Critical Conceptions of Graffiti in Schools

by

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The purpose of this thesis is to examine teacher and student perceptions of graffiti found in schools. This is a qualitative study based on data collected from the interviews of ten participants (students and teachers from elementary schools). The participants were asked to comment on why they believe graffiti are produced in schools, what, if anything, should be done with graffiti in schools, and if they see any educational value in graffiti. This thesis also includes a review of literature on graffiti in schools, particularly in relation to student engagement. This thesis asserts that schools can be symbolically violent places that silence the voices of students and that it is sometimes a reaction to this violence that students write graffiti. The recommendations of this thesis include infusing critical pedagogy into learning in order to democratise schools and to enact genuine and meaningful student engagement.
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Chapter 1
Introduction

1.1 Overview
Graffiti is profoundly common in schools. Graffiti is the scribbling seen on the walls, desks, books, materials and even the school grounds and buildings. It sometimes has considerable meaning to the onlooker as when a message is clearly written, or it has a more questionable meaning when it is written in a style, format, or with a purpose that the onlooker cannot interpret. Either way, graffiti is communicating a message. Regardless of what we think of the message, be it liberating or oppressive, benign or charged, it communicates a message. Children, youth and adults see messages at different times and in different spaces. But then the question may be asked: what, then, do we do with the graffiti we see? The most common response I have experienced in Ontario schools is to cover graffiti up, wash it off, “ignore” it. I question whether there is another way.

To be clear, for the purposes of this thesis, graffiti will be considered any writing, scribbles, pictures, or communication contained in a school or on a school surface. While graffiti can also include tags, murals, art, stylised writing and so on, this study will use the word graffiti in the context of what messages people (including students, children, youth, staff, and adults) communicate in Ontario schools. Although other forms of graffiti can be deemed important, they are, for the purpose of this study, beyond the scope of this research.

1.2 Context of the Research Problem
Schools can be places of oppression. They can also be places of emancipation. Such are the arguments of different camps within critical pedagogy. (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005) This thesis acknowledges both perspectives and recognizes the elements that oppress students and teachers as well as the elements that could be adopted to help liberate them.
If we start with the premise that culture is socially constructed by specific groups of people for specific purposes, we can begin to see how the construction could be framed in such a way that some, i.e. those constructing the “rules”, would benefit, even at the cost of others. Schools fall within the realm of culture. In schools we teach culture. We choose what material to learn, what books to read, what movies to watch, how to socialize, how to engage, and what is “good” and “bad”, “right” and “wrong”.

Neoliberal ethics are deeply entrenched within Ministry Curricula where it is no longer hidden that the goal of education is to build a strong economy and labour force (Ontario Curriculum: classical studies and international languages, 2000). Learning is tied to capitalism, the free market, and the market economy (Giroux & Giroux, 2006). This is the culture that I implicitly teach students in middle school. I teach them how to act to fit into various categories within a capitalist culture by how I organize and watch people, program, and places people and program intersect. Success is determined in part by how well students fit within the confines of culture. Students whose thoughts, actions and words are outside of the set parameters, struggle. This, I would argue, is a type of violence.

It is not unreasonable that there are reactions to the violence of this imposed conception of culture. Sometimes this reaction is recorded as graffiti on school property. It is the purpose of this study to ask students and teachers what they think of the graffiti they see in schools, to analyse the data, and, after themes emerge, to make some conclusions about how schools engage students and how the end result of that engagement could be more effective. This study analyses the effect of dominant systems on young people and teachers.

**Research Problem**

Graffiti is generally seen as a problem in North American schools (Green Clean Resource Guide: Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010) and in schools outside of North America (Hasley & Young, 2002). It can be the marker of a good school or a less than desirable school. One article mentioned that if parents were choosing a school for their children to attend, they should go to
the washroom to see the types of graffiti (Henderson, 1989). The recommendation is insightful as it points out that examining graffiti will give parents, teachers, and administration an idea of the issues on student’s minds. As some of the participants said in interviews, the type of graffiti seen in schools can be an indicator of a larger issue than bored children with pencils in semi-private spaces.

The literature on graffiti in educational spaces indicates that graffiti is often the voice of the voiceless who have no other fora to be heard (Nwoye, 1999; Rodriguez & Clair, 1993). So what are those whose voices are rarely heard telling us about how we run schools, engage students, and deal with relevant issues in their lives? Thus is the focus of this thesis.

1.3 Research Objectives

The purpose of this study is to critically examine what teachers and students think about the graffiti they see in schools. I am interested in this topic because as a teacher in an Ontario school, I see graffiti often. Sometimes the graffiti is funny, sometimes it is oppressive, and sometimes the graffiti makes me concerned for the wellbeing of students. Regardless, graffiti seems to be the authentic “voices” of students. (Calvin, 2005) The aspect of authenticity interests me because I would like to know, if students were not afraid of the ramifications of their speech, what they would say to the adults in the school. What could we learn about how we “educate” students, about how we help them and how we fail them? If we allowed students to genuinely speak, would we like what they had to say about what we are doing to them in the name of education?

I am interested in inquiring such delicate and “risky” questions because I am a student of critical pedagogy. As a reflective practitioner I continually need to ask myself how I am helping and if I am negatively influencing (albeit unconsciously and unwittingly) students by way of my pedagogy. I acknowledge that Pierre Bourdieu’s concept called Symbolic Violence is enacted on students and forces students and teachers to engage with education in a certain way (Schubert,
This study intends to look at how schools may be symbolically violent and how critical pedagogy can help to relieve some of that violence.

1.4 Research Questions
The primary research question of this study is:
What do students and school staff think about graffiti that is written in schools?

The subsidiary questions are:
i) What do students and teachers think we should do with the graffiti that appears in schools?
ii) For what reasons do students and teachers think people write graffiti in schools?
iii) What do students and teachers think about the use of graffiti in schools for educational purposes?

1.5 Framework: Theoretical, Conceptual, and Methodological Parameters of the Study
All information is viewed through a framework. In this study I will be utilizing a critical pedagogy framework which will guide the development of the thesis including the analysis of data. I have examined scholarly work on graffiti in educational institutions and scholarly work on Symbolic Violence. These two conceptual frameworks help me view the qualitative interview data in certain ways and affect my analysis by taking into consideration political, historical and social contexts along with my own experiential conceptions of graffiti, education, and culture. In Chapter 3 I will elaborate further and in greater detail on the conceptual framework of this study.

Significance
The focus of this study is to examine what teachers and students think about the graffiti they see in schools. Specifically, it is to see if students and teachers think there is anything to be learned from graffiti, or how graffiti could possibly be used for learning purposes in schools.
If students (and possibly teachers) are writing graffiti in schools, it may be an indication that they do not feel they have a voice to express their thoughts in an open forum. If students (and possibly teachers) were to speak up in a way that goes against the grain of hegemonic normality, and if their voices were respected and if spaces were safe enough for dissenting voices to be heard, would graffiti decrease? Is it important for graffiti to decrease? Does graffiti have a place as a cultural marker? Would the brothels in Pompeii be experienced differently if there was not still graffiti on the walls? Is graffiti part of the human experience? What does it say about the push to sanitize graffiti?

The significance of this thesis is to investigate what students and teachers consider to be important when looking at graffiti. When graffiti is oppressive or a cry for help, what does that say about the climate of schools? Why is it that students feel they cannot voice opinions in the open? What are we to know about students who feel the need to be seen and heard and do so by writing their name in a bathroom wall, on a desk, or in a book? What can the interviews of students and teachers tell us about the validity of what the literature on graffiti claims and what we as teachers can do to help democratise schools?

This study, including the focus identified above, is significant for various reasons. First, it gives a first hand account of students and teachers’ views about graffiti in a Canadian context. From the literature searches it emerges that no such study has yet been conducted. This study would add to the research that acknowledges the importance of “silent” voices in schools on a topic that is hardly analyzed in detail and without major bias. Moreover, this study will offer an analysis of students’ and teachers’ views from a critical pedagogical framework that acknowledge the possibility and impact of the reality of violence in schools. Finally, the study also looks at the possibilities of the use of graffiti as a possibility of enacting a genuine and meaningful student engagement.
Location

In order to understand why I’ve presented information as I have, I feel it necessary to locate myself as the writer to help give a more fulsome understanding of this work.

I am teacher and a student, part of the dominated class and at the same time part of the dominant class. I live within a series of seemingly incompatible paradigms that allow me to see the multiplicity of the world from various angles simultaneously. My blind spots are rooted within my experiences and my conceptions of how I perceive the world and the “word”.

I am a teacher, a hetero-sexual male, part of the “educated” middle class, a graduate student writing a thesis in a university in a large urban centre. I live in the over-developed world and enjoy many of the privileges that come with living in Canada. I have two university degrees and am working on a third. I speak without an accent and dress (purposely) in a matter that not only makes me seem to be a “model minority” but also affords me a certain social and cultural capital when I interact with people of the dominant class.

At the same time, I am a racialized body; I practice a religion that seems to be in opposition to the beliefs of the “West”, and I have been formed with a certain understanding of my “place” in society as an immigrant and therefore one less entitled. I am also a student which puts me into power differentials with professors and administration in my role as a teacher. While I can impose power and domination over students, I am at risk of having a similar power and domination held over me by administration, professors, or even groups of peers.

I was born in South Africa under the apartheid system. Stories told by elders while I was growing up always included discussions of race, inequity, politics, and religion. There was a subtext, usually communicated through jest, that identified our place as inferior to whites but superior to Africans (by Africans I include all those who, in Canadian society, would be called “black”). At the same time, stories were often told about how family and friends helped both
Indians and Africans in different ways against the colonial oppressor. Here again, I come from a straddled identity of both oppressed and oppressor.

The seemingly incongruous identities I hold that form up a portion of who I think I am help me, when I am critically reflective, to remember how act when I seemingly hold power over someone and how to deal with the situation when I perceive that someone has power over me. Power, which seems to be the connective theme of all my identities (having it or not) needs to be considered at all times when communicating. It undoubtedly lies as the subtext for how I communicate and also for what is communicated on the walls, books, and bathroom stalls of schools.

I am interested in this topic because I realize that many voices go unheard in public schooling. The mutterings of students and teachers in classes, hallways, staff meetings, and generally throughout schools indicate that if it were safe and possible, teachers and students would voice views contrary to what is outlined as normal, regular, acceptable, and respectful. Student engagement also might look different if it were that their voices were allowed to be heard in a different way in the classroom.

How and what students shared in class might be deeper, more profound and critical if what was being learned reached the interests of students through how they learned it and how they shared their learning.

As a teacher, I see the many ways school hierarchy silences voices. Administration shuts down teachers and students alike, the teachers silence the students, and students overpower other students. Perhaps a consideration as to why bullying happens in schools is that the system we have nurtured them in is based on adherence to the “official view” or “establishment point of view” (Giroux, P. 198 2007) whose modus operandi is overpowering others
The impetus for this project has a romantic origin. Walking through the streets of Bologna, Italy, my thesis supervisor, a group of graduate students and I noticed the amount of graffiti in both English and Italian on the streets around the university and in the city in general. It was enough to make one think. Translations of the Italian graffiti validated my consideration that the University of Bologna was a political place with an active student body. On the train ride back to Verona, where the students and professors were staying, I had a conversation with my supervisor about the graffiti seen in the day. We spoke about why students would take to writing on the walls of the school. We thought about the graffiti seen in the schools in the Greater Toronto Area. I noted the difference in tenor between the Bologna graffiti and its politicized nature and how most GTA graffiti seemed to be benign, unnecessary, or narcissistic. Further discussions happened around democracy and schools, student voice, and the climate of schools for both teachers and students. After many meetings, the focus of this project became teacher and student conceptions of graffiti in schools, looking at what people thought about what they saw and what could be done with and about it. It seemed important then and now to note that this project is not placing a judgemental value on graffiti as being “good” or “bad” but rather present and something that needs to be dealt with. I began to rethink how I saw graffiti in the GTA.

Theoretical Framework
Because of the violence enacted by culture in schools, I chose to look at Bourdieu’s conception of Symbolic Violence. It simply and eloquently expresses how the construction of culture can be oppressive. The information on graffiti confirmed aspects of Bourdieu’s theory; voices that are silenced will find a way to be heard.

Conceptual Parameters
The concept I chose to use in order to examine the literature on graffiti and Symbolic Violence was critical pedagogy. It is within examining the historical, social and political contexts that one can find the “cause” for problematic situations. Finding the cause of a problem can help effectively solve it. This is one of the goals of critical pedagogy. Popular discourse, however,
seems to only examine the signs and symptoms of the problematic situations found in education. The result of only examining signs and symptoms is a soft and oftentimes failing response to a situation. Critical pedagogy examines concepts and ideas through an emancipatory lens that confronts issues of domination and oppression. It is this type of lens that will point out the issues with present dominant systems as well as provide suggestions for moving forward. The work of Paulo Freire and those who support his work are heavily relied upon in both critical pedagogy and this study.

Methodological Parameters
I chose the snowball sampling method to select participants as it provided a “safe” vehicle for participants to get in touch with me. Participants in turn suggested other people who might have been interested in the study. Those participants then got in touch with me and if they met the criteria they were included in the study.

I conducted semi-structured interviews as it would give more data than a survey and allowed for the possibility of asking follow-up questions or for clarifications or elaborations. I felt that interviews would permit full answers with minimal effort.

1.6 Defining Key Terms
Graffiti – any marking used to communicate meaning or message made on a surface

Symbolic Violence – theory constructed by Pierre Bourdieu that examines the invisible power that established and maintains the hegemony of the dominant class

Hegemony – the cultural norm of the powerful elite. What we tend to ascribe to when we speak of culture.
Critical Pedagogy - an emancipatory pedagogy from the lineage of Critical Theory based on the work of Paulo Freire. Critical Pedagogy is involved with taking into consideration a variety of frameworks to understand society and confront oppression.

Curriculum of Life – A theory designed by John Portelli and Anne Vibert that uses critical pedagogy as a basis of an actual curriculum used in schools that is engaging, democratic and emancipatory

Student Engagement – the connection or involvement of students to the material studied in school.

Student Voice – the thoughts, feelings, emotions, and words that students say or write down

Democracy – a philosophical and theoretical way of life that takes into account equity, community, creativity, and a serious consideration of differences

Neoliberalism – extreme individualism that holds the marketplace and free market fundamentalism as the reason and standard of what is done in all realms of society, including education.

1.7 Principal Argument and Preview
The argument I am making in this study is that schools are violent places. Although they may not perpetrate a physical violence, they do perpetrate an invisible type of violence that can be as harmful. This violence, Symbolic Violence, oppresses and silences the voices of dissent. The resistance to this violence can be seen in some forms of graffiti in schools. If schools adopted a pedagogy that was critical and looked to uncover the domination and oppression enforced by culture, normality, and “the way things are”, then perhaps schools could be spaces of liberation, students could engage with curricula in ways that take care of their needs as people, and the violence that is enacted could be confronted and perhaps alleviated. I use the example
of The Curriculum of Life as a model for what a school could look like if it adopted a critical
stance on education. Using a Curriculum of Life would allow for graffiti to be engaged with,
discussed, and used as a forum for working through issues and challenges that students, and
perhaps staff, face in their lives in and out of school.

This thesis is comprised of 6 chapters

**Chapter 2:** Literature review

**Chapter 3:** Conceptual Frame Work and Methodology

**Chapter 4:** Findings

**Chapter 5:** Discussion and Analysis – advance thesis

**Chapter 6:** Conclusion
Chapter 2

Literature Review: Graffiti and Symbolic Violence

2.1 Introduction to the Chapter

It is important to situate this study into the body of literature that already exists that relate to the overarching themes and concepts in this study. I have organized this review into two subgroups: Graffiti in Educational Institutions and Symbolic Violence. Graffiti in educational institutions is a topic explicitly connected to this study. Symbolic violence however has a stronger yet implicit connection. Both contribute to examining the issues surrounding the graffiti that people write in schools.

2.2 Graffiti

Sex and Gender

Within the literature discussing graffiti in schools, one of the themes that arises is that of sex and gender. Women often write as much, and in some cases more, graffiti than men (Green, 2003). However, female inscribed graffiti is often intended to be interacted with much differently. While both men and women will write “sexually oriented” or “erotic” graffiti on university washroom and library walls, the literature suggests that men make statements while women interact. Also, men’s washrooms tended to have more explicit homosexual oriented graffiti than women.

Graffiti Written By Males

In an analysis of graffiti made by Green, men seemed to write more about politics and sex than women (2003). Also, graffiti written by men tended to neither be advisory or serious but pithy quips about race, sex, penis size, or location; for example, “x” was here. For men, statements of sex seemed to be competitive; a pronouncement of “conquests”, performance, or prowess (Bruner & Kelso, 1980). The graffiti, both pictorial and in word were about individuals, either themselves or about others, but mostly contained sketches of male and female sexual organs,
either in the act of sex, the males in the process of ejaculation, or just the organs themselves (ibid).

