CRITICAL PATHWAYS TOWARDS ANTIRACISM IN AN ELEMENTARY KNOWLEDGE BUILDING CLASSROOM

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education
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CRITICAL PATHWAYS TOWARDS ANTIRACISM IN AN ELEMENTARY KNOWLEDGE BUILDING CLASSROOM

Doctor of Education, 2006
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ABSTRACT

This research project studies how a critical knowledge building environment might be created and sustained by taking into consideration several factors: (1) the dialogue and patterns of participation within this space; (2) whose knowledge is valued and whose is silenced; and (3) the various forms of resistance in the classroom and school where this research takes place. It questions whether knowledge building can help to foster critical antiracism in the classroom, and also looks at how critical antiracism can inform the practice of knowledge building by explicitly recognizing, naming and questioning the power that exists within the classroom, online and offline.

Data was collected from a Knowledge Forum® database, focus group discussions, classroom observations, in-class discussions with the students and teacher, email, and an analysis of the revisions within the Ontario Social Studies curriculum documents from 1998 and 2004 in an attempt to understand the way in which both explicit and hidden curricula are mandated provincially.

Also part of this study is the investigation of my role as an antiracist educator/researcher in this project and the various tensions, silencing, and resistance that I encountered throughout this journey. This role is recognized as one of power and powerlessness, depending on with whom this role is negotiated. I investigate this role through the
negotiations with various participants and their explanation of my role as well as through the reflexive process of autoethnography where I frame my role and my location as it is negotiated with the participants, my family, my work, and the process of coming to this project.
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Chapter 1

CRITICAL PATHWAYS TOWARDS ANTI-RACISM IN AN ELEMENTARY KNOWLEDGE BUILDING CLASSROOM

Introduction

This project investigates the possibility of creating a democratic learning environment by placing knowledge building\(^1\) within a critical\(^2\) antiracist\(^3\) framework. The study takes place within a grade three classroom in a Toronto school in a lower income, diverse neighbourhood.

As a critical study, I acknowledge and reflect on my positionality within this study as the researcher and the impact that position has on the project itself. Knowledge building theorists\(^4\) recognize principles which are indicators of knowledge building in classrooms including: student focused inquiry, idea improvement through idea diversity and student expression of epistemic agency, the collective responsibility for community knowledge and the democratizing of knowledge through a shared work space where all participants have access.

Similarly, in an antiracist classroom, students' voices as well as the voices of their families are heard through the sharing of ideas, problems, and knowledge through the development of a critical community\(^5\). Knowledge building works towards continual idea improvement as a process that is marked by shared space and voice—democratizing knowledge. This project investigates knowledge building principles through a critical frame in which power relations are questioned and implicated in the knowledge building process. Varying expressions of power

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\(^3\) See Dei, 1996.


can be made explicit, but there will still be silencing through the hidden curriculum\(^6\) as well as power in the school and the system as whole. This can result in the detraction from the ideal of knowledge building.

**Definitions and Terminology**

**Critical Antiracism Education**

I am working with Dei’s definition of antiracism which incorporates the intersection of oppressions and acknowledge their effect on each form of discrimination. These intersecting oppressions work together to set up barriers to success for students in our system:

Antiracist education is a proactive educational practice intended to address all forms of racism, and the intersections of social difference (race, class, gender, sexuality, and disability). Antiracism is more than a discourse. It is a form of education that makes very explicit the intended outcomes to subvert the status quo and bring about change. It is political education whose credibility rests in action. (George J. Sefa Dei, “Communication across the Tracks: Challenges for Antiracist Education in Ontario Today”, *Orbit: Antiracism Practices and Inclusive Schooling*, 33(3), 2003:2)

The terms antiracism, integrative antiracism (Dei, 1996) and critical multiculturalism (Banks, 1999, 1998; Giroux, 1995) are used throughout this thesis to stay true to the names given by the theorists whose works inform this project. When specifically citing the works of these theorists, their terminology will be used. When addressing antiracism education in a general sense, critical practice or critical antiracism will be used. My reason for choosing this terminology is that multiculturalism has taken on a different meaning in a Canadian educational context, one that is considered to be uncritical in its approach but rather focused on the celebrations of various cultural groups (Fleras, 1996:76). As Dei’s definition above

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states, antiracism is critical in nature and is rooted in action. This project is intended to be reflective of a critical approach to integrative antiracism.

**Critical Antiracist Educator/Researcher**

I define myself throughout this thesis as an antiracist educator/researcher. As a practitioner, I have implemented antiracism education in my classrooms and now in my school as a vice-principal. My commitment is to the teaching practice and always has been, thus one of the many reasons for seeking a Doctorate in Education rather than a Doctor of Philosophy. In line with critical antiracism education, I approach my practice and the practices of others from this frame. When I was first exposed to Knowledge Forum and knowledge building, it was through the eyes of an antiracist educator and it was through this lens, that I began to analyze the connections between the two practices. My practice has always been one of reflection and in that way, I have continued to develop as an antiracist educator. As an antiracist educator/researcher, I hope to inspire the same self-reflection and action towards transformative practices in others.

**Knowledge Building**

Knowledge building is defined by what it is and what it is not. Knowledge building is not learning: "The concept of knowledge building serves to connect knowledge creation and knowledge work as these are understood in the adult world with essentially similar activity that can go on in schools" (Scardamalia, 2003c). Further to this, Scardamalia asserts, "it is essential to distinguish learning, the process through which the cultural capital of a society is made available to successive generations, from knowledge building, the deliberate effort to increase the cultural capital"..."Knowledge building is work on the creation and improvement of ideas. The dynamic is social, resulting in the creation of public knowledge." When knowledge is
placed in a public forum, all ideas are considered improvable. Knowledge builders place their ideas into a public space where the ideas are improved, transformed and incorporated into other ideas, theories and notions with the explicit goal of knowledge advancement and idea improvement. Advancement entails developing or building knowledge new to that particular knowledge building community (see below) and not necessarily new knowledge to the world.

Knowledge Forum

Knowledge Forum (http://www.knowledgeforum.com/University/university.htm) is an electronic group workspace designed to support knowledge building and knowledge building communities (see below). The version of Knowledge Forum used for this study was 4.5.4 which is a web-based application. Functions include posting notes, creating views, uploading documents, pictures and video. Notes can be linked together through rise-above notes, referencing and quoting within notes, creating web-like connections between ideas and theories. Notes can exist in multiple views and multiple contexts. See further information in the section, Knowledge Forum, in the following chapter.

Knowledge Building Community

Knowledge building communities can be as small as a single classroom to as large as a worldwide community working towards a common goal of idea improvement and knowledge advancement. Scardamalia and Bereiter (1994) state, “Schools need to be restructured as communities in which the construction of knowledge is supported as a collective goal, and the role of educational technology should be to replace classroom discourse patterns with those having more immediate and natural extensions to knowledge-building communities outside school walls” (265). These knowledge building communities are supported by the software, Knowledge Forum, but also exist in an offline environment in spaces where knowledge
building is practised (Messina, 2001). These communities can exist, as does the Knowledge Society Network (KSN), in a variety of contexts, professions and environments.

**Knowledge Society Network (KSN)**

Scardamalia (2003b) defines the Knowledge Society Network as an experiment to test the limits of one of the knowledge building principles, symmetric knowledge advancement, and the phenomenon whereby "participants in a network are able to advance their own knowledge-building agendas by helping other participants advance theirs". Participants in this particular network are located in countries around the world and across various sectors including "education, health, cultural and community organizations, businesses, and homes and unites teachers, students, scholars, business associates, parents and administrators in the common goal of preparing citizens for the knowledge age." This network recognizes the need for diversity to establish a culture of knowledge advancement which is dependent on idea diversity.

**Critical Knowledge Building**

Critical knowledge building is the practice which is established in this research. It brings together knowledge building and critical pedagogy, specifically antiracism education, to explicitly address power in the classroom on many levels including: online and offline discussions, notes, and content as well as the explicit and hidden curriculum in the online and offline environments. It challenges the principles of knowledge building from a critical perspective. Critical knowledge building also acknowledges the strength of knowledge building to empower, enable and create shared dialogue in the classroom whereby the roles of teacher and learner are shared as well as expertise and experience to inform the knowledge building process in the classroom.
Antiracism Education as a White Teacher/Researcher in a Diverse School Community

When antiracism education aims to rupture power and privilege and transform learning environments to make way for multiple ways of knowing, it must be asked, how does a White educator/researcher implement such strategies in a community7 that is diverse? What is the place of a White educator within the antiracist discourse? Antiracist educators have different opinions on this issue. Dei (1996) suggests “the interrogation of Whiteness can, and should be, an entry point for members of dominant groups in society to join the antiracism debate” (Dei, 1996:28). Suggestions from hooks (2003) and Lee (2003) indicate the use of language as a place to start. A recognition and purposeful transformation of language that perpetuates race and racism within educational settings begins to acknowledge the White supremacist language, which disregards systemic racism. Claims of “colour-blindness” (Delpit, 1994; Sleeter, 1993:161-163) among educators must be problematized and recognized as the denial of the salience of race or that racism exists at all. Delpit (1988) also suggests “those with power are frequently least aware of—or least willing to acknowledge—its existence [and] those with less power are often most aware of its existence” (282). It is the White anti-racist educator’s responsibility to acknowledge, question and ultimately dismantle this power.

Within the context of this thesis project, therein lies my role as a White, antiracist educator who has gained entrance to the school as a researcher. The White educator in the antiracist classroom has been described as an ally (Lawrence and Tatum, 1997). Lawrence and Tatum suggest “creating a new identity that of educator as ally, an advocate for students of colour, and a much-needed antiracist role model for White students, is a long-term process” (341).

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7 Community is used here to mean the classroom as well the extended learning environment at home through remote access and online learning including students, teachers, researcher and parents (and all the permutations of those stakeholders). The
This process and identity crisis is a journey I have travelled. I have been questioned and challenged in my studies at OISE/UT as a White woman studying and implementing antiracist education and practice. As a White educator, I have heard racist remarks from colleagues and from administration. I have heard accusations that parents are playing the “race card” as a way to defend their position of hostility towards the school and the system as a whole which trivializes the importance of their claims and does not value the truths of which they speak. I have heard students’ racist remarks to their peers as staff walk by, impervious to these words.

Throughout my years as an educator, I have also had great role models—educators who believe in empowering students and their families to advocate for themselves in a system that does not support or overtly enable that involvement. I have learned from great teachers how to look at the curriculum as a space for multiple perspectives and partial knowledge. I have watched classrooms of elementary students critique novels and textbooks for bias and exclusion and take this passion to speak and write publicly. I have watched students become engaged in schooling before my eyes and set in motion a life of action.

I have been criticized for being White and thinking, just because I am Jewish, that I have a place in the discourse of oppression. For an antiracist educator, one who teaches teachers how to enter into this discourse and this place, to tell the White educators that there is no place for White in antiracism, is to end the discourse, the dialogue and the hope for a “beloved community” (hooks, 2003: 53). hooks further explains:

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concept of community will be further developed in Chapter Two, in the section, The Development and Sustaining of a Critical Community.
If we fail to acknowledge the value and significance of individual anti-racist White people we not only diminish the work they have done and do to transform their thinking and behaviour; but we prevent other White people from learning by their example. All people of colour who suffer racial exploitation and oppression know that White supremacy will not end until racist White people change. Anyone who denies that this change can happen, that one can move from racist to being actively anti-racist is acting in collusion with the existing forces of racial domination. (2003:57)

As a researcher, I recognize my power in the project to tell a certain story and silence others. I also understand that although I have entered this site as a researcher, at the time of the research, I was still a teacher in the same board and same family of schools. I am responsible to my federation collective agreements when entering another teacher’s classroom and I must be cognizant of the people who have given me this access and must treat that permission with respect and trust. What I also realize is that as an antiracist educator, I am in a place where I must critique these locations of power and find a space for dialogue and movement towards understanding and inclusion.

My own entry into the antiracist discourse was a result of my university years and my experience as an educator. It is a result of the way I was raised to be respectful of difference and welcome new knowledge and understanding rather than just accept my experience as the only experience. I have been a teacher for eleven years. During this time I have worked predominantly in low socioeconomic schools with diverse populations throughout the Toronto District School Board. My career as an educator began as an occasional teacher due to low hiring rates and minimal vacancies in the Toronto area. My Bachelor of Education program at York University allowed me to begin my formal investigation regarding the effects of racism on the education system as well as the effects of racism on the program itself and the role of antiracist education to challenge it.
During this time of minimal hiring, many of my White colleagues would suggest that the only way to get a job in that climate was to be a “visible minority”. This created tension and division within my program and resentment towards anyone with an interview or worse, an actual job. My closest friend in the program was a woman of colour and unable to function within this climate, chose to work abroad rather than endure the racism which had become rampant within the faculty and Toronto.

I quickly realized that to reach the children in my classrooms, I had to find resources that were reflective of their experiences and knowledge. My first placement was in a split grade 1/2 classroom where there were twenty-seven students representing 15 different countries. There were no resources in the room as it was an occasional job and the teacher I was replacing had packed everything away. I attended a workshop and received a book series, *Our Wonderful World* (Blakey, Lillian, et al. Ginn Publishing Canada (GIN), 1995) to use in my classroom. This series was compiled and edited by three educators working in what was then the North York Board of Education. The basis for the series was that the books were illustrated and written with an authentic voice and representation. The stories were as diverse as the population in Toronto. Accompanying the story books were tapes which told the story in English and in the language of the culture portrayed in the story. The English was read by the same person who spoke the other represented language so that different accents were purposefully represented. In the background of each reading was music from the culture as well. As a new teacher, an occasional teacher, I had no mentor in the school and very little support and even fewer resources. This one book series changed my classroom practice forever. I saw how the students reacted to the stories, the voices, and the music. With the playing of one tape the student would feel validated and proud—this would inspire and
support other learning within other areas of the curriculum. The traditional readers that the
other grade one and two teachers were using did not have the same effect.

Following this, I made it my goal to take any workshops in the board by these three women.
Subsequently, I have had the great opportunity to work with two of the women and have
become friends with both of them. They have inspired me, guided me and supported me on
my journey as an antiracist educator. Both women continue to influence my practice as an
educator and more recently, as a school administrator.

I was able to eventually work side-by-side with one of the women, Lillian Blakey, leading
antiracist workshops throughout the board, finding ways to integrate antiracism, technology
and the Ontario curriculum through a project called, Our Voices, which aimed to integrate the
voice of First Nations peoples of Canada into the understanding and history of our country.
She not only practised equity through her vision of the curriculum, but she encouraged and
enabled others to pursue leadership by always bringing someone new with her to her series of
lectures and workshops. I was lucky enough to be invited to two. She also encouraged me to
apply for curriculum writing projects with the Toronto District School Board and with the
Elementary Teachers’ Federation of Ontario, for which I have worked on multiple projects.

Working with the other woman, my former school principal, Mira Hattiangadi, these ideas
were extended to a Network of Innovative Schools\(^8\) (NIS) grant to the school to develop our
Charter of Rights and Freedoms project which aimed to integrate technology, antiracism and the
grade five social studies curriculum topic, Aspects of Government in Canada\(^9\) (Ministry of

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\(^8\) The Network of Innovative Schools is an organization run by the Canadian federal government which provides grants, professional development and a network to schools who use technology.

\(^9\) This title was changed in the 2004 version of the Social Studies, History and Geography grades 1-8 curriculum guide to, Aspects of Citizenship and Government in Canada.
Education, 1998). Both were successful and both affected change at the school and board level, even the provincial level as our school was, following our NIS grant, invited to join the Ontario provincial government in their Innovative Models of Learning Project later called the Pathfinder School Project which was highlighted and used as a model for excellence in education across the province. This ultimately led to my involvement and two secondments to the Ministry of Education’s Ontario Knowledge Network for Learning (OKNL)\(^\text{10}\) and the E-Learning Initiative. Technology became a vehicle to share and access knowledge as well as expand the school community.

All of these experiences have brought me to this research project—a project which hopes to provide opportunity for growth, criticality and action on the part of all participants, including myself.

**Access to Technology**

Access to technology in Toronto’s schools poses a problem resulting from cutbacks, lack of technical support and inequitable distribution of hardware throughout various schools. The inequity which exists is the legacy left from the era when five feeder school boards were amalgamated into the Toronto District School Board in 1999. The five school boards had varying levels of commitment towards technology in the classroom and now, the amalgamated board continues to play catch-up trying to alleviate these inequities.

The school where the research occurred, Lakeview Public School,\(^\text{11}\) has eight classrooms, each with several computers, a computer lab in a room beside the library and a wireless iBook lab that originally had sixteen iBooks. The iBook project was an agreement between the school

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\(^{10}\) It was through my first secondment to OKNL that I was first introduced to Knowledge Forum due to my involvement in the Barcelona Project which was investigating learning communities and education projects worldwide.
and Apple Canada to place this wireless iBook lab, including a printer, a cart and sixteen laptops, in the school, with professional development support to support literacy initiatives at the school. The board does not take responsibility for these laptops in terms of repair or upgrading images since they were not ordered through the school board’s vendor. One of the iBooks was a designated “teacher laptop” while the other fifteen were shared among all students in each class which would accommodate one computer per two students. Within the classrooms, the students use the computers predominantly for playing games when their “regular school work” was complete. Organized class use of computers happened with these wireless iBooks and within the computer lab rather than in the classrooms by a sign-up sheet and scheduled periods for computer use. The teachers had a lab time allotted to them and could sign up for any additional lab times provided the lab is free.

