How the Perceptions of Educators Influence the Breakfast Program
in Ontario Secondary Schools

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Abstract

Breakfast programs are becoming more prevalent throughout the Greater Toronto Area as schools recognize the importance of breakfast on academic achievement and overall health. There are many program models that educators can select for his or her school and these models influence the breakfast items offered, student experience, and even participation rates. The purpose of this qualitative research study is to explore how the perceptions of educators influence the breakfast program in Ontario secondary schools. This study explores the factors that influence the decisions made by educators and the outcomes of these choices. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews with three educators who are heavily involved in executing the breakfast program at his or her school. The findings of this study suggest that the cultural identities of the educators play a significant role in his or her perceptions of the programs goals and shape the program that he or she implements. Furthermore, findings highlight the importance of collaboration within a school and insinuates that sometimes the program is about more than just food.

Keywords: breakfast program, cultural responsiveness, collaboration, universal design, equity
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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.0 Research Context

An increasing number of schools in the Greater Toronto Area have integrated a breakfast program, however a significant number of students are still not incorporating breakfast into their daily routines. Many studies have been conducted on the effect of breakfast on student health and academic performance. Some of the health benefits include: lower body mass index through the management of appetite, improvement of diabetes due to the stabilization of blood sugars, and decreased cardiovascular risk factors (Burley, Paul, & Blundell, 1993; Speechly & Buffenstein, 1999; Sakata, et al., 2001; Ma, et al., 2003; Clark, et al., 2006; Kothe & Mullan, 2011). In terms of the cognitive benefits of breakfast, students who ate breakfast showed improved performance in school and even an overall higher IQ (Meyers, Sampson, Weitzman, Rogers, & Kayne, 1989; Nicklas, 2004; Muthuswamy, 2006; Liu, Hwang, Dickerman, & Compher, 2013). So the question is, how do we increase student participation and does the breakfast program model affect participation rate?

In a 2013 study, a researcher used student surveys to identify that the main barriers of eating breakfast. The two most common responses were that students did not having enough time to eat breakfast in the morning and they did not feel hungry before school (Olsta, 2013). Even though lack of time and lack of hunger were found to be the biggest roadblocks to eating breakfast, the stigma is that only children from low socioeconomic backgrounds do not eat breakfast because they cannot afford to (Olsta, 2013). This is perpetuated by society and institutions by funding breakfast programs in schools of areas of low income. Even within the urban city of Toronto, the majority of schools that have a breakfast program are in regions of lower social economic status. This stigma can be problematic because students are hesitant to
participate. Studies have indicated that certain breakfast models are able to minimize the stigma surrounding the program.

There are several breakfast program models and the model used can vary from school to school. There are two major factors that influence the model a school adapts: 1) the availability of program funding and 2) the educators that develop and run the program. The literature shows accessibility of funding is highly correlated to the location of the school and the surrounding neighborhoods socioeconomic status. Since the school itself has very little control over this factor, I want to focus on how educators choose the program model and how his or her perceptions influence his or her decisions.

1.1 Statement of the Research Problem

Nutrition is the underlining factor in a lot of health issues today, thus it only makes sense that nutritional education and programs should be prioritized. It is essential for teachers to be good role models and set examples for his or her students. Therefore, all educators must support and participate in the breakfast program if he or she wants students to participate. Some literature depicts schools as a place that shapes character, and teaches them the good from the bad, when families are lacking in this task (Joseph and Efron, 2005, p. 525). Suggesting that educators have a role in teaching students the importance of healthy eating habits.

Nutrition initiatives, such as breakfast programs, are commonly started and managed by onsite school educators. Educators have the ability to make the breakfast program as large or small, inclusive or exclusive, and even as western or culturally diverse as he or she wants. This stresses the importance of passionate educators, and the role of his or her perceptions on the programs.
1.2 Purpose of the Study

This research project investigates the factors that influence the decisions made by educators for the breakfast program. This includes his or her choice of breakfast program model, food items and the goals he or she has for the breakfast program. Ultimately, the findings inform the education community how complex running a breakfast program really is. This study delves into the challenges educators face and the many pieces that need to align for the breakfast program to be effective and embraced by the school community.

1.3 Research Questions

Using this lens of culturally responsive teaching, I will be investigating how the perceptions of three Ontario public secondary school educators influence the breakfast program at his or her school.

The following sub questions will support my primary research question:

1) How do the cultural identities (experiences, beliefs, values, and personalities) of educators shape the breakfast program?

2) What are the perceived benefits of the breakfast program?

3) How does the implemented model influence the student experience?

1.4 Background of the Researcher

Having been to school in three different countries, my schooling in the United States stands out the most for one distinct reason; the food. My mother always says that my first worlds in English were “can you please pass the milk,” a phrase I learned during snack time in preschool. I do not remember any educational aspects of those three years of my life, but I remember the fantastic nutritional programs that these schools offered. The school that I went to for
kindergarten and grade 1 had a breakfast program that was offered to everyone in the school. School buses would drop us off at school, where all the kids would go straight to the cafeteria, pick out his or her favourite cereal, and fill the little plastic bowl with milk. These three years of my life were so significant that I still remember them 20 years later. Among the biggest differences that I noticed when I moved to Canada, was that elementary schools did not provide school buses nor breakfast at school.

I graduated from the University of Toronto with a minor in physiology and a double major in cell & molecular biology and human biology, but my real passion lies in nutrition. My human biology major had flexible degree requirements, so I was able to utilize nutritional sciences courses to fulfill them. It was not until I took my first nutrition class in my third year of university that I really feel in love with learning.

I took a year off after my undergraduate studies because I originally planned on pursuing a Masters in Nutritional Sciences and needed to take a few extra courses to meet the prerequisites. After work in a nutrition laboratory for a year and a half, I realized that quantitative research was not what I had imagined it to be, and not what I saw myself doing. The aspect of nutrition that I loved was the reliability and applicability to our every day lives. Every time I learned something interesting in nutrition class, I remember going home and telling my roommates. I loved learning about nutrition, but even more, I loved teaching others about it.

I pursued the Master of Teaching program at OISE because allowed me to incorporate my passion of health and education. With this research project, I had the opportunity to conduct interdisciplinary research on nutrition and education.
1.5 Overview

In chapter two, I examine the literature on benefits and barriers to breakfast, the challenges of breakfast programs and culturally responsive teaching. Followed by chapter three which outlines the methodology of this research study, including my participant biographies and research limitations. In chapter four, my findings and the analysis of my findings is presented in the form of three overarching themes: universal breakfast, cultural responsiveness, and collaboration. Finally, I conclude this research paper with chapter five by outlining the implications, future areas of study, and my recommendations for educators and school breakfast programs as we move forward.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.0 Introduction to the Chapter

This research paper investigates how the perception of three Ontario secondary school educators influences the breakfast program model that is implemented at his or her school. First, this chapter explores the reasons why school breakfast programs are important by looking at the benefits of and barriers to breakfast. Breakfast programs can take on various different forms, all of which fall under two models: subsidy-based and universal-free. There are challenges associated with each of these breakfast program model and those challenges are examined in this chapter. Finally, this chapter concludes with a comprehensive analysis on the role of culturally responsive teaching for equity and inclusion.

2.1 The Importance of Breakfast

Today, the two major driving forces in school health initiatives are inadequate nutrition amongst children and the growing obesity epidemic (Crawford, Gosliner, & Kayman, 2011). The latest Canadian Health Measures Survey by Statistics Canada indicate that from 2009-2011, about one-third [31.5%] of Canadian children, between the ages of 5-17 years, are overweight based on the World Health Organization [WHO] cutoffs (Roberts, Shields, de Groh, Aziz, & Gilbert, 2012). Although breakfast programs have been present in Canada for over two decades, only in the last few years have the importance of breakfast been acknowledged. Breakfast can, not only, improve the health status of an individual, but it can also improve academic achievement.
2.1.1 Academic Achievement.