**Graffiti in Male Washrooms**

In washrooms, Male graffiti often commented included hostility and race and being hostile to different races (usually being hostile toward racialized bodies). In a study conducted by Kelso and Bruner, 54% of graffiti shown in washrooms was derogatory or racist (1980). Images of swastikas or comments on race or affirmative action policies were evident in many instances of male graffiti but relatively absent in female graffiti (Green, 2003; Kelso & Bruner, 1980). Men also tended to comment on aspects of politics and economics, use expletives more often, and use longer sentences.

**Graffiti Written by Females**

Women tended to ask more questions and disclose personal information. Their graffiti more often referred to emotion and relationships often asking for advice on health and relationships (including how to deal with violent situations in relationships), body image, religion, philosophy, and sex (Green, 2003). Female graffiti regarding sex tended to lean toward sex advice, either giving or receiving it, and in situations of “straight” sexual relationship, it was mostly positive and supportive (Ibid; Kelso & Bruner, 1980). When discussions around homosexual relationships came up, sometimes as with male graffiti, there were a series of “negative” comments written. Within the discourse, there were definite positive comments regarding female homosexual relationships and female homosexual sex (Kelso & Bruner, 1980). This was rarely seen in male washrooms according to the reports of graffiti indicated in the literature.

**Graffiti in Female Washrooms**

The graffiti in women’s washrooms also was presumably seen exclusively by female eyes so issues regarding men, specifically how to deal with men in situations of relationships, sex, or violence allowed women’s graffiti to come up with possible solutions and outcomes to problems dealing with men. It seemed to be a “safe space” to discuss concerns. It also allowed
for a community to form or at least the knowledge that other females were going through similar circumstances and that they were not alone or “normal” for thinking these thoughts (Green, 2003).

**Differences Between Graffiti in Male and Female Washrooms**

Men on the other hand, even if they had those concerns would not voice them. For example, a woman asked for advice regarding her readiness to have sex with her boyfriend in a washroom stall discussion. Many women commented based on their own experiences. Kelso & Bruner state that if a man had such concerns in regards to having sex with his girlfriend, he would dare not ask, even if it were a concern to him (1980).

**Discursive Graffiti**

In library stalls, where it is assumed that both men and women would have access, there were also discussions between men and women regarding relationships, sex, and infidelity. Here is an example written on a library stall:

(a) “Antonio (surname deleted) is a hoe. I feel so sorry for his girlfriend.

(b) Damn Antonio she called you out!! She wrote your full name and everything.

(c) If you wrote this leave your telephone number, because I am Antonio’s girlfriend. And you should not have been fucking with him in the first place. Bitch.

(d) Well bitch, let me tell you something. Every time you kiss him you are tasting my pussy! So fuck with dat you stupid ass heifer bitch!”

(Rodriquez and Clair, 1999, p.11,12)

**Politics**

Another aspect that arises in issues of graffiti in learning institutions is that of political discussion. Graffiti in certain circumstances lent itself to conversation on a topic being open enough or provocative enough to encourage discussion. Nyoye commented on the political
nature of the graffiti found in Nigerian universities regarding the political situation in Nigeria and other African nations. For example, in one university washroom the following was written:

(a) “Apartheid is like a cancer. The only cure is to cut off the affected part, if it spreads keep cutting...”
(b) Every white S. African is already affected, so “cut” all of them?
(c) Yes, all of them, men, women, and children
(d) Agreed, but don’t inherit their property or you will be affected.
(e) Disease does not affect, in infects.
(f) Use of English zero”

(Nwoye, 1993, p. 426)

Discussion in Graffiti
The discursive elements of graffiti are highlighted as an important element of certain types of graffiti. Literature suggests both male and female graffitists have a discursive element. When compared, male graffiti often seemed to tease, insult, dominate, and sometimes add to a discussion. Graffiti written by females seemed to be more in an advisory capacity, posing judgement, admonishing others, or seeking community. Discursive graffiti seemed to gather a community around a certain idea or concept. It allowed groups of people to find they were not alone in considering certain thoughts, ways, lifestyles etc. The community that evolves from graffiti belongs to the idea that when a message appears on a wall, it robs the owner of exclusive possession over it. By writing graffiti it invites community, one that supports or rallies against what may be written (Lomas, 1973). The mere fact that graffiti is written implicates it as a type of communication that is intended to be read and seen by others. Graffiti, by its nature, implicates community of some sort.

Graffiti as Message Board
At Brown University, women exposed men who had been sexually aggressive or sexually assaulted them on dates as a warning for other women to stay away from them. After the first man’s name was written and was told to watch out for him, names of men began to appear on women’s bathroom walls who
were accused of sexual assault. “The graffiti also invited others to: “Compile a list of other men to watch out for”. The bathroom list arose out of frustration, anger and pain. Many of the women had tried to go through proper channels and have been thwarted. Many new programs on campus started because of this graffiti (Rodriguez and Clair, 1999).

In another university, a news reporter wanted to know about the experiences lesbian students had on campus. There were responses that indicated a desire to communicate information but a caution regarding how it would be presented and the possible negative ramifications it could have for them as lesbian students who may be named on campus. The thread was recorded as follows:

(a) “I think all homosexuals should get together and contact me to write about it [homosexuality] for “Campus” section of [student’s newspaper]. It’s a start. Contact Campus Editor!

(b) Can you promise confidentiality? I am not ashamed of my love for other women, but I would hate to open myself up to the ridicule of sexual bigots. Take a look at the poorly stated but strongly felt comments written here and try to imagine what a can o worms such a disclosure in your medium would open up for me and other women like me on campus.

(c) Please put an article in the [paper] on you dykes ‘cause I really want to understand what makes you tick. OK. “Inquiring minds want to know”. (Rodriguez and Claire, 1999, p. 6)

Discussions regarding lesbianism began and was discussed with mixed accord, having a range of responses from support, confusion, disgust to condemnation. The following was recorded:

“One point only, lesbianism is unnatural. Two women cannot produce life. You all are sick but you are looking for companionship beyond female friendship. A love/sex relationship between two women defies nature itself.
Fear of sista power. Don’t impose your won insecurity and confusion on other sistas!

Black women are life!
I really don’t understand how a woman could be attracted to another woman and I agree with the sister girl to the left of me. Homosexuality is very unnatural and since God says its wrong in the bible I don’t [think] he would create a human being that way. It’s a learned behaviour.

Dikes suck

Repressed homosexuals make me ill

Suck pussy Bitch!”
(Rodriguez and Clair, 1999, p. 7)

It is worth noting that as a reaction to violence men were enacting upon women, in Cleveland women were renting space on billboards and writing messages to men and women. The messages to men were in relation to the violence men were perpetrating toward women and the messages to women were messages of communal anger, resistance, or support (Johnson, 1990). At the end of the article there was an address where readers who supported this action could send money to support the action.

**Authenticity**
Graffiti can be seen as an authentic piece of writing. However, there are limited present factors imposed on the writer to keep a certain perspective. It is true that experience, hegemonic thought/dominant opinion imbibed by people, and cultural and religious norms among other aspects may colour how someone responds to a graffiti, the anonymity that graffiti often
affords one to present comments in the most honest way available. Graffiti conversations allow for many opinions to be written (Rodrigues & Claire 1999).

**Freedom**

Freedom manifests itself in different ways through graffiti literature. Freedom can be considered the privacy that allows people to write what they wish in secrecy and anonymity that secures honest thought without retribution (Nwoye 1993, Lomas 1973, Kelso & Bruner, 1980). The reasons freedom in this regard is important is because in some cases students don't have a voice in other venues, validation of thought, a place to vent which in other arenas may be seen as socially inappropriate.

Nwoye speaks to the point of freedom due to lack of venue by stating that privacy "allows the graffitist the opportunity to discuss an issue which is proscribed, restricted, or taboo in ordinary circles" (Nwoye, 1993, p. 428).

**Power**

Perhaps the most overarching and salient concepts that arise out of the literature is that of power. Kelso & Bruner assert that it is the essence behind all graffiti either in its intention or a reaction to power. Specifically, speaking to the relations between men and women, Kelso and Bruner assert that male dominance and the perpetuation of current power structures are the essence of power behind graffiti, either the assertion of that power or the reaction to it. As seen in some of the examples above, most male graffiti seemed to have an inclination to dominate another in some form or another. The fact that male graffiti is often deemed pornographic, rather than erotic, indicates a dynamic of “power over” rather than “risqué intimacy with” another (1980). Kelso and Bruner say white males use graffiti to re-assert power over minorities as they are threatened by the number of non-whites in the workforce jockeying for the same power they want. Men and specifically white men write graffiti to reaffirm their power and control. Even the women who write about relationships are writing to find community and support due to the violence both physical and psychologically they face at the
hands of men. Women are placed in a subordinate position in relationships and look for community to gain power back against men (Kelso & Bruner, 1980).

The use of graffiti in educational institutions gives a host of seemingly authentic information about the thoughts of the attendees of the school. It brings many questions to mind such as: are these the honest thoughts of people or are they the “posturing” to fit in to dominant society? Would men write more discursive graffiti if it weren’t seen as so feminine? How much does fear or lack of power play into the fact that there is not more graffiti that resists dominant systems on a personal level? How accurately do the messages in graffiti reflect the thoughts of the majority or minority of students? Some of these questions will be considered within the context of middle school graffiti, teacher and student thoughts about graffiti, and what learning could be done with the graffiti found in public schools.

### 2.3 Symbolic Violence

French Sociologist Pierre Bourdieu developed concepts to critically analyse culture and society and how they are enacted upon different groups of people. One such concept was symbolic violence. The concept of symbolic violence was derived from the theory of symbolic power. While in Algeria, Bourdieu constructed the theories of symbolic power and violence by examining the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized in Algeria. He examined the imposition of language and culture on the colonized in order to coerce populations to fall in line with the rule of the dominant power (the French) but in such a way that the population would not recognize they were complicit in agreeing to the oppression (Schubert, 2012).

From the literature reviewed, symbolic violence has three main elements to it: the recognition of hierarchies, the discipline and control of populations, and the subtle and sometimes invisible nature of the violence. Bordieu points out that although symbolic violence may be “gentler” than physical violence, it is just as real and in some cases more brutal (Ibid).
Cultural Capital

The conception of a subtle and hardly detectable violence can be evidenced through the social markings of how one carries oneself, what clothes one wears and how one wears them, how one speaks and with what accent (Topper, 2001). This way of being in the world, or cultural capital which Bourdieu defined as the culturally specific competence one has that allows one to access power, privilege, and connection to the dominant order is taught and inculcated through social and cultural institutions like school.) The literature states that symbolic violence produces the inequities in access to resources based on the access to social or cultural capital (Schubert, 2012). For example, certain linguistic competencies are privileged over other due to the indication of social location of the speaker (Topper, 2001). The more cultural capital one has, the closer they are to the dominant mode of values and therefore closer to accessing resources. Symbolic violence happens when those with greater cultural capital are privileged over others who have less cultural capital. To show the pervasiveness of symbolic violence in pedagogy, Bourdieu and Passerson state that:

“Pedagogic action is, objectively, symbolic violence first insofar as the power relations between the groups or classes making up a social formation are the basis of the arbitrary power which is the precondition for the establishment of a relation of pedagogic communication.”

(Bourdieu & Passerson, 1990, p. 6)

Hierarchies

In order for symbolic violence to be enacted, it requires the stratification of society. By categorizing and classifying people into groups, those who fit the model of “rightness” constructed by the dominant class in turn impose their will upon those who do not fit that model. Bordieu looked at the effect of a democratised schooling system in post World War 2 France. He noted that of the students who were of a lower socio-economic status, few continued onto high school and even fewer continued onto post secondary institutions. Students who performed poorly were siphoned into vocational programs to become labourers
(Key Concepts). He noted this deliberate sectioning off as symbolic violence. It was a violence in that it was a form of domination, and symbolic in that it actioned itself through the symbols and signs of culture rather than through physical force.

Bordieu emphasised that although the main focus of schooling was to teach and socialize students, he asserted that “schools teach students particular things and socializes them in particular ways” (Grenfell, 2012). Although the situation of symbolic violence and schooling is represented by Bordieu through the case study of post World War 2 France, symbolic violence is seen to affect people acting within any institution or system that include hierarchy and norms.

In essence, it is a way for society to construct “correct” and “incorrect” ways of conducting itself. Bordieu deconstructed and examined why some ways were considered “correct” and others “incorrect” and found that the “correct” way of doing things allowed one access into the dominant group and served to sustain the dominance of that group. It became a way to make one’s form of cultural capital\(^1\) the “natural” way of being in the world. It took the arbitrary cultural capital (arbitrary in that there is no universal truth that makes one way of living and interacting superior over another way; and arbitrary in that it is chosen because it suits the needs of one group better than another) as the natural way of being regardless of the absence of inherent superiority. To inculcate the culture of “correct” and “incorrect”, dominant social norms were and are reproduced through institutions including schools (Bowles & Gintis, 1976).

Bordieu posits that institutions reproduce social hierarchies and enforce control and discipline. Those who work within the dominant habitus (the lens through which one sees life stemming from one’s experiences) recognize the natural and therefore legitimate way of behaving and experience success (Bowles & Gintis, 1976). Schools, institution, society and culture show

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\(^1\) Cultural Capital is another Bourdieusian concept that recognizes that all capital is not economic. The social and/or cultural ways that one interacts with the world gives and indicates a certain status. Having a cultural capital that is in line with the dominant class will afford more possibilities than a cultural capital that is outside of the parameters of the dominant class. Cultural capital linked to aspects of culture and success is determined by one’s nearness or distance to the culture of those who hold power (Bourdieu, 1986).
through many examples that the cultural arbitrary which constructs what is “correct” and “incorrect” conduct and the “right” way to achieve success (Ibid). The more that one measures up to that standard of hegemony or dominant culture, the greater one’s cultural capital (including how one presents one’s self, the accents and language used when speaking, and a host of other constructed ways of being).

The symbolic interactions of behaviour and modes of conduct between participants of different statuses within a given system help to reproduce and feed the structured inequalities within institutions and systems (Ibid). Bourdieu wrote of the social interaction between language and symbols and how they reproduced structures of dominance and hierarchy. The singularity of the “correct” way of conducting life expresses its legitimacy, and through it, the hegemony and dominance over others participating in the system. The dominant class “let[’s] the system they dominate take it’s own course” (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 190) and with the result, they exercise their domination. An example used Schubert was “correct” cutlery usage in a restaurant. If someone did not know what fork to use, they would be regarded as belonging to a lower social class and therefore inferior (2012). Therefore, those who know how to use the fork had a social advantage and were inherently superior. Success was and is related to one’s social position and privilege and therefore their inherent superiority. Shubert mentions

“It is worth nothing, though, the misrecognition of social privilege as natural superiority in this way serves to solidify that privilege and, for members of subordinated groups, exacerbate symbolic violence and intensify social suffering” (Schubert, 2012, p. 190).

In education the successful and “superior” know how to negotiate education systems and those who do not are the “inferior”. This thinking harms students who are not of the advantaged class.
In schools, the reproduction of social hierarchies is implicit in classroom management, design, and lesson implementation. It becomes a critical component of how discipline is enacted in the classroom. Order is established through surveillance (observation), examination (testing), and classification (grading) in order to enforce compliance. Compliance is gained by the standards set up and enforced by teachers and parents rather than by overt force, and only a reference to the way “things are” is needed to support effective classroom behaviour and order. Control is thereby permitted without interrogation (Toshalis, 2010) Hierarchy in the classrooms reproduces discipline and control to enable compliance and order through gentle and even “loving’ means (Bowles and Gintis, 1976). The normalcy of hierarchies that are unchallenged are taught and accepted as a part of good manners and a part of culture (Schubert, 2012). The established order is justified and there is no need to use force to ensure compliance with rules and structures (Ibid).

**Control, Force and Complicity**

The function of symbolic violence is to maintain control over populations without force. It is an invisible power used with the complicity of those it is enacted upon or those who benefit or use it. The lack of force allows it to be enacted with the consent of the dominated (Shannon & Escamilla, 1999). Because control is enacted with consent, the control veils the symbolic violence and at the same time minimizes the perception that control affects the dominated class. Goldstein (2005) says that in schools, symbolic power and symbolic violence is akin to a code and points out what students and teachers must do, and also tells them who they are and what roles they play in the classrooms and the school (Bourdieu, 1991).

