SCHOOLYARD FARMERS:
YOUTH WRITING FOOD LITERACY CURRICULUM

by

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Abstract

This practitioner research study explores what happens when we invite youth to author curriculum. Ten high school students were hired into paid positions as curriculum writers over the course of three days to work collaboratively to author curriculum for our schoolyard farming program. The chapters of this thesis document the process, explore the implications for my own practice, and share what students wanted their own teachers to know about their experience writing curriculum. Throughout the study I have woven in the ideas of Paulo Freire and a critical conversation about whiteness in this work. Findings suggest that the process of co-authoring curriculum in a way that valued students’ prior food knowledge proved to produce a rich and nuanced curriculum document. Students were also able to transfer their learning to begin to challenge the ways in which power operated in their own classrooms outside of this project.

Keywords: food literacy, curriculum, whiteness, food justice, practitioner research, school farms, critical literacy, critical pedagogy and anti-racism.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

I run a schoolyard farming project in Toronto that employs high school students in paid summer jobs as urban farmers. Youth spend their days hand-weeding lettuce beds, harvesting and washing bunches of beets, pruning tomato plants, selling produce at the farmers market and packing orders for restaurant clients. They participate in weekly community meetings and cooking classes where they learn how to cook the food they are growing at their school from scratch. They work collaboratively to run a productive farm business: supplying produce to high end restaurants in the city; filling shoppers’ grocery bags with organic veggies at the farmer’s markets; selling produce, at a reduced price point, to a community based affordable food box program; and donating produce to the school cafeterias. Students often start the season not recognizing many of the crops grown at the farm, but finish the summer confidently explaining to market shoppers the difference in flavour between a sweet carmen pepper and a spicy tiburon poblano. They chat with other farmers at the market about the best organic methods for dealing with a flea beetle problem. They describe the best cooking techniques for producing crispy kale chips. And they proudly call themselves farmers.

Students in our farming program are participating in what I would call food literacy programming – they learn both knowledge and skills to read and engage with the food system as a whole, including an understanding of the political dimensions of how that system works. Food literacy is an emerging concept in the field of education. Sumner (2013) notes that as “a new term, its current meanings hint at a concept under construction” (p. 82).
Food literacy is also having a bit of a moment, so to speak, in the food movement and the broader education sector. The first ever national school food conference will be hosted in Montreal this fall (November 2015) with a stream of plenaries and workshops around the topic of food literacy, a recent episode of Ontario’s lunch time call-in show on CBC Radio was devoted to the state of food literacy in Ontario schools, and there are now several provincial and national networks working on food literacy in schools across the country.

Part of this rise in popularity stems from a 2012 visit to Canada from Olivier de Schutter, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food. He came to Canada to examine the current state of food (in)security in this country. In the final report, one of his recommendations was for the development of a comprehensive, rights-based national food strategy that included “school-based food literacy education” (de Schutter, 2012, p. 20). This has shone a spotlight on the organizations advocating for food literacy education in Canada and has brought food literacy to the attention of both the Ministry of Education and the Ontario Ministry for Agriculture Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA). OMAFRA recently released three food literacy targets related to the passing of the Local Food Act in 2013. Stakeholders across the country are beginning to identify food literacy as a priority – yet this raises several questions, namely, what is food literacy, who decides, and what does a food literacy curriculum look like?

We are entering the third growing season of our schoolyard farming program. So far all of our programming — lessons, workshops, conversations and field trips — has been organized very informally and has come from the interests of both our students and staff. There is real value in having a program that emerges from the questions of our
students, but there is also value in having some clearly articulated curriculum objectives. In my professional context we recently received a grant to document our work and share our model with other teachers, schools and community partners that are interested in running their own schoolyard farming social enterprise. This means we have been funded to write a food literacy curriculum that will be used in our program but also shared more broadly.

To write curriculum is to “address the question of what should be taught” (Egan, 1978, p. 12). It is to articulate what around us, what knowledge and skills, are valuable enough to be deemed necessary to be learned by others. To be a curriculum writer is to have the power to name what knowledge is valuable. Being a curriculum writer is having the power to “name the world” (Freire, 1970, p. 88).

Prior to my time at OISE I would have written a curriculum for our farming program myself. I might have asked for feedback from students and colleagues about some components, but the writing would have been done almost entirely by me. Early on in my course work I encountered this text by Adrienne Rich (1986), which really resonates with me:

When those who have the power to name and to socially construct reality choose not to see you or hear you … when someone with the authority of a teacher, say, describes the world and you are not in it, there is a moment of psychic disequilibrium, as if you looked in the mirror and saw nothing. It takes some strength of soul—and not just individual strength, but collective understanding—to resist this void, this non-being, into which you are thrust, and to stand up, demanding to be seen and heard (p. 199).

I am critical of the fact that the people most known for food literacy work are white and I do not want to be another white, privileged person trying to define the world for others, especially marginalized young people. I want to find out what happens when a
diverse group of young people take hold of the power to name the world, when educators position youth as knowers and create more horizontal notions of expertise. How could a curriculum for our program be written in a way that is inclusive of students’ knowledge and values their epistemic privilege (Moya, 2002), especially on a subject as personal as food?

Central to these curricular questions is a complication of my own whiteness, and the hegemonic nature of whiteness in our curriculum, schools and institutions. How can I do this work while continually checking my positionality as a white, middle class educator, and engaging with the complexities of intersectional oppressor-oppressed relationships?

The critical focus on whiteness here is a deliberate part of my anti-racist praxis. Currently, the school board in which I work has a 70% white teaching staff and a 72% non-white student population (Alphonso & Hammer, 2013). It is important to ask questions about what happens when the teaching staff, the administrators, the classroom resources, and the curriculum all reflect a white experience to a student population that is largely not white. Similarly, the community food movement in which I work is a white one – with non-profit organizations largely being led by white people, or as Slocum (2006) notes, the people who actually experience food injustices “tend to be on the table but not at it,” that is, they are “the objects of the work but not the leaders” (p. 330). It is at this intersection of writing curriculum about food with a diverse group of young people that it is necessary to take a critical stance on both whiteness and white supremacy to see how it is implicated and imbued in my work. I am interested in how curriculum can be written to counteract the ways in which it is currently steeped in whiteness. One way of
doing that is to work collaboratively with youth of colour, to position them as authorities on the subject of food, farming and food justice.

In his book *Immigrant Students and Literacy*, Gerald Campano (2007) asks the question: “What would it mean to develop curricula that acknowledge our students’ unique social identities, not as problems but rather as profound sources of knowledge?” (p. 16). In this study, I aim to extend this exploration to ask what would it mean to use our students’ sources of knowledge to develop their own curricula using the lens of food security and food literacy? How can we invite students to be co-constructors of this curriculum? And what is the role of a teacher when we invite youth to draw on their own knowledge and assets to address issues of community food insecurity through a curriculum design process? These are the research questions that have shaped this study.

This work was heavily influenced by Paulo Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970). This seminal book has shaped not only much of my own teaching practice and understanding of social justice, but also informed the pedagogical philosophies of many of the authors, activists and teachers I admire and draw inspiration from. When I started to ask questions about how to co-create a curriculum with young people I discovered Freire’s (1970) writings on “co-investigators” working together to “design the content of an education” that emerges from the lived experiences of those who face oppression (p. 106). I have used Freire’s writing about curriculum construction to ground and shape the curriculum writing process used with the students.

This thesis explores what happens when we create more horizontal notions of expertise between educators and students in the curriculum writing process. Ten students were hired into paid positions as curriculum writers over the course of three days to work
collaboratively with me to create a curriculum for our school farming program. The chapters of this thesis document the process, explore the implications for my own practice, and share what students wanted their own teachers to know about the curriculum writing process. Throughout the study I have woven in the ideas of Paulo Freire and a conversation about whiteness in this work.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

This practitioner research study explores writing a food literacy curriculum with youth while complicating my own positionality as a white middle-class educator. In this chapter, I first outline my position in the research and why I am choosing to focus on whiteness. I then outline the Freireian concepts relevant to the creation of curriculum. I then explore literature related to curriculum, food literacy, youth as knowers, and whiteness. I am interested in seeing how these ideas sit in conversation with the work of Paulo Freire, as his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970) was foundational to the work done by the youth in this study. I have woven the work of Freire into each part of this literature review as I see clear connections between his ideas and the literature reviewed here. I have drawn on both American and Canadian research – this is partly due to my own stance as an American raised in the Canadian school system, but also due to both the hegemonic nature of American culture in Canada and the greater volume of US-based research. While there are distinct differences in the ways schooling and racism have been structured in these two countries, there are also sharp similarities that warrant looking at both sides of the border.

**What is Settled/Naming My Agenda**

When Elizabeth Ellsworth (1989) designed a course at the University of Wisconsin-Madison in the spring of 1988 that would “act on the side of antiracism” she held herself accountable for naming the political agenda behind her curricular and pedagogical choices (p. 301). She was explicit in naming the political stance and orientation of her work by including the word racism in the title of her course, rather than
housing it under “code words like critical” (Ellsworth, 1989: 300). In a way she was articulating what was “settled” (Hand, 2008) in her work. Hand (2008) writes about a teacher’s choice to present curricular content as either a controversial topic or a settled topic (p. 213). Content is either taught as up-for-debate (controversial) or taught-with-an-answer (settled) (Hess & Avery, 2008: 9).

Hand (2008) argues that we have a normative collective understanding that racism is wrong and therefore it should be taught as settled (p. 215). Ellsworth’s (1989) ideas extend this to say that the students in her class would not debate whether racism existed on campus but rather investigate “how it operated and with what effects and contradictions” (p. 299). She is teaching the existence of racism as settled. Ellsworth (1989) invokes the writing of Audre Lorde (1984) to argue “that the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house” and to present racist and oppressive structures as anything other than settled would subject them to rationalist debate and force racialized students to use the master’s tools, tools which are designed purposefully to exclude them (p. 305). Debating the existence of racism, teaching it as anything other than settled, forces these students to “collude with the oppressor in keeping the oppressed occupied with the master’s concerns” (Ellsworth, 1989: 305).

I do not wish to collude with the oppressor, so here I aim to be explicit about what I find to be settled. These are the assumptions that inform my inquiry: race is a key organizing category for inequality because of the permanence of white supremacy in Canadian and US societies (Du Bois, 1904; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Picower, 2009; Lund & Carr, 2010); racism means prejudice+power and is a systemic and institutional form of violence (Bidol, 1970; Katz, 1978); there is no such thing as reverse
racism (there can be discrimination against white people, but not an institutional order that systemically discriminates against them) (Pincus, 2003; James, 2007; DiAngelo, 2011; McKenzie, 2014); whiteness is hegemonic and dominant in North American culture (Slocum, 2007; DiAngelo, 2011; Fine, 1997; Frankenberg, 1993; Dyer, 1997); as people are raced, they are also classed and gendered, and these intersectional, interlocking forms of oppression rely on each other in complex ways to operate (Crenshaw, 1989; Fellows & Razack, 1998; hooks, 2003).

Read a Thousand Books

I have chosen to include an in depth literature review on whiteness in relation to food, curriculum and teaching. This is partly to ground the work of this thesis but also largely as part of my own praxis. I want a solid understanding of how whiteness and white supremacy are implicated in my work in both food movements and education as I want to be able to do the work of dismantling the white supremacy that these structures are rooted in. I also want to answer the call of activists of colour, whom I greatly respect, for white people to do the work themselves:

Listen. It’s not my job to teach white people about race. If they want to have a better analysis on race, they can read a book. Shit, they can read a thousand books, because a thousand books have already been written on the subject. Films have been made, art installations have been erected. Its all been said (McKenzie, 2014, p. 78).

Articulating a broad and deep review of the literature on whiteness is a necessary part of my anti-racist praxis, and so that is central to this literature review.
Capitalizing Black and not white

“Capital letters jump off a page, and signal an Importance greater than that of the uncapitalized words” (Perlman, 2015).

There is no consensus about the capitalization of Black within academic literature when writing about race. Mahoney (1993) chose not to capitalize either Black or white noting that to capitalize only the term Black, to use “nonparallel capital letters, appeared…to reproduce the problem of treating white as an invisible norm” (p. 218). Harris (1990) also chose not to capitalize Black since race and gender are “inextricably intertwined and to capitalize “Black” and not “Woman” would be to imply a privileging of race” (p. 134). Alternatively, Springer (2001) chose to capitalize Black but not white, as whiteness is largely not recognized as marked in the same way as blackness (p. 197).

I have chosen to capitalize the word Black in this study when referring to race, as Tharps (2014) notes that “Black with a capital B refers to people of the African diaspora [while] lowercase black is simply a colour.” For many years the word white was capitalized when referring to race in journalism while Black, or Negro, were not. In 1930, The New York Times announced a change to their policy, following a letter writing campaign by W. E. B. Du Bois, stating that they would begin to capitalize Negro as not only a stylistic choice but “an act of recognition of racial respect for those who have been generations in the ‘lower case’” (Tharps, 2014). The term Negro has become an unpopular term, “associated with a subservient type of Black person,” so Tharps (2014) asks, “If we have traded Negro for Black, why was that first letter demoted back to lowercase?”
It is also argued that there is a strong concept of identity behind being Black that is a distinct experience from being white (Dreamy Brown Girl, 2015). As activist Dreamy Brown Girl writes:

Most white people don’t seem to identify as white so much as different nationalities: Irish, German, English, etc. A lot of Black people don’t have the luxury of getting so specific because our history has been erased [through slavery]; I can’t tell you what I am. I could be Jamaican. I could be Ghanian. But I don’t know. I do know I’m Black, so for me, and for lots of other Black folks, that is our identity (Dreamy Brown Girl, 2015).

Pitner (2014) affirms this noting that, “Many white Americans can name off hand the countries and even the cities that their ancestors came from, but Black Americans most likely cannot engage in this casual cultural recognition without paying for DNA testing.”

To capitalize Black begs the question of whether to capitalize white. O’Conner and Kellerman (2011) (who do not capitalize white) note that to capitalize white implies that “white [people] constitute a single ethnic group” which they argue is “certainly debatable.” I am also hesitant to capitalize white as this practice is commonly used in the writings and websites of white supremacists, as evidenced by the “website registered to the man accused in the Charleston killings, who capitalizes ‘White’ but not [B]lack” (Perlman, 2015). It may reflect a bias for me to capitalize Black and not white, however as Perlman (2015) notes in her piece about deciding whether to capitalize Black, there are contexts “where bias is appropriately intentional.” My choice to capitalize Black here is intentional and political. It is to do right for those who have spent generations in the lower case.

Pedagogy of the Oppressed

“No one has done more to move the struggle forward over the role of education as a vehicle for liberatory praxis than Paulo Freire” (McLaren, 2001: 109).
Paulo Freire, the Brazilian educator and philosopher was born into a middle-class family in Recife, Brazil in 1921 (Gadotti & Torres, 2009, p. 1255). The experiences of his family during the Great Depression greatly influenced his perspectives on class and poverty, and in turn his philosophy of education (Gadotti & Torres, 2009, p. 1255). He went to law school but pursued a career in teaching, becoming a secondary school teacher and then the Director of the Department of Education and Culture for the Brazilian State of Pernambuco (Gadotti & Torres, 2009, p. 1255). He worked in the areas of literacy and citizenship education, developing methods of teaching reading and writing to adult peasants and farm workers that used dialogues and “circles of culture” as pedagogy (Gadotti & Torres, 2009, p. 1256). In one example, 300 sugarcane workers were taught to read and write in only 45 days using his methods of student-educator dialogue (Gadotti & Torres, 2009, p. 1256).

Accused of being “a communist and a subversive,” Freire was jailed by the Brazilian military in 1964, following a coup that overthrew the Goulard government (McLaren, 2001, p. 109; Gadotti & Torres, 2009, p. 1256). He was offered exile instead of continued imprisonment and was exiled along with 100 other popular leaders (Boshier, 1999, p.115). He left Brazil, unable to return until 1980 (Gadotti & Torres, 2009, p. 1256). He settled in Chile and it is there that he wrote his most influential work \textit{Pedagogy of the Oppressed} (1970). Most of his major works were written in this particular moment in history – a time in which anti-colonial liberation movements were taking shape in Africa and revolutionary movements in Latin America were challenging long-standing oligarchies (Noguera, 2007).
During his exile, Freire took a position in Geneva from where he worked to develop literacy programs for Tanzania, Guinea-Bissau, Angola, Mozambique and other countries (Boshier, 1999, p. 116). He returned to Brazil in 1980 to eventually become appointed Secretary of Education for São Paolo (Gadotti & Torres, 2009, p. 1257). In 1991 he returned to writing (Boshier, 1999, p. 124). McLaren (1999) notes that long before his death in 1997, Freire acquired “mythic stature” among progressive educators, social workers, theologians and scholars of many other disciplines (p. 49). Freire traveled to over 100 cities throughout his lifetime to share and discuss his work, and even before his death many schools, unions, libraries, and research scholarships bore his name (McLaren, 2001, p. 110). His thoughts and theoretical developments have influenced academic scholarship beyond the field of education (Webb, 2012, p. 593). His ideas and educational philosophies are far reaching and have greatly impacted the work of this thesis as well. What follows are some Freirean concepts that are influential to my work. I have also connected his ideas to the rest of the literature reviewed in this chapter.

**Dehumanization.** The exploitation of oppressed people is rooted in the positioning of those people as not fully human. Their dehumanization is not a concrete historical fact, nor is it a determined destiny, but rather the result of “an unjust order that engenders violence in the oppressors, which in turn dehumanizes the oppressed” (Freire, 1970, p. 44). Freire notes that oppressors are also dehumanized because they participate in the dehumanization of others (Freire, 1970, p. 47).

**Humanization.** Freire calls humanization “the people’s vocation” and a primary goal of a liberatory pedagogy (Freire, 1970, p. 44). Oppressed people, as a result of
being positioned as not fully human, struggle against their oppressors seeking to regain their humanity, and ultimately, their liberation (Freire, 1970, p. 44).

**Oppressed and oppressors.** In the struggle to regain their humanity, oppressed people need to ensure they do not become the oppressors themselves as the only way to obtain true liberation is to “restore the humanity of both” (Freire, 1970, p. 44). Freire asserts that the oppressors will never have the strength to relinquish their own power, and only power that “springs from the weakness of the oppressed will be sufficiently strong to free both” (Freire, 1970, p. 44). He asks, “Who are better prepared than the oppressed to understand the terrible significance of an oppressive society?” (Freire, 1970, p. 45).

**Conscientização/Conscientization.** This refers to individuals learning to perceive social, political and economic contradictions that exist in society and their daily life, and then taking action against those oppressive elements of reality (Freire, 1970, p. 35). For example, people learning to see clearly their own dehumanization, and the structures that support and maintain their own oppression, would be part of “becoming conscious beings” (Freire, 1970, p. 79).

**A pedagogy of the oppressed.** To work towards the goals of humanization and conscientization, Freire puts forth a pedagogy of the oppressed, which is:

> “a pedagogy that must be forged with and not for the oppressed in the incessant struggle to regain their humanity. This pedagogy makes oppression, and its causes, objects of reflection by the oppressed, and from that reflection will come their necessary engagement in the struggle for their liberation. And in the struggle this pedagogy will be made and remade.” (p. 48).

The pedagogy of the oppressed has two stages (1) the oppressed unveil the world of oppression and through praxis commit to transforming it, and (2) once the reality of
oppression has been transformed, the pedagogy no longer belongs to the oppressed but to all people (Freire, 1970, p. 54).

**Critique of the banking model of education.** Freire describes a current broken model of education wherein school is a “knowledge market” in which a professor sells “packaged knowledge” to a learner who is positioned as “client” or consumer (Freire, 1978, p. 13). Students are meant to be docile receptacles that collect this information, which is often devoid of meaning, history and context. Freire notes that “the more meekly the receptacles permit themselves to be filled, the better students they are” (Freire, 1970, p. 72). The scope of action allowed by students in this model is limited to receiving, filing and storing deposits of knowledge (Freire, 1970, p. 72).

**Teacher-student contradiction.** Education suffers from narrative sickness, in which a narrating subject (teacher) speaks to a patient, docile object (student) (Freire, 1970, p. 71). The refusal of the teacher to learn from the student “grows out of an ideology of domination” (Freire, 1978, p. 9). Freire calls for a fix that requires “reconciling the poles of the contradiction so that both become simultaneously teachers and students” (Freire, 1970, p. 72). In this pedagogy, there ceases to be teachers and students, but rather teacher-students and student-teachers who both learn by working together; they become co-investigators through dialogue (Freire, 1970, p. 80-81).

**Praxis.** Freire proposes a “problem-posing” pedagogy in which teachers and students abandon the deposit model of education to instead replace it with the posing of the problems that communities face in their everyday life (Freire, 1970, p. 79). This is tied to praxis, meaning “the action and reflection of men and women upon their world in order to transform it” (Freire, 1970, p. 79). Education becomes rooted in the problems
faced by the oppressed community and then becomes about doing the work of dismantling oppressive systems. This work includes action and reflection, activism and consciousness raising. Education becomes a political, liberatory practice.

To be clear, Freire’s philosophy of education cannot be reduced to a method or one pedagogical technique. Giroux (1992) argues that often Freire’s work is appropriated by western academics in a way that “denude[s] it of some of its most important political insights” (p. 21). Giroux (1992) warns that “white academics run the risk of acting in bad faith when they appropriate the work of a Third World intellectual such as Freire” without articulating “the politics and privileges of their own locations” (p. 21).

**Critiques.** Freire presents strict categories in the form of “oppressed” and “oppressor.” Some have argued that these categories are not always (or ever) that clear (Noguera, 2007). Noguera (2007) asks, “is a low level drug dealer or pimp a member of the oppressed or oppressor class? Both exploit and prey upon the weak and powerless to sustain themselves, yet neither can be regarded as a member of the ruling class.” Freire has also been critiqued for giving primacy to class in his analysis of oppression rather than race (Haymes, 2002) or gender (Ellsworth, 1989; Stefanos, 1997).

He has received critique from feminist scholars for presenting a singular experience of oppression and the use of the male referent as universal experience (Weiler, 1991). His rather static and singular categories of “oppressed” and “oppressor,” “leaves unaddressed the forms of oppression experienced by different actors, the possibility of struggles among people oppressed differently by different groups” (Weiler, 1991, p. 453). Weiler (1991) argues that a feminist re-reading of his work is not counter to the goals of Freirean pedagogy but rather one that enriches those goals. Freire’s assumption that the
“teacher is on the same side as the oppressed,” that if the educator and the students engage in a critical dialogue about the world they will “uncover together the same reality, the same oppression, and the same liberation,” is found to be problematic as it universalizes a much more complex situation and denies the ways in which both teachers and students are differently raced, classed and gendered (Weiler, 1991, p. 454).

In Freire’s later works he did begin to address some of these critiques by writing about the intersectionality of race, class and gender, however he still asserted that race and gender had to be understood through class (thus still giving primacy to class) (Freire, 1997; Freire, 1998b).

**Curriculum**

“What do schools teach, what should they teach, and who should decide?”
(Flinders & Thornton, 2004: XI)

**What do schools teach?** Curriculum starts with the question of what should be taught and then extends “to the study of any and all educational phenomena” (Egan, 2003, p. 16). This includes not only what to teach but the questions of how – as Egan (2003) notes focusing “on either how or what at the expense of the other is improper” (p. 16).

For early curriculum theorists like Bobbit (1924) and Charters (1923) curriculum writing involved scanning what adults needed in order to live successful lives and then planning a curricular path to meet those educational objectives. A central tenet was a belief that curriculum “must directly and specifically prepare students for tasks in the adult world” (Pinar et al, 2008, p. 97). Curriculum development at this time was a
“scientific” method of building a scope and sequence of learning based on efficiency - searching for curriculum that would “maximize output (i.e., student learning) at a minimum cost (i.e., paying teachers)” (Flinders & Thornton, 2004, p. 3). Curriculum was about reproducing an existing social order, preparing students for everyday life as adults.

For Dewey (1929) schools were a tool of social reform, rather than social reproduction, and school curriculum should break through the barriers that exist between students’ school-life experiences and community-life experiences. He articulated that “education is a process of living and not a preparation for future living” (Dewey, 1929/2004, p.19) and the child’s present experience should form the basis of curriculum (Pinar et al, 2008, p. 105). Jane Addams shared this notion of learning as continuous and not reducible to preparation for a life to come later (Pinar et al, 2008, p. 107). Curriculum, then, was about the cultivation of democratic vision and social awareness, and so subject matter became resources for this larger curricular cause, rather than subject matter as the curriculum itself (Pinar et al, 2008, p. 107).

The Tyler Rationale published in 1949 outlined four steps for writing curriculum: (1) deciding on the educational purpose of the school; (2) deciding which educational experiences can be provided to meet these purposes; (3) articulating how these educational experiences can be effectively organized; and (4) building an evaluation plan for determining whether these purposes are being met (p. 1). This method informed much of the curriculum generated in the 1950s and 1960s – a time known as the reformation of curriculum development (Pinar et al, 2008, p. 149).

Much of the curriculum produced in this time period was authored by subject-specific experts, rather than teachers, educators, or curriculum generalists (Flinders &
Thornton, 2004, p. 48). This mirrors the process of curriculum review currently occurring in Ontario, wherein “teams of experts in the subject discipline from across the province analyze the current curriculum against the desired state for the revised curriculum” (Ontario Ministry of Education, Online FAQ, 2015).