In my first year at the school, 2003/2004, there was considerable professional development support from Apple Canada. Each teacher had a project they were doing with the iBooks and Apple sent in a trainer to work with the teachers and students to model “best practices”. Projects included graphing using AppleWorks linked to mathematics curriculum and data management and probability, electronic books using KidPix, and editing and story writing using AppleWorks. The principal ensured that the supervisory officer and other “decision makers” knew of this project at the school. The following year, the project expanded to several other schools within the same family of schools this time, with the board funding the project. As the project expanded beyond the walls of Lakeview, there was declining support for professional development as well as repairs and technical support on the laptops from Apple Canada. The result was that by September, a year after the iBook project began; several of the

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11 All names, including that of the school, are pseudonyms.
laptops were no longer operational, thus making it difficult to have a 2:1 ratio for students to computers. By the end of this project, seventy percent of the laptops had fallen into disrepair and two were missing.

The lab at the school had eight iMacs, one of which was temperamental and did not run all the necessary software. There were two Dell computers the school received in the last several months of this study that had been refurbished for elementary school use. These ten computers were connected to the Internet. The remaining computers in the school lab were older Macintosh computers which had limited capability, memory and no internet access, thus limiting their use to very few simple programs for the students. The computers were not connected to a network, making saving and storing of content complicated. Classroom folders existed on each computer, but students often forgot which computer they were on when they saved the material and therefore had difficulty finding/retrieving their work.

The school improvement plan indicated a commitment to the implementation and integration of Information Technology to support literacy initiatives\textsuperscript{12} at the school. Teachers continued to use the computers for various projects although the use dwindled in the classrooms during busy periods such as report card times when the teachers take laptops home to complete their report cards, leaving the inventory of iBooks too low for any meaningful classroom engagement using them. Reporting occurs three times a year for three to four weeks each time. Additional issues of access to technology exist which perpetuate power imbalance within the education system. If students do have computers at home, they may not have internet access or necessary software to build onto skills learned at school.

\textsuperscript{12}The school has been part of the Early Year Literacy Program for two years.
Paradigm Assumptions

Two paradigm assumptions underlie the location of this thesis, the methods of inquiry, and the analysis. In this project, constructivist and critical paradigms are merged in an attempt to deepen understanding of both knowledge building and antiracism education practices. Creswell and Miller (2000) define a constructivist approach as a belief in “pluralistic, interpretive, open-ended, and contextualized perspective toward reality” (125-126). The critical perspective also includes the uncovering of “hidden assumptions about how narrative accounts are constructed read and interpreted (126).” A critical perspective is also interested in “what governs our perspective about narratives is our historical situatedness of inquiry, a situatedness based on social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic, and gender antecedents of the studied situations” (Creswell and Miller, 2000:126). Lincoln and Guba address issues of knowledge and knowing within varying paradigms, explaining that with the critical perspective,

...knowers are not portrayed as separate from some objective reality, but may be cast as unaware actors in such historical realities (“false consciousness”) or aware of historical forms of oppression, but unable or unwilling, because of conflicts, to act on those historical forms to alter specific conditions in this historical moment (“divided consciousness”). (2000:177)

Lincoln and Guba further explain that for constructivists,

...truth—and any agreement regarding what is valid knowledge—arises from the relationship between members of some stakeholder community...agreements about truth may be the subject of community negotiations regarding what will be accepted as truth...agreements may eventuate as the result of a dialogue that moves arguments about truth claims or validity...it is created by means of a community narrative, itself subject to the temporal and historical conditions that gave rise to the community. (2000:177-178)

It was my hope that within the project, the community we built together would be a critical community in which participants would become aware of systemic racism and bias but also
would be able to negotiate and find voice when attempting to build knowledge and construct meaning.

Knowledge building falls within the constructivist paradigm. Knowledge building is “work on the creation and improvement of ideas” (Scardamalia and Bereiter, in press). Scardamalia and Bereiter (in press) suggest that knowledge building is the “deepest form of constructivism [in that] people are advancing the frontiers of knowledge in their communities”. Meaning is negotiated through social interactions (Jaramillo, 1996:136). Social constructivism “views the origin of knowledge construction as being the social intersection of people, interactions that involve sharing, comparing and debating among learners and mentors.” (Applefield, Huber, and Moallem, 2001: 38).

The roles of learners and mentors become fluid through shared expertise and the goal of idea improvement. This aspect of knowledge building lends itself theoretically to a critical paradigm because it assumes that roles are not assigned and power is shared. This study questions this assumption and suggests that only if these roles and power are made explicit and subsequently ruptured, can knowledge building be critical?

Antiracism education falls within the critical theoretical paradigm in that it asks that the participants and researchers consider the social and historical context of the situation and the various oppressions which exist and are perpetuated through the structures that exist. Antiracism aims to transform education and, in turn, society to make it “live up to the true meanings of democratic citizenship, social justice, equity and fairness” (Dei, 1995: 25).

The methodology of this study, critical action research, lends itself to this constructivist and critical project in that it is collaborative and reflective of the needs of the community and place where the research takes place. It is cyclical, negotiated and shared. It is “about taking everyday
things in the life of education and unpacking them for their historical and ideological baggage. It is similar to, but not the same as, the everyday process of improvement, in that it is public and collaborative” (Noffke, 1995:5).

Rationale for this Study

As an educator, I have witnessed struggle by students and parents who try to engage in a school system that does not recognize them as an asset but as a liability. I have also worked with and for teachers and administrators who aim to practice critical pedagogy, set high expectations and continually find new ways to engage students and their families in the school and learning despite the barriers that exist. They recognize creativity, joy and spirit and celebrate the diversity of knowledge and experiences these people bring to our schools and society. Through my postgraduate education and practice as an educator, I have continually been challenged to identify my place in critical discourse and advocate for students as they attempt to develop a voice.

I had the great opportunity to attend a Knowledge Forum summer institute through a position I held at the Ministry of Education of Ontario. During this summer institute, a group of students were part of a panel discussion with a room full of researchers, professors, educators and industry representatives about the value of knowledge building in an elementary classroom. These students, at the age of eight years old, were able to not only hold their own during their presentation but also challenge a room full of adults with many qualifications and accolades to their names. They spoke eloquently and with confidence and did so in an informed, evocative, and critical way. At this point, I wanted to find out more believing that knowledge building may offer a way to give voice to so many students I had worked with and would do so in the future.
Upon further investigation through informal discussions at this summer institute, emails, participation in Knowledge Forum databases such as the Knowledge Society Network (http://ikit.org/ksn.html) operated by the Institute for Knowledge Innovation and Technology (http://ikit.org/index.html) or IKIT, developed by Scardamalia and Bereiter, as well as participation in courses developed by this group, I came to see places where my own research and practice in critical pedagogy could inform knowledge building in such a way as to make the interactions within these communities critical and reflective.

Three key aspects of knowledge building within an antiracist classroom are critically examined: (1) access and acceptance of knowledge (Giroux, 1988) as cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1985, 1991); (2) the possibility of building/creating democratic learning environments (Freire, 2002; Darling-Hammond, 1993; Dewey, 1916); (3) and the development and sustaining of a critical community (hooks, 2003) within this shared space of knowledge building and antiracism education to further inform knowledge building theories.

The research questions have developed from these aspects of knowledge building and yet, overlap between the three areas: Curriculum: Hidden, Explicit and Transformative; Roles and Relationships in Research; and Dialogue and Sharing Knowledge. Curriculum has components which are both hidden and explicit. The recognition of what aspects are hidden or explicit depend upon the person who is subject to the curriculum. For instance, I am aware of a hidden curriculum within the explicit curriculum of the Ontario curriculum documents—the “unstated norms” (Giroux, 1983) which permeate the text and messaging of these curriculum documents. Similarly, in the classroom, the rules, the roles and the relationships, specifically, the power which governs these dynamics in the classroom is also both explicit and hidden curriculum. What is discussed, whose knowledge is valued and which conversations are taken
up compared with those silenced, also can fall under the realm of both hidden and explicit curriculum.

To make the hidden curriculum explicit is to transform curriculum. By challenging the principles of knowledge building (Scardamalia, 2002) through a critical lens of questions addressing curriculum, roles, relationships, dialogue, knowledge and power, the hidden curriculum of knowledge building can be made explicit and may transform knowledge building into the possibility its proponents offer.

**Research Questions**

In summary, this study attempts to follow one elementary classroom during the implementation of a critical knowledge building practice within the social studies curriculum by investigating the curriculum, both hidden and explicit, the dialogue and participation patterns affected by issues of power between participants, knowledge valued and silenced, roles in the classroom and school and the curriculum itself. The research questions focus on the following themes: *Curriculum: Hidden, Explicit and Transformative; Roles and Relationships in Research; and Dialogue and Sharing Knowledge*. Under each subheading, the initial question is meant to be an overarching question within that theme and the questions which follow and are bulleted, are meant to support the initial overarching question and offer further clarification of what is meant by the initial question.

**Curriculum: Hidden, Explicit and Transformative**

How do the hidden and mandated curriculum influence, create opportunities for or barriers to transformative practice through critical knowledge building?
In what ways do knowledge sharing patterns contribute to critical knowledge building in terms of inclusive curriculum content, shared power and multi-vocality?

Are the knowledge building principles of Real Ideas, Authentic Problems; Improvable Ideas; Idea Diversity; Epistemic Agency; Community Knowledge, Collective Responsibility, Constructive Use of Authoritative Texts and Democratizing Knowledge supported through this process? In other words, can knowledge building be critical?

**Dialogue and Sharing Knowledge**

In what ways do dialogue and participation proceed in a knowledge building classroom?

- Are matters of social/political critique and racism or antiracism taken up in the class’s online discourse? If these matters are raised, do they encourage further inquiry and critique through extended threads of discussion or creation of new ideas or are they peripheralized and marginalized within the discourse and not taken up at all?

- What type of resistance ensues if the researcher, classroom teacher, and/or students encourage these lines of discourse?

- What knowledge is shared and whose knowledge is considered influential?

**Roles and Relationships in Research**

How does my negotiation with the various roles and relationships (the role of and relationship with the classroom teacher, the role of and relationships with the school administrator, and the ability to redefine the role of students) change throughout the project and how does this change affect the project?
• How do my role as researcher and my own positionality affect dialogue and participation?

• How, if at all, do roles change throughout the knowledge building process?

• How do I identify with my role of researcher and use my knowledge and power in this process with myself and with others?

**Organization of Chapters in this Study**

The thesis is divided into eight chapters. In Chapter One, *Critical Pathways towards Antiracism in an Elementary Knowledge Building Classroom*, I have outlined the education problem to be investigated in this project by addressing my role as a White, antiracist educator/researcher in a diverse school setting and the various challenges I have faced because of my Whiteness and privilege. I review also the role models I have had and how they have impacted my own development as an antiracist educator/researcher.

As technology is an integral part of this project, I review the issues related to the access to necessary technology but also include the struggles with the inherent inequities in terms of access throughout the board as well as in the school where this project took place.

The assumptions of the constructivist paradigm with the critical paradigm, are discussed in terms of their convergent and divergent themes as a way to frame this research as hybrid in its assumptions but clear in its goals—to increase student engagement, develop and sustain a classroom community, impact professional dialogue and development for the classroom teacher and myself as the researcher through critical knowledge building.

Chapter Two, the *Literature Review*, reviews relevant literature which addresses critical theory and antiracism education in terms of its democratic possibility. It then places knowledge
building within a critical (Giroux, 1988) antiracist practice (Dei, 1996) but recognizes this as a place of resistance within the knowledge building discourses. The ways knowledge building principles might arise in critical practice are discussed through the alignment of Scardamalia’s principles of knowledge building (2002) and Dei’s principles and concerns of antiracism education (1996).

The concepts of explicit and hidden curriculum are reviewed and recognized as impacting all learning: to make any attempt at a transformative educative practice necessarily means engaging in both curriculums. In discussing these curriculums, the concept of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1993) is acknowledged as a determining factor of success in our schools: those with little cultural capital find it much more difficult to negotiate the explicit or hidden curriculums in our classrooms. However, in a critical project, what is considered capital can be altered by talking back, breaking silences, and creating a space for collaborative and shared expertise. Essential to this critical space is the development and sustaining of a critical community.

Finally, Chapter Two includes a review of the various components of the Knowledge Forum, a database conferencing software based on knowledge building theory, and how it can impact critical knowledge building. The various functionalities of the program including views, notes, scaffolds and scaffold supports, build-on notes, rise-above notes, problems, keywords, referencing and quoting, annotating, find and search and the use of attachments are introduced.

In Chapter Three, Methodology, my location as insider/outsider in the study is reflected within the context of establishing a collaborative project, participant/observer status, and how this changed throughout the project. My process for selection and recruitment of participants is discussed and analyzed through a critical frame. The various approaches used for this project
are addressed including a qualitative approach, a critical approach, action research and autoethnography. The methods used for data collection include the Analytic Tool Kit (ATK), Email, Journaling, Focus Groups, Observation, Document Analysis and Autoethnography. Validity and data analysis procedures are also addressed.

Chapter Four, *The Curriculum: Hidden, Explicit, Transformative*, describes the revisions to the Ontario Social Studies curriculum documents between the 1998 and 2004 versions, critically addressing where the revisions allow educators to perpetuate non-critical practice in the classroom. These documents can support educators’ resistance to criticality and transformative practice.

Chapter Five, *The Politics of Power and Precarious Places*, is a description of the school and the classroom in terms of power and resistance that was inherent in the site and the research project. It reviews the observations I made within this space, and the levels of consciousness I developed over time at the site.

Chapter Six, *Knowledge Sharing, Knowledge Building and the Dialogue of Value* analyze the data in terms of knowledge production, the role of an antiracist educator, modeling critical antiracist practice, authentic voice and indigenous knowledges. Dialogue and participation are also analyzed in terms of power and the negotiation of power, resistance and voice in the school and classroom, online and offline.

Chapter Seven, *The Story Teller: Reflectivity in Research through Autoethnography*, delves into my role in developing this project and throughout the duration of the data collection by reviewing how I developed as an antiracist educator/researcher, the negotiation of identities and entrance to the site, and the compromises that were inherent in this project. It also looks at my role in terms of the worlds of others, recognizing that all identities and roles are negotiated in the
worlds of others. The journey is framed within obstacles, interruptions, contingencies, turning points, epiphanies and moral choices along the way. The entire chapter is framed within the definition of autoethnography by Ellis and Bochner (2000).

A summary of the results is addressed in Chapter Eight, Implications and Future Directions, where issues such as trust and relationships in the research, the school and research as a site of resistance, discourses of accountability and inclusive curriculum are framed within the concept of critical knowledge building as a space of possibility. The findings related to how knowledge is shared and taken up within this critical space is addressed through sharing of expertise, distributed leadership and sharing the role of critical educator/researcher. The methods of focus groups and action research as they impact on collaborative dialogue is also reflected on in terms of the criticality and alignment with the project itself.

Limitations and future directions are addressed in my concluding remarks where I reflect on my learning in the project as well as some insights into the complex role of researcher, particularly in a critical project such as this.
Chapter 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Emancipatory\textsuperscript{13} Possibility of Democratic Learning Environments

Critical theory "questions the assumption that societies...are unproblematically democratic and free" (Kincheloe and McLaren, 2000:281). But the concept of democracy itself is complicated and contested. For the purposes of this research project, the "society" being questioned and problematized is the community established within a knowledge building classroom, both online and offline, and within the larger school community, through antiracist practice—affecting both the curriculum content and the negotiation of content through antiracist and inclusive classroom practice.

The explicit goals of knowledge building are the continual advancement of knowledge and idea improvement. Within antiracism education, the goal is a more inclusive form of instruction that aims to transform society through the acknowledgement and problematizing of power structures which are perpetuated in society through our school system. When these two goals and pedagogies are brought together, a new goal is created where knowledge advancement is only possible through the integration of multiple perspectives, the inclusion of an antiracist perspective and valuing of diverse voices and experiences. This goal must be made explicit within knowledge building so that issues of oppression are brought to the fore within the database and classroom in content and practice. Equity must be examined within all forms of discourse in terms of who speaks, who is heard and who is silenced.

\textsuperscript{13} Kincheloe and McLaren (2000:282) call attention to the term emancipation and caution the critical theorist in the use of this term in two ways: first, they acknowledge the fact that "no one is ever completely emancipated from the socio-political context that has produced him or her" and secondly, that there is an "arrogance that may accompany efforts to emancipate 'others'".
Dei's theories of antiracism education call for learning through and with community as a collective and collaborative project which is dependent on multiple and diverse perspectives (1995:33). Knowledge building approaches to pedagogy, in theory, offer the possibility of such a space. Bereiter and Scardamalia (1993) suggest that "teamwork is expertise" (21). It is through shared expertise and knowledge that advancement can take place, "there is a collective pursuit of meaning and understanding" (204).

