the students’ race, culture and ethnicity into the curriculum and classroom. In teaching
for social justice, all four participants recognized the importance of providing multiple and varied opportunities for their students to find empowerment in their learning and as members of their school and community. Simultaneously, the participants worked to provide opportunities for the students to find empowerment through their identity and their experiences. The four participants have each worked in urban schools that serviced students from high-needs communities throughout the Toronto urban area as well as in Washington, D.C.

*Lucy*

Lucy has taught in a dual language program for five years in Washington, D.C, and has been engaged in curriculum writing. Currently, she is completing a Master of Arts in Education at a Toronto university. As a teacher at a bilingual elementary public school, Lucy was responsible for teaching the English language arts portion of the dual language program. There she taught grade three and grade five and integrated social studies, science and math into language arts. Lucy has spent time on writing for kindergarten to grade eight English Second Language curriculum, she has also written English language arts curriculum for a specific school community that focuses on bilingual sign language instruction. Throughout her work Lucy has demonstrated her commitment to social justice issues and critical literacy.

*Jude*

Jude has worked in public education for the past 35 years and has extensive experience as an educator, administrator and instructor in a pre-service teacher education program. He has taught at a number of public schools within diverse communities in Toronto, where he has also held the position of vice-principal and principal at two elementary schools both serving high-priority neighbourhoods. During the more than ten
year period in administration, Jude took time off to pursue a Master’s degree, and later was seconded to the Faculty of Education at a Toronto university to assist in the setup of its Urban Diversity program. For the past eight years Jude has held a senior role at a Toronto university, working with teachers and administrators in schools to understand the issues of power and privilege and how they can implement Culturally Responsive and Relevant Pedagogy in their schools and classrooms.

Sadie

Sadie is in her tenth year of teaching at a low-income public high school in Toronto that is located in a diverse and high-priority community. She has taught grade nine through grade twelve. Sadie is a part of both the Canadian World Students and Social Science Department, and the Guidance Department, with experience teaching all grade levels. Sadie has experience teaching a variety of courses including: Geography, History, Social Science, Leadership, and STEPs to University course taught in partnership a Toronto university.

Prudence

Prudence teaches at a diverse public high school in northwest Toronto. She is in her tenth year of teaching at this school, and has previously been engaged in teaching for an educational program focused on empowering at-risk youth. Currently, she teaches the grade eleven Canadian and International Law as well as Anthropology and Sociology courses. She described herself as being committed to social justice and teaching from an anti-racist perspective.
Understanding Culturally Responsive and Relevant Teaching in Achieving Social Justice Education

Teachers’ understanding of social justice education and how it relates to Culturally Responsive and Relevant Pedagogy plays a significant role in its application in the classroom. How teachers understand social justice education and what their goals are has direct consequences for curricular design and engagement. This section explores the relationship between social justice education and Culturally Responsive and Relevant Pedagogy, and how teacher pedagogy focused on equity and diversity issues can provide a more enriching learning experience.

*Understanding Social Justice Education*

The study explores Culturally Responsive and Relevant Pedagogy as a framework for social justice education. It is imperative, therefore to establish a clear understanding of what is meant by social justice education pedagogy and how Culturally Responsive and Relevant Pedagogy can be used as a framework to support it. In my interviews, I asked participants to reflect upon the meaning of social justice education and their goals as social justice educators. The research participants shared a common understanding, upholding student experiences in the curriculum as a central component in their programming. They each saw social justice education as a way of providing students with opportunities to be engaged and active participants in their learning. Furthermore, the majority of participants touched on the important role of the teacher in interrogating and questioning the power relationships and inequalities that exist in classrooms and schools and create ways to bring students’ cultures and experiences into the curriculum.

Throughout our interview Lucy continued to refer back to the power relations that exist within the educational system and their impact on student learning. For her social
Justice education is about “how you define education and what the purpose of education is.” Lucy asserted that social justice education “is about knowledge,” and it is about providing students with the tools to “recognize how there is power within knowledge and thinking about whose knowledge it is and how does it serve you.” From Lucy’s perspective an important part of being an educator committed to social justice education than is “allowing students to recognize that they are active and can be active and engaged citizens in the world.” For Lucy it is imperative to provide students the space to develop their sense of self while finding meaning between real world issues and the classroom.

For Jude, social justice education implies an understanding of your role as the teacher, and how you will best serve the students that you are teaching. He explained:

> Social justice education means that you are going into education seeing that your role is to help challenge that view of education [as an unequal system] and to challenge the status quo in education and help younger people to understand the issues that are important in their lives and help them see themselves as actors as opposed to recipients of education.

Jude emphasized the importance of providing students with the tools they need to challenge the adversity that they may be faced, allowing them to assert an active role in their education. Like Jude, in her classroom Sadie works to recognize the inequalities that her students experience. For Sadie, social justice education is about “providing [students] with ways to understand, dissect... and being able to recognize why injustices happen and how to move forward from it and make change.” She sees her role as an educator as providing her students with “the ways to gather the skills and the tools to be able to challenge the injustices.”
Understanding Culturally Responsive and Relevant Pedagogy

All my participants emphasized the importance of a relevant curriculum that recognizes the experiences and perspectives of their students and provides the space that empowers them. For many of the participants, the seminal work of Gloria Ladson-Billings (e.g. *Dreamkeepers*, 1994), has informed their understanding of Culturally Responsive and Relevant Pedagogy. I would argue – as my participants confirm - that Culturally Responsive and Relevant Pedagogy is a framework for social justice education that acknowledges issues of power and privilege and provides a space that embraces the knowledge and experiences of students and allows them to see themselves as active both in their school and in their communities to make change.

Jude explained that “Culturally Responsive and Relevant Pedagogy has to be about somewhat challenging some kind of inequality that they see in their classrooms or in their school.” In his role working with teachers in the Toronto urban area to incorporate culturally relevant programming, Jude emphasized the importance of viewing their students and their communities which they are from, from an asset-based perspective. Jude asserts the need for teachers to challenge and begin to “think differently about their kids around the communities in which they teach around the parents of the kids that they teach and see the assets that the kids, community and parent bring to the school.” Jude moves away from a deficit approach to a pedagogy that focuses on what the students, school and community may be deficient in and instead endorses an asset-based model that celebrates the strengths that the students have to share. Jude described his hope for individuals that choose to become teachers were doing so because they “see teaching as a vehicle for social change.”
In understanding what this means for our role as educators, Lucy noted that “we need to recognize our position as teachers in thinking about power relations with our students, to create spaces where the students’ backgrounds, and experiences are honoured, relevant and part of the curriculum.” Both Lucy and Jude shared an awareness of themselves as change agents with the responsibility to engage in practices grounded in equity.

**Developing an Inclusive Curriculum**

In this section I discuss the relationship between pedagogy and practice in the classroom. What are the priorities of developing a culturally relevant curriculum and how is it implemented in the classroom? The approaches and practices to equity pedagogy varied among the participants, however, when considered together, they demonstrated a shared commitment to connecting curriculum to students’ lives, their knowledge, backgrounds and cultures. The participants each worked to develop student awareness of social issues in the classroom. In their curriculum, students are constructed as agents of change and actors with the knowledge to work in collaboration in decision making.