In the 2011 publication of Feeding Our Future, Muthuswamy found that children who ate breakfast more frequently had increased academic achievements. This long-term study was based on a pilot program that lasted two years from 2008-2010. With the cooperation of the Toronto District School Board [TDSB], four middle schools and three secondary school were involved, providing healthy breakfasts to approximately 6,000 students in the Jane and Finch area of Toronto (Muthuswamy, 2011). The study looks at the relationship between academic success and the frequency of breakfast consumption. Muthuswamy (2011) used data from the 2010 Feeding Our Future Survey and the TDSB’s student information system was used to generate this information. Using grade 9 and 10 credit accumulation, grade 9 EQAO mathematics scores and OSSLT results, the data shows that students who were on-track or had high standardized test results consumed breakfast more frequently than students who were at-risk or had low standardized test results. Similar findings were also presented for the students in middle school [grades 7 and 8].

Various other studies have also been conducted on the relationship between school breakfast programs and school test score (Meyers et al., 1989; Kleinman et al., 2002; Boschloo et al., 2012; Adolphus, Lawton, & Dye, 2013; Ribar & Haldeman, 2013). Researchers around the world have been trying to pin point the relationship between breakfast and the brain. British researchers Cooper, Bandelow and Nevill (2011) conducted two randomly assigned trails to 96 adolescents, aged 12 to 15 years old. The participants completed three different cognitive function tests, all of which measured for response time and accuracy. Response times were only improved by breakfast consumption in high levels of the Sternberg paradigm test, which examines the working memory load. Overall, researchers found that breakfast consumption was
more beneficial when required to complete cognitively demanding tasks, and did not have any
effect on simple cognitive tasks (Cooper et al., 2011). Another group of British researchers
Hoyland, Dye, and Lawton (2009), completed a literature review a few years earlier on the
looked at forty-five studies published between 1950 and 2008, finding “that breakfast
consumption has generally positive effects on cognitive performance,” (p. 239) further
strengthening later findings by Cooper et al (2011).

Swiss researchers Baldinger, Krebs, Müller, and Aeberli (2012) took it out of the
classroom and tested 656 children between the ages of 7 and 10 years old, to see if breakfast had
any effect on his or her motor functional skills. Five different motor function tests were
performed by each participant: sidewise jumping, tapping, standing long jump, 20m sprint, and
shuttle run. These activities were selected to test for coordination and conditional skills. Findings
showed that children who ate breakfast daily had better motor functional skills than the irregular
breakfast eaters (Baldinger et al., 2012).

Lastly, American researchers Liu et al (2013) from the University of Pennsylvania, found
that breakfast consumption is associated with increased IQ in Chinese kindergarten children.
They conducted a cross-sectional study, looking at 1,269 six-year-old children. Findings showed
that regular breakfast eating children performed significantly better on full scale, verbal, and
performance IQ tests scores. Suggesting that breakfast can have social benefits, in addition to
cognitive improvement (Liu et al., 2013).

2.1.2 BMI and Overall Health.

The consumption of breakfast actually helps maintain a healthy body mass index [BMI, 
kg/m²], despite the myth that eating breakfast increases daily calorie intake (Reddan et al.,
Studies have been conducted around the world, all of which have concluded that participants who ate breakfast regularly have lower BMI’s than their non regular breakfast eating counterparts (Gleason & Dodd, 2009; Deshmukh-Taskar et al., 2010; Szajewska & Ruszczyński, 2010; Baldinger et al., 2012; Coppinger et al., 2012; O’Neil et al., 2012; Albertson et al., 2013; de la Hunty et al., 2013; Nurul-Fadhilah et al., 2013; Odegaard et al., 2013). World wide research support on the interaction between BMI and breakfast goes to show that it is the consumption of a morning meal that is important and not the composition of the meal, as each country has different dietary habits. Some studies have restricted the choice of breakfast food, while others take a more realistic approach and survey participants on breakfast frequency.

An interesting study by Gleason and Dodd (2009) compared the effect of school breakfast and school lunch programs on BMI. They utilized a cross-sectional design to generate a model to estimate school breakfast and school lunch program participation, as well as student BMI levels. 2,228 students ranging from grade 1-12 participated in the study. Gleason and Dodd concluded that school lunch program participation was not associated with BMI at all, however there was a significant inverse relationship between school breakfast program participation and BMI. Students that participated more frequently in breakfast at school had significantly lower BMI’s (Gleason and Dodd, 2009). Their finding further reinforces the importance of encouraging breakfast consumption in an ever-increasing obesity epidemic.

Another group of researchers, O’Neil et al (2012), decided to test whether pre-sweetened ready-to-eat cereals were associated with a decrease in nutrition intake and increased body weight. They state that a big concern is “many cereals consumed by children are pre-sweetened” and the “intake of added sugars may dilute the micronutrient density of the diet or increase weight” (O’Neil et al., 2012, p. 64). They conducted a cross-sectional study of the US population
from 1999-2002. They collected data from children ages 4-8 [n=1480], 9-14 [n=1790] and 14-18 [n=1826] (O’Neil et al., 2012). 24-hour diet recalls were used to gather the types and the amounts of food and beverages consumed by the participants. They found that children that consumed pre-sweetened ready-to-eat breakfasts were not associated with higher BMI’s and they met the daily nutritional recommendations (O’Neil et al., 2012). This study helps to dismiss the stigma that breakfast increases daily calorie intake, which is a major barrier for breakfast consumption amongst adolescents (Sweeney & Horishita, 2005).

Research suggests that breakfast helps maintain a healthy body weight by controlling appetite, through the stabilization of blood sugar and gut hormone levels (Leidy & Racki, 2010; Pereira et al., 2011, Odegaard et al., 2013). Pereira et al (2011) speculate that the stabilization of blood sugars and insulin levels can decrease the chance of type 2 diabetes. Mean while, the maintenance of a healthy body weight can also decrease the risk of cardiovascular diseases by decreasing hypertension (Sakata, K., et al., 2001; Timlin & Pereira, 2007; Odegaard et al., 2013; Papoutsou et al., 2014).

So, why breakfast? Breakfast has been proven to improve school performance, as well help individuals maintain a healthy body weight while decreasing the risk of various metabolic diseases.

2.2 Barriers to Breakfast

I spoke earlier about one of the major barriers to breakfast being the stigma, portrayed by adolescents, that breakfast makes you fat (Reddan, Wahlstrom, & Reicks, 2002; Sweeney & Horishita, 2005). There are actually several other physical and habitual barriers that prevent adolescent participation in breakfast. The one that most people think of immediately is the physical carrier of affordability. This, of course, affects a significant proportion of the population.
and is the driving factor behind many nutrition initiatives. According to the Chief Public Health Officer’s Report on the State of Public Health in Canada 2008, “one in ten households with children experience food insecurity” (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2008, p. 41). Food insecurity means that these households do not have “physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious foods to meet the needs of a healthy and active life” (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2008, p. 41). One of the leading breakfast program organizations in Canada, Breakfast for Learning, claims that 62% of Canadian secondary school students do not eat breakfast before going to school (Breakfast for Learning, n.d.).

Sweeney and Horishita (2005) conducted a survey among inner city high school students to investigate breakfast eating habits. These students were asked to state reasons for skipping breakfast, 64% of breakfast skippers said that school starts too early and there is not enough time in the morning to eat breakfast. 28% of breakfast skippers said that they did not have the appetite before they leave for school (Sweeney & Horishita, 2005). An earlier study by Reddan, Wahlstrom, and Reicks (2002), also concluded that children perceived the lack of time in the morning and not being hungry before leaving for school as barriers to breakfast. The lack of breakfast eating habits is a tough barrier to overcome as it effects students of all social economic status.

The two major institutions of influence for children are family and school. When families do not have the habit of eating breakfast, it can become our role as educators to inform students about health eating patterns (Videon & Manning, 2003). It can be impossible to identify what is holding the child back from participating in breakfast, this is why school breakfast programs are fantastic. The universal-free model at school allow students to make choices on their own with all of the resources to their disposal, ensuring that all student feel equal. The subsidy-based
breakfast model runs on similar ideologies, however subsidy-based programs acknowledge that there is a large resource gap between certain groups of students, and therefore takes a more equitable approach (Crawford, Gosliner, & Kayman, 2011).