**What should they teach?** The 1970s were the start of the “reconceptualization of curriculum theory” (Flinders & Thornton, 2004, p. 119; Pinar et al, 2008, p. 186). This shift in curriculum theory was supported by a broad climate of revolution and political change in the 1960s (e.g., civil rights movements, popular student movements, and anti-war protests), which meant that “nearly every discipline associated with the social sciences underwent self-critique and the curriculum field would be no exception” (Pinar et al, 2008, p. 187).

Freire (1970) called for an emancipatory curriculum co-constructed with students that is rooted in problem-posing and praxis, and Apple (1975) called for a radical rethinking of our curricular questions. Apple writes:

> I reject the comforting illusion that the types of questions that are commonly being asked by curriculum workers and other educators are fruitful. In fact, it seems to me that many of the modes of activity, the forms of language, the basic ideologies, even the things we do to supposedly ‘help’ kids are in need of a radical (in the sense of going to the very root of an issue) rethinking (p. 89).

As Pinar (1978) argues, prior to the reconceptualization, curriculum theorists dealt with schools as they are – their task was to create curriculum improvement without fundamentally altering existing societal arrangements or institutions (p. 206). The work of reconceptualists acknowledged the value-laden nature of both curriculum and curriculum research, as well as the potential emancipatory function of curriculum (Pinar, 1978, p. 209).
The reconceptualization brought attention to the fact that curriculum is much more than state-mandated learning objectives. Aoki (1993) speaks of a distinction between the curriculum-as-plan and the lived curriculum wherein the lived curriculum is “the plan more or less lived out” (p. 201). It is each student’s unique lived experience with the content and the teacher’s wisdom in knowing the multiplicity of their students’ experiences with the curricula (p. 203). There is the plan and then there is the lived experience of that plan – both are curriculum.

The idea of the written curriculum as distinguished from the lived curriculum is reminiscent of Campano’s (2007) notion of a “second classroom,” which is the curricular work that happens in the margins – in between periods of the school day, in tandem with (or sometimes counter to) the mandated curriculum, drawn from students’ interests, desires, cultural expressions and stories (p. 4, 40-41). It is a curricular and pedagogical space that highlights the emotional labour of teachers as they balance the needs of their students with the delivery of a state-mandated curriculum (Campano, 2007, p. 40).

Hidden curricula are the norms and values that are implicitly and effectively taught in schools but are not explicitly articulated in the written curriculum (Apple, 2004, p 79). Often this hidden curriculum is one of maintaining (and normalizing) hegemonic structures and creating docile students (Apple, 2004, p. 77). This is significant as Apple (2004) notes that often the tacit teaching, or hidden teaching, about political socialization in schools is more effective than the deliberate teaching found in a civics class – that is to say hidden curriculum often has a greater impact than the written curriculum in classroom spaces (p. 79; also Kumashiro, 2000, p. 32; Ibrahim, 2004, p. 118).
A critical stance towards school curriculum is an integral part of effective culturally relevant pedagogy, as well as the inclusion of local community (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 479 & 482). Effective teaching and curriculum design, particularly in low socioeconomic status and racialized schools, requires “a close engagement with community knowledge and institutions” (Luke, Woods & Dooley, 2011, p. 8). Delpit (2012) argues that both the culture of the local community and the culture of young people that need to be incorporated into curriculum, because “if the curriculum we use to teach our children does not connect in positive ways to the culture young people bring to school it is doomed to failure” (p. 210).

Who should decide? Historically, curriculum decisions have been left to small, elite portions of the population that are concerned with the functioning of schools (Flinders & Thornton, 2004, p. 1). For Bobbit (1924), teachers should decide upon curriculum objectives, or scope and sequence, since they are closest to the labour of the subject (p. 4). Bobbit argued for a “dispassionate analysis of what youngsters needed to lead productive lives as adults” and therefore dismissed any claims that the interests of the students should be involved in curricular questions (Flinders & Thornton, 2004, p. 3). Tyler’s Rationale, which greatly informed curriculum produced in the 1950s and 1960s, “is not a teacher’s statement of curriculum development; it is a bureaucrat’s” (Pinar et al, 2008, p. 149). Much of the curriculum produced using Tyler’s methodology was authored by subject-specific experts, rather than teachers (Flinders & Thornton, 2004, p. 48). Aoki (1993) notes that planned curriculum originates outside of the classroom and is “imbued with the planner’s orientations to the world” (p. 201). Dewey argued that curriculum should be informed by the educational interests of the students although he is clear to
articulate that he did not advocate for “freedom without adult guidance” (Pinar et al, 2008, 105).

Freire (1970) argued that an emancipatory curriculum must emerge from the lived experience of the students:

The starting point for organizing the program content of education or political action must be the present, existential, concrete situation, reflecting the aspirations of the people. Utilizing certain basic contradictions, we must pose this existential, concrete, present situation to the people as a problem which challenges them and requires a response – not just at the intellectual level, but at the level of action (p. 95).

He did maintain that a teacher was still a director and a guide of education – he cautioned against “falling prey to a laissez-faire practice” of teaching and asserted that the teacher’s role “includes helping learners get involved in planning education,” rather than “merely following blindly” (Freire & Macedo, 1995, p. 379).

It is Freire’s writing on the process of creating curriculum that greatly informed the design of this study. The curriculum writing process that the youth in our farming program followed was shaped by the process Freire lays out in Pedagogy of the Oppressed. I look at this process more closely in the Methodologies chapter of this thesis.

The curriculum theory reviewed here, whether from traditionalists, reformists, or reconceptualists, tends to position only adults as curriculum writers. This thesis asks what happens when we position youth as the authors of food literacy curriculum. In the next section I give an overview of empirical studies that include students in curricular questions.

**Youth authoring curriculum.** Very few studies exist that look at cases of youth authoring curriculum or participating in the curriculum design process (Bovill et al, 2008). Many teachers are aware of the gap between existing curricular requirements and
what students actually want to know, however the solutions and attention given to the problem vary and are driven by the interests of the teacher (Hagay, Baram-Tsabari & Peleg, 2012, p. 407). In some cases teachers are involved in authoring curriculum and driving curriculum policy innovation as a means of making classroom curriculum more relevant to local contexts (Bascia et al, 2014, p. 228). Others call for students to be directly included in the development of educational policy through authorizing their perspectives (Cook-Sather, 2002, p. 3). To “authorize student perspective” is to “count students among those who have the knowledge and the position to shape what counts as education” (Cook-Sather, 2002, p. 3). To do so makes educational policy more relevant, more accessible, and students find themselves empowered and willing to “participate constructively in their education” (Cook-Sather, 2002, p. 3).

There are examples of the post-secondary classroom being a site of co-constructed curriculum and co-authored educational resources. These include using wiki websites for creating a student-authored medical textbook (Thompson, Schulz & Terrence, 2011, p. 1392) or students writing real-life case studies as curricular content for effective pre-service teacher education programs (Richards, Hemphill, Templin, & Eubank, 2012, p. 47). Bovill et al (2009) looked at nine examples of first-year university students participating in the curriculum design process for their own courses and found that when “students’ own experiences become a focus for learning and basis for curriculum design, students found learning to be more relevant and authentic” (p. 18). There are also a few studies that look at the collaborative work of university faculties of education, pre-service teachers and students writing curriculum together (Grace, 1999; Simon et al, 2014; Guerrero et al, 2013). Students who participated in Proyecto Latin@, a
project partnership between the Toronto District School Board and the University of Toronto where youth received both a senior course credit and pay for participating in a bilingual, youth-driven research project, reported that participating in a project where they were able to shape the content and ask questions relevant to their daily lives allowed them to “develop their sense of self-worth, respect, creativity, autonomy, and the ability to make meaningful and relevant contributions to the lives of others” (Guerrero et al, 2013, p. 121).

**Food Literacy**

Although food movement activists have long talked about food literacy and its relation to school curriculum, the term itself is an emerging concept in the field of education. Jennifer Sumner (2013) notes that as “a new term, its current meanings hint at a concept under construction” (p. 82) while Vidgen and Gallegos (2014) argue that “there is no shared understanding of its meaning” (p. 51). Many current conceptions of the term align with a definition of health or nutrition education (Vidgen & Gallegos, 2014, p. 52), while others extend the term food literacy to include a broader scope of not just cooking and eating, but also understanding “food production, procurement, preparation and processing” (Murimi, 2013, p. 195). Current conceptions focus on a variety of pedagogical approaches including reading food labels, developing cooking skills, or acting to ensure food is part of the civil commons (Sumner, 2013, p. 83).

Within education circles, I find that the term food literacy, if ever used, is associated with basic nutrition education and does not account for the structures of power and issues of inequitable access present in the food system. Others have made similar
arguments noting that current conceptions of food literacy are often highly individualistic and apolitical (Kimura, 2011, p. 465; Sumner, 2013, p. 83).

For example, when OMAFRA recently held a stakeholders meeting in the fall of 2014 to establish aspirational food literacy targets for the province, I was invited to attend several moderated round table discussions with other stakeholders – farmers, food processors, teachers and agri-food industry representatives. As we answered questions about setting food literacy goals I continually raised points about equity, access, and justice in our food system and the need for these issues to be reflected in provincial food literacy targets. Most of the comments I made were not noted by the moderator (an OMAFRA employee) and when the food literacy targets were finally published this winter, they could accurately be described as highly individualistic and apolitical. The food literacy targets focus on (1) increasing the number of Ontarians that know what local foods are available and when, (2) how and where to buy them and (3) to choose to prepare them more often (OMAFRA, 2015). These goals overlook the fact that many Torontonians know exactly how and where to buy local foods but are limited in their ability to do so because of larger structural barriers such as living on social assistance and having their Special Diet Subsidy cut, forcing them to choose between paying rent or eating dinner (Goar, 2013).

In my own work, food literacy means equipping students with the knowledge and skills to read, navigate and engage with our complex food system – a system that is profoundly unjust and broken. It must move beyond nutritive food education to food justice education, with students keeping a critical focus on the way power and politics
mediate our relationship with food and with each other. In searching for a definition of food literacy, it is important to make clear what we mean by *food justice*.

**Food justice, food security & food sovereignty.** People in the food movement often use the terms *food justice*, *food security* and *food sovereignty* interchangeably – so I want to be clear here about their distinct definitions. If we are searching for a food literacy definition that is grounded in food justice, it is important to understand the term food justice itself. Gottlieb & Joshi (2010) characterize food justice work as related to three key arenas:

(i) seeking to challenge and restructure the dominant food system;
(ii) providing a core focus on equity and disparities and the struggles by those who are most vulnerable;
(iii) and establishing linkages and common goals with other forms of social justice activism and advocacy including immigrant rights, worker justice, transportation and access, and land use (p. ix).

Loo (2014) extends this to argue that a comprehensive understanding of food justice cannot only consider the “distributive disparities” of the food system but must also examine the “participative disparities,” the ways in which people are limited in engaging in a food system, that are themselves the basis of material and distributive injustices (p. 788).

*Food security* has quite utilitarian roots. Its original 1974 definition from the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations reads as “the availability at all times of adequate world food supplies of basic foodstuffs to sustain a steady expansion of food consumption and to offset fluctuations in production and prices” (FAO, 2003). Patel (2009) notes that the initial definition reflects its political economic context of a “technocratic faith in the ability of states to redistribute resources” (p. 665). Recent usage has included a broadening of the term to include non-state actors (such as NGOs and
community organizations) as authors of the food system and shifts the discussion “away from food production toward broader social concerns” (Patel, 2009, p. 665). An updated definition used by the FAO defines food security as:

A situation that exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life (FAO, 2013).

Although the term has broadened somewhat food security is still very much about the issue of having access to enough food. It is still very much about calories and basic nutrition (see for examples: Charlebois et al, 2014; Dimitri & Rogus, 2014; Wakefield et al, 2015).

*Food sovereignty* is a term introduced by the leadership of La Via Campesina, an international peasants movement. It was created to specifically challenge the prevailing notions of food security and its avoidance of discussing the social control of the food system (Patel, 2009, p. 665). La Via Campesina argues that there needs to be a change in the internal political arrangements of the food system and that we must shift from food security to food sovereignty – meaning, “The right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through sustainable methods and the right to define their own food and agriculture systems” (La Via Campesina, 2011). Food sovereignty values the knowledge and lived experiences of peasants, small farmers, landless people, women farmers, Indigenous peoples and agricultural workers. It focuses on collective and self-determination, and is critical of corporate control of the food system. I am reminded of a talk I heard Winona LaDuke give in Taos, New Mexico at a Food Justice Conference, in which she remarked that food literacy work has to be about “decolonizing our children’s taste buds.” Food sovereignty is very much about decolonization, peasant-led agrarian
reform (Torrez, 2011, p. 53) and a radical restructuring of the food system (Loo, 2014, p. 795).

Focusing on those who are currently on the margins of the food system reflects Freire’s assertion that a pedagogy of the oppressed must be developed and practiced by the oppressed and not by the oppressors (Freire, 1970, p. 54). The term food sovereignty reflects the necessary role that those who face oppression must play in leading the food movement. Additionally, food sovereignty does not simply call for the integration of those who are marginalized into a broken system as the fix; as Freire notes, “they have always been ‘inside’ the structure, that’s what made them ‘beings for others’” (Freire, 1970, p. 74). Rather food sovereignty calls for those who are marginalized to radically transform that system itself.

**Freire and food - reading the world.** All three terms are closely linked. However food sovereignty and food justice share an analysis of structures of power in the food system, whereas food security is often criticized for not examining existing power inequities or forms of oppression. In essence, food security does not see the whole system; it does not see the whole *world*. It only works with a portion of the world.

Freire argues that analyzing systems of power, unveiling oppressive structures, involves learning to read the world. For Freire, reading the world *always* precedes reading the word, and the world that we learn to read before we read the word necessarily involves food (Freire, 1987, p. 5). He recounts one of his first experiences reading, through reading the skin of a mango:

> The texts, words, letters of that context were incarnated...in fruit rinds: the varying colour tones of the same fruit at different times – the green of a mango when the fruit is first forming, the green of a mango fully formed, the greenish yellow of the same mango ripening, the black spots of an overripe mango – the
relationship among these colours, the developing fruit, its resistance to our manipulation, and its taste. It was possibly at this time, by doing it myself and seeing others do it, that I learned the meaning of the word *squashing*. (Freire, 1987, p. 6)

If food literacy means being able to read a food system, it necessarily means being able to read the world. There is a clear connection between Freire’s notion of reading the world and the notion of reading the food system. Sumner (2013) also argues that food literacy connects to Freire’s notion of “reading the world.” She provides this working definition of food literacy – the only one I have found so far that comes close to the conceptions of food literacy in my practice:

Food literacy is the ability to “read the world” in terms of food, thereby recreating it and remaking ourselves. It involves a full-cycle understanding of food – where it is grown, how it is produced, who benefits and who loses when it is purchased, who can access it (and who can’t), and where it goes when we are finished with it. It includes an appreciation of the cultural significance of food, the capacity to prepare healthy meals and make healthy decisions, and the recognition of the environmental, social, economic, cultural, and political implications of those decisions (p. 86).

Sumner comes to food literacy through her work in the field of adult literacy, a field that draws heavily on the work of Paulo Freire. In the next section, I aim to connect some of the literature on multiliteracies and critical literacies with the notion of food literacy.

What does literacy tell us about the emerging idea of food literacy?

**The “literacy” of food literacy.** Teachers often think of how learning about food includes some forms of written text and it is through those instances of reading written text that students are practicing literacy. Reading nutritional information, writing about food memories, reading a seed catalogue - these are seen as written, text-based ways of learning literacy *through* food education. For example, Barton and Hamilton (2000) provide a case study of “cooking literacy” in which Rita follows a recipe for baking a
lemon pie in her kitchen. Though they note that this literacy event includes other semiotic systems including numeracy and non-text based images, the literacy event is still “mediated by written text” (Barton & Hamilton, 2000, p.10).

Framing food literacy as a way of using written text to engage with food systems education is an approach I often use when working with teachers that are interested in bringing food literacy into their classroom – if they can connect learning about the food system while fulfilling a specific expectation in their Language Arts curriculum, then they have a way of legitimizing their pedagogical choices through rooting them in current curriculum expectations. I can see the value in this practice.

However, I am more interested in how food literacy itself is a legitimate and valuable form of literacy for our students. I would like to move from a place of defending food literacy simply because it includes some form of written text-based literacy, to instead articulate how food literacy itself is a critical multimodal literacy practice. I am interested in the ways we might see the food system as a form of text itself – something that can be read, understood, and redesigned.

Lankshear and Knoble (2003) discuss a rise in the 1980s of applying the term literacy to any knowledge or learning “deemed educationally valuable” (p. 14). Schools are expected to help students become computer literate, politically literate and math literate. For instance, the Ministry of Education developed the Working Group on Financial Literacy which defines financial literacy as “having the knowledge and skills needed to make responsible economic and financial decisions with competence and confidence” (Ministry of Education, 2010, p. 7). This reflects Lankshear and Knoble’s (2003) notion that the use of literacy in this capacity is a metaphor for competence or
proficiency (p.14). This also reflects the (apolitical) notion of food literacy as one of food skills competency – about being proficient in growing, cooking and eating.

Lankshear and Knoble (2003) also note a more recent use of the term literacy that “foregrounds the notion of making meaning – as a producer or consumer – from signs, signals, codes and graphic images,” which moves us closer to the idea of reading a system (or reading the world) (p. 15).

Being “literate” also involves situating oneself inside a certain field of knowledge, being able to read and write that field’s literature and speak its language. In this sense, becoming food literate would mean becoming situated within the food ‘field of knowledge’ (the whole food system) and being able to make meaning of its signs and codes as well as speak the language.

Membership in a field of knowledge echoes Gee’s (2001) notion of discourses (p. 1). As Gee notes, being in a discourse “is being able to engage in a particular sort of ‘dance’ with words, deeds, values, feelings, other people, objects, tools, technologies, places and times so as to get recognized as a distinctive sort of who doing a distinctive sort of what” (Gee, 2008, p. 155). For example, knowing the discourse of “business” and being recognized by others as a “business person” through the words you use, values you share, places you spend time, and ways that you dress.

Does being food literate mean you know the right ‘dance’ of words, people, objects and places related to food? I hesitate with this notion because it implies that some students are located outside of the discourse, and are therefore food illiterate. The term illiterate is not a neutral one. Food is such an intimate part of who we are – it is part of our culture, family, tradition and physical being from birth – the idea that students aren’t
already food literate undermines the knowledge that they already hold around food. Similarly, Freire (1985) argues that through his reading of the world, he was already literate by the time he arrived at school (p. 8). He even discusses the knowledge that students bring with them when they enter a classroom to learn how to cook:

Let us take for example the practice of cooking. Cooking presupposes certain kinds of knowledge regarding the use of the cooking stove. How to light it, how to turn the heat up and down. How to deal with the possibility of fire how to balance the ingredients in a harmonious and pleasing synthesis. With practice, newcomers to the kitchen will confirm some things that they already know, correct others they do not know so well, and gradually open up the way to become cooks (Freire, 1998a, p. 29)

Students show up to this class already knowledgeable in many ways about food and cooking and using a stove. They do not show up empty. I think there is danger in denying this prior knowledge, in saying that some individuals are not food literate, when what we are really saying is that they are not the “right kind” of food literate (perhaps the white kind of food literate).

Gee’s (2008) distinction between primary and secondary discourses could be helpful here. Your primary discourse is the one you learn at home, in your family and community, while your secondary discourses are the ones you learn in school, such as an academic language or a computer language. Perhaps everyone has a primary food discourse - a discourse in which we identify a strong sense of self connected to our culturally specific food practices (Gee, 2008, p. 156). Food literacy education that helps us to read the structures of power in a complex food system, the kind of food literacy that I do in my work, is perhaps a “secondary discourse” for students (Gee, 2008, p. 157). In this case, food literacy could become an additional discourse that students have access to without diminishing their own already existing, rich, and incredibly valuable food
knowledge. As Delpit (1992) argues, we do not need to eliminate students’ primary discourses but rather “add other discourses to their repertoires” (p. 301).

This idea of primary discourses also resonates with the notion of *funds of knowledge* which refers to the “historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning and well-being” (Moll et al, 1992, p. 133). This notion values the cultural knowledge of parents and families, and maintains a positive view of households as containing “ample cultural and cognitive resources” (Moll et al, 1992, p. 134) which I think is vital when talking about food. In food literacy work it can be easy for education about food (and all education for that matter) to position parents and families as making the wrong choices, not trying, or as uneducated – especially when students are racialized (See: Flessa, 2008, p. 19; James & Saul, 2007, p. 845). I see this coming from white educators who deliver food programming for racialized and newcomer youth. Even if their intentions are good, often the result will be a distancing between the student and their own family’s food traditions. I want to ensure food literacy work deeply respects, values, and enriches students’ primary knowledge of food. This only happens when we keep a critical lens on power and whiteness, as food justice work does.

The lens of power reflects the body of work around critical literacies – a framework for understanding and critiquing the ways literacy and language are tied to power (Campano, Ghiso & Sanchez, 2013, p. 102). As teacher Linda Christensen (1999) wrote, “I want to teach a critical literacy that equips students to ‘read’ power relationships at the same time that it imparts academic skills” (p. 54). Critical literacies understand the teaching of literacy as political and never neutral or value-free
(Christensen, 1999, p. 55; Freire, 1987, p. 6). Rather than having students focus on a close reading of a text, they can engage in a close reading of larger societal problems. Reading power relationships speaks to the notion of reading power in the food system.

In their work with an all boys school in Detroit, Campano, Ghiso & Sanchez (2013) identified critical orientations among students that were not taught by the teachers. Rather, students were “cultivating critical orientations and dispositions already seeded in the soil of their local context, which included the mentorship of teachers and community members” (p. 102). They characterized these critical literacies as organic. The use of the term organic draws on the idea of the organic intellectual (Gramsci, 1971) who, unlike the traditional intellectual who “views the world from a neutral ivory tower,” instead theorizes from their own “social experience and struggle” (Campano, Ghiso & Sanchez, 2013, p. 103). This resonates with the work of this thesis: respecting the organic and locally based knowledge and orientations of our student farmers. I think if food literacy is not critical food literacy there is danger in not only overlooking relationships of power that exist in our food system but reproducing those injustices in our work. It has to be critical, or else it may do more harm than good.

Students as Knowers

Naming the world. Valuing what students already know about food should be a necessary component of all food literacy education. It means their own reading of the world is considered important knowledge. Positioning students as curriculum writers also means that students are able to name the world, as mentioned earlier in the Adrienne Rich piece. It gives students the authority to describe the world and ensure they are reflected
within that description - that they can take up space in the centre and no longer be “marginal.” It also means positioning students as knowers and knowledge producers.

Students-as-knowers speaks to Freire’s (1970) concept of student-teachers and teacher-students. Freire rejects the banking model of education wherein students are passive receptacles of “deposits” of knowledge from their teacher (p. 72). Freire argues for restructuring the relationship between teachers and students so that “both are simultaneously teachers and students” (Freire, 1970, p. 72).

This speaks also to more horizontal notions of expertise in the act of writing curriculum with youth. The term horizontalidad, coming from the popular power movement in Argentina, implies democratic communication that strives towards non-hierarchical creation and is a break from vertical ways of organizing and relating (Campano et al, 2010, p. 278). Campano et al (2010) use the term in relation to their research partnership between their university and the teaching faculty at an all-boys public elementary school. They argue that expertise does not live solely in the university, and then flow to the teachers, but should be seen as more democratically and horizontally held between all members of the research community (including teachers and students) (Campano et al, 2010, p. 277). Horizontalidad is also as a way of understanding relationships within collaborations not as a means to an end, but rather as ends in themselves (Campano et al, 2010, p. 278). This horizontal notion of relationships is reflected in Freire’s (1998a) writing on true learning where “learners will be engaged in a continuous transformation through which they become authentic subjects of the construction and reconstruction of what is being taught, side by side with the teacher,
who is equally subject to the same process” (p. 33). The learning is done together and is a continual, ongoing process.

Ellsworth (1989) notes that while teachers can learn from their students, there are some things that as a teacher she could “never know about the experience, oppressions, and understandings of participants in [her] class,” which means it is impossible for any one voice (including the teacher) to “assume the position of centre or origin of knowledge or authority” (p. 310). Positioning students as curriculum writers acknowledges the epistemic privilege (Moya, 2002) of youth who are on the margins, actively expanding, or even dismantling, the centre.

**Epistemic privilege** refers to the ways in which marginalized individuals have a “special advantage with respect to possessing or acquiring knowledge about how fundamental aspects of our society (such as race, class, gender and sexuality) operate to sustain matrices of power” (Moya, 2002, p. 38; see also: Mohanty, 2000, p. 58; Campano, 2007, p. 16). Moya (2002) is clear in that this does not necessarily mean that social locations have epistemic meanings in “a self-evident way” but rather that the experiences of oppressed people can provide them with knowledge that can help us all in understanding how “hierarchies … operate to uphold existing regimes of power in society” (p. 38). That knowledge is unique to members of oppressed groups and is based on experiences that people who are not oppressed usually lack (Moya, 2002, p. 38). Additionally, acknowledging the rich epistemic privilege of the oppressed is “more than a sentimental gesture” as it is necessary for political struggle (Mohanty, 1997, p. 214).

**Problems vs. possibilities.** Cammarota (2011) identifies two dominant approaches to working with poor and racialized youth in city spaces: problems based vs.
possibilities based. The *problems based* approach sees young people through a deficit model (p. 830). This is reflected in common imagery attached to urban schools (schools located within the areas marked by the “inner city” rings) that “pathologize students, parents and communities” with deficit constructs (Daniel, 2010, p. 824). Daniel would also problematize the distinction between urban and suburban schools, noting for example that in Toronto much of the lower income or government subsidized housing is actually located in suburban settlements, or the “inner suburbs” (Daniel, 2010, p. 828; see also: James & Saul, 2007, p. 842).

