Connecting to Our Learners:

Culturally Relevant and Responsive Pedagogy in the Ontario Social Studies and History Curriculum

By:

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A research paper submitted in conformity with the requirements
For the degree of Master of Teaching
Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto

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“Without knowledge the world is bereft of culture. And so we must be educators and students both.”

- Roberta Bondar
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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to understand strategies and barriers teachers have when implementing culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy within the Ontario social studies and history curriculum to promote student engagement. In particular, the study provides examples of how teachers deliver a culturally relevant and responsive curriculum to accommodate the cultural diversity within their classrooms, and ways in which educators connect the content to all students through critically analyzing what they teach, and how they teach it. Through the study, the teachers also highlight strategies they use to identify culture in their classroom, and how they use this knowledge to ensure learners are reflected in the classroom. Beyond students seeing themselves in the classroom, the study works towards how teachers encourage and engage the students to critically analyze content, and move towards becoming agents of social change.

Key Terms:
culturally relevant pedagogy, culturally responsive pedagogy, CRP, CRRP, Ontario Social Studies Curriculum, cultural diversity, student engagement
Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge and thank everyone who has supported me through the research process. Thank you to my supervisor, Dr. Janet Markus who was constantly supportive and patient with me through the entire process. Thank you to all of the professors in the MT program, particularly David Montemurro for assisting me with my focus of research, and Dr. Arlo Kempf for guiding us through the research process.

My parents have also made this experience possible. They have been incredibly supportive throughout my educational journey, and have always supported my decisions, even when I was unsure of myself. Their hard work and value in education was the foundation for my own passion in education and lifelong learning.

Thank you to my participants who shared their time, insights and experiences with me. I learned so much from you during our time together. You are so passionate about the profession, which is incredibly motivating.

Finally, I am so grateful for my classmates. We have all been through so much together, and there is no other group of amazing individuals that I would have wanted to spend the past two years with. I would like to thank you for the laughter and tears. You made coming to class incredibly enjoyable, and it was from you sharing your experiences, perspective and insight that taught and challenged me so much about education, and about life.
Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION

Introduction to the Research Study

Education is a basic human right provided to all Canadians, and is an institution that provides each learner with a unique experience. Unfortunately, the unique experiences observed are not always equitable due to systemic barriers, which create challenges for teachers when delivering curriculum. Although there exist several policy documents that inform and guide decision-making, teachers are constantly challenged by choice and the implications of their decisions. The complexities of the profession go far beyond the what, or content, and extend to how we teach it, and understanding why it is necessary for students to learn. In short, teaching is political in nature, and to promote equitable practices we must consistently embody the role of a student, and engage in critical reflection. Furthermore, our decisions must consider, and authentically integrate the diversity of all learners within the classroom. These elements of diversity include, but are not limited to students’ culture and identity, which is broadly defined, their learning styles, and their socio-emotional needs. With the influx of technology and the constant imagery perpetuated through the media, a classroom is not the only place where learning takes place. With the responsibility of creating an inclusive environment, and critical classroom practices, I will explore ways that teachers work to promote student engagement, and strategies to make it relevant for all of their learners through the framework of culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy within the History and Social Studies curriculum.
Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study is to investigate current instructional strategies used to implement culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy within the Social Studies and History curriculum in order to promote student engagement and academic success within classrooms throughout the Greater Toronto Area. When students see themselves represented within the classroom materials and content, they “feel connected to the curriculum and, consequently, increasing their motivation and enthusiasm for learning” (Rolheiser et al, 2011, p. 5).

Research Questions

This investigation explores how culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy within the Social Studies and History curriculum can promote student engagement and success within GTA schools. The questions my research seeks to address are:

• How do teachers actively learn about the cultural identities of their students and connect to their experiences in the classroom?
• How well does the Social Studies and History curriculum reflect the broad diversity of student’s backgrounds within GTA classrooms?
• What teaching strategies and/or pedagogies do teachers intentionally apply to meet the cultural diversity of students within the GTA?
• How do teachers acknowledge and facilitate conversations about issues of equity present within the Social Studies / History Curriculum?

The goal of my research is to educate teachers in culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy, to illustrate ways to effectively implement this approach in order to promote student engagement,
and ultimately create a platform within the classroom that students have the ability to be agents of social change through an asset-based, critical inquiry framework.

Background of the Researcher

My interest in this topic initially began during my undergraduate degree at Bishop’s University in Quebec. While at Bishop’s, I was in a concurrent education program and graduated with my Bachelor of Arts, Major in Educational Studies, and minor in History. Through one of my mandatory courses, Multicultural / Social Justice Education, I first learned about the Residential School System. As a student who had always taken History throughout high school, I was appalled that this was my first experience hearing about these horrific incidents that were a part of a culture and nation I identified with. When the professor asked us to raise our hands if we had known about these institutions that assimilated Aboriginal culture, I was even more shocked that only three of the approximate twenty-five students in the room raised their hands. Why was this not taught in schools? Why does this gap in Canadian history education exist? Is it fair that the government chooses what content we learn, and what opportunities do teachers have to infuse social justice content they find significant into their classrooms?

When I started at Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) at University of Toronto, the course Curriculum and Teaching Social Studies was a part of our teacher education program. This course focused on critical inquiry and its place within the classroom, especially through the social studies and history curriculum. We had an opportunity to study the new Ontario Social Studies curriculum, which was to be fully implemented in Ontario schools starting in September 2014. This progressive curriculum focused on developing questions about what was and was not present, and after learning about a variety of perspectives, formulating a
personal opinion. I immediately saw this piece of critical inquiry as essential for students to understand that they can communicate their opinions and become social agents of change, however I was unsure how to effectively implement a successful program. The opportunity to learn from teachers about their strategies, successes, and barriers when implementing culturally responsive and relevant pedagogy in their programming led to my interest in further exploring this topic.

Overview

This Master of Teaching Research Paper (MTRP) consists of five chapters. Chapter One introduces the topic, the purpose of the study, as well as my personal narrative and interest in this topic. Chapter Two provides a review of the current literature, including a definition of culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy, an investigation into how culture is defined, the history and social studies curriculum, and strategies and barriers to implementing culturally relevant pedagogy through the social studies and history curriculum. The third chapter outlines the methodology used, including procedures and limitations of the study. Chapter Four will outline the findings from the interviews that were conducted. The MTRP concludes with Chapter Five, where I will discuss the implications for this research and my findings, as well as my conclusions as a researcher and my recommendations for the educational community.
Chapter 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

“No matter what our ethnic or cultural backgrounds are, we are each limited by the experiences of our own culture. As teachers it is essential that we grow beyond our own cultural background and learn about the social, political, and human experiences of others”
- D.L. Hall Mark

What is Culture and Why Is It Important in the Context of Education?

While the purpose of education is highly controversial, the primary goal among educators should be to improve student learning. Every year, Canada welcomes 225,000 newcomers, many of whom will enter the Canadian school system and be a part of the 200 ethnic groups it represents (Rolheiser et al., 2011). Students bring a variety of cultures into the daily classroom, and it is the responsibility of educators to develop and foster an inclusive classroom environment. These experiences are integral to student learning, and “to overlook this resource is to deny children access to the knowledge construction process” (Villegas and Lucas, 2002, 25).

