Genocide Education is not the Study of ‘Gloom and Doom and Terror’: Investigating Experiences of Genocide Educators in Ontario Secondary Schools

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Abstract

Current research and professional practice suggests that genocide education can help students question the historical and moral implications of human rights violations, explore their own identities in relation to crimes against humanity, and become more engaged, responsible citizens. However, the material explored in genocide education can be emotionally taxing on a personal level and challenging for teachers to effectively convey to students. While there has been an increase in course development related to genocide education at the secondary level in Ontario, there is little research that supports educators with effective teaching strategies, methods, and tools. This study documents some of the challenges that Ontario secondary school educators encounter when teaching genocide education. Participants for this study were recruited because of their experiences teaching genocide education in Ontario through the Grade 10 Canadian History and the Grade 11 Genocide and Crimes Against Humanity courses. Findings of this study uncover suggestions on how best to support teachers and students when engaging with genocide material. These findings suggest that educators often feel uncomfortable teaching genocide material, which translates to challenges in implementing critical pedagogy in the classroom, among the others. In order to address this challenge, genocide educators need to be supported through better awareness of professional development opportunities and outside resources.

Key words: genocide education, genocide studies, history, teaching, critical pedagogy
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Background to the Research Study

The notion of human rights as we know it stems from the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (UDHR) adopted by the United Nations in response to the mass atrocities committed against certain groups during World War I and II. In adopting the UDHR on December 10, 1948, the world pledged to prevent another international conflict by recognizing that the “inherent dignity” and “the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in this world” (Devine, 1997, p. 146). The world united in pledging to protect its citizens from racism, discrimination, oppression, and any act that could compromise their rights and liberties attributed to them as human beings.

Despite the commitment of the world under the UDHR, the protection of human rights continues to be negated, allowing for crimes against humanity to occur and perpetuate. In each decade since 1948, at least one genocide has occurred (Totten, 2004, p. viii). Three genocides alone were committed between 1988 and 1995: the atrocities committed against the Kurds in northern Iraq, the Rwandan genocide, and the genocide perpetrated in the former Yugoslavia (Totten, 2004, p. viii). The thought of these crimes sparks questions within the education system around what educators can do to prevent future human rights abuses, and how students can be a voice for change against injustice.

The education system is the platform by which these pivotal events should be explored, discussed and analyzed. It is important to introduce these kinds of discussions to students at the elementary and secondary level in order to facilitate their path toward understanding the value of their individual human rights, as well as to help them become, as genocide scholar, Samantha Power, terms it, “upstanders” in this world (Totten, 2004, p. 4).
In the 1970s, the demand for Holocaust education arose throughout public schools in the United States. In 1973, *The Holocaust: a Case Study in Genocide*, was published as the first Holocaust education curriculum, which was eventually endorsed by New York City’s Board of Education (Fallace, 2008, p. 32). Educators perceived it as a method to promote democracy in secondary schools by challenging student values through controversial topics (Fallace, 2008, p. 183). They wanted to explore the impact that a particular historical event could have on individual or social conscience. Since then, researchers and scholars alike have conducted studies on Holocaust education that have yielded results like increased sensitivity to cultural differences among students and increased awareness of discrimination, racism, and oppression. The success of Holocaust education has prompted a curiosity among researchers to explore the impact that other genocides can have on students.

The spread of genocide education throughout the United States sparked an interest among school boards and professional development organizations in Ontario. In 2008, Facing History and Ourselves collaborated with the Toronto District School Board to develop a Grade 11 History course, Genocide and Crimes Against Humanity. The Ontario Ministry of Education and several school boards in Ontario have subsequently adopted the course. Genocide education and crimes against humanity are touched on briefly in the Ontario elementary school curriculum, but covered more in depth within the secondary field. Courses that cover genocide education in secondary schools other than the Genocide and Crimes Against Humanity course include, but are not limited to, Grade 10 Canadian History, Grade 11 World Religions, Grade 11 Ancient Civilizations, Grade 12 Canadian and International Law, and Grade 12 The West and the World. As a result of the implementation of new courses in genocide education at the secondary and university levels, discussions have ensued among scholars and educators regarding what grade
level genocide education should start at, how to include genocide education in the school curriculum and what pedagogical approaches teachers should employ to ensure students are grasping the key objectives.

Much of the literature on genocide education centers on Holocaust courses at the university level in the United States and the impact that it can have on students. As a result, secondary teachers in the Canadian context often consult outside organizations, like Facing History and Ourselves, for additional support in approaching genocide content and are unaware of the resources available to help support them through teaching genocide courses. Subject material that explores genocide can be daunting to teach, as the information can be graphic, disturbing, and emotionally charged. As genocide education is a fairly new term, there are few studies to date exploring best practices for teachers who confront genocide education, especially at the secondary level, and thus, little support in the literature for teachers to consult. This study will attempt to shed light on this relatively unexplored perspective by examining some of the challenges secondary school educators face when approaching genocide education.

**Purpose of this Study**

The purpose of this research study was to explore the challenges that secondary school educators in Ontario encounter when teaching genocide education. I investigated these issues through a qualitative research study, which was a combination of a detailed literature review and semi-structured interviews. Interviews were conducted with secondary school educators in Ontario who had experience teaching genocide as part of the Grade 10 Canadian History course or the Grade 11 Genocide and Crimes Against Humanity comparative study course. My analysis of these interviews was guided by the themes extracted from the literature review.
The educators interviewed for this study and the scholars consulted for the literature review have expressed the value of genocide education as a platform to explore issues like discrimination, stereotyping, oppression in the classroom, both historically and contemporarily. They advocate for the potential of genocide education to help students consolidate the past and present, the ability to make connections, and engage in critical thinking. One of the leading genocide scholars, Samuel Totten, believes that genocide education can be a medium to teach about identity, morality, and character (Totten & Parsons, 2009, p. 43). These objectives are reflected in the Grade 11 Genocide and Crimes Against Humanity course curriculum. In 2008, the course became available to students in the TDSB and eventually branched out to other boards like the Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board and the York Region District School Board. It is currently being offered in 30 schools across Ontario (Centre for Social Innovation, 2014). In the course proposal, Facing History and Ourselves outline its main objectives:

Given the specific multi-cultural and multi-ethnic diversity within Toronto, we feel it is essential that students born within and outside Canada have the opportunity to explore in depth the causes and consequences of genocide and the lived realities of the aggressors, targets, bystanders, and resisters to these horrific acts of violence. A study of these experiences will help foster a sense of empathy for the targets of these violent acts and hopefully encourage students to understand the connections they have to their fellow human beings. (Sarkissian, 2014)

The course takes students through case studies of genocides, including Armenia, the Holocaust, Cambodia, and Rwanda. It operates under a comparative study framework. However, students are prepared to confront the content at the beginning of the course through activities and
assessments that explore identity, membership, and the factors involved in choosing to participate. The course is inter-disciplinary, incorporating psychology, philosophy, and political science. While each genocide is organized into a case study framework, students study them comparatively through inquiry-based questions and broader themes. The focus is less on genocide studies and more on genocide education, which is what this study is attempting to emulate.

The 2013-2014 school year marks the sixth year the TDSB has offered the course, with each year sparking an increase in enrolment (Sarkissian, 2014). Furthermore, the TDSB has also declared April, “Genocide Awareness Month,” since the course’s inception. Thus, there is an evident interest and demand for courses that explore genocide education. However, there has been little research conducted that examines how effectively the Grade 11 Genocide and Crimes Against Humanity curriculum is being delivered or whether the course’s objectives are being met. The process is cyclical though. In order for the curriculum to be delivered effectively teachers need appropriate professional development and support. It is my hope with this study to pinpoint some of the challenges secondary school educators have faced with genocide education in order to provide educators with suggestions on best practices, and ultimately contribute to the progress of this important field in education.

**Research Questions**

This study is guided by the following question: What challenges do secondary school educators encounter when teaching genocide education? As much as this study aims to provide teachers with support in approaching genocide education, it is important not to neglect the role of students, as they are the primary stakeholders as well. Therefore, the following sub-question was
created to address this: In what ways does genocide education heighten students’ awareness of current social injustices, such as discrimination, racism, sexism, ableism etc.? The main objective behind genocide education is to help students critically think about the world around them, especially through questioning their own identities. I would like to explore teachers’ perceptions on how and/or if students are making these connections.

This study explores the implications of studying genocide education. However, there are many events in history that are covered in high school that explore genocide, but do not have the label. Furthermore, one of my interviewees does not have experience teaching the Genocide and Crimes Against Humanity course, but has taught genocide in the Grade 10 Canadian History course. Thus, I designed a question that could potentially remove some restrictions based on the term “genocide education”: What strategies do you employ when teaching difficult history? It is my hope with this question to yield results for educators who experience challenges teaching events considered to be difficult socially, emotionally and academically.