*Connecting to Students’ Lived Experiences*

All of the participants adopted an approach to learning that embraced the diverse experiences of their students and incorporated a curriculum that connected to their students and their daily lives. The participants each acknowledged that their students’ identities were considered in curriculum content and pedagogical instruction. Having more knowledge of their students and incorporating these insights into their classroom practices allowed for a more meaningful learning experience for all the students. Lucy,
Jude, and Sadie each recognized the importance of acknowledging the community and inviting families in the classroom to share their stories.

Lucy stated that she is committed to creating opportunities for families to be involved with student learning, recognizing the wealth of knowledge they had to share with the students in her class. “I did a lot of engagement with families,” Lucy commented, “we brought families in to share their stories.” She highlighted the immigration unit that she did with her students, where families were encouraged to come to the class to share their personal stories. As part of this project, students were responsible to develop inquiry questions which they used to interview family members and “learn about why they had to leave [their home country], whether it was war or dictatorship or just finding a better life.” The immigration unit focused on “people’s own experiences,” and it was by drawing on this connection between the family history and personal stories of their parents, that Lucy was able to provide her students with a way of “having [their] experiences [reflected] in the curriculum.” As part of her commitment to equity-pedagogy, Lucy would “bring in parent experts [to] share,” their knowledge on the issues. When it became unfeasible for Lucy to “bring parents in,” she made sure that her students “were going outside,” to experience personal connections with the subject that they were studying. Building on these connections and the interests of her students was of central importance to Lucy in her pedagogy, and was reflected in her dedication to bring parent and community experts into the classroom and take her students on filed excursions to learn from first-hand experiences.

Jude highlighted a project called “Community Helpers,” where he observed a teacher in her classroom integrate the experiences of the students into the curriculum. The “Community Helpers” project brought together people “who work in the community and
are from the community, into the classroom to speak to the kids.” The students were responsible for researching and documenting the contributions of members of their community. Taking on an active role, the students “went and took pictures of someone in their family […] interviewed them and came back and presented the person from their family” to their class. Jude acknowledged the impact that this kind of project has on a students’ learning experience. “That they acknowledged and did research around [a family member],” he explained, “is valuable in so many ways.” In doing so, the project acknowledged the lived experiences of the students and recognized the valuable contributions of the community. “It is learning about stuff that is connected to them as opposed to something that is completely far away,” that makes it valuable learning. Drawing on connections to students’ lives and integrating content students are involved in made for a richer learning experience. Jude reflecting as a teacher educator and administrator explained the reactions of the teachers:

Once they start to connect to their kids in many different ways, they are amazed at how some kids who they thought were just not there suddenly become present and eager and motivated to do work and to learn in ways they thought were not possible.

The teachers witnessed a more positive learning experience and engagement from their students when they would incorporate projects that explicitly made connections to the students’ lives. Similarly, Sadie reflected on inviting culture and families into the classroom through navigating spaces of identity. She made note of her goal to spend time examining with her students at the start of the year the experiences that form their identity and how that impacts the “lens” they approach things with. She stated:

I want them to start thinking about issues around identity. Because before we can start having class discussions we need to know where we come from. I get them to start thinking about their cultural
backgrounds, where they come from, and what does that actually mean? I get them to actually go into their home communities [...] I think part of it is how you invite families into the classroom. And so navigating those spaces of identity I think is really important because it then invites community into the classroom.

While Sadie is a strong supporter of creating space that embraces the diverse cultures of her students. She cautioned, however, about doing it in a way that does not essentialize the students and approaches culturally responsiveness in a tokenistic way. “I think there is not wanting to essentialize students,” Sadie explained, “because every single persons experience is different so it really requires as a teacher to really engage and know your students and to draw out what they are interested in.” Referring to the underlying complexity of the cultural dynamics at an urban high school, Sadie further noted the challenges of implementing different cultures into the classroom. She pondered:

[There are students that are from] Sri Lanka, Senegal, as well as Tamil. It is a delicate line you walk between people and cultures. What are their histories? What are their experiences? Do we honour the [Tamil] Tigers? It’s a really kind of delicate place.

She cautioned about these cultural tensions that she is experiencing at her school and how it must be considered when teaching for social justice. She notes that there is “an uncomfortable hierarchy,” at her school among and between the different cultures. Sadie further explained that:

It is a really delicate line that you walk between people and cultures [between] North Koreans and South Koreans [...] Turkish and Kurdish. The class is a really tough space, because you are teaching from a space that is [oriented toward] social justice and human rights [while balancing these tensions]. So, inviting cultures into the classroom, that’s a challenge.

It is for these reasons why she cautions about inviting student cultures into the conversation. For her it is important to recognize these issues and how it impacts student
identity and their relationships with one another. Furthermore, Sadie took issues with teachers who claimed to not see colour in their classrooms.

I actually do think we need to move to a place where we are saying “no there are injustices we have to see the colour and the class and the religion.” We have to see all of this in our classroom to move forward our material that use is reflective of that.

She felt it was necessary to respond to each student differently by creating time and space for her students to talk about their lived experiences in her class. By creating a space for her students to confront uncomfortable issues she was able to foster strong relationships with her students and better support their needs and interests.

Jude echoed the problem of tokenism. He explained:

Not everyone who is impacted by racism does not necessarily have the same effect on them. We need to think about culture in a very broad sense. [...] It has to be that everyone sort of brings who they are into the classroom in a possible way, through story books, projects, and investigations. Kids get involved in, through interviews that they do in the community for acknowledging for example the work that people in their families are engaged in and in my mind that is bringing them and their culture in the broad sense into the classroom.

All the participants highlighted the importance of adapting a broad approach to culture in their classroom, and embrace the unique contributions that each of their students share within the school community.

**Advancing Affirming and Positive Relationships**

Lucy, Sadie, and Prudence emphasized the importance of teacher expectations and the relationships formed with their students for a positive learning experience. They agreed that it was imperative that they established caring and positive relationships with their students. They accomplished this by creating personal connections and creating safe
and comfortable place in the classroom. Importantly, they each believed in setting high expectations for their students.

Throughout the interview, Lucy reiterated the importance of teacher relationships and the expectations that they have for their students. “I always had high expectations. I think number one, whatever I did, I had high expectations for all my students.” For Lucy, “it is the relationship you have with the kids,” that had primacy in her class, it was not just the curriculum content. Lucy highlighted the important impact that “the relationships and the high expectations,” that you have with your students can have on their learning experience. She attested that she “would never give up on a [student] that they knew that [she] believed in them.” Moreover, Lucy strived to create connections between school and home, and would work with parents to ensure the success of the students in her class. She would provide resources, engage in conversations with the parents, and try multiple strategies, while ensuring that the appropriate support systems were in place to help her students achieve academic success.

Building positive relationships with her students was central to Prudence’s classroom as well. She believed in the importance of “teaching to the whole student.” For her, “seeing the student as a whole person,” being aware of the issues that they may be going through and how that affects their learning is important part of being a social justice educator. This allowed her to develop the social and emotional awareness of her students and have a greater understanding of their needs. Recognizing and validating who the student is as an important part of learning. For Prudence, importance is placed not only on the curriculum but on the “hidden curriculum,” she worked to find ways in her class to “relate back to their existence.” Furthermore, she viewed her class community as a place to share food and play music, a space where student could express themselves.
openly and freely. Through sharing of food and playing music, Prudence invited her students to build community and build relationships with one another.