In Preparing for Culturally Responsive Teaching, Gay (2002) defined culture as an aspect that “encompasses many things, some of which are more important for teachers to know than others because they have direct implications for teaching and learning. Among these are ethnic groups’ cultural values, traditions, communication, learning styles, contributions and relational patterns” (p. 107). Culture, however “goes much deeper than typical understandings of ethnicity, race and/or faith. It encompasses broad notions of similarity and difference and it is reflected in our students’ multiple social identities and their ways of knowing and being in the world” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013b, 1). For the purpose of my study, it is essential to understand that culture is an aspect of students’ lives that must be integrated into the classroom, taught, and analyzed in an authentic way. This is expressed through a publication written by the Ontario Ministry of Education, recognizing that, “in order to ensure that all students feel safe, welcomed,
accepted and inspired to succeed in a culture of high expectations for learning, schools and classrooms must be responsive to culture” (2013b, 1). Culture is recognized as static and not homogeneous, and notably through culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy there should be no assumptions, or “ready-made” representations of culture. Students should be “constantly engaged in the production for their own cultural representations through expressive means” (Rolheiser et al, 2011, 14). The influence of culture in the classroom is prevalent, as “statistics make evident the influence of culture on learning through the commonly cited “gap” in achievement for children from marginalized groups” (Morrison et all, 2008, 433).

**Culturally Relevant and Responsive Pedagogy**

Culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy is a framework that is widely recognized in the literature. It acknowledges the necessity for classroom content inside and out of the curriculum to validate the lived experiences of all students within a classroom. The scholarship addresses the philosophy as: “culturally relevant; responsive, congruent, or sensitive pedagogy; teaching; instruction; multicultural education; and equity pedagogy, among others” (Morrison et al, 2008, 434), however it is commonly argued that culturally relevant pedagogy moves beyond the multicultural approach through a more authentic integration of students’ cultural identity reflected in content and instruction. This overarching idea acknowledges that educators must look at content through a critical lens and actively question the decisions they make in the classroom. Effective integration of critical inquiry through cultural diversity has been explored at length. Although perspectives vary, and are explored through the lens of students, educators, administration and teacher education programs, all commonly agree that within the societal institution of schools, it is necessary to integrate and analyze culture through programming

While the term ‘culturally relevant teaching’ was developed by Gloria Ladson-Billings in 1992, the underlying ideology had been previously explored through anti-oppressive scholars. Notably, Paulo Freire advocated the notion of conscientization, which he defined as “a process that invites learners to engage in the world and others critically” (McLaren, 1989, p. 195), emphasizing the need to take action beyond critical reflection by advocating for social change. Freire’s work developed in Brazil, however it aligned with scholarship conducted in the United States to empower marginalized populations (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Concepts advocated by Freire are reflected within Ladson-Billings’ three-tier approach to “good teaching,” which was argued to be accomplished through academic achievement, cross cultural understanding, and critical consciousness (Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2008). The three elements developed by Ladson-Billings are based on student experience and what learners need to achieve, however there is a strong body of literature connecting to this work to the mindset of culturally responsive educators, and ways to effectively prepare educators prior to entering the field. For the purpose of my study, I will focus on the work of Ladson-Billings, Gay, Villegas and Lucas to gain a comprehensive view of both the teacher and learner perspective.

Villegas and Lucas focus on the mindset of culturally responsive educators through six overarching themes. These themes overlap with both Ladson-Billings’ methods of how to accomplish her three-tier approach, and Gay who also relates to these themes through focusing on teacher education programs. Commonalities among their work include socio-political
consciousness and understanding the role of educators, high expectations through students experiencing success, a desire to make a difference, getting to know students through community building, and responding to cultural diversity through lesson delivery (Gay, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2008; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Extensive research has been completed building upon the foundational work presented by these scholars. In an Ontario-based publication compiled by the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education on inclusive education, concrete examples to culturally responsive teaching practices where students identities prevalent in the curriculum connect to increased motivation, and a heightened enthusiasm for learning (Rolheiser et al., 2011).

Many scholars within the field of inclusive education acknowledge the necessity to integrate the social identity of all students into the classroom (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014; Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2008; Gay, 2002; Banks, 2001; Rolheiser et al., 2011). However, Larson-Billings recognizes that we must extend beyond individual academic achievement and cultural competence and that “students must develop a broader socio-political consciousness that allows them to critique the cultural norms, values, mores and inceptions that produce and maintain social inequities” (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 162), to become social agents of change.

**Student Engagement through Culturally Relevant and Responsive Pedagogy**

The Toronto District School Board (TDSB) is the largest school board in Canada, servicing a city that is among the most culturally diverse in the world (TDSB, 2013). In a census conducted in 2011-2012, the board acknowledged the “largest self-identified racial groups [as] White (29%), South Asian (24%), East Asian (15%), and Black (12%)” (TDSB, 2013). The need
to recognize and design lessons that reflect the learners in the classroom is critical as “poor performance, disengagement, and drop out are often linked to educators’ and schools’ inattention to students’ cultural and religious backgrounds and identities” (Rolheiser, 2011, 27). This was emphasized by Gay, who advocates for increased focus on culturally responsive teaching to be incorporated into teacher educations programs. “Some professional programs still equivocate about including multicultural education despite the growing numbers of and disproportionately poor performance of students of colour” (Gay, 2002, 106). Furthermore, critical inquiry through examining perspectives and practices can enhance learning in all subjects and stimulate reflection (Rolheiser, 2011).

In a study that investigated academic achievement and engagement in English classrooms using culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy, Lopez (2011) argued that the content must be of high-interest, which occurs when the students seem themselves in the content. Her study concluded that ways to measure engagement included the following: increased participation, improved grades, enhanced critical thinking skills and students becoming active participants in their own learning through asking more questions. Her study included student perspectives and comments on the literature the students read, which expanded the canon and represented a diversity of culture within the English class. For example, Lopez wrote, “Shabanu is about a Muslim girl who fights the hardships from her religion and culture to keep her inner freedom and happiness intact.... Being a Muslim and a Pakistani myself, it felt really great to read this book in the English curriculum ... for me the concepts were easy to understand” (p. 51). Within the same study, the perspective of the teacher was shared: “the greatest area of impact was on the South Asian students. They became empowered and felt valued as they shared knowledge of their
culture. They were able to clarify issues for students where there were misconceptions and became resource persons throughout the study of the unit. For the White and Black students a new set of knowledge was created, and they were eager to learn about other cultures” (Rolheiser, 2011, 52). The overarching goal through culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy is for every student to see themselves within the classroom, through discussion, materials and content, which is presented through the literature as a way for students to become engaged, and move towards critically questioning and becoming active participants in their learning. Schools “should be places where students not only learn about diversity, but experience it. We know that when students see themselves reflected in their studies they are more likely to stay engaged and find school relevant (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009, 15).”

The Role Teachers Play in Culturally Relevant and Responsive Pedagogy

The role of teachers who practice culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy has been separated into classroom strategies, personal strategies, including their mentality, and how they actively implement such pedagogy into the classroom.

Classroom Strategies

There is extensive literature about classroom strategies to implement culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy, however a disconnect exists regarding how to authentically and effectively implement these broad strategies through specific examples. Interestingly, the strategies presented seem as though they should be present throughout classrooms, which is why Ladson-Billings argued that culturally relevant pedagogy is simply just “good teaching.”
however there is clearly a disconnect, which is why Gay focuses extensively on preparing pre-service teachers though teacher education programs.