In Reproduction in Education, Society, and Culture, Bourdieu and Passerson outlined how teaching tools used by teachers and school boards are not only aids to inculcate a certain system but are also instruments of control used to perpetuate the dominant order (1990). Bourdieu and Passerson held that schools inculcate the system of control through the books, materials, methods of instruction, and so on, to teach culture to children who grow up to follow a certain set of rules that maintain the dominant order. The control of populations is kept by
people inculcated from an early age on to follow the rules. People are complicit in the enactment of violence in that they see it as “the way things are” without questioning the arbitrariness of culture and society (Ibid).

**Control and Resources**
Social differentiation between groups interacting within or without the hegemonic system are then marked by the amount of resources (social, cultural, or economic) they have and therefore their likelihood of being either dominated or dominator (Topper, 2001). The coded and uncoded language that is spoken, the accents people use by default or by choice, and the ways people interact reproduce the structures of hierarchy and domination. The amount of recognizable and worthwhile power one has is evidenced in social interactions and relationships explained through aspects of consent and complicity in the system and misrecognition of particular signs and systems (Morgan & Bjorkert, 2006). Controlling people through the lens of one’s cultural capital and the resulting discipline through the observations of others allows the individual to internalize the control of the dominant order to the point that one becomes one’s own overseer (Topper, 2001).

**Control and Power**
The ideas within the literature on symbolic violence point to control being a result of unequal power relations that are deemed as natural. Naturalized violence occurs when the dominated see themselves wholly within the knowledge and culture they have in common with the dominator (Aune 2011). Language is a tangible example. Language and the culture that attaches itself to language are imposed upon individuals through systems of schooling, culture, and family. People are controlled through coercion and condescension, especially those who are not visibly or linguistically of the dominant class. The logic seems to follow that if one speaks the language of the dominant class with the acceptable accent of the dominant class, then that person is more eligible for access to resources. In schools, children are taught to say words in specific ways and speak with specific accents. Those who do not conform are chastised, ridiculed, patronized or disciplined in some other way. Often those who teach are
also of or close to the dominant class and reproduce the values and structures that bring one
closer to resources. It is natural to want to speak in a certain way because that is how the
successful speak. The dominant conception of “proper language” is legitimate and valued. The
success of symbolic violence lies in how it surrounds the notion that it is not recognized as
control or violence, but rather simply the way things are (Schubert, 2012).

**Control Through Organization of Spaces**

Symbolic violence also helps to control people through the organization of spaces, the direction
of relationships, and the maintenance of the productivity of the disciplined (Toshalis, 2010).
Through institutions such as schooling, students are controlled via submission to the hierarchy
established by culture and reinforced by the fabric of the *classroom management tactics of
teachers; students are organized, given brief moments of less supervised socialization, and told
when and how to interact with students and teachers* (Ibid). This controlled environment allows
for the legitimacy of symbolic violence to also be accepted in other instances in the lives of
individuals. It becomes sensical for students to be grouped. School teaches recognized that
arbitrary groupings help students; however, it is better to teach them when in a pre-formed
group. That that they can be best controlled and disciplined (Ibid). Later in work places, it will
seem reasonable that workers be grouped. The stage is set for employee structuring later in
life.

**Discipline**

Symbolic power and Symbolic violence each *discipline* populations into complicity and control.
The discipline is not just to punish participants but to organize spaces, direct relationships,
shape discourse and to maintain the productivity of disciplined. Toshalis states that the
reproduction of social hierarchies in schools, vis a vi the classification, streaming, and social
structures maintained therein are a critical component for the enactment of discipline in the
classroom and school (2010). These hierarchies, supported by the dominant culture, permit
inequity without interrogation. Discipline and control unfold without interruption to make
compliant the populations that symbolic violence is enacted upon (Bowles&Gintis, 1976).


Invisibility
Symbolic power is the invisible power exercised with the complicity of those who do not want to know that they are subject to it or that they exercise it (Shannon & Escamilla, 1999). Those who commit acts of symbolic violence can sometimes be well-intentioned people trying to do the “right thing” but unconsciously follow “the way things are”.

Teachers are an excellent example of those who commit symbolically violent acts in the name of benefiting children. Power is exercised through “gentle, invisible violence” that is “chosen” as much as undergone (Toshalis, 2010). Due to invisibility through the accepted legitimization of aspects of culture and ways of being, the victims of violence can be argued to be in agreement with the violent relationship between the dominated and the dominator (Shannon & Escamilla, 1999). Teachers teach the “right way” to think, act, and be. Children grow up to be adults who espouse the same values. In this, teachers can be seen to have facilitated the violence by reproducing it and declaring it to be “common sense”.

The literature also addresses the subtle or invisible nature of symbolic violence. Symbolic violence is not a physical/brutal violence. Rather it operates on the level of obligations, debts, roles, expectations, and verbal and non-verbal communications (Toshalis, 2010). The symbols determine proximity to resources and the ability to be able to become less reliant on others for those resources (Schubert, 186). Symbolic violence does not strip away freedom or agency outrightly but instead generates complicity (Ibid).

Morgan and Bjorkert state that it is harder to exercise direct domination than implicit domination. Also, the more the action is disapproved of by the dominant class the more likely that it is gentle and thereby being disguised (2006). Creating complicity through the subtle and insidious means of symbolic violence can prove to be a more successful means of domination as the dominated rule themselves due to the “common sense” values legitimized by culture (Schubert, 2012).
Invisibility Through Legitimacy

To be a successful form of domination, symbolic violence also relies on the reach of a legitimated way of life to stretch beyond the level of politics and into those areas that are seemingly apolitical (Morgan & Bjorkert, 2006). Aspects of sport, schooling, food and music all contribute to symbolic violence through their legitimization of the political. Symbolic violence requires people to agree to it. People agree to a mode of being that is in line with hegemonic thought. Although is not seen as political, even the act of holding a fork a certain way, or cheering at a sporting event, can indicate proximity to resources. Regular popular culture becomes a tool to separate people through a political lens.

Part of the insidiousness of symbolic violence is the difficulty to prove its existence. Symbolic violence deals with the legally sanctioned inequalities that have contributed to more acts and situations of inequity. But, because the empirical evidence is absent and only qualitative evidence presents itself, it is harder to prove (Morgan & Bjorkert, 2006; Topper, 2001). Symbolic violence emphasises a degradation of human dignity that is not physical and therefore it is difficult to point to its existence (Topper, 2001). A more direct form of interpersonal violence such as physical abuse is easier to prove and therefore more likely to be recognized. Because symbolic violence goes largely unnoticed, it also goes unchallenged (Morgan & Bjorkert, 2006). One cannot readily accuse such a subtle perpetrator for acts of aggression.

What schools teach, how they teach it, and in whose interests it is taught make up the violence that is enacted upon students and to some extent teachers in schools. This violence is often met with complicity. When it is met with resistance, students risk being labelled as “bad”, “disruptive”, or “trouble-makers”. Students who resist the violence enacted upon them and try to forge a new way of being become examples of what not to do and what not to be. Theirs is a path that can lead to much discussion and complaint in staffrooms and hallways about their intractability. At times their resistance is inscribed on the walls. Those inscriptions provide fodder for this thesis.
Chapter 3
Conceptual Framework and Research Methodology

The purpose of this chapter is to review the conceptual and methodological frameworks used in this thesis. Initially I explain the critical pedagogy, i.e. the conceptual framework I use to examine this topic. I then examine the connection between critical pedagogy and how it relates to an examination of the literature on graffiti and symbolic violence. For the remainder of this chapter I describe the research parameters and the methodology I used. I also discuss the recruitment strategies, the data analysis, and how the research methods used intersect with critical pedagogy.

“The learner is incomplete, but when drawn into dialogue, becomes aware of its location as a historical subject with certain creative capacities.” (Stevenson; 2010, p. 77)

In this section I outline the parameters of the conceptual framework used in this study. I explain how I have come to use “Critical Pedagogy” as a means to conceptually consider the ideas, participant’s thoughts, and my suggestions for future work.

3.1 Critical Pedagogy
Critical Pedagogy is said to be the pedagogical wing born out of Critical Theory. Critical Theory was conceived out of the Institute of Social Research at the University of Frankfurt (often referred to as the Frankfurt School) in Germany. It is the theoretical tradition based on the intersection of scholars Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, and Herbert Marcuse and the philosophies of Marx, Kant, Hegel, and Weber. Much of the political sensibilities were influenced by the carnage of World War 1 and it’s impact on Germany. Horkheimer, Adorno, and Marcuse focussed their attentions on how capitalism was changing and how forms of domination accompanied that change (Kincheloe and McLaren, 2005).
Ten years after the establishment of the Frankfurt school, Nazi control of Germany posed a danger to the Jewish scholars. The scholars relocated to the United States. Horkheimer, Adorno, and Marcuse continued their work in the United States and became voices of dissent eventually providing the philosophical foundation of the New Left. Recognizing forms of domination nurtured by capitalism, the scholars of Critical Theory saw their role as publically unveiling the discourses of power and the historical and social contexts that produced them. Their focus was to democratisise social order (Ibid).

Critical Pedagogues are not a conceptual monolith. There is much variety to the scholars within the school of Critical Theory. For example, Bowles and Gintis argued that schools are capitalistic agencies and reproduce bureaucratic systems, while Henry Giroux and Paulo Freire argued that schools could be centres of resistance and democratic possibility (Giroux, 1998).

Critical Pedagogy is the pedagogical wing of Critical Theory. It is based in the same emancipatory ethic that resists the cultural, historical, and contextual elements that dominate many by the hands of few. Much of the work in Critical Pedagogy has been attributed to come from the ideas and writings of Brazilian educator Paulo Freire. Freire, along with a plethora of significant scholars note that many themes arise in Critical Pedagogy. Some of these are: Democracy and Citizenship, Neoliberalism and Capitalism, Transformation and Change, Dialogue, Neutrality, and Hope and Love.

**Democracy and Dialogue:**

One of the central themes of Critical Pedagogy is the democratic engagement of students. Where democracy has become understood as a process of election every few years, democracy within a critical pedagogical framework has more to do with the quote at the beginning of the chapter. It is about the recognition of the importance of dialogue, the recognition of the teacher and student engaging in a political act, and the understanding of one’s location as a result of history and culture and not as the fatalistic sum total of the student or teacher (Freire,
It diverges from simple-minded pluralism where arguments are binary, opposition is silenced, or the ideas of one (often the teacher) is imposed on the students.

A critical democratic pedagogy engages in dialogue (to be discussed in more detail later on) and differs from the Neoliberal/Capitalistic opposite by turning enemies into adversaries and antagonism into agonism. Democracy inside of a critical pedagogic framework addresses and encourages difference and through that process helps the learner, be the learner teacher or student, become more autonomous in thought (Stevenson, 2010).

Those in oppressed situations often find themselves living a life of unrealized potential. A critically democratic pedagogy dares to engage in the ethic of empathy noting that a politics of liberation is necessary so that people can live autonomous lives (Freire, 1998). It recognizes that teaching needs to help teachers and students not to become indifferent to issues like starvation, unemployment, and other challenges on both a local and global scale.

Democracy as an element of Critical Pedagogy is rooted in caring and empathy in that it recognizes the fragility of life, time, and resources. Empathy shows teachers and students the pitfalls of being as individualistic and narrow-minded as we have been taught to be through media and culture. Time and resources are seen within a broader scale and are worth championing against the grain of dominant discourse and action (Freire, 1970).

Democracy makes transparent the statement that ‘teaching is a political act’. Democratically engaging with ideas, dialogue, and aspects of freedom and authority in classrooms and public spaces allows students and teachers to construct their own meanings of words and the world around them (hooks, 2003). If teachers locate themselves to students and show they recognize that teachers and students are both “unfinished”, then the role of student and teacher become less fixed and both journey toward learning together. If, as within a modern yet traditional paradigm, the rolls of teachers and students are fixed, then falling into the trap
of faux-master and student\(^2\) becomes much easier which in turn then constructs the climate for authoritarianism, a depraved sense of position, and no need for critical self-reflection.

Dialogue is a necessary component of democracy and critical pedagogy. Again, the quote from Stevenson at the beginning of this section shows the imperative of dialogue in learning. Dialogue necessitates love, mutual respect, and trust. If those are not present, then aspects of authoritarian or binary teaching occur, leaving students and teachers feeling unsafe, especially if they do not belong to the dominant culture or work within a hegemonic framework (Stevenson, 2010).

Dialogue coupled with empathy allows a “universal human ethic” to evolve where everyone feels dignity and respect and is protected from verbal and systemically violent inequities such as racism, sexism, and other forms of discrimination. Dialogue, being supported by a universal human ethic, creates a space for students and teachers to engage different positions and consider otherwise unthinkable ideas. Beyond that, discourse and self-reflection allow students to use this human ethic to ground themselves in the virtue of an ethical responsibility that comes to terms with the social, cultural and class determinants of history and place in the world. One would find it difficult to come to these conclusions in isolation. Therefore, the dialogic nature of democracy and critical pedagogy hold us responsible to realize that we may be conditioned but not determined to be in or hold a certain position and therefore can change who we are or who others believe we are (Freire, 1998).

**Transformation, Change, and Critical Self Reflection**

It has been said of Education that its transformative nature can either humanize or dehumanize students and teachers (Freire, 1998). In an authoritarian, top down, teacher-as-trainer ethos, I, as both a teacher and student, concurrently see and feel the dehumanization of teaching and education. Within the “system” it becomes standard fare to become cynical and fatalistic, even

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\(^2\) Faux-master and student is a term I’ve coined to indicate that there are possibly authentic “master and student” situations that can be and are critical and democratic. However, the faux-master and student is applied to teachers who come to power in a class not because of any substantive knowledge about the profession necessarily, but rather because of age, education, and the power and authority held over students within a modern educative context.
with the best of intentions. In part, this is why Critical Pedagogy necessitates teachers to continuously learn. Outside of learning per se, teachers need to themselves be and to teach students to be critically self-reflective (Stevenson, 2010). Through critical self-reflection, teachers and students can help to create small acts of resistance to hegemonic and dominant systems that can allow systemic or personal change and transformation. This is no easy feat as it necessitates a vulnerability that makes one confront and question one’s ideas, conceptions, beliefs, and understanding of the world (Cooper & White, 2012). Facing that a life may have been lived unjustly or at the expense of others could be devastating. Alternatively, it could come to help stop cycles of violence and oppression within one’s sphere of influence. In a small moment, it allows for the realization of one’s humanity and part of a highly interconnected global system. The recognition of one’s place in the human family creates the conditions for the empathy. Also, the challenges with critical reflection are less “injurious” within a system that is supported by a universal human ethic. The transition from being an individual among individuals to being part of a larger, connected whole can thus seem less daunting and guilt-causing.

Critical reflection as part of the process of transformation and change also helps to note that beings are formed by history and culture, but, as Freire mentioned, we are not predetermined (Freire, 1998). We are capable of learning. We can construct knowledge and, through education rather than training, we transform and enter the process of becoming. Not that we will ever ‘become’, because the changing nature of situation and experience will not allow us to stagnate or finish, but we will recognise that our becoming is related to our unfinishedness. Freire discusses unfinishedness as the process that helps us to continuously search for meaning. It is a continual learning of knowing how to involve oneself in the world, re-create it and transform it. (Freire, 1998). Critical self-reflection of position, cultural and social factors, and imperatives that have gone into consciously and subconsciously creating identity allows openness to engagement. Rather, one is to engage as friends or adversaries with love and the hope that the result is a more whole human being that is part of a larger family of human beings.
Engagement

Freire outlines his ideas around engagement in Pedagogy of the Oppressed. In it he discusses a “banking” model of education and a “problem posing” model of education. The “banking” model, so named because the teaching attached to it is reminiscent of depositing and withdrawing money in that it treats students as objects that are there to fill with information. ‘Banking’ education tends to be, but is not always or limited to, one-way teaching where the teacher teaches and the student absorbs. (Freire, 1970)

The ‘problem-posing’ model is dialogical, where students deal with issues and concerns involving students. It focuses more on the construction of ideas through posing and responding to problems and challenges and to previously considered ideas, thoughts, theories and concepts. Also, problem-posing education helps people to develop ability to critically perceive how they exist in the world. Problem-posing education involves dialogue, transformation, consciousness of unfinishedness, and is rooted in critically democratic ethic (Ibid).