2.3 Challenges of the Breakfast Program

There are two major challenges of school breakfast programs. The first challenge is the lack of student participation, and second being program funding (Muthuswamy, 2011). The model selected greatly influences the participation and amount of funding required to sustain the program. Each school has the autonomy to control the specificities of their program, and as a result, various methods of delivering breakfast exist. All of these methods of delivery fall under the two overarching models; universal-free and subsidy-based. The difference between these two is that the universal-free model is inclusive to all students in the school; this means that all students receive free breakfast, regardless of family income. While the subsidy-based model is exclusive only those students who qualify based on socioeconomic status. Subsidy-based breakfast programs are still available to students that do not qualify, however he or she must purchase the meal items at his or her own expenses, rather than having it paid for by the school.

2.3.1 Participation.

Some schools with the breakfast program have tried to overcome the lack of appetite in the morning by serving breakfast around 10am (Muthuswamy, 2011). However, there have not been any studies to indicate that serving breakfast several hours after waking up results in the same academic and health benefits. In the 2011 publication of Feeding Our Future, Muthuswamy found that student participation increased when breakfast was served in the classroom around 10am than in the school foyer upon arrival. It is not clear whether this is related to the lack of
appetite in the morning or other factors. Furthermore, Muthuswamy (2011) found that a quarter of student’s [26%] rely solely on the school for their morning meal, signifying the importance of school breakfast programs.

Several studies have found that schools with the universal-free model of breakfast have higher participation than the subsidy-based model (Murphy, Pagano, & Bishop, 2001; Crepinsek, Singh, Bernstein, & McLaughlin, 2006; Leos-Urbel, Schwartz, Weinstein, & Corcoran, 2013). A large part of the reason for the lack of participation in school breakfast programs is due to the negative social stigma associated with subsidized meals (Sabol, Struempler, & Zizza, 2011; Bailey-Davis, Virus, McCoy, Wojtanowski, & VenderVeur, 2013; Leos-Urbel et al., 2013). Students perceive breakfast at school as something that ‘only poor kids do’, which is the reason that many students, whom qualify for the subsidy-based breakfast, do not participate. The universal-free breakfast model helps to reduce this social stigma because it is offered to all students, not singling out the students of lower socioeconomic status (Amaya & Gates, 2014).

Although the universal-free breakfast model appears to be the perfect method of breakfast delivery, the amount of funding and resources required is just not possible for most schools. Even within the universal-free model, there are many different methods in which the breakfast is delivered.

2.3.2 Funding and Resources.

To have the funding and resources available to sustain the breakfast program is not easy. Muthuswamy (2011) estimates the average cost of breakfast per student per day in the Greater Toronto Area to be $1.59. The cost estimated does not cover the money required for kitchen supplies and staff. A regular public school simply does not have the money in the budget for a universal-free breakfast model, which is why many school resort to the subsidy-based model; to
help as many children as they can, given the circumstances. Schools can apply for municipal and provincial grants to help cover the cost of running a breakfast program, however funding is dependent on availability and whether the school is deemed eligible (Muthuswamy, 2011). Many not-for-profit organizations have been created to help schools with the financial burden of running a breakfast program. These organizations fundraise and recruit volunteers to help schools decrease the cost. Breakfast for Learning, Breakfast Club Canada and Halton Food for Thought, are just a few of the organizations available to help Canadian communities start and sustain school nutrition programs (Breakfast for Learning, n.d., Breakfast Club Canada, n.d.; Halton Food for Thought, n.d.).

2.4 Culturally Relevant and Responsive Teaching

There is a difference between multicultural education and culturally responsive pedagogy. Culturally responsive pedagogy is reflective of the differences in students present within a classroom. Whereas multicultural education does not have to be. Various cultures can be represented in the pedagogy or content without the presence of those cultures in the class (Rychly & Graves, 2012). Geneva Gay (2000) describes culturally responsive teaching as being transformative, empowering and validating for students.

2.4.1 Equity and Inclusivity.

In 2009, the Ontario Ministry of Education released a document called Realizing the Promise for Diversity, which outlined Ontario plan to move towards an equitable and inclusive education system. This document really drew attention to the importance of teaching responsively in order meet the needs of the students. Gloria Ladson-Billings first introduced the idea of ‘culturally relevant teaching’ in 1992 where she described it as recognizing and
integrating the different cultural identities, interests, learning abilities, and experiences of students into the pedagogy. Gay states that, “culturally responsive teaching makes academic success a non-negotiable mandate for all students and an accessible goal” (2000, p.34). Ultimately, the purpose of culturally relevant teaching is to ensure that students feel validated and able to access the information, through the ability to relate to the way that the content is presented or content itself (Gay, 2002; Rychly & Graves, 2012).

**2.4.2 Characteristics of Culturally Responsive Educators.**

Researchers believe that culturally responsive educators share key characteristics that differentiate them and enable them to support diverse students (Ladson-Billings, 1992; Gay, 2000; Rychly & Graves, 2012; Ministry of Education, 2013). With respect to the breakfast program, there are four characteristics that apply: caring, extensive knowledge of his or her students, reflective, and the desire to make a difference.

**2.4.2.1 Caring.**

Rychly and Graves (2012) emphasize that the word caring is not a synonym for ‘kind’, but rather another way to describe educators who have high expectations for their students and “will settle for nothing less than high achievement” (Gay, 2000, p.47). Caring educators also have a personal relationship with students and are able to understand the students’ perspectives because the educator has extensive knowledge of the students’ background (Gay, 2000; Rychly & Graves, 2012). Gay (2000) goes even further to say that caring educator are emotionally invested in his or her students.

**2.4.2.2 Extensive Knowledge of His or Her Students.**

The second characteristic of culturally responsive educators is that he or she really knows his or her students (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). In order to practice relevant teaching, educators
must first get to know the interests, needs, and identities of the students (Ladson-Billings, 1992). Therefore, it is important for educators collect data on the students by building personal relationships.

2.4.2.3 Reflective.

Being reflective is an important part of being an educator, but even more pertinent in the context of culturally responsive teaching. Rychly and Graves (2012) separated this into two parts: 1) educators have to be “reflective about their attitudes and beliefs about other cultures” and 2) educators have to be “reflective about their own cultural frames of reference” (p.46).

Rychly and Graves (2012) argue that reflecting on conscious and unconscious preconceptions of other cultures is a very important because a consequence is the internalization of stereotypes. In order to be culturally responsive, educators have to be aware of his or her own bias and ensure that it does not affect how they perceive nor treat the students (Gay, 2000; Villegas & Lucas, 2002; Rychly and Graves, 2012). Furthermore, that it is important for educators to also be self-reflective of how his or her own cultural identity influences the decisions he or she makes.

2.4.2.4 The Desire to Make a Difference.

The last characteristic of culturally responsive educators is the desire to make a difference. These educators strive towards equitable and inclusive education by committing to be “agents of social change” (Ministry of Education, 2013). This means that he or she works to diminish barriers that prevent students from receiving the same educational experience, while also working towards creating a safe and inclusive environment.
2.4.3 Collaboration.

Collaboration is an important feature of culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2000). Collaboration promotes reciprocity, interdependence, and community, three attributes that foster an inclusive environment. Gay (2000) explains how cooperation and collaboration are prominent techniques and goals used by educators when educating marginalized students. The idea is that “students are expected to work together and are held accountable for one another’s success” (Gay, 2000, p.36) replacing individualism with mutualism (Gay, 2000; Rychly and Graves, 2012).

2.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, I looked at the literature surrounding the reasons school breakfast programs are important, challenges of school breakfast programs and the role of culturally responsive teaching for equity and inclusion. Chapter three explains the research methodology that I used to collect data, analyze findings, and recruit participants. A biography of each of my three participants are also in this upcoming chapter.
Chapter 3: Research Methodology

3.0 Introduction

In this chapter, I go over the procedure and instruments that I used to collect my data. I discuss how I selected my participants and the steps I took to analysis all of the data collected. I concluded this chapter by explaining the ethical review procedure and identify several methodological strengths as well as limitations that influenced my research project.