The *possibilities based* approach focuses on the assets that youth “putatively bear” (Cammarota, 2011, p. 830). A possibilities based approach relies on engendering opportunities for young people to draw on their own assets and knowledge to determine the solutions to solve problems in their communities (Cammarota, 2011, p. 830). This resonates with Freire’s depiction of the process of dialogically designing a literacy program and using resources from the people – producing generative themes and codifications that emerge from the community, using problem posing and cultural circles as a way of learning from each other. This dialogical design process informed the work done by the youth curriculum writers for this thesis project.

Cammarota also asserts that although young people do face daily problems such as “drug use, educational failure, and violence” it is incorrect to assume these are inherent to the population or internally adopted from their environments (and therefore young people are “pathologically integrated with their environment”) (Cammarota, 2011, p. 832). Young people may learn maladapted behaviours but these are socially constructed, learned (even if they are internalized), and they are “still subject to reflection, resistance
and restructuring” (Cammarota, 2011, p. 832). This speaks to Freire’s writing on limit-acts and limit-situations; through conscientization oppressed people come to see a “determined” situation as one made up of limiting situations that can be acted upon and changed (Freire, 1970, p. 99; Noguera, 2007). This speaks to Daniel’s (2010) call to “remove blame from individual students in city schools and locate it in the broader structural inequities in the system” (826). This speaks to the current state of our food system. If we can build a critical food literacy curriculum that frames current inequities in the food system as limit-situations that require limit-acts to fix, we can continue to see real change.

**Whiteness**

As a white educator working in a diverse school system, I am choosing to focus a critical lens on whiteness in both my work and research. This stems from a critical race perspective that “always foregrounds race as an explanatory tool for the persistence of inequality” (Ladson-Billings, 1997, p.132). Whiteness is three things: (1) a location of structural advantage; (2) a standpoint from which white people look at themselves, at others and at society; and (3) a set of cultural practices that are largely unmarked and unnamed (Frankenburg, 1993, p. 1). Whiteness is not recognized as race but rather as something to be achieved, a grouping that bodies can be admitted into, without having to recognize their admission or its associated privilege (Slocum, 2007, p. 523). As Slocum (2007) notes, “Whiteness is hegemonic in the US: it is dominant in spaces regardless of the number of bodies in a certain place” (p. 521). It is a way of being in the world that maintains a system of white supremacy (Picower, 2009, p. 198).
writes, “The thing about whiteness is [white people] don’t have to claim it to have it” (p. 70).

The roots of whiteness lie in the European Enlightenment’s notion of rationality with its “privileged construction of a transcendental white, male, rational subject” (Kincheloe, 1999, p. 164). Encounters with non-white people, as part of a violent colonial project, are then framed in “rationalistic terms” with whiteness representing orderliness, rationality, and self-control and non-whiteness as chaos, irrationality, violence, and the break-down of self regulation. Rationality emerged as the conceptual base around which civilization and savagery could be delineated (Kincheloe, 1999, p. 164).

As Fanon (1952) wrote in Black Skin, White Masks, “the difference between civil and savage is the proximity to the white man” (p. 26).

The normalization of whiteness makes it so that white people do not need to think about race in their daily lives. As Frankenburg (1993) notes, “The self, where it is part of the dominant cultural group, does not have to name itself” (p. 196). This supports the common experience of many white people who experience themselves as “just normal” and feel that race does not play a significant role in their lives (Torrens, 2009, p. 3). This also speaks to the notion of whiteness being both unmarked and unnamed (Frankenburg, 1993, p. 1).

Leonardo (2004) critiques the notion that white people are passively handed an “invisible knapsack” (McIntosh, 1990) of privilege arguing instead that they actively partake in a system of domination that affords them privilege:

[White people] set up a system that benefits the group, mystify that system, remove the agents of actions from discourse, and when interrogated about it, stifle the discussion with inane comments about the reality of the charges being made (p. 148).
White people “mystify the process of racial accumulation” by forsaking structural analysis of oppression to focus on individuals and liberal notions of meritocracy (Leonardo, 2004, p. 141).

“Mystifying the process” is reminiscent of Freire’s writing on the mythicizing of oppression – depositing myths that are “indispensible to maintaining the status quo” (Freire, 1970, p. 139). These myths include a dominant narrative that the oppressive order is a free society, that all people are able to work where they wish, the myth of meritocracy, and that anyone industrious can be prosperous (Freire, 1970, p. 139). These myths become internalized by the oppressed to maintain a system of subjugation (Freire, 1970, p. 140).

Slocum (2007) asserts that “people are located differently in their brownness and whiteness” (p. 525). Whiteness is hegemonic (Kinchloe, 1999, p. 162) but not homogenous. This is reflective of the complexities of light skin privilege, particularly for those with a family heritage of marginalization. Bonita Lawrence and Cherrie Moraga both address these complexities specifically in the context of Indigenous populations. In her work with First Nations groups in the Canadian prairies, Lawrence (2004) notes that First Nations “white-looking participants had received some form of unacknowledged benefit from not having to show up with a brown face when looking for an apartment, in dealing with government bureaucracy or in trying to find a job” (p. 178). In this case, individuals who come from a cultural heritage that has been historically marginalized due to colonial violence and racism, yet who have light skin, still benefit from white supremacist institutions. Moraga (1996) notes that this privilege is contingent on place; in
the southern US she is viewed as “Indian” but in Mexico she is read as white (p. 234). The privilege of light skin can change with location.

The privilege of light skin also changes over time – Irish, Italian and Jewish people have all been viewed as non-white in particular places at specific moments in history but could be read as white today, depending on context (Kinetchoe, 1999, p. 167; Guess, 2006, p. 668). Ladson-Billings (1997) notes that the construction of the categories “white” and “Black” in America was an answer to the question *who is eligible for slavery?* (p. 129). The *not eligible for slavery* group was “composed exclusively of peoples of European descent” and so those who were previously distinguished by national or language groupings (ie., Irish, English, German, French, Scots) reconstituted themselves as a racial grouping (white) (Ladson-Billings, 1997, p. 129). Castenell and Pinar (1993) note that the category “people of colour” has also changed “according to political circumstances” (p. 3). This further elucidates the idea that race is a construction and not a biological category (Castenell & Pinar, 1993, p. 3). Or as Apple (2003) notes, “Race is certainly not a stable category” (p. 109).

It is important to remember that as people are raced, they are also classed and gendered, and these intersectional, interlocking forms of oppression rely on each other in complex ways to operate (Crenshaw, 1989; Fellows & Razack, 1998; hooks, 2003). This differs from Freire’s more static and fixed notion of homogenous oppressed/oppressor classes. Freire has asserted, in his conversations with Macedo (1995), that “while one cannot reduce the analysis of racism to social class, we cannot understand racism fully without a class analysis” (p. 401). However, Freire has also been critiqued (Haymes, 2002) for implying in his work that class trumps race as an organizing facet of
oppression. Haymes (2002) argues that the reality for Black Americans “in an anti-Black racist society is that they live class *through* race” (p. 155). Ladson-Billings (1997) also notes that “being ‘middle class’ does not shield African-American students from discriminatory and racist individual and institutional behaviours” in schools (p. 130).

Leonardo (2004) argues that ideas of whiteness, although gaining prominence in academic circles, are not new; they are simply being heard now that they are being espoused by white authors to white audiences (p. 142). These ideas have long been articulated by activists and authors of colour yet are now gaining popularity through the writing of white scholars (who are drawing on work they once dismissed as irrelevant) in a way that “reproduces the servant-served paradigms in scholarship” (hooks 1994, p. 104; see also: Du Bois, 1903; Fanon, 1952; Morrison, 1992).

**White curriculum.**

“All Americans are racialized beings; knowledge of who we have been, who we are, and who we will become is a story or text we construct. In this sense curriculum – our construction and reconstruction of this knowledge for disseminating to the young – is racial text” (Castenell and Pinar, 1993, p. 8). The main influences shaping US public education at the turn of the twentieth century were to provide a custodial function for children, to “Americanize” large numbers of children born of European workers, and to prepare youth for becoming industrial workers (Noguera, 1995, p. 194). Noguera (1995) argues that “these goals influenced the content of curriculum” (p. 194). Curriculum was designed with assimilationist goals in mind – assimilating towards whiteness. As Gaztambide-Fernández & Murad (2011) write, we need to understand “curriculum as central to the colonial project of heteropatriarchal white supremacy” (p. 15).
This assimilationist process occurred simultaneously in Canadian schools. The development of Residential Schools in Canada stemmed from the 1890 Davin Report which investigated the Industrial School model of the US and called for a similar model for Canada’s North West Territories (Milloy, 1999, p. 7). Canadian residential schools were fundamentally a racist, assimilationist and colonially violent project designed to “move [A]boriginal communities from the ‘savage’ state to that of ‘civilization’ to make Canada one community – a non-[A]boriginal one” – which is reminiscent of Fanon’s writing about the experience of Blackness as ‘civilized’ only when moving closer to whiteness (Milloy, 1999, p. 4; Fanon, 1952, p. 26).

Residential schools were explicitly a project of eradicating a culture through schooling. Deputy Superintendent General Duncan Campbell Scott stated this quite clearly: “Our object is to continue until there is not a single Indian in Canada that has not been absorbed into the body politic and there is no Indian question, and no Indian department, that is the whole object of this bill” (quoted in Haig-Brown, 2007, p. 172).

Canada’s formal Multiculturalism Policy, enacted in 1980, is one that masks the racism in our country and gives Canadians a false sense of moral superiority (Daniel, 2010, p. 830). As Daniel (2010) notes,

The treatment of the First Nations’ peoples and the existence of slavery and the Ku Klux Klan in Canada are polished over with a sheen of multicultural tolerance and stories of the Underground Railroad which was regarded as the passage of freedom for many [Black people] seeking a safe haven from the ravages of slavery in the United States (p. 830).

Daniel argues that Canada is invested in the myths of meritocracy, which again speaks to Freire’s notion of mythicizing the world (Freire, 1970, p. 139-140).
In her conversations of multicultural education, Moya (2002) reminds us that in order to maintain its hegemonic power, the culture of power “must make its dominance appear natural – must convince everyone that what is, is what should be” (p. 168). Therefore, she argues that the curriculum is structured to provide greater emphasis on dominant cultures and groups. This reflects the Canadian experience of curriculum representing white culture, white histories, white identities and a white reality (Daniel, 2010, p. 833). As Castenall & Pinar (1993) note, the absence of African American literature, perspective and history in schools’ curriculum “is not a simple oversight” but rather “represents an academic instance of racism and willful ignorance” (p. 6). Curriculum does not simply passively support a system of white supremacy but rather is structured to do the work of white supremacy.

Racism is the backbone of the banal structures of every day life, including academic textbooks written based on government-mandated curriculum (Anderson, 1991; Montgomery, 2005). Montgomery (2005) studied textbooks authorized for use in Ontario from 1960-2000 and post-2000 to discover that while the amount of content on the subject of racism increased after the year 2000, there still lacked any reference to privilege and the portrayals of racism implicitly denied “the historical power and privilege of people racialized as white” (p. 437).

Selden (1999) argues that almost every current dominant practice in education – including curriculum development among others – has its roots in “race betterment” and fear of the Other. Apple (2003) notes that these concerns are rooted in the white gaze and thus “issues of whiteness lie at the very core of educational policy and practice” and that
“The way to honour Paulo Freire is to extend his struggles into this terrain as well” (p. 117).

**Whiteness and food.** Apple (1997) also argues that the current food system is imbued with whiteness and can ultimately be understood in the act of eating cheap french fries,

Eating cheap french fries is putting food in one’s mouth, chewing and swallowing. Yet at the very same time, it is also and profoundly a fully social act. It is engaging in the end point of a long chain of relations that drove people off the land, caused their flight to the slums and denied their children health care and schools. Even more immediately, it is to be in a relationship with the workers who cooked the fries and served them at that fast food restaurant, workers who usually have extremely low pay, no benefits, no unions, and must try to cobble together two or three part-time jobs to try to put food on their own tables. I am tempted to say here that eating cheap fries is one of the ultimate expressions of whiteness (p. 126).

Billings and Cabbil (2011), two long time food activists, assert that “from field to fork, the production and consumption of food is racialized” (p.103). Our current food system is largely corporately controlled, so while consumers and small-scale producers have little voice in the process, “people of colour have even less” (Billings & Cabbil, 2011, p. 104). Slocum (2006) notes that it is clear that “racism is an organizing process in the food system: people of colour disproportionately experience food insecurity, lose their farms, and face the dangerous work of food processing and agricultural labour” (p. 327).

They provide a case study of a section of New Orleans dubbed “New Orleans East.” This area is home to 73,000 people (which would constitute the fourth largest city in the state of Louisiana), and is a “prime address” with most residents earning average annual incomes between $50,000-$100,000 (Billings & Cabbil, 2011, p. 104). Residents are mostly upwardly mobile young professionals who work in government, health care
and business (Billings & Cabbil, 2011, p. 104). New Orleans East is predominantly home to African American residents and it also does not have one single large grocery store – residents must drive twenty miles to buy groceries. Billings and Cabbil (2011) write:

> What gives here? It can’t be a shortfall in population needed to make a big chain store profitable. It can’t be buying power: African Americans as a group are some of the biggest consumers in society. It can’t be class: these folks are decidedly middle class. What one is left with is race (p. 105).

This is a similar story in other urban areas that are largely home to people of colour. Detroit experienced a very significant process of white flight that drastically changed the racial make-up of the city in 1967. Between 1950 and 2000, Detroit lost over half its population and transitioned from 16 percent to 80 percent African American (Freudenberg et al, 2009). As white people fled to the suburbs, grocery stores did too (Zenk et al, 2005, p. 660). In 2007 the last major grocery store in the city of Detroit closed forcing 80% of the city’s residents to purchase their food from “fringe food retailers” such as “liquor stores, gas stations, party stores, dollar stores, bakeries, pharmacies and convenience stores” (White, 2011, p. 407). In their study, Zenk et al (2005) found that African American-majority communities in Detroit are on average 1.1 miles further away from a grocery store than are white neighbourhoods (p. 660). This issue of food access is a racial problem, which is not surprising, as Alkon and Agyemen (2011) assert that “The food system itself is a racial project” (p. 5).

Ownership in food production is a great source of wealth “and white people own everything by design” (Billings & Cabbil, 2011, p. 109). If some white people do not own the means of production, they at least hold out realistic hope that one day they might (Billings & Cabbil, 2011, p. 109). People of colour, even when given the promise of eventual ownership, usually meet disappointment. Freed slaves in America were
promised “forty acres and a mule” to start their new lives, yet that never made it to federal policy. As Du Bois (1904) notes, “the righteous and reasonable ambition to become a landowner, which the nation had all but categorically promised the freed man was destined in most cases to bitter disappointment” (p. 31). Instead Black people were forced into a system of sharecropping,

> Croppers are entirely without capital, even in the limited sense of food or money to keep them from seed-time to harvest. All they furnish is their labor; the landowner furnishes land, stock, tools, seed and house; and at the end of the year the laborer gets from a third to a half of the crop. Out of his share, however comes pay and interest for food and clothing advanced him during the year. Thus we have a laborer without wages and without capital (Du Bois, 1904, p. 157).

Even in recent years, Black, Latina/o and female farmers in America have been refused loans by the United States Department of Agriculture while white farmers are financially subsidized to control crop growth (Billings & Cabbil, 2011, p. 109; Feder & Cowan, 2013, p. 1).

The assimilationist project of Residential Schools in Canada was closely tied to food. Eradicating Indigenous foodways, positioning them as “savage and uncivilized,” was a foundation of the colonial project. In this description of the role Aboriginal children played in their own cultural food traditions, their foodways were tied to their resistance to subordination:

> As soon as spring opens – the children are engaged in assisting to make sugar, then planting succeeds. After that gathering berries then comes husking corn – so that the greater part of the year is occupied someway or other. It is very difficult to keep the Indian children in subordination. They are so much accustomed to move about and have things their own way at home, that after all it is really wonderful that any of them know anything at all (Department of Indian Affairs, cited in Milloy, 1999, p. 25).
Food was also a big part of building the case that residential schools should in fact be residential rather than day schools:

A child residing a considerable distance – say 3 to 4 miles – from the school, leaves its home say at 8 am to attend school and with the well known improvidence of Indians, no luncheon or dinner has been prepared by its parents for the child to take with it. As a result the child remains fasting, if it stays the day through, and after repeating this process a few times it becomes discouraged and ceases to attend (Department of Indian Affairs, cited in Milloy, 1999, p. 25).

Despite the racist argument for residential schools built on the shaky grounds of school attendance and food, Milloy (1999) notes that Indigenous children leaving their communities for school “likely left behind a better diet” (p. 122).

There is a prevalence of whiteness in not only the food system, but also the food movement that is working to fix that system. One study noted that of 13 organizations in the North East of the United States, the leadership positions were 84% white and 16% people of colour, while their non-profit board members were 89% white and 11% people of colour (Slocum, 2006, p. 330). This reflects my experience working in food organizations in Toronto and with partner food organizations in the United States. The leadership of the food movement, at least of the organizations that get funding and have staff, is very white. Slocum notes that the people who actually experience food injustices “tend to be on the table but not at it,” that is, they are “the objects of the work but not the leaders” (Slocum, 2006, p. 330). For example, despite the fact that the majority of urban farmers who grow in New York City’s 1000+ community gardens self-identify as African American or Latina/o, the face of urban agriculture in that city, as depicted in media coverage, is white, and white-led organizations have an easier time accessing funding, training and resources (Reynolds, 2015, p. 240, 250). Passidomo (2014) argues...
that when white activists lead food justice projects in communities of colour they risk exacerbating food insecurities and “reifying racialized power differentials” (p. 395).

It should be noted here that people of colour are actively organizing around food issues, and have been for centuries. Despite the bleak nature of food security in Detroit, the Detroit Black Food Security Network is organizing buying clubs, starting Black owned cooperative grocery stores, running productive urban farms and creating food policies at the municipal level that result in real change (White, 2011, p. 411). Organizations led by people of colour are leading the change, despite the whiteness of the non-profit food movement. One only needs to look at the work of Growing Power in Milwaukee, The Food Project in Boston, Phat Beets and The People’s Grocery in Oakland, The BLK ProjeK in the Bronx, among countless others, to see real change in the food movement – change that is actively and meaningfully dismantling white supremacy in the food system.

**White teachers.** When we hear “critical teacher” without examining the implications of how that teacher is raced, classed and gendered, then that term “critical teacher” defines a discursive category that is based on the current mythical norm, which Ellsworth (1989) articulates as a young, white, Christian, middle-class, heterosexual, able bodied, thin, rational man (p. 310). Cochran-Smith (2000) echoes this by acknowledging in her pre-service teacher education program that ‘we’ referred to a ‘(white) we’:

Reading between the lines of my own courses and of the larger teacher education curriculum revealed a [w]hite European American construction of self-identity and “other.” “We,” I came to realize, often referred not to “we who are committed to teaching elementary school differently and improving the life chances of all children,” but to “we white people (especially we white women) who are trying to learn how to teach people who are different than us (p. 181).
Noguera (1995) writes about the same trend – urban schools that have a disproportionately high number of white teaching staff relative to the student population (p. 202). This is the case for Toronto as well, as the proportion of white students in the TDSB is 28%, while the proportion of white teachers is 70% and female teachers is 80% (Alphonso & Hammer, 2013).

There is a call for white educators to think of how they are also “of colour,” meaning “they too have a place in the racial order and how this racialization shapes the ways they go about their work” (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2006, p. 63). There is a tendency for white people to view racism as something that people of colour have to wrestle with but that they are not implicated in (Frankenburg, 1993, p. 6). However, both white people and people of colour “live racially structured lives” rather than non-racial or race neutral lives (Frankenburg 1993, p. 1). Moya (2002) calls on teachers to develop an awareness of the consequences of their own social locations (p. 170). This is not easy but is necessary, as even the most liberatory of pedagogical practices can have “oppressive effects when the [teacher] fails to engage in a self-critical dialogue with the people she is intending to educate” (Moya, 2002, p. 171). As Giroux (1997) argues, white people “need to learn how to live with their whiteness by rearticulating it in terms that help them to formulate what it means to develop viable political coalitions and social movements” (p. 295). This reflects the call for white teachers to play a more “activist role in the amelioration of racial injustices” (Case & Hammings, 2005, p. 607).

There is also a call for teachers to help students recognize, understand, and critique social inequities, but it is noted among teacher educators that many prospective teachers not only lack these understandings themselves “but also reject information
regarding social inequity” (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 477). Much research has been done on the experience of white student teachers. Montgomery (2013) found that white student teachers were only willing to acknowledge racism as *out there, in that space, in those people* or *back then* (p. 8). In one study white student teachers resisted antiracist curriculum in their pre-service education by using distancing strategies of maintaining silence, social disassociation, and physical separation during class time (Case & Hammings, 2005, p. 606).

This speaks to the notion of white fragility, where white people are so insulated from critical conversation about race that even a minimum amount of what DiAngelo (2011) calls “racial stress” becomes intolerable and is met with defensiveness and often outward displays of anger, fear and guilt (p. 55). Freire (1970) notes that discovering oneself to be an oppressor can “cause considerable anguish, and does not necessarily lead to solidarity with the oppressed” (p. 49).

Freire and Macedo (1995) discuss how Freire’s notion of dialogue is often reduced to a “vacuous, feel-good comfort zone” when used by white students in regards to discussing race (p. 379). Macedo (1995) recounts a story of a white student who remarked that “[the class] should spend at least three weeks getting to know each other so as to become friends before taking on sensitive issues such as racism” (p. 380). This notion of needing to be safe comes up often in anti-racist work with white people and, unfortunately, is used to mean the work should be unchallenging, free of call-outs – a smooth road. Freire (1970) notes that liberation, for both the oppressed and the oppressor, is “a childbirth, and a painful one” (p. 49). Macedo (1995) argues it is also a point of privilege for white students to negotiate the terms under which classmates who are
members of oppressed groups are able to “state their grievances” in regards to oppressive systems (p. 380).

To be clear, these are not simply examples of passive resistance to engaging with antiracist work but rather a much more active protection (and production) of white supremacy. Picower (2009) dubs these the “tools of whiteness” – designed to protect and maintain the structures of racism (p. 197). These strategies are also known as “white talk” (McIntyre, 2007; Trainor, 2005), which is talk that serves to insulate white people from addressing their positionality and privilege.

Trainor (2005) argues that not all white talk is necessarily racist, nor is it used by all white people (p. 142). Trainor (2005) notes that a white student teacher’s use of “well my ancestors didn’t own slaves” sounds like a distancing from responsibility in racist structures, but Trainor argues the student used it as a way of claiming solidarity with students of colour – being on the same side of the issue (p. 142). However, Leonardo (2004) reminds us that although white people today may not have participated in slavery, “They surely recreate white supremacy on a daily basis” (p. 141).

Another distancing strategy used by white teachers is what Fellows and Razack (1998) dub the “race to innocence” wherein privileged people discount their privilege to be viewed, instead, as oppressed (e.g., white women focusing on the oppression they face as women but not on the privilege they gain from whiteness) (p. 335). This speaks to my own desire to foreground a conversation of race in my work. As it is easier (and more comfortable) for me to analyze the ways in which I face oppression as a woman, I seek to go to those uncomfortable places where I have significant privilege as a white woman. This intersectional (Crenshaw, 1989) lens speaks to the notion that everyone is someone
else’s other (Gentile, 1985, p. 7). As Razack (1998) argues, “No one is off the hook since we all can claim to stand as oppressor and oppressed in relation to someone else” (p. 47).

Within the context of writing curriculum, or naming the world, I want to be very critical of the idea of white teachers defining what students of colour should learn. Ellsworth (1989) wrote about this in her experience teaching,

I could not unproblematically “help” a student of colour to find his or her voice…I brought a social subjectivity that has been constructed in such a way that I have not and can never participate unproblematically in the collective process of self-definition, naming of oppression, and struggles for visibility in the face of marginalization engaged in by students whose class, race, gender, and other positions I do not share. Critical pedagogues are always implicated in the very structures they are trying to change (p. 307).

Ellsworth debunks the myth of the emancipatory teacher, the teacher positioned as knowing more about racism than their students and knows how to unproblematically free them from their oppression. Daniel (2010) calls out the representations of urban Canadian schools in which the protagonist is a white teacher “who braves the urban jungle” - imagery that replicates the colonizers ethic (p. 832). Ellsworth (1989) argues that this is not possible, as “no teacher is free from their own learned or internalized oppression” (p. 307). Freire (1970) notes that when those from the oppressor class join the oppressed in their struggle, “they almost always bring with them the marks of their origin” (p. 60). In other words, they are never free of their whiteness.

The myth of the (white) emancipatory teacher also speaks Grande’s (2000) writing on white do-gooding: white people living in off-reserve communities and crossing borders during the day to do their definition of “good work” for Indigenous people on-reserve (p. 477). This work is often self-serving and uncritical of how white skin privilege is enacted in their daily lives. This challenge of white do-gooding speaks to
my own concerns of working in communities in which I do not live, and of which I am not a member. I do not mean to imply that the politics of reserve communities are transferable to other community contexts but rather that the mobility, and the ability to cross (racial) community borders, enter easily, and then define what others need is tied to my whiteness. I do not want to lose sight of being critical of this in myself and my work.