Knowledge building has the central goal of idea improvement whereby all ideas are treated as improvable. It is in line with Minnich's concept of partial knowledge (1990) in that students can place their ideas in a public forum, whether within the database or in class discussions and other participants can build onto these ideas to work towards a more inclusive representation or idea. There is the understanding that this benefits the community knowledge rather than the individual being right or wrong since the power of the collective community in the building of knowledge and idea improvement would be an asset.

Antiracism education and action research ask the questions: Whose ideas constitute improvement? And how do these ideas challenge racist systems and structures? By merging the principles of knowledge building and antiracism education within a critical action research project, it is hoped that the theory of knowledge building will become more critical in its understanding of interactions, community and discourse.

**Critical Practice in a Democratic Learning Environment**

Critical pedagogy recognizes the "politics of experience...where knowledge, discourse, and power intersect so as to produce historically specific practices of moral and social regulation" and asks that those who engage in critical pedagogy "interrogate how human experiences are produced, contested, and legitimated within the dynamics of everyday classroom life" (Giroux,
1988:87). In Freirian terms, it is the role of *conscientização* which refers to "learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality" (Freire, 2002:35). The hope of critical pedagogy is that schools can "become sites of resistance and democratic possibility through concerted efforts among teachers and students to work within a liberatory pedagogical framework" (Kinelsey and McLaren, 2000:280).

In his discussion of democracy in his book *Rights Revolution*, Ignatieff (2000) suggests the duality of democracy, both extending the rights to individual members of marginalized groups and protecting those groups from erasure through incorporation.

In one sense, the rights revolution is a story of inclusion, of how previously excluded groups obtained rights of equality. In this regard, the extension of rights has widened and deepened our democracy. In a second sense, however, the rights revolution has been about protecting certain groups from the effects of democracy. Group rights to language and aboriginal rights to land and resources are designed to enable minorities to protect that which is essential to their survival from the power of elective majorities" (1-2)

Democracy in the classroom can create a space of shared voice and also protect those who do not speak or feel they cannot. It intends to provide rights of the individual but also the rights of the group. A critical perspective of democracy in the classroom challenges these silences. In a functioning democracy, elected members of parliament represent the people. In Canadian politics, the experience of a referendum represents an attempt at democracy and yet still, there are many who do not participate. Why certain people choose to participate in referendums or elections and others do not can be a function of the freedom to choose but at the same time, may be a function of the degrees of powerlessness experienced by those who have this freedom. Likewise, it is questionable to claim that a learning environment is democratic when there are members who participate at varying levels.
Dei describes antiracism education as “an approach which includes a commitment to political and academic education for meaningful social change” (1996:11). Dei further defines antiracism as necessarily integrative by the intersecting oppressions of the social constructs of race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender, language, physical ability, and class in order to fully address educational equity, social justice and change (1995; 1996:55).

Giroux defines critical multicultural education as “more than simply acknowledging differences and analyzing stereotypes, more fundamentally, it means understanding, engaging, and transforming the diverse histories, cultural narratives, representations, and institutions that produce racism and other forms of discrimination” (1995). Nieto (2002) challenges the belief that tolerance is the goal for inclusive multicultural education and defines four levels of multiculturalism: tolerance; acceptance; respect; and affirmation, solidarity and critique (259). In line with these levels, Banks refers to four approaches to multicultural education including the contributions approach, the ethnic additive approach, the transformative approach, and the decision-making and social action approach (1998). McCarthy adds “a critical approach to multiculturalism must also seek to promote democratic initiatives in curriculum and pedagogical practices and social relations in schools” (1993:298-299). To truly practice antiracism education means to make a commitment to transformation, action and critique.

Giroux (1988) emphasizes the importance of a critical perspective in multicultural education rather than a discourse of pluralism, which stresses a “fictitious harmony”. He explains that there is a “structured silence” in this harmony, which does not “indict or interrogate existing structures of domination”. He challenges the critical pedagogue to insist on “emancipatory political action” (97).
Knowledge is intertwined with democratic education—access to knowledge, sharing knowledge and what is considered to be knowledge.

Embracing the concept of democratic education we see teaching and learning as taking place constantly. We share the knowledge gleaned in the classrooms beyond those settings thereby working to challenge the construction of certain forms of knowledge as always and only available to the elite. (hooks, 2003:41)

There should be seamlessness between what we do in schools and what happens outside those walls—a pervasiveness of content and experiences—knowledge outside and knowledge inside work together to validate life experiences and engage students in the processes of schooling.

Knowledge Building through Critical Antiracist Practice

Knowledge building within a critical antiracist practice offers pedagogy of collaboration, dialogue and shared community responsibility through the common pursuit of knowledge, understanding the need for idea diversity, idea improvement and the dependence on multiple perspectives.

The roles of the teacher and the researcher are essential to the implementation of such classroom practice. “The teacher is not a guide or a coach but rather is someone whose understanding is regarded as an authoritative resource on the subject along with other sources. And so, the teacher’s own knowledge does not circumscribe what students will investigate” (Lamon, Reeve and Scardamalia, 2001:2). Furthermore, “in an empowered classroom, a culture of silence cannot exist when a[n]…environment provides the forum for students’ voices to be heard” (Lee and Reitano, 2000:9). “Everybody has the same rights, and everybody has the right to be heard. Democracy is supposed to belong to everyone” (Ignatieff, 2000:6).

By crossing the border between constructivist and critical paradigms, basic tension and resistance exist. Hybridity in research is necessarily a site of resistance. It is a place on the
margins. In *marginality as a site of resistance*, hooks expresses marginality not as a place “one wishes to lose, to give up, or surrender as part of moving into the centre, but rather as a site one stays in, clings to even, because it nourishes one’s capacity to resist. It offers the possibility of radical perspectives from which to see and create, to imagine alternatives, new worlds” (1990b: 341). This study is marginal as it brings together two disparate research paradigms in the hopes of improving both practices through a shared vision. This space in the margins offers alternatives to practice. For the purpose of this study, I will be focusing on the principles of knowledge building within a critical framework as a way to discuss the possibility of a democratic learning environment and antiracist pedagogy using Knowledge Forum and knowledge building.

The possibility of criticality is invoked in knowledge building primarily through the knowledge building principles (Scardamalia, 2002) and the parallels which can be drawn to critical practice. Scardamalia names twelve principles14 of knowledge building. Scardamalia (2002) indicates that all principles are integrated and present in knowledge building practice. In this study, there is a focus on eight of the knowledge building principles: *real ideas, authentic problems; improvable ideas; idea diversity; epistemic agency; rise above; community knowledge, collective responsibility; constructive use of authoritative texts and democratizing knowledge* as they align with and can be informed by critical practice.

By reviewing Dei’s principles of antiracism, I draw attention to the necessary understanding of the expression and practice of power in the classroom and the impact of intersecting oppressions to maintain an education system riddled with inequity. For example, the concept

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14 Scardamalia (2002) names twelve principles of knowledge building: *real ideas, authentic problems; improvable ideas; idea diversity; rise above; epistemic agency; community knowledge, collective responsibility; democratizing knowledge; symmetric knowledge advancement; pervasive knowledge building; constructive uses of authoritative sources; knowledge building discourse; and embedded and transformative assessment.*
of improvable ideas within the critical paradigm would be remiss in its description. So that, if a racist notion is shared within a classroom that idea is not improvable as Scardamalia would suggest but rather challenged for reproducing inequalities and the impact that ideas has own the dynamics of the classroom and the ability for students to function in that classroom.

Dei (1995) identifies ten basic principles of antiracism education, which place this practice within the realm of critical pedagogy. Also identified by Dei are eight concerns and understandings which align to antiracism practice. Most of these principles, concerns and understandings related to the critical practice of knowledge building intersect with the principles identified above. The first three principles of antiracism education (Dei, 1996) refer to the social construction and social effects of race, the intersections of racism with other forms of social oppression such as sexism, homophobia, classism and ableism which Dei refers to as “integrative antiracism”, and the third relates to White (male) privilege and power and the dominance of this power within society. These first three principles speak to the impact of racism, power and privilege and the impact this has on the dynamics of a classroom and students’ ability to learn.

Dei’s fourth principle speaks to the “…marginalization of certain voices in society and, specifically, the delegitimation of the knowledge and experience of subordinated groups in the education system” (29-31). This will affect participation, dialogue, access to content, cultural capital of the students and their ability to negotiate learning or in this case, knowledge building.

Dei’s sixth principle is the “explication of the notion of ‘identity’, and how identity is linked with/to schooling…it is important for educators to understand how students’ racial, class,

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15 Dei’s fifth principle states “every form of education must provide for a holistic understanding and appreciation for the human experience, comprising social, cultural, political, ecological and spiritual aspects”. Although I recognize the importance of this statement, it goes beyond the scope of this project.
gender, disabilities and sexual identities affect and are affect by the school processes...the
notion of identity is intertwined with the processes of knowledge production” (31-32). This
principle targets student identity and yet also draws on the necessity for educators to
understand how these identities are negotiated or denied in a classroom. Educators can
support students on this quest to claim an identity understanding that group identity and
identity of the individual intersect but do not essentialize the individual identity. As students
begin to establish their identity, they also work through how their experiences, knowledge and
self are tied to others. To assert one’s identity is a political act and sets the students on a course
of action and engagement within the school.

Dei’s seventh principle emphasizes the need to “confront the challenge of diversity and
difference in Canadian society” (33). The school is viewed as a “working community’ in that
the powerful notions of ‘community’ and ‘social responsibility’ recognize all members of the
school community have something to offer through “diverse viewpoints, experiences and
perspectives” (33). Included in this definition of schooling are all members of the school and
greater community: students, teachers, administrators, support staff, families, daycares, and
other community services.

The eighth principle “acknowledges the traditional role of the education system in producing
and reproducing not only racial, but also gender, sexual and class-based inequalities in society”
(34). Students perceive themselves as either succeeding or failing in school. There is a premise
that there are right and wrong answers and further to this, there are only certain types of
students who possess these correct answers—those who are a part of the dominant culture
and have access to cultural capital while maintaining the myth of meritocracy.
The ninth principle acknowledges that “the school problems experienced by the youth cannot be understood in isolation from the material and ideological circumstances in which the students find themselves” (35). Related to this is the tenth principle that “questions the pathological explanations of the ‘family’ or ‘home environment’ as a source of the ‘problems’ some youth experience in relation to schooling” (35). The ninth and tenth principles interrogate students’ ability to engage in schooling and look towards the school and its structures to support the students by establishing assets rather than working from a deficit or pathological model of identification and blame.

Dei uses the principles to focus on practices that are inherent in inclusive schools and antiracism education and calls them concerns and understandings. The first understanding recognizes the “multiple roles that individuals occupy in the school system and society, and how knowledge, social power and economic privilege work in mutually reinforcing ways to structure people’s daily lives” (1996:85). Related to this, Dei echoes his eighth principle whereby schools serve to reproduce inequality. Schools do this through both the explicit and hidden curriculums, the practices of teachers and administration.

The second concern is that to be in line with inclusive schooling, “collaboration must be pursued diligently as a major goal...teachers should be able to uphold and promote strategies for cooperative learning that also emphasize collaboration and bonding among students, administrators, teachers and parents” (1996:86). Within this, Dei also asserts that students should be allowed to “set their own priorities” (1996:86).

The third concern is the alignment of antiracism principles and practices. Dei further explains that this will impact the students as they “should not feel any dissonance in terms of what their
teachers speak about theoretically in the classroom, and what they actually do outside the school walls” (1996:86). Antiracism is a pervasive practice.

The fourth concern asks that teachers “lead the way to resurrect the ‘subjugated knowledges’ of their students” (1996:86). Through collaborative practice and cooperative learning strategies, teachers find a space for silenced and marginalized voices. Related to this is the fifth concern: “teaching should assist students in learning about the achievements of all groups in a way that addresses questions of inclusivity and the validation of alternative knowledges” (1996:87).

The sixth concern is that “teachers know what to do with available resource materials” (1996:87). Teachers should be able to have the tools to critically examine materials as well as access relevant materials to support student inquiry and priorities.

The seventh concern again addresses knowledge but of the whole school community and brings knowledge and experience to understandings working towards recognition of partial knowledge (Minnich, 1990). “Teachers should be able to recognize students, parents, community workers and caregivers as genuine partners in the production and dissemination of school and social knowledge” (1996:87).

The eighth concern tackles “educational strategies to address problems of exclusion in the school system target all students, teachers and staff. Curriculum design, reform and management should have input from all stakeholders in the educational system” (1996:88). Part of this is the student’s “sense of responsibility to a larger global citizenry” (1996:88).

The context for the knowledge building principles and the antiracism principles and concerns is different and yet themes related to knowledge, voice, multiple perspectives, safety and agency are echoed throughout. Below is a table indicating the knowledge building principles,
their meanings as defined by Scardamalia (2002) and then compared and contrasted with several of Dei's principles of antiracism education as well as his concerns and understandings for antiracism education. In the final column, common themes are described within a critical knowledge building practice.

By comparing and contrasting the two practices in terms of the defining principles, it is my goal to critique knowledge building from a critical perspective, thus making it more effective in terms of power and inequity inherent in the knowledge building environment making it more likely to support the knowledge building claims of epistemic agency and democratizing knowledge. It may help to inform questions surrounding participation patterns and silencing within knowledge building classrooms and Knowledge Forum databases.
### Comparison of Knowledge Building Principles with Antiracism Principles and Concerns

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<td><strong>Real Ideas, Authentic Problems:</strong> Knowledge problems arise from efforts to understand the world. Ideas produced or appropriated are as real as things touched and felt. Problems are ones that learners really care about—usually very different from textbook problems and puzzles.”</td>
<td>Fourth Principle: Marginalization of Voices</td>
<td>First Concern: Multiple roles of individuals and the impact on the reproduction of inequalities in schools.</td>
<td>Addressing real ideas and authentic problems in a critical frame, student voice and multiple perspectives are given the foreground through discourse in the knowledge building classroom. Learners are encouraged to seek their own inquiry as a way to relate and engage with schooling. Students are considered legitimate contributors of knowledge based on their ideas and experiences.</td>
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<td>Seventh Principle: Confronting Diversity and Schools as Working Communities</td>
<td>Fourth Concern: Space for “subjugated knowledges”.</td>
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<td>Eighth Principle: Schools Reproducing Inequities</td>
<td>Seventh Concern: All school community members are legitimate contributors of knowledge.</td>
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<td>Ninth and Tenth Principles: Student Engagement and the Pathology of Home and Family</td>
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<td><strong>Improvable Ideas:</strong> “All ideas are treated as improvable. Participants work continuously to improve the quality, coherence, and utility of ideas. For such work to prosper, the culture must be one of psychological safety, so that people feel safe in taking risks—revealing ignorance, voicing half-baked notions, giving and receiving criticism.”</td>
<td>Sixth Principle: Identity and Engagement</td>
<td>Second Concern: Support for collaboration.</td>
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<td>Eighth Principle: Schools Reproducing Inequities</td>
<td>Fourth Concern: Space for “subjugated knowledges”.</td>
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<td>Fifth Concern: Achievements and contributions of all groups.</td>
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<td>Seventh Concern: All school community members are legitimate contributors of knowledge.</td>
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| **Idea Diversity:** “Idea diversity is essential to the development of knowledge advancement, just as biodiversity is essential to the success of an ecosystem. To understand an idea is to understand the ideas that surround it, including those that stand in contrast to it. Idea diversity creates a rich environment for ideas to evolve into new and more refined forms.” | **Fourth Principle:** Marginalization of Voices  
**Sixth Principle:** Identity and Engagement  
**Seventh Principle:** Confronting Diversity and Schools as Working Communities  
**Eighth Principle:** Schools Reproducing Inequities | **Second Concern:** Support for collaboration.  
**Fourth Concern:** Space for “subjugated knowledges”.  
**Fifth Concern:** Achievements and contributions of all groups.  
**Seventh Concern:** All school community members are legitimate contributors of knowledge. | A recognition and explicit goal of idea diversity acknowledges the need for multiple voices, ideas, theories, and experiences to build knowledge. |