**Background of the Researcher**

My personal journey toward this research stems from my own curiosity and experiences as a high school and university student. After briefly learning about the Holocaust in the Grade 10 Canadian History course, numerous thoughts about humanity surfaced in my mind. These thoughts transitioned into questions like, “How are people capable of hurting others?” However, I remember not feeling comfortable bringing these thoughts up in the classroom because the focus was on covering the content. We learned about the Holocaust through *Schindler’s List*, the course textbook, and through graphic images in order to put a “human face” to history. There was no discussion on the broader implications behind learning about such atrocities, and no room for reflecting on our own identities, choices, and decisions. That was the extent to how genocide
was covered in my high school experience. When I entered university, the questions that surfaced in Grade 10 were only exacerbated. I wanted to know more because I could not come to terms with the ability of humanity to commit such atrocities.

I enrolled in a year-long Holocaust course in my third year of university. The course answered most of my content-related questions, but I still lacked clarity on the bigger questions: Why do people hate? What triggers people to have bad thoughts? What provokes people to act on these thoughts? A month after completing the course, I embarked on the March of Remembrance and Hope, an educational journey hosted by the Canadian Centre for Diversity that consists of visiting the concentration camps and other Holocaust-related sites in Germany and Poland. I travelled with educators, Holocaust survivors, and sixty other students from across Canada. Together, we examined how factors like hatred, prejudice, and discrimination, enabled the materialization of the Holocaust and other genocides. By the end of the trip, I started to consolidate what I witnessed on this journey with present-day prejudice, identity formation, and judgment. As a result, the group collectively generated a plan to promote respect, inclusiveness, social cohesion, and positive change within our schools and communities.

The journey opened my eyes to events beyond the Holocaust. I learned about the impact that other genocides, like Cambodia and Armenia, have had on communities. I learned how easily ideas can be transformed into actions. I also learned how much of the past we can use to understand the present and potentially, the future. However, most of all, I learned that genocide education is more than just the facts. Being exposed first-hand to the locations of terrible events in our history, like the Auschwitz concentration camp and the Grunewald Train Station, made me reevaluate my own identity and position in this world. I felt like I had a newfound responsibility to help students who may not have this opportunity to learn in this kind of environment. These
are the lessons and experiences I was lacking in high school, which I intend to make up for as a high school teacher and researcher.

Throughout the past few years, I have been fortunate enough to be a part of the Master of Teaching program at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, which has enabled me to practice research and teaching simultaneously. I believe I have been in an ideal position to produce the most efficient and effective research, as I was able to consolidate theory with practice. Paulo Freire suggested for teachers to transition from their role as depositor of knowledge to that of partner with their students in the learning process (Agra, 2011, p.147). Teachers should be able bridge the gap between what is explored in the classroom and what students are exposed to in their daily lives. I believe that genocide education is an effective medium to facilitate that. However, teachers need the support and resources in order to explore genocide education to its potential. This is where I see the value and importance of this study. It is my hope that this study will not only provide support and new perspectives for educators, but inspiration to further this important field of research.

Overview

This study contains five main sections. Chapter 1 includes an introduction to genocide education, my purpose of study and the factors that influenced my decision to pursue the topic. Chapter 2 consists of a review of the relevant literature in this field. The methodology section in Chapter 3 contains information about the procedure used in this study, the participants, and the ethical review process. Chapter 4 describes the data collected, including the main themes from the interviews. Lastly, Chapter 5 includes an analysis of the data and limitations of the study. References and a list of appendices follow at the end.
CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

As previously mentioned, the institutionalization of Holocaust education became prevalent in the 1970s, with the first Holocaust education curriculum published in 1973 by New York City’s Board of Education. The spread of Holocaust education programs within schools and organizations in North America exerted pressure to broaden the content to include other genocides (Apsel & Verdeja, 2013, p.6). This is exemplified by the literature released, such as Totten, Parsons, and Charny’s *Century of Genocide*; newly developed courses, such as the Genocide and Crimes Against Humanity course; and new curriculum by Holocaust education organizations, such as the Friends of Simon Wiesenthal Center’s “Genocide: Humankind’s perpetual failure.”

Ironically enough, the study of genocide is an ancient phenomenon; the declaration of genocide as a field of study is what has changed. As such, Leo Kuper, author of *Genocide: Its Political Use in the Twentieth Century*, writes, “The word is new, the crime is ancient” (Apsel & Verdeja, 2013, p. 128). While there has been much progression in the literature covering genocide studies, much of the research often falls under other names, such as “Holocaust education” or “human rights education.” Therefore, it is often challenging to research genocide education as an all-encompassing field of study. In fact, the first piece of literature that explores a full range of genocide was published in 2004 by Samuel Totten, entitled, *Teaching About Genocide: Issues, Approaches and Resources* (Totten & Parsons, 1991, p. 429). Furthermore, there is little research examining the challenges in implementing new genocide courses within secondary education in Ontario, as well as strategies for classroom teaching.
The literature consulted for this study ranges from Joyce Apsel and Ernesto Verdeja’s (2013) pedagogical suggestions for genocide educators at the university level to Geoffrey Short’s (2000) study on Holocaust education in Ontario secondary schools. Four themes have emerged upon analysis of the current literature on genocide education. They consist of the following: teacher discomfort with genocide material, ineffective pedagogical practices, the Holocaust as the archetype of genocide, and a lack of professional development opportunities for teachers. While these themes are discussed in categories, they are intricately linked to comprise the challenges secondary school educators have encountered with genocide education according to current literature. For example, the scarcity of professional development opportunities available is reflective of educators often feeling uncomfortable with the material and resorting to ineffective pedagogy. Educators are often not equipped with effective resources and strategies to engage in the content with students. The impending discussion will elaborate on these themes based on how they are presented in the literature.

1. Teacher Discomfort with Genocide Material

The concept of “discomfort” is approached in different contexts within each of the sources. Definitions range from educators being uncomfortable subjecting students to sensitive material to educators’ insecurities teaching the subject matter in detail. Joyce Apsel’s research yields results that match the former. She asserts that expert educators on genocide studies, from middle school to university, often have an emotional connection to the material (Apsel, 2004, p. 108). These connections may range from educators who have family members that have been affected by genocidal events to educators who have a German background (Apsel, 2004, p. 108). This link, or bias, could potentially shape the ways in which the material is presented to the
students. For example, if a teacher has a personal connection to the Rwandan genocide, he/she may be reluctant to delve into personal accounts of survivors in fear of triggering certain emotional responses. Apsel also touches on student responses to the material. She states that many teachers have reported excusing students from the classroom in response to video clips and films (Apsel, 2004, p. 122). Some students have claimed that the material makes them depressed and have often dropped the course.

Garrett discusses these kinds of implications on students in his study. His research follows the experiences of six pre-service teachers at various stages in a secondary social studies teacher education program. All participants noted the affective challenges they encounter when introducing their students to difficult history. Some of the responses reported by the pre-service teachers include students laughing at the visual representations of violence and students being disengaged in the topic (Garrett, 2010, p. 186). Garrett (2010) addresses Eva’s experiences in introducing difficult topics in the classroom. She expressed reluctance to engage in emotional social science topics in fear of “introducing ambiguity and uncertainty about the degree to which our society works” (p. 204). Eva feared not being able to answer the difficult questions that her students posed to her when engaging in this kind of material.

Similarly, Fallace (2008) focuses on teacher bias, but from a strict Holocaust perspective. Fallace specifies the reluctance on the part of the teacher to address the Holocaust in depth. He cites a study conducted in Illinois on teaching the Holocaust as a part of the wider history curriculum. Based on the results of this study, the degree of coverage was contingent on the teacher’s “Holocaust profile” (Fallace, 2008, p. 140). This delineates a teacher’s specific interests, background, and training on the subject matter (Fallace, 2008, p. 140). Fallace
essentially posits that a teacher only covers the material in the classroom that they feel comfortable and confident teaching.

Totten and Pederson (2012) attribute this issue to the fact that genocide education only started gaining prominence in the late 1990s (p.421). As a result, teachers have had limited exposure to genocide education courses and thus, feel uncomfortable going into detail. Due to the fact that teachers are not well-informed on all genocides, it is often the case that they touch on the basic knowledge, leaving no room for student exploration and questioning. Totten and Pederson (2012) also posit that teachers gloss over the material because there is limited coverage in the curriculum (p. 421). Therefore, there is not as much of a pressure to go into detail. Despite the different lens that each author employs in this category, the general notion that teachers feel a sense of discomfort with genocide curriculum is fluid throughout the literature.