Morrison et al (2008) identify several key strategies for successful implementation of culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy. Through teacher programming, Morrison highlights the importance of scaffolding, modeling, thinking aloud, encouraging collaboration among students, having clear expectations, and closely monitoring students. In addition, these authors believe that student strengths should drive instruction while promoting a nurturing environment. Morrison et al. build off Ladson-Billings’ three-tier model, and advocate the importance of cultural competence within the lens of culturally relevant pedagogy, stating that “students need not give up their cultural identity in order to achieve academically. Rather, meeting high academic expectations is more possible when teachers promote children’s cultural competence…[through] reshaping the prescribed curriculum, building on students’ funds of knowledge, and establishing relationships between school and the children’s homes” (p. 437). Knowing the learners in the classroom, and being mindful of pedagogy are two common themes throughout the literature (Richards et al, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2008; Gay, 2002; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Strategies including diverse groupings are significant as some cooperative-valuing cultures will often thrive within a group setting, and engaging students through hands-on learning, and student choice within assessment and activity. Moreover it is thought that teachers should recognize the informal and covert ways curriculum documents define what is and is not valued in our society. (Morrison et al, 2008; Kugler & West-Burns, 2010). Overall, teachers must use an inquiry-based approach driven by what the students bring into the classroom through a variety of instructional strategies to engage all learners within the classroom.
Teacher Attitudes

How teachers view their students, and their perspective related to student learning has implications for student self-efficacy and success. There has been a depth of research focusing on teacher mindset. A foundational attitude teachers must have is the willingness to engage in critical reflection, which is the basis of culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy (Villegas and Lucas, 2002; Gay, 2002). Through classroom discussion and content delivery, teachers can either engage in critical discourse, or silence views that are not considered the dominant culture. Through a reflexive practice, teachers must question if “we can fulfill the different needs of students if we do not appreciate cultures, beliefs, and values that differ from neoliberal ways of thinking,” and whether we “can really understand differences if we do not understand the contexts from which they arise” (Rolheiser et al, 2011, 9).

It is through a certain set of disposition and skills that the mindset of a culturally responsive educator is developed, which enables teachers to work creatively and effectively to support all students in diverse settings (Richards et al, 2006). This occurs when teachers consciously question present social, historical and political contexts through questioning personal attitudes, behaviours and beliefs. Additionally, educators must not only recognize discrimination, but also understand and prevent issues connected to power and privilege by questioning social identity; these approaches can positively alter the student experience (Villegas and Lucas, 2002). Through a caring approach, educators must question the aspects of diversity and identity reflected in the classroom, understand what is missing, and use this information to guide curriculum decisions.
A prevalent theme in the literature regarding teacher attitudes when successfully implementing culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy is having an asset-based approach. Through having high expectations as outlined by Ladson-Billings (1995, 2008), educators need to “hold positive and affirming views of their students and their ability to learn and achieve academic success,” and furthermore, “demonstrate genuine respect for students and their families as well as a strong belief in their potential (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013b).” These educators view social identity within the classroom as an asset, and not a limitation or deficit (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013b, 4). Villegas and Lucas extend this idea by explicitly explaining that educators must use what they know about the students and have shared learning provide access for all learners in the classroom. Moving beyond using culture as a tool for student learning, Gay advocates that “culturally responsive teachers help students to understand that knowledge has moral and political elements and consequences, which obligate them to take social action to promote freedom, equality, and justice for everyone” (Gay, 2002, p. 110).

**Challenges to Integrating CRP in the Classroom**

Teachers who integrate culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy in the classroom face several challenges. Although Ladson-Billings referred to culturally responsive and relevant pedagogy as “good teaching,” one must ask why it is not more prevalent in our schools. This could be a result of barriers that teachers face while implementing the program, or while attempting to implement the program. The challenges, and barriers teachers face have been commonly documented in the literature and can be categorized into two sections; logistical barriers, and challenges within the curriculum and nature of the content.
Logistical Barriers

The four major themes within the scholarship on logistic challenges include lack of time, funding, age appropriate resources, and departmental barriers (Rolheiser et al, 2011; Morrison et al, 2008). In schools, departmental heads, and administration often influence teachers. In a 2004 study, Leithwood et al. recognized that although teaching has the greatest impact on student outcome, leadership is second (2004). This implies that if teachers do not have the support of staff and like-minded individuals on their teaching team, then implementation of culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy becomes more challenging due to a lack of resources and of collegial sharing.

Gay strongly advocates that a major challenge to successful implementation of culturally relevant teaching is that teachers are unaware how to teach in this inclusive way as a direct result of gaps in teacher education programs. In a 2002 study, Gay stated that there exists a need to include knowledge, attitudes and skills within pre-service education programs. Often, teachers do not believe that they know enough to infuse culture into the curriculum. However, Gay argues that teachers, who are “overwhelmingly White, middle-aged and monolingual English speakers” (Ladson-Billings, 2008, 38) do need a knowledge base about ethnic and cultural diversity in order to integrate CRP in their classroom. Beyond understanding content, teacher education programs need to show pre-service teachers how to analyze textbooks and resources, how to find better cultural representations, and how to recognize barriers of implementing culturally relevant pedagogy prior in the hopes of removing them (Gay, 2002). Teacher education should also engage students in meaningful discourse and educate themselves on socio-political issues within their direct and global communities (Ladson-Billings, 2008).
**Barriers in Curriculum and Content**

Teachers are constantly being challenged by the new content they must integrate into their classroom. Often, content can be learned through sharing of knowledge, a textbook, or other sources, however cultural information links to emotion and can be a sensitive subject. Due to the nature of integrating culture into the classroom, teachers often struggle with what constitutes their own identity and how to bring in the identities of their students. These factors make it difficult for some teachers to infuse culturally relevant practices while being equitable (Rolheiser et al, 2011). Additionally, some teachers have a deficit mentality, a concept where “attributes are seen as different from dominant norms are deemed less valuable and worthwhile. Deficit mentality does not consider a variety of factors and contexts; rather it privileges certain norms - particularly white, middle-class norms” (Rolheiser et al, 2011, 8). This is both a challenge and a gap in teacher education, as outlined by Gay, as teachers need to challenge dominant norms in order to ensure all students are reflected in the curriculum and can experience success.

The curriculum is a policy document that leaves room for teachers to make decisions about what to include or emphasize in their programming. However, it can be challenging for teachers make these decisions. Although curriculum documents state clear learning expectations, they give teachers room for flexibility, with space for teachers to made personal decisions on what they choose to teach. Additionally, teachers may have the right approach and understanding that it is essential to both having the students reflected in the curriculum and be critically engaged (Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2008). However, there is disparity as teachers are often unsure how to successfully implement such programming. Furthermore, significant amounts of research on culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy was completed in the United States, a context in
which teachers are often so focused on student success in the standardized tests administered each year that they do not promote the importance of students as agents of change (Milner, 2014). These standardized tests are reflective of traditional education systems, which is a barrier as “culturally relevant pedagogy calls into question the hegemonic structural, organizational and epistemological assumptions about schools. Culturally relevant pedagogy ultimately clashes with the traditional ways in which education is carried out in our society, thus making culturally relevant teaching actions seem herculean to many teachers” (Morrison et al, 2008, 444).

**Examples of CRP in Action**

There is an overwhelming gap of information in the literature, as authentic integration of culturally relevant pedagogy is not widely studied across disciplines. Commonly, culturally relevant pedagogy is examined through English and mathematics classes in an American context, which contributes to barriers for teachers knowing how to validate and empower their students’ culture in the classroom.

Ladson-Billings presented an example of CRP integration within an English unit on Romeo and Juliet in the United States. She found that culturally relevant teachers encourage critical inquiry by probing students to critically analyze the everyday choices that teachers make. Romeo and Juliet is a Shakespearean play that was written in the sixteenth century (Ladson-Billings, 2008). While covering this play, a teacher who practiced culturally relevant and responsive teaching within the classroom had students connect their own struggles with the themes outlined by Shakespeare, including dating, mental health and suicide, as well as the overarching theme of forbidden love. Ladson-Billings highlights that in this context, culturally relevant teachers are able to engage and inspire students to connect to the learning in meaningful
ways, and not only does the teacher understand the purpose, but this purpose is also shared with the students (2008).