3.1 Research Approach and Procedure

This qualitative research study investigated how educator perceptions influence school breakfast programs. I conducted an ongoing review of relevant literature and interviewed educators who were involved in school breakfast programs. The interviews were approximately 45 minutes and semi-structured.

To investigate whether the perception of educators impact the breakfast programs at their schools, I used qualitative research to gather the type of data required to satisfy my research question. Qualitative research aims to understand the what, why and how of a topic, and data was gathered in the form of words; through conversations, interviews and a journal of observations (Brikci & Green, 2007). Qualitative research also allowed for a deeper view into my topic and revealed connections that would have be unnoticed or missed (Watkins, 2012).

3.2 Instruments of Data Collection

A semi-structured interview protocol was the primary instrument used to collect my data. This means that there was a pre-developed set of questions that reflect the research focus, however I also had the freedom to form new questions during the course of the interview (Dicicco-Bloom, 2006). The advantage of being able to form new questions during the interview
was it enabled me to explore areas that were not originally anticipated. Semi-structured interviews also allowed me to collect verbal and non-verbal data from participants, which revealed a certain level of depth that may otherwise would have been overlooked if another instrument of data collection were used (Opdenakker, 2006). Therefore, semi-structured interviews were the most appropriate method of collecting data to explore my research topic.

3.3 Participants

In this section, I review recruitment criteria and discuss why I believe these participant requirements are critical for my study. Additionally, I introduce each of my participants and why they were recruited.

3.3.1 Sampling Criteria.

Due to the nature of my research study, I have several requirements for recruitment. I plan on selecting three participants based on the following criteria:

1) He or she must have a minimum of five years of teaching experience in a public Ontario secondary school;

2) He or she must be current educators who are heavily involved in the planning and execution of the breakfast program at his or her school;

3) He or she must currently work in a public Ontario secondary school that has had a breakfast program for the last three years.

The reason I choose to have a minimum of five years of teaching experience as a recruitment criterion is because I want educators that have an abundance of experience working with students and observing students’ behavioral patterns. This criterion was important for my study because I believe that educator perspectives change over time and through experience.
Since I wanted to investigate how educators’ personal perceptions influence the program, it was important that the participants had a strong presence and stance on how the breakfast program were to operate. Furthermore, in order to explore my research question in depth, I wanted educators from schools that have had a breakfast program for at least three years to learn about participation patterns, program limitations and modifications that have been made to the program since its launch.

3.3.2 Sampling Procedures/Recruitment.

There are a few different forms of sampling for qualitative studies, the two most appropriate for my research focus is purposive and convenience sampling. Unlike random sampling, purposive sampling is when participants are selected because they can provide understanding of a research focus (Creswell, 2013). Convenience sampling falls under the umbrella of purposive sampling and selects participants based on ease or convenience (Marshall, 1996). Due to the small sample size and methodological framework of my research study, I will be using convenience sampling (Patton, 1990). Over the last year, I have attended professional development conferences, teacher education programs and worked with certified teachers at a numeracy summer camp. I immersed myself in several outlets that were saturated with individuals in education, and therefore used these networks to find and recruit participants.

With the help of my colleagues and professors, I contacted educators who fulfilled the sampling criteria through emails and in person to ask if they would be interested in participating in my research. I provided my information to potential participants to ensure that if they contacted me, it was because he or she was volunteering and wanted to be a part of the research, rather than feeling obligated to participate (Brikci & Green, 2007).
3.3.3 Participant Biographies.

3.3.3.1 Participant 1: Emily.

Emily has been an educator for 35 years and is the head of the student success, guidance and special education at a secondary school in the Peel District School Board. Emily started the breakfast program at her school 8 years ago. I contacted Emily because she fulfilled all of my recruitment criteria and I wanted to investigate how her intimate association with the program at her school had influenced her perception of the breakfast program.

3.3.3.2 Participant 2: Richard.

Richard has been an educator for 35 years and is currently a secondary school youth worker in the Toronto District School Board. Richard started the breakfast program at his school 16 years ago. Richard’s breakfast program was one of the first in the Greater Toronto Area and I was interested to see how his breakfast program had changed over the years.

3.3.3.3 Participant 3: Chris.

Chris is a secondary school guidance counselor in the Toronto District School Board and has been an educator for 20 years. Chris inherited the breakfast program from his predecessor 6 years ago. I contacted Chris because I had heard that his schools had one of the larger breakfast programs in the city and I wanted to see how inheriting a program would differ Chris’s perspective from my other two participants who started the program at their school.

3.4 Data Collection and Analysis

My data was collected in the form of one semi-structured face-to-face interview. I organized my interview into five sections: 1) background information on the interviewee, 2) teacher practices, 3) beliefs/values, 4) influencing factors, and 5) next steps. This flow really helped me collect the relevant data and also prompted unforeseen conversations. By easing into
the interview with concrete questions that the interviewee could answer about his or herself, I was able to create a level of comfort before delving into deeper questions regarding my research. All interviews were audio recorded on my laptop.

The first step in my data analysis was transcribing all of the audio recorded in verbatim. I replayed the audio recording, and typed each word into a word document ensuring to include any pauses or emphasis of wording. I really struggled to code my interview because I had no idea what to expect of the interview and I had no experience coding. Additionally, limited literature related to my research question made the coding process even harder. “Coding is a cyclical act”, something that I experienced at its full effect as I went over my interview four times before finally satisfied with my codes (Saldana, 2008, p.8).

I coded my interview using a mixture of in vivo, descriptive and values coding, because I felt that certain types codes encapsulated my findings well for certain topics (Saldana, 2008). In my first round of coding, I used a pencil to mark my “first impression” phrases, which comprised of common topics that arose from the interview (Saldana, 2008). Using culturally responsive teaching as my lens, I was able to craft three categories that seize my findings well: 1) universal design, 2) cultural responsiveness, and 3) collaboration.

In my second round of coding, I went back and recoded the interview more intricately, assigning codes that I felt captured the essence of what my interviewee was trying to convey. In my third round of coding, I tried to sort the codes into one of my three categorizes. This process resulted in the recoding of certain passages and the codes were “segregated, grouped, regrouped and relinked in order to consolidate meaning and explanation” (Grbich, 2007, p.21, as cited in Saldana, 2008, p.8). It was not until my fourth round of coding that I committed to the codes by
colour coating them, with coloured pens, according to the category they fell under, and sorting them into my data table of codes.

My codes were “clustered together according to similarity and regularity” (Saldana, 2008, p.8). Categorizing my data really helped me align my findings with my overarching research question. Additionally, categorizing helped me with the revision my sub questions to better support the overall goal of my research study. I then compare my interview findings with other research from the literature review to look for similarities and differences in the data. By doing this, I was able to make sense of the data collected and decipher its significance. When trying to understand the divergences in the data, I looked at what the participants did not say, the null data. Null data played a significant part in answering my overall research question.

3.5 Ethical Review Procedure

Several ethical issues were taken into consideration in the design of my research study. Primarily, all participants’ identities were kept confidential and anonymous by assigning pseudonyms and removing any indicators that could lead to the identification of the participants’ school or students. Maintaining the confidentiality of the participants was important in the protection of unforeseen repercussion of participation such as jeopardizing their current position at school (Dicicco-Bloom, 2006). All participants were asked to sign a consent letter, indicating that he or she gave me permission to interview and audio record the entire process. The letter was provided to the participant with an overview of my research study and outline any expectations and ethical implications associated.

There are no known risks in participating in this study. Participants were given the opportunity to review the interview transcripts and clarify or withdraw any statements. This procedure is called member checking which is actually a strategy employed to validate the data.
collected (Brikci & Green, 2007). Participants also had the right to withdraw at any time up until this research paper was submitted. Finally, an expectation of participating was that there would be one interview lasting between 45-60 minutes. All audio files and all data related to the interview would be stored in my password-protected computer for five years before it is destroyed.

3.6 Methodological Strengths and Limitations

One of the biggest methodological limitations in my research study was the inability to observe and interview students. The MTRP ethical guidelines state that only educators were allowed to be interviewed as means of data collection. As a result, I was not able to investigate whether students felt that the breakfast program impacted them socially, academically, nutritionally and/or developmentally.