2. Ineffective Pedagogical Practices

The concept of pedagogy accounts for the strategies, methods, and practices of teaching, and is pervasive throughout many fields and disciplines. Pedagogy is contingent on a variety of factors, such as experiences, educational background, and personal beliefs. There are endless pedagogical approaches within secondary education. However, not all of them can be considered effective. The literature examined for this study addresses the concerns regarding ineffective pedagogical practices and the ways in which these practices interfere with students’ ability to grasp key lessons from genocide education. Totten and Parsons (1991) find that students are seldom able to define genocide, and identify its preconditions and consequences (p. 86). Students can articulate the key facts, ideas, and people affected, however, they find it difficult to venture beyond that. The authors attribute this issue to the fact that some teachers delve into courses
without prefacing the material with questions of rationale, such as, “Why study genocide?” (Totten & Parsons, 1991, p. 86).

The notion of rationale for teaching genocide is explored in depth in Rittner’s research. Rittner focuses on the “shoulds” of pedagogy, rather than the “should-nots.” She recommends that teachers at the secondary, college, or university level, establish a set of rationales at the beginning of a course that addresses genocide education because unit plans often lack transparent goals and objectives (Rittner, 2004, p. 7). Rittner includes an example of an effective rationale:

To develop a deeper appreciation of the relationship of rights and duties, and to realize that human rights and the corresponding duties they entail are not the birthright of the few but the birthright of all—every man, woman, and child in the world today. (Rittner, 2004, p. 11)

She claims that if students do not understand such rationales at the beginning of their studies, they are at risk of being exposed to skewed objectives of genocide education; they will come out of the course with extensive knowledge of the facts, and little information on the overall implications of studying genocide. Rittner (2004) explains,

When we teach about genocide, we should not teach only about facts and figures, or about historical context and recent, or age-old, ethnic, religious, or national conflicts, important as all of that may be. Rather, we must also raise ethical questions, explore the human capacity for selfishness as well as the human capacity for compassion. (p.2)
In addition, other teachers may explain the significance of studying genocide, but fail to facilitate and encourage student answers. They claim that the most effective pedagogy when teaching about genocide “helps students think about such issues as the use and abuse of power, the implications of a society that violates civil and human rights, and the roles and responsibilities of individuals, groups, and nations when confronting human rights violations and genocidal acts” (Totten & Parsons, 1991, p. 86). This approach encourages students to transition from merely accepting the facts to questioning the larger implications behind them.

The notion of the status quo is also addressed in Apsel and Verdeja’s (2013) research. They examine this issue through the inclusion of more concrete examples. The importance of the course syllabus is touched on, as it outlines the expectations and foundational principles students should understand by the end. Apsel and Verdeja (2013) state that teachers should use the syllabus as a lesson in itself. They should pose questions like, “What is included/excluded, and why?” (p. 141). They also argue that students enter the course with a variety of preconceived ideas about genocide. One of these ideas is the “great man theory of evil,” where students are being taught that merely studying Stalin, Hitler, and Pol Pot will suffice in understanding the Holodomor, the Holocaust, and the Cambodian genocide (Apsel & Verdeja, 2013, p. 143). By contrast, one of the primary purposes of studying genocide is to “introduce students to the complex nature of history and of historical destruction and to rethink how genocides are carried out” (Apsel & Verdeja, 2013, p. 143). In order to address this, Apsel and Verdeja advocate avoiding preaching and lecturing so that students can come to their own philosophical understandings of the difficult history presented.

Comparatively, Short (2000) focuses on pedagogical practices by means of choice of resources when teaching about the Holocaust. Many of the teachers in his study refused to
employ film as a means to teach about the Holocaust because they believed it could potentially inflict trauma on their students (Short, 2000, p. 297). Holocaust films like Night and Fog are mentioned by the teachers as being too graphic and inappropriate for fifteen-year-olds to be watching (Short, 2000, p. 297). Short claims that inapt judgment on the part of the teacher could potentially mislead students. He adds that the lack of commitment displayed to learning about other genocides, as well as inappropriate pedagogical practices, could potentially reinforce racist attitudes among students that teachers should be working to tackle in the classroom (Short, 2000, p. 297).

Garrett’s study addresses this idea of protecting one’s students from traumatic information as an ineffective pedagogical practice. He mentions a study conducted by Metzger and Suh in 2008 on the use of film in the history classroom. They interviewed teachers on the implementation of films in the classroom that depicted sensitive issues like slavery and racism. One of the participants believed it was,

Important for her students to visualize slavery and understand why it was brutal and wrong, but she did not want to openly address this painful historical issue with her young students or explicitly connect the problem of slavery and racial violence with social problems in the U.S today. (Garrett, 2010, p. 56)

Therefore, while this participant acknowledged the importance of addressing difficult subject matter with students, he/she valued protecting students over unpacking the issues in order to foster meaningful and critical learning. Garrett (2010) consolidates this information by stating that effective learning of genocide, ethnic hatred, aggression, etc. is contingent on educators re-
examining their own theories of learning and how these theories could potentially influence one’s pedagogical approaches (p.46). All of the sources examined in this review perceive, in one way or another, ineffective pedagogical practices as impediments to student capability of learning the valuable lessons offered from studying genocide.

3. The Holocaust as the Archetype of Genocide

Since the introduction of Holocaust education as an important field of study in the 1970s, it has transitioned into a precedential model for course development in genocide education throughout North America. The current number of resources, curricula, educators, organizations, and projects that focus on Holocaust education is extensive. As much as Holocaust education has inspired research and the development of courses centering on other genocides, educators have often used it as a point of reference for other genocides. Totten, Parsons, and Charny (1997) assert that the Holocaust has become widely accepted in the Western hemisphere as the most terrible event in human history (p.xv). As a result, educators look to the Holocaust as the archetype of mass murder (Totten, Parsons, & Charny, 1997, p. xv). It is often the case that students categorize genocide education as learning about the Holocaust and “other” genocides because that is the lens they are being exposed to.

Totten contextualizes this idea through a discussion of the “null curriculum.” He claims that due to the fact that courses with a Holocaust focus at the university level outnumber courses taught on genocide through a comparative approach, students often develop a sense of ignorance about the field (Totten, 2004, p. viii). He quotes Professor Elliot Eisner, a professor of education at Stanford University, to justify his argument: “What schools do not teach may be as important as what they do teach” (Totten, 2004, p. viii). What is left out by instructors not only can
potentially affect students’ ability to exercise alternate perspectives, but can also expose students to a distorted view of history (Totten, 2004, p. viii).

Totten and Parsons explore this challenge in depth with explicit reference to information applicable to secondary students. They state that educators who spend too much time teaching the Holocaust run the risk of modeling to students that “it was either the one and only case of genocide that was committed in the 20th century or the one most worthy of study” (Totten & Parsons, 1991, p. 87). As a result, students tend to be well-educated on the Holocaust, but seldom know that other genocides have occurred, such as the Holodomor in Ukraine between 1932 and 1933, and the genocide of people in Bangladesh by the Pakistani military in 1971 (Totten & Parsons, 1991, p. 87). Educators can rectify this issue by ensuring they are transparent to their students about why certain victimized groups are included in the curriculum over others, and by discussing what factors should be accounted for in making such decisions.

In juxtaposition to the aforementioned, Totten and Parsons also explore the idea behind including coverage of too many genocides in one course. They include an idea expressed by Henry Friedlander, author of The Origins of Nazi Genocide, to encapsulate this challenge educators are presented with:

The problem with too much being taught by too many without focus is that this poses the danger of destroying the subject matter through dilettantism. It is not well enough for well-meaning teachers to feel a commitment to teach about genocide; they must also know the subject. (Totten & Parsons, 1991, pp. 85-86)
In courses that focus solely on genocide, there is a pressure on educators to ensure they are touching on each one. However, this could potentially create room for students to develop “oversimplified generalizations” that paint a picture of history that is incorrect. (Totten & Parsons, 1991, p. 87).

Garrett provides a different lens on coverage from a secondary level perspective. One of the participants, Ben, discussed the connection between power standards and the pressure to ensure all of the material is covered in detail. Ben insinuated that he often resorted to lecturing because of the pressure he felt from the extensive information included in the curriculum (Garrett, 2010, p. 195). He experienced difficulty in choosing what details to leave out because he believed that “painting anything but a complete picture of a particular topic is a mistake” (Garrett, 2010, p.195). Furthermore, Ben attributed more importance to his students understanding the facts in detail, rather than the nature of student engagement, which is connected to the previous theme of ineffective pedagogy. As suggested by the various studies consulted, the tendency of educators to underemphasize other genocides can lead to a series of implications on student learning and their ability to grasp the importance of being aware of the genocides that have occurred outside the scope of the Holocaust.

4. Lack of Professional Development Opportunities

The literature further reveals that the scarcity of research on the challenges of implementing new genocide courses at the secondary level and lack of professional development opportunities hinder the progress of the field of genocide education. While Apsel focuses on university students as her stakeholders, she sheds light on the politics involved in integrating new perspectives into a curriculum. She attributes the challenges of introducing new curriculum on
genocide to the mounting “tensions and differences within different socioeconomic, political, and generational interests” (Apsel, 2004, p. 107). The “politics of education” constitutes public and private funding, as well as the strength of a community to advocate for their needs in order to run courses that focus on genocide education (Apsel, 2004, p. 107). These kinds of politics reflect the ability of such community groups to either successfully promote genocide courses or limit their development.