In a New York City social studies classroom, a teacher assigned students to create a family tree within the unit on immigration and communities outlined in the curriculum. This assignment was based off a teacher prompt within the curriculum document. In this example, the teacher “viewed the assignment as an opportunity to explore the immigrant history of the diverse class and, consequently [their] deep personal connections to communities around the world” (Kesler, 2011, 419). It was only within this particular teacher’s eighth year of teaching this curriculum that he questioned his classroom decisions when a parent wrote to him explaining that her daughter felt excluded and marginalized from this curriculum work. In this narrative, the student was adopted by a single mother and she did not feel represented within the assignment. This created a platform for the teacher to ask himself, “What other forms of alienation and discrimination might exist in the texts assigned that had not been recognized or examined? How much were these texts functioning from dominant culture norms? Whose stories were left out of the classroom by these texts, and how was that affecting the students as learners?” (Kesler, 2011, 419). The teacher in this account critically challenged his decisions. However what would be the impact if a different teacher did nothing and continued to marginalize and invalidate students within the classroom? Ultimately, this was an example of how teacher reflection can promote culturally responsive teaching within the classroom.
Ontario Policy and Curriculum Documents

The focus of this study is on how teachers implement culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy within the Social Studies and History curriculum, and therefore is essential to understand the policies in place to reach provincial standards. Additionally, there are several policy documents that outline the importance of inclusive education, which address several of the underlying themes in culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy. Equity and inclusion in the educational community has been identified as a global priority that ultimately has the goal of increasing student achievement, and developing more informed, productive and engaged citizens. As a growing response to the 225,000 immigrants welcomed into Canada each year, and the diversity present in Ontario schools, policy documents have been developed to accommodate and embrace inclusive schools (Rolheiser et al., 2011). Within a Canadian context, there are several policies currently implemented to support equity. These include but are not limited to the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, Ontario Human Rights Code, Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, and Ontario’s Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy. The Ontario Ministry of Education emphasizes the importance of embracing diversity and defines inclusive education as, “education that is based on principals of acceptance and inclusion of all students. Students see themselves reflected in the curriculum, their physical surroundings, and the broader environment, in which diversity is honored and all individuals are respected” (2009b, p. 90). The Toronto District School Board extends this policy and describes their goal to “enable all students to reach high levels of achievement and to acquire the knowledge, skills and values they need to become responsible members of a democratic society,” which aligns with the goals of Ladson-Billings framework for culturally responsive pedagogy.
Throughout the Ontario publication *Inquiry to Practice: Reaching Every Student Through Inclusive Curriculum* (2009b), the previous Social Studies Curriculum is referenced to illustrate a need to engage critical discourse regarding the narrow, Eurocentric view the curriculum perpetuates. The publication argued that if we do not set the stage for a discussion, it is assumed the curriculum was meeting the needs of all learners, which was reflected in the 2008 curriculum. A specific example was found within the Grade 6 unit, Heritage and Citizenship: First Nation Peoples and European Explorers. The danger within this unit was that it only endorsed European explorers, and neglected to examine all perspectives as it ignored the narrative of the Black explorers. The argument made by Rolheiser is that, as teachers, we need to become agents of change as we model active citizenship through our decision-making within curriculum delivery (Rolheiser et al, 2011).
Chapter 3: METHODOLOGY

Procedure

The purpose of this qualitative study is to understand the strategies, the barriers experienced, and the perspectives of two teachers who implement the framework of culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy authentically into their classroom. The study was completed through two interviews of teachers at the junior/intermediate level (grades 4 – 10), in order to understand their current knowledge of culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy, and identifying and responding to culture within their classrooms. The interview questions used for data collection can be found in Appendix B. This study used a narrative research approach by exploring the practice of several practicing teachers (Creswell, 2013). Throughout the literature, studies have been done to assess culturally relevant pedagogy within the classroom, however I will be extending the literature by specifically looking at the Ontario Social Studies and History curriculum. In addition, much of the literature has focused on teachers in the United States, leading to a limited understanding of the Canadian context.

Participants

This study included two practicing teachers within Toronto, working in both traditional and non-traditional classroom settings. The participants have had teaching experience at the junior, intermediate and senior levels (grades 4-12) with varying levels of experience. The participants are both female. One of the participants, Paula, has over forty years within the field of education in both teaching and administrative roles. Cindy is a
recent graduate of a teacher education program, and now works with students in grades four and five.

**Data Collection & Analysis**

I collected data through informal interviews, using the questions outlined in Appendix B. These interviews were conducted in person, and recorded to ensure accurate data collection. Upon completion of the interviews, the data collected was reviewed and transcribed. The transcripts were then presented to the participants to ensure accuracy of their experiences for this narrative study. Then, I reviewed the research to seek out common approaches and strategies that are implemented in classrooms.

**Ethical Review Procedures**

This study followed the ethical review procedures as outlined by the Master of Teaching program. To ensure the participants understood the study, they received and signed a consent form, outlined in Appendix A. The resulting data from the study remain confidential, and the names of participants and schools were removed. The participants also had the right to end their involvement in the study at any time, without penalty.

**Limitations**

The limitations were due to both the study itself and its participants. Firstly, the participants’ responses were limited to their life experiences, beliefs, and experiences within the education system. In addition, the number of participants was limiting as this study only shares the perspectives of two teachers within Toronto. While it contributed to
the current research and raised relevant questions, this number of participants limited the reliability of this study. Another limitation that was prevalent within the study was due to the nature of the research questions. The study drew parallels between the cultural beliefs and values of the teachers, and how they recognize cultures within an educational setting. These often led to feelings of discomfort, which may have been reflected in the participants’ answers. Finally, this study did not take place in a classroom setting, and did not consider the student perspective. It is possible that there was a disconnect between what was said in an interview, and the teacher’s practice in their classroom.
Chapter 4: FINDINGS

Introduction

This chapter is a compilation of the data obtained during two in-person interviews, which were recorded and then transcribed to understand the experiences of two educators who have had experience teaching social studies or history within Ontario schools. The participants in this study have both taught within the Toronto District School Board, most of their experiences take place within this school board. These teachers contributed a wealth of information, which will be identified by themes interpreted through the data. The themes established through the research collected are:

- Teacher Interpretations of Culturally Relevant and Responsive Pedagogy
- Teaching Strategies for Effectively Integrating Culturally Relevant and Responsive Pedagogy
- Challenges of Implementing Culturally Responsive and Relevant Pedagogy
- Examples of Culturally Relevant and Responsive Pedagogy within the History and Social Studies Curriculum

These themes are further deconstructed into sub-themes, which have been connected to the current scholarship. Although there are significant parallels between the scholarship outlined in the literature review and the findings of this study, there are some gaps which will be acknowledged within this section. Additionally, the findings, although coded through themes contain overlap as the themes are interconnected to one another. My overall goal of my findings is to contribute to the growing conversation about culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy within a Canadian context.
The Participants

The participants within this study will be distinguished by pseudonyms to maintain their anonymity. The participants identify as teachers who implement culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy within their practice. The following description outlines the teachers background experience in education:

- Paula has been in the field of education for nearly forty years in the Toronto District School Board. During those years, she spent most of her time as a classroom teacher, curriculum leader, and curriculum coach for the Ontario Ministry of Education. Over the past eleven years, she took on a more administrative role through being a vice principal and principal. Currently, she continues to work within the field through designing and implementing programs for experiential learning trips within Canada. The programs and curriculum she develops align with Ontario Ministry of Education guidelines, and the company has a partnership with the Toronto District School Board, where they hire teachers within the board to facilitate the experiential programs.

- Cindy is a more recent graduate of a Bachelor of Education program, which she completed in Toronto. She has been teaching full-time for one year, currently with Grade 4 and 5 students.