One example of problem-posing education that was not linked to Freire is that of Don Lorenzo Milani experience at the school at Barbiana. Milani began his school at Barbiana soon after being moved there from Calenzano (Mayo, 2009). Milani’s pedagogy revolved around a critical citizenship that was to help people with the immediate and long-term aspects of their lives. Education was not about information but about learning how to be critical, reflective, and active. Milani showed flexibility in his pedagogy that showed him to be critically reflective and dialogical in his pedagogy when he stated that he learned from the students of both the “popular school” and the School at Barbiana. He says that the young workers and peasants taught him to think, where as he only taught them to express themselves (Borg and Mayo, 2006). Milani helped many illiterate peasants to become articulate and critical citizens through posing questions about their experience of their world. His school at Barbiana which embodied a critically pedagogical ethic took the “failures” of the rural village and fostered the critical citizenship that brought them to write an eloquent criticism of the public education system in
Italy in the 1950s called *Lettera ad una professoressa* (Letter to a Teacher). The problem-posing ‘curriculum’ of Milani brought out the reflections and thoughts of students (critical analysis) who created a critique of Italy’s education system (action). Milani’s pedagogy was praxis, a mixture of both critical analysis and action, which helped to create a critical pedagogy aimed at transformation and change for rural students who, by the banking model paradigm, would have been considered failures.

It would not be prudent to outline Critical Pedagogy without a brief consideration for what Critical Pedagogy rails against. Within the last many decades, a rising influence in education has constructed how teachers and students see education, teaching and learning. A Neoliberal ethic has valued competition in education over cooperation, has come to equate education with the accumulation of wealth, and has shown that teaching and education should thusly be *training*. In few words, education is motivated by profit. (Stevenson, 2010). Freire notes this and writes against it calling it a “scourge”, believing it to be a doctrine that leads us to have no choice but to adapt ourselves and learning to a new global market, and that it leads to fatalistic cynicism (Freire, 1998). Neoliberalism cleverly hides itself out of the spotlight of overtly applying banking models of education and uses language such as helping students compete in global markets (Ontario Curriculum: classical studies and international languages, 2000).

Neoliberalism was the antithesis of what Freire and Critical Pedagogues worked for. Due to neoliberalism’s capitalistic strength, it can seem insurmountable. Freire often repeats the phrase “change is difficult, but possible” in *Pedagogy of Indignation* (2004). It is the love and hope that fills Critical Pedagogy which make it a worthwhile vocation. Regardless of the hopelessness that Neoliberalism implied, critical pedagogues must do this out of a love for humanity and a hope for change. Hope is an active element that helps to humanize us and bring us together in love as a group (Freire, 2000).
Power, Privilege, Hegemony, Domination

A discussion about Critical Pedagogy is incomplete without an overt discussion about power, privilege, hegemony, and domination. Kincheloe outlines that power exists to regulate populations in order to bring out desired behaviours (2011). Through the actions and funding of power-elites, messages are forced upon populations and approval is won or consented to. As seen within the literature on symbolic violence, approval is subtly gained enough times that it becomes, as Gramci says, “common sense” (Kincheleoe & McLaren, 2005).

The cultural norms of conduct and conversation steer us away from outlining the specifics of power and cultural domination and allow us to speak to power on a macro-level (the government), or on a micro-level (the individual) (Kincheleoe, 2011). The subtle workings of power are funded by lawyers hired by lobbyists to convince governments to pass laws that persuade populations that whatever a situation is, is best. Through this model, ideas, laws, concepts and culture gain legitimacy (ibid, 2011).

Critical Pedagogy seeks to confront rather than ignore the dominant power structures. Roland Barthes in Mythologies (1957) outlines the cultural construction and subtext of acceptable and polite culture and shows it for a more severe reality. Critical Pedagogy wishes to highlight the cultural and social arbitrariness of many rules and laws that govern our behaviour and thought. We are all located as historical subjects with certain creative capacities (Stevenson, 2010). Through critically democratic dialogue, using a universal human ethic, teachers and students can transform and change their position in the world using empathy and an ethic of responsibility that engages our “word and the world” (Freire, 1998). This allows us, the unfinished learners, to continually transform into beings of love, and hope for a more fulfilled future regardless of how power, domination, hegemony and Neoliberalism stare us down.

Critical Pedagogy, Graffiti, and Symbolic Violence

The literature on graffiti indicates that there is a violence that causes people to write graffiti (Nwoye, 1998) and there can be a violence that comes from graffiti (Lynn & Lea, 2005). Graffiti
can be liberating or it can be oppressive. In both instances, critical pedagogy is a method for unveiling and creating an alternative narrative to the historical, systematic, and contextual frameworks that are acting to dominate some and privilege others.

Bourdieu’s conception of Symbolic Violence addresses the same systematic norms of being that cause some to be successful and others to fail. The cultural arbitrariness of how schools are run privileges some and oppresses others. The symbolic violence of schooling can be addressed through the democratic principles of critical pedagogy.

Through an emancipatory curriculum, much like the Curriculum of Life, in schools where issues are discussed openly, where the hierarchy of student, staff, teacher and administrator is blurred, and people in schools are heard even though there is authority over them (Freire, 1998), some of the factors that cause violence can be addressed by graffiti and other subversive acts. Whether it is through the disengagement of students from their lessons or the disengagement of students and teachers in the running of the school, critical pedagogy can help to alleviate issues of domination and oppression in classes and schools. This does not mean that critical pedagogy is a panacea. It is, however, an assertion that critically democratic spaces provide environments where students seem to thrive, have a greater understanding of civic responsibility, and can articulate issues of domination and oppression (Portelli & Vibert, 2002).

3.2 Methodology

3.2.1 Overview of Research Design
The purpose of this study was to learn about student and teacher thoughts regarding graffiti in schools. The broader aim of the study is to inform of another opportunity to apply a Curriculum of Life (Portelli & Vibert, 2002) in order to bolster the argument that schools need to be democratic in structure. Using democracy in schooling as my end goal, I chose to interview both students and teachers, i.e. those most intimately involved in education, who were in the elementary division.
I was interested in learning what students and teachers thought of graffiti written in schools. I wanted to know if students and teachers thought that graffiti could be used for learning purposes, and finally, what should eventually be done with the graffiti found in schools.

In obtaining data, I used a snowball sampling method that allowed interested participants to get in touch with me. Through this method, I would be ensured that students and teachers participating would do so on their own accord. Participants were accepted on a basis of their status: as a student in an accredited school in Ontario and as a qualified and practicing teacher in Ontario. The first five students and first five teachers that fit these criteria were accepted as research participants.

Students and teachers were interviewed individually and in a private space. The rationale for individual interviews over other alternatives such as focus groups, for example, was to ensure that there would be no external pressure from other people in the interview to influence answers in any particular way. Because of the nature of the conversation, it was recognized that some students or teachers could feel that their authentic answer might not be well received by a peer group or might influence another participant to answer in a manner in keeping with the dominant opinion of the group or in a way that did not reflect their own beliefs. The option, however, was always given to the participant to have someone nearby for support if they wished.

3.2.2 Data Collection
Semi-structured interviews were used as the format for collecting data (See Appendix A for interview questions). The interviews were recorded (See Appendix B for consent forms regarding permission to participate and to be recorded in the interview) and transcribed. I chose to interview both students and teachers in order to see how a variety of voices considered graffiti written in schools. To gain a fuller picture of a) the types of graffiti seen in schools, b) the thoughts about how, if at all, graffiti could be used for learning purposes, and c)
what should be done with graffiti written in schools, both those who are typically accused of writing graffiti (students) and those who typically encounter graffiti (teachers) were interviewed. To further this study, administrators, i.e. those who often discipline students who have been caught writing graffiti, could be interviewed so as to see where ideas between all three groups intersect and diverge.

3.2.3 Research Methods and Participant Recruitment

Participants were recruited through the snowball sample method (Noy, 2008; Cohen & Tamar, 2011). Recruitment was initiated through letters of invitation (see Appendix C) and through informal conversation. Subsequent letters including participation letters, guardian consent for participants under 18, and student assent letters can be found in Appendix D, E, and F.

The first five participants who met the criteria for participation and responded to the recruitment call were accepted. This method allowed an element of randomization that helped to possibly gain participants of varied backgrounds.

As the researcher, I recognized that those who choose to respond to being interviewed about graffiti may have enjoyed a certain level of social capital that supported his/her sense of safety despite the contentiousness of the topic noting that graffiti can be seen as an offense, either criminally or personally.

Ropers-Huilman addresses this when she points out that participants will construct themselves in a certain way based on how they perceive the researcher (1999). In this they may even choose to disengage due to lack of trust of the researcher or a system that is choosing to scribe their thoughts.

3.2.4 Semi-Structured Interviews

To guide the study, I formulated explicit questions to learn about student and teacher attitudes toward graffiti (see Appendix A). The questions asked supported a structure to determine the
essence of attitudes toward graffiti; as well, the semi-structured nature of the interview allowed me to ask further questions and allowed for additional investigation into ideas that came up during the interview.

3.2.5 Data Analysis

The interviews were recorded as per permission obtained through the letter of permission (see appendix D). The questions asked were of three categories:

- instances of graffiti, i.e. examples and locations
- what, if anything, there was to be learned from graffiti
- what should be done with graffiti

Student and teacher responses were analysed to discover if there were any patterns in responses toward how graffiti in school was viewed and what should be done with it. The findings are recorded in the next chapter.

The interviews were transcribed and studied. Themes that emerged were recorded. For the transcripts, a colour scheme was used to delineate which answers fit under a specific theme and which responses were outliers.

The following colour scheme was used when examining transcripts. Ideas that had to do with what graffiti had been seen were coded blue, attitudes toward graffiti were coded green, what should be done with graffiti was coded yellow, ideas that were outside of what was asked were marked with purple, and any trends were connected with the colour orange. There was some overlap in student and teacher answers:

- where graffiti had been seen
- what should be done with graffiti
- what student and teacher attitudes toward graffiti
In those instances, both colours were used to show a common theme. After the transcripts were coded, the ideas were regrouped into themes, and then categories and subheadings. After the transcripts were coded, the ideas were rewritten according to their themes and then categorized and assigned subheadings.

3.2.6 Participants
The interviews ranged from just over ten minutes in length to over forty minutes in length. Students and teachers seemed engaged and interested in sharing their ideas in the interviews. All interviewees seemed relaxed and calm during the interviews.

I begin this section by looking at the demographics of the interviewees. I then highlight the major themes that were brought up in interviews.

For this study, five students and five teachers were interviewed.

Teacher Interviewees
I assigned pseudonyms to protect the anonymity of the participants. The participants were not identified in any specific way nor was any specific information reported with regard to current or former sources of employment. The teacher pseudonyms and their teaching profiles are recorded below in the order that they were interviewed:

Teachers
Lynn: Female, Middle School Teacher, Science and Math (3rd year teaching)
Sarah: Female, Elementary School Teacher, Kindergarten (7th year teaching)
Katelyn: Female, Middle School Teacher, Art (15th year teaching)
Nadia: Female, Middle School Teacher, French (11th year teaching)
Emily: Female, Elementary School Teacher (14th year teaching)

There were five teachers interviewed. All of the teachers identified as female. The years of service as a teacher in Ontario ranged from three to fifteen years. The teachers all lived in
homes they owned and could be said to belong to the middle class. Lisa, Katelyn, Nadia, and Emily were all born in Canada. Lynn was born in the United Kingdom. All of them learned English as their first language. Lynn identified racially as “black”. The other participants did not comment on race but could be considered “white”.

**Student Interviewees**

Students were also assigned pseudonyms to protect their anonymity. The participants were not identified in any specific way and no specific information was reported with regard to current or former schooling. The student pseudonyms, along with their student profile, are recorded below in the order that they were interviewed:

**Students**

Alex: Male, Middle school student  
Farida: Female, Middle school student  
Fatima: Female, Middle school student  
Julia: Female, Middle school student  
Jason: Male, Middle school student

Five students were interviewed. Of the students interviewed all were in publicly funded Ontario middle schools (in grade six, seven, or eight. Two of the participants identified as male and three identified as female. All students were from two parent families, lived in houses that their parents owned, and could be said to belong to the middle class. Two students were what would be considered “white”, one “black”, and two “Southeast Asian”. All of the students had been born in Canada and all had learned English as their first language.

3.3 Critical Research

Critical research is best conceptualized within and is dedicated to the empowerment of individuals. It is an attempt to discuss, unveil, and confront the differentiating power dynamics that privilege some at the expense of others. Because of its nature, research is at its essence
political and therefore needs be concerned with an emancipatory consciousness and the investigation of how individuals and groups may be better able to change their living contexts and become agents of change in their particular circumstances (Kincheloe, McLaren, Steinberg; Roper-Huilman, 1999). Pierre Bourdieu notes that the primary focus of society is to expose the “mechanisms of domination” and show how social inequities are reproduced. This in turn tends for social sciences, and by extension social sciences qualitative research to be inherently critical (Shields, 2012). Critical research is concerned with reporting the “talking with”, rather than the “speaking for” the researched, with the end goal of confronting inequitable power relations. It is concerned with asking questions of all knowledge, even that knowledge which confirms itself as a methodological framework (Kincheloe, McLaren, Steinberg, 2012). Qualitative researchers rely on their own experiences, judgements, history, social context and construction of what is real to help enhance existing ideas or generate new perceptions of events, conceptions, and conditions in various real-life situations (Cooper & White, 2012).

How Research is Conducted
The qualitative researcher is concerned with how research is conducted rather than what the research produces in terms of certain truth (Ibid). In critical qualitative research, the impact the researcher has on the researched is at the forefront of all interactions, and the interpretations made are consciously seen through the experience and assumptions of the researcher (Patai, 2011). Context is of utmost importance and therefore critical qualitative research is based upon a purposeful ambiguity in order to allow for a variety of modes and methods that allow for the most powerful and appropriate ways to find and analyse data (Cooper & White, 2012).

Why We Do Research
One of the prime concerns of research is - understanding the general applicability of phenomena in related or general applications of study. Due to the multiple ways of knowing and the different nuances individuals bring to research, scholars are often consciously aware of the untidy nature of qualitative research (Ibid). The untidiness of it allows for a liquidity of
methods to be used so as to best fit a particular situation. Rather than being static, it allows for fluidity of methodology.

Qualitative scholars tend to use a host of methods and perspectives for considering qualitative research rather than a singular, top down, object-focused method. Using a variety of methods allows a respect for the integrity and complexity of the subject and participants involved in the research.

Placing research within a variety of methods helps to more accurately and sensitively envision new possibilities. Critical research holds multiplicity of methods at its core and at the same time puts the matter purposefully into a context to ensure there is greater knowledge of self in the data and the data analysis (Ibid).

Research is Political
As a teacher, a student, a researcher, and at times the researched, I recognize the need for the grand vocation critical inquiry promotes. All that we do in classrooms is political (Kincheloe, McLaren, Steinberg, 2012). If this is so, then our aim need be to focus our politics toward the emancipatory side of teaching, democratising spaces, and creating environments of criticality that, as Paulo Freire says, “questions all knowledge” (Ibid). To avoid an emancipatory curriculum or to declare “neutrality” leads one into the trap of neoliberal fatalism and reproduces the hegemonic norms that continue to profit from the dominant system (Freire, 1998). Reproducing the cycle of hegemony is what critical research engages to disrupt and change.

Research in This Project
The point of this thesis is to examine graffiti, a scribble often considered a crime or a blight on public space (Hasley & Young, 2002), and question if it is worth considering before it is erased. This thesis does not place a judgement value on graffiti. Using graffiti as a critical study, I
inquire about how a greater emancipatory element infused in schools could affect the lives of students and teachers.

If educative spaces are democratised, for example by adopting a Curriculum of Life where students are engaged and part of the political processes of education, then how could students engage more in their own education, recognize their place in civic space, and become aware enough to help make future spaces more equitable for others.

To go about this, I have used interviews and critical pedagogy to allow students and teachers to explain how they think graffiti could be used for learning purposes and what should be done with graffiti found in schools.

Rather than looking at the students through an interpretivist model, this thesis looks at students through a critical approach that examines the structural mechanisms that go into creating systems whereby students feel they have limited voice to address concerns and therefore may choose to express themselves alternately by writing graffiti.

This project can be deemed critical in that it seeks to empower individuals, confront unspoken politics, is concerned with the emancipation of voice and space, and intends to help people self-advocate as agents of change through the creation of robust democratic spaces. This project is qualitative in that it looks at a group of individual experiences of being. It is research in that it includes the examination of texts, both scholarly literature and examples of graffiti, it includes the interviewing of individuals of different groups, and it involves the interpretation of the interviews and the stories of the participants.

It is my hope that this research can be of the body of literature that helps to democratize educational spaces in order to emancipate students and teachers both in and out of schools. The methods used in this thesis were the most effective to gain information about student and teacher thoughts about graffiti. It asked the source, both students and teachers, directly, what
graffiti they had seen, what they thought of the graffiti, if it could be used for learning purposes, and what should be done with the graffiti in schools. Without essentializing the researched or speaking for them, this thesis reports what students and teachers think about graffiti and allows me to group those thoughts into conclusions based on my experience, judgment, context and socio-political inclinations. All research is interpretive. All research must keep the researcher and the researched in mind (Patai, 1999). Using the lens of critical pedagogy allows for the experiences of the participants to speak for themselves.