**Implications for students.** Bickmore (2011) notes that economically marginalized and visibly minority male students are “most harshly and disproportionately blamed and punished” in schools (p. 649). Gladden (2002) also echoes that suspensions and expulsions are disproportionately applied to minority students (p. 264). Losen & Edley (2001) distinguish between race and class noting that “African-American males from the wealthiest families are almost as likely to be expelled or suspended as white males from the poorest families” (p. 231).

Noguera (1995) notes that schools with middle class students in white suburbs also have problems with violence, however these stories are downplayed in the public media – as the “threat of violent crime in society is characterized largely as a problem created by Black perpetrators, violence in schools is equated with Black, and sometimes Latino, students” (p. 201).

In Toronto, the Safe Schools policy of Zero Tolerance, which has since been replaced with the Progressive Discipline Policy, has been found to “have differential effects on Black students resulting in their schooling and life opportunities being seriously limited” (Solomon & Palmer, 2004; James & Saul, 2007, p. 847). This is also true for other marginalized students, including those living with disabilities (Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2003, p. i; Rushowy & Rankin, 2013).
White students are more likely to be referred to the office for an “objective event that leaves a more permanent product” like smoking, leaving class without permission, or vandalism, whereas Black students are more likely to be referred to the office for infractions that “require more subjective judgment on the part of the teacher” such as loitering, disrespect or excessive noise (Skiba et al, 2002, p. 334). This connects to Noguera’s (1995) argument that at the heart of school violence is fear – particularly the white teacher’s fear of a racialized student population (p. 204).

Noguera (1995) argues that effective teachers need to “cross borders and negotiate differences of race, class, or experience” in order to establish a meaningful rapport with their students – this helps to humanize school environments, where teachers and students can work together towards collective goals (p. 206). James and Saul (2007) echo this to say it is imperative that all teachers, especially those working in neighbourhoods in which they do not live, get to know their students so that they gain valuable insights about their cultural and social lives, “which teachers can in turn incorporate into their curriculum content, pedagogical approaches and schooling programs” (p. 854).

Many South Asian and Asian students experience racialization as a “model minority” by their white teachers (James & Saul, 2007, p. 849). One student noted that for her this means: “I have always been expected to excel in my work, and I have deeply disappointed my teachers when I do not, especially when I am dismal at math” (James, 2003). The model minority myth is not only detrimental to the students it is forced upon, but is also “used as a political weapon against other marginalized groups of colour” (Lee, 2003, p. 45). The flawed model minority myth obscures any structural barriers that affect
student performance and as a result, “Black males...suffer from the added perception that their struggles in school are solely a consequence of their own inadequacies” (James and Saul, 2007, p. 849).

The whiteness of schools can negatively impact notions of identity – James (2003) writes of a Black student, Michelle, who remarked that all of her teachers were white, the people in the books were white, and pictures hung around the school were of white people (p. 80). She continued,

The dominant culture that was taught and displayed in my school played an increasingly significant role in the formation of my identity. Tell me, what person in their right mind would not want also to be white? After all, whites seemed to be like the most important people in the universe (p. 80).

This evokes Fanon’s (1952) writing in which he would “dream of a form of salvation that consists of magically turning white” (p. 44). Or Freire’s (1978) writing of how a colonial school system imposed on Black students positions them as inferior beings whose “only salvation lay in becoming ‘white’ or ‘Black with white souls’” (p. 14). Freire (1970) calls this a “colonized mentality” made up of contempt towards the oppressor mixed with an attraction to them (p. 62). Kincheloe (2007) argues that teachers need to problematize the prevalent notion that racialized students need to be “reformed by the gospel of white culture as pedagogy” (p.12).

There is a resulting existential duality for racialized youth in an oppressive society. Freire (1970) notes that members of the oppressed group are “at the same time themselves and the oppressor whose image they have internalized,” as they are “housing the oppressor within themselves” (p. 61 & 95). Du Bois (1903) also articulates a “double consciousness” experienced by Black people, which is the “sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others” (p. 3).
Battiste (2000) argues that racialized students are only given access to a curriculum in which they are invisible, which leads to student disengagement and a lack of motivation, for which students themselves are blamed:

Occasional pictures in books are the only images of participation in the educational world… the cultural imperialistic curriculum in these schools has degraded and demoralized cultural minority students, assigned them to transitional classes, failed them, and then accused them of lacking motivation, attention or spirit (p.198).

White teachers play a key role in creating patterns of achievement and opportunity for their students (Picower, 2009, p. 198). When we hired our team of youth farmers in the first season of our program, the school’s guidance department placed five white, male students from dual-income families, some of whom already had part time jobs, in our paid employment program. When I brought up my concerns I was told that these were “good students” because they had participated in the dual-credit college program available at the school the year before. This is a specialized program that the students had been selected for. In this instance, they were being selected again for a paid opportunity based on their previous experiences of having been selected earlier for a specialized program. The Guidance Department framed the students’ extra-curricular experiences as evidence that they were “good students,” without recognizing that the opportunities these white students had were given to them by their white teachers. This speaks to the idea of misrecognition (Bourdieu, 2001) that Gaztambide-Fernández et al (2013) apply to social class and cultural advantage being misrecognized as talent in arts based education (p. 125). In this instance, I got the sense that their whiteness was being misrecognized by white teachers as a type of talent, an ability to be a “good student.”
Hess and Avery (2008) cite studies affirming an inverse relationship between classroom racial diversity and teachers’ willingness to infuse the discussion of controversial issues into their curriculum (p. 8). Classrooms with high racial diversity, high immigrant student populations, and those located in urban centres have less opportunities to engage in the discussion of controversial issues in their schools and therefore often only have access to less engaging and dynamic curriculum (Hess & Avery, 2008, p. 8).

Attempts to address the whiteness of curriculum to engage marginalized students have been made. James and Saul (2007) argue, however, that the multicultural approach favoured in Canada often ends up,

Ignoring the social and cultural contexts of students and the structural inequities that have mediated their school experiences. The result is a tokenistic, celebratory approach that most often works to obscure the very real challenges against which these students struggle in their communities (p. 847).

Ladson-Billings (1997) has studied teachers who have been identified by parents of Black students as being successful at working with children of colour. One of the key features she finds in their pedagogy is a refusal to “employ a race neutral or colorblind approach to teaching” (p. 138). This mirrors Dyer’s (1997) call for effective critical pedagogy to do the work of making whiteness strange (p. 4), of addressing racism and whiteness in classroom spaces in ways that are meaningful and elicit political change, rather than being merely tokenistic.
Chapter 3: Methodologies

In this chapter I detail how I came to do this research, provide some context for the work, explore the methodological questions I asked while designing the study, and then outline the methods that I used for the research.

“Getting it”

Prior to my time running this schoolyard farming program I spent a year in Vancouver as an apprentice farmer with an urban farm in Vancouver’s downtown eastside (DTES). The first farm site was a quarter acre farm built on the parking lot of a single room occupancy (SRO) building on Hastings Street and run as a social enterprise. The main purpose of the farm is to employ residents of the neighbourhood as paid farm staff. The DTES has disproportionately high rates of unemployment, homelessness and precarious housing, people living with HIV & Hepatitis C, addiction and mental health challenges (Linden et al, 2013). The neighbourhood is incredibly food insecure (Miewald, 2009; Miewald & Ostry, 2014). There were sex workers, many of whom were my friends, working the corner of our farm lot and there were frequently needles and pipes in our garden beds.

The DTES is also home to some of the most loving, considerate, welcoming and hard working people I have ever met. I farmed alongside individuals who have overcome some of the toughest obstacles one can face, some who were still showing up to work despite the challenges they faced living in the shelter system or navigating a drug addiction. In that neighbourhood I developed loving, meaningful relationships with resilient people who would usually be featured on the news as the stereotypical “face of
poverty.” I felt comfortable walking down Hastings Street but also knew that I had the distinct luxury of leaving the neighbourhood at the end of the day. I farmed in the downtown eastside, but I did not live in the downtown eastside. Even though the neighbourhood is a beautiful community, it is also, at times, truly exhausting. The people I worked alongside did not get the opportunity to leave the streets, to leave the alleys and the rooming houses. I knew that I had the privilege of mobility, and that mobility was tied to my economic and white skin privilege.

I now have a certain cultural capital from my work in this neighbourhood. I get to say that I have worked there. When I talk about my time in that community, people think differently of me – I benefit greatly in being able to say that I “lived it.” I have felt acutely aware of this as I have returned to Toronto and people ask questions about this neighbourhood.

The farm is constantly receiving media attention and since I returned to Toronto a short interview with the Farm Director Seann Dory was put online. He talks about Ken Lyotier, the founder of a recycling social enterprise in the DTES, and his idea of “getting it,” particularly for academic researchers entering into the community for their own work:

He talks about getting it, so you know, it’s hard to explain, but when you come into the neighbourhood and there’s a lot of people that parachute into here to do studies or projects and then they leave with that knowledge and with that kind of cachet that they’ve worked in this neighbourhood but the people who stay in the neighbourhood long enough to get it and understand not only the politics of the neighbourhood but the needs of the people that are in it, and that’s a moving target to be sure, but to actually spend enough time here to “get it” and put the work in, because this community invests in a lot of people, and invests in their knowledge, especially people from the outside, and a lot of people have made careers off this neighbourhood and sometimes this neighbourhood doesn’t get the benefit or the return on investment that those people have.
The idea of building a career off of this community and not offering a return contribution really resonates with me. My career has benefitted from my membership in this community and it is important for me to be critical of this and ensure that I am continually giving back to this space and these people. I have tried this through on-going grant writing services for the farm, maintaining friendships with my fellow farmers and remaining critical and conscious of how I speak about my time there. I am not doing it perfectly, but I am trying. And I don’t think that I am doing enough.

I have become acutely aware of this idea of researchers “getting it” in my current job. The two schools at which we farm in Toronto fall within the top 20 (out of 109 schools) on the Learning Opportunities Index (LOI), a Toronto District School Board tool that ranks schools by need in hopes of ensuring that historically marginalized student populations receive an equitable allocation of resources and support. Both schools have an (unearned) “reputation.” When you Google one of my schools, the Google autocomplete feature automatically fills in “school name+shooting,” despite there never having been a shooting in the school. Again, I find that my work in these school communities gives me, as a white person, a certain cultural capital. I was told I was “such a brave white woman” for working where I do. This infuriates me.

I do not want to be a part of perpetuating what Daniel (2010) calls the “colonization ethic” in education, where Canadian media often portrays students in urban schools as “violent, racialized bodies” who are saved by “the protagonist” which is “usually a white teacher who braves the urban jungle to ‘civilize the barbarians’” (p. 832). This is reminiscent of Meiner’s (2002) “(white) Lady Bountiful” teacher archetype – the “colonial governess who was seen as having a unique duty to bring civilization to
the ‘uncivilized’” (p. 87). Despite not wanting to perpetuate these dangerous white teacher archetypes, I need to acknowledge the ways in which I am implicated in maintaining them, even if I am critical of them. I wrestle with the fact that I can be at one time simultaneously critiquing them while perpetuating them. As Meiner (2002) notes, it may not be the intention of a white teacher to reproduce the white Lady Bountiful icon, but it is often how others will read the white teacher’s actions, especially since that colonizer ethic, that colonial governess, is the most “readily available representation in pop culture, and in the cultural memory,” of the work of white teachers (p. 90).

I work in these schools because they are warm, nurturing environments filled with young people who are vibrant, charismatic, resilient and smart. The teaching staff and administrators are hard working, incredible people who are dedicated to student success. They are schools that do not have the same access to resources as schools located in more wealthy areas of the city. If I am going to write grants that bring financial capital, alternative programming, extra-curricular activities, paid jobs for youth and capable staff to a school, I want to do that equitably and in a way that names and addresses the inequities in our current school system. I am not there to be a “brave white woman.” So what is my role as a white educator, working in schools with predominantly students of colour, while trying to research my own practice, for a thesis that will afford me a graduate degree? What does it mean to again be working in a community in which I do not live and I leave at the end of the workday? How can I use this research to work in solidarity with this community (my community?) Am I an ally? That is what good anti-racist white people are supposed to be, right? Be a strong ally.
“Allyship”: white people focusing on whiteness

McKenzie (2014) wrote a piece about allyship that deeply resonates with me and hits on some of this discomfort I have been feeling in my work. McKenzie (2014), addressing white people, writes that allyship,

Is not supposed to be about you, it’s not supposed to be a way of glorifying yourself at the expense of the folks you claim to be an ally to, it’s supposed to be a way of living your life that doesn’t reinforce the same oppressive behaviours you’re claiming to be against (p. 138).

In short, allyship is not a title that white people can claim for themselves. It is a continual practice of doing the work of dismantling racism, alongside other systems of oppression, and in solidarity with people of colour. Allyship has to be about the work, and not an identity you gain. Apple (2003) warns that when white people focus their work on whiteness it can “run the risk of lapsing into possessive individualism” and “privileging the white, middle class [person’s] need for self-display” (p. 115). It can easily become about the ally identity, rather than the actual work of allyship. And yet I am choosing to focus my work on whiteness. I am doing this as a response to the call from activists and writers of colour for white people to do anti-racist work within their own community (Domise, 2015), and to speak for themselves rather than for those who are marginalized (McKenzie, 2014, p. 45 & 56; see also: Holloway, 2015). There is no other way for me to write about racism than from (and about) the perspective of a white person. To do so any other way would be me speaking for others that I have power over through a system of white supremacy that already privileges my voice and positions me as more knowledgeable/capable/etc simply due to the colour of my skin.

I am involved in a network of colleagues from food organizations working in Toronto that is trying to organize to dismantle racism in the food movement. We have
met on and off over the past three years as a group to have conversations about racism in our work and to organize against it (hosting panels and film screenings, organizing anti-racism trainings, sharing readings and holding dialogues to work through them). Part of this work involves caucusing – breaking into groups along racial identities – there is a white caucus and a people of colour caucus. For a while we were meeting to do our own work, which looks very different for white people than it does for people of colour, and then would regroup to continue organizing around race in the food movement. One of the key reasons for re-grouping is to hold each other, particularly white people, accountable. It is easy for white people to think that identifying as an ally is the end of the work, when really it is only scratching the surface.

hooks (1994) has written extensively on the relationships between white women and Black women in feminist scholarship and education. In her book *Teaching to Transgress*, she writes of conversations she has had with female academics about whether the feminist movement has created transformative relationships between white women and women of colour in university spaces. hooks (1994) notes that she heard radically different responses as white women had felt a major change, noting they were more aware of race and racism and that they were “more willing to assume accountability and engage in anti-racist work” (p. 104). Conversely, hooks notes that women of colour were “adamant that nothing had changed” and that most “white women still assert power even as they address issues of race” (hooks, 1994, p. 104). hooks is critical of the notion of white women benefitting in real ways (promotions, pay increases, academic recognition) from doing anti-racist work while simultaneously perpetuating racist power structures by not honestly addressing them in meaningful ways.
I am aware that when I talk about my participation in the white caucus, or how I am choosing to critically examine whiteness in my thesis research, in conversations either at work or at OISE there is a certain social capital that I have as a “progressive.” There is a reaction that positions me, again, as the courageous white woman. It is important that I continue to be conscious of this, and continue to be honest with myself and take in critical feedback from others. Ellsworth (1995) echoes this sentiment: “We cannot act as if our membership in or alliance with an oppressed group exempts us from the need to confront the grey areas we all have within us” (p. 322). Or as Freire (1970) asserts, “Those who authentically commit themselves to the people must re-examine themselves constantly” (p. 60).

Thompson (2008) warns of the “lone hero stance” often adopted by white anti-racist teachers, in which they position themselves as the “exceptional white person”:

In this common stance, antiracist whites project any negative qualities associated with whiteness onto others, while they stand out as the rare white person who “gets it.” By acknowledging [their] whiteness but highlighting [their] difference from less enlightened or ‘trustworthy’ whites, [one] can evade the question of their own complicity in racism (p. 329).

It is within this context of simultaneously wanting to critically address whiteness in my work while remaining critical of the slipperiness of benefiting from that work that I attempted to design a research methodology that would not simply replicate existing systems of privilege and oppression at play in my work. I want to critically explore my own positionality in a way that holds me accountable to not co-opt anti-racist scholarship to further concretize my position as a privileged person. This is the crux of designing a methodology for this work – how can I decenter whiteness in curriculum while exploring (and therefore centering) whiteness in my thesis work? As Apple (2003) notes, when
white people focus their work on whiteness, there is danger that it “becomes a monologue masquerading as a dialogue” (p. 115). I want this work to be a dialogue.

**Context of The Work**

**School Demographics.** City Secondary (a pseudonym) is a high school located in the east end of downtown Toronto. The school itself is in a densely populated area and does not have much in the way of outdoor green space. Bordered by streetcar tracks, the school was built to go up rather than out. The limited green space means that the classroom on the fifth floor opens up to a rooftop space that was originally designed to be a rooftop tennis court and outdoor instructional space. It includes a ten-foot wall around the edge, a covered terraced area, two staircases that open on to the roof and a classroom. It is for this space that we secured funding to install a rooftop farm in the summer of 2013. The rooftop is now home to over 300 moveable garden planter boxes, 120 sub-irrigated bucket planters, perennial fruiting bushes, and a small greenhouse for seedling production.

City Secondary is home to a Key Skills program, meaning over half of the student population is in a non-credit program and have a learning exceptionality including MID (Mild Intellectual Disability). Their classes focus on Academic Skills (developing functional literacy and numeracy), Social Skills (developing positive attitudes and interpersonal relationships) and Employability Skills (developing time management skills, problem-solving skills and TTC training) (TDSB Brochure, 2014). Students in the Key Skills program do not work towards the requirements of the Ontario Secondary
School Diploma (OSSD) and instead receive a certificate of completion when they graduate high school.

Half the students at City Secondary are in a credit program working towards their OSSD and usually find themselves at City Secondary after transferring from other schools. Students find success at City Secondary due to the small class sizes and tireless teaching staff who have built the school into a caring and safe community.

East Tech (a pseudonym) is an east end high school, located in an inner-city suburb, that was built on several acres of arable farmland. Compared to City Secondary, the school is sprawling. Most of the classrooms, tech shops and instructional spaces can be found on the vast first floor and the school is surrounded by acres of lawn. In the summer of 2009 we installed a market garden in the front and back lawn of the school, as well as a small fruiting perennial garden on the west side of the building.

With a technical focus, students often attend East Tech for the specialized programming such as welding, automechanics, plumbing, electrical, construction, horticulture and culinary art programs in the Food School. City Secondary and East Tech both have a thriving culinary arts program. Students are involved in the preparation of lunch at both schools – cooking the cafeteria menu each day from scratch.

Both City Secondary and East Tech do not offer Academic (Grade 9 & 10) or University (Grade 11 & 12) level courses in any subject area. Students are only given the option of Applied, Workplace, Open, College or non-credit level courses. If they wish to take an academic section at East Tech, they are supported in enrolling in a neighboring high school for that course.
Choosing a Methodology

**Research Questions.** As a reminder, these are the research questions that shape the design of this study: What would it mean to use students’ sources of knowledge to develop their own curricula using the lens of food security and food literacy? What happens when students are invited to be co-constructors of curriculum? And what is the role of a teacher when youth are invited to draw on their own knowledge and assets to address issues of community food insecurity through a curriculum design process?

**Praxis.** Freire’s (1970) notion of praxis involves the continual action and reflection of people “upon their world in order to transform it” (p. 79). For an educator to work only in words – to “deprive the word of its dimension of action” – is to lead to what Freire calls *verbalism*, “idle chatter, an alienated and alienating blah” (Freire 1970, p. 87). Without action, words are empty, and there can be no transformation of the world (Freire, 1970, p. 87).

Conversely, if action is emphasized over reflection, we end up with *activism*, which Freire calls “action for action’s sake” which makes true dialogue among people impossible (Freire, 1970, p. 88). Praxis requires both action and reflection, and cannot sacrifice either to be effective for transforming the world (Freire, 1970, p. 87).

Freire (1970) asserts that praxis leads to true words – words that are used to name the world, and once named, the world “reappears to the namers as a problem that requires new naming” (p. 88). It is through naming the world, with true words simultaneously ripe with both reflection and action, that we are able to transform the world (Freire, 1970, p. 89). Freire is clear that there must not be a situation in which some are naming the world on behalf of others, or else that situation will only serve to maintain the dominance
of one group (the namers) (Freire, 1970, p. 89). Praxis, the reflection and action that results in true words, must be an honest dialogue rooted in love, that leads to the liberation of the oppressed (Freire, 1970, p. 89). This study positions youth as namers of the world and attempts to engage both my own practice, and the youth I work with, in an ongoing process of reflection and action to change the way curriculum is constructed.

Practitioner research. This thesis project is a form of practitioner research. Practitioner research is systematic, intentional inquiry by educators into their own teaching practice (Lytle & Cochran-Smith, 1992, p. 450). Systematic refers to an ordered way of gathering information and documenting experiences both inside and outside of the classroom, which includes making some kind of written record (Lytle & Cochran-Smith, 1992, p. 450). It also refers to an ordered way of “recollecting, rethinking and analyzing classroom events” (Lytle & Cochran-Smith, 1992, p. 450). This work is also intentional, meaning it is planned and not spontaneous, although the learning can come from spontaneous events – the documenting of that experience is part of a systematic research project (Lytle & Cochran-Smith, 1992, p. 450).

I am situating this study as practitioner research rather than teacher research. Although I am a certified high school teacher, I am not employed by the school board as a classroom teacher. Much of my day-to-day work mirrors that of a classroom teacher (designing and delivering lessons, mentoring students, nurturing community within a class of students, working with curriculum objectives), however I am uniquely positioned in the school setting as an educator that is not responsible for student assessment or evaluation. This is an important distinction as it affects my relationship with the students and also the teachers and administrators on site. When Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009)
wrote a sequel to their 1993 book *Inside/Outside: Teacher Research and Knowledge*, they chose to call it *Inquiry as Stance: Practitioner Research for the Next Generation* (2009). They note that they moved away from using teacher research in the title to instead use practitioner research as “the term teacher unnecessarily and inaccurately narrowed the scope of the work,” whereas practitioner is a more “expansive and inclusive way to mean a wide array of education practitioners including teachers” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009, p. ix). I do not identify as a classroom teacher, but I do identify as an “educational practitioner.”

Practitioner research disrupts positivist notions that knowledge comes only from objective scientific methodologies (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 2; Denzin, 2004, p. 448) or that knowledge flows only from post-secondary academic institutions to classroom teachers (Campano, Ghiso & Sanchez, 2013, p. 104). It reflects some of the characteristic features of postmodernism – rejection of fixed notions of knowledge, acceptance of complexity and multiplicity, acknowledgement of subjectivity, refusal to accept boundaries or hierarchies in ways of thinking, and a disruption of binaries that define things as either/or (Atkinson, 2003, p. 36).

As a collaborative process, practitioner research positions not only educators as producers of knowledge, but also their “students themselves are empowered as knowers” (Lytle & Cochran-Smith, 1992, p. 448). It is a democratization of knowledge – positioning both educators and students as knowledge makers (Campano, Ghiso & Sanchez, 2013, p. 104). It reflects the notion of contingency, the idea that all knowledge is partial and contingent upon context and conditions such as a specific lived experience (Atkinson, 2003, p. 42).
The collaborative process challenges the “expert knowledge” model of research – wherein an expert social scientist autonomously conducts field research through observation and interview (Erickson, 2011, p. 54). Erickson (2011) argues that the legitimacy of the expert knowledge model has been “seriously challenged” with many researchers choosing instead to blend the roles of “researcher” and “researched” – listing both as collaborators in a research question (p. 54). Collaboration no longer refers only to collaboration within teams of professional researchers, but rather “presumably equal participation” of researchers and subjects (Angrosino, 2005, p. 732). The term subject has “implicit colonialist connotations” (Angrosino, 2005, p. 731).

Practitioner research is also deeply political work, as Lytle (2008) writes, “Much practitioner inquiry remains radical and passionate, deeply personal and profoundly political – richly embedded in situations where teachers have agency around their own practice and where their commitments to educational access and equity remain clear” (p. 373). For me, this practitioner research is about exploring my practice for the ultimate purpose of becoming a better educator, one that moves us closer to the goals of equity in schooling. It has a broader purpose than solely improving or polishing my own skills as an educator.

Freire (1970) also writes about the ways teaching is always unfinished work – that teaching space is a text that needs to be read, interpreted, written and rewritten (p. 89) while teachers themselves are always in a process of becoming – of continually questioning and articulating what they do not know (p. 120). There are clear connections between teacher research and Freire’s notion of the unfinishedness of teaching.
**Action research & youth participatory action research.** My research is a social justice inquiry, meaning it is intentional in naming and addressing differential systems of power, access and oppression (Charmaz, 2011, p. 359). I am choosing to study my own professional context because I want my research to make a real difference in my daily work and in my practice (Herr & Anderson, 2005, p. 2). In many ways this reflects action research where action is central to the work and power, or “the locus of control,” is shifted from the researcher to those who have been traditionally referred to as *subjects* of research rather than active participants (Herr & Anderson, 2005, p. 2).

Action research also often leaves the positionality of the researcher open – it can be an outsider to the research context working with participants – whereas practitioner researcher necessarily requires that the researcher be an insider (since they are inquiring into their own practice) and it places the practitioner directly in the centre of the work (Herr & Anderson, 2005, p. 3).