Teacher Interpretations of Culturally Relevant and Responsive Pedagogy

Definitions and Understanding of Culturally Relevant and Responsive Pedagogy

The interpretations of culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy among participants are essential to examine, as it is the foundation of this research. Although there were similarities among both participants, they had their own perceptions of what culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy is, and what it looked like in their classrooms. These definitions were based
on their own unique experiences, professional development, and through their teacher education programs. Cindy, a recent graduate of teacher education was very familiar with the terminology, and the works of Ladson-Billings, and although Paula was less familiar with the scholarship, her classroom strategies integrated aspects of culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy, which was made clear through her examples. Cindy identified culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy as:

“allowing the curriculum to connect to each individual learner, so, that’s not just connecting to their interests but also to their backgrounds where they come from, they’re social economic status, and just making the curriculum relevant to their own lives to ensure that they can make connections between their lived experience and what they learn in school.”

Similarly, Paula’s definition also related to student experience, and how they brought unique perspectives and opinions to further their learning into the classroom community. Paula defined culturally relevant and culturally responsive pedagogy separately, however combined them as she consolidated her thinking. Paula referred to culturally responsive pedagogy as the ways in which students used their background to contribute to the conversations within the classroom, and what the diversity of perspectives can bring to the learning environment. Through an inquiry approach, Paula suggested that, “being culturally responsive allows people to bring themselves to whatever they are inquiring about, or whatever they want to learn about, so in a way it always has to be open ended… in a way that there really is no right answer.” Additionally, Paula included that it also encompasses the ways in which curriculum is constructed, and how educators interpret the curriculum, through whose perspectives are explicitly included, and the voices that are ignored. Paula shared her understanding of culturally relevant pedagogy using technology in the classroom as an example. Her understanding of culturally relevant was defined through teaching students in a way that connects to them. “I don’t have to know how to use the
technology, but I have to allow my students to use whatever technology they’re comfortable with to inquire about a particular topic,” she said, as student learning must not be hindered from limited teacher knowledge. Her mindset of a community of learners, paired with the perspective that teachers do not know everything will become evident through specific strategies she provides. She placed the responsibility of learning on the students, using her pedagogy to structure the classroom environment to adhere to collaboration and inquiry. Notably, Paula shared that she would never “impose her own fears on students,” and her mentality that we continue to learn was an evident theme through her personal narrative.

Through their definitions of culturally relevant teaching, they both encompassed some aspects as outlined in the literature. They both included the importance of cross-cultural understandings and making the content reflective of the learners, however did not explicitly state the need for high expectations essential for students to experience, or having a critical consciousness (Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2008). This was, however exemplified through various examples and strategies they outlined. Through the three-pillar framework, Ladson-Billings argued that educators much shift the ways they think about the curriculum, which was embodied by both participants.

**Teacher Mindset**

Attitude and mindset of the teachers comes through during the interviews, even without participants explicitly stating it. Through the interviews, the teachers both demonstrated great levels of passion for the profession, and shared that teachers must believe in their students, through their confidence that all students can succeed. This mindset reflects the work of Villegas and Lucas (2002), who were proponents of having high expectations for students, paired with the
desire to make a difference. Paula explicitly stated this when referencing the common curriculum, which was the policy that previously defines education in Ontario. Unlike today, where students are streamed between academic and applied subjects, the common curriculum was a more inclusive model where all students are integrated. Paula argued that teachers must know how to teach the diverse ability of students through grouping and regrouping, and ultimately getting to know the learners in the classroom. Her pedagogy requires a deep knowledge of the students, which Villegas and Lucas argued was necessary for effective implementation of culturally relevant teaching. Additionally, Paula showed evidence of herself as a reflective practitioner. Through meeting the needs of diversity within the class, she said:

“one of the biggest problems was that the teachers didn’t know how to group and regroup students, and teachers had to group and regroup and be flexible, however teachers were often not reflexive and did not do this, but we need to think how is this going to reach all learners.”

Paula and Cindy shared several specific examples in the classroom, where having a positive outlook was imperative. Both participants referred to the concept, appreciative inquiry, where educators prompt students to think about the positive elements within classroom experiences. Cindy explained that there is something good in every situation, whether it is building resiliency, or character, she argued that students need to understand how to recognize and focus on the positive, which will benefit them if faced with adversity. Similarly, Paula said: “…it is that deficit mindset that we are hardwired to often jump to… the negative about what kids or teachers can’t do, and even if we may not be able to do it all, we need to focus on what we can do.”

Additionally, Paula and Cindy both commented on the noise levels in their classroom. Teachers in Paula’s experience had seen noise as distracting and negative. Paula recalled a time
when a Principal entered her classroom and commented on the levels of noise in relation to student learning. Paula said, “they were loud… and talking loudly about math… isn’t that exciting? It looked like the class was completely out of control, but it wasn’t. The students were there, I was there, sleeves rolled up, engaged in conversation, and when you’re engaged you’re actually learning something…”

Finally, the mindset that we are lifelong learners was identified and reinforced by the examples given by both participants. Cindy was passionate about creating a new narrative for the classroom, focusing more on learning, and less on structural details. Cindy commented that although the structure is necessary, which is observed through policy documents and curriculum expectations, teachers must effectively extend the narrative and show students what is not there, and create a culture of shared curiosity and questioning. During Paula’s time as a principal, she encouraged teachers to constantly reflect on how they can develop as educators. She supported ongoing learning by supporting teachers at her school to have the freedom to sign up for professional development throughout the summer, and as long as it was beneficial to their classes she made it clear that it would always be approved. Paula, as a lifelong learner herself stated that “a degree in education that a teacher received five, ten, or even two years ago does not guarantee that they are current on the research… we never really can be but we have to do our best.”

**Classroom Environment for Promoting Culturally Relevant and Responsive Pedagogy**

**Promoting and Inclusive Environment**

In every grade and subject, regardless of how large the class size is, teachers need to promote an inclusive environment, one where students are ready to learn and able to engage with course content. Cindy said that building a safe classroom environment is something that comes with time, although she said that “getting to know each individual student is the most important
aspect, and building a rapport with students is foundational to student learning.” She provided several examples of how she sets up this environment in her classrooms. Cindy had experienced success with programs including Tribes, which focuses on four community agreements of active listening, mutual respect, right to participate or pass, and appreciations, no put downs, and that even if a school-wide program is not implemented, the foundational ideology of respecting others and self must be prevalent. Paula accomplished an inclusive environment through collaborative learning, paired with explicit teaching of certain skills, including conflict resolution, and problem solving. Furthermore, Paula recognized that creating a conversation on equal and equitable approaches, modeling democracy, co-creating what they see as acceptable, and discussing natural consequences, engages students through a shared understanding of respect. Recognized by both Cindy and Paula that fostering an environment of inclusion is necessary, Cindy highlights the benefits within individual students, and the classroom:

“Creating a safe and supportive environment allows students to be more open about themselves, their identity, their background, and their past classroom experiences... if they are not comfortable, they are likely not going to share if they feel threatened - schools are intimidating enough as it is... however this takes time and effort, from both the students and teacher.”

Throughout discussing the history curriculum, uncomfortable conversations, and culturally relevant and responsive curriculum the need for an inclusive environment was continually acknowledged by both educators.

**Identifying Culture in the Classroom**

Identifying culture within a classroom environment is an extension of creating a safe classroom environment. The participants were aware that culture could not be identified if students did not have the willingness share their identities, however identified that not making
assumptions could be challenging. The participants shared strategies of how they identified culture in the classroom, and acknowledged the importance of knowing to promote inclusion of all cultures and to ensure a diversity of cultures were represented within the classroom, and integrated through curriculum. Through building inclusion, Paula has students identify their culture, and what they identify with through creating a profile. Cindy’s strategies mirror Paula’s, as she engages learners in icebreaker activities. She recognizes the importance of having the students also getting to know each other, and a specific strategy she utilizes is having students interview one another. Beyond establishing culture present in her classroom, Cindy also incorporates culture into the curriculum, and most notably through English and history. A strategy Cindy emphasized was having students create a mind map. Not only does this cater to the diversity of learning needs, yet it extends to multicultural identities. “I want students to recognize the identities they see within themselves, whether it is Canadian, Filipino, a brother, a sister… having students realize that they can identify with several identities and presenting it broadly enables students to see themselves within the curriculum, and also allows met to get to know my students better.”