Apsel and Verdeja explore this issue as it pertains to secondary educators. They assert that there is a lack of research that examines the challenges in creating new courses in genocide studies (Apsel & Verdeja, 2013, p. 6). There is also little research and scholarship that focuses on providing secondary school educators with new strategies and practices on teaching students about genocide. Both sources stress the importance of increased professional development opportunities and further research into the field in order to support effective delivery of genocide education.

While each of the sources analyzed in this review offer different perspectives on some of the challenges involved in teaching genocide education, they collectively acknowledge the factors that plague current educators. These range from a sense of discomfort in teaching genocide material, to the tendency to use the Holocaust as an archetype to approach other genocides, to a lack of professional development opportunities for educators. Although these sources derive from various dates, authors, and fields, there is still a lack of research on the challenges that afflict educators at the secondary level, as well as strategies to support them. Not only does this reaffirm the need for research of this nature, but it provides a glimpse into the direction genocide education is heading toward.
CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Although genocide education is a new field of study and research, there is a fair amount of literature that explores some of the general difficulties in teaching genocide material at the university level. By employing a qualitative approach, however, I hoped to reveal new perspectives within the field of secondary education. Creswell (2007) states that “we conduct qualitative research because a problem or issue needs to be explored. This exploration is needed, in turn, because of a need to study a group or population, identify variables that can be measured, or hear silenced voices” (p. 39). Thus, this research study examines the challenges that secondary school educators are plagued with when exploring genocide education.

This research is comprised of a review of the literature that discusses many of the challenges within the field of genocide education, as well as three semi-structured, face-to-face interviews with secondary school educators from the Greater Toronto Area. The literature review presented an empirical and conceptual framework to situate the data yielded from the interviews. This section includes the procedure by which the data was collected, a description of the research participants, the methods of data analysis, the ethical review procedures, and the limitations I encountered in the study.

Procedure

The data for this research study was collected through face-to-face, semi-structured interviews. I conducted three interviews with educators at the secondary level who have had experience teaching one or more genocides in an Ontario school. A list of questions was developed ahead of time in consultation with my research supervisor (see Appendix B). These
questions served as a guide throughout the interview, but did not restrict the interview from proceeding in a certain direction. A copy of the questions was provided to the participants at the beginning of the interview, as well as a letter of informed consent (see Appendix A). The stipulations in the letter were explained in detail prior to starting the interview. The participants were given a chance to ask as many questions necessary before signing the document. I provided the participant with one copy and I kept one for my records. The interviews were recorded with a digital recording device. After the interviews were completed I transcribed, analyzed, and coded the data. The themes extracted from the data are outlined in Chapter 4.

Participants

The participants for this study were recruited upon recommendations from colleagues and a professional development organization. I issued a call for research participants to colleagues, who provided me with the contact information of educators who have had experience with genocide education. Similarly, I contacted a professional development organization and requested the names of individuals who may have wanted to be a part of the study. This process resulted in the recruitment of three participants.

My first participant, Joanna, has taught in the Catholic secondary school system in Toronto for twelve years. She has experience instructing the Grade 10 Canadian History course, Grade 11 Introduction to Anthropology, Psychology, and Sociology course, and the Grade 12 The West and the World course.

Matthew, my second participant, has been a teacher for the past nine years and is currently working in a public secondary school in Toronto. He instructs the Grade 11 Genocide and Crimes Against Humanity course, the Grade 11 Introduction to Anthropology, Psychology,
and Sociology course, and the Grade 12 Canadian and World Politics Course. Matthew also has experience teaching the Grade 10 Canadian History course.

The third participant, Brian, worked for a public secondary school in Toronto teaching the Grade 11 Genocide and Crimes Against Humanity course, drama, and ancient civilizations. Brian is currently on sabbatical for the year developing curriculum for an organization that supports genocide education throughout North America. All three participants were excited and eager to contribute new perspectives to the emerging field of genocide education.

**Data Collection and Analysis**

After the data was collected and fully transcribed, I proceeded to analyze and consolidate it into larger themes. I read through each transcript once and followed a second time by highlighting key ideas with specific colours attributed to each. I kept the ideas as direct quotes and categorized them as broader themes in a table. I decided to analyze direct quotes because I wanted to keep the data as authentic as possible. As such, Creswell (2007) states,

> When studying individuals, qualitative researchers conduct a study with the intent of reporting these multiple realities. Evidence of multiple realities includes the use of multiple quotes based on the actual words of different individuals and presenting different perspectives from individuals. (p. 18)

I organized the first set of themes based on my research question, sub-questions, and themes outlined in the reviewed literature on genocide education. Some of the interview questions that yielded the data that was analyzed include:
1.) What teaching strategies do you employ when teaching difficult history?

2.) What types of assessments do you use to monitor your students’ understanding of genocide?

3.) In what ways does genocide education heighten students’ awareness of social injustices, such as discrimination, racism, sexism, ableism, etc.? (See Appendix B)

The broader themes were dissected into five main themes that are presented in the following chapter. Some of them mirror the findings in the literature review, while others comprise new perspectives in the field. While it was an extensive and meticulous process, I am extremely satisfied with the outcome, as new conclusions, perspectives, and recommendations on educator challenges within genocide education at the secondary level were successfully generated from the study.

**Ethical Review Procedures**

All of the participants were explained in detail the structure and implications of this interview process. They were aware of being recorded during the interview, as well as the subsequent transcription. A letter of informed consent was issued to each participant outlining all of the aspects behind the ethical review procedure. These included their anonymity, as well as the schools and organizations they work for, the right to withdraw from the study at any time or refrain from answering a question, and the storage of data after the interview (See Appendix A). Each participant’s anonymity is ensured by individual pseudonyms attributed to them. Furthermore, all participants were made aware of the role of my research supervisor and the
access granted to him of all data in order to provide suggestions and edit the study. All participants willingly signed the consent document and have been provided with a copy of the research study.

**Limitations**

Genocide education has been a significant part of my life for quite some time, ranging from my experiences as a student, secondary school teacher, and researcher. Therefore, this study inevitably contains personal biases and perspectives. However, with regard to researcher bias, Creswell (2007) affirms that “researchers bring their own worldviews, paradigms, or sets of beliefs to the research project, and these inform the conduct and writing of the qualitative study” (p. 15). Research is beset with bias, otherwise there would be no purpose to conducting a study.

Courses, curricula, and organizations continue to expand in order to support the progress of genocide education, especially at the secondary level. Consequently, it was initially challenging to find secondary level educators who have had experience with genocide material, whether it was in the form of teaching, facilitating workshops, or writing curriculum. Once I found appropriate participants and completed the interviews, it was difficult to pursue interviews beyond them because of the limited timeframe. Due to the time constraints of the Master’s program, my sample-size was relatively limited. Furthermore, the three participants all teach in schools located in Toronto. In the following chapter, I discuss the influence of student demographic on the dynamics of the class. This study only addresses the student demographic within the Toronto region and in particular schools. If this study were to be conducted in schools outside of the Greater Toronto Area or in a different province, the results could potentially change. These limitations only leave room for further investigation into the study.
CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS

Introduction

The findings of this research study reflect the data collected from three participants who provided unique insights toward the field of genocide education. Each participant offered interesting assessment and pedagogical strategies. Each participant also taught genocide education from various perspectives and contexts. For example, Joanna taught the Holocaust and the Holodomor through the lens of the Grade 10 Canadian History course, while Brian taught the Cambodian genocide from the perspective of the Grade 11 comparative genocide course. While each participant offered distinct understandings of genocide education, they are aligned in supporting the field as a unique opportunity to explore the hidden curriculum among students. The hidden curriculum ranges from helping to create more informed citizens in order to ensure another genocide does not occur, to facilitating students in developing an appreciation for human rights. The participants are also united in expressing a deep passion for the progression of genocide studies within secondary education. Joanna encapsulated this in saying:

It’s always challenging to teach students about difficult history. I think that it doesn’t mean you shouldn’t. I think students are bright minds. They are our future generation and they should understand our history so that we can carry forward a generation that is compassionate, empathetic, tolerant, loving, caring, and will fight for these issues of social justice.