Participatory action research is guided by three principles: (1) the collective investigation of a problem; (2) the reliance on local knowledge to better understand that problem; and (3) the desire to take individual or collective action to deal with the problem (Morrell, 2006, p. 6). In this thesis research, students were involved in the collective task of writing curriculum, their local knowledge was prioritized for creating the curriculum and they all have shown a collective desire to participate in constructing a curriculum for our program. The work of writing the curriculum seems to be a form of collective action, of creating an intervention into the mainstream process of curriculum writing that often leaves out youth voices. However, this is not the same as youth directing or doing the research themselves. This research is more so focused on what it
means for me as a practitioner to take an approach to curriculum writing that involves youth.

**Insider/Outsider.** Everyone involved in this study (myself and the students) are insiders to the youth farming program. However, within this there are layers of “insiderness.” Do we all come as equal insiders or would my experience as a staff who is only in the school for half a year position me as an outsider in some ways? Or does my position as their employer distinguish me as an outsider? Is there a distinction to be made between youth and adult allies? It is tricky to tell where the insiderness lies, although I do think it is clear that in terms of positivist academic research, I am not an outsider as I am intimately tied to the project (Anderson, Herr & Nihlen, 1995, p. 31). With all of these questions about positionality, it is comforting to read Anderson, Herr and Nihlen’s (2007) position that knowledge production from *all* positions is valid as long as one is “reflective and honest about one’s multiple positionalities” (p. 48).

Anderson et al (1995) also articulate six modes of possible participation in action research that range from co-option to collective action (p. 40). This project is situated within the *colearning* mode of participation, meaning that local participants (in this case youth farmers) and facilitators (me) work together to “share their knowledge to create new understanding and work together to form action plans” (p. 40). They also present four different squares of self-knowledge that can be used by researchers when designing a study (*we* representing the researchers, *they* representing the participants).
Table 1. The four squares of knowledge:
(Adapted from Anderson, et al, 1995, p. 39)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. We know</th>
<th>2. We don’t know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>They know</td>
<td>They know</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. We know</td>
<td>4. We don’t know</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They don’t know</td>
<td>They don’t know</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This thesis research is situated in the first square of knowledge (we know, they know). This square demonstrates a prioritization of reciprocity as each participant comes with knowledge, skills and expertise that are recognized and valued (Anderson, Herr & Nihlen, 1995, p. 39). This reflects a collaborative research process that refuses to position the researcher as the expert, but also refuses to undervalue the knowledge and experience of the researcher (Anderson, Herr & Nihlen, 1995, p. 40). This is central to practitioner research, in which the emic knowledge of the practitioner/researcher is valued (Lytle & Cochran-Smith, 1992, p. 447).

Any insider status I have in this project is something that I welcome but also need to remain conscious and critical of. Having such intimate access to a school community and strong relationships with this group of young people means that I need to be working in solidarity with them. As Campano (2012) writes, “access [in research] is about joining a struggle, it is deeply personal and political” (p. 282). It is important for me to recognize this insider status as a very privileged and special position.

At the same time I am conscious that my research is intimately tied to this school farming program that I have developed and nurtured, a project that has taken lots of actual blood, sweat and tears to create. Anderson et al (2007) argue that with insider projects it may actually be beneficial to have an outsider participate as there are issues that come with “studying your own baby” (p. 33). They argue that the tendency for self-
promotion may be too great and having an outsider join the project may be a way to help prevent this. Additionally, Esterberg (2002) warns that it can be difficult to see something new in a setting you already know (p. 64).

**Methods**

**Drawing from Freire for a curriculum-writing process.** In determining how to co-construct a curriculum with the youth, I was inspired by *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, in which Freire dedicates a full chapter to his method for designing a curriculum, or what he calls the “program content of education or political action” (Freire, 1970, p. 95). He notes that the starting point for any educational content must be the “present, existential, concrete situation reflecting the aspirations of the people” (Freire, 1970, p. 95). This concrete situation, through the action and reflection of praxis, is historically situated while also actively creating new history (Freire, 1970, p. 101). As praxis creates a constant process of transformation, “epochal units materialize” (Freire, 1970, p. 101).

Epochal units are not static or confined, but rather are characterized by the complex of “ideas, concepts, hopes, doubts, values and challenges” facing people in that current situation – from epochal units emerge themes from daily life, and these themes make up a *thematic universe* (Freire, 1970, p. 101). The thematic universe is “where we must go to find the program content of education” (Freire, 1970, p. 96).

Epochal units can have different scales. Freire asserts that from the broadest epochal unit, affecting all humans, emerges the fundamental theme of *domination*, and its opposite, *liberation* (Freire, 1970, p. 103). At smaller scales, within smaller circles, communities are subject to both the broad (universal/continental/historical) themes, but
also to their own particular themes, related to their specific local context (Freire, 1970, p. 103).

Here, it is important to note Freire’s concept of limit-situations and limit-acts. For Freire, part of coming to consciousness is being able to recognize parts of our lived reality as limiting situations – situations that limit freedom – and that can be recognized as both constructed and possible to overcome rather than “passively accepted as given” (Freire, 1970, p. 99). Limit-situations can be met with limit-acts, which are actions that are directed at dismantling and changing the limit-situations (Freire, 1970, p. 99).

In the creation of a content of education, Freire asserts that the investigators and the people must work together as co-investigators (Freire, 1970, p. 106). Freire warns that if you shift the investigation away from the people, away from what is meaningful to them, then the people are treated as objects and we return to a banking model of education, rather than a reciprocal teacher-student and student-teacher model (Freire, 1970, p. 107).

Freire describes a hypothetical scenario of designing an adult literacy program in a peasant area, which includes the following steps:

(1) Together, the co-investigators will try to “decode” the local reality, observing the community in varying scenarios: “labour in the fields, meetings of a local association, the role played by women and young people, leisure hours, games, sports, conversations in homes” (Freire, 1970, p. 112);

(2) Co-investigators meet to report to each other what they observed as themes in the community – together they re-consider their considerations that stemmed from observing the local context (Freire, 1970, p. 113);

(3) They identify the contradictions, or limit-situations, in the community and the codify these situations – creating codifications (sketches, photographs) that act as objects representing the limit-situation (Freire, 1970/012, p. 114);
(4) These codifications must necessarily represent situations familiar to the people and ideally will “not be overly explicit nor overly enigmatic” (Freire, 1970, p. 114);

(5) These codifications are then presented to the people to be decoded – which then leads to the opening up of more generative themes and a dialogue that can reveal both limit-situations and limit-acts, leading to conscientization (Freire, 1970, p. 118).

In designing a series of activities to use with the youth over the three days that we worked together, I drew from Freire’s method of generating themes, codifying those themes and then decoding the codifications to elicit more themes. The only real shift I made was that the students themselves generated both the themes and the codifications – whereas in Freire’s model, the investigators generate the codifications and bring them to the people (Freire, 1970, p. 118). This change speaks to Freire’s own assertion that experiments in education and content creation cannot be transplanted between contexts, but rather “must be reinvented” (Freire, 1978, p. 9). The outline for the three days of working together was fairly loose. It had a structure, but was intentionally left open so that it could also take direction from the students’ interest and energy, and could adapt at the end of each day. As Moll et al (1992) note, strategies for research often “evolve through the process of doing,” which is very much what happened in this research (p. 139).

**Paid work & material benefit.** I wanted the students in this project to benefit in meaningful, material ways for their participation in this project. This is heavily influenced by Lyotier talking about “getting it” - academics benefitting in material ways from researching communities like Vancouver’s downtown eastside, without the community also receiving a real material benefit, or return on investment for their work. hooks (1994) specifically addresses white academics who benefit in material ways
(promotions, paid wages, career advancement) for their work in anti-racism while people of colour see no material benefit for their contribution to that same work (p. 104). These ideas have framed the way I wanted to engage with the students on this project.

From the beginning, I wanted to see students who participated in this curriculum writing project receive pay for their work – not simply an honorarium, but fair wages that recognize the knowledge and labour they were contributing to this project. There are many studies that pay youth participants for their contributions – whether a small hourly or daily wage for their work as research assistants or project staff (Bostock & Freeman, 2003; Campbell & Trotter, 2007; Maglajlic, 2004; Power & Tiffany, 2006; Guerrero, et al, 2013) or a more symbolic gesture of a small project honorarium, rather than a day wage (de Winter, & Noom, 2003; Flicker & Guta, 2008; Veinot, et al, 2006). I wrote a grant application over the winter months for our program in which I included a budget line to hire the students into paid positions as curriculum writers. All students who participated in this project were paid $15 per hour, the current livable minimum wage for this city (see: www.15andfairness.org).

Students will also be listed as co-authors on the final curriculum produced and part of their participation in this project involves updating their resume to include Curriculum Writer in their job experience. They will also receive a letter of reference that outlines the details of their work to use in future job applications.

Five of the students are also returning this summer (July-August 2015) as paid Leadership Staff and will be able to help shape the curriculum they wrote into workshops for the new group of students. The grant we received is for the next three years, meaning each winter we will be able to hire students in paid positions to review and re-write the
curriculum. There is longevity to this project as youth involvement will continue long after the submission of this thesis.

**Ethics.** The research study was approved by the University of Toronto *Social Sciences, Humanities and Education Research Ethics Board* as well as the Toronto District School Board *External Research Review Committee* prior to the start of this project. I selected pseudonyms for the names of each school we work with and the students each selected their own pseudonym for this project.

**Student recruitment.** All students who had farmed with our program during a summer session were eligible to participate in the work. This was a total of 22 students. They were invited via email (see Appendix #1 for text) and several also followed up with conversations at the school about what the job was going to be like. Ten students attended an orientation session held after school to learn more about the specifics of what we would be doing (e.g., dates, times, and type of work) and also to sign the Participant Assent form (Appendix #2). Students who were under 18 also took home a Parent/Guardian consent form to sign and return on the first day of work (Appendix #3).

**Student demographics.** Ten youth participated in this curriculum writing project – five students were from City Secondary, three students were from East Tech and two youth had recently graduated from East Tech and were no longer enrolled in the TDSB. Three farmed in the summer of 2013, six farmed in the summer of 2014, and one student farmed both summers, as they had returned as a leadership student. They are a racially and ethnically diverse group of youth – self-identifying with the terms Black, Jamaican-Canadian, Light-Skinned Black, First Nations, Chinese, Filipino, Muslim, Mixed, and White. This is significant to note, as Ibrahim (2004) contends, “Students do not come to
classrooms as generic, disembodied individuals. On the contrary, racial and gender identities formed outside of the classroom are crucial to the learning processes” (p. 127).

Three of the ten students have been designated as having a learning exceptionality and receive accommodations and modifications in their learning at school. All students have described themselves as “not very good students” and have expressed discomfort with certain school subject areas, and school in general, over the time that I have known them.

All students have also excelled in our farming program. During their summer jobs with us they show up on time (sometimes annoyingly early for a 7:30 am shift at the farm), engage with the work, support each other, build kind and caring friendships, take risks and try new things, and ask to be rehired the following year. They are a caring, thoughtful, funny and vibrant group of young people.

**Data sources.** One of the strengths of practitioner research is that it often entails multiple rich data sources (Lytle & Cochran-Smith, 1992, p. 451). For this thesis, I had several data sources to collect and draw from. Our curriculum writing sessions were audio-recorded and then later transcribed. I also kept a notebook of observations and reflections that I contributed to at the end of each day, and in the time following the curriculum-writing days, adding notes upon follow up visits to the school. The focus groups with students were also audio-recorded and transcribed. I kept copies of the work created in the curriculum writing sessions – this included mattering maps, curriculum drafts, photos that students created, and the final curriculum produced. This process also included observation in some sense, as Angrosino (2005) notes that even studies that rely
on other means of data collection, such as interviews or focus groups, still employ observational methods when they note body language or gestural cues (p. 729).

**Reading the data.** After transcribing the data I went through a process of coding the transcriptions – identifying and labeling themes and patterns to be able to “organize, manage and retrieve the most meaningful bits” (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996, p. 26). Coding is part of data analysis but is not the analysis itself (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996, p. 26). Coding rather represents the link between textual material of raw data and the researcher’s theoretical concepts (Seidel & Kelle, 1995, p. 52). Coding is not simply a practice of reducing data but can also be viewed as “data complication,” that is, a method of expanding, transforming, and reconceptualizing data “to open up more diverse analytical possibilities” (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996, p. 29).

Codes can come from a set list of themes, emerge from the research questions, be sociologically constructed or in vivo – meaning the codes are derived from the language used by the social actors in the field (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996: 32). For this thesis, I used open coding, meaning the codes emerged from my own reading of the text, rather than a predetermined list.

I also kept analytic memos throughout the course of coding and analyzing data to record thoughts I had about both the data and the process. Saldana (2009) notes that analytic memos are a way of “dumping your brain” about participants or phenomenon or process in the research by “thinking and thus writing and thus thinking even more about” your ideas (p. 32). Or as Clarke (2005) notes, “Memos are sites of conversations with ourselves about our data” (p. 202).
Comparing curriculum drafts. We created some learning expectations for our curriculum on the first day of working together that were collaboratively edited and re-worked throughout the following two days. Each day’s work was saved as-is so that I could compare the same sentence that was written on Day 1 with how it may have changed on Day 2 or 3. Some of the students’ ideas were merged, added to, or deleted throughout the group process. This process is explored more in-depth in the following chapter.

Reviewers. Reading the data also means attempting to read what is not there. Atkinson (2003) calls this “reading the silences in your own texts” (p. 40). This, to me, seems impossible without the support and lens of other people’s eyes on the text. I have invited some of my colleagues who are familiar with the project, but not directly involved, to read my data and comment on what stands out to them. They have also been reading drafts of my work. This addresses some of the concerns presented around people researching their own work - as insiders are “true believers in their particular practices” it can be easy for them to put a “positive spin” on their data (Anderson et al, 2007, p. 35).

Involving colleagues in reviewing the data is also important to me as an anti-racist practice and checking my own white positionality. bell hooks (1995) writes about white women trying to do anti-racist work in isolation without the feedback of people of colour,

It is a utopian dream to imagine that white women will divest of white supremacist thinking in isolation without critical engagement and dialectical exchange with non-white peers. It is concrete interaction between groups that is the proving ground, where our commitments to anti-racist behaviour are tested and realized (p. 105).
For this reason I have asked colleagues and friends who are not white, and who are involved in the anti-racist organizing going on in my professional context, to read over my work and offer critical points of feedback. In exchange I am also reading their writing and answering their calls for support in their own work. As Anderson and Saavedra (1995) note, “Practitioners in a rush to empower their own voices, can, often unwittingly, silence the voices of others” (p. 229). If ultimately my work only serves to advance my own career while silencing the voices of others, then I am implicated in perpetuating racist and oppressive structures that are often at play in academia. I want to ensure my research not only contributes to my community but also actively intervenes, and takes action, in addressing and dismantling oppressive structures and systems found in both academia and in my professional context.
Chapter 4: The Process of Writing Curriculum

I have three full days (totaling around 20 hours) of audio-recorded and transcribed conversations from our work together. There is no shortage of interesting, puzzling, inspiring dialogue between the students to draw from. It has been difficult for me to isolate a few select quotes and instances. Additionally, I do not want to break these important conversations into smaller fractured pieces, but rather present long sections of dialogue so as to provide a rich depiction of these moments, as Wilson (2008) argues that if you break “things down in to their smallest pieces, you are destroying the relationships around it” (p. 119). Part of the uniqueness of this work is the collaboration between the students and myself. I want the dialogue represented here to show the richness of that collaboration, so I am choosing to include whole texts of a conversation. These large chunks of conversational data also help to demonstrate how students collaboratively negotiated meaning, and together developed their ideas and perspectives.

In this section, I explore the process of co-constructing curriculum by sharing the activities we used and some of the dialogue that reflects the work we did together. I am choosing to include details of the process because this thesis was very much about trying to create a curriculum writing process that counters the current model of subject specific teachers and experts defining learning objectives for others. There are also not many studies that have positioned youth as curriculum writers, which means there is not a lot of documentation on how that work can be, or has been, done. Rather than simply include a lesson-plan style outline of our time together, I am choosing to highlight the successes and challenges of the work and centering the dialogue and voices of the students. A thick
documentation of the full process speaks to documentation itself as a form of political intervention (Appadurai, 2006, p. 174).

**Breaking the Ice**

We started our three days together with some icebreaker activities to ensure that the students all knew each other. Although they had all previously worked with the farm, some worked in separate summer sessions and attended different schools during the school year. On student, Hope, shared that “the games helped with being yourself, cause you already know them so you can be yourself, you don’t have to be ashamed of what you said or anything. You could say what you thought.” For Hope, taking time to build some familiarity within the group allowed her to feel more comfortable with the other youth and that it made it easier for her to share her thoughts and ideas in the collaborative writing process.

**Building a Group Contract**

Sitting in a circle with chart paper in the middle, students were invited to share and name what it is that they wanted from each other, and from me, throughout the next three days. Some answers included:

“Not get frustrated with each other, know each others pace and work together,"
“Be nice to each other,”
“Make new friends,”
“Respect others – I don’t want to see people make fun of people’s backgrounds,”
“Be open minded,”
“Think of alternative ways of thinking and ideas.”

We took a moment to read over the whole contract once everyone had shared their ideas, opened up space for people to add more thoughts or to challenge one they may not agree
with, and then signed the contract as a symbol of committing to the group. We agreed that it would be a living document that we would leave up on the wall and we could add to it or make changes as needed. In the following days I would ask the group to take a look at the contract to see if we needed changes, but no one expressed wanting to make any additions or changes.

**Reading Freire**

As a way of naming my agenda (Ellsworth, 1989, p. 301), we started our curriculum writing work by reading a section of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Freire, 1970, p. 71-73). I read the text out loud and paused every few paragraphs to unpack what we had read. Freire’s concept of the banking model of education really resonated with the students. One student articulated that “it’s a lot like being an empty bucket,” and that metaphor stuck for the rest of our time together. Many of our conversations in the following days – and the weeks after - were about students being “empty buckets” and a school system that “fills them up.”

One student, Hope, was critical of the idea of students arriving to school as empty, arguing that students are already knowers when they come to school:

**Hope**: I just, I think I feel disappointed that people think that of us. I think everyone has their own, I mean, they know a lot. People aren’t just empty you know, they have things that they’ve learned, like from their parents, right. We aren’t just empty.

This is reminiscent of Freire’s (1987) notion that we learn to read the world before we read the word (p. 5), or a critical literacies perspective that students are already literate, that they have a primary discourse (Gee, 2008, p. 156) that they learn at home that can be supported, rather than eliminated, at school by “adding another discourse to their
repertoire” (Delpit, 1992, p. 301). This primary discourse is also one that can be valued as a form of epistemic privilege (Moya, 2002; Mohanty, 2000; Campano, 2007). It should be positioned as a rich source of knowledge that is valued in both classrooms and curriculum design.

Students also began to reveal some the structural nature of oppressive systems. When talking about whether it was possible for their teachers to take the position of a teacher-student, Taylor remarked that it would not happen, “because its not just the teachers, it’s the [school] board.” The students started to zoom out from the classroom interactions to consider the actual institutions and systems in place that maintain oppressive structures and how they operate.

When discussing if things could change, a conversation around the generational nature of schooling occurred:

**Eddie:** [Teachers] learn it in teachers college, that we are buckets.

**Lynn:** Before that they were in school…

**Katie (me):** And who were their teachers?

**Hope:** Teachers…

**Katie:** Who maybe saw them…

**Evans:** As buckets!

**Hope:** Yeah, teachers were told they were empty buckets at one point too then…

The recognition that teachers themselves were at one time students in a banking model of education helped the students to see that the system supports and maintains itself through that ongoing banking narrative (Freire, 1970, p. 71). Hope’s idea that teachers were told they were empty buckets supports Freire’s notion of mythicizing the world, where
“ oppressors deposit myths indispensable to preserving the status-quo” (Freire, 1970, p. 139). Students are told that they are empty vessels that must passively absorb information delivered by a teacher and those same students grow up to become teachers who perpetuate the myth that students are empty vessels that must passively absorb information, and so it continues.

Taylor also began to recognize that institutions not only passively maintain systems of oppression, but were designed from the outset to do so:

**Katie (me):** So if we have an education system that is broken, well, would you say it’s broken?

**Hope:** Kind of, yeah.

**Taylor:** I wouldn’t say it’s broken. It was never really fixed in the first place…I don’t know, it’s never really like been like a system that is right.

This demonstrates one way that students in this group became aware of the systems they navigate. This is an example of a coming to consciousness – or conscientization – of learning to perceive and recognize social, political and economic contradictions that maintain systems of oppression in daily life (Freire, 1970, p. 35).

Students also responded with interest to Freire’s notion of teacher-students and student-teachers (Freire, 1970, p. 72). In fact, Lynn raised the point that a good teacher is one who learns from their students prior to us getting to the conversation of teacher-students in the Freire passage:

**Lynn:** I think teachers think they are above us because they have more knowledge than us. I don’t think that’s true because we have this one teacher, Ms H., she’s actually a really good teacher and she teaches us stuff, but we also always teach her stuff. She accepts the fact that we’re teaching her back. A lot of teachers don’t like when we try to show them that they are wrong. Or try to teach them something that we already know.
We used this concept to ground the work we were going to do together – to write a curriculum from the perspective that both the youth and myself are knowledgeable, capable authors of curriculum who have a wealth of experience to contribute to the curriculum writing process.

**What Is and Isn’t Curriculum**

In a large group discussion, I posed the question “What is curriculum?” Answers included:

“What you learn in school,”
“What the teacher has to do,”
“I don’t know,”
“Rules for teachers,”
“A plan for your class,”
“Boring”

We settled on the idea that curriculum is a plan for student learning and that we would use the question “What should students know by the time they finish this school farming job?” to frame our work.

In small groups, students were given an Ontario Ministry of Education curriculum document as well as a piece of other text based writing (a magazine, a newspaper, a board game, a calendar, or a novel). They worked to compare the curriculum documents with other types of documents to identify what made up curriculum versus other forms and formats of text. With a laptop connected to a projector, we collaboratively generated a way of organizing this information. We did most of our writing over the three days with this type of set up – one person at the computer but the whole room able to watch in real-time what words were being written as they were projected on the screen. Decisions around how to share and how to organize our ideas were left to the group:
**Katie (me):** So we’re going to make – well, how should we divide the information? How should we organize it?

**Eddie:** In half.

**Katie:** Why in half?

**Kamiliya:** ‘Cause you know…

**Lynn:** It should be in threes – make a table – in threes like this [gestures up and down with her hand].

**Katie:** Three columns?

**Lynn:** Yeah you need one for just curriculum things, one for the things that are same for everything and one for, um…

**Katie:** Things that are different?

**Lynn:** Yeah

**Katie:** Does that sound good?

**Vincent:** Yeah perfect

**Katie:** Ok three columns it is.

They shared their answers with the whole group noting that curriculum documents had “long sentences,” “lots of words in one big block,” “no pictures,” “hard words” and “were boring to read.” Other formats of written text had “photos,” “more interesting fonts,” were “meant for bigger groups” (broader audiences), “larger text,” and “shorter words” which students said made them “more readable by more people”.

They then highlighted what they wanted to be sure to include in their own curriculum document, what they wanted to avoid, and what was drawn from another type of text that they liked and wanted to include in their curriculum. Things they wanted to include were: “pictures,” “humour,” “graphics,” “cycles” (meaning flow charts), “charts,”
“shorter chunks of words,” “plain words,” “broader audience,” “readability,” “relate-ive” (meaning easy to relate to), “point form,” “stories,” “quotes from students,” “a cool font,” “colour,” and a “glossary”:

**Hope:** “If we *have* to use a big word, like it’s the right word and it’s the only one, we should make a glossary to explain the word.”

**Mattering Maps**

We made a list of all the spaces we work in – this included the gardens at both schools, the kitchens, the classrooms, the farmers’ market and the compost area. In small groups, students picked one of these spaces and mapped it out by drawing it on chart paper. We then “toured” each location – each group would show us around their space. As a whole group we then asked ourselves *what matters to us about this map* (Ibrahim, 2004), with the lens of youth experience working in those spaces as student farmers and now as curriculum writers:

**Katie (me):** OK so what we want to do now is, say that you need to prepare a group of new school farmers to work at this location, so they are brand new, maybe they go to East Tech and have seen the school before but they have never worked in the garden. What are the things based on what you’re looking at on the map, that they need to be either taught how to do, or informed how to do, or told where something is, or told how to use it, or whatever. What do you see?

**Hope:** The hose…

**Evans:** Yeah.

**Katie:** What about the hose?

**Evans:** You need a key.

**Eddie:** No you have to grab a wrench and then the wrench…

**Evans:** Yeah a water key.

**Miles:** Yeah it’s called a water key.
Katie: [hands out post it notes] Hope, what was yours?

Hope: Nothing I said nothing… [laughter]

Katie: Hey hey hey – take the post it note [laughter]

Evans: What did you say, Hope?

Hope: Nothing, I just don’t like writing.

Katie: Ok tell me what to write – so you said we have to know…

Evans: How to use the hose.

Hope: Where it is…

Katie: So how to use the hose and where it’s located –

Hope: And how to open it…

Katie: Ok so, how to use the hose and where it’s located, how to open the door to it. What else about watering?

Lynn: You need a thing, the key, for this right?

Katie: Ok so how to use the water key.

Eddie: How to pack up the hose right.

Katie: So how to store it?

Eddie: Yeah.

Katie: Ok so we know how to get the hose out and we know how to put it away - what else is important?

Taylor: Like how to water – like if you are watering you don’t want it to be on like full blast and you’re like pulling plants out of the dirt.

Kamiliya: Oh yeah, yeah.

Katie: So like water pressure?

Lynn: Yeah.
**Eddie:** Use shower?