| **Constructive use of Authoritative Texts:** “Participants critically evaluate information sources and recognize that even the best are fallible” and that in a knowledge building “participants use authoritative sources, along with other information sources as data for their own knowledge building and idea improving processes” (Scardamalia, 2003). | **Fourth Principle:** Marginalization of Voices  
**Sixth Principle:** Identity and Engagement  
**Seventh Principle:** Confronting Diversity and Schools as Working Communities  
**Eighth Principle:** Schools Reproducing Inequities | **Fourth Concern:** Space for “subjugated knowledges”.  
**Fifth Concern:** Achievements and contributions of all groups.  
**Sixth Concern:** Use and access to resources.  
**Seventh Concern:** All school community members are legitimate contributors of knowledge. | Students have permission to question text and place their own knowledge, ideas and opinions in conjunction with or in comparison to published works. A recognition and acceptance of other forms of knowledge also exist including personal experience and knowledge. Contributions can be from all members of the school community. |
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<td><strong>Epistemic Agency</strong>&lt;br&gt;“Participants set forth their ideas and negotiate a fit between personal ideas and ideas of others, using contrasts to spark and sustain knowledge advancement rather than depending on others to chart that course for them. They deal with problems of goals, motivation, evaluation, and long-range planning that are normally left to teachers or managers.”</td>
<td><strong>Fourth Principle:</strong> Marginalization of Voices</td>
<td><strong>First Concern:</strong> Multiple roles of individuals and the impact on the reproduction of inequalities in schools.</td>
<td>The notion of how agency is linked to the production knowledge is articulated. Rather than conforming to what is believed to be the correct answer or idea, students questions why they think the way they do and how this works with the other ideas in their community. In this sense, agency translates into engagement as students are expected to take responsibility for their own goals and learning priorities.</td>
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<td><strong>Sixth Principle:</strong> Identity and Engagement</td>
<td><strong>Sixth Principle:</strong> Marginalization of Voices</td>
<td><strong>Second Concern:</strong> Support for collaboration.</td>
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<td><strong>Ninth and Tenth Principles:</strong> Student Engagement and the Pathology of Home and Family</td>
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<td><strong>Seventh Concern:</strong> All school community members are legitimate contributors of knowledge.</td>
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<td>Students are able to assert their own ideas and identities within the knowledge building practice and yet ultimately, there is a sense that the community works together to establish idea improvement and knowledge new to the group. There is a sense of responsibility to the group in that students add their ideas to the groups to move the group forward. Without the contributions of all community members, a certain amount of knowledge is lost.</td>
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<td><strong>Eighth Concern:</strong> Students have a “sense of responsibility to a larger global citizenry”.</td>
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| Knowledge Building Principles  
*(Scardamalia, 2002:82-84)* | Antiracism Education Principles  
*(Dei, 1996:27-36)* | Concerns for Antiracism Education  
|-------------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|
| **Democratizing Knowledge**   | Fourth Principle: Marginalization of Voices  
*Sixth Principle: Identity and Engagement*  
*Seventh Principle: Confronting Diversity and Schools as Working Communities*  
*Eighth Principle: Schools Reproducing Inequities*  
*Ninth and Tenth Principles: Student Engagement and the Pathology of Home and Family* | Second Concern: Support for collaboration.  
Fourth Concern: Space for “subjugated knowledges”.  
Sixth Concern: Use and access to resources.  
Seventh Concern: All school community members are legitimate contributors of knowledge.  
Eighth Concern: Students have a “sense of responsibility to a larger global citizenry”. | Within critical practices, democracy is understood as a “site of struggle and is informed by competing ideological conceptions of power, politics, and community” *(Giroux, 1988:170)*. By creating a space where access to knowledge and ability to voice differing ideas and notions, does not guarantee a democratic learning environment. Issues such as varying ability, language development, distribution of power, silencing, access to cultural capital, as well as explicit and hidden curriculum within that discourse must be studied in any knowledge building project before principles of democratizing knowledge can be justified. |

Figure 1: Common Themes in Knowledge Building and Antiracism Education
The comparison of knowledge building and antiracism indicates some common themes. Scardamalia (2002) attests to the relevance of all principles for knowledge building to occur and yet Law and Wong (2003) found in their study that certain knowledge building principles were accessed more than others. This may speak to the need to place knowledge building within a critical frame when considering the principles Law and Hong found to be used less than the others. The findings in Law and Wong (2003) indicated a hierarchy of knowledge building principles. One of the most difficult principles for students to use was Constructive Use of Authoritative Sources:

...only very few groups demonstrated rudimentary ability to make constructive use of authoritative sources. Students might have quoted some authoritative sources to uphold their arguments, but they did not add-value, further interpret or keep a critical stance towards such materials. They demonstrated little intention to examine or to challenge public documents from authoritative sources. (6)

This may be explained because in the traditional classroom, students are not taught to challenge texts but rather to use them as evidence to support the truth or knowledge they present. The idea that students can contest or have a differing opinion to published work is unfounded in many classrooms. To challenge a published text would be iconoclastic in traditional classrooms. Reflecting on the place where Law and Wong’s (2003) research occurred and the role that the education system plays in students’ ability to access these principles was also considered:

The ability to conduct embedded and transformative assessment and the constructive use of authoritative sources appeared to be not associated with the level of engagement in the knowledge building process, but rather their prior exposure to these principles. The extremely low attainment in these two principles may be related to the relatively unquestioning attitude towards text that knowledge-centered external examinations have promoted in the prevalent school and community culture in Hong Kong. It would be interesting to explore whether the relative accessibility of these principles would be different for different cultures. (Law and Wong, 2003:10)
If a student's ability to access particular knowledge building principles and make use of them is dependent on the social processes of the classroom and in the case of Law and Wong (2003) possibly dependent on the systemic hegemonic structures in various schools, or as they suggest, cultures, then it would be up to the individual teacher in an individual classroom to give access to and explicitly name the right to participate in knowledge building. These principles which must be modelled and shared with students, create a shift in power.

In summary, the challenge addressed by Knowledge Forum and knowledge building pedagogy is to engage students in the collaborative solution of knowledge problems, in such a way that responsibility for the success of the effort is shared by the students and teacher instead of being borne by the teacher alone. (Scardamalia, 2002: 83)

All principles of knowledge building suggest that these pedagogies would require a shift in power, control and perspective away from the teacher and shared among all participants. A critical perspective problematizes these assumptions by highlighting the challenge that all discourse is gendered, racialized, and riddled with power structures. For example, in order for knowledge building to occur, the teacher must introduce it and be open to it. The principles of knowledge building suggest community knowledge and collective responsibility. If the teacher perceives the role as sole proprietor of knowledge, then knowledge building cannot occur. If the knowledge shared does not engage all participants in that community, then one must ask, why not and what knowledge is lost as a result of this disengagement? How does the concept of improvable ideas fit into an antiracist classroom? Who is silenced if the central goal to knowledge building is idea improvement?

**The Questions to Determine the Practice**

The principle of knowledge building and the degree of their presence in knowledge building classrooms can be questioned through a critical frame. Both Scardamalia (2003c:14) and Dei
(1996:83-84) developed questions to address their practices of knowledge building and antiracism education respectively. The questions are meant as a guide for those embarking on either journey and yet both speak to student engagement and the pervasiveness of content throughout the school day, curriculum and into the outside world.

Scardamalia suggests that the questions she lists are to be used to determine if the practice in the classroom is truly knowledge building. The questions listed for knowledge building refer to pedagogy and how this transfers throughout the school day and into the real world. By questioning students’ empowerment and agency with knowledge and idea improvement, these questions can be compared and contrasted with critical theory whereby hidden curriculum and silencing can be addressed. If the questions asked do not have an affirmative response then the practice does not allow for free exchange of ideas, idea improvement and multiple perspectives.

Dei explains his list of questions as a way for educators who practice transformative learning to ensure that they are developing inclusive curriculum. Questions extend beyond content and pedagogy and into school climate and praxis. Questions relate to hegemonic structures in the school, bias, power and voice/silencing. For Scardamalia, the questions relate to the activities or practices in the classroom. For Dei, the questions vary from what is happening in the school, the classroom and the larger community. There is a commitment beyond the classroom understanding that the whole child—home, family, community and identity are wrapped together to achieve student engagement and learning in the school setting. Knowledge Forum has been used at the classroom level, at the school level and internationally

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16 Praxis is a complex activity by which individuals create culture and society and become critically conscious human beings. Praxis comprises a cycle of action-reflection-action which is central to liberatory education (http://www.scf.org.pl/educatewebsite/educate2601/glesonecdn2.asp).
seeking community as knowledge is socially constructed. Intersections exist within these lists of questions or indicators for successful practice of either knowledge building or antiracism education including: student empowerment/agency, shared responsibility for knowledge and understanding, pervasive use of the content throughout the curriculum and in all aspects of schooling and finally, the connections to real world experiences. In this way, Scardamalia engages with community beyond the classroom but does not engage in a discourse of power or what if their knowledge is not an “extension of the way ideas evolve in out-of-contexts”? If the students finds him or herself in a situation where the knowledge addressed in the classroom does not reflect their out-of-school contexts or worse, if the student does not perceive his or her “own mind” within the world, then does this suggest there is something wrong with the knowledge or the student, or even the student’s world? In critical knowledge building, the questions may read, “Do the students view their work as an extension of the way these ideas evolve in out-of-school contexts and if not, is there the opportunity to question this dissonance? Is there a hierarchy of what is considered an improvement of these ideas or does each way in the world inform the work?”

These intersections speak to student engagement through shared voice, critical thinking by redefining acceptable knowledge as well as the seamlessness of education to real world experience—the pervasiveness of knowledge building rather than in discreet units of time selected by the teacher but also through the pervasiveness of multivocality and the working towards a continuum of inclusivity through multiple experiences rather than essentializing notions of identity and culture through one representation.
Questions for Transformative Practice—Knowledge Building and Antiracism

Education

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<tr>
<th>Dei’s Questions for Transformative Educators</th>
<th>Scardamalia’s Questions for Knowledge Building Educators</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. Do all students have equal access to available resources and materials in the school setting?</td>
<td>1. Are students empowered to take responsibility at the highest levels of knowledge work—to establish goals beyond what others set for them?</td>
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<td>2. What is taught in the schools?</td>
<td>2. Do students take pride in the knowledge advances of the whole community, share responsibility for what is accomplished, and value others’ contributions as well as their own?</td>
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<td>3. What is not taught? What are the omissions, negations and misrepresentations in the existing texts?</td>
<td>3. Are ideas considered from the standpoint of improvability and potential usefulness or only viewed from the standpoint of personal expression or knowledgability?</td>
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<td>4. What should be taught, by whom and how?</td>
<td>4. Are the products of one unit of work input for another round of knowledge building or are they parcelled out in time-and-topic-bound units?</td>
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<td>5. Who wields the ultimate power to make the above (question 4) and other school decisions?</td>
<td>5. Does creative work with ideas occur spontaneously throughout the day or is it confined to certain higher-order thinking or student-inquiry times?</td>
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<td>6. What is the political project behind introducing an equity curriculum and for engaging in equity pedagogy?</td>
<td>6. Do discussions (oral or online) show persistent development of ideas or do they consist mainly of factual reports and brief exchanges of opinion?</td>
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<td>7. How do educators create a genuinely democratic learning environment for all students?</td>
<td>7. Is assessment part of the self-regulatory process of the organization, or primarily something imposed from outside?</td>
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<td>8. Do the teaching styles used engage and equip students with the critical thinking skills needed to question all aspects of the ‘deep curriculum’?</td>
<td>8. Do students view their work as an extension of the way ideas evolve in out-of-school contexts?</td>
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<td>9. How are minorities, women, and the poor portrayed?</td>
<td>9. Do students see their own minds and the world around them as a powerful source of improvable ideas, or is their role confined to asking questions, to which others have answers?</td>
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<td>10. What is being exoticized, totalised or essentialized, and by whom and how?</td>
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<td>11. How are questions of power, privilege, oppression and inequality acknowledged and dealt with?</td>
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<td>12. What voices, opinions, and experiences are being heard? Who is being silenced and how?</td>
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<td>13. What responsibilities are being denied?</td>
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<td>14. Do the teaching strategies used help students to critically review classroom discourses for their implications for race, ethnicity, class, age, physical ability, gender and sexual orientation?</td>
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<td>15. How do educators prepare students to deal with the contradiction between the school’s promise of equality and the realities of racism, sexism and other forms of oppression and inequality in society?</td>
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<td>16. How do educators affirm differences in their schools?</td>
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<td>17. Do educators see the cultures that students bring to their schools as a source of ‘cultural enrichment’ or ‘cultural baggage’?</td>
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<td>18. How do educators assist students to create their own visibility in the schools?</td>
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<td>19. Do educators related to each student as an individual or as a member of a group?</td>
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<td>20. How do educators, students and staff occupy and share non-hegemonic spaces?</td>
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Figure 2: Questions for Practice—Antiracism Education and Knowledge Building

These questions guide the educator to ensure that there are multiple perspectives and an open space for dialogue and yet critical practice asks that these spaces be problematized as spaces of
inequitable power and access. This access may be explicit in terms of content that contests the
lived experiences of participants or it may be hidden in the sense that students are presented
with an open, online database where all have access to the notes and yet there still exists
barriers to access such as cultural capital, language, ability or perceived barriers such as labels
for views, or the fear of challenging another participant or text. Students have traditionally
been taught, either explicitly or implicitly, to comply rather than challenge and critique.

The Explicit and Implicit Curriculum-Knowing, Learning, Critiquing

Critical educators claim that a hidden curriculum is inherent in schooling. Vallance (1983)
explains that a “pervasive hidden curriculum” facilitates the “social-control function of
schooling” (11). She refers to the hidden curriculum as “non-academic but educationally
significant consequences of schooling” (11). However, Giroux cautions against that definition,
as he believes that the hidden curriculum exists both within the academic and non-academic
facets of schooling (1981:82-83).

The hidden curriculum consists of the explicit teacher of socialization through the social
oppressions that are inherent in all communication and learning within a school culture as well
as the valuation of particular school curricular content. Giroux defines the hidden curriculum
as:

...Those unstated norms, values, and beliefs embedded in and transmitted to
students through the underlying roles that structure the routines and social
relationships in school and classroom life... The hidden curriculum functions
not simply as a vehicle of socialization but also as an agency of social control,
one that functions to provide differential forms of schooling to different
classes of students17. (1983:47)

17 “Differential forms of schooling to different classes of students”, addresses issues of access to schooling as theorized by
Bourdieu in terms of cultural capital further discussed in the following section, Knowledge as Cultural Capital.
In the critical classroom, all exercises can be considered academic. With the revaluation of authoritative text, multivocality of experience and advancing the knowledge of the group, all things can be considered academic, meaning students learn from all actions and content in the classroom. In a critical classroom, they can learn that their opinions, experiences and knowledge are valued and necessary. Conflicting with these ideals, the Ontario curriculum can serve to reproduce the dominant culture through what the Ontario curriculum document claims to be “essential knowledge” (Ontario Ministry of Education and Training, 1998:2). Subjects and topics within these subjects are considered to be what the students of Ontario should learn. As students work through this curriculum, they are dependent upon the interpretation of the curriculum by their teachers and the resources the teachers choose to use to deliver that content.

Minnich (1990) cautions us against such knowledge labels as essential. “It is circular reasoning when what has been accepted as knowledge is considered as definitional of or essential to knowledge-itself, a move that disguises partiality or impartiality” (152). The Ontario curriculum speaks to a hidden curriculum of meritocracy and pathology of the marginalized\(^\text{18}\). The expectations have the power to silence. When an expectation asks that students indicate contributions of First Nations peoples to the lives of the Pioneers without seeing the diversity of First Nations peoples outside of the European experience in North America, there is a hidden curriculum which advocates for silence.

These notions relate back to Dei’s principles of antiracism education which “problematizes the marginalization of certain voices in society and, specifically the delegitimization of the

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\(^{18}\) For a detailed analysis of the Ontario Social Studies curriculum, refer to Chapter 4: The Curriculum: Hidden, Explicit, Transformational.
knowledge and experience of subordinate groups in the education system” (1996: 29-30) which is inherently tied to “[w]hite (male) power and privilege and the rationality for dominancy in society” (1996: 28). The Ontario social studies document (1998) defines the role of students based on the assumptions of a meritocracy.

There will be some students, however, who will find it more difficult to take responsibility for their learning because of special challenges they face. For these students, the attention, patience, and encouragement of teachers can be extremely important factors for success. However, regardless of their circumstances, learning to take responsibility for one’s progress and learning is an important part of education for all students. (4-5)

Students’ lack of responsibly for their learning is highlighted, yet deficits in curriculum policy and implementation strategies for that curriculum are not. By supporting a dialogue within a classroom community established to support education as the practice of freedom, there exists the goal that all voices can be legitimized.

Bereiter and Scardamalia (1993) draw attention to the “formal knowledge” which is taught in schools, through skills and facts presented through tasks and activities. They explain that “informal knowledge” in contrast, is “the kind that students bring with them and the kind that they will need in order to function expertly (188).” Both facets, they explain, are not dealt with in school curricula. They go on to acknowledge the typical “defects” recognized by educators including, “declining standards, poorly qualified teachers, dropouts…. violence, drugs, poor discipline, and functional illiteracy” (188) as separate issues to that of the process towards expertise.

This interference of “defects” towards the goal of shared expertise in the classroom is exactly what Dei refers to in his ninth and tenth principles of antiracism—the ninth “stresses that the problems experienced by youth cannot be understood in isolation from the material and ideological circumstances in which the students find themselves” (Dei, 1996:35) and the tenth
which questions “pathological explanations of the ‘family’ or ‘home environment’ as a source of the problems; some youth experience in relation to schooling” (Dei, 1996:35). This formal knowledge serves to maintain these “defects” and the lack of recognition for the “informal knowledge” perpetuates the status quo rather than rupturing and transforming educational settings. Scardamalia and Bereiter address these “defects” such as “dropouts and violence” without looking at them from a critical standpoint whereby societal factors which are perpetuated by schools and societies serve to reproduce these patterns within cultural, racial and socioeconomic groups19. Minnich (1990) asserts, “There is no more powerful position than that which dominates while appearing not to, no more influential position than that which sets the standards for and informs cultural meanings and their expression as knowledge” (161). To say that these “defects” are separate from the process of expertise is to deny access to students who “find themselves” (Dei, 1996:35) in these situations.