My intention behind this study was to uncover some of the challenges secondary school educators are faced with in teaching genocide curriculum. A meticulous analysis of the data provided by the participants reveals some themes consistent with the literature reviewed and
others that demonstrate new perspectives. Needless to say, the themes are intricately connected, with many sharing common characteristics. Five common themes were extracted from a larger pool, and are as follows:

1.) Pressure to Include all Genocides

2.) Negotiating Other Genocides in Addition to the Holocaust

3.) Employing Critical Pedagogy

4.) Inconsistent Pedagogical Practices Among Colleagues

5.) Lack of Awareness of Professional Development Opportunities and Outside Resources

1. **Pressure to Include all Genocides**

   The pressure to address all international genocides in the classroom was a challenge identified by all of my participants. The curricula of the courses that address genocide education outline the specific genocides teachers are expected to cover. For example, the Grade 10 Canadian History course includes the Holocaust, the Holodomor, and Rwanda, while the Grade 11 Genocide and Crimes Against Humanity course covers a range of genocides, from Armenia to Darfur. Each participant made mention of following the curriculum as much as possible. However, all of the participants addressed the influence of their students’ cultural and ethnic backgrounds on how much of the curriculum is covered. Brian articulated the implications this kind of pressure could have on teachers: “I think teachers find it emotionally intimidating for themselves thinking about how they would think about what they would do with students and the subject material.” He believes that this issue is attributed to the misconception of genocide studies as being a field consisting of morbidity and terror. If a teacher possesses this
misconception going into teaching a course for the first time, it could shape their students’ perspectives on what genocide education entails. Brian elaborated on this misconception:

I think that people generally think that genocide studies are studies of gloom and doom and terror but I think they are actually studies of choices that people make and trying to figure out why people make those choices….what kind of situations create the need for people to make terrible choices, and the historical narratives that lead there.

While teachers cover genocides like Rwanda and Armenia because they are part of the curriculum, their decisions are also impacted by the cultural and ethnic backgrounds of their students. Joanna cited her most recent class experiences in explaining why she attributed a significant amount of time to studying the Holodomor. Her Grade 10 Canadian History class consisted of a high population of Ukrainian-Canadian students who studied the Holodomor at their Ukrainian Saturday school. While the Holodomor is mentioned briefly in the curriculum, she emphasized the pressure to make teaching relevant to the lives of her students. Joanna framed this instance as a positive kind of pressure:

It was a response to the background of my students, their experiences, their family history, and it’s made the classes and discussions more meaningful because they’ve made personal connections. Everyone has personal history and oftentimes, in a classroom setting where you’re talking about the types of difficult topics, people’s histories do come to the forefront.
Both Matthew and Brian echoed Joanna’s beliefs of emphasizing certain parts of the curriculum over others based on the cultural and ethnic identities of their students. Matthew teaches at a school consisting of a large demographic of Tamil students. Matthew mentioned that these students in the Genocide and Crimes Against Humanity course were always fascinated to learn more about the conflicts in Sri Lanka. As a result, Matthew accommodated these interests even though the study of the atrocities committed against Sri Lankan civilians was not included in the curriculum. Matthew believes that “it seems like an injustice to just say that there are all these other ones but we are only going to talk about these three. You’ve got the entire year, you can fit it in.” Matthew utilized this pressure as a teaching tool to encourage further research into students’ personal interests.

While Brian shared similar experiences of teaching a large population of Tamil students, he did not limit himself to the curriculum, specifically in reference to summative assessments. He implemented several opportunities for choice among students for the summative assessments he assigned. In the past three years teaching the genocide course, Brian said there was at least half a dozen students who chose to research the conflict in Sri Lanka for their assessment. He accommodated their interests because it “is really valuable for them after going through the course because their education is based on the stories of their parents and is generally speaking, incredibly incomplete and insulated.” Though Brian often incorporates the backgrounds of his students as part of his pedagogical process, he stressed the importance of a holistic approach to genocide education. He stated that the school also has a large Caribbean population, with some students who have exhibited homophobia and anti-Semitism based on their Conservative, Christian upbringings. Therefore, although Brian incorporated his students’ backgrounds into his
teaching, he also emphasized the importance of teaching other genocides that leave room to address existing prejudices, like the aforementioned, in the classroom.

2. Negotiating Other Genocides in Addition to the Holocaust

There is often a misconception in genocide education that the Holocaust and genocide are interchangeable terms. Each participant expressed a different perspective regarding this misconception. One of the sub-questions that I asked to all of the participants is: “How did you come to teach this course [Grade 11 Genocide and Crimes Against Humanity or Grade 10 Canadian History] and what shaped your interest in it?” Matthew talked about how his interest stemmed back to the university courses he completed, all of which had a significant focus on the Holocaust. Although Matthew’s experience in university, where he learned a lot about the Holocaust, did not influence him to emulate the same pedagogy in his own classroom, he acknowledged the issue in current secondary education. He explained that “there is a huge focus on the Holocaust. I don’t necessarily find that bad, but I find it an injustice to not talk about the others.” In addition to focusing on the Holocaust is the tendency to be insular in teaching it. For example, Matthew was astounded by the fact that there were several students in his classes who thought that Anne Frank was the only victim of the Holocaust. Matthew skims the surface of the struggle to teach a particular genocide within the broader conceptual and historical framework of the Genocide and Crimes Against Humanity course.

Joanna expressed a unique position in comparison to Matthew and Brian, as she currently teaches genocides through the lens of the Grade 10 Canadian History course. In her interview, she used the Holocaust as the primary example when explaining her strategies, assessment pieces, and personal beliefs about genocide education. For example, in response to the question,
“What types of summative and/or formative assessments do you use to monitor your students’ learning?” Joanna immediately addressed the tests, quizzes, and historical fiction assignment she uses for the Holocaust unit. Furthermore, Joanna reported that her students have always exhibited interest in learning about the Holocaust in depth over other material:

I do find that students want to learn about World War II in this course out of all the units. They want to learn about Adolf Hitler. They want to learn about Nazi Germany. They want to learn about what happened during the Holocaust. There is just general interest in that particular area of history.

All of the participants were aware of the challenge of balancing the coverage of the Holocaust with the Rwandan genocide, the Armenian genocide, Sudan, and so on. Brian focused the discussion on explaining his opinion about why the Holocaust is often viewed as paradigmatic in courses that include units on other genocides. He connected this issue to the way genocide education was approached two decades ago:

I think when people hear ‘genocide’ they think about the Holocaust because that’s what genocide education was, you know fifteen to twenty years ago when most teachers were in school. They knew the Holocaust as watching Night and Fog or staring at pictures of piles of corpses and being asked, ‘What would you feel like if this was you?’

There is also the issue of valuable resources available to effectively teach certain genocides. Brian talked about the overwhelming amount of information and resources available on the Holocaust because it was so well-documented. He also claimed that teachers face a lack of
information on the Armenian genocide to utilize for assessments and instructional strategies because Kemal Ataturk attempted to destroy all remnants of Armenian history in Turkey. This idea is linked to the lack of professional development opportunities available to genocide educators, which I explore later in this chapter.

3. Employing Critical Pedagogy

Engaging in learning outside the scope of key ideas is particularly challenging in history, as mentioned by all of the participants, because it is easy for the students to resort to learning and regurgitating facts without exploring their significance. Helping students understand the main objectives of genocide education is an area in which all participants were active in promoting due to the nature of the content. Not only is the ability to make connections a crucial part of the Ontario curriculum, but it is especially prominent in genocide education. Joanna shed light on her challenge in helping students see the connections between the past and the present. She mentioned that her students tend to ask a lot of questions about the Holocaust because they want to understand why it occurred. To get them to think about the broader implications of the Holocaust and how it can be compared to other international events is not an easy task:

When I bring in newspaper articles that are quite fitting and timely, they’re shocked. I think they’re like, ‘Oh my goodness, it’s in the newspaper today.’ It makes me feel like, ‘See, I told you why this is important because the world is talking about it.’ There are communities that are still trying to heal from it so I think using the newspaper is an amazing tool. Half the time when I bring in an article to class, most students wouldn’t even know to look in them.
Brian emphasized the need for fruitful conversations and critical thought in the genocide course. In order for this to occur, the misconceptions that students have about genocide need to be addressed as soon as they are detected:

I try to do it in Grade 10, so I don’t have to do it in Grade 11. Maybe it takes a month, maybe the entire first case study, to really get to the point where you can have a more complex conversation with most, almost all of the students about what’s going on. What I notice is that students actually really respond to it, far better than most adults do. Students, young people, tend to love the back and forth.

Brian exemplified this belief through a story of a previous student’s experience with the summative assessment for the course, which was an action project on mental health. She wore a necklace with a different mental health fact on it every day at school for one month. One day, two boys came up to her in the hallway and told her that the facts were false and that mental health issues did not exist. As part of the reflection piece, she included this story and made the connection that the ignorance of those boys only exemplified the need for mental health awareness. Although facilitating critical thought among students is difficult initially, Brian believes the genocide course provides the platform for educators to do so.