In building relationships with students the participants also placed importance in creating safe spaces. Lucy emphasized the importance of creating safe and open space in her classroom. She would use community circle as well as mindfulness awareness practice in her classroom to invite her students to engage in inquiry and ask questions. She explained that her class would gather in community circle and discuss issues that were important to them. “This is how you see that relationships are important,” she noted, that through community circle students could better identify with themselves and with others. Furthermore, in supporting personal well being of her students, Lucy used mindfulness awareness practice in her classroom. She used the example of ringing the singing bowl, and inviting the class to engage in mindfulness practice by stating “the bell invites you to just calm down and become present, right here and right now.” She described her students as really involved in mindfulness awareness practice and wanting to take ownership in leading the sessions for the class. 

**Integrating Issues of Social Justice in the Classroom Curriculum**

The participants all expressed the importance of integrating issues of social justice in to the classroom curriculum, thereby ensuring the development of critical-thinking skills and consideration of multiple perspectives that allowed them to be engaged in their learning and active global citizens. The participants in the classroom curriculum tried to shed light on more insidious forms of discriminations that have been accepted in the world, and encourage their students to critically think and question these experiences. Central to the participants’ pedagogies is providing students the forum to interrogate their own identity and engage with the world in a more empathetic and inclusive way.
Lucy took pride in the units that she created for her students. Each unit was thematic and focused on integrating content. It was “not just random, like everything was project based,” and with a purpose. The units were focused on variety of social issues, incorporating equity, diversity, and multiple perspectives. Some of the projects that she highlighted included work on unions, “where kids read about the mill workers strike,” the students focused on finding a resolution together and examined issue of inequity. Lucy highlighted the example of a project called the Water and Poverty Summit, which provided students the opportunity to “research in teams different water issues happening around the world.” The project focused on multiple perspectives and provided students the opportunity to learn about the issue from the perspective of the various stakeholders that were affected by the issue. “They had to research a topic from the perspective of a citizen, a politician, a scientist.” Commenting on this experience, Lucy shared that “it was cool because you could see within one issue everyone had different perspectives.” She used a variety of sources, including primary sources, documentaries, political cartoons, photographs, literature, that provided students with the opportunity to learn about different perspectives. Additionally, Lucy used photographs and political cartoons that students would analyze and draw inferences from. “I used a lot of political cartoons because I think political cartoons talk about perspective, because it is the comment that the artist is trying to make at that time.” The political cartoons provided students with an accessible way to examine primary sources and multiple perspectives understanding prevalent issues throughout history.

Lucy placed strong importance on creating a curriculum that provides students with the critical skills they need to be successful and to engage in the world. She noted that “we need to reconstruct the curriculum so we can give these kids these skills but we
also do it in a way that honours and recognizes and can be politically active.” She is able to do this by engaging her students in critical pedagogy, through the critical examination of social issues.

Sadie emphasized the importance of questioning and inquiry, providing a space for class discussions to take up issues of equity and diversity. Through a unit on seasonal agriculture program in Canada, Sadie incorporated different ways of questioning focusing on the issue of migrant labour. With her class, they looked at the seasonal agriculture issues and where she had her students “come up with twenty different questions that they would ask people” involved in the agriculture program. Sadie explained that “by asking these good questions they were now seeing kind of issues of equity and diversity within those questions that were coming up.” The project allowed students to engage in a variety of resources and issues surrounding the program. Using primary and secondary sources, including federal government documents, articles and documentaries, the students learned about the historical context of the program. The students had the opportunity to conduct a “Skype interview with a woman who worked with the seasonal agricultural program” where students had the opportunity to ask the questions that they had previous developed. The project allowed students to understand the different perspectives around the program and have a heightened awareness of the issues. Furthermore, the culminating task that Sadie had designed for the unit involved the students creating a tweet on Twitter responding to what they had learned from the whole process. This allowed the students to express their opinions that were backed in research, while reflecting on the experiences of those individuals who have gone through this and how they might have felt. Furthermore, this allowed students to empathize with the experience faced by those involved in the
program and what it might have felt for members of the family that may have been separated.

Similarly, Jude highlighted a project he observed in a Toronto school that involved students working in collaboration to determine issues of fairness. Students were responsible to go to each class to identity what they believed to be fair or unfair happening in the school. “Involving kids in determining issues of justice and lack of justice, what is fair and unfair makes the issues be their issues.” Once the students identified the schoolyard as unfair they then “engaged in all kinds of research with people in the school and what other kids felt were other major areas that needed attention in relation to recess.” Students were involved in data collection, including conducting surveys. Jude explained:

They collated all their information, the data, and came up with what were the most important issues that the kids in the school thought needed to change in the schoolyard and for what reasons. It’s not in the curriculum but totally based on kids own interests and issues. Having it then connect in so many ways to the curriculum and then actually having it be something that leads to some transformative change and empowers kids to see what they can make change.

Jude noted that the project “was a really positive experience,” as it drew upon students interests and encourages them to take on an empowering role aimed toward action and change in their school.

In her law class, Prudence focused on incorporating different worldviews so students to gain a broader understanding based on varying perspectives on issues of law and justice. She encouraged her students to look at the “shades of grey” when looking at policy and try to look at it from different perspectives. Commenting on the projects that she has done with her class, Prudence said that “I want them to do something that is more
interesting. I want to incorporate equity.” By engaging in issues of social justice, the participants each sought out ways to adapt the curriculum that allowed for students to engage in their learning in a way that is validating and allows them to be politically active.

**Power Structures and Barriers to Learning**

The following section examines the power structures that continue to be pervasive within the education system and in urban communities creating additional barriers for many students. There are several ways that power influences Culturally Responsive and Relevant Pedagogy. Though power structures are vast and complex, the following highlights three areas: societal barriers, school structures, and relationships. Each of these areas represents systemic factors that promote discrimination and oppressive practices, exacerbating obstacles to student learning. In addressing these factors, participants drew upon the experiences that they have observed which have shaped their attempts of building culturally responsive and relevant classroom.

*Societal Barriers & the Impact on Student’s Learning*

When reflecting on the structural barriers that students face in their everyday lives, the participants each spoke of how factors of race and class can have an impact on student learning. The participants agreed about many of the challenges faced by students in their classrooms, school, home and community. The participants to a large extent agreed about the socio-economic issues that many students in their class were faced with and how they impacted their learning. When asked about the structural factors that may be creating barriers for students learning, they situated their comments within an understanding of the challenges of living in an urban community. Prudence, Lucy, and
Jude reflected on the impact that a student’s socioeconomic condition can have on their engagement at school and on their day to day livelihood.

For example, Prudence recognized that students living in a high-priority neighbourhood often times have to make a choice between going to school and having enough to eat. These restrictions impact student engagement and their participation in class. “Some of these kids don’t have money to go to school,” Prudence asserted. “You have to move through society not knowing where your next meal is coming from or how you are getting to school.” Prudence considered the patterns between issue dates of government assistance and student attendance. She clarified that not all the students in her class and at her school live in high-needs communities and dependent on social assistance to serve their basic needs. However, for many of her students they are “facing pressures” that other students are not necessarily confronted with which have implications for their engagement at school.