Another limitation was there is very little Canadian research on the breakfast program because this notion is relatively new in Canada. Since it is difficult to generalize findings from other countries due to the vast cultural dissimilarities, I had to extrapolate data from mainy American Studies.

Finally, I recognize that my sample size was very small, however I believe the due to the nature of my study and my research focus, three participants was appropriate. Furthermore, the data collected from qualitative interviews provides depth and richness that accounts for sample size (Opdenakker, 2006). The interview gave educators an opportunity to reflect upon challenges that he or she have encountered and how he or she overcame it. The interview also gave educators an opportunity to think about any future goals or directions they may have in mind. My findings lack generalizability and would only inform the topic from the lens of three Ontario educators in publicly funded secondary schools.
3.7 Conclusion

This chapter reviewed the methodology behind my research. I explained that I used a qualitative approach because qualitative research provided me with data that has a much greater depth and was the most appropriate method for my research focus. I also outlined ways that I recruited my three participants and I listed recruitment criteria which were essential for locating the most suitable participants for my research. I explained how I analyzed the data collected and what I looked for in the data to answer my research question. Finally, I concluded chapter 3 by looking at key ethical consideration and methodological limitations. In the chapter 4, I report my key research findings and discuss the significance of these findings.
Chapter 4: Research Findings

4.0 Introduction to the Chapter

After reviewing my interviews with three Ontario educators, three overarching themes emerged throughout and across these conversations. For this chapter, I have chosen to organize my findings accordingly,

1) Universal Design
2) Culturally Responsiveness
3) Collaboration

This chapter explores how the cultural identities of educators influence the breakfast program, and the benefits of the program that are often overlooked. These two findings are current gaps in the literature and really speak to one important concept; sometimes it is not just about the food.

4.1 Universal Design

4.1.1 Breakfast Program Models.

The literature speaks about two different breakfast program configurations: subsidy-based and universal-free. Both of which are very broad and various models of delivering breakfast can fall under both configurations. All three of the educator that I interviewed has a slightly modified variation of popular breakfast program models. Emily and Richard, both of whom have been educators for 35 years, use the ‘sit down’ breakfast program model. Both of their schools allocate the family studies room to be the designated program space. Emily and Richard’s breakfast programs start about 45 minutes before school and students receive a warm meal comprised of at least three of the four food groups.
Emily has a set menu for each day, however, she is open to idea of student input and changing the menu based on what they like. Due to the limitations of resources, specifically funding and staffing, Emily’s program only runs three mornings a week and asks students who can afford it to pay fifty cents. When I asked Emily about the goals she has for the program, she promptly stated that her goal is to have the program run five days a week and not to charge students anything. Currently, Emily’s program averages about 50 students a day out of a school of 900. Emily’s program resembles a mixture between subsidy-based and universal-free, because the program is subsidized to fifty-cents for all students, regardless of his or her socioeconomic background. For those students who can not afford to pay fifty cents for breakfast, Emily makes arrangements for them to have access to breakfast for free. Therefore, although Emily’s program is not completely free for all students, it does still take on more of a universal-free design.

Richard’s program only has a fixed menu for one day of the week and he is known for trying new breakfast items. He believes that if you give students the menu in advance, they will decide whether they want to come based on whether they like what is being served that day. Where as if the menu is a secret, students that show up and are hungry will eat it. Richard has more autonomy over how to run the program because funding is not a limitation for his program. He applies to various grants and therefore is able to offer free breakfast to everyone, five days a week. Richard explained that there has been a decline in breakfast program participation over the last few years, and attributes a part of that to the decline in school population. He estimated the current participation to be 50-60 students in a school of about 600. Richards program follows a universal-free design where breakfast is offered to everyone and free of charge.

Emily and Richard both started the breakfast program at their schools and have kept the model the same for a number of years because the model is a good fit for their students and
themselves. Chris, on the other hand, inherited the breakfast program from his predecessor 6 years ago and experimented with other models before finding one that was appropriate. Chris has been an educator for 20 years and explained in his interview that when he inherited the program it utilized a voucher type model. A voucher type system is where students would self identify as having financial need and the students who qualify would receive a card that fully subsidized either breakfast or lunch. Unfortunately, at Chris’s school only 20 students were benefiting from this program model out of a student body of 2000. When Chris inherited the program, he described the process of finding a program that fit his needs and goals:

At first I tried a ‘grab n’ go’. So the students would come into the main foyer, in the mornings between 8:15 and 8:30 lets say, I can't remember the exact times now. They get their food distributed by volunteer teachers and volunteer students...but we still weren't hitting that many students with that so...I heard about other schools…using this bin program, so we started to use that and our numbers went through the roof.

The idea of the ‘bin model’ requires teachers to participate with the breakfast program. Teachers sign their class up at the beginning of the semester and report to Chris how many students they have in period one. Chris then forwards the information to the cafeteria staff and each morning, a bin with the corresponding number of breakfast packages is prepared and ready for a student in the class to pick up. A student is sent to the cafeteria to bring the bin back and breakfast is consumed in the classroom. Although the program takes on a different form, students are still getting three food groups every morning and there is a set menu that rotates every two weeks.

Chris explained that the Toronto Foundation for Student Success decides the breakfast menu as they provide his program with the funding and supplies. With this model, Chris is able to serve 900 students breakfasts everyday out of a school of 1500. He said that the Toronto Foundation
for Student Success is open to menu changes, however given that 900 breakfasts are prepared every morning, he is not overly concern with trying to satisfy every student. Similar to Richard, Chris’s program takes on a universal-free design, offering breakfast to all students for free.

The sit down, voucher, grab n’ go and bin model are all arrangements that are popular amongst breakfast programs, each model with their own benefits and drawbacks. Each participant interpreted the benefits and limitations of the models with his or her own subjectivities, and personalizes the model that he or she perceives to be the best fit for his or her students, as well as the best fit for themselves.

4.1.2 Breakfast for All.

Although all three of my participants have implemented different breakfast models, all of the programs take on a universal design. They recognized that not every student in their school is in need of it, but they all agreed that an important aspect of the program is having it open to everyone and ensuring that is it non-stigmatizing.

Emily and Richard recognized aspects of the program that goes beyond simply feeding kids who cannot afford breakfast, because there are many reasons why teenagers do not eat breakfast and the program is counteracting them. In Emily’s opinion, “it would be naive, to assume in all breakfast programs, in reasonable middle class areas, not in low income areas, to assume that all the kids that go to the breakfast program are needy.” Through my interactions with each of the participants, I noticed all of them revealed a significant amount of self-reflexivity in their answers, which translates into the justification behind each of their chosen breakfast program model.
4.2 Cultural Responsiveness

There is a gap in the literature regarding how breakfast programs are started and how the models are selected for each school’s program. Through my conversations with my participants, I found that all of the educators have very different experiences and backgrounds, and this greatly impacts what he or she perceives as the main goals of the breakfast program. Furthermore, these goals play a critical role in the shaping of the program model and overall breakfast experience.

4.2.1 Cultural Identities of the Educators.

4.2.1.1 Emily.

Emily was the only participant who studied Food and Nutrition in university and she was also previously the head of Family Studies. This surprised me because I originally anticipated that a nutritional background would be more common amongst my participants. When I asked Emily what prompted her to begin a breakfast program, she related it back to her background by saying “my initial interest was because I use to teach Family Studies, so healthy eating is a big deal.” Through Emily’s observations, she noticed that:

The students who eat breakfast, some of them only seem to eat one meal a day. And that's not necessarily solely economic, that's some sort of teenage brain thing. So I think that providing them with something that stabilizes their blood sugar and gives their brain a chance to work first thing in the morning is a brilliant way to get a good start.

As the current head of student success, guidance and special education, Emily’s background and values had a big influence on her decision to get involved with the breakfast program.
4.2.1.2 Richard.

Richard worked in social services for several years prior to working in a school and admits that he did not know very much about nutrition prior to starting the breakfast program. He explained how his role in the school as a youth worker allows him to collect extensive data on students:

I had an in with kids, that I knew more background than teachers would know. And umm...there were kids that I knew, this was it. Breakfast was the only meal they got… some of them would have school, work, sleep, come to school OR sleep a little bit, work all night and come to school. When you know those kids, you sort of start to realize that they need to eat.