The hidden curriculum can serve to uphold existing power structures and perpetuate oppressive practices, maintaining structure and control. Members of the culture of power or dominant groups can succeed because they know the codes, the language, and the key to success. This concept is theorized by Bourdieu as cultural capital.

**Knowledge as Cultural Capital**

Pierre Bourdieu developed a theory of cultural capital which “attempts to explain the arbitrary cultural distinctions in defining positions in social space that vary in power and privilege” and in locating individuals within those positions (Olnec, 2000:318). Schools are sites which usually serve to reproduce the dominant culture through explicit and implicit valuation of

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19 Dei’s (1997) concept of “pushing-out” addresses a way to consider “drop-outs” as the responsibility of the school system which fails to engage these students thus pushing them out of the school system.
knowledge. This reproduction is done through the curriculum content, delivery and communication between schools, families, teachers and students.

Interchanges between teachers and students, however much obscured in the guise of everyday interactions, represent exchanges in which the cultural capital expended by both parties is positively and negatively sanctioned, which may or may not yield symbolic profits. Within the myriad of formal and informal acts of evaluation that schools enact, particular knowledge, linguistic behaviour, styles, dispositions, and modes of thought and expression are given value. Students are found qualified or wanted according to how completely and convincingly these are displayed. (Olneck, 2000: 320)

Knowledge building is defined as well as the “deliberate effort to increase cultural capital of a society” (Scardamalia, in press: 4). Although knowledge building would not fall within the realm of critical pedagogy, it is nonetheless invoked through some of the explanations of the practice. The question of value must be problematized through critical pedagogy in order to truly understand what and upon whose ideas, knowledge is built. This concept of cultural capital must be recognized as “mechanisms of cultural reproduction [which] function concretely within schools” (Giroux, 2001: 88). Giroux calls upon the theories of Bourdieu to explain the roles schools play in perpetuating dominant culture:

...cultural capital refers on the one hand to the different sets of linguistic and cultural competencies that individuals inherit by way of the class-located boundaries of their families...Schools play a particularly important role in both legitimating and reproducing the dominant culture, for schools...embody class interests and ideologies that capitalize on a kind of familiarity and set of skills that only specific students have received by means of their family backgrounds and class relations. (2001:88)

Concepts of “value” and “cultural capital” included in the definitions of knowledge building do not recognize the racialized, gendered and classist notions which are reproduced within the cultural capital of our society as well as the knowledge which is valued by a particular community. Scardamalia names “real ideas, authentic problems” as one of the many principles of knowledge building where she states, “Ideas produced or appropriated are as real as things touched and felt. Problems are ones that learners really care about” (2002, 83). To appropriate knowledge, within the critical context, is a form of colonization, subjugation and power.
Within Scardamalia’s definition it falls within one of principles of knowledge building practice suggesting that producing an idea or appropriating an idea are equally legitimate within the context of knowledge building. Within the context of critical knowledge building, certain ideas, whether they are cared about or not, if they perpetuate stereotypes, are blatantly racist or biased in some way, will be challenged. The idea suggested in the Ontario curriculum that First Nations people contributed to the lives of early settlers rather than recognizing the affects the early settlers had on and continue to have on the lives of First Nations people is to represent partial knowledge as “essential”. Notions such as these must be challenged in critical knowledge building.

The theory of cultural capital, as applied to educational settings, recognizes the value of dominant culture as a social resource within schools. Bourdieu (1993) defines cultural capital as “a form of knowledge, an internalized code or cognitive acquisition which equips the social agent with empathy towards, appreciation for or competence in deciphering cultural relations and cultural artefacts” (Bourdieu: 1993:7). This impacts schooling in every aspect. If a student’s origin and prior experiences are not from the same culture of power that shapes the explicit and hidden curriculum, the student will not have access to the knowledge or the social cues which those within the culture of power (Delpit, 1988) have learned from birth.

Lorde (1990) defines this “mythical norm” as “White, thin, male, young, heterosexual, christian, and financially secure...It is with this mythical norm that the trappings of power reside within this society” (282). All others are marginal in comparison to this identity. There are some who enter into the school system already ensconced with the culture of power or belonging to this “mythical norm”. This inherited culture is a resource which privileges those from the dominant culture that helps them to do well in school. The curriculum content is part of their heritage; their parents and their grandparents were also most likely a part of this
dominant culture. Their parents understand how the school system works and how to support their children through it.

Depending on the cultural group, it takes longer to become a part of this culture. For example, Jews who would have traditionally been outside of this dominant culture have been able to assimilate easier following the changes to immigration in Canada in 1948\textsuperscript{20} and the acceptance of Jews as White. Other ethnocultural groups, such Italians and Portuguese, experienced the same Whitewashing as immigrants to Canada. With each wave of immigration, new prejudices and allowances are afforded to cultural groups who are randomly given preference over others.\textsuperscript{21} This cultural capital can be “spent” to acquire things like education, popularity, and success. The schools generally serve to perpetuate these power structures by implicitly dictating which culture has the most capital. This theory is built on the idea that the valuation is arbitrary and subjective, two points which no not diminish its power. It is important to problematize essential knowledge, how one can achieve knowledge and how knowledge is validated within schools (Bowles, 2004) within this context. The possibility of shifting cultural capital exists when what is considered to be of value is altered. In critical knowledge building, student knowledge, experience and the knowledge and experiences of their families can inform the community knowledge thus making students of diverse backgrounds who value and honour their heritage valued contributors to that collective knowledge. Scardamalia addresses this somewhat through “idea diversity” but there is not an explicit recognition of the ideas to which she refers. She explains, “To understand an idea is to understand the ideas that surround it, including those that stand in contrast to it” (2002, 82). In the critical knowledge building

\textsuperscript{20} For a further discussion on how the Jews became White, see Chapter Seven in the section, \textit{An Antiracist Educator and the Challenge.}

\textsuperscript{21} For a complete analysis of this phenomenon, see John Boyko (1995), \textit{The Last Steps to Freedom: The Evolution of Canadian Racism.}
classroom, ideas about any culture or history must be placed within a larger context. So, to study ancient civilizations such as the Aztecs within the grade five social studies and not to consider why the civilization fell due to imperialism and colonialism is to represent a history that is incomplete. As well, to believe that the civilization is gone is to disregard and disrespect the influences this culture and civilization continues to have on our world today.

The schools can, to varying degrees, act as filters by perpetuating power structures which exist and thus create road blocks leading to disengagement for those outside the dominant culture. Bourdieu names this process “social elimination”. Dei et al (1997) similarly, reconceptualizes the problem of dropping out as “pushing out”. Freire, also, recognizes this “pushing out” as an act of aggression in agreement with Bourdieu and Dei. Freire explains that “violence is initiated by those who oppress, who exploit, who fail to recognize others as persons...It is not the helpless, subject to terror, who initiate terror, but the violent, who with their power create the concrete situation which begets the ‘rejects of life’” (2002:55). In a similar way, the antiracism perspective argues that the school system pathologizes certain racially marginalized students’ family or home experiences (1996: 35) rather than critically examining how the school is implicated in that experience. The students and their families are seen as responsible for their own disengagement, rather than the school itself. Scardamalia and Bereiter (1994) suggest that criticism of contemporary schools is tied to the focusing of efforts and initiatives on acute problems such as dropouts, drugs, and violence on one side and standardized tests on the other. They further suggest that by focusing on how students limit knowledge building potential would work towards school improvement and restructuring (266).

School improvement in Ontario asks that 75% of students reach the provincial standard, levels 3 (B) or 4 (A). Now, we find the Ontario government focusing efforts and dollars to the other 25%. If the school reaches 75% at standard, what can we expect of the other 25% of our
students? Are they succeeding or do they fall into the category of “at-risk”? and what are they “at-risk” of doing or not doing? School improvement efforts in Ontario address literacy scores and mathematics scores but also, where do our students go after graduation or worse, where do they go if they do not graduate and what are we, as a school system, doing to support that. These “at-risk” students represent those students who are marginalized and pathologized within our system. By suggesting that knowledge building can work towards school improvement without recognizing the complexities of those who are not “successful” is to not look at the “ideas which surround it, even those that stand in contrast to it”.

Scardamalia and Bereiter suggest that by engaging in knowledge building, education will become a second order environment which will mimic business in that “in which the accomplishments of participants keep raising the standard that the others strive for” (1994:266). This idea is problematic from a critical perspective since by giving all students the tools for success or access to knowledge building there will continue to be inequities in terms of access based on the amount of cultural capital each student has to engage in this process. Bourdieu’s theories suggest that teachers differentiate among students in ways that are accepted within the culture of power and is subsequently upheld in the schools. Students are described as having deficits in terms of needs, problems, and weaknesses.

Freire’s banking concept of traditional education refers to education as an economic exchange—“an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor” (2002: 72). Bourdieu would call what is “deposited”, cultural capital. This practice assumes that the teacher is omnipotent and the students are receptacles to be filled.

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22 See the section in Chapter Five, The Classroom—The Students: Struggling, Leaving, and the Fresh Starts.

23 In the section, Knowledge Building through Critical Antiracist Practice, there is note questioning what “banking” means in terms of Cummins’ theories of Identity Texts and Transformational Pedagogy.
He further explains, “Projecting an absolute ignorance onto others, a characteristic of the ideology of oppression, negates education and knowledge as processes of inquiry” (2002/1970:72).

The concept of cultural capital can be facilitated either as a deficit model or a transformative model. A deficit model locates a hierarchy of different classes, racial groups, ethnic groups, gender, sexuality and ability groups in terms of their wealth of cultural capital. It argues that without cultural capital, success and power will not be shared with those outside of the culture of power. A transformative approach to cultural capital, in contrast, asks experts and teachers, whom Bourdieu labels as the “agents of ideological domination, acting in concert with the ruling class” (cited by Bowles, 2004:3), to transform their own practice to become inclusive, and to value all voices, perspectives and cultures. It means the teacher refuses absolute power and shares expertise, knowledge and cultural capital or knowledge with all students in the class—or in some cases, changes what is considered or valued as capital within the classroom and possibly the whole school. “Both through theoretical critique and classroom practices, multicultural education attempts to strip the façade of neutrality from prevailing cultural standards, curricula, pedagogy, and instruments of assessment” (Olneck, 2000: 323).

Drawing upon the literary and art fields, Bourdieu invokes two principles, the heteronomous principle which relates to the culture of power and the autonomous principle where the artist or writer functions independently from the dominant power (1993:40). In the case of knowledge, the heteronomous principle can be likened to the explicit and hidden curriculum which perpetuates control and power over subjugated knowledges. The autonomous principle serves to support and transform the power distribution through the taking up of subjugated knowledges and the legitimizing of multiple perspectives. Bourdieu refers to this place as “a space of possibility” (1993:176).
Knowledge building offers the possibility of transformative use of cultural capital through the open space of the database and classroom dialogue. Expertise is touted to be shared in the knowledge building classroom where both teacher and student drive knowledge advancement and idea diversity is an asset to this advancement. However, this possibility exists only when knowledge building is practiced within an antiracist and critical framework and the dialogue and participation are problematized through issues of power, cultural capital and access. When knowledge, dialogue, participation, shared space, voice and silence, power, access to cultural capital, and the hidden curriculum are made explicit through classroom practice and curricular content, then knowledge building can offer this space of possibility. “In challenging popular discourse and discursive practices, antiracism provides a critical interrogation of conventional, common-sense knowledge. It disrupts ‘stable knowledge’” (Dei, 1999:401). It is the responsibility of the classroom teacher, as a transformative, antiracist and critical educator, to make this space of possibility happen.

The antiracist educator plays a pivotal role in this space of possibility. The direct intervention and guidance of an informed educator who can see the space of possibility within a classroom dialogue, curriculum and instructional practices are essential to bringing about critical knowledge building ideals.

**Recognizing Partial Knowledge-Talking Back/Breaking Silence**

Moving from silence into speech is for the oppressed, the colonized, the exploited, and those who stand and struggle side by side, a gesture of defiance that heals, that makes new life, and new growth possible. It is the act of speech, of ‘talking back’ that is no mere gesture of empty words, that is the expression of moving from object to subject, that is the liberated voice. (hooks, 1990:340).

Critical knowledge building, the practice established in this project, includes the examination, critiquing, and deconstruction of dominant knowledge. It is a process that can lead the way to
transformation within both the explicit and hidden curriculum, leaving room for legitimizing multiple perspectives. Minnich explains that this taking up of multiple knowledges does not demolish traditions but disestablishes them (1990:148). Minnich further suggests that we must:

...rethink what we thought we knew, recognizing now that the knowledge established by the dominant tradition is indeed partial...Thus, we realize also that supposedly objective, disinterested, non-political knowledge not only is constructed rather than ‘found’, but has often been faultily constructed. (1990:148).

The knowledge building principle, epistemic agency, suggests that the “participants set forth their ideas and negotiate a fit between personal ideas and ideas of others, using contrasts to spark and sustain knowledge advancement rather than depending on others to chart that course for them” (Scardamalia, 2002:10). Minnich (1990:164) suggests that the process of expanding partial knowledge becomes an expansion of personal boundaries. Pieters (2000) explains the role of the antiracist educator—“Educators can use a variety of teaching and learning techniques that foster with students a critical understanding of ways in which conflict can be created and resolved in antiracism education curriculum” (9). Olneck suggests “whether multiculturalism transforms cultural capital depends not only on the strategies of nondominant groups and their agents, but also on the actions of dominant groups and their agents” (2000:326).

What is valued as cultural capital can transform within the knowledge building classroom, both online and offline, when epistemic agency for students is considered to be a principle indicating the practice. Those perceived to be the most intelligent can be seen to create legitimate knowledge. Those without these advantages can be silenced. On the other hand, those who have traditionally been successful in the classroom can also be the same children who function as individuals rather than a collective. Their success is their own to enjoy
sometimes limiting their comfort in working collaboratively. What is valued in a critical
knowledge building classroom is not only intelligence or high achievement but rather, the
ability to take risks, work as a team and share success. This can overturn who speaks and
whose knowledge is valued. If the space of possibility exists, then all participants can create
and share knowledge and have a voice in this dialogue.

When theorizing the concept of voice, the notion of silence is invoked in juxtaposition. Critical
practice acknowledges the need to legitimize the voices of silenced students, communities and
teachers who recognize the need to rupture structures which exist to reproduce race, and class
and gender inequities within the school system and our society (Fine and Weis, 2003).

Silencing permeates classroom life so primitively as to render irrelevant the
lived experiences, passions, concerns, communities, and biographies of low-
income, minority students. In the process, the very voices of these students
and their communities, which public education claims to enrich, shut down.
(Fine and Weis, 2003: 16)

Dewey explains:

...there must be a large variety of shared undertakings and experiences. Otherwise, the influences which educate some into masters, educate others in
slaves...Diversity of stimulation means novelty, and novelty means challenge to

Silencing and marginalization through curriculum content and classroom practice echoes
hooks’ theory of engaged pedagogy which insists that both teacher and students should be
active participants in the classroom and that “education can only be libratory when everyone
claims knowledge as a field in which we all labor” (hooks, 1994:14). hooks further suggests
that silence is “multi-dimensional. Most obvious are the ways racism, sexism, and class
exploitation act as agents to suppress and silence. Less obvious are the inner struggles”
If it includes these characteristics of criticality and liberation, then knowledge building can promote critical classroom practice where multiple perspectives may be considered crucial to advance the groups' ideas, opinions and knowledge; however, this is only a possibility when the notions of whose knowledge is present are problematized which the knowledge building model does not do. These claims of democratic learning environments are critiqued and analyzed in this thesis by making antiracist knowledge available and explicit.

For the practice to be transformative, all stakeholders must be present in the praxis (Freire, 2002; Giroux, 1988 and 1981; Dei, 1996). The dialogue will invite inclusivity with all participants and with an extended definition of school community (Dei, 1996).

Human existence cannot be silent, nor can it be nourished by fast words, but only true words, with which men and women transform the world. To exist, humanly, is to name the world, to change it. Once named, the world in its turn reappears to the namers as a problem as requires of them a new naming. Human beings are not built in silence, but in word, in work, in action-reflection.

But while to say the true word—which is work, which is praxis—is transform the world, saying that word is not the privilege of some few persons, but the right of everyone. Consequently, no one can say a true word alone—nor can she say it for another, in a prescriptive act which robs others of their words. (Freire, 2002:88).

Freire argues that the "primordial right to speak" has been denied to the oppressed. It is in dialogue and shared naming through collaboration, that the right to speak and name is established. He further argues that dialogue can only happen in a place where there is love, humility, faith, trust, hope, and critical thinking.

Giroux (1988) explains that not only is it essential to include students in classroom dialogue, he cautions that engaged dialogue cannot occur in large groups (39). He further suggests: "Group interaction provides students with the experiences that they need in order to realize that they
can learn from one another. Only by diffusing authority along horizontal lines will students be able to share and appreciate the importance of learning collectively” (39).

Bickmore (1991) suggests, “Multicultural education and critical thinking goals invoke the potential value of conflict for learning and progress; people can learn to handle cultural and ideological conflict by practicing with it in school” (2). She further explains that conflict can enter the classroom through the content or the pedagogy of the classroom (3).