**Katie:** Ok so hose settings, and when to turn it off? So were not just making a swamp…

**Hope:** That would be fun though, we could go swimming [laughter].

*Figure 1. Mattering Map of East Tech Secondary Garden with curriculum ideas*

Their conversation has a lot of playfulness and laughter. There was a lot of excitement and action in their discussion – students bouncing ideas back and forth, building off of the one they just heard. Hearing other students’ ideas would often spark a new idea, or a clarification. The ideas written down on the postcard were often the result of a few ideas, or several people sharing their thoughts. The richness here comes from their sharing and building on each other’s contributions.
We repeated this process for each map, creating learning objectives for each space. Most learning objectives followed this same layered process of having several students build on an idea. For this expectation that students should learn about watering, eight different people were involved in voicing ideas, clarifications, additions or questions. Other students were nodding, or expressing agreement or disagreement non-verbally. This happened for many other learning objectives as several people would contribute to the creation of one sentence.

**Collaborative Writing and Editing**

I collected all of the post-it notes that were generated from the maps and typed them up at the end of Day 1. The following morning we projected these rough notes up on the screen and worked together to edit, change, expand, merge or delete ideas based on group consensus.

For example, one learning objective that came from the East Tech map was: “*Know about row cover uses.*” When this was projected up on the board, Lynn initially remarked, “Row cover, I don’t know nothing about that,” and she then shared everything she knew about row cover, which was a lot:

- **Katie (me):** “Know about row cover uses.”
- **Lynn:** Row cover, I don’t know nothing about that.
- **Taylor:** I guess we should have a small list then maybe?
- **Katie:** Because it’s just a few points?
- **Taylor:** Yeah, like how to put it on and why to put it on, basically.
- **Katie:** OK so know ‘how to put it on’ and ‘why to put it on’ and then what we can do is provide an example. So for ‘how to put it on’ what should we say?
Lynn: Use those sticks to hold it down from the wind.

Taylor: Yeah those little metal things.

Katie: Right, so the stakes?

Lynn: Yeah use the stakes to hold down each edge of the cover, or you can use mulch.

Eddie: We used the mulch for like [gesturing with his hands]…

Katie: We buried it.

Eddie: Yeah we buried the edges of the cover and then sometimes we used rocks to hold it down.

Katie: And what about why?

Lynn: We used it if it was like sometimes going to be cold, like too cold for the plants, like frost.

Katie: Ok so helps keep plants warmer for longer.

Hope: Keeps the bugs away.

Katie: Yep!

Taylor: And don’t you use a certain colour for certain seasons – like we had white in the summer and black is for the winter?

Katie: Yep they do different things.

Lynn: Yeah black is like keeping it warm in winter and blocking weeds.

Katie: And then the other reason we use row cover is to water less frequently.

In the end, “know about row cover” became “know about how and why to use row cover on the garden beds, e.g. How: use the stakes to hold down each edge, bury the edges of the row cover in mulch to keep out bugs; Why: helps keep plants warmer for longer, keeps bugs and pests out of the crops, keep the garden beds moist so that they can
be watered less often. Know the difference between summer covers and winter covers (block out the weeds).”

There were also several instances throughout the three days where students would initially say they did not know enough about a topic to comment on it, “row cover, I don’t know nothing about that,” but would then expand on that same idea in really rich ways. During the focus group following this process Lynn remarked:

**Lynn:** It’s easier to write than it looks, like I thought when we were doing it like it would be all these like big words and hard stuff and we’d have to follow what was already written and it was like the total opposite. We got to say what we know, and we knew lots of stuff.

The process of writing collaboratively allowed students who often don’t experience academic success at school to affirm their knowledge. Having their work projected up on the screen literally reflected their knowledge back to them. This seemed to be a positive and affirming experience for them.

**Generating Themes**

The curriculum writing work described above was to produce learning expectations for the day-to-day work of farming at our school sites. We wanted the curriculum that the students wrote to not only be about the job related tasks but also inform the workshops that we do in the program. For this, we followed a process inspired by Freire’s method of designing the “content of an education” (Freire, 1970, p. 95), as outlined in the *Methodologies* chapter of this thesis.

We all sat around one table with a stack of blank cue cards and some markers in the centre. Students were asked to think about food issues in their own lives - their
schools, their neighbourhood, their homes, and their own community. There was no structure introduced for the conversation, just an invitation to share ideas. Each idea was then written on one of the cue cards.

The students were swift to generate themes emerging from their experience with food. Many themes were developed by several students as they would build on each other’s ideas to expand a point or clarify an idea. The list of themes is included here in Table 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2. Generative Themes: Issues in the Food System</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Processed foods – cheaper, keeps long, easy to make</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Healthy food isn’t marketed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- More affordable grocery stores have rotten produce</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Grocery stores are too far</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Living near grocery store doesn’t negate their expensive prices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Food harvested early has less quality and nutrition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Price of housing is too high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Imported foods cause more pollution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Food allergies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Takes 25 minutes to walk to the Chinese grocery store</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Chain grocery stores are expensive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Food is expensive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Convenience of fast food and junk food</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Housing is too expensive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Farmers are experienced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- More junk food options, less health options for people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- People eat too much meat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Organic food isn’t as accessible as junk food</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
- Farmers use steroids to make their animals grow faster
- Lots of salt in processed food
- Farmers markets are hard to get to
- Grocery store fruits and veggies are too expensive
- People not knowing what goes in the green bin and no one to maintain them
- There are only recycle and garbage bins, there are no composts

There were several themes that students did not, at least initially, agree upon.

These included housing prices, the consumption of meat, and the value of fast food. Here is their conversation about the relationship between housing and food:

**Katie (me):** What else? Issues with the food system…

**Eddie:** Maybe it's just like the area you live around, like that could be one problem too like a lot of grocery stores are, like, the area you live in has a lot of grocery stores.

**Vincent:** Well not everyone can live beside a grocery store!

**Katie:** How come?

**Kamiliya:** I used to. Where I used to live.

**Katie:** Vincent how come?

**Lauren:** Not everyone is five minutes from a grocery store.

**Vincent:** It takes me 25 minutes just to walk to a Chinese grocery store.

**Eddie:** Whoa!

**Katie:** Can I write that down?

**Vincent:** yeah

**Katie:** And is the Chinese grocery store…

**Evans:** It's cheaper…

**Katie:** …where you prefer to go?
Vincent: Yeah for sure.

Katie: How come?

Kamiliya: You have to take a streetcar then.

Vincent: We don’t take the streetcar, that’s money, we walk there!

Eddie: Can you move?

Vincent: Some people live where they live, they can’t move.

Katie: So not just Vincent, how come some people don’t just move if they don’t like the food in their neighbourhood?

Taylor: People can’t afford to move.

Vincent: Can’t afford it, its too expensive, houses – who even lives in houses?

Katie: So housing is too high?

Vincent: I’ll write it.

Miles: Is that a problem for food though?

Katie: What do you think?

Hope: Well yeah cause it depends on where you live, like you can’t get to a grocery store so you get take out food.

Eddie: And then it puts you on a budget too – like you can only spend so much money on food.

Taylor: And you don’t want to spend so much money just to get there to get the food.

Eddie: Yeah.

Taylor: What was I writing?

Katie: Um – housing is too expensive.

Vincent: Too much.

Katie: What do you think Miles? You kind of reacted with an “I don’t know if it’s about food?”
Miles: I don’t know, I live near a No Frills, so it’s not really been a problem for me, but just No Frills being expensive is a problem.

Katie: So even though you are close to the grocery store, the food in the grocery store is expensive?

Miles: Yeah.

Katie: So it’s not enough to just be – like the fact that you can walk there isn’t enough.

Miles: Yeah.

Katie: If we just magically had a grocery store in every neighbourhood…

Vincent: Oh! That would be nice! [laughter]

Katie: Would that be enough though?

Vincent: No.

Miles: I don’t know how to write this down…

Katie: So you live close to a grocery store but it’s too expensive – you can just write that.

Vincent: Shame on that grocery store then.

Wang (2006) notes that, “Peer interaction can be emotionally challenging when confrontation happens among students from different backgrounds” however, in debating with each other and listening to each other’s experience, “they may begin to move towards one another from different directions” (p. 119). Apple (2004) echoes this in arguing that conflict between students can lead to progress and a mutual consensus – that teachers should not necessarily be afraid of engaging disagreements and conflicts of opinion in their classes – especially with “urban and working class students” so that they can develop (or reinforce existing) positive associations towards conflict and change that
enable them to challenge “complex and often repressive political realities” (p. 79). Questions like “Why don’t you just move?” could be challenging in a way that shuts down conversation, but engaging in dialogue where you really listen to each other can move students closer to understanding each other’s lived experience.

**Codifying Themes**

After writing down themes from their daily lived reality with food, we spread all the cards out on the table. Students then worked in either pairs or groups of three to select a few themes that stood out to them, which did not have to be the theme that they had introduced. Each group of students either used their own cell phone camera or one of the cameras we had at the school to go out into the local community to create an image that captured their theme. When I first described the process of creating a visual representation for their issue as a “codification,” the students connected it to types of codes that they knew: “a password,” “an algorithm,” “a puzzle.”

Students had around an hour to go out and take images. They did so in their groups without me going with them. When they returned, they texted me their photos, I printed them out over lunch, and then we started on the next step which involved decoding the codifications.

**Reading Codifications**

We started with placing one image on the table. We agreed that whoever made the image would wait to speak, so that the students who did not know the theme it represented would have some time to think through and name what they see. Students reflected on what they saw, often beginning with a literal reading of what was in the
picture – e.g. “a truck” – and then moving to the issues that might be connected to having a truck deliver food in your community – e.g. “pollution.” The new themes were written on a new cue card to be added to the themes already generated from the previous conversation. The full list of new themes they generated is included in Table 3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3. Reading Codifications: New Themes Emerging from the Pictures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not physically accessible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K-Cups too much plastic and toxic for the ozone and the environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes organic isn’t an option</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Price</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Big brands are more expensive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No halal option</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation causes pollution and high cost</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No compost bin accessible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Big companies taking away money from the community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paying more for the brand name</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greenhouse are expensive and costs a lot to operate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mortgages and rent that’s more than a full paycheque</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High sodium salty – health problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No supermarket close by</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affordable store had flies and rotten</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Carrot and Orange” use healthy food words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make it sound like you’ll be full “combo”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too oily, not healthy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expensive + tax $$$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marketing – pictures, combos, coming and spend $$$ “Louisiana Brand”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pollution, Imported, doesn’t give back to community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make it taste by adding salt, fat, sugar and oil – make it hard to avoid</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Growth hormones
Market/Reality with the real living conditions of cattle
Branding – start to rely on that brand, smaller independent shops suffer
False advertising

This photo of a truck outside of our food distribution warehouse sparked the themes of pollution, cost and import, but then also elicited the following conversation:

Figure 2. Codification of the “transportation causes pollution and high cost” theme

Katie (me): Anything else in this picture?

Eddie: Snow…

Ryley: The handicap spot is blocked by the snow!

Katie: Oh it is!
Miles: That’s actually kind of bad…

Kamiliya: What?

Katie: There’s a disability spot…

Eddie: That’s blocked off because of the snow!

Hope: Cause that’s the door to the warehouse

Katie: So this is a place where people are coming to get their food every week, coming to volunteer…

Evans: It’s not accessible!

Katie: Not physically accessible, that’s a big problem.

Accessibility had not yet come up as a theme in our process until we read this photo, and after that it became a central issue in our conversations around what to include in the curriculum. Reading the photo was also an act of reading the environment and the community in which it was taken, essentially reading the world. The process of encoding and decoding through photos helped to spark new ideas, ideas that were still deeply rooted in the students’ local context, but that created a new mechanism for bringing them to the forefront. The codification is not only a representation of the theme but a “re-presentation” of the theme (Freire, 1970, p. 109). The content of the education becomes “dialogical par excellence” as it is “constituted and organized by the students’ world view,” and through re-presenting each image, the content is constantly expanding and renewing itself (Freire, 1970, p. 109).

This expansion and renewal happened with each image. A photo of the outside of a chain coffee shop lead us to add themes of big businesses, corporate ownership, fewer options for consumers, marketing strategies for junk food, single use coffee pods, and
food waste. A picture of a package of bacon (originally representing the theme of “high sodium”) lead to a conversation of halal food options and cultural diets. The photos helped to draw out more nuance and complexity from some of the issues the students were bringing up. This debate about food costs and access to good quality food emerged from a photo of garlic:

![Image of garlic (1)](image)

*Figure 3.* Codification of the “More affordable grocery stores have rotten produce” theme.

**Katie (me):** OK so what do you see in this picture?

**Kamiliya:** Garlic.

**Taylor:** $1 for a whole basket.

**Ryley:** That’s pretty good.

**Kamiliya:** Yeah, but it’s not fresh.

**Eddie:** It’s kind of rotten looking…

**Miles:** Isn’t a $1 for all that garlic a good thing? I thought we were taking pictures of bad things?

**Hope:** But this is the bad stuff, like at supermarkets it’s expired and so they put it on a shelf and then give you half price off.
Kamiliya: Yeah it’s not fresh, it should be fresh.

Ryley: Looks good to me.

Katie: OK so the quality of the produce? We have some different ideas?

Lynn: Bad quality.

Kamiliya: It’s bad.

Taylor: It’s like how we said before, like in grocery stores in certain neighbourhoods the vegetables are cheaper cause they are older.

Katie: Just cause the pictures isn’t too clear, because of the way I printed it, Evans do you want to say what did this food look like when you were in that store?

Evans: It was rotten, there were some flies, there were black spots, it wasn’t appealing.

Kamiliya: Told you it was not fresh.

Miles: Flies? I don’t like that.

Freire (1970) asserts that through interpreting codifications, students begin to learn from their peers, as in these moments “they ‘re-consider,’ through the ‘considerations’ of others, their own previous ‘consideration’” (p. 112). In this instance, Miles was able to reconsider what he initially saw as a positive aspect of his food system (the low cost of the garlic) as a more complex issue (access to low quality food in low income communities). This also moved him to begin to see the larger structures at play, moving towards a conscientization of how income, housing and food systems are tied up in complex ways. The multiple readings of the same image also speak to Weiler’s (1991) critique of Freire’s “universality of the truth” by asking, “what if there are multiple readings of the world” (p. 454)? A feminist pedagogy would highlight the “difference,
positionality and the need to recognize the implications of subjectivity or identities” of the students and teachers in this group, rather than assume a universal experience of either oppression or privilege (Weiler, 1991, p. 460).

**Sorting Themes**

![Figure 4. Reading student codifications and sorting themes into curriculum categories.](image)

After a break we all came back to the table. One by one we read a card with a theme on it and began the process of grouping themes together to create categories that would become curriculum expectations. As more themes were read, students would expand the categories, split them apart, or start them from scratch. They did not always
agree on where themes should go or what the categories should be. For example this conversation emerged about cultural diets and the accessibility of food:

**Katie (me):** So – ‘no halal option’ – which category?

**Eddie:** Ummm, farmers?

**Lynn:** Organic?

**Kamiliya:** Maybe organic?

**Hope:** I was thinking food allergies…

**Evans:** Food allergies?

**Katie:** What do you think?

**Taylor:** I don’t think halal is an allergy.

**Evans:** [laughing] yeah!

**Katie:** Hope, why did you think to put them together?

**Hope:** I don’t know?

**Katie:** Why did it come to you?

**Eddie:** Is it almost the same as like saying like some people can’t eat regular meat?

**Katelyn:** So it’s like an allergy, not that it’s an allergy, but like it’s a restriction.

**Evans:** I think it should go on its own.

**Katie:** What if we put it near it and decide later?

**Evans:** Not even near it [laughing].

The process of adding more themes to our sorting process led to expanding some categories and narrowing in on the name of each category. Eventually, they decided that
the ‘no halal option’ theme should become a category on cultural diets and other forms of access.

Once all the cards were at least roughly sorted, we reviewed the themes in the category, gave the category a name, and then asked if we needed to add any additional themes to round it out. For example, this conversation occurred when addressing the “no halal option” theme:

**Katie (me):** OK so that means that – lets start over here. Does everyone agree that a category about cultural foods –

**Hope:** I agree.

**Lynn:** I agree.

**Katie:** - Or dietary restrictions or food access in that sense –

**Kamiliya:** I agree.

**Katie:** - Which would be people getting the food that they need, is that good?

**Lynn:** Yeah.

**Katie:** Ok, if we have a category about like getting the food that you need, is there anything that we need to add to that?

**Evans:** Wait - I think food allergies and halal should probably go in to accessibility

**Katie:** Ok, how come?

**Evans:** Cause like for food allergies if it’s not accessible, if you’re on certain diets and stuff.

**Hope:** Yeah that makes sense.

**Katie:** So do people agree with that? A category about accessibility?

**Taylor:** Sure.

**Hope:** Cause they have to go farther to get halal, or it’s not in their neighbourhood.
Evans: Yeah.

Katie: So if we put halal, food allergies, close by, physical access, um all these things together – what would we call this category?

Lynn: Accessibility.

Katie: Accessibility? Do people agree with that?

Kamiliya: Oui.

Katie: Any other ideas?

Hope: No that sounds good.

Katie: OK is there anything that you would want to add, if that’s the name of our category? If you’re like “ok we’re thinking about accessibility, and we haven’t mentioned…blank.” We have allergies, we have religious or cultural diet, we have physical access.

Hope: I think we’re good.

Lynn: I think we need diets for other people, like vegan and vegetarians and stuff – cause like a lot of food even if it’s not a meat it has like a meat in it.

Katie: OK so like lard or chicken stock or something?

Lynn: yeah and then people can’t eat it.

In this instance Lynn is “looking to the margins” to find other groups of people who would have been excluded from the conversation about food (in this case, vegans and vegetarians) (Kumashiro, 2000, p.31). Evans also widened the notion of accessibility from one that meant physical, barrier-free access to spaces, to one that included access to foods that affirmed cultural and religious diets – an idea that is fundamental to food justice and often lacking in existing food literacy curriculums.
**Hinged Themes**

There were instances in which I added themes to a category to add more complexity to the students’ ideas, rather than solely relying on students to generate themes:

**Katie:** What would go in to a meat category that is not already there?

**Lynn:** The kind of meat? I don’t know. Because like in the movie you showed us, they were saying how like cows really should be eating grass, but they were feeding them corn stock, something totally out of their diet, and then like, I don’t know there’s more to it than I can say.

**Katie:** So like you’re talking about the types of diets that the animals have?

**Lynn:** Yeah.

**Katie:** And how come that’s important?

**Hope:** ‘Cause you’re eating the meat.

**Lynn:** And like if they aren’t getting the right diet, then like if it’s not good for them, then like how is it good for you?

**Katie:** Right and then I would also say that one of the big arguments for that is the environmental reasons because if they are eating something they are not supposed to be eating, and then they produce more methane gas and that speeds up climate change, I’d say something that’s not really in here yet is the environmental impacts of choosing to eat meat. Can I add that?

**Hope:** Yeah that’s good.

**Eddie:** Sure.

**Taylor:** Are cows really that big of a factor in like the ozone layer?

**Katie:** They say it’s bigger than cars.

**Ryley:** What?! No way!

**Katie:** Yeah.

**Taylor:** So it’s more dangerous to have a cow on your farm than to drive a car?
Katie: If it’s industrially farmed and fed feedlot corn, if its grass fed then it’s different.

Kamiliya: What?

Lynn: If it’s fed corn then it’s worse for the climate than a car is.

Kamiliya: oooooh!

Katie: It’s the methane – it has more of an impact than the CO₂ that comes from cars.

Eddie: So we need to get rid of McDonalds and Harvey’s!

Katie: So the proportion is not the same but the impact is more severe with the methane…

Miles: So we have to kill all the cows? That sounds like massacre!

Taylor: it’s not a massacre, it’s an environmental solution…

Ryley: You don’t gotta kill them all, just feed them naturally.

Part of Freire’s process for creating the content of an education is the right for the teacher-students to participate through adding themes that are not previously suggested by the student-teachers. Freire calls these “hinged themes” (Freire, 1970, p. 120). In this instance they were concerned about farm animals’ diets and how they would impact human health in terms of what meat eaters ingest, but I added the hinged theme of climate change and methane gas production.

Sometimes these hinged themes would also lead to a conversation about the larger structures that organize our society and maintain oppressive systems. Here we are discussing the food available in their neighbourhood:

Lynn: Isn’t it like you’re buying something less good? Like you’re buying something less but for less. So you’re not getting four fresh tomatoes for less you are getting four rotten tomatoes for less.
Katie (me): One thing to consider is like where are these stores?

Kamiliya: They are everywhere.

Katie: I guess my question is, are these stores in expensive parts of cities?

Miles: No, not at all.

Evans: I don’t know, they might be.

Katie: Where do we find these?

Eddie: Sometimes in small towns.

Katie: Yep

Ryley: Poverty areas.

Kamiliya: Where there is poverty.

Katie: So maybe this is tied to questions of poverty? Cause sometimes this is what people can afford but sometimes this is all they are ever offered. Sometimes we don’t value people so we don’t give them valuable food.

Lynn: That’s true – it should go with poverty and income

After this conversation, students started to more readily name the larger structures that were impacting the themes coming from their daily reality. During the exercise of grouping themes and identifying what was missing, they named the larger-scale systemic issues of livable income, housing availability, capitalism, profit driven corporations, land ownership, and racism. This reflects Freire’s writing on being submerged in reality versus emerging from reality: “Individuals who were submerged in reality, merely feeling their needs, emerge from reality and perceive the causes of their needs” (Freire, 1970, p. 117).

Students knew housing was too expensive from their daily reality of the cost of living, but began to see why housing was so expensive when discussing capitalism, racism, and land ownership.
Chapter 5: My Teaching Practice

Stopping Time

The hardest part of transcribing was not the actual typing out of 20 hours of tape, or parsing out a lively conversation between a group of 11 people excited to be talking together, but rather having to listen to myself as a facilitator of the group. Listening back on my own teaching was a very informative process that was at times embarrassing, funny, inspiring, and very boring – sometimes all within the same few minutes. Ballanger (2009) talks about how her teacher research involves “stopping time” – using a recording device to go back to puzzling moments in her teaching practice to hear them again, read them over, share them with others, and reflect (p. 6).

In listening back on my own teaching, and in reading and re-reading the transcriptions, a few key pieces stand out in my recordings. One is that I talk a lot. Perhaps, at times, too much. There is one instance from Day 1 where it takes me two minutes to make the same point that Lynn makes in only 5 words. This is a common phenomenon in classrooms, wherein teachers often monopolize a majority of the talking time in a classroom space (Gharbavi & Iravani, 2014, p. 555; Allwright & Bailey, 1991, p. 139; Bellack et al, 1966, p. 238). It is also important here to acknowledge the role that whiteness has in monopolizing talk. McKenzie (2014) writes that a major way in which white people can push back against their privilege is to stop talking so much, noting that white people “always get to have a voice and that voice usually drowns out the voices of others” (p. 115). There is a clear distinction made in that a white person using their privilege to speak out against oppression is important, but that the every day, day-to-day,
privilege to “chime in, take up space, add your two cents” that comes from whiteness needs to be challenged (McKenzie, 2014, p. 115).

**Opening Up Space**

It’s not only the quantity but the quality of classroom talk that matters (Gharbavi & Irvani, 2014, p. 555). Macedo and Freire (1995) write of the need for curiosity in learning from both teachers and students, and the need to avoid structuring a “bureaucratic exchange of information” (p. 383). They argue that to shape group discussions into bureaucratized ones in which there are assigned time slots for talking, and “students have to participate in a turn taking task of ‘blah blah blah’” is to stifle real dialogue (p. 383). I used this argument when shaping the plan for our curriculum writing work, ensuring that our conversations and activities were really loosely structured. We never established a turn-taking order within our conversations but rather left the structure of a conversation open and not-predetermined by me as the teacher.

I was also intentional about providing lots of wait time when posing questions or introducing a topic to discuss. Thornbury (1996) argues that providing wait time for students to reflect, gather thoughts and provide a response is important for having meaningful conversation (p. 282). During our work together, I remember that pauses felt very long. They felt long enough for me to panic and have an entire internal dialogue that doubted the question I had just asked or whether the activity was even going to work, or to ask myself “How come no one is talking?” When listening back to the recordings, I dreaded having to listen to these pauses, but discovered that they actually felt quite short when I listened to them in real time. It reminds me to allow for silence to linger a little longer, to provide space for students to think through ideas without being rushed to share
them, or rushing to move on to the next question. It reminds me that these silences really only stand out to me in the moment, and they are actually a normal part of a rich, lively, dialogue.

**Negotiating My Politics in the Classroom**

Freire and Macedo (1995) are clear in articulating that the quality of the talk is also directly tied to the presence of political analysis. They argue that the sharing of experiences is not dialogue; to be dialogue it “must have a political analysis” (p. 388). There were many times in listening back to the tape in which I chose to have an opinion or to take a stance on an issue, which is very different from the status quo of teacher neutrality that was pervasive in my pre-service teacher education and in the schools I work in today. Recently while harvesting turnips with Ryley, one of our curriculum writing students, we were talking about how he was about to turn 18 and then could vote. He asked who I would vote for but before I could respond he said “That’s a rude question right? Teachers aren’t supposed to talk about who they vote for.” I asked him where he heard that and he said: “Well our civics teacher. She said she would get in trouble if she told us who she voted for, she said she had to keep it to herself or the office would be mad.”