Matthew mirrored Brian’s perspective on the ability for students to break down their misconceptions after effectively exploring the material in the genocide course. Matthew addressed the notion of awareness among students. Being unaware of information like the genocide of people in Bangladesh by the Pakistani military in 1971 or the stigma attached to the
word “retard,” hinders students’ ability to break down barriers to learning. However, Matthew reported about his positive experiences toward the end of the course:

If something came up in the news about discrimination, they would be like, ‘That’s just like what happened in…’ Kids are able to immediately make that connection that this group is being victimized and that this can happen if we don’t stop it. It’s like the bystander effect- once you know about it you are taking more action if you see something happen.

Matthew attributed ignorance as a barrier to student learning. It is not that students choose to be ignorant, they are just unaware—unaware of the power of language, the occurrence of specific genocides, and of the rationale behind studying genocide. Educators need to be cognizant of these kinds of challenges that pervade students in order to foster more awareness within the field of genocide education.

4. Inconsistent Pedagogical Processes among Colleagues

Educators who teach the same course with different sections often find it difficult to coordinate their timelines, assessments, and depth of coverage of material. Theoretically, teachers want to keep their courses as consistent as possible, as students are completing the same exam at the end of the course. However, all of the participants explored the issue of synchronizing with other teachers who are responsible for different sections in the course. Matthew addressed some of his frustrations when he taught the Grade 10 Canadian History course. He believes that some teachers do not provide students with an in-depth account of
genocides like the Holodomor, Rwanda, and the residential school system, because they allocate too much time to other events in the curriculum. Matthew explained this issue:

With Grade 10, we always had a common exam. At certain times throughout the year we would get together and discuss where we are. They would say, ‘I’m in the 1920s,’ but I was in the 1960s. They would tell me, ‘Well, you’re rushing through it.’ Well, no. They are just covering every minute detail there is in the 1920s.

He believes that the students are affected by these inconsistencies because they could potentially be missing information needed to complete specific parts of the exam.

Both Brian and Joanna reported on the discrepancies among teachers regarding their pedagogical approaches to genocide material. Brian included an abundance of assessment examples, student experiences, and stories to illustrate his ideas about genocide education throughout the interview. He talked about a specific short story he has used to illustrate key lessons about identity when teaching about the Holocaust. Although he saw the value in using this story, other teachers found it repetitive and superfluous. Needless to say, Brian confided in his own pedagogy and beliefs about teaching genocide studies. He explained the connections he was able to ascertain through the story:

He’s [the student] of Ethiopian descent and he identified with ‘The Bear that Wasn’t,’ in the sense of being told that because he didn’t like rap music, he wasn’t black. He was oreo. What did that mean to him? He’s a really intelligent, well-spoken, articulate kid. He loves poetry, but he doesn’t like rap music. It’s not his thing, but then all of a sudden he’s not black. Just like the bear said, ‘If you’re not like me, then you can’t be a bear because I’m a bear and I’m in a cage.’ What
does that tell us about the larger questions of identity and membership? Those pieces transfer really nicely into case studies. What about German Jews? They fought in World War I. There were many German Jews who were highly decorated World War I veterans that were nationalistic. Why were theyothered in this way? What was it that supposedly made them different?

Joanna explored the difficulties behind keeping her teaching strategies, assessment choices, and timeline consistent with other teachers. She connected this issue to fact that there is a large volume of curriculum which is “very dense and difficult to get through” in the course of one year. As a result, some teachers choose to cover the Holocaust as an entire unit, while other teachers gloss over it in two lessons. Joanna agreed with Matthew about the impact these inconsistencies can have on students. She stressed the importance of effective communication among teachers, transparency, and putting the needs of students as the ultimate priority.

5. Lack of Awareness of Professional Development Opportunities and Outside Resources

Genocide education is a fairly new subject area, gaining prominence in literature and course development in the 1990s. The first official course in the Ontario secondary school system that approached genocide outside the scope of broader history courses was implemented in 2008. Hence, the areas of professional development for teachers and availability of outside resources are developing slowly. Joanna, Matthew, and Brian all share experiences where they have felt that the support they were provided within and outside the school environment was insufficient. Joanna discussed her responses to student questions about other genocides:
I try to do my best if students have questions about other genocides, those that are more current, Rwanda or what’s happening in Darfur. There are always resources that I can point them to if they have general interest and the want to explore more.

While Joanna referenced pointing her students to further resources she did not mention any in particular. Furthermore, Rwanda is part of the Grade 10 Canadian History curriculum she teaches. Thus, she may not have a strong knowledge on Rwanda due to the lack of resources provided to her by the Toronto Catholic District School Board or Ontario Ministry of Education. She also did not mention any professional development opportunities offered to teachers who address genocide content in their classrooms.

Matthew described in detail the disappointing nature of professional development opportunities in Ontario, as well as the ineffectiveness of the resources provided to him for the genocide course. He described briefly the Ontario History and Social Science Teachers Association (OHASSTA) annual conference he attended. This conference consists of workshops and presentations on curriculum innovation in Ontario, as well as new teaching strategies for social science teachers throughout Ontario’s elementary and secondary schools. While Matthew noted that he attended some reasonable workshops, there were many that were “useless,” especially toward supporting him through the genocide course. However, the biggest challenge he found was compiling effective resources at the beginning of the year and attaining a good grasp on them in order to help students do the same. He explained the value of the worksheets provided in the curriculum:

Some of it is great and some of it fairly useless in terms of being practical to use.

I’m not going to spend many hours going over just what would take five minutes
to explain Some stuff, especially in Unit 1, I agree is important to establish in terms of how they create ‘us vs. them,’ and I agree I like getting students to think about themselves. However, I found some of the worksheets mediocre. I photocopied all of them before the school year started and found I was looking at them throughout the year saying, ‘I’m not going to bother hand that out, or that out etc.’

Due to the fact that Matthew believes there is a lack of resources provided by the curriculum that he would use in the classroom, he resorted to finding his own. He is a part-time librarian at his school and has accumulated a fair amount of genocide resources. The students often come to the library to consult these resources for their assessments or for additional reading.

Brian’s reservations comprised of insufficient support from the school administrators and professional development. He is responsible for bringing the Genocide and Crimes Against Humanity course to the school he is currently on sabbatical from. However, the process was challenging:

It took me four months and half a dozen meetings and emails from superintendents and various other people to convince the principal it should be offered. The administrators are incredibly risk-averse. When you see the kind of stuff they have to deal with on a daily basis, I can understand why, but there are lots of good things that come out of it [the course].

In order to prepare to teach the course, Brian completed a summer seminar with Facing History and Ourselves. This year the only teacher who wanted to teach the course in place of
Brian was the one who also completed the seminar; no one else expressed a desire to teach it. The first year the course was offered, he was the only teacher who was genuinely interested in taking it on, despite not having professional development to support him through it at the time. The only negative feedback he has heard about the course is from those teachers and administrators who have not taken the opportunity to attend workshops like those that are offered by Facing History and Ourselves in order to better understand the important lessons students can learn from it. The development of further professional development opportunities, as well as the marketing of those that already exist, can rectify these kinds of misunderstandings.
CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

Introduction

Based on the literature consulted for this study and the data yielded, it has been demonstrated that the field of genocide education has the potential to help students question the historical and moral implications of human rights violations, explore their own identities in relation to crimes against humanity, and become more engaged, responsible citizens. While I was aware of the significant value of genocide education for students prior to this study, the data collected solidified the need for more research on current practices of secondary educators in Ontario, in order to facilitate the growth of this important field of study. The material explored in genocide education can be emotionally taxing at a personal level and challenging for teachers to effectively convey to students. The purpose of my study was to narrow the gap in this area of research within genocide education. The research was designed to answer the following question: What challenges do secondary school educators encounter when teaching genocide education? It is with the hope that the data collected to answer this question will support and guide educators through their future professional understandings and practices in genocide education.

Five main themes resulted from the interview process and subsequent data analysis. The participants all came to a consensus on a feeling of pressure in different capacities to include coverage of all genocides in their respective courses. All of the participants attributed this kind of pressure to the cultural and ethnic backgrounds of their students and their expressed interests in learning about genocides outside the scope of the curriculum. Secondly, a tendency to either approach the Holocaust as an archetype in relation to the other genocides or underemphasize other genocides was discussed in all of the interviews. While genocides like Rwanda, Cambodia,
and the Holodomor are included in all of the curricula, the participants reported many students often equating the term “genocide” with the Holocaust.

Closely related is the challenge in implementing critical pedagogy throughout class participation, discussions, and assessments. Brian reported first having to break down certain misconceptions about genocide and its implications students have, such as being unaware that specific genocides have occurred or continue to, in order to clear the path toward critical thought. Joanna and Matthew focused on comparing student learning at the beginning of the course and their ability to make connections toward the end of the course.

A more general theme that was fluid throughout all participant beliefs was the difficulty in accommodating different pedagogical practices of other teachers responsible for the same course. For instance, Matthew reported the challenge in coordinating timelines with other teachers in the Grade 10 Canadian History course due to conflicting beliefs on the depth of coverage of significant events like the Holocaust. A final theme that emerged from the data collection is the lack of awareness of professional development opportunities for educators teaching about genocide and a scarcity of outside resources on genocides that are less pervasive throughout secondary curricula. The remainder of this chapter will consolidate these findings with the themes revealed in the literature, discuss implications of the study for practice, and provide suggestions for further study.