Banks’ Decision-Making and Social Action Approach (1998: 74) is an example of education as a practice of freedom (Freire, 2002:93). Dialogue is established through idea diversity which is described as an essential component to knowledge building in that “to understand an idea is to understand the ideas that surround it, including those that stand in contrast to it” (Scardamalia, 2002). Furthermore, the principle of democratizing knowledge necessarily values “all participants as legitimate contributors to the shared goals of the community” (Scardamalia, 2002).

**Knowledge Building or Knowledge Construction**

Knowledge building’s central goal is what its proponents call the process of idea improvement whereby members of that group work collaboratively to deliberately work towards knowledge advancement by viewing each idea presented in this public space as improvable (Scardamalia and Bereiter, 2003) or partial (Minnich, 1990).

Knowledge building is an innovative educational approach that emphasises the production of knowledge as a social practice and collective cognitive responsibility. Knowledge building involves more than individual knowledge acquisition; it refers to students’ productive practices of knowledge elaboration, creation and advancement. (Chan, Lam and van Aalst, 2003:3)

Within their paper, Chan, Lam and van Aalst (2003) suggest that Knowledge Forum, the software designed for knowledge building, offers “possibilities for collaborative knowledge
construction” (3). They use the phrase, “collaborative knowledge construction” synonymously with knowledge building. Knowledge building falls within the constructivist paradigm as a practice of social constructivism of the deepest kind according to Scardamalia and Bereiter (in press). Knowledge construction, from the social constructivist lens, speaks to the collective and social construction of knowledge. The phrase knowledge construction is also used in critical realms whereas knowledge building is not.

Critical pedagogy has the goal of social action and transformation of hegemonic structures within the anti-racist classroom practices and knowledge as it relates to the intersecting oppressions of race, ethnicity, gender, class, sexual orientation and ability at its centre (Giroux, 1995; Banks, 1999; Freire, 2002; hooks, 1994; Dei, 1996). In this context, knowledge construction is indeed a social and collective endeavour but also included in this construction is the influence of positionality of the individual or group’s identity within the context of where this knowledge is constructed.

Although many complex factors influence the knowledge that is created by an individual or group, including the actuality of what occurred, the knowledge that people create is heavily influenced by their interpretations of their experiences and positions within particular social, economic, and political systems and structures of society. (Banks, 1993: 5)

The goals of critical pedagogy and knowledge building are inherently different but, the methods of student empowerment24 (Kanpol, 1999:53-54) are curiously similar. Students are invited into a space that advocates for epistemic agency, collective responsibility, multiple perspectives and idea diversity.

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24 Kanpol deciphers the difference between traditional empowerment and critical empowerment in terms of teacher education. I would like to extend his definition to include students. He explains that empowerment is both action and reflection, thus invoking the Freirian concept of praxis.
By aligning knowledge building within the critical paradigm, the hope is that the students set these goals and the students direct the process. Dei explains that with antiracism education: “the curriculum and classroom instructional practice could allow students to set their own priorities for their learning” (1996:86) which echoes the knowledge building principle of epistemic agency. Giroux (1988) cautions educators that “…social reproduction is linked to classroom social relationships and how the construction of knowledge is related to the notion of false consciousness……particularly as mediated through the hidden curriculum” (27). Delpit (1988) cautions,

We must not be too quick to deny [students'] interpretations, or accuse them of ‘false consciousness’. We must believe that people are rational beings, and therefore always act rationally. We may not understand their rationales, but that in no way militates against the existence of these rationales or reduces our responsibility to attempt to apprehend them. And finally, we must learn to be vulnerable enough to allow our world to turn upside down in order to allow the realities of others to edge themselves into our consciousness. (297)

If students are producing or “building” knowledge while working under the false consciousness of the hidden and explicit curriculum, then they may not be aware of their right to speak or that they may in fact hold other knowledge—marginal knowledge, which when brought to the fore, would influence and raise consciousness rather than perpetuate the beliefs or mythologies of the dominant culture. This false consciousness is perpetuated through the “truths” presented through the curriculum content and pedagogy in the classroom. Students who do not identify with the culture of power will be functioning at a deficit when the “cultural knowledge within their community conflicts with school knowledge, norms, and expectations” (Banks, 1993: 7). In other words, students do not have the cultural capital to function successfully within our schools. When students are opened to the possibility that knowledge is experience and linked to culture, thus altering what is considered to be cultural capital, they can begin to see knowledge as collectively produced and negotiated.
Knowledge is linked with culture, identity, and social practice. Practice and experience constitute the contextual basis of all knowledge. Culture is implicated in how we express our thoughts, ideas and experiences verbally, intuitively, spiritually and cognitively. Knowledge is produced through a given space, culture, experience, history, identity and social practice. (Dei, 1999:405)

For many of our students, their parents were also educated in systems where Euro-American bias stringently pervaded all that they learned. This type of bias is internalized and parents and their children do not recognize their experiences and histories as knowledge, or at least as valid knowledge. The opening up of the classroom to multiple perspectives and histories allows for recognition of this shared understanding.

Examples in this project could be the Muslim students who believed that there “were no Muslim people during the medieval times”25 or that all people in the Philippines live in huts with roofs made from banana leaves26. In a traditional classroom, students interpret reality based on the information given to them and if they don’t see themselves in it, they can disengage or devalue their own or their family’s experiences and knowledge. Without the teachers explicitly welcoming all experiences and knowledge, the students will revert to interpreting truth as that which is in print. In the first example, the students were focused on the grade four social studies unit on Medieval Times and had only been given texts that represented the Christian European experiences during this time in history. Following my encouragement to seek out information on the Muslim influence during the Medieval Times, the students found that the influence was great and intertwined with their own histories. In the second example, a student found information about the Philippines in a text available in the classroom. Although her family was from the Philippines, she had never been there herself.

25 More detail for this example is in the following section, Agency and Safety in a Critical Community.
26 More detail for this example is in Chapter 4 in the section, Transforming the Curriculum—Critical Moments.
Another student who had lived in the Philippines added to the knowledge the first students presented using his own experiences to improve the idea.

In critical knowledge building, all participants can question which knowledge is valued above others and which is subjugated—which knowledge is heard and which is silenced. Invariably, what counts as knowledge and what does not? In essence, knowledge is seen and understood as problematic rather than neutral. Banks (1993) asserts:

> An important goal of multicultural teaching is to help students to understand how knowledge is constructed. Students should be given opportunities to investigate and determine how cultural assumptions, frames of references, perspectives, and the biases within a discipline influence the ways the knowledge is constructed. Students should also be given opportunities to create knowledge themselves and identify ways in which the knowledge they construct is influenced and limited by their personal assumptions, positions and experiences. (Banks, 1993:11)

In critical knowledge building, students have the opportunity to question assumptions, ideas, and theories. They can build on the ideas of others and challenge them as they work toward idea improvement.

Giroux reviews the construct of knowledge from a Freirian perspective (1981: 130-133): “at the core of knowledge is both a questioning attitude and a specific set of social relationships” (132). Based on this problematic and dialectic nature of knowledge, Giroux suggests that “we need as educators to develop a pedagogy designed not only to help students build their own meanings, but also to help them reflect on the process of thinking itself” (1981:132). “Knowledge…cannot be spoken from some objective, all-embracing standpoint of absolute authority…it can never be made preontologically available or complete” (Kanpol and McLaren, 1995:6).
In *Teaching to Transgress*, hooks explains "the need for critical thinkers to engage in multiple locations, to address diverse standpoints, to allow us to gather knowledge fully and inclusively" (1994:91). She suggests a "commitment to 'radical openness,' the will to explore different perspectives and change one's mind as new information is presented" (2003:48). Banks refers to the importance of making explicit the "cultural assumptions, frames of reference, perspectives, and biases within a discipline" (1999:15). In doing so, Banks invokes the constructivist approach to teaching and learning as "a key component of the transformative, multicultural curriculum" (1999:61). Dei writes of the importance for teachers to "lead the way to resurrect the 'subjugated knowledges' of their students" and insists that "classroom instruction could encourage students to find their own voices...[and] challenge the peripheralizing of alternative and oppositional viewpoints, perspectives and discourses within school knowledge" (Dei, 1996:86-87). Tatum (1992:18) refers to "the creation of opportunities for self-generated knowledge" to facilitate positive student development. This is comparable with Scardamalia's principles of democratizing knowledge, idea diversity, epistemic agency and real ideas, authentic problems.

If the discourse of knowledge building becomes more critical in its analysis of the process of knowledge building within a truly democratic learning environment, then knowledge building becomes knowledge construction in that knowledge is socially constructed, mediated, interpreted and weighted with all the power and hegemonic structures which exist in the social exchange to create that knowledge. The knowledge is a product of collaboration and
negotiation of that knowledge between all participants, the place where it occurs, and all the histories brought forward in those “extraordinary conversations”.

**Collaborative Expertise in a Critical Knowledge Building Environment**

Expertise, knowledge, and voice are concepts which converge when working within a critical knowledge building environment. Expertise is defined as “great skill or knowledge in a particular field.” In claiming to have expertise, essentializing can be a possibility. When expertise is shared, as knowledge building is a shared and social process, each piece of knowledge or each example of expertise, can build upon the next so that each expertise is partial in the same way knowledge is partial. “In the presentation of certain knowledges as ‘truths’, the complex, multiple and often contradictory constructions and contested meanings of identities and subjectivities of minority groups are often lost” (Dei, 1999:403).

Lisa Delpit (1988) explains that in order to build a classroom for multiple ways of knowing and multiple perspectives, expertise must be shared. “The teacher cannot be the only expert in the classroom. To deny students their own expert knowledge is to disempower them...both student and teachers are expert at what they know best” (288). She further explains the need for “real audiences and real purposes is a vital element in helping students to understand that they have an important voice in their own learning processes” (288).

Knowledge Forum can provide audience and a shared space and yet if the engagement and access is not available to all participants due to the many barriers that can exist, then the audience may not be engaged. Just because the space is there and notes are posted does not...

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27 Fine and Weis (2003) explain “schools constitute sites in which what [they] call ‘extraordinary conversations’ and practices can flourish, organized toward rigorous academic work and critical democratic engagement of youth and educators” (4).

mean that students are engaged, responding or building knowledge together. It is the antiracist teacher who can enable this shared expertise to exist. It is the sharing of power and voice within the classroom that becomes the political act (Aladdin, 1996:16) of the antiracist teacher.

The notion of developing expertise has been theorized as a goal or arrival at a certain level of understanding in a particular area (Alexander, 2003; Lajoie, 2003) much like knowledge is presented as fact, complete and neutral within non-critical spaces. The development of expertise is analyzed to provide further understanding of the practices of experts so that this phenomenon can be repeated within the context of the classroom (Lajoie, 2003; Sternberg, 2003). Scardamalia and Bereiter discuss the development of expertise as a collaborative effort. The process of developing expertise is not the property of the individual but the collective property and responsibility of the group (Bereiter and Scardamalia, 1993). Just as the teacher must revoke the claim to sole proprietor of knowledge and knowing\textsuperscript{29}, so too must the various members of classroom. If knowledge and expertise are shared and collaborative in nature, it promotes the possibility of education for democracy.

Within a knowledge building classroom, that expertise becomes shared among all participants. These participants can include the students, teachers, researcher, other participants in the database and invited subject matter experts. Bereiter and Scardamalia (1993) assert that expert cultures share expertise, “Everyone would be regarded as more or less of a colleague” (227). It is important to note that throughout the works of Scardamalia and Bereiter, there are phrases or terminology that attests to the lack of criticality in their work. In the case of suggesting that “everyone would be regarded more or less of a colleague” there are levels of collegiality implied

\textsuperscript{29} The opinions or expertise of the members of the classroom may be established from positions of power and privilege, bias and stereotypes.

\textsuperscript{30} Refer to Freire’s banking concept of education.
suggesting that a hierarchy continues to exist within their democracy and that there is value and power depending on the more or less of the participant to be considered a colleague. In critical knowledge building, indigenous knowledges are sought after for authenticity of voice. Multiple perspectives and the valuing of multivocality enrich our knowledge and our experience of learning. Sharing and collaboration would move the group forward, transform the classroom, and could legitimize subjugated knowledges.

The Development and Sustaining of a Critical Community

The development of a critical community must be an act of collaboration and trust among its members. The goals of the community, meanings and participation are negotiated through a discursive practice. Communities are dynamic and changing to ensure sustainability. Community is established by its members, its goals and its location. A critical and democratic community is established through voice, collaborative expertise, multiplicative ways of knowing and the legitimization of subjugated knowledges. “To build community requires vigilant awareness of the work we must continually do to undermine all the socialization that leads us to behave in ways that perpetuate domination” (hooks, 2003: 36).

In a critical community there is recognition that “profound fractures, and variation, cut through lives within these communities. Simple demographic nuances, by race/ethnicity, gender, class, generations, and sexuality [mark] dramatic distinctions in experience” and “boldly sever what may appear to be, at first glance, internal communities” (Fine, Weis, Weseen, Wong: 2000:110-111). Community comes with connotations of homogeneity in some sense whether in goal, pursuit, or make-up. A critical community recognizes the community as having power as a group, but also having power struggles within it. “…there was a possibility of a learning community, a place where difference could be acknowledged, where we would
finally all understand, accept, and affirm that our ways of knowing are forged in history and relations of power” (hooks, 1993:8). Although goals may be collaboratively created and pursued, there is always the possibility that someone or several members do not recognize themselves within this group. To pursue a critical project within a community is also to be reflective of the community itself, not just the goals to be pursued.

Critical Community and Dialogue

In naming a group of people a “community” the namer takes on the power and privilege in the act of labelling that of that group a community. For example, a teacher can identify a student based on a community with which the teacher believes that students is a member. The student, on the other hand, may not see him or herself as part of that community for a variety of reasons. Recognition within any community, but necessarily in a critical community, of differences are as important, if not more important than the similarities which exist in this group. Once inside a community, it becomes apparent that these collectives “are defined as much by their conflicts, factions, and divisions as they are by their commonalties” (Angrosino and Mays de Perez, 2000:680). Self identification with a community is preferable since to name one’s identity can be “an active gesture of political resistance...to challenge domination” (hooks, 1991, 172-173).

To create a critical community in a classroom can be problematic since by simply being present in the classroom, students can be defined or named as part of that community. But to name a community and its participants is quite different than the act of participating with self-identified members in a critical community. The act of defining or naming is an act of domination. It is only through time and the development of trust that a classroom can be a critical community.
Participants in the classroom can be defined as a community because they all participated in this project and yet students came and went throughout the project. Individuals can belong to a variety of communities at any one time. The social nature of the practices of knowledge building and critical pedagogy are described through three notions of dialogue, community and democracy which inform each other through their dialectic nature. Dialogue supports community development and the presence of dialogue can promote democratic ideals.

There is a “need to develop the ‘great community’ to which Maxine Greene refers, not in a mechanical or unproblematic way, but through constant negotiation and renegotiation” (Nieto, 1998:55). In contrast, Young (1989) cautions that the ideal of community “is politically problematic...because those motivated by it will tend to suppress differences among themselves... [and] is an unrealistic vision for transformative politics in mass urban society” (300). Dei (1996) redefines community in the school to include students, teachers, support staff and administration but also includes parents, caregivers and community workers. He states, “Local community knowledge is an important pedagogical tool and source of cultural information which educators can tap for the benefit of their students and the school” (87) and that these community members should be involved in their teaching practices as a way to engage students and respect community knowledge.

Recognition of the social aspect of knowledge building is expressed as: “the ability to connect discourses within and between communities [to open] new possibilities for barrier-crossing and mutual support” (Scardamalia, in press). Scardamalia and Bereiter (1994) argue:

...the classroom needs to foster transformational thought, on the part of both students and teachers, and that the best way to do this is to replace classroom-bred discourse patterns with those having more immediate and natural extensions to the real world, patterns whereby ideas are conceived, responded to, reframed, and set in historical context. (265)
Concepts such as transformational, barrier-crossing, shared voice of students and teacher, and altering discourse patterns in the classroom all set within an historical context speak to critical practices within knowledge building.

Giroux describes the necessity of group interaction and shared experience: “Through group dialogue, the norms of cooperation and sociability offset the traditional hidden curriculum's emphasis on competition and excessive individualism” (1988:39). Within knowledge building, meanings, beliefs, ideas and opinions should be negotiated collaboratively and socially. “It is not always possible to resolve the problematic character of our personal understanding internally, particularly when it is provoked by other people. Then we may need to enter into an explicitly social process and create new meanings collaboratively” (Stahl, 2000:72). Dei suggests “collaboration be pursued diligently as a major goal in contemporary education” (1996:86).

As hooks suggests, “Making the classroom a democratic setting where everyone feels a responsibility to contribute is a central goal of transformative pedagogy” (hooks, 1994:39). Within the principles of knowledge building: community knowledge, collective responsibility and democratizing knowledge relate back to this conception of shared responsibility towards transformation of ideas, notions, and knowledge. Community knowledge and collective responsibility value “shared contributions” as much as “individual achievements”. Participants “produce ideas of value to others and share responsibility for the overall advancement of knowledge in the community” (Scardamalia, 2002).