He attributes an experience from working in a middle school to what sparked his interest in starting a breakfast program. He explained that he would run into students on the way to school, but all they had was pop and chips. At the time, the middle school had a kitchen, and he asked a kitchen staff member why she did not serve health foods. The lady responded by saying that the students would not buy it. Richard is not quite sure why it bothered him so much because he did not know very much about nutrition back then, but it is something that he remembers vividly almost 20 years later. Similar to Emily, Richard’s experiences and beliefs had a lot to do with why he took the initiative to take on such a large responsibility.

4.2.1.3 Chris.

Chris has a background in English and his reason for getting involved differs greatly from Emily and Richard. When I asked Chris why he decided to get involved with the program, he paused and thought about it before being honest and saying that, “I wish I could say it was some burning desire to feed children, but it was just one of the portfolio items, that was a part of my
group when I came into the guidance department.” Unlike the other two educators, Chris’s experience, values, and beliefs did not play a role in his decision to get involved. For Chris, there was no intrinsic motivation to be apart of the breakfast program and this had a huge effect on the model he selects for his school.

Emily and Richard both exhibited having the desire to make a difference. Referring back to my chapter 2, this is one of the characteristics researchers and theorists believe is shared amongst educators that are culturally responsive (Ladson-Billings, 1992; Gay, 2000; Rychly & Graves, 2012; Ministry of Education, 2013).

4.2.2 Influence of Cultural Identities on the Breakfast Program Implemented.

The cultural identities of the educators greatly influenced the program implemented, specifically what educators perceive as the purpose of the program. The literature often reports on the measurable benefits of breakfast, while the unquantifiable benefits of the program are overlooked. The three participants had a spectrum of answers when I asked them what they believed students could gain from the breakfast program.

4.2.2.1 Chris.

Chris views the measurable benefits of the breakfast program and attributes it to the benefits eating of the meal. He believes that when students have a proper meal, their behavior improves and students are more focused and ready to learn. Chris’s beliefs align very well with the literature on the documented benefits of feeding breakfast to children (Copper et al., 2011; Muthuswamy, 2011). For Chris, he perceives the purpose of the breakfast program to be simply to feed students. Therefore, his focus is trying to provide breakfast to as many people as possible and this is very evident in his bin model selection. When Chris was asked about the other models
that his school has tried, he responded by saying that the other models all had very low rates of participation.

4.2.2.2 Emily.

Emily believes that participating in the breakfast program not only helps students focus in class by stabilizing their blood sugar, but also gives them a better start to the day. Emily explained what students can gain from the breakfast program in two parts. For the students that came to eat, the program is a good social and informal place for students to start their day on a positive note. Emily pointed out that the majority of her volunteers were international students. For the students that come to volunteer, they learn about helping others and gain personal skills through interactions with other students and staff. Emily’s choice in the sit down breakfast model reflects what she perceives to be the purpose and benefits of the program. Unlike Chris, Emily sees beyond breakfast itself, and therefore her purpose is not so focused on delivering breakfast to as many students as possible. If Emily were to implement the bin model, the opportunity for the volunteers to have direct interactions with other students in the school and safe social space for the students eating, would be eliminated.

4.2.2.3 Richard.

Certain aspects of Richard’s perception on the benefits of the breakfast program agree with Emily and Chris. For the students that come to eat, the program helps them stay concentrated during class, and healthy eating habits are being reinforced. Unlike the other two educators however, Richard firmly believes that sometimes it is not just about the food. He explained that the program is not only feeding students, but it provides them a good start to the day as they are being cared for. Similar to Emily, Richard noticed that there are a lot of newcomers and ESL students that come to the breakfast program. He has seen how the programs
safe and positive space has facilitated social interactions between students who have never talked to one another.

When I asked Richard what he thought was the biggest driving factor for students to participate, he paused before saying that the program provides a lot of students a sense of belonging. Richard has been running the breakfast program for the longest amongst my participants and explains the really transformative part happens behind the counters with the volunteers. One student went from hiding behind counters to speaking in front of thousands of people and making deputations. He has one with a learning disability, doing the financial reports by hand to practice spelling and coordinating the other volunteers. He described several instances where a student has really grown during their time with the program and how important the program was to some students that they still continue to come back to volunteer, even after graduating several years ago. Richard explained to me that the program provides the perfect environment to have informal conversations with the students and really get to know them. He gains their trust, and intrinsically motivates the students to try things outside of their comfort level. Through my conversation with Richard, I gathered that he is emotionally invested in each of students and cares for them greatly. Rychly and Graves’s (2012) definition of caring fits Richard perfectly; an educator with high expectations for their students and will not settle for any less than high achievement.

Richard explained that his own experience growing up has a lot to do with his personality and values. He told me how he was not a bad kid, but he would get in trouble a lot when he was younger. Richard still remembers the people who saw the good in him and understood him when no one else did. He believes that he synthesized some of those qualities and now he just wants to pass them on. I think that it is these qualities that make the student experience so different in
Richard’s breakfast program. He said one thing that really resonated with me: “I think you can teach one thing on something, or you can expand it and make everything a learning moment.” For many students, Richard and the program were able to reach them in ways that the curriculum was not.

Richard pointed out “sometimes, even though it’s about the food, it’s not at all about the food.” So, although Richard’s model restricts him from providing breakfast to as many students as Chris’s model, he values the immeasurable positive by-products of the program over the quantifiable amount of students being fed. Therefore, it is evident that the breakfast model implemented by each educator is directly reflects their perception of what the purpose and the benefits of the program are. For Chris, the purpose of the breakfast program is to feed students, so that they can be more engaged in class, and this is why he perceives the bin model to be the best fit. Emily and Richard, however, recognize that sometimes it is about more than just the food, which is why they have chosen the sit down model. Both Emily and Richard noticed the benefits of using collaboration as a technique to promote community and inclusivity, converging with Gay’s (2000) analysis of collaboration as a method of educating marginalized students.

**4.2.3 Cultural Considerations.**

Emily was my first interviewee and was very self reflective as she wondered how much of the breakfast items offered in the program are dictated by an individuals own personal breakfast choices, and are they ethnically appropriate? I decided to explore this because it was not an idea I originally considered and started by asking about the demographics of each educator’s school. I wanted to understand what the student population was like and whether the breakfast program reflected this. I noticed a difference in answers from my participants, although
all of them have roles that permit them to have the detailed knowledge necessary for answering my question.

When I asked Chris about the backgrounds of the students at his school, he provided a very general statement saying that there are a lot of new Canadians at the school. He did not specify beyond that as to their race or ethnicity, which was surprising because Emily and Richard were very specific and even spoke towards the countries that their students were predominantly from.

Chris’s large program implemented a fixed menu and the items offered are considered Western breakfast staples. The size and logistics of Chris’s program makes is more difficult to accommodate for the cultural needs of students. One pitfall of the bin model, in this context, is that Chris is less involved with the execution of the program but more involved with the planning. This model also does not really give Chris an opportunity to collect information on the students participating as breakfast takes place in the classroom. In the previous section, I explained how the model chosen directly reflect the values and perceived purpose of the program by each educator. With that said, it is likely that the lack of cultural consideration is because it is not something that Chris considered or it is not one of his priorities for the program.

Emily’s current breakfast menu is similar to Chris’s and she refers to the items as fairly mainstream. Emily explained that, if funding were not an issue, she would like to explore more culturally relevant breakfast items because she recognizes the amount of international students that are at her school:

Are they ethnically appropriate…Like there groups in the school that you're not getting, coming to the breakfast program. Is it because they aren't eating appropriate food? A good example of that this year was that we had some visiting students from China,
because we're an international centre, and their homestay families, for the week, had given them a packed lunch. I sat there and WATCHED them throw the peanut butter and jelly sandwiches into the garbage because it's not part of their cultural background.