Similarly, Jude drew upon his observations of a changing Toronto and claimed that there is a growing “correlation between poverty and race [and these] socioeconomic issues cannot help but impact the kids and their families and therefore impact their learning.” He emphasized that for students who have to the worry about not having enough to eat or money to pay for basic necessities “it [becomes] more challenging for them to learn.” On the other hand, while acknowledging that poverty and race can have a tremendous impact on children, he focused on what that means for the role of the teacher and the school in mitigating those barriers. A considerable challenge for teachers working in urban schools is that “kids, generally speaking, have completely different experiences than teachers.” It is the role of the teacher than to understand these issues and find ways to best teach these students. It is not only the teacher who has a role to play to close the
gap. Jude also pointed to the responsibility of the public school system to ensure that all students have the basic necessities they need to be successful at school:

> Schools have a huge role in terms of making sure that every kid is well fed and that every kid has enough… there is nothing that should happen in a public school, in my mind, that is connected to whether or not your family can afford it or not afford it. I think there are the outside forces, and then there are things that the teachers and the schools have to figure out about how best to teach kids that are different from us and how has been suffering with issues their whole lives.

It was important to Jude, as an educator to take on a reflective role and to be mindful of the various issues that the students and their families may be experiencing. This is a point that Jude had emphasized throughout our conversation. Reflecting on his time as a principal, Jude commented that there were many issues that were factors for the students and families at his school, “I needed to acknowledge those as an educator, and as much as possible try to help mitigate those things and how they impact our kids in the school.”

Similarly, Sadie considered the challenge of being an educator in an urban community and the importance of understanding the pervasive issues faced by the students and their families:

> A challenge is that you really need to be up to date and you really need to understand what is happening in the lives of these students… we can try to understand and be empathetic to their experience and see how then that impacts us in our teaching but we can’t put ourselves in someone else’s shoes.

Sadie is aware of the changing dynamics of urban communities, and reinforced throughout our conversation the importance of having an understanding and awareness of the issues your students are faced with. “[If] we don’t understand issues in the urban community, we can’t be an urban educator.”

While Sadie spoke at length about the diversity of her students and how she has tried to find ways to embrace the cultural diversity in her classroom, she is aware of the
The school where Sadie has taught for the past ten years is in a high-priority community and the students are of varying ethnic and cultural backgrounds. As a result of the multicultural diversity, Sadie commented that there are many challenges to implementing a critical pedagogy in her classroom that necessarily highlights the cultural diversity of her students. As noted previously, Sadie commented that the multicultural landscape of her school has produced an “uncomfortable hierarchy,” among the students according to their ethnicity. “It is a delicate line you walk between people and cultures, [for example] between North Koreans and South Koreans, so as an educator you really needed to know what these are.” This perceived hierarchy of cultures in her school has presented many obstacles for Culturally Responsive and Relevant Pedagogy. Sadie explained that:

Inviting student’s cultures into the school is kind of beautiful, the kids see themselves in the curriculum, they can engage at different levels. [However] they are also opening the door to histories of conflict so you need to be able to feel comfortable with that conflict and that place of conflict. Because it is not all like rosy and beautiful it can be really tough.

In creating an inclusive space for her students, Sadie noted the importance of understanding the interplay of issues present in her school that affect her students. Fundamental to cultural responsive and relevant practices for social justice is creating a space for dialogue that minimizes oppression and moves toward a more inclusive way of understanding how to embrace each others differences (Singer, 2011, p.61).

_School Power Structure and the Challenges of Supporting Every Student_

All the participants commented about the structural barriers faced with the school system and the power structures found within the school and how that impacted their efforts to create a relevant and responsive curriculum. Among the challenges faced by the
participants in their attempts to challenge problematic practices in the school was

resistance from administration and from colleagues. Lucy, Sadie, and Prudence spoke

about the challenges they were faced when trying to implement a social justice program

in their classroom and pointed to the impact of administrative support.

Lucy spoke to the challenges she faced with administration and the school
structure in trying to implement a culturally relevant teaching program. Lucy contended

that the challenge had been “the administration and […] the system itself.” Similarly,

relationships with the administration has been a main challenge for Sadie in planning
inclusive curriculum in her class. Sadie described her relationship with the administration
like “playing a game”:

I know my administration, the language they want me to use and I know
how they want me to present things to them to get these approved. So it’s
like playing a game, and I really hate it. It’s kind of like this game that you
really have to play, you really have to know the power dynamics within
the school.

In our conversation, Sadie made a really important point with regard to responsive
teaching. She noted that she is often the only person in her school dedicated to social
justice practices, consequently her students in her class are faced with the task of
“learning and unlearning,” a particular way of teaching. For Sadie, this has meant
“creating an environment for students to unlearn and then learn in a new place,” which
made her commitment to teaching through an equity approach challenging and “kind of
tiring.”

Like Sadie, Lucy spoke at length about the challenge of not having a school-wide
initiative that prioritizes social justice pedagogy. Lucy lamented upon the challenges of
being a culturally responsive and relevant teacher in a school which does not recognize
that pervasive gaps existent in student achievement. She shared the frustration she felt, seeing students get left behind, “waiting for that teacher to recognize the gap in their learning and say the buck stops here.” It is here that Lucy notes is a place where the administration could take on a more assertive role in assuring that teachers on a whole are responsive to the needs of their students. She further explained:

The challenge has never been the kids, it has been the administration and it has been the system itself. It has been a system of high stakes test, of database instruction, being defined by data in standardized testing and not teacher interaction, observation, authentic assessments and authentic learning. So the system itself has been the largest challenge for me.

Similar to the experiences that Lucy faced with the administration when trying to implement equitable practices for social justice, Prudence, throughout our conversation alluded to the challenges that the school system presented in her programming for her students. “I am trying to kind of manipulate the system in a way,” she remarked, as she reflected back on times when she was perceived as combative in her approach. Instead she now focuses on “seeing the shades of grey, kind of like working within the system to try to help the disenfranchised, which is kind of what you are looking at to try and help youth graduate.” Additionally, Prudence shared a similar frustration as Lucy and Sadie toward administration. She noted that the challenges that she faces with administration is not directed at the goals she has for her classroom, rather is rooted in the more large scale systematic challenges embodied in school board policy. She noted that “Administrators have their hands tied with policy.” Because of these structural barriers, Prudence asserted, there is a “need to educate the parents or guardians to get that trickledown effect to the students.”
Jude reflected on his past role as a principal at a Toronto public school in a high-priority community and on his role as instructor in a pre-service teacher education program. Using the insights gained in both these roles, he attested that:

Having a leader in a school that stands for this support system and puts resources in this is a judge thing for teachers who want to take on that work. It is a really hard, not impossible, but much harder to do it when the administrator would like not to do that work.

Committed to Culturally Responsive and Relevant Pedagogy, Jude reinforced the importance of having a supportive administrator in place that is dedicated to upholding an equitable and inclusive school community.

Assessment Shaped by Power

A final note on power structure that often comes up in the literature and was raised by one of the participants is on the issues of assessment. The participants did not all directly speak to assessment, apart from Lucy, who spoke at length about the challenges of standardized testing. “You need to know that standardized testing does not matter,” she asserted. Lucy believed that standardized testing is shaped by power and reflects the dominant culture, restricting opportunities for students to achieve success. Referring to standardized testing in the United States, Lucy acknowledged that similar parallels can be made to Ontario’s system of standardized testing, specifically EQAO:

I think structural factors are when children are being defined by their standardized testing data. There is an assumption in the system that teachers are not aware of their kids […] The structures tell kids that they are basic, the structures tell kids that they are below basic.