**Challenges and Barriers of Implementing Culturally Relevant and Responsive Pedagogy**

This was a significant theme throughout both interviews, as Cindy and Paula had both experienced internal and external barriers that inhibited successful implementation of culturally relevant and responsive teaching. Notably, these barriers stemmed from their personal definition of culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy. The sub-themes of barriers are logistics (time and resources), attitudes of other faculty and administration, and gaps within teacher knowledge, including teacher education programs.
Logistics

Time and resources are often a barrier in teaching. Both participants highlighted these challenges frequently throughout the interviews, however each participant had their own interoperation of how logistics can be limiting to implementing culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy.

The predominant issues with time were that the curriculum contains an extensive amount of content to be covered, and not enough time to build relationships with students to ensure they are comfortable with sharing their perspectives, which is essential for implementing culturally relevant pedagogy. Cindy was a strong supporter of getting to know the learners prior to designing her lessons as she felt that to integrate culture, she needs to have knowledge of where the students in the class are coming from. Furthermore, creating engaging and culturally relevant lesson required more planning time from the teachers, and Paula argued that it was time teachers did not always have.

Resources can also be restricting when teaching culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy. This theme was reflected in review of the literature. In terms of resources, the common themes were, that teachers did not know where to access legitimate sources, and how to effectively use the resources that they had. These concerns were described by Cindy. Paula, however commented that, “…part of the problem is with the publishers. They need to advocate for change through the textbooks,” and alternately she did not believe that resources were lacking as a result of accessibility to the internet. She felt that a common barrier she observed within schools was the “ability of teachers to use and provide students access to multiple resources, and engaging students in a way that they want to explore a variety of sources.”
Faculty and Administration and Teacher Attitude

Several times during the interview, Paula shared that through her forty years in education, progressive ideology, and change occurred slowly. She said,

“It is difficult to walk into a traditional department and change the way that things are going, and that’s the problem, as young teachers become socialized in traditional ways. It is difficult though, when you are not supported with the resources and the freedom...”

Paula noted that the school staff has a significant impact on outcome. She commented that, “unless you are with likeminded people who want to bring the same change, it can be challenging, however when you find colleagues who share your passions, the collaborative work becomes inspiring.” Cindy described similar obstacles she experienced within departments, and has commonly been exposed to teachers who prefer to work independently. Referring to her current role, Cindy said,

“being engaged in a more collaborative role, and working closely with a group of teachers, I see the benefits of a team approach. Students are really intuitive, and if they sense that there is a good atmosphere in terms of working together, then they will emulate the same thing...”

A challenge she constantly faced was getting to a place where collaboration is used as a tool, for both lesson design and implementation. This reflects Paula’s preferred approach that,

“We need to continue to think and reflect on what our commitment to the profession is... what it means to be a teacher on an individual basis. We need to model what we believe to our students, show them the importance of learning.”

Although these themes directly align with teacher mindset in the literature review, Paula addressed a challenge within the attitude of teachers as lifelong learners through the Teachers Union. Paula identified the union as an obstacle, and as an area of the profession that she has always been disappointed as she believes that they need to embody a much larger focus on
professional development, and providing teachers with tremendous support through job embedded professional development.

**Gaps in Teacher Knowledge**

Teachers bring their own knowledge to the classroom every single day. This knowledge is constructed from life experiences, and educational background. The previous literature has looked at gaps in teacher education and how those gaps translate into ineffectively incorporating culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy into the curriculum. Culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy has two overarching themes; having students engage in critical inquiry through presenting a multitude of perspectives, and further, having students develop their own opinions and advocating their beliefs, and ultimately becoming social agents of change. A challenge Paula faced related to gaps within teacher knowledge are outlined below:

“**Within the history or social studies curriculum, specifically looking at all of the perspectives and accounting for what the students bring into the classroom can be difficult. Even then you ask what perspectives are still missing? I don’t know everything, and my students are not going to bring everything into the classroom, and students should know as much as possible before they form their own opinions...**”

Similarly, Cindy made explicit reference to gaps in teacher knowledge, in that students learn what their teachers decide to teach, and that “all teachers at some point have been victims of teachers sharing a narrow-minded view of the world, or a single perspective.” Mirroring Paula’s challenge was questioning how we learn it all, and then effectively teach what we know in a way that students engage critically in the material. Cindy made explicit reference to teacher education programs. Upon completion of the program, she left understanding the definition of culturally responsive and relevant pedagogy, however outside of teacher education she is still navigating how to effectively implement culturally relevant curriculum.
Within the history and social studies curriculum, Cindy provided a specific example using Residential Schools. She said, “you have so many people who have no idea what they are, and I often ask myself why?” She concluded that,

“When we teach history, we want people to feel patriotic. We want people to feel a sense of pride in our own country. We teach people what we want them to know, and that is often through the lens of the victor. There are systems in place preventing us, however looking at the new social studies curriculum, it was encouraging to see residential schools enclosed as a prompt... but again it is up to teachers to make those decisions and facilitate the conversations in a meaningful way. We just need to make sure all sides are shown... even the dark parts of our history... because that is someone’s history, and ultimately as Canadians it is our history.”

Facilitating Conversations

The participants continually emphasized their struggle with facilitating conversations that were labeled as uncomfortable. Throughout the social studies and history curriculum specifically, there are several opportunities to engage in discourse that students might find emotional, or difficult to respond to. Cindy and Paula both recognized that not having these conversations, especially when organically integrated into the curriculum through student inquiry was far more dangerous than the conversations itself. Specific topics highlighted conclusively by the participants included war, religion, cultural diversity, slavery and Western-guilt and child labour through globalization. Beyond facilitating conversations that teachers are well-educated in, Cindy admitted that she “sometimes struggles with the feeling that [she] is teaching someone else history.” Cindy acknowledged that “teachers are often white, middle-class, females,” and as someone who “doesn’t fit in to that statistic,” she still felt that there is a lot of history that is not her place to teach, and she said that she used students as an outlet to guide and direct these conversations. Paula agreed with the difficulty of these conversations, and said,
“I don’t think that this is something that is easy, nor does it come easy... some topics you bring up, and students don’t react appropriately, but I have found that sometimes students don’t act appropriately because they don’t know how to react... it really is complex.”

She continued to talk about the danger of making assumptions, and what the students may or may not know as they enter the classroom.

Cindy, as a more recent graduate acknowledged, “…facilitating conversation is something that I am still working on.” Certain challenges she highlighted included, “challenging racial and cultural stereotypes, and facilitating a space where students can critically analyze what is going on, and construct their own decisions…” She offered her approach of appreciative inquiry, and being conscious of the emotional needs of the students, and reflected back on the importance of an inclusive environment. Overall, she said, “it is not black and white, there is a huge grey area, but students navigating their own emotions is how they learn… and at the end of the day, that is what it is all about.”