Emily speculated that certain groups of students were not participating because the items being offered were fairly Western and not culturally responsive. Emily’s ability to reflect on her own cultural frames of reference and take into considerations the cultural identities of the student population at her school was very indicative of that of her reflective characteristic (Rychly & Graves; 2012).

Richard stated that one of his roles as the coordinator is to ensure that the program is universal, non stigmatizing and culturally sensitive. He explained how he always jumps at the opportunity to incorporate different ethnic foods because of the large newcomer population at his school. In the past, Richard says that they have had Columbian empanadas, Indian roti and Chinese dumplings as items for breakfast.

As a part of the universal design of all three programs, all three educators ensure that the food provided is halal so that no students are excluded. However, whether to include items that are mirror the diverse student population, is at the discretion of the educators. Similar to culturally responsive teaching in a classroom, in order for a breakfast program to be culturally relevant, it requires educators to understand and use the culture and experiences of their students as the link to getting students to understand the importance of the program and of breakfast (Kennedy, 2004). According to one of the characteristics of culturally responsive educators outlined by Villegas and Lucas (2002), Richard and Emily demonstrated extensive knowledge of his and her students. Both educators understanding the backgrounds, interests, and needs of his
or her students, using this information inform the considerations he or she makes for his or her breakfast program (Ladson-Billings, 1992; Gay, 2000; Rychly & Graves, 2012).

4.3 Collaboration

4.3.1 Missed Intersectionality Opportunities.

Emily and Richard told me how easy it would be to tie the curriculum to the breakfast program. Emily explained that when their school partnered up with a developmentally delayed program in previous years, she would to invite the students to come and learn how to prepare their own breakfast and clean up after themselves. Emily also mentioned how a great integration piece would be to have business classes involved in contacting local business for donations.

Richard said that if there were school wide cooperation, the program could be made really dynamic because there are so many ways to tie the curriculum to the breakfast program. Some of his ideas would be to have nutrition classes go to the store with a grocery list and learn to read nutritional labels, as well, to have math and science classes learn about measurement and plants in the school garden. Richard described missed intersectionality opportunities as,

a potpourri of all kinds of educational knowledge that's practical for kids. You can teach more to a kid about angles playing pool than you can sitting there and drawing it on a board. So for me, I see a lost potential for what more you can do, than just feed kids. But you need a task force of people to do it and committed people.

The potential of the breakfast program to extend beyond feeding students was the most surprising finding. Furthermore, intersectionality of the curriculum and extracurricular programing are great ways to practice culturally relevant pedagogy, but interdisciplinary collaboration is required.
4.3.2 Educator Perceptions on the Importance of Collaboration.

Chris’s breakfast program requires the cooperation of first period teachers in order for students to participate. For those students whose period one teacher do not allow food in their classroom, they are left out. Chris tries to convince teachers to participate by giving them the flexibility in how they want to execute the delivery of the breakfasts. He explained that some teachers hand it out at the beginning of class while other wait until the end of class. In terms of preparing the breakfast, Chris’s school pays the cafeteria staff, which is very different from my other two participants who have students and staff that volunteer to prepare the food. Overall, Chris’s program really relies on the collaboration of teachers; otherwise it would not be possible. Chris advised educators who are looking to start a program to talk to other schools who have a program that is working and educate yourself on the different models available.

Unlike Chris, Emily’s program depends on the collaboration of students, staff, and the community. About 3-4 students and at least one teacher would volunteer to prepare food for the program every day. When I asked Emily what advice she would give to educators looking to launch a breakfast program, she told me that the program could only be done from a team approach and not just one teacher running it. She explained the importance of having a committed group of adults to help organize and run the program, otherwise it would not be possible. Emily said that in the past, the local church and parent council are some outlets to look at for support.

Similar to Emily, Richard also relies heavily on the collaboration of students and the community. Fives days a week, Richard and his student volunteers prepare food for the breakfast program. Many cooperate companies have a day of care where they help out in the community. Four years ago, employees from the Bank of Montreal asked Richard if they could come in for a
day to volunteer. He told me that he never turns people that want to help away, so the people from BMO came in one day and just could not leave because they saw the impact of program on the students. Currently, BMO comes in once a month to help Richard and the volunteers prepare breakfasts. He also has one teacher that comes in to help, but he tells me that the majority of teachers at his school do not really support the breakfast program. When I asked him why that is, he says that he is not quite sure but he thinks it is because many people call it ‘Richards program’ and therefore do not feel obligated to participate. Richard expressed to me that his biggest concern is the viability of the program, because when he retires, he is not sure if any one will step up to take his place. When I asked Richard for advice that he would give educators looking to start a breakfast program at their school, he told me “you need to find a committee of dedicated people who are as passionate about it as you.”

I originally thought that the breakfast program model would be the factor that determines the level of collaboration required, however as I look at my data, it is evident that regardless of the model implemented, collaboration is a critical aspect. All three of my participants expressed the importance of collaboration in order for a program to be successful and sustainable. This finding is very important because it shows that breakfast programs require support and cooperation from the entire school community, students and staff, because there is a lot of unforeseen potential that goes beyond simply feeding kids.

4.4 Conclusion

From my conversations with these three educators, I found that there are many different breakfast program models and sometimes it takes trial and error before finding a model that suits your school and yourself. Each model has its own advantages and disadvantages, but the disadvantages can be overlooked depending on what educators’ value as important for their
program. Overall, there is a consensus that it is important to ensure that breakfast programs are non-stigmatizing and available to every student.

This research project has reinforced that every educator needs to practice self-reflexivity and acknowledge that our own cultural identities, subjectivities and values play a large role in shaping our decisions, even in extracurricular activities. This finding is in agreement with Kennedy’s (2003) view that the cultural responsiveness requires teachers to be aware of how their teaching practices are influenced by their own cultural values. Furthermore, educators are capable of making any breakfast program into much more than just about the food.

Finally, interdisciplinary cooperation is a great way of making the curriculum expectations culturally relevant to the students. Therefore, the importance of collaboration and professional learning communities should not be isolated within walls of the classroom, but they should also be extended to extracurricular activities.

In chapter 5, I summarize the key findings and significance of this project. I also explain the broad and narrow implications of my findings before outlining my recommendations for the program. Finally, I conclude this research paper with areas of breakfast programs that I believe could be researched further.
Chapter 5: Implications

5.0 Introduction to the Chapter

In this chapter, I first summary the key findings and significance of my research study. Then, I explore the implications of my results with respect to the educational community as well as myself as a teacher and researcher. Based on my findings in chapter four, I outline some recommendations that I have as breakfast programs continue to bloom throughout the Greater Toronto Area. Finally, I suggest areas for further research regarding breakfast programs and finish with concluding comments.

5.1 Overview of Key Findings and their Significance

Through interviews with my three participants, I found that although all three programs resembled standard breakfast models, and lot of experimentation and modification occurs before the educators are satisfied with the model implemented for their school. Not only must the model best suite the students’ routine, but it must also be the best fit for the educators themselves. All of the models implemented by my participants’ have their advantages and disadvantages, however, depending on the values and goals of the educators for their breakfast program, the advantages of their models may overshadow the disadvantages. Participants have their own unique beliefs on what is essential for their programs, however all agree it is imperative to ensure that the program is non-stigmatizing and available for all students. This is significant because it indicates that the educators recognize the importance of inclusivity and universality in the battle with against inequity. Furthermore, the educators acknowledge that there are many reasons as to why students do not eat breakfast at home, and it may not solely be economical. Therefore, although not every student may need breakfast, the students at these three schools have integrated the program into his or her daily routine.
My research also shows the importance of self-reflexivity amongst educators, even when participating in extracurricular activities. The factors that influence the decisions we make outside of the classroom are very similar to those that influence our decisions inside the classroom. Aligning with the literature, my research shows that educators who are culturally responsive are aware of the impact of their own cultural identities, subjectivities and values as far as their educational practices. Moreover, my findings indicate that the breakfast program is about more than just the food, but rather it provides a safe and positive space for students to flourish as individuals.

Lastly, there is an unbelievable amount of potential for interdisciplinary collaboration in the breakfast program, however the opportunities are often ignored in schools. Intertwining the classroom content with breakfast programs is a great way to make the curriculum culturally relevant and relatable for the students. Hence, professional learning communities and educators in schools should collaborate with extracurricular programs, such as the breakfast program.