Lucy was critical of the “one-size-fits-all” approach to assessment that standardized testing upholds. She provided her students with multiple and varied ways to demonstrate their learning. While Lucy acknowledged the validity of the standardized tests, she
attempted to provide her students with opportunities to demonstrate their learning in ways that were more appropriate and better reflected their lives, cultures, and interests.

\textit{Relationships Shaped by Power}

Lucy, Jude and Prudence acknowledged the impact that teacher relationships with their students can have on their opportunities for learning. It is important as an educator to be aware of our own identity and the power and privilege that we have as teachers and be open to interrogate those privileges and examine the impact that it may have on our students.

Lucy in understanding that the education system and schools are “locations of transmission of the hegemonic notions of knowledge [and] culture,” asserted that “schools are not neutral.” She emphasized the importance of understanding whose interests are being recognized and are served, and whose are being ignored and marginalized. It becomes imperative therefore that “we recognize our position as teachings in thinking about power relations with our students to create spaces where the student’s background and experiences are honoured, relevant and part of the curriculum.”

However, Lucy recounted conversations with her students where they had experienced adverse power relations with their teachers. Lucy commented on the discriminatory relationships between the students and many of the teachers in the school where she had worked. She spoke at length about the relationships that teachers have with their students, and noted that one of the common barriers that the students were faced with in the learning is the misunderstanding of teachers. Lucy noted that often “teachers that do not understand [their students]” and provided an example of students raising this as a concern:
I have had kids come and say “I think this teacher is racist.” And just kids noticing how some kids are treated. The kids are aware of race, they are aware of class, they are aware of the differences and they are aware of how teachers treat them. And I think those are barriers. How the teachers view them and treat them accordingly.

Jude and Prudence recognized that their power, privilege and identity mediated their classroom interactions with students. They both felt it was important as educators to interrogate the privilege that they identified as having and in order to use it in a way that is supportive to the needs and well being of their students.

Jude spoke to the complexity of identity and privilege, and reflected on the importance for educators to interrogate their own identities. Jude believed that it is important for teachers to begin to reflect on their identity and the privileges that they have and what that means for teaching, their students, and dynamics in the classroom. In his teacher education class, Jude has lead pre-service teachers to reflect on their own power and privilege. Introduced by the Flower Power activity, he has lead teachers through an exercise to determine how many “petals” one has on their flower. In doing this activity, teachers are required to consider the notions of privilege and what it means for their students in the classroom. Through this activity, Jude has had teachers interrogate “white privilege”, which Peggy McIntosh , an American feminist and anti-racist activist, in White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack, explains is like “an invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, maps, [and] tools…”(1988). For Jude, it is important for teachers to consider “unpacking the knapsack of white privilege, [and begin to question], and begin to understand “what does that mean, what does that mean for us, what does that mean for our kids?” In engaging in this activity, teachers
begin to think about their identity and the impact it has on their lives and the lives of their students. Jude further stated:

I think a really important part of that pedagogy for teachers to sort of begin to change their thinking and feeling is that they sort of look at themselves and figure out, and say okay so I have a lot of power.

For Jude, the goal of the exercise is not for teachers to reject or deny their “power,” rather it is to gain an awareness and understanding of how they can use this “power” to positively impact the experiences of their students.

You can’t deny that power. The thing really isn’t whether you deny it, the question is how do you use your power to do good [...] So how do I as an administrator or as a teacher working with kids that are so different from me in so many different ways [...] how do I use the power to best support these kids and their families to be successful and understand that we have to turn all of this on its head.

For Jude, the goal in engaging teachers in this exercise is to expose the “hegemonic discourse of society,” and to make teachers “more aware of the hidden systemic issues that their students are faced and to question them.”

Prudence shared a similar commitment to interrogation of her identity and understanding how her “privilege” affects her relationship with her students. “What you have is a lot of privilege in a lot of spaces.” She commented on how she needs to remind herself that she is different that her students, who are for example faced with financial restraints that affect their daily choices, including food, and transportation. “I teach my students that privilege is contextual and fluid. So, acknowledging when you have privilege and when you can use it to help others is number one.” She admitted however, that “it is tough to acknowledge that you have privilege.”
Privilege of parents

While the other participants do not speak to the privilege of parents, Lucy described the inequitable treatment toward the “privilege” and the “non privilege” parents within her school. This was described as a source of frustration for Lucy in trying to implement culturally responsive and relevant framework.

Here we are a dual language program and I can see the sign on the door that says “people who understand the system only.” So, privileged parents, I call the power parents, parents who feel comfortable enough. But seeing the inequity of “who’s who,” the inequities of whose needs are being met and whose needs were being ignored and the decisions that were being made in our school that were privileging certain parents with more privilege and power than the parents we were meant to serve which were the working class Latino families.

Her frustration was centred on what she perceived as an inequitable system. Specifically, one in which the needs and interests of some parents, the ones that understood how to operate within the system, were being addressed, concurrently further ignoring the needs of the parents that are already being underserved.

Empowerment of the Learner

All of the participants shared a goal in teaching that celebrates student knowledge, background and experiences and provides students with the tools they need to be actively and critically engaged in their learning success and as global citizens. Based on the content of the conversations with the participants, empowerment of the student can be fostered through engagement and critical consciousness, however these categories are not mutually exclusive nor does this exclude other aspects of student empowerment.
Engagement

All of the participants embraced an approach to equitable practices that embraced social justice, while allowing students to connect their experiences to their learning, through a critical lens. Lucy noted that her students are connected and engaged when she uses culturally responsive and relevant teaching. On reflecting on the engagement of her students Lucy shared, “if the kids are being able to connect to their experiences and find success because a teacher believes in them and has high expectations than the kids will meet them.” For her it was important to create safe and inclusive spaces where her students would feel comfortable expressing themselves and comfortable to raise questions.

It’s about bringing spaces where kids can [share] that I think is important […] the kids feel more comfortable bringing stuff up. The kids were able to feel that they are in a comfortable enough space to ask questions […] and I feel that they have a growing sensitivity to things.

Throughout our conversation, Lucy emphasized the positive impact that inquiry work that reflected students interests had on student engagement. Furthermore, she noted that when “you respect your [students] and keep them engaged with meaningful work, not busy work,” that you are able to maintain a positive classroom environment.

Prudence in considering student engagement asserted that “they engage because they know it is about self-empowerment, student empowerment and they see themselves in the curriculum.” Here, Prudence draws on the connection with student identity and their experiences when highlighted the curriculum, they become more invested and engaged in their learning.

This understanding of engagement is followed by Jude as he considers the feedback that he has received from teachers that have engaged in teaching and learning
from a culturally responsible and relevant framework. He notes that “the kids become different kinds of learners that they engage in ways never thought possible.” These activities, such as the community helpers activity, mentioned earlier, “engages [students] and therefore makes it a positive learning experience…if you are engaged in what you are doing you are having a positive experience.”