3.3.1 Methodological Limitations and Strengths

Limitations
All research will have limitations and strengths to it. No research can claim to be perfect. That being said, as critical researchers it is our duty to consider and confront the biases, judgments, and limitations of the studies we conduct in order to stay away from concluding “the truth”.

In this study I was not able to interview male teachers. Although one male teacher did agree to an interview, a mutually convenient time was not possible to arrange. Greater representation by sex may have presented different attitudes toward graffiti, a greater variety of graffiti seen, and different ideas as to what to do with graffiti. It is possible that male participants may have reaffirmed what the female participants reported. The greatest difference could have regarded graffiti seen in semi-private spaces such as male-only washrooms.

I was also not able to interview high school teachers on their thoughts about the graffiti they have seen in high schools. High school teachers may come into contact with a wider array of graffiti. I base this on my own experience of high school students being, as a whole, more audacious in speech and action than middle school students and through their greater experience and maturity perhaps could have been more thoughtful in their responses than their younger counterparts. High School graffiti may have given a greater indicator of what
specific issues students may have had in schools. Another sampling method, one that perhaps targeted specific groups of teachers, may have resulted in a greater variety of participants.

Many students and teachers could not initially remember examples of graffiti. It may have been worthwhile to have teachers and students see the interview questions ahead of time before the interview to think about their responses, and particularly, what types of graffiti they had seen and what they thought about them.

Interviewing older students and perhaps students who felt more disenfranchised by the schooling system due to race, class, gender, sexuality may have brought about a deeper insight into why students write graffiti, what the messages they intended to communicate to other students, teachers, or administration, and what their experiences have taught them about schooling, graffiti, and democracy in schools.

**Strengths**

This research methodology had strengths to it. The semi-structured interviews allowed for interviewees to go on tangents when speaking and discuss new ideas regarding the topic. This interview style also allowed for a greater degree of consideration and reflection than a static survey. I was able to follow up for clarification and ask subsequent questions based on what the participant had said. This allowed the participants an excellent chance to represent their views in the most authentic of ways.

Allowing for verbatim transcription allowed me to examine the data and find commonalities, themes, and outlier opinions outside of the real time of the interview. I was able to consult the transcription and my notes. Again, this allowed for me to represent participant’s views as authentically as I could.
This thesis allowed for authentic and genuine ideas around student and teacher conceptions of graffiti in order for conclusions to be made around democratization of schools, the impact of a Curriculum of Life, and suggestions for next steps for schools regarding graffiti.
Chapter 4
Student and Teacher Findings

4.1 Introduction to the Chapter
In this chapter I report on the results of the interviews had with both students and teachers. These findings show the different themes, attitudes, and ideas about graffiti and what should and could be done with it before it is erased.

4.2 Student Findings

4.2.1 Location
Students reported seeing graffiti in several different places. All students reported seeing graffiti in public washrooms. Another location students reported seeing graffiti was in schools, specifically on desks, on the sides of cabinets, on hand dryers and on bathroom walls. They also reported seeing graffiti downtown, on trucks and busses, and on the walls of buildings, both on the inside and the outside.

4.2.2 Type
The students reported a variety of types of graffiti in schools. They reported seeing messages to other students and dialogues between students. Some of the messages reported were phrases such as “don’t pollute the earth”, advertisements for blogs and websites, territorial statements by gangs, declarations of affection, cries for help, quotes from literature, messages that dealt with sex or sexuality, name calling, opinions, or messages intended to tease, bully, or seek power over other students. The dialogues reported concerned life experiences and issues of emotion or mental health.

4.2.3 Opinions
Students had different reactions to the types of graffiti they saw. Three students commented on the “pointlessness” of some graffiti. Their responses stated that the graffiti either held no meaning or that the writer had wasted her/his time in the writing of it. Julia mentioned that
they had often seen graffiti which was attention-seeking in nature. Fatima commented on how funny graffiti in schools can sometimes be. Three students mentioned issues of hatefulness in some messages. Jason indicated that the graffiti they had seen was not “overly hateful”. Two students mentioned the environment as the content of graffiti messages. Students reported a mix of reactions to graffiti from annoying to not bothersome to gratifying.

Students reporting graffiti about love interests, blogs, and depictions or sayings related to sex or sexuality. All of these words and images were deemed pointless due to their randomness and lack of content. Several students expressed that there is nothing one can “get” out of the graffiti.

4.2.4 Form
Graffiti were sometimes seen as dialogical. The issue of depression was a topic seen in a graffiti conversation in a washroom. Opinion-based conversations were also reported. Also observed were series of reactions and responses to posted comments.

4.2.5 Educative Value
When asked what people could learn from graffiti, students had a mixture of responses. Most students initially reported that little could be gleaned from the graffiti seen in schools. Jason out-rightly said that nothing could be learned from graffiti. He reported that it was “only graffiti” and that it was “easy to ignore”. Jason repeated the idea that there was no inherent message in graffiti and that graffiti was written to simply “pass time”. It was this Jason’s belief, as it was the belief of another interviewee, that students wrote graffiti because they were bored in and by school.

Julia said that graffiti could be an indicator of school climate in that the content of graffiti in schools reveals some of the issues are that students were experiencing. She also indicated that mental health issues are sometimes disclosed through the medium of graffiti. Julia noted that these issues are sometimes difficult to talk about and that such graffiti could be used by staff to
provide students with timely intervention and supports. She continued by saying that this, however, was not an effective strategy to get help as the administration does not go into student washrooms and therefore would not see the “cry for help.” Julia added that the only ones who would see it would be the custodial staff and the student felt the custodial staff would not act on such messages.

Similarly, Alex mentioned that if administration looked at graffiti, they might learn about issues that students were uncomfortable reporting to an adult about for fear of being labelled a “snitch”.

The students commented on the content of the graffiti they had seen. Farida brought up the issue of offensive graffiti that was deemed racist and said that it was terrible. This student commented that racist graffiti pointed to a problem within the school. Another student commented that graffiti in schools was “cool” and funny. At the same time, this student stated that she understood how it was an affront to private or personal property and so without a positive message, this student didn’t necessarily agree with the writing of the graffiti even though she enjoyed reading it.

Some students expressed that murals on buildings could serve as vehicles for raising public awareness about social issues. The students also responded to the artistry and style of mural graffiti seen mostly in urban centres like downtown Toronto and felt they could learn from it.

Student opinions about graffiti were mostly unfavourable. There were provisos, however, for graffiti that prompted reflective contemplation. Other messages that were deemed permissible were complimentary statements about the school and those that broached “important issues” such as concerns about the environment. Most students found that because of the interpreted pointlessness of graffiti, it was not a worthwhile activity. Fatima said that students who are deemed cool or troublemakers are the students who engage in graffiti. This sentiment was echoed by Julia who said that people write graffiti to get attention.
As a summative statement, all students felt that in general, there was no real reason to write graffiti and therefore students should not engage in it.

4.2.6 Fate

When asked what should be done with graffiti, students initially indicated that they did not know. All of them agreed that it eventually should be erased. When asked if anything could be done with the graffiti before it was removed, the students took time to think. Alex indicated that graffiti was an effective way to communicate issues without speaking. He explained that concerns could be raised for address and remediation if administration or teaching staff looked at the graffiti written in semi-private spaces like washrooms or even on more public spaces like a school-sanctioned graffiti wall. Alex also referred to the criminal aspect of graffiti and how if students were seen writing graffiti they could be suspended or charged with mischief. He noted that security cameras could point to who it was writing the graffiti.

Other students noted that issues raised in graffiti that was written in and around the school could be addressed in class. They noted that both the pointless and the poignant graffiti could be discussed in class to determine motivation for writing. Farida reported that meaningful graffiti need not always be positive. If racist graffiti existed in the school, it would be considered meaningful and therefore worth speaking about in class. Julia reported that graffiti enabled discussions based on the fact that it was an authentic spontaneous uncensored student voice.

Julia further mentioned that some graffiti may cause an uncomfortable or unpleasant atmosphere in the school. She commented that it would be worthwhile to discuss in class the issues students are having with the school, with others, or with themselves. Julea said that discussing these issues in class could encourage students to get support from a help line.

Discussions about the content of graffiti could also help to bring forward issues that are not part of the dominant discourse (for example, homosexuality) and enable students who are
privately contemplating these issues to discuss them in class with more personal safety and discretion.

Julia also suggested online message boards as an alternative to graffiti as they would bypass the inherent matter of vandalism and yet still enable self-expression. Jason didn’t see much relevance in the graffiti messages. He said that he felt graffiti could encouraged discussion. Jason reported feeling that graffiti needed to be anonymous or else interpretation of the messages could be influenced by bias. That being said, Jason felt that overall, graffiti was not an effective use of time, had little to no impact on students or school, damaged school property, and was a waste of materials. Jason recognized a need to put into action various surveillance policies to curb graffiti. Many students said that graffiti was an offense to public property and was not “positive” for students or the school.

4.3 Teacher Findings

4.3.1 Place
Teachers unanimously stated that one of the places they had seen graffiti was in the washroom. Some teachers mentioned desks and textbook as places they had seen graffiti. Others mentioned bridges and by train tracks. One teacher stated that she did not go to “student” spaces so her responses would be limited.

Teachers discussed a range of feelings toward graffiti that ranged from annoyance to amusement. Other feelings toward graffiti were that students who wrote graffiti were either being boastful or cowardly. One teacher mentioned an incident in a particular where a student had written the expletive “fuck you” to the administration. In that instance she said she it was the student sending a message to power, i.e. the administration of the school. The teacher reported feeling that if students didn’t have a voice in schools then this was one way they could be heard.
“I’ve seen it at a school that I was working at down here but it was to send a message to the principal so it was basically the principal’s name and inappropriate language ...”

When considering why students write graffiti, many teachers said that writing was a result of boredom. Katelyn thought that it was “weird” that they would write graffiti at all. Teri mentioned that it was a cowardly act in that the writer of the graffiti would not be accountable for what they had written. She also reported that there was a level of risk and excitement that accompanied writing graffiti. Lisa noted the possible feelings attached to the physical release of actually carving something in to a desk.

4.3.2 Type

A type of graffiti that teachers noticed had to do with body parts. Teachers unanimously noted genitalia drawn in textbooks, on walls, and in bathrooms. Teachers also noted the presence of doodles in the same spaces.

4.3.3 Making Meaning/Communication

When trying to construct meaning from graffiti, teachers reported that the graffiti was often either an undermining or negating statement or conversation.

“Some of it is dialogical. If a girl writes a comment and another girl responds, it is often to negate or undermine what the first comment said. Sometimes there might be a statement about something in general and there might be some responses confirming it or disagreeing with it.”

“What I remember in the [university] bathroom stall was people were engaged in some feminist debate. And it was like an exchange, I would assume, between more than one person. Somebody had written something like ... “women exploit men too” and the next one was “said no one ever” and they were like “get a dictionary” and “do you even know what exploit
“means?” and “what’s the context” and there was a whole back and forth over this pithy statement.”

All the teachers indicated that they felt graffiti was a direct form of communication. Teachers felt that sometimes it was difficult to understand because it was written in symbols or slang rather than recognizable text. Teri noted that importance of trying to decode graffiti in the case of potential gang violence. She remarked “If there is going to be a bloodbath, we need to know”.

The value of decoding symbols and the identification of the writer were of mixed importance to teachers. Some teachers said that they did not care and would respond neutrally to graffiti they did not recognize. Others felt it important to know what students were thinking.

When considering the meaning of graffiti, many teachers felt that the writer of the graffiti needed to have a space to further their ideas. To do that, the writer would need to feel safe enough to come forward and be able to speak authoritatively about the graffiti that had been written.

“Kids love to be asked what they think. Who doesn’t love to be asked what they think, especially kids tend to report, at least to me, that they don’t get asked enough. You know, for genuine input.”

“If the kids who wrote it are explaining it, they’re talking about what they wrote, what they’re thinking, who they are, their identity, their perspective - that would be worth while”

When Emily was asked if she thought students would feel safe to discuss graffiti they had written knowing it’s against the rules, she responded “I suppose it depends on the adult they are talking to. They will feel safe with some and not with others.”
4.3.4 Concerns

Teachers raised concerns surrounding graffiti. A concern that all teachers mentioned was the defacing of private property. The fact that students were writing on surfaces that did not belong to them was a surprise to many teachers and an affront to some. Katelyn personalized the property and mentioned that she did not like that students were writing on “my desks”. When Katelyn pointed out to a student that he/she was writing on a desks in class, “vandalizing” it, she noted that the student promptly stopped. Teachers also mentioned that they were surprised that students did it, especially in class both inside and on top of desks because it was against the rules. The graffiti that was written in view of the teacher was often noted to be doodles, a student writing his/her name, or random words.

The issue of power came up through concerns teachers had. This concern saw power moving in different directions. A concern Nadia had was that students were writing things about other students thereby making schools unsafe for the subjects of the graffiti. “… when kids are left to their own devices to express themselves through graffiti, it’s that they would say something hateful or the would say something offensive and it is our responsibility to provide safe and healthy environments for all children, and if they are going to start naming names, or being racist, or being violent, or being misogynistic, everyone has the right to a school environment that is free of those things.” Also, the content of the graffiti was seen as a violation of student rights to have an education “that didn’t include pictures of penises and boobs”. The teacher furthered her argument by stating that parents from diverse backgrounds may be perturbed that their children were being exposed to such graphics. She said, “There are a whole range of faiths and a whole range of cultures at all schools and at my school and I definitely know that there would be lots of parents who would not be just annoyed, but upset, that their little daughter is opening up a textbook with graffiti of penises in it.”

The lack of censorship was discussed as a concern in that students at any time could be walking into situations that they may not be ready to handle. Many of those situations concerned words or pictures about other students, teachers, administration, or people in general;
students could be put into danger because of what other students had written. It was unclear if this was related to physical threats or if it were just theoretically experienced.

Power was also discussed in terms of the reproduction of violent ideas. If graffiti that went against a universal human ethic\(^3\) were written, then it may affirm/reaffirm the idea that thoughts which seek to take power away from people offend or intimidate others. Nadia said “The more people who are raised as misogynists see their views reinforced the more they believe that it is an acceptable, reasonable view to have…”

The fact that graffiti is mostly an anonymous act leads to the concern that there is a lack of consequence or responsibility for what was written. If it is that students are able to say whatever they like without consequence, it might produce a climate of fear, hostility, or distrust.

“I always get the feeling from graffiti that everything is supposed to be so anonymous, so I don’t know if that mystery is supposed to be in being anonymous but I always figure if you have a message to say, you should autograph it so people know who you are. Same in the washroom. It’s usually anonymously done and it’s saying something derogatory about some girl in particular.”

Teri brought up gangs as a concern. The concern surrounded the messages gangs could send to each other and how that could end up creating unsafe environments for students, school staff, and the community. Concern existed that the anonymity of graffiti could facilitate issues becoming violent and dangerous.

\(^3\) Universal Human Ethic is an ethical responsibility. It is an ethic that “condemn[s] the fabric of illusion, in which the unprepared become hopelessly trapped and the weak and the defenceless are destroyed. To condemn making promises when one has no intention of keeping one’s word, which causes lying to become an almost necessary way of life … the ethic of which I speak is that which feels itself betrayed and neglected by the hypocritical perversion of an elitist purity, an ethic affronted by racial, sexual, and class discrimination. For the sake of this ethic, which is inseparable from educative practice, we should struggle, whether out work is with children, youth, or adults” (Freire, 1998, p. 23, 24)
“I don’t know, I guess people chalk the whole graffiti thing up to kids having a wild night or more these days so that it’s a gang thing. It’s how gangs are communicating with each other. Because the things you see you can’t read. It’s not written in English, so it’s only for certain people to read and understand, which might not not be good for us because we could naively going along without understanding what all of that means until it’s a bloodbath or something serious happens and we’re all in shock. We should have these people who can interpret graffiti go around.”

4.3.5 Indicator

Teachers felt that graffiti was an indicator of school and classroom climate. All teachers mentioned the word “climate” to describe the general tenor of the school and how people felt when they entered it. The type of graffiti, the amount of graffiti, and how visible it was indicated issues and challenges within the school and in the school community. All teachers noted that it was a message to the school that needed to be addressed. Although all teachers believed that graffiti needed to be erased, they also felt that what students were writing in schools needed to be addressed to create a safe climate in the school.