I encountered this same perspective in my own pre-service teacher education. Teachers are meant to present a balanced perspective of both sides of an issue and themselves remain neutral. It never sat well with me, particularly if teachers are explicit and intentional about working towards the goals of social and racial justice. Freire (1970) is clear that teaching is a profoundly ideological and political act that “cannot be neutral” (p. 90). For education to be truly liberatory, Freire argues that there must be coherence in
what teachers say, write and do in classroom spaces, and that coherence in actions is just as important as the content of the education (Freire, 1970, p. 94). For me to identify as an activist working towards the goals of racial justice in my life outside of teaching but not bring that to my classroom practice would be to lose that coherence and to play into the false neutrality of teaching. Freire (1998a) writes:

What ought to guide me is not the question of neutrality in education but respect, at all costs, for all those involved in education...What is my neutrality, if not a comfortable and perhaps hypocritical way of avoiding any choice or even hiding my fear of denouncing injustice. To wash my hands in the face of oppression (p. 101).

To be clear, this does not mean that a teacher has free license to impose their own ideologies on their students. As Freire and Macedo (1995) write, “An educator shouldn’t impose a thought but also should not hide it” (p. 388). Barton and McCully note that although teachers may feel they are hiding their stance on an issue through taking a “neutral” position, students can often ascertain their teacher’s position through body language (p. 15). Additionally, they assert that to not disclose a position on the issue at hand is a violation of trust (or a lack of coherence), which leads to a deterioration of the safe environment that may have been established (Barton & McCully, 2007, p. 15).

There were also several moments in our work together in which a student presented an opinion that I wanted to challenge or stretch or build on but I chose not to. For example, in a conversation about livable wages, Evans stated, “The higher the minimum wage, the less jobs.” This is not necessarily true and if we were working side by side harvesting radishes and having this conversation, I probably would have explored this idea more and pushed his thinking a little bit. However, in this moment, I had framed this experience as one that positions students as authorities, and I chose not to impose my
analysis on his thoughts. I think that was a misstep. Ibrahim (2004) writes of the importance of pushing on what people know to move them towards conscientization:

How do we acknowledge previous experience as legitimate content and challenge it at the same time? How do we affirm student voices while simultaneously encouraging conscientization: the interrogation of such voices? And how do we avoid the conservatism inherent in simply celebrating personal experience and confirming what people already know (p. 116)?

Freire and Macedo (1995) call it a “great ethical error” not to intervene and push students’ ideas to move them towards coming to consciousness (p. 391). Others share this same concern about the risks involved in participatory processes which can, if we are not careful, simply “reify the views of the less powerful” which “often means an uncritical value is placed on the views of the students” (Bovill et al, 2009, p. 19; Reynolds et al, 2004). Although I did not push Evans on his idea that we would lose jobs if the minimum wage went up, I did say, “This sounds like something we should talk more about!” To which he replied, “I think so.” So the idea of increasing the minimum wage made it in to our curriculum and we can open up an ongoing conversation about what that means for job loss or creation in our community. Thus, the conversation is not closed.

**Teaching to Facilitate**

I have a lot of questions about my role as a teacher in this space of co-construction. Freire (1970) writes that “authentic education is not carried on by ‘A’ for ‘B’ or by ‘A’ about ‘B’ but rather by ‘A’ with ‘B,’ mediated by the world” (p. 93). Education in this sense is collaborative work in which both teachers and students contribute to learning and teaching. However, Freire and Macedo (1995) are clear to articulate that the teacher still holds more power in this relationship. They dislike the word “facilitator” as it offers a false sense of equality in relation to access to power -
teachers are not facilitators (a more power-neutral sounding term than teacher) but rather they “teach to facilitate” (Freire and Macedo, 1995, p. 378).

In reading and coding the transcriptions of the curriculum writing sessions, I noticed that over the three days whenever I made a suggestion – whether it was for a word choice or a way of ordering ideas – regardless of how many students also made alternative suggestions for the same decision, the students always went with whatever I had suggested. It was not until the last day in the afternoon session, after we had introduced a consensus based decision-making tool that morning, that students started to challenge my suggestion or articulate their desire to use another student’s idea over mine.

To me this reflects the power that a teacher has, as my suggestion of a word to use or a way of doing something carried more weight than the suggestions of the students. This was in a space of co-construction, of shared power, and yet my words meant more, over and over again. Wang (2006) writes that if a teacher refuses not to claim the teacher’s authority to overrule a student, choosing instead to use a pedagogy of “authority with” rather than “authority over” (as I would say that I tried to do in this study), they ignore “the complex power interplays between teacher and student in which the teacher has more power over the student” (p. 116). Wang (2006) argues then that the teacher’s role is to figure out how to utilize that institutional power to “further the project of social justice” (p. 116). This makes me wish that Freire wrote more about the teacher’s addition of “hinged themes” in designing the content of an education. These added themes are presented as another step in the process without recognizing that they hold more weight coming from the person in the group with the institutional power (the teacher). For example, during this process I added climate change and meat eating, capitalism,
environmental racism and the colour of poverty as hinged themes to our curriculum. I do not mean to imply that these were not necessary additions, but rather to articulate that these suggestions came from a place of institutional power and of holding more weight than a student’s suggestion (even if I would like to think that is not the case).

Naming the World

Ballanger (2009) writes about valuing different kinds of talk, which was an inspiration for doing this project – valuing students’ talk and positioning it as legitimate through creating curriculum from it. When I speak about this work, I speak of students writing from their own experience, using their own words, and organizing their own thoughts. However, I have come to see that I need to be more critical and recognize that it did not always happen in this way. In re-reading the transcripts, there was a moment in which a student provides a very rich, interesting description of an issue and I paraphrase it with my own words, in a way that I feel deprives it of its richness. In discussing the availability of food in his neighbourhood, Taylor shares that “Healthy food is like a black market” and when I say it back to him, writing it on to chart paper for the group to see, I paraphrase it as “OK, so food is inaccessible?” He says “Yeah – inaccessible.” But that’s not what he really says.

White Ideas as Right Ideas

It is important to remember that students’ talk is raced and classed and gendered in the same ways that they themselves are. There were several instances in the collaborative writing process where many students would make a suggestion about how to phrase a certain idea and I would ultimately pick one, even though at the time it felt
more like we came to that conclusion together. For example, we can look at this conversation about how to describe harvesting salad greens:

**Evans:** OK well you need to hold the plant while you are cutting it.

**Katie:** And how do we say that, in writing?

**Hope:** Grab the plant with your hand…

**Taylor:** Get a firm grasp…

**Vincent:** Hold a bunch of it…

**Ryley:** Hold it gently in your hand…

**Katie:** Ok hold it gently in your hand

This is interesting to me because all of the suggestions are perfectly valid ways of describing this step in the salad greens harvesting process, including the original idea that came from Evans. Ultimately, I just picked one without really getting any sort of consensus from the group. The important part for me here is that I went with the idea that came from a white, male student. I do not think that that was the only reason I picked it, but I think it’s important to recognize the role that whiteness may have played in taking this idea more seriously, or giving it more validity, more weight, than the ideas from other students. Why did I even feel it was important to get more ideas from the group? Why did I not just go with Evans’ original idea? Was it because I wanted it to be “collaborative,” or because I did not value his talk? Is there some coded racism, some internalized white supremacy in my actions here? I think it is important to ask this question and it needs to be a necessary part of my praxis moving forward.
Valuing white talk is linked, I would argue, to racially biased assumptions and cultural deficit theories that are engrained in white teachers about racialized students (Martin, 2000, p. 12). Instructional practices are rooted in a disconnect between teachers and students, particularly in urban centres where the majority of teaching staff are white and the majority of students are not (Milner, 2013, p. 486). It speaks to the phenomenon of Black students’ talk being read as incorrect rather than as nuanced and complex (McKenzie, 2014, p. 18; Delpit, 2012), which stems from a culture of white supremacy.

Inviting in Without Burdening

I have questions as a white educator about what my role is in teaching about race with students of colour – how do I recognize what students of colour bring to the space, inviting them to speak about parts of their life I know nothing about, without positioning them as the voice of their race? Haritaworn (2010) warns that this, “turn[s] minoritized students into educators, rather than allowing them to be learners” (p. 27). For example, during a conversation about cultural diets, I singled out Kamiliya, the only Muslim student in the group, to speak about halal foods:

Ryley: What is halal anyways?

Taylor: The guy like blesses it.

Katie: Kamiliya?

Kamiliya: Oh what?

Katie: Ryley wants to know what halal means.

Ryley: What do you do to an animal to make it halal?

Kamiliya: What?
Miles: What does halal mean?

Kamiliya: Oh it means like, I don’t know…

Lynn: I think it means like you bless it.

Kamiliya: No, it’s just like we can’t eat pork because pig eat other animals and because cow only eat like leave and grass. So we can’t really eat animals eating another animal. And something about how you cut the chicken – you know how like white people when you go farm they just cut it [makes a slashing motion], so how we cut it is first we have to…

Miles: Way to generalize white people…

Kamiliya: …say something and…

Eddie: Like saying grace?

Taylor: It’s a prayer.

Kamiliya: Yeah like a prayer, so you cut it really slow…

Taylor: Wouldn’t slow be more torturous?

Kamiliya: Not like slow slow [laughter]

Lynn: Like, you appreciate what you are eating.

Ryley: I heard they cut the neck and then they hang it up and then get all the blood out.

Katie: It’s just a different way…

Kamiliya: Of killing the animal.

Katie: But then part of it is like for myself, I’m not Muslim, but I can eat halal options.

Eddie: I eat halal all the time.

Kamiliya: Yeah lots of white people eat halal.

Taylor: It doesn’t taste different.

Katie: Right? But if it’s an option that is going to make the food more widely accessible to more people…
Miles: then we’re all for it!

Evans: yeah!

On the one hand I could argue that drawing in Kamiliya was a way of amplifying her voice (Kumashiro, 2000, p. 34). I could frame it as a way of valuing her epistemic privilege (Moya, 2002; Mohanty, 2000; Campano, 2007,) or her “unique vantage point” as a racialized youth (Leonardo, 2004, p. 148). However this is also a moment in which I singled out Kamiliya and positioned her as a “spokesperson” for her culture (Derman-Spark, 2008, p. 17), a practice that James and Saul (2007) warn can end up as tokenistic rather than empowering (p. 847). This moment could have also been a bit of all of these things.

Consensus Building

On the third day, upon noticing that students often went along with whatever I suggested, we introduced a consensus building mechanism for making group decisions called “fist to five.” Whenever we had a group decision to make we would turn it into a proposal to vote on, and then everyone in the group (including me) would raise their hand in the air either as a fist, indicating that they wanted to block the proposal, or a 1-5. One finger meant they were opposing the proposal but were OK to move forward – their dislike is registered, but the group can move on. Five fingers meant full agreement and support of the proposal. Here is an instance of us using fist to five to decide on what language we were going to use in our curriculum to refer to the learners:

Evans: We should leave it at students, I think.

Lynn: I like farmers way better.
Katie: Who says not farmers?

Evans: Students might not consider themselves farmers.

Lynn: But you are a farmer for that day, or that summer.

Evans: That’s true.

Ryley: Farmer?

Evans: I think student sounds better.

Katie: OK how come?

Evans: Its just, it sounds better.

Ryley: Student farmers?

Katie: What do you think about student farmers?

Lauren: Yeah student farmers.

Kamiliya: I like that!

Evans: Nope. Disagree.

Katie: OK Evans you gotta give us your case for ‘students.’

Evans: Um it sounds better.

Katie: You gotta tell us more! [laughter]

Miles: It’s better because it’s just better. [laughter]

Evans: I don’t know, I just like it better.

Katie: How did you feel at the farmers market when people called you a farmer?

Evans: I felt OK, but I preferred students.

Katie: And who’s on the farmer side? Who wants it to just say farmer?

Lynn: Well maybe it should say student farmer?

Ryley: That way everybody wins.
Evans: No, students.

Hope: OK come on, we gotta work on this.

Katie: Evans are you a no, like we cannot move on, or are you like a #1 and I’ll go with it.

Evans: I’m a #1, a #1, not a fist, I’m a #1.

Katie: For student farmer?

Evans: Yeah.

Katie: OK our proposal to the group is “should we use the term student farmer” – give me like a fist-to-five, so you are either fist, a no, or a one I don’t agree but we can do it or you’re like five? Kamiliya what are you – fist-to-five…

Kamiliya: Oh I’m a three I guess

Katie: OK we did it! We’re using student farmers.

This is also the first instance of a student not simply accepting an answer or paraphrasing that I propose. After this, there were more instances of students not only articulating their position but also defending it, voicing why they wanted to go with their suggestion, rather than simply saying yes to whatever I proposed (such as when I changed “black market” to “inaccessible”). I think having an actual mechanism in place was the most important part of this negotiation. It’s easy enough to say that ideally students opinions should be considered or prioritized, but if there is no real mechanism for capturing that insight, or negotiating that decision, then it’s hard for that to actually work. It’s not enough to just say that we want to value students’ voices without actually providing a mechanism or a pathway for those voices to be heard and be given weight. And these consensus based decision making models in the classroom are vital when doing social justice work, as it
helps you address the structural inequalities between the teacher and students in the class, as well as inequalities between students in the class (Okazawa-Rey, 2008, p. 35)

**Talking about race – “white people don’t really want to talk about it”**

It was during the third day, while rounding out the themes – adding hinged themes and creating full pictures of each issue – that students began to address racism in the food system:

**Katie (me):** This is the [theme] about farmers – is there anything about farmers that you can say we are missing? Anything people should learn about farmers?

**Lynn:** We need more organic farmers.

**Katie:** Yep, we’re talking lots about the consuming part but we can talk more about the production part.

**Lynn:** Learning about local farming and like what they do and who they are.

**Katie:** Yep the demographics of farmers – most of our farmers in Canada are white 60-year-old men who are about to retire.

**Kamiliya:** No Black people?

**Evans:** Not a lot of Black people, no.

**Katie:** The majority are white – and so where’s the problem there and how do we fix it right?

**Evans:** Yeah we should talk about that.

**Katie:** So the demographics of farmers…

**Evans:** And where are they located and what are they doing and who are they…

**Katie:** Maybe who actually owns land and who rents?

**Kamiliya:** White people own it.

**Evans:** True.
Eddie: And you have to wake up at like 5 am [laughter].

Katie: Ok so demographics – lots of farmers are male, in rural areas, we can learn more about what other people are doing in cities, women farmers, farmers of colour…

Evans: Those are good people.

Eddie: I’ve seen female farmers…

Taylor: When we went to [the farm field trip last summer] that was really diverse, that was cool to see, I liked that.

Katie: Yeah and one cool thing is a lot of those people are starting their own farm this year, a Black farmers’ collective.

Evans: Where’s that?

Katie: They are in the process of finding their own land.

Kamiliya: Where?

Katie: It’ll be in Toronto.

Kamiliya: Where?

Katie: I think they are still sorting out where they will be – they don’t own land right, so they have to borrow or rent from others. So we could have them come in as a guest to talk about what they are doing.

Evans: Or we could go help them and learn from them.

Katie: That would be great

Eddie: Sure I like that.

[Ryley and Miles talking to each other]

Ryley: Wait do they only work with Black farmers? Like what about white people?

Miles: I’m sure they hire all kinds of people.

Ryley: Oh ok.

Katie: What’s up Ryley?
Ryley: Nothing.

Miles: Is it just only Black farmers?

Katie: I think right now it is…

Miles: They aren’t banning anybody…

Katie: For sure, it’s not that people are banned…

Taylor: They are kind of showing that they are capable and can do it too and there should be more people who aren’t white farming

Katie: Yeah and for some people, like their people’s history with farming has been a history of slavery, so when we talk about farming, our histories and experiences are different, and it’s going to be a different conversation. And for people who have that in their history to get together and talk and work together, there might be some healing in the space through working together. And as a white person, I can’t fully relate to that, and that’s ok. So it’s not that I’m not welcome in the conversation – it’s just a different conversation that has to happen.

Taylor: Yeah I can see that, they need a space.

Ryley: OK yeah.

Evans: What about First Nations people? What about them? It seems like they are trying to make First Nations people extinct.

Katie: What’s that?

Evans: They are trying to make our First Nations people extinct.

Katie: Why do you say that?

Evans: ‘Cause we barely talk about First Nations people.

Katie: Should that be a part of this conversation?

Evans: Yeah like they make their own food, we should talk about them too as farmers.

Kamiliya: White people don’t really want to talk about it, there’s First Nations where I live, like there’s two schools, there’s like a white people school and a First Nations school.
**Lynn:** Yeah I know what you are talking about and I had a teacher that was like, I mean they opened an African school like not too long ago and like everyone thought it was like just for like African people but like white people should learn too like from that culture.

**Katie:** That’s like the argument that everyone would benefit from Africentric education, no one is going to be worse off because they learned the history of Black people and people of colour.

**Lynn:** And a lot of people don’t understand that we originated from Africa many of us, we should talk about it.

In this exchange I was the first person to bring up the idea of race by noting that the demographics of Canadian farmers are largely white. This would then position race in this method of content creation as a “hinged theme” presented by the teacher rather than coming from the students. I question what it means to have ideas come from the teacher, from a place of institutional power, rather than emerge from the students first. Is it any less authentic or relevant if it came from me, rather than being student-driven? The students still wanted to talk about race; there was lively conversation and a lot of back and forth dialogue and side conversations.

I am also struck by how there are many deep theoretical ideas (some that I covered in my literature review) that were exemplified by the students in this piece of dialogue – Kamiliya referring to white people not wanting to engage in race conversations (*white talk, tools of whiteness*), Lynn calling for more culturally diverse curriculum in school (*culturally relevant pedagogy*) – without being named as such. To me this reflects the rich knowledge young people have and how it really isn’t all that different from the knowledge that flows downward from academic institutions. It is knowledge that students have learned from their reading of the world, but it is also
knowledge that is rarely valued until it is theorized, named and published by an elite institution.

### Centering Whiteness

The conversation about Black and First Nations farmers in many ways still centered on the experience of white people. There were fears of white people being excluded (“*Wait do they only work with Black farmers? Like what about white people*”), questions of whether white people wanted to deal with the issue of race (“*White people don’t really want to talk about it*”), and were white people able to participate in the Black growers collective if they wanted (“*Is it just only Black farmers?*”). In this large group conversation, I also followed up specifically with the white student in the conversation – inviting them to tap back into the whole group discussion with a “*What did you say?*” There were side conversations between students of colour that I did not reach for. In what ways do I centre the experiences of white students? And in what ways is this just reinforcing systems of white supremacy in our classroom spaces?

Bell & Golombiksy (2004) talk about the challenge of teaching race and centering whiteness: “Teaching race requires teaching whiteness, but teaching whiteness not only hazards reinstating whiteness as ‘normal’ but it also means channeling our energies back towards white students” (p. 311). This is further complicated by the call from many activists and authors of colour for white people to do anti-racist work and education with other white people (McKenzie, 2014, p. 45 & 56; see also: Holloway, 2015). This line of thinking would mean my place as a white educator is to work with white students. In contrast I hear bell hooks’ (1995) critique of white people working on anti-racist
education in isolation without “critical engagement and dialectical exchange with non-white peers” as an unattainable “utopian dream” (p. 105; see also: Delpit, 2012, p. 88).

One strategy to move forward is to bring in more teachers and facilitators of colour (which we have done in our staff team these past few years). It is important for me to recognize that as a white staff person there are things I cannot do for my students that a teacher of colour could. As Dominican novelist Junot Diaz writes:

If you want to make a human being a monster, deny them, at the cultural level, any reflection of themselves. Growing up, I felt like a monster in some ways. I didn’t see myself reflected at all. I was like ‘Yo, is something wrong with me?’ That the whole society seems to think that people like me don’t exist? And part of what inspired me was this deep desire, that before I died, I would make a couple of mirrors. That I would make some mirrors, so that kids like me might see themselves reflected back and might not feel so monstrous for it (Diaz, 2009).

As a white educator I cannot be that mirror for a student of colour, but as a program coordinator with the power to employ youth mentorship and program staff, I can choose to create more mirrors for the students that we work with through hiring practices. I can develop a program staff team in which students of colour can see themselves reflected. In previous summers students all had one-on-one mentorship sessions with me throughout the summer to work on their self-determined goals. This summer all of the students are instead having these mentorship sessions with our new program staff, who are all people of colour. I support the staff in supporting the students, in finding resources and coming up with creative ways to help students meet their goals. A key reason for this is to open up more spaces for mentorship and learning to be less white and more reflective of the diverse group of students we work with.

This is not to say that there is no room for white educators to do anti-racist work. I worry that to move too far in that direction is to absolve white people of the responsibility
to fix white supremacy. I want to be clear in stating that white people are not absolved of doing this work, but rather the work may look different. Ladson-Billings (1997) has studied teachers who have been identified by parents of Black students as being successful at working with children of colour. One of the key features she finds in their pedagogy is a refusal to “employ a race neutral or colorblind approach to teaching” (p. 136). Delpit (2012) also profiles successful teachers of Black children. She asserts that although many good teachers of Black children are also Black themselves, “Their success is not because their skin matches their students but that they know the lives and culture of their students” (Delpit, 2012, p. 87). Delpit (2012) argues that white teachers can be good teachers of Black youth if they make time to learn about their students, their daily life, their culture and their unique selves, “as knowing students is a prerequisite for teaching them well” (p. 87). I still, however, think there are limitations to what white teachers can do for students of colour and am interested in further exploring this question in my praxis.

What anti-racist praxis looks like for white teachers is bringing me back to the idea of my place being to work with white students. This summer we have been workshopping the students’ curriculum – developing and delivering workshops on food justice that are rooted in the curriculum expectations the students wrote over March Break. These workshops are being facilitated by one of our staff of colour, and sometimes co-facilitated with me. Increasingly, I find myself in conversation either in the workshops, in the field or in our community meetings, with the white students in our group. One white student voiced concern that the workshops are generally come back to “how bad white people are” and we were able to have a long discussion differentiating
between white people and a system of white supremacy, and what it means to open up honest conversations about race and racism that we don’t normally have in school spaces. This is reminiscent of a “pedagogy of the privileged,” which Curry-Stevens (2007) defines as a pedagogy “that intentionally seeks to engage privileged learners in workshops and classrooms and to assist in their transformation as allies in the struggle for social justice” (p. 33).

Another strategy is to open up deliberate, intentional spaces to have honest and critical conversations as a staff team about the work we are doing with students, and to have those conversation with students. Is our work centering whiteness? Is it silencing and further marginalizing students of colour? Is it surface level work? How can we do better? This is to answer Kumashiro’s (2000) call to “constantly look to the margins” to “find the students who are being missed and have needs that have yet to be articulated” (p. 31). This also speaks to Delpit’s (2012) call for white educators and educators of colour to move towards each other through conflict, rather than away (p. 88).

**Complicating Oppressor/Oppressed**

When we were mapping what matters about the garden spaces, this conversation took place about weeding:

**Taylor:** You’re going to want to wear gloves.

**Evans:** Yeah you definitely need gloves.

**Eddie:** Or if you’re a real man, you use your bare hands.

I had started this work with a focus on my own privilege as a white person but this comment pulled me right into the messiness of oppressor/oppressed relationships. In this
moment I was both a white person (representing oppressor) and a woman (representing oppressed). I chose to engage Eddie in his comment:

**Katie:** Oh my gosh, what did you say?

**Eddie:** I remember Thomas and I always used to say, if you’re a real man, use your bare hands to pull out thistles.

**Katie:** But then what does it mean for lady farmers?

[*laughter*]

**Eddie:** You can be a real man too!

**Katie:** Oh thanks Eddie [*laughter*].

This moment stands out to me for two reasons. First, it complicates Freire’s notion of oppressor and oppressed positionalities as fixed and static categories. Freire (1970) remarks that even if a member of an oppressive class “joins the oppressed in their struggle for liberation” that “they almost always bring with them the marks of their origin: their prejudices and their deformations” (p. 60). In this regard one is fixed in an oppressor class even if they are working in solidarity with those who face oppression. Others are critical of this notion arguing that oppression is complex, contextual and intersectional (Crenshaw, 1989; hooks, 2003). As Gentile, quoted in Ellsworth (1989) remarks, “Everyone is someone else’s other” (Ellsworth, 322). Ellsworth (1989) is clear in articulating that to assert multiple identities and positionalities in relation to oppression is “not to excuse or relativize oppression by simply claiming, ‘we are all oppressed’” but rather to “clarify oppression by preventing oppressive simplifications” (p. 323). Or as Razack (1998) argues, “No one is off the hook since we all can claim to stand as oppressor and oppressed in relation to someone else” (p. 47). This is not a universalizing
simplification of oppression, but rather a nuanced call to action in which we all have to
do the work (even if that work looks different depending on your experience of
oppression and privilege).

Secondly, this conversation stands out to me as a cautionary example of the “race
to innocence” that often befalls white women doing anti-racist work (Fellows & Razack,
1998, 335). This is when white women rush to identify themselves as marginalized
through gender rather than to identify themselves as privileged through whiteness. Sleeter
(2008) finds this to be very common as a large proportion of teachers in urban centers
across North America are white women who have worked themselves up a social class
and so are quick to recognize and name social stratification based on class or gender, but
not race (p. 41). That is not to say that white women shouldn’t examine the ways
gendered language can privilege male perspectives, but that we need to ensure that
analysis is intersectional and not dismissive of, or deflecting from, critiques of whiteness.

What We Expect of People

Joan Cone writes about her work de-tracking the English department in the high
school she taught at in California – dismantling the system that offered separate remedial
and advanced placement tracks of English courses to instead have students work together
in diverse classrooms (Cone, 2002). She argues that the racialized gap in achievement is
actually a “gap in our expectations” of racialized students (Cone, 2002). Part of the
design of this project was an intentional challenging of those lowered expectations – of
expecting more from young people, of positioning them as experts in this field capable of
authoring a rich curriculum document. Delpit (2012) calls this being a warm demander:
Warm demanders expect a great deal of their students, convince them of their own brilliance, and help them to reach their potential in a disciplined and structured environment (p. 77).