The positive experience that Jude remarked upon is shared by all the participants. Each reiterating that they perceived their students to have been engaged and have had positive learning experiences. Both Sadie and Prudence described what they perceived engagement to look like and sound like in their classrooms. For Sadie, engagement in her classroom was described as one that is “lively, noisy, where students are discussing things and talking.” That there is a “feeling in the classroom” where the students want to “learn more and want to access more information.” In her classroom, Sadie described engagement as “hype in the class” where her students were working in a way that was directed toward a greater purpose. Sadie commented that “in my most beautiful sense I see it as they see it as a tool for emancipation.”

Instead for Prudence, it was “the quieter moments” the embodied engagement of her students. She recognized student engagement as “the nuances […] [of students] working at their own pace.” Prudence highlighted a few examples of routines her class that exemplified this engagement, which included students working while sharing food, and playing music in the classroom while everyone worked at their own pace.

Both participants described a sense of community and harmony in their classrooms that reflected the needs and the dynamics of the students in that class community.
Fostering Critical Consciousness

All of the participants in the study embraced an approach to teaching that saw student empowerment as its ultimate goal, providing students with the tools and knowledge they need to engage critically with the world and to recognize the agency that they have in their lives. Providing students with these tools, students become advocates in their life and in their learning and recognize their individual and community assets.

Sadie, Lucy and Jude focused on developing their student’s critical understanding of the world. For Sade, it was important for her to provide her students the opportunities to develop the language to articulate their experiences and how to move forward to develop a sense of agency. She further considered that:

[It is important for students] to figure out the language around [what they are feeling] so that they can actually have words for it as oppose to having this kind of feeling of anger inside. Which are really true feelings, but being able to move from that place of feeling, to not even action, but just articulation.

Sadie was aware that her students were faced with a complexity of issues in their life, and that in order to be active agents in their life they needed to develop a sense of resiliency and recognize the potential of their agency. She further noted:

For me a lot of that really comes down to resiliency. Really, when I think about [engagement], [it is] not necessarily are they engaged, [but] if they are going to be involved in their school work and be active agents in their life and recognize their agency.

Sadie acknowledged, however, the complexity of student engagement and student resiliency,

I think student engagement really forces you to go to those gritty hard places. It makes you go to those uncomfortable places where you are uncomfortable and your footing is really being taken from underneath you. You might be recognizing that you might be racist, you might be classist, and you might have all of these things in
there. Or recognizing kind of a sense of social justice or recognizing that your people in Somalia might have oppressed other people, and other people are is now your best friend in this school. But, if you have that kind of resiliency. I think that allows you to become engaged and recognize your own agency in your life.

Sadie raised the importance of student resiliency as a component of student engagement, reinforcing the importance of persevering through the “gritty hard places” and issues that arise from the complexity of student diversity and identity. When faced with this complexity one’s resiliency allows them to move forward and develop agency in their life. In responding to the question of whether there is a link between student engagement and the students socio-cultural backgrounds, Sadie cautioned that there exists too many layers which need to be considered. She asserted the importance of considering who is defining engagement and for what purpose:

- I think the term student engagement is really difficult because student engagement might mean getting the best marks and knowing that you want to go on to school. Or student engagement might mean recognizing social injustices and how you were to change it, maybe within yourself and then you can go out to your community.

Understanding these layers and the complexity of student engagement is important to consider as an educator, particularly when approaching teaching from a perspective centred toward student critical awareness and empowerment.

In fostering critical awareness in her classroom, Lucy focused on a critical literacy approach to engage and empower her students in their learning. This is highlighted in her response to the question of what her goals are for teaching for social justice, she states:

- I hope that students feel comfortable in who they are. I hope that students find that they can use literacy in ways that are critically engaging, that have them think and question and those they can use their writing to share their stories and experiences. They can be politically active and also find strength in their background.
Through literacy and sharing of their personal narratives, students become empowered in their learning. Lucy continued on to reiterate the importance of acknowledging student experience in the curriculum. When student “experiences are being reflected back” they will feel welcomed and normalized. However, she cautioned that students may instead feel alienated. This goes back to the issue raised previously by the other participants, with regard to tokenistic and essentializing ways that student cultures can be represented in the classroom.

Jude placed a similar emphasis in empowering students through practice that embraces who they are. He acknowledged that common response to students and their families living in high-priority neighbourhoods, by educators is to look at what they do not have and to focus on their deficits. Instead, he insisted on the importance of focusing on the assets of the student and the community which they live. For Jude, “people in the school are not just people who don’t have this and don’t have that. They are also people who have incredible strength.” It is the “ability that people have to make due and the strength that they have to make this work.” Jude pointed to the example of English Language Learners, who have the ability to speak multiple languages:

The fact that so many kids speak so many languages and that we generally in schools acknowledge English […] we never acknowledge and value those languages in the classroom and see that as strength. I think those kinds of things go against what we understand about language acquisition and that the more languages you speak the better you are going to be.

Jude emphasized the importance of embarrassing and validating the assets that students embody, while simultaneously building on student agency in their ability and their learning. Prudence placed a similar emphasis on the importance of student empowerment. “It is all about empowering the students,” she remarked as she reflected
on her programming. For Prudence, parents and families play an important role in enabling students to feel empowered.

If we engage the parents, if we give them the relevant materials which is how to navigate the education system then they can go home empowered and help their child so their child can in turn graduate […] as soon as parents learn to navigate the system they then get the cultural capital that they can then give it to their child.

She placed particular attention in her classroom to the parents of her students. The importance on the role of the parents and the family in supporting student success is noted previously by Lucy in her commentary on the power relationships among parents and those that have the tools to navigate the system and those that do not have that knowledge of how to manipulate the system to work for them.
Chapter Five: DISCUSSION

Introduction

The research study began with the research question: In what ways can Culturally Responsive and Relevant Pedagogy promote education for social justice within urban schools? In doing so, the study examined the pedagogies and the practices that educators used to address inequities and injustices while promoting equity and inclusive classrooms. After spending a considerable length of time with the data, coding to find common themes, processing and analyzing the data, the narratives of each of my participants revealed common understandings and implications of doing this kind of work that has important implications for teachers in urban schools.

The main findings of my research that are presented in Chapter Four and were divided into the following central themes: Understanding Culturally Responsive and Relevant Teaching in Achieving Social Justice Education, Developing an Inclusive Curriculum, Power Structures and Barriers to Learning, Empowerment of the Learner. This chapter provides a further analysis of the findings and makes connections between my data and the literature I reviewed in Chapter Two. In the final sections I consider the implications for teachers and the broader education community, and suggestions of areas for further research.

Interpreting the Significance of the Findings

The four central themes that emerged out of the data highlight the fundamental aspects of Culturally Responsive and Relevant Pedagogy and what that means in teaching for social justice in urban schools. The participants shared a common understanding of social justice and its relationship to Culturally Responsive and Relevant Pedagogy. The
findings outline their understandings of social justice education and their goals. Their pedagogical understanding and commitment have significant consequences for the curricular designs and methods used in the classroom for student engagement. The participants shared an understanding of the necessary role of the teacher to challenge the pervasive inequalities of the education system, simultaneously providing students the space to develop their sense of self, see themselves as actors as opposed to recipients of education and find meaning between real world issues and the classroom. This reflects Paulo Freire’s conception of the dialogical relationship between teacher and student, whereby they “reflect simultaneously on themselves and the world without dichotomizing this reflection from action, and thus establish an authentic form of thought and action” (2000, p. 83). Education, therefore, is constantly remade in the “praxis,” where both student and teacher continue through a cycle of practice and reflection, and action in order to make change.