**Relation to the Literature Review**

The findings from this study are closely aligned with the findings from the literature review. However, the literature included in the review comprises research on genocide education from the elementary, secondary, and university educational levels across North America. However, this study is limited to secondary education in Ontario. Therefore, many of the
findings yielded from this study are specific to secondary education in Ontario and provide a more in-depth analysis of the themes extracted from the reviewed literature. Nonetheless, both the literature review and key findings from this study reveal important challenges of educators within genocide education, as well as implications for future practices.

Due to the nature of the difficult content explored in genocide education, teachers have often reported a sense of discomfort in working with it. The literature explores a range of definitions of discomfort. For example, Fallace (2008) reports that oftentimes, teachers choose to emphasize one genocide over the other based on their familiarity with the content (p. 140). By contrast, Apsel (2004) conceptualizes discomfort as teachers’ responses to student sensitivities to learning about genocide (p. 122). Garrett (2010) exemplifies this interpretation through Eva, a pre-service teacher, who felt intimidated to introduce notions of ambiguity and uncertainty among her students (p. 204). Nonetheless, the literature finds that studying genocide provokes a sense of uneasiness among teachers and students, which can potentially impact student learning and decision to pursue further study. This finding is reflected in two of the themes that I uncovered from the interviews.

Firstly, the idea of discomfort is covered in the theme that explains the pressure among teachers to include all genocides in the courses they teach. All of the participants reported that their decision to explore genocides outside the scope of the curriculum was contingent on the demographic of their students. For example, Matthew explored the conflicts in Sri Lanka based on the concerns and interests expressed by many of the Tamil students in his class. Secondly, discomfort was implied by the participants when discussing the lack of professional development opportunities and outside resources. Brian mentioned that he was the only one to express interest in teaching the Genocide and Crimes Against Humanity course due to the fact that he had been
the only teacher to complete the seminar offered by Facing History and Ourselves. Thus, he felt prepared and comfortable to effectively teach the course. This seminar was meant to help support teachers through the curriculum. Despite the differences in categorization between the literature review and this study, teachers have expressed the daunting nature of teaching genocide and lack of adequate knowledge on the material as a primary challenge.

A theme that was consistent in both the literature review and the findings in this study is the tendency to view the Holocaust as an archetype of genocide. As a result, it has become challenging to situate teaching other genocides within a broader conceptual framework. Totten, Parsons, and Charny (1997) argue that due to the ubiquity of Holocaust education, people in Western consciousness believe it is the most terrible event in human history (p. xv). This is often translated to the classroom. Totten provides a university-level perspective on this through a discussion of the “null curriculum.” He argues that the information about other genocides omitted by instructors can potentially shape misconceptions about history among students (Totten, 2004, p. viii). This theme is directly echoed in my findings. Joanna focused her discussion on assessments, instructional strategies, and pedagogy within the Holocaust unit, indirectly demonstrating an overemphasis on that unit. However, Brian and Matthew discussed the misconception among students and the general public that the Holocaust is the only genocide that occurred in the twentieth century.

An interesting point of contention within analysis of this theme addresses the coverage of many genocides. Totten and Parsons (1991) argue that teachers who touch on too many genocides in the course can potentially incite students to develop “oversimplified generalizations” that can progress into distorted ideas of history (p. 87). By contrast, all of the participants believed that it would be an injustice to students to focus solely on the genocides
included in the curriculum. The major justification consists of the fact that there are important lessons that each genocide can offer that are distinct from the others. Nonetheless, this research suggests the importance of deviating from the Holocaust as an archetype to avoid students emulating the same belief in the future. If students are exposed to the misconception that the Holocaust is the paradigmatic genocide or the only genocide, for that matter, it runs the risk of this kind of misconception being perpetuated throughout society.

The theme in the literature review that differed greatly from my research was the idea behind ineffective pedagogical practices. However, I believe the factors that account for this gap are bias and context. The literature review consists of authors who have based their research on extensive observations of other teachers or have been in the field long enough to reflect on their challenges as educators. I found that these authors were more critical of teachers’ strategies, methods, and practices of genocide education. For instance, in Short’s study (2000), many of the teachers refused to use film as a resource to teach about the Holocaust because visual representations could potentially incite trauma among students (p. 297). Short is candid in claiming that this kind of inapt judgment and inappropriate pedagogical practices could mislead students, and potentially reinforce the racist beliefs they should be tackling in the classroom. Garrett’s study echoes this candidness through an analysis of a study on the use of film in the history classroom. One of the teacher participants mentioned the importance of analyzing contentious issues like slavery and racism with her students, but refused to expose them to visual representations of them (Garrett, 2010, p. 56). Garrett (2010) stresses the importance of understanding why teachers avoid this pedagogy, at the expense of inhibiting students’ ability to glean the important lessons of difficult history (p. 56).
These kinds of critiques are not evident in my research. The participants did not reflect on their own pedagogical processes that could be improved, but rather those of other teachers. The notion of inconsistent pedagogical processes among colleagues constitutes its own theme in my research. Both Matthew and Brian talk about the challenges in helping other teachers see the value in their choices of resources and depth of coverage of major events like the Holocaust. Perhaps the interview questions did not prompt the participants to reflect on their own pedagogical practices that have not been successful in the past. The participants may also have felt uncomfortable in an interview exploring their own strategies that could be improved. If I were to conduct further interviews and continue research on the same question, I would include a question that ensures the participants discuss reflections on their own pedagogical practices in order to provide a fuller picture of what their classroom practices might look like.

The insufficient number of professional development opportunities within Ontario for genocide educators and a lack of availability of outside resources constitute a significant challenge in the literature review and in my research. The literature argues that the tensions between different socioeconomic and political groups impede on the ability of educators to engage in professional development within genocide education. Apsel and Verdeja (2013) discuss the little research that focuses on providing new strategies and teaching practices for secondary level educators, as genocide education was only introduced as a course six years back (p. 6).

Similarly, all of the participants in this study advocate for further professional development. Matthew and Brian explored this theme more in-depth than Joanna. Matthew discussed the ineffectiveness of the current workshops available for teachers who address genocide education in their courses. For example, he mentioned that some of the workshops
offered by OHASSTA have been inexpedient, offering information and strategies that he was already aware of. In terms of internal support, Brian explored the lack of support he initially received from the administrators of the school he was teaching the Genocide and Crimes Against Humanity course at. He noted having to convince the principal through several emails, meetings, and referrals over the course of four months to offer it. Brian reflected on the fact that once the principal was able to see the valuable lessons the course had to offer, he advocated for the course to continue. Both Brian and Matthew conduct their own outside research to find resources to support them through the Genocide and Crimes Against Humanity course. While Matthew mentioned OHASSTA as a professional development opportunity, Brian often referenced the opportunities offered to educators through Facing History and Ourselves.

Based on the responses of the participants, it seems as if the root of the cause for ineffective professional development opportunities is the lack of awareness. While Joanna mentioned some of the mediums she consulted for resources to teach about the Holocaust, she did not discuss any professional development opportunities. What she may not be aware of is the number of professional development networks available to genocide educators in Ontario. One example is Facing History and Ourselves, as discussed by Brian. This organization offers an abundance of incredible workshops, book talks, resources, curricula, lesson plans and seminars for genocide educators (for more information, see https://www.facinghistory.org/). In addition, they collaborate with several school boards and schools in Ontario on projects and workshops that students can participate in. The Sarah Corning Centre for Genocide Education in Toronto also provides resources for educators and organizes guest speakers to facilitate discussions in secondary schools (for more information, see http://www.corningcentre.org/).
Another example is the Genocide and Human Rights University Program. It is a ten to twelve-day summer institute hosted by the University of Toronto. It provides participants with an “intellectual framework for understanding the numerous complex emotional issues related to genocide,” as well as effective teaching tools to employ in the classroom (International Institute for Genocide and Human Rights). The cost for this program is high, however, if more schools, school boards in Ontario, and the Ministry of Education were to be made aware of the impact genocide education has had, and continues to have on students, perhaps they would be willing to invest in these kinds of opportunities to support educators.

Furthermore, this study revealed the causal link between a lack of professional development opportunities and the other themes extracted from the data. The pressure to teach all genocides, battling the misconception of the Holocaust as an archetype of genocide, the challenges of employing critical pedagogy, and inconsistent practices among teachers all connect to the lack of awareness and participation in professional development. If the participants of this study had been exposed to more workshops, resources, ideas, and teaching strategies within genocide education, there is a chance that some of these challenges would be lessened, or even eliminated. Genocide education is a new and expanding field in research and curriculum development. As the Genocide and Crimes Against Humanity course becomes more pervasive in secondary schools in Ontario, I am confident that further opportunities will be developed to support educators in fostering the valuable lessons genocide education has to offer to students.