Through the process of doing this research, I found myself face-to-face with an overt critique from a school administrator that these students simply “could not do this work.”

One day in late February I was walking out to the parking lot with some students who were helping me unload some soil from my car. An administrator stopped us in the hall and removed one student’s hat saying he could get it back after school and then told me that he had read “my proposal” and he wanted to speak to me in his office. I did not know what he was referring to, as I had not shared my thesis proposal with the administrative team yet, and said I would try to find him after school that day to chat. As we walked out to the parking lot the students laughingly teased “Katie’s in trouble” as he had sounded angry.

After March Break I was at the school for one of the follow up focus groups for this research. I had just paid for a pizza delivery at the office when I ran into the administrator. He said again that he needed to speak to me about my proposal before I did the work because, “I read what you wrote, and as a professor, I gotta say, it’s not going to work.” I told him that we actually did the curriculum writing over March Break and it went great. He still said he needed to see me in his office at the end of the day.

The students and I completed the focus group, chatting about the work we did while eating pizza. They said profound things about the experience of writing curriculum and about what they wish teachers in the school would start to do differently. I packed up and headed back to the office. The administrator asked me to come into his office and sit in a chair across from his desk.
He informed me that he was part of the ethics review for my proposal and that the only reason it went through was because he knew me. He said with a laugh that I should thank him for his help. He asked if anyone at OISE had read my proposal, stating over and over again that “It just wasn’t going to work.” I told him I had ethics review, my supervisor had read it, many colleagues had read it, and I had received SSHRC funding for the work. When he heard the part about the funding, he sat up straighter in his chair – it seemed to give some legitimacy to what I was proposing. He said again “It’s just never going to work.” I told him we already did the work over March Break, that it went really well and the students accomplished something incredible. He did not want to hear about it. He said, again, that the proposal would never work, that the students could not do it, that he was offering his help. I felt like we were having an Abbott and Costello style “Who’s on first?” conversation:

Admin: Well, it’s just not going to work…

Katie: Which part?

Admin: What you proposed -

Katie: OK which part of what I proposed?

Admin: Your proposal…

Eventually he said I should bring him my proposal and, feeling like a child being scolded, I actually asked if “I could now be excused.” He laughed and said “You’re not in trouble,” I said thanks and got up to leave.

I left his office, walked straight to my car, sat down and tried to calm my heartbeat and the anger welling up in my chest. This was an incredibly frustrating and belittling experience. I got a real sense from him that he did not think, as a young woman,
that I was capable of doing this work. This speaks to Weiler’s (1991) critique of teacher’s institutional authority as not the same for women teachers – as women often need to “claim authority in a society that denies it to them” (p. 461). He implied that my work was only going forward because of a favour he did for me, not because it had merit on its own. His body language changed drastically when I told him I had SSHRC funding for this work, implying that he needed an external source of validity for my words to be legitimate, to hold any weight, and for there to be an external authoritative belief that the students, and myself, could do this work.

The part that really devastated me was his statement that writing curriculum was “not something the students can do,” despite me telling him that we had in fact already done the work and it went great. He was not interested in hearing about how it went, or the magic of what they were able to accomplish together in such a short time. He was interested in being right, in asserting his power over me and asserting his power over the students.

I bring this up to provide a clear example of this gap in expectations (Cone, 2002). This gap speaks to Delpit’s (2012) writing about “stereotype threat,” drawing on the work of Steele (2003). Stereotype threat is “the experience of anxiety or concern in a situation where a person has the potential to confirm a negative stereotype about the social group to which they belong” (Delpit, 2012, p. 17; Steele, 2003).

In Steele’s study, Black and white college students were given a test to write, and prior to the test were either told nothing about their abilities (e.g. “You have an hour, go ahead”), or were told that the test is a tool to see “how people already determined to hold strong language skills solved linguistic problems” (Delpit, 2012, p. 17). In the case of
providing no comment on abilities prior to the test, an “as expected racial gap” emerged with white students outperforming Black students. However, when students were all told that they already had strong language skills prior to taking the test, “the gap was eliminated” (Delpit, 2012, p. 17). The same phenomenon occurred in a math test given to male and female students, with female students performing worse when taking the test, but the gap being eliminated when students were told that “men and women typically scored similarly on the test” before writing the test (Delpit, 2012, p.17).

This thesis research was about challenging this gap in expectations, about disrupting the words of that administrator, about positioning students as talented, knowledgeable and intellectual authors of curriculum. Of telling them that’s precisely what they are prior to starting the work – and their final curriculum piece is rich, descriptive, nuanced and incredibly smart.
Sharing Student Responses From the Focus Groups

A week after the last curriculum writing session we held two focus groups, one for the students at each school. The students really dove in to the question “What do you want your teachers to know about your experience writing curriculum?” So in this final section I would like to highlight students’ voices on the subject of curriculum and school.

Talk to your students. Taylor said that curriculum would be better and more engaging if teachers “got their students involved” and “instead of just having [teachers] just teaching what they think kids need to know, ask them what they want to know.”

Learn from each other. During both focus groups the students brought up Freire’s idea of teacher-students and student-teachers often. They articulated that students and teachers learning from each other was something that took place in our process and that they hoped would take place in their classroom experiences more often moving forward:

Miles: So what I’m trying to say is that they are the teacher but some teachers just treat the students like buckets and that’s not a real teacher, it’s like a puppet.

Taylor: Yeah like there’s a difference between playing the role of a teacher and then like actually teaching.

Miles: Yeah a real teacher is one who not only learns from the students but the students learn from the teacher, that’s how it should be to be good.

Share power. When asked what they learned from this experience, Evans said that power should be shared between everyone at the school:
Evans: Share the power, like with everybody.

Hope: Yeah.

Katie: Share the power?

Kamiliya: Yeah share it together, spread it out.

Katie: And what would be good about that?

Evans: Then people aren’t able to abuse the power.

Evans recognized that a democratization of power meant fewer opportunities for power to be abused, rather than a hierarchical model in which power is concentrated in the hands of a few individuals at the school level. They noted that in this curriculum writing process they got to experience what it was like to share power with adults:

Hope: Power is like, powerful. Like to have power is a big meaning, to actually do something that people don’t get to do…cause usually it’s the TDSB that gets to decide everything and not have input from what we actually want.

Katie: So would this be an instance where you did have power?

Hope: Yeah we got to say what we wanted, we got to decide what was important for other people to learn, and we actually got like adults, like your participation, and ours as students who’ve actually done it. We shared some power together.

Make it relevant (it’s not just about money). Students were paid for their curriculum writing shifts, and they are also paid when they work with us over the summer or in after-school positions in the garden or at the farmers market. People often say that the reason students do well in our program is because they are paid, which I am sure is a real part of the motivation to show up and be present in the work. But the students had a conversation about whether it is the money that makes the work good, and if being paid to go to school would help:
Taylor: When there is money involved I am a lot more likely to show up on time, cause I realize at school it is so hard to get up in the mornings knowing at the end of the day I’m leaving empty handed.

Lynn: I was explaining that to [my teacher] the other day and he was not understanding – he’s like school, you have to be on time for school, but there’s a difference when you don’t have money to be on time and bus fare and then when you are getting paid to be somewhere, then you have that money to keeping going and doing things and progressing and providing for your life.

Ryley: And if you enjoy it.

Miles: About that – a long time ago I saw this documentary, I think it was called Freakonomics…

Katie: Ok

Miles: And basically what they did was like in this school in America, a lot of students didn’t go to class so what the school actually decided to do, and the parents too, was that they would pay the students to go to school, and the higher the grade the more money you got paid, but then even though that was there, kids still didn’t go to class.

Ryley: Its cause they don’t enjoy it.

Miles: Yeah it’s the motivation.

Lynn: Yeah for sure.

Taylor: That’s like when I wake up in the morning, I get here at like 9:30 and that’s cause I wake up and I’m like dead tired and I could sleep all day if I wanted. And just knowing that you get here and you are bored for the whole day, you are sitting down at your desk all day writing and you kind of know that’s how the next day is gonna go, and how the next day is gonna go. So if you don’t, if it’s all boring and stuff, it makes you not want to get up and go to school.

Katie: So what if nothing changed about school except for getting paid?

Miles: Trust me, if you really don’t care about school, you wouldn’t care if you got paid for it.

Ryley: I’d probably still be late.

Lynn: I think it would be the same, cause I worked at Winners and it was the most boringest job ever and even then I would call in late or find a way not to go
and stuff, and even the money didn’t motivate me. But I think working last summer, it was always something different to do throughout the week so you know you weren’t just gonna sit and do the same thing so it motivated me to come on time and actually come every day and be on time.

For the students, although money is appreciated, it would not solve the problem of how to make school meaningful. Students remarked that the repetition of the day-to-day desk work (or as Delpit (2012) discusses: “inane seat work,” “the crayola curriculum,” or a “pedagogy of poverty” (p.124)) meant that they felt they knew exactly how each day was going to go – it was going to be irrelevant to their daily life, unchallenging, and therefore not engaging. Teachers would do well to follow the students’ earlier advice of getting to know your students, finding out what they are interested in and democratizing some of the power in classroom spaces. This is all reminiscent of the writings of Delpit (2012), Noguera (2007) and Ladson-Billings (1995) among other educational scholars.

**We are not empty buckets.** Students were critical of the banking model of education and were quite vocal in saying that they were not, in fact, docile bodies waiting to be filled with decontextualized pieces of knowledge. Hope was quite clear that her lived experience as a caregiver in her family gave her valid knowledge.

**Hope:** Maybe we are empty buckets with certain things but we have experiences, like maybe you don’t have the experience that I have through my mom being sick, you don’t know that experience and what its taught me, but that’s life experience I have, so I’m not an empty bucket.

**How this work ripples.** In the very first session on the very first day, Hope was hesitant to participate, and when she finally did, she was not interested in writing down her contribution to the group process: “I don’t want to write anything, I hate writing.”
When we started reading Freire she became really engaged in the group conversation. She reacted very strongly to Freire’s critique of the banking model of education saying “People aren’t just empty you know.” Throughout the course of the three days she became more vocal in sharing her ideas, asking others to defend their ideas, and clearly articulating her own thoughts about curriculum. She seemed to really be sparked by the work we were doing, becoming more animated and vocal as the days went on.

The Monday after our curriculum writing sessions I popped into the staff meeting at the school to drop off some seeds to the science teacher. The English teacher stopped me in front of the other teachers and said quite loudly, “Katie, I need to talk to you about what happened over March Break.” I was immediately nervous – his tone sounded like maybe I had made a critical mistake or offended someone – I braced myself for a critique. “What do you mean?” I asked. “It’s Hope, she won’t stop talking about buckets in my class. She is grilling me about why we are doing what we are doing, how did I make those choices. We spent all period today talking about who has the power in my class. What on earth did you do to her?!” By the end of that last sentence he was smiling. It was clear that he was not concerned about what we did over March Break, but instead was genuinely interested in how we sparked that interest in Hope. I told the teachers about how we read some Freire together (“and they understood it?!”) and that we then collaboratively wrote a curriculum together. We had a great conversation about the work the students accomplished.

Later in the week at our focus group Hope shared this story when I asked the group what they thought about curriculum after participating in the writing process. I had not yet told her about the conversation I had with her English teacher:
Hope: It’s funny though, I actually sat down and talked to [my teacher] about the book, about like students being buckets, and we had a big discussion about it and actually in our English class for once he actually sat us down and talked to us about, like we did this poem thing, we had to write poems from our heart -

Evans: With [that teacher]?

Hope: Yeah and he actually asked us how we want to be marked on it.

Katie: And what happened?

Hope: People said at first, like it should be how we wrote it, and it went all over, but then we decided its should be how much we put in to it, that’s how we are getting marked on it. So each of us will have our own little thing.

Katie: Did that happen after you talked to him about it?

Hope: Yeah kind of.

Katie: When was the part where everybody sat down and talked?

Hope: After I talked to the class.

Katie: So March break we did this, you came back after March break and talked to him about pedagogy of the oppressed?

Hope: Yeah!

Katie: And then his response was to…

Hope: Like actually let us say what we wanted to be graded on which I think is interesting!

Katie: That’s awesome Hope!

Evans: Yeah!

Katie: So you took it to your class?

Hope: Yeah I challenged him with what we learned from the book and he really listened
Hope finished her story with a huge happy grin. I got a feeling that she had a real sense of pride and accomplishment for the ways in which she asked critical questions with her teacher about his curricular and pedagogical choices.

At the end of the school year in June, when we were loading some of the harvest on to the school elevator, the English teacher grabbed me in the hall and said, “Come to my class quick, I have to show you something.” He handed me a hardcover book from a stack of 15 of them on his desk. As I flipped through I realized this book was written by the grade 12 English class. I said, “The students wrote this?” He smiled, “The students wrote the whole thing – they came up with it, they each wrote about their past, their present and a letter to their future selves.” I said it looked incredible – it was full of long pieces of text and hand-drawn images, the students’ hard work was evident. “Its because of Hope you know, she started this.” We laughed with each other and flipped through the pages of the book, savouring their words.

The process of reading Freire together, of writing curriculum collectively, of sharing power and learning from each other enabled Hope to speak up in class and to ask more of her teachers and her education. But it was also all of her life experiences that lead up to this moment – caring for her mother and her sister, giving of herself to her family, living with her grandmother who taught her about hard work even when you are tired, working as a farmer over the summer – these were all a part of her challenge to her teacher. She already knew the world before we started this process, but through naming it, emerging from it, and coming to consciousness, she was able to challenge authority in her life in a way that resulted in real change and inspired others around her to create more meaningful and relevant educational experiences.
Chapter 8: Conclusion

This study asked what would it mean to use students’ sources of knowledge to develop their own curricula using the lenses of food security and food literacy? The process of co-authoring curriculum as a way of valuing students’ epistemic privilege (Moya, 2002; Mohanty, 2000; Campano, 2007) proved to produce a rich and nuanced curriculum document. Students reflected that it was a positive experience, one in which they learned about their own skills and knowledge, collaborated in positive ways with their peers, and were able to transfer that learning to begin to challenge the ways in which power operated in their own classrooms outside of this project.

This study also asked about the role of a teacher when we invite youth to draw on their own knowledge and assets to address issues of community food insecurity through a curriculum design process. This question involved a close reading of my own teaching practice. This work has confirmed and reaffirmed my commitment to being a “warm demander” (Delpit, 2012) of my students, of getting to know my students out of a deep love and respect for who they are, of continually asking questions about my positionality and being open to critiquing my practice (Freire, 1970), and about believing that young people are both powerful and brilliant.

Implications for the Field

This research demonstrates that students are capable, competent curriculum writers. A next step in the research is to see how young people’s profound sources of knowledge can be valued in other areas of school policy development. In our focus group, students had a rich conversation about attendance policies, paid employment at
school, and teachers’ pedagogical choices. There should be space at the school policy table for youth voices.

Additionally, in today’s climate of high stakes testing and neoliberal school reform, it is not only students but also teachers who are often relegated “to a supporting role at best” when it comes to the creation of curriculum (Bascia et al, 2014, p. 231). There is a need here to see who else in our school communities — teachers, parents, administrators, social workers — should be authoring or contributing in real ways to curriculum development and school policies rather than solely subject-specific experts.

There are also very few studies that pay youth a living hourly wage (or even the legal minimum hourly wage) for their participation in a research project. Most pay a small honorarium, which is more a symbolic gesture rather than a reflection of the true value of their labour. Some of this comes from research projects not always being well funded, however it is important to ask more critical questions about the ways in which academic institutions profit off of graduate research work while those that participate in the research, who open up their lives to analysis and inspection, do not receive adequate compensation for their labour.

Implications for my Practice

This work leaves me with a lot more questions than answers about my teaching practice. I think that is a good thing. As Wang (2006) writes about social justice work in teaching, “There is ambiguity and an uncertainness that you are doing the right thing and so you always start again” (p. 115). Or when writing about deconstructing the White Lady Bountiful archetype, Meiner (2002) draws on Lather (1998) to say that in this
praxis “questions are constantly moving and one cannot define, finish or close; this is a praxis of not being so sure” (Lather, 1998, p. 488).

I have questions about the role of white educators in anti-racist education; I am interested in notions of what a “pedagogy of the privileged” (Curry-Stevens, 2007, p. 33) may look like and what anti-racist solidarity work looks like for white teachers and white students. I am also interested in how caucusing, or creating spaces for people of colour and white people to work separately in break out groups on the work of dismantling racism, may be an effective part of my teaching practice with the youth in my program. I am aware that the practice of caucusing is often positioned as segregation, which makes it a particularly complicated pedagogical tool to navigate in diverse classroom spaces. However, I think it is worth exploring, especially since creating safe spaces for people of colour to talk about racism is so profoundly healing (Blitz & Kohl, 2012; Dias, Drew & Gardiner, 2012). If my only hesitation to creating these spaces is the discomfort of white students, their parents, or white teachers, then I am doing a disservice to the students of colour in my community to not explore caucusing as a part of our program.

I see this thesis as one slice of my ongoing, life-long research into my own practice. I hope to continue to ask critical questions about my own place, and limitations, as a white teacher and to be open to my work shifting and changing to rise to the challenge of addressing racial injustice and dismantling white supremacy.

**Critical Hope**

When educators do not actively name and challenge white supremacy, we are necessarily complicit in perpetuating and maintaining it. If we are aware that curriculum
is a racial text (Cochran-Smith, 2000), that it is a heteropatriarchal white text (Gaztambide-Fernández & Murad, 2011), and that it works to alienate students of colour (James, 2003) and inculcate the values of white supremacy into our students, teachers and communities (Apple, 2003), then to not act, to not change it, is to “collude with the oppressors” (Ellsworth, 1989).

And it must be said that people are dying. Students of colour are being disproportionately and unjustly disciplined, expelled and forced down a school-to-prison pipeline (Noguera, 2007; Losen & Edle, 2001; Skiba et al, 2002). People of colour are being disproportionately and unjustly stopped by the police and those interactions are leading to incidents of violence and death (Rankin & Winsa, 2012; Juzwiak & Chan, 2014). We don’t really have the option to no longer make changes in the way our institutions work, in the ways our students learn. People are dying. Black churches are burning (Green, 2015). And if we truly believe that Black lives matter, then we need to begin to make real changes in the way our schools operate. One way to make that change is to challenge the hegemonic nature of whiteness in our schools – changing the way we write curriculum is a great space to start, and food can be a way of drawing young people in to that work.

Freire and Macedo (1995) assert that “educators have the right to think and dream about a world that is less oppressive and more humane towards the oppressed” (p. 390). Part of what has drawn me to Freire’s work over the years is his belief that oppressive systems are not fixed; he denies fatalism in these structures, and demands that people see the world as made up of both limiting situations but also ways of acting upon those structures to enact change. Freire (1998a) writes:
The future is seen not as inexorable but as something that is constructed by people engaged together in life, in history. It’s the knowledge that sees history as possibility and not as already determined. The world is not finished, it is always in the process of becoming (p. 72).

To be an educator is to shape our world. We can choose to engage together to shape our world into a more equitable and socially just one. There is hope in social justice work. This is not a naïve hope - a blind faith that things will get better - but rather a critical hope, “which is grounded in reflexivity and action for transformation” (Zembylas, 2014, p. 14). Or as Freire writes, a hope that is grounded in both “love and rage” (Freire, 1994, p. 4). For Freire (1994), hope is necessary for educators, but it is also not enough: “alone, [hope] does not win. But without it, my struggle will be weak and wobbly. We need critical hope the way a fish needs unpolluted water” (p. 2).

This research has made me (critically) hopeful that through engaging young people in the process of curriculum writing, in acknowledging their rich food knowledge and cultures, we can create more caring, safe and liberatory school spaces.
Appendix 1 – Email Recruitment Text

Schoolyard Farmers: Youth Writing Food Literacy Curriculum

Dear ____________________,

I hope this email finds you well! During the winter months, now that our gardens have been put to bed, we would like to take some time to write a curriculum for our program. We are interested in doing this with students who have spent a season farming with our program – students like you!

We need to put down on paper what students should learn and how they should learn it – and we would like to invite you to be a part of that process. As someone who has worked with us, we want your input.

We will be offering paid positions for students who have farmed during a summer session. You will be asked to commit to three shifts. Together we will create a curriculum for our program. These shifts will be audio-recorded. At the end of the project, you will also be invited to participate in a small focus group about your experience. In these small group discussions, I’ll be interested to learn about your experiences writing curriculum. Focus groups will take about 30 minutes and will be audio-recorded. Audio recordings will remain confidential and information shared in focus groups will be treated as confidential by all participants.

I will be using these audio recordings to write a research paper for my Master’s Degree.

There will be an information session on (Date & Time). To be eligible for the position, you need to attend the information session and we ask that you commit to attending all of the shifts.

At the information session you will learn more about the project, be able to ask questions about what we are doing and why, as well as take home a consent form.

You can RSVP to this email to let me know that you can make it to the information session, or you can give me a call. If you have any questions, please feel free to email or call.

Looking forward to hearing from you,

Katie German
Appendix 2 – STUDENT ASSENT FORM
Schoolyard Farmers: Youth Writing Food Literacy Curriculum

Dear ________________,

I write to inform you of a research project exploring students' experiences writing curriculum for our farming program. The data collected for this study will be used to write a research report that will facilitate reflection on current educational practices, and may inform future policy initiatives.

Over the winter months, we will work together to come up with a curriculum for our summer farming program. You will use your experience as a schoolyard farmer to create a curriculum for future programs – what should students learn and how should they learn it. I will audio-record our sessions working together on the curriculum.

I would also like to invite you to participate in a focus group discussion at the end of the winter. In these small group discussions, I’ll be interested to learn about your experiences writing curriculum. Focus groups will take about 30 minutes and will be audio-recorded. **Audio recordings will remain confidential and information shared in focus groups will be treated as confidential by all participants.** I will not use your name or anything else that might identify you in written work or presentations.

You are free to change your mind at any time, and to withdraw even after you have consented to participate. You may decline to answer any specific questions. There are no known risks to you for assisting in the project. Choosing not to participate in the study will not affect your employment with us.

If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a participant in this exploratory study, you may also contact the University of Toronto Ethics Review Office at ethics.review@utoronto.ca or 416-946-3273.

If you agree to participate in this study, please sign the attached form. In addition, please bring the permission letter to your parents and ask them to sign the permission form. This form is necessary in order to conduct the focus groups. Thank you very much for your help.

Sincerely,

Katie German
Masters Student, University of Toronto
I acknowledge that the topic of this research has been explained to me and that any question that I have asked has been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I can withdraw at any time without penalty.

I have read the letter provided to me by Katie German and agree to participate in the curriculum writing project and focus groups for the purpose described. I have also obtained my parents’ permission to participate in this study.

Signature: ________________________________

I agree to allow this focus group to be audio-recorded. I understand that this recording will be transcribed to ensure accuracy and that the recording will be destroyed once the research is completed.

Signature: ________________________________

Name (printed): ________________________________

Date: ______________

Katie German
Masters Student, University of Toronto

Faculty Supervisor:
Dr. Rob Simon, Associate Professor

Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning
Appendix 3 – PARENT/GUARDIAN CONSENT FORM
Schoolyard Farmers: Youth Writing Food Literacy Curriculum

Dear parents/guardians of _________________________:

My name is Katie German and I am the coordinator of the schoolyard farming program. I am also a Master’s student in the Curriculum, Teaching and Learning department at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE). I write to inform you of a research project that I will be conducting, exploring students' experiences writing curriculum for our farming program.

The purpose of this research is to better understand how youth can be curriculum writers. Students who have worked with us in the past will be hired over the winter months to work together to create a curriculum for our summer program. The data collected for this study will be used to write a research report that will facilitate reflection on current educational practices, and may inform future policy initiatives. The curriculum designed by the students will be used in future summers for the program. The University of Toronto and the Toronto District School Board have granted approval for this study.

The curriculum writing will take place over the winter months. I will audio record our sessions together and would also like to request your permission to include your son/daughter in a focus group discussion about their experiences writing curriculum. These discussions will take about 30 minutes and will be audio-recorded. All recordings will remain confidential and information shared will be treated as confidential by all participants. I will not use your son/daughter’s name or anything else that might identify them in my written work, oral presentations, or publications.

Participation in this study is voluntary and will not affect your son/daughter’s employment with us. You and/or your son/daughter are free to change your mind at any time, and to withdraw even after you have consented to participate. Your son/daughter may decline to answer any specific questions. There are no known risks to you or your son/daughter for assisting in the project.

If you have any questions or concerns about you and your son/daughter’s rights as a participant in this exploratory study, you may also contact the University of Toronto Ethics Review Office at ethics.review@utoronto.ca or 416-946-3273.

Please indicate on the attached form whether you permit your son/daughter to take part in this study. Your cooperation will be very much appreciated. Please do not hesitate to contact me or my supervisor, Dr. Rob Simon, if you have further questions.

Sincerely, Katie German
Masters Student, University of Toronto
PARENT/GUARDIAN CONSENT FORM (page 2)

Schoolyard Farmers: Youth Writing Food Literacy Curriculum

I agree to allow _____________________________ to take part in this research
(son/daughter's name)

I do not wish _______________________________ to take part in this study.
(son/daughter's name)

Signature: ___________________________________
Date: __________________

Katie German
Masters Student, University of Toronto

Faculty Supervisor:
Dr. Rob Simon, Associate Professor

Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning
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