Committed to praxis in their teaching, my research participants shared several examples of how they reflected on their practice to ensure that what they did was meaningful. Through this cycle of practice and reflection, the participants shared a commitment to finding multiple entry points through which students could relate and make connections to their learning. Each of the participants upheld a strong commitment to developing an equity-focused and inclusive curriculum that honoured and validated the knowledge and experiences of the students. The research participants put forward several examples of incorporating student experience into the classroom. Lucy, Jude, Sadie and Prudence, in their experience teaching in the classroom have each found opportunities to bridge students lived experiences with the skills and tools they need to be successful in their learning. Gloria Ladson-Billings upholds this importance of reflecting the student in
the curriculum, reflecting that effective pedagogical practice must necessarily “[address] student achievement but also help students to accept and affirm their cultural identity while developing crucial perspectives that challenge inequalities that schools perpetuate” (1995a, p. 467). Incorporating student experiences into the curriculum, teachers are not only honouring and validating the diverse cultural, ethical and linguistic identities of their students, they are simultaneously providing students the affirmation they need to move from a position of deficit to one of strength and action.

For all the participants parent and family involvement in the classroom was an important way of fostering inclusion and community among the students. Jordan Singer in *Brave New Teachers*, contends that “by bringing parents and the community into the classroom, students feel less of divide between their lives at school and their lives outside of school” (Solomon, Singer, Campbell, Allen & Portelli, 2011, p.65). Through building opportunities to strengthen partnerships between the school and family, teachers are able to help “break down the traditional sense of alienation [that] many parents from marginalized populations, immigrant families and inner city communities feel with regard to schools, schooling and the education system” (Solomon et al., 2011, p.65). A commitment to fostering these relationships facilitates a greater sense of belonging among the students and their families.

One of the challenges Sadie and Lucy both noted was having to deconstruct and reconstruct the curriculum to reflect a more equity focused program. Despite the necessity of these processes to achieve more inclusive learning, the teachers shared frustrations in being the only teachers doing this kind of work, which meant that students were constantly having to unlearn and relearn different ways of knowing. As noted by Gloria Ladson-Billings, teachers engaging in equity practices “must be able to
deconstruct, construct, and reconstruct the curriculum (Ayers et al., 2008, p.165). Based on the conception that the curriculum is not a neutral document, it needs to be deconstructed to “expose its weaknesses, myths, distortions, and omissions” (Ayers et al., 2008, p. 165). In teaching for social justice, each of the participants focused the topic of inquiry-based projects on social issues. While engaging in critical inquiry, students were encouraged to question the power of knowledge and consider the diverse perspectives taken up in any issue.

In addition to their commitments to creating and upholding a culturally relevant curriculum, the participants were committed to establishing positive and affirming relationships with their student. In teaching students in urban schools it is imperative to have “positive attitudes about ethnic, racial, and gender differences” (Gay, 2013 p.56), this informs your expectations as a teacher and your actions that you take toward the diverse students in your classroom, contributing to a more positive learning environment for students. The pedagogical principles of culturally responsive teaching are based on a “holistic process in that knowledge, attitudes, values, ethics and actions are developed simultaneously” (Gay, 1994, p. 141). It involves creating integrated curriculum that supports teaching the whole child that means teaching students the basic numeracy and literacy skills they need to be successful as well as attending to their critical consciousness. As Geneva Gay notes, “educators must understand diverse cultures, social backgrounds, and ethnic identities and teach to them as well as through them if they are to be successful in teaching the whole person of culturally diverse children” (1994. p.142).

Through the conversations with my participants, the concept of teacher identity and privilege arose. The findings reveal the importance as a teacher to understand the
power and privilege that we have in the classroom and how it relates to the student. In
being an equity-minded teacher, interrogating one’s privilege becomes a central focus,
not so that it is denied rather to find ways that it can be used to support the needs of our
students. When Jude speaks of teaching pre-service teachers to identify the privileges and
power they have in different spaces, through the flower power activity, his goal is not for
the teachers to deny that power. Rather, he focuses teachers to engage in a process of
self-reflection and interrogation. Through this process, teachers simultaneously recognize
the various contexts in which they have power and find ways to use that power to support
the needs of their students.

My participants were each well aware of the pervasive power structures that acted
as barriers to the daily lives of their students. In understanding the challenges their
students faced, they worked to find ways that the students could feel empowered and as
active agents of change in their lives, building on the strengths and assets of the students
and their community. Geneva Gay states that teachers need to shift from deficit to asset
based perceptions of student and their communities. Moving away from the fallacy of the
perception of these communities and students which purports an understanding of
“universal marginality, powerlessness, and disadvantaged.” She argues that:

There is something positive and constructive among people and communities most
disadvantaged in mainstream society; and that teachers genuinely committed to
transforming learning opportunities for students from these communities must
identify, honour, and engage these resources or funds of knowledge in their reform
efforts. There is, indeed, power, potential, creativity, imagination, ingenuity,
resourcefulness, accomplishment, and resilience among marginalized populations
(Gay, 2013, p.54).

James Banks further argues the importance of understanding our students from an asset-
based as opposed to a deficit-based perspective. Through an asset-based approach, he
contends, provides students the necessary agency to foster positive change. It is “when
students are empowered they have the ability to influence their personal, social, political and economic worlds” (Banks, 2001, p.197). The examples provided by the participants highlight the centrality of student empowerment in teaching for social justice. The practices of the participants provide students the knowledge and skills they need to make change in their lives and in the world.

**Implications**

The study has provided several examples of practices of Culturally Responsive and Relevant Pedagogy that reveal strategies and methods that can be incorporated into one’s teaching practice in meeting the needs of the diverse students in urban schools. As the literature review reveals, the equity-pedagogical tradition which originated in the United States was responding to the particular diversity and issues prevalent in an American urban context. Although there has been research that have applied these concepts to the Toronto urban context that still remains limited in scope, the hope is that my research will fill the gap by addressing the specific context of Toronto urban diversity. The narratives of the teachers interviewed for the purpose of this study, demonstrate how each applied a unique version of culturally responsive and relevant teaching that responds to the local, and individual contexts of their schools and communities. These experiences provide exemplars that other educators can learn from to create meaningful learning experiences for their students in urban schools.

Educators working in Toronto urban communities must become aware of the issues that their students are faced with and respond to them in a meaningful way in order to be successful urban educators. It is important as teachers to interrogate the structures of power and privilege within the board and within the school and community, and see
how it impacts the opportunities to learn and success of our students. The purpose of the study was to bring to light the successful teaching practices of educators who have taught within high-priority urban communities and how they work to teach for social justice. Although urban communities share many common characteristics, it is important to give consideration to the individual communities and the students in our classes. Such was seen with the educator that taught in the Washington, DC and those that taught in Toronto. Although both apply a pedagogy of cultural relevance in their teaching, their conception of diversity was necessarily different reflecting the students that are in their classes. Through the findings key lessons that can be learned and considered as implications for teachers include, but are not limited to the following.