5.2 Implications

5.2.1 Broad.

Through my research, there is a strong implication that culturally relevant pedagogy plays a large role outside of the classroom. Whether educators are aware of it or not, his or her own cultural identity and experiences impacts every decision he or she make. An important part of being culturally responsive is to be aware of your own cultural identity and the cultural identities of students, not imposing your own identity onto the students, but rather being conscious of the differences. Culturally relevant pedagogy is an important part of teacher education, but based on my participants, the educators in charge of the breakfast program are not
necessarily classroom teachers. A difference in educational background could result in a variation or the lack of understanding of culturally relevant pedagogy.

Moreover, my findings imply that breakfast programs are very time consuming and logistically complex. It requires a lot of coordination, teamwork and the sacrifice of an educator’s personal time. Educators who had more school wide support did not indicate a concern for the future of her or his program, where as the educator that did not have support by his colleagues, worried about the programs longevity after his departure. The implication of this finding is that in order for breakfast programs to be sustainable, it must be a collaborative effort.

Finally, there is a stigma attached to school breakfast programs as the public often sees it as an elementary initiative for low-income areas. The research behind the benefits of breakfast on the human body and on cognition development has validated the importance of consuming breakfast, but has not erased the stigma. The universal breakfast approach taken by all of the educators is aimed to tackle the stigma related to socioeconomic status within her or his school, however there is still one aspect of the program that I cannot answer. Two of my participants recognized this dilemma as either a criticism that other people have made regarding breakfast programs, or something that they ask themselves. By offering breakfast programs, are secondary schools taking on parental responsibilities?

5.2.2 Narrow.

It is well documented that there are significant benefits for students who participate in the breakfast program at their school, however, research on the educators and student volunteers behind the programs is very limited. Prior to collecting data, I was hoping to not only validate the breakfast program, but also gather insight on the different aspects involved in planning and executing the program. After looking at my findings, I have realized that running a breakfast
program requires much more thought, consideration and differentiation. Similar to planning for a lesson in the classroom, the breakfast program must also be tailored to the student population. The implication for myself as an educator is that in order to be culturally responsive, I must get to know the students and make pedagogical decisions for the breakfast program to reflect the cultural identities and experiences of the students. At the same time, I must also be aware of my own identity and how it influences my decisions for the program. I think it would be impossible to not incorporate some of my own beliefs and values onto the program, but the important thing is to practice self-reflexivity to ensure that all cultures are being respected and acknowledged. This means that as an educator, I am be constantly collecting data on the students, in and outside of the classroom.

5.3 Recommendations

Based on my findings, I recommend that anyone interested in starting a breakfast program at their school must first have an idea about what they want the program to accomplish. Whether the goal of your program is to simply feed students or to teach, connect and inspire students, it is essential that you find a dedicated team of educators who are just as passionate about your goal for the program. According to my research, the viability of the breakfast program relies on the support and efforts of the entire school community; therefore I recommend that the breakfast program be integrated as a school initiative.

Furthermore, I recommend that school should have professional development for all staff members to focus on the importance of self-reflexivity and being culturally conscious of their own identity, as well as, being culturally responsive to the students. My findings show that extracurricular programing, such as the breakfast program, is not necessarily run by teachers, but
also by school guidance counselors and social workers. As a result, these educators may not have the same training as teachers and the idea of culturally relevant pedagogy may be new to them.

5.4 Areas for Further Research

There are two areas that can be research further, however are beyond the scope of this paper. First, what is the impact of different breakfast program models on students who eat the breakfast. Two of my participants indicated that the sit down model provides students with a safe environment, a positive start to the school day, and facilitates social interactions between peers. Does the sit down model itself really benefit the students in ways that the grab and go or a bin model cannot?

Second, more research can be done to investigate whether culturally responsive programs have better levels of student participation and an increased feeling of inclusion. Cultural responsiveness was a major finding in my research project, however do the students really notice and how does it impact her or his sense of belonging?

5.5 Concluding Comments

The importance of the breakfast program extends beyond simply the benefit of the food itself. My findings show that the program is a great way of getting to know the students and teaching students in a context that is familiar and relevant to them. The implication of my findings for the educational community and for myself as a teacher is that culturally relevant pedagogy is just as critical in extracurricular activities as it is in the classroom. To ensure that all educators have a good understanding of what culturally relevant pedagogy is, I recommend professional development sessions. To conclude, sometimes the breakfast program is not just
about the food, but it reflects whatever goals you have for it, whether that is to create a relaxed and inclusive environment or fun and educational experience.
References


Murphy, J.M., Pagano, M., & Bishop, S.J. (2001). *Impact of a Universally Free, In-Classroom School Breakfast Program on Achievement; Results from the Abell Foundation’s Baltimore Breakfast Challenge Program*. Massachusetts General Hospital, Boston, MA.


Appendix A: Letter of Consent

Date: ______________________________

Dear _______________________________,

My name is Lucy Xu and I am a student in the Master of Teaching program at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto (OISE/UT). A component of this degree program involves conducting a small-scale qualitative research study. My research will focus on the how educator perceptions influence the breakfast program in Ontario secondary schools. I am interested in interviewing teachers who are highly involved in their schools breakfast program. I think that your knowledge and experience will provide insights into this topic.

Your participation in this research will involve one 45-60 minute interview, which will be transcribed and audio-recorded. I would be grateful if you would allow me to interview you at a place and time convenient for you, outside of school time. The contents of this interview will be used for my research project, which will include a final paper, as well as informal presentations to my classmates and/or potentially at a research conference or publication. You will be assigned a pseudonym to maintain your anonymity and I will not use your name or any other content that might identify you in my written work, oral presentations, or publications. This information will remain confidential. This data will be stored on my password-protected computer and the only people who will have access to the research data will be my course instructor Arlo Kempf. You are free to change your mind about your participation at any time, and to withdraw even after you have consented to participate. You may also choose to decline to answer any specific question. I will destroy the audio recording after the paper has been presented and/or published, which may take up to a maximum of five years after the data has been collected. There are no known risks or benefits to participation, and I will share with you a copy of the transcript to ensure accuracy.

Please sign this consent form, if you agree to be interviewed. The second copy is for your records. I am very grateful for your participation.

Sincerely,

Lucy Xu
647-970-8488
lucy.xu@mail.utoronto.ca
Course Instructor’s Name: Arlo Kempf
Contact Info: arlo.kempf@utoronto.ca
Consent Form

I acknowledge that the topic of this interview has been explained to me and that any questions that I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I can withdraw from this research study at any time without penalty.

I have read the letter provided to me by Lucy Xu and agree to participate in an interview for the purposes described. I agree to have the interview audio-recorded.

Signature: ________________________________

Name: (printed) ________________________________

Date: ________________________________
Appendix B: Interview Questions

Section 1: Background Information of the Interviewee

1. What is your role currently in the school?
2. What did you study in university?
3. How many years have you worked as an educator?
4. How many years have you been at this school?
5. Can you give me a general overview of the students at the school in terms of their academics and overall socioeconomic status.
6. So I can get a better picture of the students who participate in the breakfast program, what are their backgrounds? Who are they in the school culture?

Section 2: Teacher Practices

7. How do students find out about the program?
8. How has this program impacted the dynamics in the school?
9. Tell me more about the breakfast program at your school.
10. What breakfast program model do you find most effective? (Have you tried other models?)

Section 3: Beliefs/Values

11. What prompted you to begin/get involved in the breakfast program?
12. What do you believe students can gain from the breakfast program at school?
13. Can you tell me how your students have generally responded to the program?
14. What resources do you use? (Funding, volunteers/staff)

Section 4: Influencing Factors

15. Have you faced any obstacles or challenges? (Participation, funding)
16. What kind of feedback have you had from people outside the classroom? Parents? Other teachers?

Section 5: Next Steps

17. Who must be included in a breakfast program?
18. What advice would you give a teacher looking to launch a breakfast program at their school?
19. What goals do you have for the breakfast program at your school?

Thank you for your participation in this research study.