**Implications for Practice**

As previously mentioned, the purpose of this study was to unveil some of the challenges that secondary school educators encounter when teaching genocide education. My personal
experiences as a student, teacher, and researcher influenced my decision to pursue research in this field. As a high school and university student I was able to identify the valuable connections genocide education has toward understanding prejudice, discrimination, and conflict in this world. I strongly believe that studying genocide and its implications made me reflect on my multiple identities, helped me start the journey toward becoming a more engaged citizen, and instilled a desire to want to make the world a better place. These kinds of lessons inspired me to pursue teacher education and research simultaneously in order to experience first-hand the link between theory and practice, and ultimately, contribute to an important field of education.

For someone who is planning to pursue teaching genocide education at the secondary level, the findings yielded from this study are invaluable to me. Firstly, the research demonstrated the importance of developing a student-centered pedagogy in a genocide education classroom. Effective pedagogical practices should include opportunities for students to grapple with difficult content, engage in critical thought, posit challenging questions to themselves and their peers, and analyze the decisions of victims, perpetrators, and bystanders to commit horrific atrocities. Teachers should choose resources that help students throughout this process. These resources should facilitate teachers in helping students achieve the course objectives.

Secondly, throughout the study, the Holocaust was often viewed as an archetype of genocide, thus, creating a barrier for educators to explore the important lessons of other genocides. While Matthew, Joanna, and Brian advocate covering genocides outside the scope of the Grade 10 and 11 curricula based on their students’ cultural and ethnic backgrounds, I wonder if this idea can be furthered. Instead of covering as many genocides that students express a desire to learn, teachers can help students investigate the issues and injustices they come up with. For example, Totten (2004) suggests a process to introduce students to the concept of genocide. This
process includes determining student knowledge of genocide at the beginning of the course (e.g. through a cluster-mind-map), helping students formulate a working definition of genocide, and asking students to write down “burning questions” they have about genocide in order to focus and personalize their learning (pp. 216-220). These constitute only a few strategies among the numerous, for maintaining a student-centered pedagogy.

Lastly, in discovering that it was difficult to facilitate conversation among my participants regarding being self-critical of their own pedagogies, I have become more cognizant of being reflective of my own practices when I am teaching about genocide. Self-reflexivity among teachers of all subjects is important, but it is especially imperative when exploring difficult and sensitive content. Teachers should take some time throughout the courses to evaluate what strategies have worked over others in order to ensure students are grasping the key course objectives. This study has mentioned several times the need to stray away from superficial coverage of genocide (i.e. the teaching of facts) and the development of a critical framework for students to explore creative thought. Teachers can become aware of the impact of their practices through student evaluations or having other teachers come and observe their classes. It is important for teachers to model that they are as engaged in the learning process as much as the students are. While this study constitutes one perspective among the many in genocide education, I now have access to more research at the secondary level that can inform my professional practices.

In conjunction with the benefit of having practical research is the ways in which this study has impacted my philosophies. From my past life and teaching experiences, I have developed the philosophy of education of making learning relevant to the lives of students. As a high school student, I often viewed the door of the classroom as a metaphorical barrier to life. In
other words, what we learned in the classroom had no correlation to my life outside the classroom. Upon entering teaching, I vowed to eliminate this barrier in my own classroom. This study demonstrated to me that genocide education is one of the platforms that teachers can employ in order to achieve this. When Matthew and Brian discussed teaching genocides that were outside the scope of the curriculum based on their students’ expressed interests, I knew my philosophy could be attainable. This study further inspired me to stay true to my beliefs and objectives as a teacher.

While this research provided effective strategies and realizations for my own teaching practices, it also holds strong implications for the broader education community. My hope with this research is that it provides transferable techniques for secondary school educators who teach genocide, regardless of the course or environment. While the research cites examples from the Grade 11 Genocide and Crimes Against Humanity and Grade 10 Canadian History course in Ontario, I believe the findings can be adapted to all or most courses that address genocide education. Most importantly, I hope this research facilitates awareness of the value behind genocide education, not only for students, but teachers, parents, and administrators. After the administrators at Brian’s school became aware of the valuable lessons attached to genocide education, they became proponents. It is up to genocide educators to spread the word of the valuable impact of genocide education in order to increase awareness throughout the broader educational community. It is with further research into the field of genocide education that more students can be reached, and hopefully, inspired.

Next Steps and Conclusion

As previously mentioned, one of the major limitations to this study was the timeframe and small sample size of participants. This research study was adapted to accommodate the
nature of the Master of Teaching program. Therefore, three participants within the Greater Toronto Area were interviewed to eventually provide answers to a broader research question. For more holistic results, further research can be conducted on this question. Also, the participants recruited for this study have experience working in Toronto-area schools. It would be interesting and extremely valuable to compare this research within Toronto schools to schools located in rural Ontario. The cultural and ethnic backgrounds of students exercised a large impact on the practices of teachers within this study. How/would the responses of educators change if they taught students of different cultural and ethnic backgrounds?

A further suggestion for research is to explore best practices for secondary educators teaching genocide education. The literature examined in this study heavily emphasizes pedagogical challenges in teaching about genocide at the university level. It provides many useful strategies, techniques, and tools for university level educators. It would be extremely beneficial for research to be conducted into the secondary education system in order to document the range and variation of ways educators are exploring the objectives of genocide education. Furthermore, as much as this study attempted to focus as little as possible on types and specific facts of genocide, more research should be conducted into the practices of comparatives studies of genocide. With genocide education, the focus should be less on what genocide is taught and more on how genocide is taught, and its implications for students. This study was meant to provide educators with support in teaching difficult subject matter. However, it is also important that we do not forget the value of genocide education in helping students gain powerful insights of humanity, and ultimately, of themselves.
REFERENCES


Appendix A: Letter of Informed Consent

Dear [participant],

My name is Bianca Galloro and I am currently a graduate student enrolled in the Master of Teaching Program at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto (OISE/UT). As part of the requirements of this program, I am completing a Major Research Project exploring the challenges that secondary school educators encounter when teaching genocide education. I believe that your insights would be an important contribution to my research.

Your involvement in this study would include participating in a 45-60 minute, audio-taped interview that will occur at a time convenient for you. Prior to the interview, a list of general questions will be provided to you that will be explored throughout the interview. The interviews will be audio recorded, transcribed and analyzed for common themes. The content of the interviews will be used for a final research paper, informal presentations to classmates and potentially at research conferences or for publication. Your responses will be kept confidential and your identity will remain anonymous, as only my research supervisor and I will have access to this data. This data will be stored in a secure location and will be erased five years following the conclusion of the study.

Please be assured that your participation in this project is completely voluntary. You may decline to answer any question during the interview, stop the interview at any time or withdraw from the study for any reason. The information gained from this study and from your interview will help provide some new perspectives on genocide education, and uncover the means with which educators are challenged in the delivery of the subject material. A summary of my research results as well as the full report, should you require a copy, can be sent to you via e-mail. Please feel free to contact either myself or my research supervisor should you have any questions or require further information.

If you agree to be interviewed, please sign below. The form can be submitted at the interview, or scanned and emailed to bianca.galloro@mail.utoronto.ca. Please retain a second copy for your records. Thank you very much for your participation.

Sincerely,

Bianca Galloro
Principal Investigator
bianca.galloro@mail.utoronto.ca

Dr. Rob Simon
Research Supervisor
rob.simon@utoronto.ca
Consent to Participate

[ ] I, __________________agree to participate in the OISE/UT research project as outlined above.

Participant’s Signature: ___________________________             Date: ___________________
Appendix B: Interview Questions

Main Research Question: What challenges do secondary school educators encounter when teaching genocide education?

Sub-questions:

1. How long have you been teaching? What courses/grades do you teach currently?

2. How did you come to teach the courses you are currently involved in? What shaped your interest in it?

3. What courses have you taught that explore genocide education?

4. What types of genocide have you taught in the past/currently teach?

5. Where do you go to find resources to teach genocide?
   o Is the curriculum a helpful resource?

6. What are some of the challenges you encounter when teaching genocide?

7. What strategies do you employ when teaching genocide or difficult history? Can you provide some examples?

8. What types of summative and/or formative assessments do you use to assess your students’ understanding of genocide? (final project, test, paper etc.)

9. To your knowledge, where in the high school course curriculum do students encounter genocide education?

10. What challenges do students experience with genocide content?

11. How do you account for your students’ backgrounds and identities in your teaching?

12. In what ways does exploring genocide impact/change the dynamic of the classroom?

13. In what ways does genocide education heighten students’ awareness of current social injustices, such as discrimination, racism, sexism, ableism etc.?

14. How do students react differently when learning about genocide compared to other curricular material?