First, it is important for teachers to engage in both a process of self-reflection and self-interrogation. Teachers that engage in praxis and critically reflect on their practice are able to better respond to meet the needs of their students. Furthermore through a practice of self-interrogation, teachers are able to explore their own cultural backgrounds and their relative degrees of privilege. As noted in chapter four, Peggy McIntosh understands “white privilege as an invisible package,” based on racial inequality and comprised of unacknowledged privileges that are not shared equally by all individuals (1988). This unacknowledged privilege that teachers may be share, when examined, can be used to “try to reconstruct power systems” (McIntosh, 1988) aimed at achieving positive outcomes for their students.

Secondly, in implementing a Culturally Responsive and Relevant Pedagogy it becomes imperative to create an inclusive curriculum that reflects, honours and validates students’ lived experiences, knowledge and cultures. In doing so, teachers need to create space for school-community connections, while acknowledging the rich knowledge of the
members of the community, particularly the parents and families of the students. Thereby creating a greater focus on the assets and strengths of the students, and creating an authentic learning experience.

Third, developing affirming and caring relationships that support a community of respect is imperative. Teachers have an importance role in setting high expectations for all students and giving them the encouragement they need to believe in themselves and recognize the strength they have to be successful. In ensuring positive relationship with their students, teachers must also work to build community within the classroom and safe spaces where students feel comfortable taking up issues of social justice.

Lastly, in teaching for social justice, teachers are simultaneously integrating social issues into the curriculum. Allowing students to consider multiple perspectives and knowledge, engaging in critical thinking skills while preparing and gaining the skills and tools to be active global citizens. Through an integrative approach to curriculum, learning has the potential to become more meaningful and provide a more authentic experience for students. Through the infusion of equity and diversity issues into subject matter students engage in critical thinking, inquiry and collaborative decision making, engaging in the material and gaining a positive learning experience. My hope for this research study is to reveal insights from the rich experiences of my research participants. I hope that this study will be helpful to teachers that are looking to integrate Culturally Responsive and Relevant Pedagogy to create a more inclusive classroom.

Recommendations for Further Research

Though this study focused on implementing Culturally Responsive and Relevant Pedagogy in teaching for social justice, further research into the efficacy of teacher praxis and the importance of reflecting on own teaching philosophy and practice, is beneficial.
to improve teaching practices to meet the diverse needs of our students. Toronto is a diverse urban city and our teaching practices should reflect the diverse needs of our students. Further research into the pre-service education program as well as professional development to better prepare students with diverse needs and cultural backgrounds.

**Concluding Thoughts**

In conclusion, this research study demonstrates the benefits of incorporating culturally responsive pedagogy as part of the teaching practice in urban schools. It is important to note that the findings of this study, although focused on the context of urban schools has important implications that can be applied to any school to foster more equitable and inclusive learning. At the centre of public education is the goal of preparing students for life outside of school. In accomplishing this, teachers need to educate students in a way that validates and honours their knowledge, culture and experiences, while providing them with the tools to develop a critical consciousness that allows them to flourish as active global citizens. While I began my research intending to investigate social justice teaching in urban schools, the ensuing conversations directed my study in unexpected ways that highlighted the complexity of diversity, including race, culture, socio-economic factors, local experiences and history of conflicts. While bringing student culture into the classroom is at the centre of culturally responsive and relevant teaching, it is imperative to make possible a safe and inclusive community within the classroom.

Moreover, this study has suggested that teachers, who integrate Culturally Responsive and Relevant Pedagogy into the curriculum, do not ignore the importance of academics, but rather teach both simultaneously. By integrating content areas, teachers
provide learning experiences that is rooted in social issues and allow students the opportunity to make deep connections in their learning. Through issue based projects, students are able to consider multiple perspectives, engage in collective decision making and be active agents of change, while developing the tools and skills and knowledge they need to be successful in life. While there is still much work to be done in meeting the needs of diverse learners and teaching for social justice, the rich experiences and concerns raised by the four participants, reveal that we are heading in a positive direction.
REFERENCES


McIntosh, P. (1988). White privilege and male privilege: a personal account of coming to see correspondences through work in women’s studies. (Wellesley College: Massachusetts).


Appendix A: Interview Questions

General Information
- What grade(s) are you teaching? What subject(s)?
- How long have you been teaching and where?

Culture and Practice
- What does social justice education mean to you?
- What are your goals in teaching for social justice?
- What is your understanding of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy?
- How have you used Culturally Relevant Pedagogy to achieve your goals for social justice education?
- From your perspective, what are the benefits of Culturally Relevant Teaching techniques? What are the challenges?
- In what ways do you incorporate equity and diversity material into your pedagogy? Provide specific examples.
- In what ways do you invite students’ cultures into the classroom? Can you provide some examples of this?
- Describe a lesson which you have taught that illustrates social justice education.
- Describe your students’ reactions/ responses. Did your students engage in the lessons?
- In your experience, what is the impact of learning about issues of social justice for student engagement?
- In your opinion, how has Culturally Relevant Pedagogy impacted student perception of the learning experience?
• What support (i.e. from administration, teacher colleagues, resources), if any have you received in your efforts to build inclusive classrooms based on social justice pedagogy?

• What obstacles, if any, are you faced in your efforts to build inclusive classrooms based on social justice pedagogy?

Urban Diversity

• What are some of the challenges of teaching in urban schools and communities? What awareness, knowledge and skills do you need to develop to meet the challenges of urban diversity? Can you provide some examples of this from your own experiences?

• What structural factors can you identify as creating barriers for students in your classroom? What impact do you think these barriers faced by students in their day-to-day lives have on their learning?

• In your opinion, is there a link between student engagement in their school work and their own social, cultural and economic context? How so? Can you give a specific example of this from your own experience?
Appendix B: Letter of Consent for Interview

Teacher/ Participant Letter of Information and Consent Form

Date: ___________________

Dear ________________,

I am writing to invite you to participate in a research project regarding the effects of social justice pedagogy and culturally relevant teaching practices in diverse classroom environments. My name is Nadia Bucciarelli and I am a Master of Teaching candidate at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, at the University of Toronto (OISE/UT).

Your participation in this study would require you participating in a 45-60 minute, audio-taped interview that will occur at a convenient time and location for you. Potential follow-up interviews may be required to clarify information, or upon your request. The audio recordings will be transcribed and the data within it analyzed. Your specific responses will be kept confidential and your identity will remain anonymous, as pseudonyms will be used in any written report or presentation that may arise from this study. During the course of this research, only my research supervisor and I will have access to this data as it will be stored in a secure place. All of the data will be destroyed no later than five years after the conclusion of this study.

Please be assured that your participation in this project is completely voluntary. You may refuse to answer any question during the interview, to stop the interview at any time or withdraw from the study at any time for any reason. There are no known risks or benefits to you for assisting in the project, and I will share with you a copy of my notes to ensure accuracy.

A summary of my research results as well as the full report (if you would like a copy) will be sent to you via-email. Please feel free to contract either myself or my research supervisor, Dr. Elizabeth Campbell, should you have any questions or require further information.

If you agree to be interviewed, please sign below and return this form in person or via email to: n.bucciarelli@mail.utoronto.ca. Please retain a copy of this letter for your records as well. Thank you in advance for considering my request.

Sincerely,
TEACHING FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

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__________________________
Participant’s Printed Name: __________________________

Date: ______________________