Teachers noted that the classroom climate was also measured by the type of graffiti found there. It was often mentioned that if any amount of graffiti was found in classrooms including desks, walls, textbooks and any other surface, it was an indicator as to how engaged students were in the class. Teachers reported that graffiti could be used as a barometer to measure how their programming and teaching tactics and strategies were being received. Some teachers felt that this would be a useful reflective piece to drive discussion, programming, and perhaps even content.

Emily said “I think it may have something to do with the climate of the school but that’s not quite it. The climate of the students themselves. What they bring. Who they are when they come to school and the dynamics of their interactions. I would have to assume the graffiti that one would find outside of a school or inside of a school would relate to other students in the
school, because you’re still communicating a message of some sort.” Lisa responded to the question “What if the graffiti is targeted, mean, oppressive. That would be very different than Beatles quotes. What should we do with it then?” with “Then you’ve got some serious issues in your school that are not about the graffiti right. You’ve got some climate issues and you need to be addressing those. The graffiti may be the jumping off point, but don’t think it would accomplish the goal of diminishing those thoughts and feelings within the school climate to just say, ‘You can’t do this. This is terrible.’ There is something much deeper there.”

“I think it may have something to do with the climate of the school but that’s not quite it. The climate of the students themselves. What they bring. Who they are when they come to school and the dynamics of their interactions. I would have to assume that the graffiti that one would find outside of a school or inside of a school would relate to other students in the school, because you’re still communicating a message of some sort.”

4.3.6 Educative Value
The teachers indicated there were myriad factors that needed to be considered regarding how graffiti could have both an educative value and could help with climate issues within in the school.

Emily said that graffiti needed to be understood in a context. To understand the graffiti written, much like any other text, the context of student was necessary for both analysis of meaning and motivation. “I think we would need the kids to be the translators and have them tell us what it means and what the context is.” Many teachers spoke of how the context was integral to understanding graffiti. The teacher who spoke of gangs and how graffiti is sometimes used to indicate “turf” emphasised this point of context. “I think it is a way of communicating, of passing on information, whether it be information about turf or other kinds of information that to the average lay person it’s not really a message, it just looks like a lot of nonsense and spoiled what was before, pretty, you know, neutral” and “the ones that were written in a lingo that I didn’t understand, I’m only slightly disturbed because I’m more exposed
to the whole gang mentality thing, so I’m thinking that it is sending a message to someone, somewhere.”

Almost all of the teachers thought it would be helpful to discuss graffiti with students. They said that they would be able to get a different perspective once they had spoken to students about what students read. Most of the teachers indicated that this would be done from a teacher-directed perspective through a lesson on text or through “Character Education” periods where issues such as bullying and self-esteem were discussed. Emily stated a fear that teachers would take over the discussion and once again student voice would be lost due to teachers saying what they thought to be “correct”. “… have them tell us what it means and what the context is, rather than us saying ‘hey, this is what it is’ and trying to steer them.” She emphasised the necessity of valuing student voice. Other teachers echoed that same sentiment saying that teachers needed to take students seriously.

Katelyn said she felt there was not much to learn from the graffiti per se. She reported that the graffiti seen in classrooms had more to do with student engagement in lessons than a wider issue in student lives, inside or out of the school.

4.3.7 Fate
All of the teachers said it was necessary to remove the graffiti at some point. Some indicated a more immediate point if the graffiti were “crude”, “inflammatory”, or “directed”. Others felt that graffiti could be removed yearly. It was emphasized that when graffiti was directed, especially toward students or student groups, it needed to be removed as soon as possible.

Teachers were in agreement that graffiti should be discussed. The interviews indicated that discussion would help to bring student concerns that were not readily addressed to the classroom to be more widely analysed and discussed. Three teachers said that this would provide students who with the forum to have their ideas or concerns addressed.
This topic of discussion brought forth many ideas about how to use graffiti as a part of learning. Teachers spoke of using graffiti walls, spaces on desk, using twitter and technology, and also of using graffiti as the medium for discussions or the deconstruction of ideas and texts.

Teachers felt that the analysis of graffiti could help address climate issues. They felt that many incidents of graffiti indicated that there were climate issues and so dealing with the graffiti would help to improve the climate of the classroom and the school. “if graffiti is targeting, mean, or oppressive, then you’ve got some serious issues in your school that are not about the graffiti. You’ve got some climate issues and you need to be addressing those.” The teacher who raised concerns about teachers being “control freaks” who wanted to guide all aspects of student behaviour, and the one who spoke of teachers taking over the discussion thereby condemning students to be without a voice shared a common fear that once again students would be left out of the discussion. “It would be difficult to use graffiti in schools for learning purposes because teachers are control freaks by nature and it would mean relinquishing a good amount of control, a significant amount of control.”

All the teachers indicated that thinking about graffiti would be a helpful means for reflecting on teacher practice, lesson engagement and implementation, the climate of the school and issues that are of concern to students. Emily said after the interview was mostly done that she had wished she’d paid more attention to what was being said in the graffiti rather than just looking at it as thought it was vandalism. Teachers said that in some way, the graffiti around the school was an impetus to reflection upon their role and the role of others in the school.

Teri said that the student wrote “fuck you” because he had no other means to get his message across to the administration. The teacher felt that the student was powerless to communicate and therefore opted for a medium that would make his voice heard. Sarah echoed the same sentiment when she reported seeing the words “fuck you” carved into a desk. She reported that the graffiti “...was an expression of a child’s rage that he wasn’t allowed to express toward the institution probably in general.”
5.1 Introduction to the Chapter

In this chapter I intend to examine my findings and ask specific questions that arise out of the themes presented by the participants. I will discuss the findings within the theoretical framework (symbolic violence and graffiti in educational institutions) and within the scope of the conceptual framework (critical pedagogy). The overarching question that informs this study is how the findings inform an understanding of what students and teachers think of graffiti in schools.

Students and teachers both noted that instances of graffiti could be both helpful and hurtful. It is important to mention that there is a balance toward examining thoughts of graffiti. Rather than viewing the graffiti from a romantic or deficit view, i.e. that graffiti is “good” or “bad”, graffiti is viewed as simply a physical marking. The emphasis for this thesis is what can students and teachers do with the graffiti that happens in schools.

5.1.1 Role of Critical Pedagogy

Critical Pedagogy is the framework in which I view this study. I find it important to use a critical stance to understand this topic because it is within the political and historical contexts that we can understand issues of student voice, democracy, and student engagement in a robust way. To not examine the various elements and systems that are specifically chosen to keep a certain method of operation in tact, one that privileges some at the expense of others, would be neglectful and reproduce the same stories and systems I am challenging.

I have organized this chapter into three sections. The first is to critique the findings against the conceptual framework (critical pedagogy). The second section addresses the issues of symbolic violence and graffiti and how they can intersect with critical pedagogy. The third is a host of questions that arise through the interviews from participants based on both the conceptual and
theoretical frameworks. The question is not if, but rather how to democratise educative spaces so that they become critical and emancipatory.

5.2 Part 1

The purpose of this section is to critique the research findings against a framework of critical pedagogy. As a conceptual lens, critical pedagogy will help to gauge the need for greater democratisation of schools. This part will play close attention to:

i) what students and teachers think of graffiti
ii) what students and teachers think should be done with graffiti
iii) what the findings tell us about systems, democracy, engagement, and hegemony

The structure of chapters and sections is flexible. I have chosen to structure this section as I have in order to help with the clarity and facilitate the understanding of the findings and how they relate to my conceptual framework. Because two groups of participants were interviewed, it was necessary to section the ideas off clearly.

There can, however, be some detractions to structuring my ideas this way. It can lead to an over simplification of ideas if various elements are not scrutinized. For example, I have mentioned before and will mention here again that a different set of participants may have provided different data. What would a greater racialized population of participants say? How would teachers and students from a lower socio economic background answer? Would a mix of people with different sexual orientations yield different results? It is important to recognize that there are many factors and that this small sample of participants cannot speak for the whole.

It is worth noting that student and teacher-thoughts about graffiti are intimately linked as teachers are often the main platform that informs students through what information they present, how that information is presented, and how to think about ideas and concepts. They
are intertwined in how they approach schooling; however, for clarity, I have set them apart and first discuss student responses and then teacher responses.

5.3 Discussion of Student Findings: What Do Students Think of Graffiti?

The students interviewed tended not to think much of the graffiti they had seen. A few said that they paid little attention to it. Julia continually mentioned that she felt much of the graffiti written was to seek attention. Most students found that the graffiti they had seen was pointless, although some of it, such as the graffiti used to make messages that they agreed with like “save the environment” were “good” and had a point and was therefore worth being written.

Nwoye, Rodriguez & Claire, and Green all indicated that graffiti was written in educational institutions due to a lack of voice within the social and political arenas in schools (1993, 1999, 2003). Those who wrote graffiti often felt they had no other channels to voice their concerns. Specifically in the case of the university women who were naming the abusive men they had dated, it is reported that the women did go through the “proper” channels for reporting incidents of violence. However, little was done and with no result (Rodriguez & Claire, 1999).

If graffiti is written because students have no voice, and the students I interviewed considered graffiti pointless or unnoticeable, then perhaps it is an indicator that these students feel they have a voice in school and therefore graffiti does not resonate with them as a means of self expression, resistance, or domination.

The graffiti that was deemed pointless often had to do with love represented by an encircling heart and initials \((x + y)\), or it was sexually oriented material. I find it interesting that the students labelled some graffiti as “pointless” because it did not resonate with them. Julia mentioned seeing graffiti about mental health and identified that as well as homophobia as issues that were important because they were indicators of need. She felt that writing it in the
washroom a useless expenditure because it would not bring the needed help from an adult because not many adults beyond the custodial staff went into the washrooms.

The ‘pointlessness’ of the encircling heart graffiti could, in fact, represent a ‘coming out’ and therefore be extremely important. The decision to announce a change in sexuality would be considered a very important stage in a person’s life. Perhaps writing it anonymously in the washroom was the safest place to begin the message. Although my scenario is constructed, it holds firmly to the idea that what one may find seemingly pointless may be very important to another. The subtext and context are of vital importance to understanding the meaning that is trying to be portrayed (Barthes, 1957).

Alex mentioned that he felt at times that students wanted to say something but could not due to social pressure (being a snitch). He reported that if there was an anonymous space for people to write messages, perhaps they could post what they needed to say, without retribution, and that the administration could then deal with the situation appropriately. Alex commented on a lack of voice from within the social group. This has implications for both students and administration. For students it is an indicator that student voice is being stilled to protect or dominate others. For administration, the implication is that students need support and are not getting it in effective ways. This confirms what the literature has said about the stifling of student voice.

5.4 Discussion of Teacher Findings: What do Teachers think of Graffiti?
Teachers found graffiti to be cowardly, offensive, annoying, entertaining, and a non-issue. However, all teachers mentioned during the interviews that when they found or caught students writing graffiti in their classes they were all shocked or had some “negative” response to the vandalism. Some seemed to take it as a personal offense that the students were defacing school property.
Teachers surmised that students wrote because of boredom (presumably boredom in the classroom with the subject matter or because of lesson delivery). Teachers also seemed to think that students wrote graffiti to negate or undermine others. Sarah and Teri said that the graffiti they saw were rages against the institution or messages to power. Both of them saw the words “fuck you” written on or carved in school property. The graffiti that Teri saw was directed at the principal whereas the carved “fuck you” was not explicitly directed. Both teachers tried to make some sense of why the students would write that. Sarah recognized that her interpretation was a “construction” and that it could have been anyone in the school and not the disenfranchised population like she initially thought. Teri took the comment at face value and believed that the student was telling the principal to “fuck off” because of something that had happened earlier between the principal and the student.

In these instances the issues of surveillance, offence, and messages arise. Rodriguez and Clair say that graffiti is often written in washrooms because it is a private space and it can therefore be anonymous (1993). Nwoye indicates that the frustration due to lack of voice or effective modes of communication between administration and students can result in graffiti and sometimes graffiti that is shocking or offensive (1999). Nwoye’s interpretation is validated by Teri and Sarah’s interpretation of why students wrote “fuck you” in the school.

The teachers taking offense to the graffiti directly addresses the graffiti that was written but does not take into account the symbolically violent systems that affect students every day to the point where they write graffiti. The violence can be an un-engaging curriculum or a violation of rights. Regardless of the reason, graffiti was seen to be a response to something external and therefore not borne out of a student’s desire to deface property without provocation.

A critical pedagogy that invokes democratic systems within the school and allows for the dismantling of traditional forms of power and oppression within schools could then help students deal with the disenfranchisement pointed to by both the literature and the
participants in interviews. This pedagogy relates to what Nietzsche termed “new principles of evaluation” where the term evaluation is taken to mean concepts to design a new educative process (Freire, 1998). As both a philosophical and epistemological framework, critical pedagogy addresses the underlying concerns that students, and perhaps teachers and administration have in dealing with the systemic and symbolic violence of schooling.

5.5 What Students Think Should Be Done With Graffiti

Most students did not think much could be learned from graffiti. They thought that the artistic side of graffiti was the most value that could be gleaned from graffiti in schools.

Julia felt that graffiti could be an indicator of school climate and health concerns. By examining graffiti, students and school staff could gain a greater understanding of what people thought of the school and how it was being run or what programs needed to be instituted that students were afraid to request in person. Julia felt that before graffiti was removed, there were elements that could give insight into what was not being said in the hallways or classrooms, for whatever reason.

Julia and Alex have recognized that the construction of space to allow student voices to be heard is important. Creating democratic spaces where teachers and administration become more of an authority and less authoritarian could allow for adults to advocate for students and inevitably help students advocate for themselves. Issues of school climate, mental health, or personal concerns will not be addressed in a meaningful way if students, teachers, and administration don’t start reorganizing how hierarchy in schools work. At no time does critical democracy advocate for a laissez-faire approach to schooling. Rather schooling is open, critical, and reflective, allowing students to engage but still be guided by teachers.

All students reported that graffiti should be erased. Some recognized that the messages need to be engaged with before being removed.
5.6 What Teachers Think Should Be Done With Graffiti

All teachers recognized that there was some to much validity in using Graffiti to inform classroom practice and the engagement of students in the class. Teachers spoke about specific skills like using graffiti in schools to address the board specific manifestation of Ontario Ministry of Education character based teaching frameworks (noting that different boards will address Character Education differently, however, it is rooted in the Ministry Guidelines for Character Development). Teachers spoke about the need to hear student voices. Emily specifically mentioned the interpretation and discussion of graffiti. It seemed as though she intended for the “decriminalization” of graffiti so that students could interpret the graffiti that was written and express themselves in safe spaces regarding how they feel about their experiences inside and outside of school.

Nadia mentioned that graffiti in her class was an indicator to her about how engaging lessons were for her students. If it was that incidents of graffiti were increased during a certain class or in certain textbooks, then she considered it an indicator that she needed to plan differently for the students.

The teachers in these two instances indicate an inclination towards a critical pedagogical process. Teachers seemed to be indicating the need for the restructuring of student surveillance and control in a way that fosters communal engagement to discuss the systems that block or make difficult the emancipation of students and teachers through a personally relevant and engaged curriculum. They are noticing that critical reflection and action, or praxis as Freire uses the word, allows the teachers create more engagement and interest from students in class.

5.7 What the Findings Tell us about Democracy, Engagement, and Hegemony from both Students and Teacher Interviews

Most of the students and teachers reacted unfavourably to graffiti. With views ranging from it being an offence to an annoyance to pointlessness, students and teachers both found graffiti to
be, for the most part, an unworthy use of time. However, in both the student and teacher groups there were those who said that at times, graffiti was positive. Students spoke about how graffiti that related to positive themes such as help and support were worthwhile forms of graffiti.

There was a direct connection between the graffiti the students deemed pointless and the students identifying it as a waste of time, and a direct connection between the graffiti the students deemed purposeful and the students identifying and relating to issues they seemed to feel strongly about. Students seemed to make less meaning to graffiti that they had no frame of reference for more meaning from the graffiti when the content of the message was within their frame of interest. At this point, I would put forward that all graffiti is purposeful in that it has meaning, regardless of our ability to understand the meaning.

All of the teachers and some of the students said that graffiti correlated with student engagement. When students were not engaged in the class or felt disconnected from the school, for whatever reason, they wrote graffiti. Students and teachers also mentioned that graffiti was a reflection of the climate of the school.

I do not wish to make a case that increasing student engagement or tending to the school climate will decrease graffiti. The purpose of this thesis is not to find ways to reduce graffiti. Rather, the purpose of this thesis is to state that creating critical spaces that are democratic in nature and that are infused with critical pedagogy will help students feel more a part of their education, the school, and their own learning. Graffiti may still exist; however, it may be different in nature or scale.