Dewey defines community as a process based in communication (1916:4). Maxine Greene explains that there is never a community, but rather, “a community in the making; through dialogue, through doing things together, through shared concern, identifying something that is
shared that can move you to some kind of action” (Weiss, Systra and Slater, 1998:27). As bell hooks proclaims: “we must build ‘community’ in order to create a climate of openness and intellectual rigor” (hooks, 1994: 40).

**Agency and Safety in a Critical Community**

Environments that call for the direct pursuit of antiracism naturally invoke conflict; although, there must be safety in terms of trust with the community members. It is an environment that calls for dialogue rather than silence. Safety refers more to the freedom to speak and disagree rather than an environment free of risk. Bickmore (1991) addresses conflict in the social studies classroom as a place of risk—“complicated and unpredictable” (4). hooks (1993) echoes these sentiments in her own classrooms at the university level:

> Many folks found that as they tried to respect ‘cultural diversity’ they had to confront the limitations of their training, knowledge, and possible loss of ‘authority’. Indeed, exposing certain truths and biases in the classroom often created chaos and confusion. The idea that the classroom should always be a ‘safe’ harmonious place was challenged. (hooks, 1993:9)

Critical practice challenges the status quo and expects action and transformation from its participants. There is risk in resistance and transformation and therefore, questionable safety. On the other hand, through critical practice, norms are established whereby participants can challenge, risk and debate—it is a necessarily discursive and collaborative, socially constructed space.

Scrardamalia invokes the concept of agency with the principle of epistemic agency: “The level of agency that is released to students is a direct reflection of teachers’ beliefs about student capabilities. The more agency teachers turn over to students the more they assume” (Scrardamalia, 2005: 49).
Agency is evident when individuals set forth their own ideas and negotiate a fit between personal ideas and those of others, and take charge of their knowledge advancement. Epistemic Agency is supported when peer dialogue is fostered and idea diversity helps sustain knowledge work. Children operating under a heightened sense of epistemic agency create their own goals, motivation, evaluation, and engage in long range planning—they take charge of the executive processes that are typically handled by the teacher. Metacognitive awareness is a key component in the development of epistemic agency. (Nirula et al, 2003:1).

Further to this, Scardamalia suggests that when students work with ideas and idea diversity towards idea improvement, “the culture must be one of psychological safety, so that people feel safe in taking risks, revealing ignorance, voicing half-baked notions, giving and receiving criticism” (2002: 75). This can occur through build-on notes, discussion in the class or through the rise-above function in the database but there may also be some hesitancy on a student’s part to take such risks. It takes time to develop this level of trust for not only students but also adult participants to reveal “ignorance” and “half-baked notions”, particularly if they have invested their own knowledge and experience in those expressions.

Giroux postulates the importance of agency in Freire’s (1985) description of studying as “it conjures up images both of critique and of possibility” (Giroux: 1988:87). One of Dei’s principles of antiracism education is agency in relation to power: “Individual agency is tied to and constrained by institutional power” (29). He further suggests that breaking the rules within institutional power structures “creates the possibility for change” (29). Within a critical knowledge building classroom, the teacher still has to create an environment where individual agency is pursued and allowed. The teacher will still represent the “institutional power”.

In Teaching to Transgress (1994), hooks explains, it is “the absence of a feeling of safety that often promotes prolonged silence or lack of student engagement” (1994:39). hooks develops this
idea of safety in her own classroom. She explains that safety does not presuppose neutrality and calmness. She explains that in her own classrooms, her style is:

...confrontational. It is a model of pedagogy that is based on the assumption that many students will take courses from me who are afraid to assert themselves as critical thinkers, who are afraid to speak (especially students from oppressed and exploited groups). The revolutionary hope that bring to the classroom is that it will become a space where they can come to voice. (hooks, 1988: 53)

A safe classroom in the critical sense is one where confrontation is expected but within that confrontation, a level of respect should be established. Tatum (1992) explains “the creation of a safe classroom atmosphere by establishing clear guidelines for discussion” (18) is necessary.

hooks writes of her classroom at the college level which differs greatly from what can be expected in an elementary classroom. Safety for the students has to be somewhere between in that students should feel safe to express concerns and go beyond curriculum expectations and traditional definitions of knowledge. Elementary students, particularly primary students, cannot be expected to view confrontation as an intellectual or political exercise. Finding voice in a primary classroom should be a gentler experience.

The parameters for safety between myself as the teacher/researcher and the classroom teacher, as adults, can be the safety to confront that hooks describes but again, Tatum’s guidelines for discussion and the need for trust must also be considered.

**Implementing Critical Knowledge Building Pedagogies in an Elementary Social Studies Classroom**

Although there are many accounts of knowledge building in elementary classrooms (Messina, 2001; Moreau, 2001; Reeve, 2001; Lamon, Reeve, and Scardamalia, 2001) the discourse is more one of “this is how we did it” rather than “this is how to do it”. This is in line with knowledge building theory in that all ideas are considered improvable (Scardamalia, 2002). There is no
final destination, but rather a continual movement forward or as Scardamalia and Bereiter refer to it, a knowledge building dynamic (Scardamalia and Bereiter, in press).

The goal for this section is to establish a process for implementing critical knowledge building pedagogy using a Knowledge Forum® database and supporting strategies for a critical social studies classroom while also describing the functionality of the program itself, with some interpretation on how these functions either encourage or discourage a critical learning environment, depending on how they are implemented and accessed.

Knowledge Forum®

Knowledge Forum is an online collaborative workspace designed to support knowledge building pedagogy. The design of Knowledge Forum is continually changing to support this process. The students in this project will be working on the browser-based version 4.5.4, (through the Internet), which means provided there is an Internet connection; students can access the database through a web address using a username and password. “Users start with an empty Knowledge Base to which they submit ideas, share information, reorganize the knowledge, and ultimately ‘rise-above’ to new understandings. Knowledge Forum makes information accessible with multiple vantage points and multiple entry points. Even the collection and display of the community’s work can be organized in flexible visual displays” (Knowledge Forum, Retrieved March 29, 2004).

In any database, there is an editor who is responsible for setting up the database itself. Each participant is given a certain level of access or permissions within the database—editor, writer, visitor or reader. Visitors, writers and editors are all authors within the database as they can

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31 Knowledge Forum is a registered trademark and copyrighted name for this software. This symbol ® will only be used in this one instance but is implied for all other times Knowledge Forum is used throughout.
author notes. The editor can provide further permissions for each of the other participants in terms of their ability to function within the database including creating views, creating scaffolds and scaffold supports, or publish views. Readers are not authors and can only view published views and notes. Visitors can also only view published views and notes. In the database we used, there were no visitors and all participants were authors. The classroom teacher, Sonja Neuman,32 and I were both editors and the students were writers with the ability to create views, scaffolds and supports. All members had the same access. We did not provide the students with access to the ability to view complete author information or the ability to edit other peoples’ notes to ensure that all students were responsible for their own notes.

Views

The database is structured on views. The views are “graphical representations of higher-level conceptual structures and are constructed by participants to give greater meaning to the notes they contain… [and] represent their best collective understanding” (Scardamalia, 2002:7). Views can be created around big ideas, curriculum expectations, or problems of inquiry. Creation of new views can be accessible to all participants therefore giving the power to organize knowledge to all participants. This is one of the many collaborative features of Knowledge Forum. It allows for all participants to organize, highlight and build-onto existing knowledge. From a view, new notes, searches, attachments, and scaffolds can be created. Pictures and movies can be added to views.

32 The name Sonja Neuman will be used as a pseudonym for the classroom teacher.
Figure 3: Welcome View

In the case of this project, although all participants were given access to the function of view creation, all views were either created by myself or collaboratively between Sonja and myself. As the project developed, student input was requested in organizing the notes into new views with the hope that students would eventually create their own views (although that did not happen).

Notes

Notes are the expressions of ideas, theories or problems. Notes are the building blocks of the database. They are searchable in many ways including: content, keywords, problems, author, and data created. Notes can exist in multiple views at the same time which can exemplify how one idea can inform many concepts. Within a note, there can also be attachments, references to other notes, annotations, pictures, movies and hyperlinks, leading the reader to other locations in the database or other places on the Internet.
Within a note, there are indications of how many times the note was edited and read and how many different people composed the note, edited the note and read the note. This information can be useful to determine the level of collaboration, revising ideas based on new knowledge development, and participant involvement. The view(s) where the note exists are listed within the note as well as the note which this note builds onto or notes which build onto this note. An indication is also made as to the number of times a note has been referenced. By placing the note or idea in a context, it is possible to see how participants came to the ideas they are sharing and how the collaborative aspects of knowledge building inform others in the pursuit of knowledge. Notes which have been read have a red box beside them; notes which have not yet been read have a blue box beside them. If a note has been read and subsequently revised, it will appear to have a shaded blue box. Notes can be co-authored by a group or a whole class.
Scaffold and Scaffold Supports

Scaffolds are ways to organize ideas and theories within the notes. All Knowledge Forum databases come with two scaffolds already created: theory building and opinion. Within the scaffold are scaffold supports which serve to guide the creation of the note. The theory building scaffold consists of the following supports: My theory; I need to understand; New Information; This Theory Cannot Explain; A Better Theory; and Putting our Knowledge Together. The opinion scaffold consists of the following supports: Opinion; Different Opinion; Reason; Elaboration; Evidence; Example; and Conclusion. Participants can choose from the scaffolds already in the database or they can create their own based on the need to support their knowledge building process.
In this project, several new scaffolds were created and available in several of the views. For the *All About Me* view, the supports were: How I got My Name; I was born in...; My parents were born in; My grandparents were born in; I can speak English and...; I think that knowledge is; I think that learning is...; and I think this project will.... In the *Researcher and Teacher Journal* view, the following scaffold supports were available: Date; Observations; Theories; Implications; Next Steps; The Plan; Other Ideas; What do you think?; and Putting our Knowledge Together. There was a KWL scaffold support created with the following supports: What I Know, What I Want to Know, and What I Learned. In the *How To* view, a procedural scaffold was created with the following supports: This Procedure is About...; First, Second, Third, Then, Next, Finally, This Came Up Because.... And Finally, in the *Cooperative Learning—Community Building* view, the following supports were available: Problem, Ideas, Solution, My Role, and My Responsibility.

The scaffold supports help to organize the notes but they also serve as prompts for the students when trying to compose their notes. The scaffold supports can be made available in any combination within each view and this organization can be changed throughout the process by adding new scaffolds or changing them.

**Build-on Notes**

Build-on notes are notes which build onto a previous note already entered into the database. This process is indicated within the database by the placement within the view. For example, an initial note will be displayed in the first column. Subsequent notes which build onto the first note in the threaded\(^3\) discussion will be in the second and third columns and so on. It does

\(^3\) A threaded discussion is an online dialog or conversation that takes the form of a series of linked messages. The series is created over time as users read and reply to existing messages. Typically, messages in a given thread share a common subject line and are linked to each other in the order of their creation. Threaded discussion is particularly useful in online venues.
create a hierarchy in terms of which note was written first but the fact that notes can exist in multiple views, in multiple contexts, works to create varying hierarchies. For example, a note which is a build-on in one view can be referenced and exist as the beginning of a new thread in another view.

![Diagram of build-on notes]

This cluster of notes indicates an extended conversation building on the first note in that series and continuing to the bottom of the view.

Figure 7: Build-On Notes

**Rise-Above Notes**

Rise-above notes are an expression of organization, categorization, and the need to bring ideas together. Often, rise-above notes act as a way to move the group forward by bringing various ideas together and creating new knowledge from diverse ideas and notes. Rise-above notes can also be used to unclutter a view which has a large number of notes. When there are more notes than the monitor on the computer can display, it becomes difficult to navigate. Often, the concept of rise-above is introduced because a participant or group of participants expresses a need to streamline the notes in a particular view. Common ideas and topics are brought together into one note which makes it easier to navigate within the view. A rise-above note looks different than a note because the icon indicates that other notes exist inside that note.

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where multiple discussions unfold at the same time. Without threaded discussion, the reader would confront a chaotic, unsorted list of messages on many different topics. By hyperlinking messages that share a common subject line, threaded
Authorship of all notes contained in the rise-above note is indicated when the note is created so that all collaborators to this advance in knowledge are acknowledged. Once the rise-above note is opened, it will show a folder. The author(s) of the note are encouraged to summarize what is in this rise-above note so that all contributors, concepts, and theories are acknowledged in some way. It is important to establish a protocol for creating rise-above notes. Before a person’s note can be brought into a rise-above, it should be discussed if there is agreement to placing the note within that context.

Figure 8: A Rise-Above in a View

![Image of a rise-above note]

New information: Some of the kids are aware that there is missing information and they are asking for information... they need to take the next step and find the information themselves.

Figure 9: Rise Above Note

![Image of notes in a rise-above note]

Problem

Within each note, there is a field where a problem can be identified. This is helpful in the sense that it asks participants to speculate, question, and inquire about ideas and theories. Problems are also searchable through the search feature and can be analyzed within the Analytic Toolkit. When participants are encouraged to view their inquiry as a problem, it urges them to think in terms of questioning and problematizing assumptions—a skill necessary in critical antiracist practice. Similar to the KWL chart—what I know, what I want to know, and what I have learned, this method of indicating problems allows for continuing the pursuit of knowledge.

![Table](image)

Figure 11: Problems and Keywords

Keywords

Keywords are searchable within the database. When composing a note, the participant can indicate keywords in a field at the bottom of the note. This aids the ability to search for particular topics and theories within the database. The keywords are indicated at the top of the note and also highlighted in green throughout the text of the note. Keywords are searchable through the search tool which is helpful when looking for key themes which emerge in the data to support the knowledge building process. Participants also will further develop skills to summarize and frame their notes by indicating keywords. Further to this, the concept of keywords will develop the participants’ ability to navigate electronic resources using search engines on the Internet.
Referencing and Quoting

Participants can quote other notes within their notes. By doing this, the quoted text is changed to italics and a hyperlink to the other note will be inserted into the note which references it. All notes which are referenced will be indicated at the bottom of the note which references them (see figure 4). This again, is a feature which makes navigation through the database easier. Ideas and notes are easily linked which works towards the documentation of and support for collaboration.

Annotating

Annotations act like a post-it note in a note. Once a note has been read, the reader has the option to close the note, build onto the note or annotate the note. An annotation does not move the knowledge forward but can be a way to comment on what has been read. Annotations are not searchable within the database. It can be a useful tool to give feedback to the note creator without creating any new ideas. An annotation is indicated by a yellow box and the author of the annotation is indicated.

Figure 12: Annotations
**Find and Search**

The database offers a tool to search and find notes. This can be a way to navigate through the database which is helpful when trying to link concepts and ideas. Rise-above notes can be created using this tool which will draw notes together which are linked by problems, keywords, or titles. It can also be used as a tool to find notes that remain unread.

![Search and Notification](image)

Figure 13: Search Tool

The searchable fields include, keyword, title, problem, support, group, date created, date last modified, unread by self, note refers to my note, status and accessibility.

**Attachments**

Attachments can be inserted into any note or view including pictures (jpeg), movies (mpeg), and text. Digital movies and photographs can be taken to help illustrate a concept or idea and attached to the note or simply displayed within the view.

**Creating a Critical Knowledge Building Environment—Dialogue, On and Offline**

Knowledge building is meant to be a collaborative workspace. It gives opportunity for multivocality and multiple perspectives. Although it is a shared space and offers an opportunity for collaboration, multiple perspectives and voice, this is not always the case due to a lack of criticality recognized and the power relations that exist within the database and
within the classrooms where this software is implemented. There may be some students who do not feel comfortable taking the risk to post their ideas. Still others, particularly in the younger grades or with limited skill in the language of instruction, may be inhibited from sharing their ideas clearly.

The situatedness of dialogue, considered as a discursive practice, means that the dialogical relation depends not only upon what people are saying to each other, but the context in which they come together (the classroom or the cafeteria, for example), where they are positioned in relation to each other (standing, sitting, or communicating online), and what other gestures or activities work with or against the grain of the interaction”. (Burbules, 2000: 264).

Students’ voices can be validated through the sharing of ideas. Knowledge building is social and all knowledge is assumed to be public and shared within the database. This sharing is also meant to be modeled and upheld through classroom dynamics. Scardamalia and Bereiter (1994) suggest that knowledge building offers entry points for all ages and ability levels in a classroom.

When networks cross classroom boundaries, younger students question and challenge older ones. Those not proficient with language can represent ideas graphically or copy and edit text from other notes to express their own ideas. Less knowledgeable students can contribute through their questions and their supportive comments. Although no medium is culturally neutral, open systems like [Knowledge Forum] offer opportunity for culturally different students to appropriate\textsuperscript{34} ideas in their own ways and for their own uses. (1994:278)

Of course, these assumptions do not take into account the prior knowledge, skills or experiences necessary for students to access this knowledge or information within the database which will dictate the student’s amount or type of participation. For instance, a student in grade three whose first language is other than English, will likely not be at the same level of

\textsuperscript{34} Using the term “appropriate” in terms of ideas is likened to an act of aggression and colonization by Dei (2002) when addressing issues related to indigenous knowledges and the appropriation of these knowledges.
English language skill as another student whose first language is English. Similarly, if all students are asked to make visual representations of their ideas, there will be varying levels of skill to create images on a computer. If the students who are yet unable to communicate effectively in written text are told to use pictures to tell their stories or ideas, then the other students in the classroom will be publicly aware of the different levels each student is at rather than discreetly handing work into the teacher. Class discussions can be a way to overcome this difference in that often, at a younger age, students can communicate more effectively orally than in writing. Still, there are issues around confidence speaking in a group, cultural traditions in which children are taught to sit quietly to show obedience rather than to verbally and publicly challenge their teachers or classmates.