**Strategies for Implementing Culturally Relevant and Responsive Pedagogy**

Throughout this section, participants described that they have implemented culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy through the use of integrated strategies in the classroom. Although all of the strategies included information that contributed to educator’s use of culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy within their classrooms, the following themes highlight specific strategies that promote student engagement in this area.
Ways to Identify and Promote Student Engagement

Identifying and understanding when students are engaged is essential for lesson planning and implementation. The purpose of this study was to understand ways to promote student engagement using culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy. Ladson-Billings said this approach was just “good teaching,” and naturally students should be engaged, however this is not always the reality. Paula says that students “are not engaged when they are all quiet…” Paula and Cindy recognize that identifying student engagement comes from observation, however Paula specifically highlights that we need to not make assumptions through our observation. “Just because students are not visibly connected or engaged, the content may have made something click inside of their brain, and they are off making connections to the learning in a way that is meaningful to them.” Beyond observation, Paula uses tools including thumbs up, thumbs down, traffic light, and exit cards to obtain tangible evidence that a student has understood the content, and listening to student conversation. Additionally if students are questioning the content and contributing to the discourse, then Paula feels that they are engaged. Furthermore, Cindy reflected on classes where students did not want to go to lunch, recess or home at the end of the day because they wanted to finish what they were working on, or continue a discussion. She said that although it does not always happen, when it does occur she can see the connection students are making through personally analyzing the content.

Teaching Strategies

The strategies provided were cohesive with strategies teachers use to differentiate instruction to the learners. Having student groupings, and flexibility within groupings to promote collaborative learning through curriculum content was a notable theme. This coincided with a
strategy Paula thought was necessary, which was giving up control. She said that we need to build a platform for students to bring themselves and their past experiences into the classroom, and that needs to come from them. Paula said, “we take too much responsibility, and it is amazing when you give kids an empty vessel and what they figure out when you give them an opportunity to think critically.” A strategy that both teachers used was effective questioning, which also brought the students into their own learners. Cindy said that the questions you ask have to ensure that students are able to make personal connections, and then provide a space for students to share their experiences and beliefs.

Paula described a dynamic program for empowering students who were labeled as “at-risk.” Paula has helped design and implement this program at her school. The program had students looking at the curriculum documents, preparing foundational statements of how they were going to achieve the expectations set out by the Ministry, and collaborating with a team the students to create a proposal. This proposal included the development of their own assessment. This program allowed students to connect directly to the curriculum, and include ways they wanted to learn, while still grasping what the province, through Ministry documents deemed important. Paula continued to explain that the students would look at why the government would want students to learn the content that was outlined, look at what was missing, and why specific expectations were excluded. Paula noted that this program naturally brought in the equity piece to teaching and learning, the students became participants in their learning in an entirely new way, which is where the facilitators of the program “realized the importance of freedom and independence.”
Outside of this program, Paula highlighted that it was necessary for students to have “voice and choice.” This intention was mirrored by Cindy who said that she always gives plenty of choice through assessment in an open-ended way for students to connect with the learning. Choice also extended toward the choice of resources. Paula also noted that through teaching and learning, students need to be represented, whether through examples in mathematics, or perspectives within history, all students must have a voice, but their voices and perspectives must also be represented in a much larger way.

**Examples of Culturally Responsive and Relevant Pedagogy**

There is a significant gap within the scholarship on teachers implementing culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy within authentic classroom settings. Few specific examples of culturally relevant pedagogy are addressed through the literature, and therefore, as a future educator, this section is integral for professional development. The participants in this interview continuously referenced the importance of collaboration with colleagues, which is the underlying purpose of this study, to gain insight on what the reality is in the classrooms. Although the focus of this study is on the social studies and history curriculum, examples outside of those subjects have been included to provide a more comprehensive look on what culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy looks like in a classroom context.

**Culturally Responsive and Relevant Pedagogy within Classrooms**

Paula commented on assignments and shared her successes when students had a choice of the task. This stemmed from the program she was involved with. However, the approach to learning goes far beyond just giving students the choice, it includes having them bring in their
own experiences, sharing their experiences, and taking it further by talking about those experiences and analyzing them in a constructive way.

Cindy highlighted a profound example within one of her English classes, where the students were reading Shakespeare’s Romeo and Juliet. She said that the students were struggling with the language and content, and how they found it difficult to relate to. Immediately, Cindy restructured her next lesson and addressed student concerns.

“I wanted to make it connect to their own lives... make it relevant in a way that would be beneficial to them. At the time, the Olympics were going on in Russia and I was able to bring in current events over the controversial issues set out by Russian government on same-sex relationships... restricting the rights and freedoms in way that we do not experience in Canada. Through reading current articles, and watching various media we connected Romeo and Juliet to the theme of forbidden love. The students were able to connect to the content, and furthermore take a critical stance on what was going on, and talked about similar issues around the world, and even brought in immigration.”

Overall themes of relinquishing control and letting students take the lead on their learning was discussed through both interviews, and switching from the role of dictator to facilitator, and letting students drive instruction.

**Examples within the Social Studies and History Curriculum**

The social studies and history curriculum is set up in a way that facilitates inquiry, which Cindy and Paula collectively agree was essential for a progressive way to teach and learn about the student’s cultural identities within the classroom. Paula commented that the social studies and history curriculum is a subject where she has allowed students to use their voice in creating assessment and driving instruction through content. Both teachers frequently commented on the need to question the social studies and history curriculum and look at it with a critical approach; asking ourselves and the students what history is there, and what histories are ignored?
There are two exceptional examples that came through in the interviews which will be explored, that were taken from the new (2013) social studies and history curriculum. The first example was from the grade seven, Strand A: New France and British North America 1713-1800. The unit focused on the expulsion of Acadians, with the big question being whether or not moving people off of their land is justified. Through the unit, the teacher brought in numerous perspectives using a variety of sources. The unit catered to the differentiated needs of students, and had a significant focus on both collaboration and inquiry. An example of this was through using the physical classroom as an interactive map, and having students model the movement patterns. While students were engaged in this the teacher prompted them to discuss whether or not the content from our history is relevant to our current world.

Through exploring current events, Syria was acknowledged, with so many being pushed off of their lands and forced to live in UN humanitarian camps. The teacher used this as a framework to discuss the big question explicitly stated at the beginning of the unit, whether or not moving people off of land is justified. The teacher not only asked the students to bring in connections to their lives, but was sure not to teach a narrow-minded view and had students formulate their own opinions. Overall, a common theme that came up through both participants was the idea that dates were irrelevant, and that history and social studies should be about the themes prevalent that students can actually connect to, and make sense of.

An example Cindy included was one that works for any unit within the history and social studies curriculum. Through the unit, the students look at the textbook, through understanding that it is only one resource of many, complimented by additional primary and secondary sources.
that portray a variety of perspectives. Cindy constructed a culminating task that had students consolidate their learning by rewriting a chapter or section of the textbook. She said,

“Students were given an opportunity to validate their opinions, and make executive decision on what they felt was important... necessary for Canadians, an more broadly any student within Canada to understand the past. It provided them with an opportunity to share their own perspectives, and could represent their own cultural diversity within the text.”

Beyond the creation of the chapter, students had to justify their decisions, and critically, yet constructively look at the work of their peers. This was framed in a way that their peers were the editors, which provided relevant connections to the world around them.
Chapter 5: DISCUSSION

Introduction

The primary goal of this study was to understand the ways that teachers at the junior intermediate level used culturally responsive and relevant pedagogy through the Ontario social studies and history curriculum to promote student engagement. Through this gateway, the study also examined teachers understanding of culturally relevant teaching, specific strategies and examples implemented in classrooms, and barriers, ultimately ways to promote inclusive education. Furthermore, the findings informed my own teaching practice, and also provides insight for other educators. This chapter continues to analyze the findings from chapter four, and recognize implications and limitations to the study.