5.8 Part 2
The literature on graffiti indicates that graffiti is often used a means to get messages across that are otherwise silenced. Graffiti can be used as a cry for help and also can be used for seemingly benign messages or ones that attempt to dominate others. Graffiti is another form
of voice. It is used to reproduce or introduce messages to an audience. If it is that voices are silenced due to a lack of agency, or amplified due to an abundance of power, messages in graffiti tell us much about the place in which it is written.

Based on the responses from the students, they seem to have encountered seemingly rather benign graffiti. It could be that symbolic violence and hegemony are strongly in place, conforming middle class students in Ontario schools to the dominant norms. It could be that they are not yet aware that they are being oppressed due to the subtlety of symbolic violence. It could be that students are surrounded by enough neoliberal fatalistic apathy that they don’t feel it is worth rebelling against the systems that oppress them.

It is worth noting that one student brought up the issue of gangs. That same student also brought up knowing that students were being watched by video cameras. That same student brought up issue of suspension and the possibly of being charged with mischief. That student was the only student who identified as “black”. The interview notes that there were things on this student’s mind that were not on the non-black student’s minds. Is this just coincidence or does Alex feel elements of symbolic violence in ways differently from the others?

Knowing that schools are places of symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 1977) then the messages students write will almost always be in relation to that violence. Messages will either support the dominant norm or rebel against it. When students are using graffiti to rebel against dominant norms, they are combating symbolic violence. Symbolic violence seeks to control, survey, and manage populations in such a way that they conform to rules that support the dominant class. It is a form of oppression that prioritizes one way of being over another. Graffiti is often a railing against that. Graffiti is often being used to comment on how students wish situations would change. Graffiti is the vehicle because there are no other avenues to open to hear the voice of the voiceless. Graffiti is the voice to those without one.
If democratic and equitable spaces are sought after, then graffiti will need to be addressed in a way that does not criminalize the writer and allows that voice to be heard. The promise of critical pedagogy is that it will construct spaces of cooperation, understanding, criticality, and emancipation. Student voices must be heard. Graffiti is now that voice. Those voices continue to get painted over and wiped down without any real interrogation of the messages.

Instituting a Curriculum of Life would help to democratise spaces through critically emancipatory pedagogy. A Curriculum of Life seeks to engage students rather than manage them. It endeavours to have students link their real lives to the curriculum they are studying. Pedagogy revolves around disciplined ways of thinking about the words students speak and hear and the world around them. The Curriculum of Life involves students and teachers in the school and community noting the connection and reliance of each on the other. This Curriculum is unapologetically political, as unapologetically political as the world around them is, including the running of the school. Schools cannot and are not seen as “neutral” or “apolitical” (Portelli & Vibert, 2001). Based on Freire’s notion of schooling, the political can never be untangled from the school (Freire 1998).

This curriculum is grounded in the worlds of the students and teachers and connects the larger political contexts of their lives to the classroom. Student lives are seen as the impetus for the imperative for learning. A Curriculum of Life holds at its core a respect for children and their experience. Issues of engagement, oppression, bullying, homophobia, racism, classism, etc. are all part of the process of teaching. It is not a separate month or celebration but the fabric of the classroom learning. Portelli and Vibert (2001) quote Maxine Greene who clearly articulated the essence of the Curriculum of Life.

We need...spaces for expression, spaces for freedom, yes, and a public space. By that I mean, as Hannah Arendt did, a space where living persons can come together in speech and action, each one free to articulate a distinctive perspective... It must be a space of dialogue, a space where a web
of relationships can be woven, and where a common world can be brought into being and continually renewed.

(P.15)

It is this critical space that graffiti is calling out for. It is a space where students are engaged and feel heard with an authentic ear. A Curriculum of Life seeks to address the hegemony and symbolic violence of schooling by balancing both freedom and authority and meeting students from an honest place of respect and trust. It is with this pedagogy that student voice can be heard and the violence that causes graffiti can be addressed.

5.9 Part 3
Questions arose after studying the transcripts of the interviews. Some of these questions are listed below:

- How do we help students navigate through the system of education?
- How do we deal with “offensive” exchanges?
- How do we invite those who don’t feel they have a voice to respond?
- How do power, freedom, and authority come into play with graffiti?
- Should we be looking for graffiti to get an idea of more authentic student thought?
- How do we give students authentic, “decriminalized” spaces to voice opinions? Can we do this? Do internet surveys work?
- Do students need private spaces to write in? (in regards to students writing in their desks)
• Should we interpret student writing/graffiti? Who protects those who wrote the graffiti?

• Where can children authentically communicate thoughts, ideas and frustrations about the mandated curriculum, the school, or issues outside of the curriculum and the school?

These questions have implications for how critical pedagogy, an example of which is A Curriculum of Life, would engage with students and teachers around issues of students, engagement, learning about life from the lives of students, and how to engage democracy in learning. It requires teachers to relinquish control and allow the social and political realities of their lives to permeate student learning.

Democratising spaces with a robust critical pedagogy can improve student engagement and make schooling more meaningful, critical, and relevant to students and student learning, as evidenced in schools that have employed a Curriculum of Life. Schooling is by its nature symbolically violent. Graffiti is a means for students to react to that violence. By addressing the resistance to violence or illuminating the subtle and obvious forms of domination that also express themselves through graffiti, schools begin to engage with the voicelessness that students experience. This type of engagement builds the criticality that the present Ontario Curriculum espouses to teach but falls short of doing so because the content is neither relevant nor engaging. Through a lack or abundance, graffiti addresses symbolic violence. A critical pedagogy addresses both.
Chapter 6
Conclusion

6.1 Introduction to the Chapter
In this chapter I outline an overview of the study, respond to the research question and summarize the findings. I restate my thesis and state the significance of the research findings. At the end of this chapter I discuss my recommendations and make suggestions for areas of future research.

6.2 Synopsis of Study
This study was designed to look at teacher and student attitudes and thoughts toward graffiti in schools. The aim of the study was to consider the implications of the findings in regard to what teachers and students thought about graffiti in schools. I conducted research through semi-structured interviews with five teachers and five students in Ontario Elementary Schools. The research reported was written in light of the literature review (Chapter 2) on Graffiti in Educational Institutions and Symbolic Violence, and the Conceptual framework (Chapter 3) of critical pedagogy. I reported on methodology using both a snowball sampling method to acquire participants and conducted semi-structured interviews once all the participants were found. I analysed the transcripts and from that analysis I was able to find themes to present and discuss.

The literature shaped my belief that the participants would have had much more resistance and indignation toward power systems. I recognize that the literature mostly spoke of graffiti in university educational institutions. However, I had thought that some of the same resentments would have been more evident in these interviews. After the interviews I considered how the findings may have looked different had more disenfranchised participants, both students and teachers, been interviewed (age, class, race, sexuality, disenfranchisement, consciousness towards systems of oppression etc.) At the end of this study, more questions arose about the
pervasiveness of symbolic violence in schools and the many ways an emancipatory curriculum could be used in schools to help children think critically, civically, and communally.

6.3 Responding to Research questions and Summary of Key Findings
The guiding research question to this study was “what do teachers and students think of graffiti written in schools”

The subsidiary questions were:

i) For what reasons do students and teachers think people write graffiti in schools?
ii) What do students and teachers think about the use of graffiti in schools for educational purposes?
iii) What do students and teachers think we should do with the graffiti that appears in schools?

Student Conceptions of Graffiti in Schools
The major themes that students brought up in the interviews were:

i) Location
ii) Type
iii) Opinion
iv) Form
v) Educative Value
vi) Fate

Of the comments made in the interviews, perhaps the one that resonated with me the most was the comment about the pointlessness of graffiti. It seems as though we imbibe, through our various curricula, that if we don’t understand it, it must not have a point or worth. We seem to be willing to cast off ideas we do not understand and for which we lack the back story. It may very well be that some students are just writing for the sake of writing. Although that
reason may not have as robust an intention as activism or emancipatory graffiti, it still carries meaning.

Teacher Conceptions of Graffiti in Schools

The major themes that arose in the teacher section of the findings chapter were:

i) Place
ii) Type
iii) Making Meaning
iv) Concerns
v) Indication
vi) Educative Value
vii) Fate

Teachers seemed to think that graffiti was an offence when done in their classes however, they seemed to understand that it was in direct relation to the climate of their classrooms or the climate of the schools. Teachers’ attitudes toward graffiti ranged from annoyed to amused to no opinion. The concern around how public property was being used came up with a few teachers raising the question of what property is private, public, and communal. It also raised questions about spaces students have or don’t have to write their feelings down in a public, what forums students had to raise concerns and be genuinely heard, and if graffiti should be interpreted and if so who should interpret the text.

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4 I still have a difficult time with this point. I recognize that in a post-structural world all texts carry meaning; however, for me, texts which I do not understand and have considered “pointless” were the tagging commonly seen in urban and suburban areas. Because I cannot understand the stylistic script and do not see the meaning behind writing a code-name or nick-name, I have found it to have little to no meaning and have considered it narcissistic. After this study, I look at tagging differently. I still do not like it however I am more inclined to find out more and perhaps consider the nuances of it before labelling it a blight on public space. I do recognize that tagging is not within the scope of this study however, to be a reflective practitioner I though it important to situate myself and recognize my own biases and leanings.
Intersection of Student and Teacher Conceptions of Graffiti in Schools and Critical Pedagogy

The students that were interviewed reported that for the most part, graffiti was not a worthwhile activity. They considered it pointless, a waste of time, or the wrong type of communication for getting needs met. The teachers that were interviewed reported that while they did see how graffiti could inform them about climate in the school or classroom, they did not particularly appreciate the graffiti that they saw in their classrooms because the graffiti either used offensive language or they were vandalizing the building.

The findings on graffiti show that there are not many critical spaces in schools and that even when teachers are open to reflecting critically about graffiti written, the follow through for creating democratic and critical spaces via something as “distasteful” as graffiti was not considered. This being the case, a few teachers commented at the end of the interviews that they had not considered graffiti as a tool for reflection on their practice or what students were experiencing, and thought that they would now look at graffiti differently and consider how other teachers interacted with this topic.

On the whole, student and teacher comments seemed to be a result of a symbolically violent system. It is understandable that the teachers’ and students’ comment were of this nature, noting the pervasive and invisible nature of symbolic violence and how it permeates much of our conception of “culture” and “proper values”. Symbolically violent systems do not elicit critique, illumination of the forms of oppression, or dissent. That is why there is such a focus on issues of control and surveillance, i.e. to stop or ostracize thought and ideas that fall outside of the dominant norm (Morgan & Bjorkert, 2006).

The teachers and students seemed receptive to having spaces be more critical and open. Initially, however, none of the participants seemed to have considered that graffiti could be a medium to open spaces of criticality. After the interviews, all teachers and some students thought that graffiti may need to be examined through a different lens.
Implications for students, teachers, and schools

Issues of climate in schools and classrooms which include student engagement in classrooms, bullying, openness to mental health challenges, and character education continue to be a focus for schools (Promoting A Positive School Climate: A Resource For Schools, 2013). The issue that students seem to have, through my informal conversations in classrooms and in the hallways, are that although there is emphasis put on character education and making classrooms more relevant, the students do not see or feel that the initiatives are reaching them in any significant way. Perhaps a lack of student engagement is a result of teachers “missing the point” with the types of lessons they are teaching and, as seen in the teacher interviews, results in the defacing of school books and desks.

It seems, as explored through the examples of graffiti that involved the word fuck, that there is a boiling point where students will create a voice through another medium if they are silenced. As teachers, when we create safe spaces in classrooms, as long the students are speaking, we know that it is still possible to help them, advocate for them, support them in advocating for themselves or others, or just listen to them. When we foster spaces of violence, we loose that connection to support students.

We know that schools can be violent places. Some of the graffiti we see directly proves that. The co-construction of pedagogically critical spaces brings into schools some of that safety. It recognizes the student as an agent, a subject that is active rather than an object that is acted upon, and from that perspective, allows for teaching and learning to be a symbiotic and flexible relationship. Sometimes teachers and students will change places and the student will teach and the teacher will learn. It is imperative for students to feel as though they have a stake and claim in their education.

Changing attitudes of teachers towards critical pedagogy specifically toward issues of freedom and authority would be important in the creation of critical spaces in schools. If many teachers recognized the extent to which they are “control freaks” as Nadia said, then perhaps they
would be able to relinquish and share some control so as to have students feel more engaged in a relevant curriculum.

6.4 Advancement of Thesis

Domination and hegemony dictate the lens with which we see situations. Without a consciousness that critically questions the pervasiveness of domination and hegemony, dominant norms continue to prevail, privileging some at the expense of others. When we recognize that we unconsciously and consciously submit to systems that oppress us, we are able to have the lucidity to contemplate the arbitrary nature of the culture we live in and recognize that we can construct another way of being.

People will use their voices in different ways to react to the violence they experience through oppressive paradigms. Those who are able may use speech. Those who are not able may be required to anonymously write graffiti in order to get their messages of frustration heard, hopefully by those who dominate systems, and hope that those who can will change systems that oppress.

Graffiti is one such way for messages to be presented. By taking student graffiti seriously and engaging with it in substantive and critical ways that neither romanticize nor criminalize the writing, some of the oppression students feel in schools may begin to be addressed. Addressing such oppression has shown to increase student engagement, improve student and school dialogue, and have school and community begin to work as a civic team rather than as individualized and separated spaces. Portelli and Vibert give such an example in the Curriculum of Life. Using critical pedagogy, A Curriculum of Life respects student experiences, addresses the worlds that students live in, makes learning more relevant by taking into account the larger political and social contexts of their lives, and uses critical learning to help students think through important questions and concerns they have in life (2001).
6.5 Significance

This thesis is important because it highlights the violent nature of schools through both literature and the first hand accounts of students and teachers in a Canadian context. After one of the teacher interviews, when speaking about the scope of this thesis, the teacher mentioned that she disagreed that schools were violent. She felt that schools sometimes had violence in them but on the whole students came to school to be cared for by supportive adults. I do not suppose that teachers come to school with the malicious intention to harm students. However, the lack of critical reflection by teachers, the way teachers use authoritarian tactics to intimidate and control student behaviour, and how teachers will manage students into seeing ideas from only the dominant lens becomes a violence that is enacted by teachers upon students. I believe that most teachers have noble intentions. Unfortunately those intentions can turn to violence when they are not critically interrogated.

The reminder, once again, that schools are constructed in certain ways for certain purposes needs to be expressed so that a shift can occur and more open spaces can be constructed. The invisibility of symbolic violence, through how we submit to dominant norms, common sense ideas, and being resolved to “the way things are” without question, reproduces norms that oppress. Those whom systems oppress are the very ones teachers claim to come to school to support and protect. The time is past due that more voices in schools are acknowledged.

Creating critical spaces in education is necessary. Bringing up conversations that questions “culture” is one way. It is through reflection, dialogue, and action that systems can change and become more emancipatory. Paulo Freire said “Change is difficult, but possible” (Freire, 1998, p. 56). It is true. The difficulty is in challenging dominant norms, reconstructing how we see ourselves as teachers, opening up spaces of cooperation between teachers and students, and continually reflecting on what we are doing in classrooms and how it impacts students. By engaging with graffiti through a critical pedagogical lens, there is a unique possibility of enacting relevant student engagement in schools.
Cautionary Note

Some of the issues that can arise from structuring the ideas in the way that I have in this thesis is that it can lead to an oversimplification of the problem. As stated, critical pedagogy is not a panacea. It is one element of many that needs to be introduced to help support a more democratic education system.

By looking only at the data collected, one could infer that there really are no significant issues in schools because the participants did not overtly say they felt oppressed, wrote graffiti, or felt that school systems needed to be changed. The reasons students responded the way they did could be for a number of reasons including their own societal location, upbringing, culture and even perhaps awareness that systemic control has been enacted upon them thereby making them unaware of their suppression. It could also be that they have not had enough life experiences to conceive of alternative ways of approaching life. Again, a different set of participants may have yielded different results.

6.6 Recommendations and Areas for Future Research

Students and teachers need to engage in ideas that may initially make them uncomfortable

Scepticism and reflection can allow teachers and students to be conscious of what messages they are asked or being told to follow. Through a genuine engagement of ideas and honestly considering in whose interest rules and modalities are supporting, students and teachers can become more conscious of what they are learning and teaching and how it is they would like to engage with the information. To discuss issues of symbolic violence with colleagues has made feel as though I seem, at times, like a Marxist lunatic that is paranoid that “the man” is coming to get us. However, the more we engage in discussions of how to critically analyse situations in a robust way and questions why systems and apparatus are set up in the way they are, we further the conversations that will allow our schools to become more critically engaging. This
however, also includes being aware of our own cognitive dissonance and to never think that we have the “right” way to do something. We must all realize that we are always “unfinished”.