Limitations and Recommendations for Further Research

There are several limitations through the study that need to be addressed. The first limitation to this study was the sample size. There were only two participants in this study, which provides a limited understanding of culturally responsive and relevant pedagogy within the social studies and history curriculum, and while their contributions were significant, they may not be representative of the population. Additionally, the participants were chosen as individuals who integrate culturally responsive pedagogy, and therefore it is impossible to recognize the frequency and effectiveness of culturally responsive pedagogy broadly in the classroom through this study. Moreover, the two participants in this study were teachers in schools within the Greater Toronto Area, where there is significant cultural diversity. It would be interesting to see how teachers present and integrate culture into the classroom for visibly culturally homogenous populations. Another limitation was the collection of data. The interviews for the study were
approximately one hour, which did not allow participants to share their experiences in depth. Additionally, the participants were sharing their knowledge and experiences based on recall, and could have not acknowledged or expressed aspects of their teaching that may have been relevant to the study. Finally, the study included topics that could be viewed as uncomfortable, and through that lens, it is difficult to understand whether teachers were completely truthful.

This study seeks to contribute to the current conversation within the literature on integrating culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy, however revealed that the conversation is not over, and still needs to be explored at length. The following is a list of considerations for future research, which are reflective of limitations experienced in this study:

• **Sample size:** The sample size included only two participants. If the study included more participants it would be possible to gain further insight on teacher practices, and gain a more comprehensive, and in depth look at strategies used within the history and social studies classrooms.

• **Broader setting:** The study was completed by interviewing two teachers in Toronto. It would be interesting to see if understandings and strategies of culturally relevant pedagogy were mirrored within rural environments.

• **Student Perspective:** The study tried to capture student engagement, however from the perspective of a teacher. Although the teachers highlighted their strategies for measuring student engagement, without interviewing students it is difficult to fully understand and recognize their levels of engagement.

• **Administration Perspective:** A reoccurring theme within the literature and the participants studied was that there seemed to be a lack of support from administration, or department
heads, and it would be valid to understand their overall goals and where the misalignment is present.

- **Teacher education:** Both teachers were able to identify what culturally responsive and relevant pedagogy was, however one teacher had been explicitly taught the term, and the other had come to understand its meaning through years of developing her own pedagogy and philosophy. Looking specifically at teacher education programs, and their inclusion of culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy, and the depth it is covered would be interesting.

- **Professional development:** Looking at what professional developing the teachers in the study engage in on the topic, and also looking at the accessibility of professional development on these issues.

**Implications and Recommendations for Future Practice**

This study solidified my understanding in the benefits and challenges of implementing culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy, and provided me with strategies for effectively integrating, and reflecting students and their cultures in the classroom. Overall, it is imperative that as a teacher, you should not alter your philosophy, or ambitions as a result of administrative barriers, as reiterated by the participants. Moving beyond this study, teachers must constantly question, and critically analyze the decisions they are making within the classroom, and understand the implications their decisions have on students, their learning and engagement. Within the context of the social studies and history curriculum, it is imperative not to ignore content even when it could be viewed as uncomfortable to teach. Shirley Sternberg wrote that, “it is with that uncomfortability that we will teach (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2007)” and I am confident that similarly, this is how we learn.
The participants in this study highlighted that there is limited professional development opportunities available for current teachers to develop, and better understand culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy as a framework. Therefore, I will commit to sharing what I have learned though this study, and sharing the mindset of the participants of learning as a lifelong process with my colleagues and future students. Furthermore, my goal is to promote the importance of collaborative planning with colleagues, and create a space to learn from the experiences of one another, share resources, knowledge and lesson plans.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, the study was successful in achieving the overall goal to understand ways in which teachers implement culturally responsive and relevant pedagogy, in their terms. The strategies outlined by the participants aligned with the study’s purpose, and are consistent with many of the themes in the literature review. I hope to use these ideas in my future teaching practice. Overall, teacher mindset is critical for implementing culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy to address the cultural diversity within the classroom. Not only do teachers have to recognize cultural difference, they need to find ways to integrate and analyze classroom content and activities. In the study, participants often included partial, or full aspects of culturally responsive and relevant pedagogy identified by Ladson-Billings' three-tier framework. However, the question still remains that if this pedagogical framework is seen as “good teaching,” then why is there a disconnect between the research, and what goes on in school’s. Ultimately, the teachers in the study shared their common goal of having engaging content, and recognizing the levels of engagement among all students, and monitoring ways to encourage the active
participation of all students within, and beyond the classroom to view content critically and become agents of social change.
Appendix A: Interview Questions

General Questions:

1. How many years have you been teaching?
2. What grade(s) are you currently teaching?
3. What subject(s) are you currently teaching?
4. What is your experience in teaching the Social Studies or History curriculum?

Culturally Relevant and Responsive Pedagogy:

5. What does Culturally Responsive and Relevant Pedagogy mean to you?
6. How do you actively learn about the cultural identities of the students within your classroom?
7. Do you think it is possible to make the curriculum relevant to all learners within the classroom?
8. How does your pedagogy, and content dependent on the group of learners in front of you?
9. In what ways do you facilitate conversations that challenge racial and cultural stereotypes, and other forms of intolerance?

The Ontario Social Studies / History Curriculum:

10. How well does the Social Studies and History curriculum reflect the broad diversity of student’s backgrounds within GTA classrooms?
   b) Can you provide specific examples?
11. What are the opportunities and/or barriers within the Social Studies and History curriculum to engage the diversity of all learners?
   b) What would need to change to support you to better reach all cultural diversity?
   c) Can you provide specific examples?

Teaching Strategies:

12. What are some specific teaching strategies that have been effective in connecting the content to the diverse cultural needs within the classroom?
   - How is the effectiveness of these strategies measured?
   - How do you measure levels of engagement within the class?
13. Can you provide me with insight of some obstacles you have experienced?
   
a. Examples: Staff/department, parents, students
   
   - How have you overcome, or how are you working to overcome these obstacles?

14. What advice might you identify or recommend for someone to effectively teach the Social Studies or History curriculum to meet the culturally diverse needs in the classroom?

15. Are there any materials, support or resources you use that are particularly effective?
Appendix B:

Consent Form – Participation of Study

Date: ____________

Dear ____________,

I am a student at Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE), at the University of Toronto, and am currently enrolled in the Master of Teaching program. As a teacher candidate, I have been given the opportunity to conduct research, and I am studying how we can better connect the History and Social Studies curriculum to the culturally diverse needs of the learners within GTA classrooms at the junior/intermediate level through culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy. I have selected you as a participant of this study because of your past experience, and background knowledge.

Your participation in this study would require you to participate in an interview that would be 30-45 minutes. The interviews will be recorded to ensure accuracy when reviewing the data. You may also request to see my interview notes to ensure accuracy among communication. I will be using the content of the interview to write a research paper, assigned as a requirement of the Master of Teaching program. The interview will be conducted at your convenience.

The use of the data collected during this interview will be limited to this research study. Your information (name and school) will not be disclosed in the research paper. Your participation in this study is voluntary, and you may withdraw from the study at any time, or decline to answer certain questions.

Please feel free to contact myself, or my research supervisor, Dr. Janet Markus, should you have any questions, or request additional information.

If you agree to participate in the research study, please sign the form below. I appreciate your time and participation in the study.

Sincerely,

Erin Baker
Researcher
M.T. Candidate, OISE/UT
e.baker@mail.utoronto.ca
Dr. Janet Markus  
Professor (B.Ed and M.T.)  
OISE/UT  
janet.markus@utoronto.ca

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Consent Form:

I acknowledge that the content of this research study has been explained to me and any questions have been answered. I understand that I can withdraw from this study at any time or request to not include specific parts of the interview.

I have read the letter provided by Erin Baker and have agreed to participate in the interview process for the research study described.

Participants Signature: __________________________

Participants Printed Name: __________________________

Date: __________________________
REFERENCES