**Professional development needs to be sought outside of board-sanctioned PD**
Audrey Lorde wrote and essay entitled “The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle The Master’s House” (1994). The theme of the title indicates that to change systems, one must find ways, methods, and apparatus outside of the dominant norm to alleviate the violence enacted on those working inside of “the system”. In order for teachers to understand how to navigate through the dominant system of education, rather being inside and unaware that there is a system in place at all, one needs to visit resources outside of Ministry of Education funded or supported professional development. To gain a critical awareness to be able to reflect on oneself as a practitioner, teachers must hear voices of dissent outside of the dominant norm. To neglect to seek new ideas will lead to the reproduction of systems that are already in place.

**Spaces need to be opened and students need to be allowed to interact authentically in those spaces**
Students need authentic spaces in which they can openly discuss issues and challenges within the school and the schooling system, openly discuss how they are interacting with their education, the world, and their communities, and openly challenge the norms we place as truths in the form of culture. It is my belief that if students were heard, they may not write “fuck you” to the principal of the school. They may write it in regard to some other aspect of their life however, if students recognize that they have a safe environment to say what they think and which exists within a critical framework, ideas are discussed, the anger towards the violence of schooling may shift and students may feel more engaged.

**Teachers need to reconsider conceptions of freedom and authority**
In order to construct a space that is based on critical pedagogy, teachers would need to reconsider how they approach freedom and authority in education. Freire talks about this in Pedagogy of Freedom where he outlines aspects of respect, discipline, and the limits that are
set by both teacher and student. By outlining the affects of “authoritarianism” and “unbridled freedom”, Freire outlines the framework for a critical pedagogy that allows student voice to be heard and encourages dialogue to be an essential component of the school and classroom. A Curriculum of Life seeks to engage students rather than manage them (Portelli & Vibert, 2001). This engagement comes from a restructuring of how teachers consider their roles in classrooms and changes them from teaching static objects to teaching active subjects.

Future Research

**Interview participants that live in areas where graffiti is considered the norm**

To extend this research, it would be interesting to consider how graffiti is considered by students and teachers who live in areas where graffiti is considered a part of culture. The impetus for this study started in Bologna, Italy, where graffiti was everywhere in the general university precinct. It mostly comprised short, pithy statements that were highly political or amusing. Graffiti seemed to be a part of life. This made me wonder. How do people here discuss graffiti since it is a part of their culture? Is there a stigma against the use of public spaces to promote messages? It would also be interesting to inquire how people in Bologna consider issues of domination and symbolic violence. Is hegemony as silent and invisible when it is called out openly in a public forum?

**Interview administrators**

Interviewing administrators of schools would also give a different perspective as to how graffiti is conceived of in schools. Noting that for the most part administrators are involved in the running of the school and disciplining students, how do they understand the student need to write graffiti? How do they choose which graffiti to cover up shortly after it is noticed and what to cover after it has been on or in the school for a long time? Understanding the thoughts of administrators would contribute to developing an understanding of what elements of hegemony are present in the school and which dominant norms are emphasized over others. It would also indicate the openness to a critical pedagogy of the school and staff.
Interview more participants with more questions regarding how they engage in schools

The more voices that are heard, the more information is available for consideration. Increasing the number of participants in the study would provide more information about how students engage with schools. To manage a larger number of participants, both surveys and interviews might need to be employed so to make the study more manageable. The collection of data and analysis of hundreds of interviews and surveys would provide a great deal of information regarding how students perceive schooling, engagement, and student-teacher dynamics.

6.7 Closing Comments

The process of writing this thesis has re-emphasised my need to submerge myself in a pedagogy that seeks to engage students. During the course work section of my Master’s thesis, I was introduced to a series of concepts and ideas based around critical pedagogy. It was, however, through the writing of this thesis that I more fully understood these ideas and the concept of symbolic violence.

My principal recently asked me who my education role model was. I responded “Paulo Freire”. Freire’s work in education has helped me to see myself for who I am, notice where it is that I need to go, and feel comfortable with knowing that I will never get there because I am “unfinished”. There is a certain ease that comes with giving up the thought that there is final destination. That does not mean I feel comfortable to let come what may; it does, however, allow me to recognize that I am always changing, and that I, too, am part of the ever-changing process called culture.

Being a student of critical pedagogy, I am more aware of how the political and historical contexts play upon the decisions I make and the decisions that are made for me. As an academic, I recognize the role that I play in helping to decolonize spaces or re-colonize them
based on how I interact with my study participants, my colleagues, and the ideas that are presented to me and my writing. As Patai stated, research can be oppressive in how we interpret our study participants. This does not mean we stop conducting research; it means we continue with the conscious awareness that the work we are doing has the potential to reproduce dominant norms (2011).

The issues concerning education within a neoliberal paradigm are many. The issues of competition over cooperation and the use of one-sided constructed standards of education that do not take into consideration the historical and societal contexts of students are infused in our curriculum and Ministry documents. It is with a critical eye that teachers and students need to deconstruct the messages, expose them, and teach around them. Like Don Lorenzo Milani teaches students to critique the systems and laws that oppressed the students at the school in Barbiana and their families, we, too, must teach ourselves and students to critique unjust systems that privilege some at the expense of others. This must not be a surface endeavour but one that seeks to get to the heart of issues that oppress. Teaching is indeed a noble discipline. That nobility, however, only comes from helping others. When we reproduce hegemonic norms, we become more like cogs than the noble teacher. The emphasis of our teaching, in order for it to be noble, needs to be centred around student engagement and spaces that can challenge dominant norms. It is difficult, but it is possible.
References


Appendix A

Interview Guide
Principal Investigator:
Naushaad Suliman

Department of Curriculum, Teaching, and Learning OISE/University of Toronto
naushaad.suliman@utoronto.ca

Semi-Structured Interview Protocol
The interview questions relate to graffiti you have seen in schools and your ideas about the graffiti you have seen in schools and your thoughts about school graffiti in general.

Please do not hesitate to tell me if you are not comfortable answering any of the following questions or if they are not relevant to you; we will move on to the following question. I would like to remind you that your responses will not be evaluated, and that neither your name or any information that would compromise the anonymity of your participation will be included in this study.

As per the consent form that you signed, I will be audio-recording this interview through the use of a digital recorder. If at any time you would like me to turn off the recorder, please do not hesitate to let me know.

Do you have any questions before I begin?

Questions for Teachers and Students (both middle school and post secondary)

1. Have you ever seen graffiti? Where did you see it?
2. Do you remember any graffiti? If yes, can you give some examples?
3. What do you think about graffiti?
4. Have you seen graffiti in schools? What was it about? Where did you see it?
5. What do you think about the graffiti you saw?
6. Do you think we have something to learn from graffiti? Why or why not?
7. Do you think graffiti could be used in schools for learning purposes? How do you think that could happen?
8. What should we do about graffiti in schools?
9. Are there any other comments you would like to make about graffiti in schools?
Appendix B

Dear Teacher,

My name is Naushaad Suliman and I am a Masters student studying at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto (OISE/UT). My thesis research is in the area of graffiti in schools, and is focused on the ways teachers and students interact with graffiti they see written in and around schools. This study will be conducted under the supervision of Dr. John Portelli. I am writing to request your permission to participate in a short interview. The interview will consist of 5-7 questions and take approximately 20 minutes to complete. The questions asked in the interview are attached for your perusal.

This study has been approved by all necessary Ethical Research Boards. I have attached the University of Toronto Ethical Approval, for your reference. Participants can contact the Office of Research Ethics at ethics.review@utoronto.ca or (416) 946-3273 if you have questions about your rights as a participant. You as the participant may keep a copy of this information letter for your own reference. Participation in this study will remain confidential, and at no point are you asked for your name or the name of your school or school board. Participation in the study is voluntary and participants may refuse to participate or withdraw at any time without consequences and may decline to answer any question.

The essence of the study is to look at student and teacher views on graffiti in schools. After data is collected and analyzed some conclusions will be drawn and suggestions given based on the findings. These suggestions could be applied to various strategies regarding school climate, student success, bullying initiatives, and/or how teachers engage with their own pedagogy. In order to gather accurate responses, the interviews will be voice recorded. All digital recordings and field notes will be destroyed within five years following the completion of the study. Only the researcher and supervisor will have access to the raw data, audio files, and transcripts. There are no foreseeable risks in this project.

Throughout the research process, and following the submission of the thesis to the University of Toronto, I will be actively seeking opportunities to publish portions or all of the dissertation research as well as present this data and my study findings at Canadian and International educational research conferences. Your identity will remain confidential in each of these publications and presentations and your pseudonym will be consistently used when describing your contributions. To further ensure your anonymity, you may wish not to discuss your participation in this study with others.

Please sign this letter below, and also print your full name, if you consent to participate in this interview. Below this, please indicate whether or not you give your permission for this interview to be digitally audio recorded and transcribed. Finally, please indicate whether you would like to request a copy of a summary of the research findings and include your contact...
information. In that case, please ensure that you provide me with your email address so that I can email you the link to the electronic version of the completed dissertation.

I would be sincerely grateful if you would be willing to participate in this study. Please retain a copy of this consent form for your records.

Should you have any questions about the study that you would prefer to discuss before agreeing to participate, I would be very happy to arrange a time to call you.

With sincere gratitude for your time and participation,

Naushaad Suliman

Naushaad Suliman,  
Masters Student OISE/University of Toronto  
252 Bloor Street West  
Toronto, ON M5S 1V6  
ausahaadsuliman@utoronto.ca

Dr. John Portelli, Professor OISE/University of Toronto  
252 Bloor Street West  
M5S 1V6  
john.portelli@utoronto.ca
Participant Signature & Contact Information
I have read and understand the above information. I understand that my participation in this research project involves my consenting to one twenty minute interview. I understand that I am free to choose not to answer any particular question and to withdraw from this research project without negative consequences.

Name of Participant
__________________________________
(Please Print)
Signature ______________________________________Date _______________

I hereby give my permission for the interview to which I am herein consenting to be digitally audio-recorded and transcribed (if yes, please sign below)
__________________________________

I would like to request that a copy of the summary of the research findings be sent to me (please sign if yes)
__________________________________.

These can be sent to either of the following:
Email address (Please provide to receive link to electronic dissertation):
__________________________________

OR

Mailing Address:
__________________________________
__________________________________
__________________________________
__________________________________
Appendix C

Dear Parent/Guardian,

My name is Naushaad Suliman and I am a Masters student studying at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto (OISE/UT). My thesis research is in the area of graffiti in schools, and is focused on the ways teachers and students interact with graffiti they see written in and around schools. I am writing to request your permission to have your child complete a short on-line survey questionnaire. The survey consists of 10 questions and will take students approximately 10-15 minutes to complete. The survey and the study have been approved by all necessary Ethical Research Boards. I have attached the University of Toronto Ethical Approval, for your reference. Student’s participation in this study will remain confidential, and at no point are they asked for their name or the name of their school boards or schools.

The purpose of this study is to look ways that teachers and students engage in discussion about the world around them. It is my assertion that teachers and students would benefit from a critically democratic approach that takes into considerations many points of view and analyses them according to various belief systems.

I would be sincerely grateful if you would be willing to allow your child the opportunity to participate in this study.

Should you have any questions about the study that you would prefer to discuss before agreeing to having your child participate, I would be very happy to arrange a time to call you.

With sincere thanks for your attention,

Naushaad Suliman

Masters Student
Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning
OISE/University of Toronto
naushaad.suliman@utoronto.ca
Appendix D

Letter of Invitation

May 14, 2013

Title of Study: Critical Conceptions of Graffiti in Schools
Principal Investigator: Naushaad Suliman, M.A. student, Curriculum Teaching and Learning, OISE.
Student Principal Investigator: Naushaad Suliman
Faculty Supervisor: Dr. John Portelli, Professor, Humanities, Social Sciences and Social Justice Education, OISE

I, Naushaad Suliman, M.A. student, from the Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning, OISE, invite you to participate in a research project entitled Critical Conceptions of Graffiti in Schools.

The purpose of this research project is to find out more about teacher and student thoughts or conceptions of graffiti written in schools. Should you choose to participate, you will be asked to participate in a brief interview.

The expected duration of the interview is twenty minutes.

This research should benefit teachers as it may help teachers to consider their pedagogy.

This study has been approved by all necessary Ethical Research Boards. Please contact the Office of Research Ethics at ethics.review@utoronto.ca or (416) 946-3273 if you have questions about your rights as a participant.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me (see below for contact information).

Thank you,

Naushaad Suliman
Masters Student OISE/University of Toronto
252 Bloor Street West
M5S 1V6
naushaad.suliman@utoronto.ca

Dr. John Portelli,
Professor OISE/University of Toronto
252 Bloor Street West
M5S 1V6
john.portelli@utoronto.ca
Appendix E

Dear Parent/Guardian,

My name is Naushaad Suliman and I am a Masters student studying at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto (OISE/UT). My thesis research is in the area of graffiti in schools, and is focused on the ways teachers and students interact with graffiti they see written in and around schools. This study will be conducted under the supervision of Dr. John Portelli. I am writing to request your permission to have your child participate in a short interview. The interview will consist of 5-7 questions and take approximately 20 minutes to complete. The questions asked in the interview are attached for your perusal.

This study has been approved by all necessary Ethical Research Boards. I have attached the University of Toronto Ethical Approval, for your reference. Participants can contact the Office of Research Ethics at ethics.review@utoronto.ca or (416) 946-3273 if you have questions about your child’s rights as a participant. You as the participant’s Parent/Guardian may keep a copy of this information letter for your own reference. Student’s participation in this study will remain confidential, and at no point in the interview are they asked for their name or the name of their school or school board. Participation in the study is voluntary and participants may refuse to participate or withdraw at any time without consequences and may decline to answer any question.

The essence of the study is to look at student and teacher views of graffiti in schools. After data is collected and analyzed some conclusions will be drawn and suggestions given based on the findings. These suggestions, that your child’s input would inform, could be applied to various strategies regarding school climate, student success, bullying initiatives, and/or how students can contribute to an improved school culture. In order to gather accurate student responses, the interviews would be voice recorded. All digital recordings and field notes will be destroyed within five years following the completion of the study. Only the researcher and supervisor will have access to the raw data, audio files, and transcripts.

There are no foreseeable risks in this project. The interviews and answers to questions will be treated with the same guidelines student responses are addressed within the Peel District School Board.

Throughout the research process, and following the submission of the thesis to the University of Toronto, I will be actively seeking opportunities to publish portions or all of the dissertation research as well as present this data and my study findings at Canadian and International educational research conferences. Your child’s identity will remain confidential in each of these publications and presentations and your child’s pseudonym will be consistently used when describing their contributions. To further ensure your child’s anonymity, you may wish not to discuss your child’s participation in this study with others.
Please sign this letter below, and also print your full name, if you consent for your child to participate in this interview. Below this, please indicate whether or not you give your permission for this interview to be digitally audio recorded and transcribed. Finally, please indicate whether you would like to request a copy of a summary of the research findings and include your contact information. In that case, please ensure that you provide me with your email address so that I can email you the link to the electronic version of the completed dissertation.

I would be sincerely grateful if you would be willing to allow your child the opportunity to participate in this study. Please retain a copy of this consent form for your records.

Should you have any questions about the study that you would prefer to discuss before agreeing to having your child participate, I would be very happy to arrange a time to call you.

With sincere gratitude for your time and participation,

Naushaad Suliman

Naushaad Suliman,  
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Dr. John Portelli, Professor OISE/University of Toronto  
252 Bloor Street West  
M5S 1V6  
john.portelli@utoronto.ca
**Participant Signature & Contact Information**

I have read and understand the above information. I understand that my child’s participation in this research project involves my consenting to one twenty minute interview. I understand that they are free to choose not to answer any particular question and to withdraw from this research project without negative consequences.

Name of Parent/Guardian: ________________________________
(Please Print)

Name of Student: ______________________________________
(Please Print)

Signature ____________________________________________ Date _______________

I hereby give my permission for the interview to which I am herein consenting to be digitally audio-recorded and transcribed (if yes, please sign below)

__________________________________

I would like to request that a copy of the summary of the research findings be sent to me (please sign if yes)

__________________________________

These can be sent to either of the following:
Email address (Please provide to receive link to electronic dissertation):

__________________________________

OR

Mailing Address:

__________________________________

__________________________________

__________________________________

__________________________________
Appendix F

Student Letter of Assent

I, __________________________, have had my role in this interview explained to me by my Parent/Guardian and the researcher. I agree to participate in this interview. I know that I have the right not to answer any question and may withdraw from the interview at any time. I agree to be audio recorded and have that audio recording transcribed (written out). It has been explained that this data will be destroyed within five years of the study.

_________________________________  ______________________________________
(Student Name)  (Student Signature)

______________
(Date)