Class discussions can be held in a circle so that all faces are seen and all voices can be heard. The discourse within the database is carried through into the class so that discussions begin to have the similar structure of building onto previous ideas, sharing of voice and space, as well as further participation and engagement. Students are taught that there is no right or wrong idea, only improvable ideas. In critical knowledge building, the principle of improvable ideas is altered in the sense that ideas are partial and rather than working towards completeness, the interpretation of the idea works towards inclusivity without essentializing notions of identity and representation. Classroom discussions can take on a different dynamic veering from the traditional class in which a teacher asks a question and student responds with the one correct answer.

The aim of a knowledge building classroom is not to facilitate discussions centred on the teacher accepting or discounting an idea but rather to create an atmosphere where all class members can build onto the ideas of other classmates and where a student can as easily facilitate a discussion as a teacher. This concept can lead to participation from students who
normally feel apprehensive about sharing ideas since there is an understanding that there is not one right answer but rather a series of ideas that improve upon each other with the goal of moving the group forward in terms of understanding, idea development and knowledge. Responsibility is collective and shared. This model is problematic when considering an idea that is racist or biased in nature. In this case, the concept of improvement does not work since a racial slur is not an idea that is improved upon but rather one that is challenged. Improvement suggests that the initial idea, or the idea the provokes the subsequent ideas, is improvable and can be enhanced through the sharing and building on of other ideas rather than one that can be dangerous or detrimental to a person’s or group’s well being.

Reeve (2001) refers to the practice of “Crosstalk” which was implemented in knowledge building classrooms as a way to talk about the knowledge offline:

In the version of Crosstalk that developed in these classrooms there was typically a set of rules and processes that became associated with this design feature. The children sat in a circle along with the teacher. The teacher was treated as an equal member of the group, meaning they (Sic.) needed to raise their (Sic.) hand to speak. No one could raise his or hand to speak until the previous person had finished speaking. The talk was based not on a topic but instead on a problem of understanding or knowledge advance from one of the members of the class. When the group would move off of the problem of understanding or knowledge advance that they had started with, then the teacher would come out of the Crosstalk to re-establish the focus of the group. (15).

Eventually, students can also take the responsibility to lead discussions and Crosstalks by refocusing the group.

Another design feature of a Knowledge Forum classroom Reeve describes is “Reciprocal Reading” (2001:23). He explains that throughout the process of knowledge building, students will have to inform their ideas using texts from a higher grade level or information from the
Internet. *Reciprocal Reading* is a process that would allow students to read a difficult passage in groups, reviewing any words or ideas that were complicated.

...all students receive a photocopy of the reading. Each child would read a sentence or paragraph (or the group would read silently) then the reader would ask if anyone didn't understand any words in the passage. Then they would ask if there were any new, important or interesting information that they should record in their notebooks or in the database. (23)

This supports the concept that knowledge building is collaborative and based in shared responsibility. Students know they are supported and can call upon classmates to work through problems of understanding related to difficult texts or notions.

A further design feature in some knowledge building classrooms is portfolio assessment. Students created portfolios within the database to track their growth. Often the portfolio views "were divided into three sections, one for knowledge growth, one for notes they were proud of, and a final section on reflection notes about themselves as knowledge builders" (Reeve, 2001:25). Just as students take responsibility for shared knowledge building and continual idea improvement, they are also responsible for monitoring and reflecting on their own growth throughout the process. "Students learn to identify their own beliefs, bring those beliefs into contact with others' beliefs and are proud of being in charge of their own learning" (Lamon, Reeve, Scardamalia, 2001:2).

These many features and experiences using Knowledge Forum to promote knowledge building in elementary classrooms are all democratizing experiences and collaborative efforts and yet, there is no indication of the need for dialogue and the problematizing of dialogue within these structures. Dialogue is believed to be an "inherently liberatory pedagogy" and "that if there are unresolved power differentials or unexamined silences and omissions within a dialogue, simply persisting with the same forms of dialogical exchange can bring them to light" is problematic.
(Burbules, 2000: 252). The social construction of knowledge within the knowledge building classroom without examining the social structures within that classroom and the various histories and contexts from which students speak and write, will prove to limit participation of all members into all dialogues.

A dialogue, like knowledge, like community, like identity, is always partial and fragmented, shared and changing. The content and the context, the participants and place, all need to be considered. To move forward towards the goal of idea improvement is a linear image and yet, critical knowledge building is a web of knowledge, experience, and partiality that expand thought and idea, practice and participation, beyond the narrow limits of a traditional classroom.

**Critical Knowledge Building in an Elementary Social Studies Classroom**

Scardamalia and Bereiter suggest that it is “The job of an elementary school class that adopts a knowledge building approach...to construct an understanding of the world as the students know it” (1999, 277). Much of the research in Knowledge Building classrooms has been in the Science and Technology curriculum (Lamon, Reeve and Scardamalia, 2001; Messina: 2001; Moreau: 2001; Reeve: 2001; Scardamalia: 2002). Science, often based in discovery, inquiry and theory, lends itself to knowledge building by its very nature. History, or social studies in the elementary panel, is often presented as a series of facts to be memorized. In Bickmore’s description of the social studies classroom (1991), she explains the typical classroom whereby the teacher stands at the front of the room relaying these facts (1). She suggests, “Students can

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35 Science is often viewed as objective and easily theorized but in fact, even science is biased. What knowledge is considered or even who is attributed to that knowledge is caught up in issues of power and prestige.
produce or contest knowledge in such a classroom, but it’s exceptional rather than essential” (1).

The theorizing and inquiry can come into play when a critical approach is applied to the “facts” of the historical texts and how these “facts” have influenced bias, stereotypes and falsehoods around the development of cultures, people, and our understanding of the world. Bickmore further suggests that social studies from a critical perspective can offer an alternative:

Radical critics of the social studies curriculum point out the value-laden nature of what is taken for knowledge...When knowledge about human events is taken as neutral and indisputable, and the teacher and textbook are taken as “the” authorities on that knowledge, then conflict is essentially expunged from the curriculum. (1991:4)

Dei identifies the importance of history when engaging in antiracist and inclusive education:

History teaches us valuable lessons about the importance of understanding the diverse social realities and the contributions of all peoples. There are many lessons in history. History must teach us. If it does not, then it is not history worth talking about. We must not only reclaim marginalized histories, but also do new readings of dominant histories to restore and rewrite what was once excluded. (Dei, 1996:15)

Participants engaged in the project will be asked to dialogue, theorize, and question history through a knowledge building community where text, fact, and ideas are improvable, critiqued and reconstructed. All participants have a voice and as a result, all have a stake in the knowledge they construct together.

Thinking critically about stereotypes, historical texts, and preconceptions is imperative when using an antiracist framework in the social science curriculum. By using knowledge building in

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36 Again, this concept is based on an ideal and will prove to be difficult to implement as there are always reasons why some participate and others do not.
the classroom to theorize about stereotypes, historical texts, and preconceptions, students will have the opportunity to examine not only their own ideas, but also the ideas of others and the textbooks, which claim to provide truth and fact. To do so, would require a teacher to begin that critical dialogue for even if students know differently or have the experience to challenge the representation which is partial but presented as whole, the students will often shy away from this conflict and challenge. To set up a classroom where representations whether in printed text or by a teacher or classmate can be challenged and students rise to that challenge is to create democracy. It requires an abdication of power on the part of the teacher and an acceptance of and willingness to engage in those challenges.

In bell hooks’ book, *Black Looks: Race and Representation*, she discusses the concept of the Other.

> Those progressive White intellectuals who are particularly critical of “essentialist” notions of identity when writing about mass culture, race, and gender have not focused their critiques on White identity and the way essentialism informs representations of Whiteness. It is always the non-White, or in some cases the non-heterosexual Other, who is guilty of essentialism. (hooks, 1992:30)

It is this notion of explorer, traveler or researcher of the Other which predominates the heritage and citizenship strand of the social science curriculum. From “Traditions and Celebrations” in grade two to “Aboriginal Peoples and European Explorers” in grade six which invite the learner to consume the other by celebrating diversity, the “discovery of the Americas” or the ancient civilizations—these perspectives fail to implicate or recognize the roles of exploration, discovery, colonialism or imperialism as they relate to the idea consumption in relation to these topics.

The use of the problem field within the Knowledge Forum notes is particularly useful when working within an antiracism framework in social studies. This is a place where the critical antiracist educator can bring awareness to the assumptions participants make with respect to
omissions in historical texts and false representations. Once this type of questioning is introduced by the critical antiracist educator, the participants can begin to question these texts and validity they hold.

For example, participants may question why there is no indication that Muslim people had a role during the Medieval Times. Many of the resources geared towards this grade four curriculum focus on the castle, the kings and queens, knights and war but make no mention and certainly fail to recognize against whom those wars were waged.

This issue arose in a class where I was working. The students were working on the social studies topic of Medieval Times and there were two Muslim girls who had chosen the topic of celebrations during Medieval Times. They were busily writing about Christmas celebrations and I asked them if they thought there were any holidays for Muslim people to which they responded, “There weren’t any Muslim people in the medieval times”. This began a thorough investigation as to the role of the Muslim world during this time in history. The problem can be expressed as, “Why don’t the books we look at give any information about Muslim people?” This lends itself to a critical inquiry-based approach to social studies. Although the above scenario required the intervention of an antiracist educator, by placing these notes and problems within an online database where all participants can read the notes, follow and take part in the inquiry, this type of questioning can become the norm. The notes can contain problems and questions rather than the restating of “facts” from history texts.

The partial nature of knowledge will be interrogated within the practice of critical knowledge building. Minnich (1990) asserts, “A part defined as a whole leaves no place for anything that

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37 A discussion of “constructive use of authoritative texts”, one of the indicators of knowledge building, is in Chapter 6, Knowledge Sharing, Knowledge Building and the Dialogue of Value, in the section, Cultural Capital and Indigenous Knowledge.
differs from it. All else must, then, be squeezed into similarity with the defining part, or remain
Other to it, outside it, in no-place, no-time” (147). By creating a space where knowledge is
recognized as partial, always improvable and continually refined and developed based on the
ideas of others, partiality is the norm. There is no completeness in critical knowledge building,
only movement towards refinement. All ideas are improvable. All knowledge is negotiable.
Collaboration and multiple perspectives are necessary for this to happen.

Bereiter and Scardamalia (1993) recognize that formal knowledge is negotiable knowledge:

Formal knowledge is created through social processes of justification, criticism, and argument. In other words, it starts life as something public, rather than
becoming public after having gestated in individual minds. We refer to formal
knowledge as ‘negotiable’ knowledge, using that term in several senses: formal
knowledge arises through processes akin to negotiation, it is something people
can negotiate about, and it is negotiable in the sense that it can be transferred,
exchanged, even purchased for money 38(62).

Bereiter and Scardamalia recognize the power of knowledge as well as access to knowledge in
terms of capital and cultural capital. Bereiter and Scardamalia would consider critical pedagogy
as falling in the realm of what they call “belief mode”, which teaches students “to turn a critical
eye on beliefs, to use evidence and logic, to resist propaganda, and they provide them with the
background knowledge needed to evaluate truth claims” (2003: 4), whereas, knowledge
building resides in the local of “design mode” whose essence is idea improvement. Within the
context of critical education, truth claims and facts must be questioned and challenged and
made explicit in light of the hegemony which exists in our schools and society. Beliefs, like
ideas, are placed within the context of which beliefs are valued, and which are subjugated.

Questioning the reliability of expectations and why certain stories are valued and documented
as knowledge to be attained within the social studies curriculum is another goal of critical
knowledge building in a critical antiracism social studies classroom. It is not only the explicit curriculum of the Ontario curriculum documents, but the hidden curriculum\textsuperscript{39}, which influences all other processes in the classroom and which can be impacted by the practice of critical knowledge building by broadening the scope of investigation, questioning historical texts, and understanding multiple perspectives rather than ethnocentric representations of historical facts. It is the understanding that knowledge is negotiable and not absolute.

Summary

This chapter engages in a review of pertinent literature that relates to the practices of critical antiracism education and knowledge building. It addresses commonalities with the two practices in terms of collaboration, multivocality, critiquing, agency, safety, community and the recognition of the partiality of knowledge and as such, critiques the limitations of knowledge building.

Dei’s principles for antiracism (1996) are compared with several of Scardamalia’s principles of knowledge building (2002) to illustrate the convergent and divergent themes between both practices. Knowledge building is framed within critical pedagogy (Giroux, 1988; Freire, 2002; Kincheloe and McLaren, 2000) whereby power and privilege are made explicit through theories such as cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1993) and partial knowledge (Minnich, 1990).

The role of the teacher is similar in both practices in that the teacher enables a classroom culture of collaboration, community building, and shared expertise/voice. Community is defined collectively but also allows for the expression of the individual—a caution is raised to

\textsuperscript{38} Refer back to Chapter Two section, Knowledge as Cultural Capital.

\textsuperscript{39} Refer to the section, in this chapter, The Explicit and Implicit Curriculum-Knowing, Learning, Critiquing for a further discussion related to the hidden curriculum.
see community as perhaps having common goals but not without its differences. Community development needs to be dialogic if it is to be a critical community.

Various functions and features of Knowledge Forum are explained including: views, notes, scaffolds and scaffold supports, build-on notes, rise-above notes, problems, keywords, referencing and quoting, annotating, find and search and using attachments in Knowledge Forum. These structures impact the classroom through the online database but also class discussions, on and offline.

Finally, using Knowledge Forum to enable a critical practice in social studies is examined through the necessary engagement with historical texts and understandings as a place to begin to understand privilege, power and the partiality of knowledge.

The following chapter describes and provides a rationale for my methodology of critical action research within a qualitative frame as well as the increased reflexivity through autoethnography. My location as a critical educator/researcher is also addressed in Chapter Three. The convergent themes of collaboration and multi-vocality inform the methodological processes in this research project.
Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY

Location of Researcher

...And once we pose it as a problem of representation, we see that not only are speaking for and speaking about analytically close, so too are the practices of speaking for others and speaking for myself. For, in speaking for myself, I am also representing myself in a certain way, as occupying a specific subject-position, having certain characteristics and not others, and so on. In speaking for myself, I (momentarily) create my self—just as much as when I speak for others I create their selves—in the sense that I create a public discursive self, which will in most cases have an effect on the self experiences as interiority. Even if someone never hears the discursive self I present of them they may be affected by the decisions others make after hearing it. The point is that a kind of representation occurs in all cases of speaking for, whether I am speaking for myself or for others, that this representation is never a simple act of discovery, and that it will most likely have an impact on the individual so represented. (Alcoff, 1991-1992:9-10)

My position of researcher in this project cannot be separated from the analysis and writing of the project. With every project, even in one like this where the interpretation of events is negotiated and recycled through all participants throughout the process, the project still is impacted and guided my positionality, my experiences and the way I construct meaning. Dei states,

Every writer is a positioned subject actively engaged in constructing meaning and interpretations. All personal and educational journeys (like human experiences) have material consequences. How one is positioned is crucial to how we understand and interpret social reality. The acknowledgement of one’s subject positions and identities (class, gender, race, sexuality) is relevant to understanding how politics shape human experiences and enunciation of social reality. (1999: 396-397)

Smith suggests that “researchers must go further than simply recognizing personal beliefs and assumptions, and the effect they have when interacting with people” (1999:173). The researcher must ask important questions relating to ownership of the project in terms of
defining the research problem, relevance to participants, and accountability. My role as an antiracist educator is also pivotal in this project. It is in this role that I position myself to ensure that the knowledge building is critical in nature. Through methods of data collection and multiple forms of validity applied to the research design, data collection and data analysis, I made every effort to ensure face validity, catalytic validity, and construct validity (Lather, 1986).

How I identify myself established my positionality within the project. Angrosino and Pays de Pérez address this concept: “Interaction is always a tentative process that involves the continuous testing by all participants of the conceptions they have of the roles of others...ethnographers and their collaborators do not step into fixed and fully defined positions; rather, their behaviours and expectations of each other are part of a dynamic process that continues to grow” (2000:683). This fluid, contextualized identity will influence the interactions, the observations and data I report and the project itself.

**Insider/ Outsider**

I see myself as both insider and outsider. I am part of the education community and at the time of this project, I was an employee within the same district school board. I am a colleague of the teacher whose class participated in the project. We were members of the same teachers’ federation and as such, are accountable to each other to be professional at all times. I was not an employee of this school but I had developed a rapport with several of the staff including the principal and secretary in the office due to my two years at the school working on the technology project. For all of these reasons, I would consider myself very much inside although there are just as many reasons why I was an outsider.

I am outside as far as I am defined as a “researcher”. The school is located in an area which is predominantly and historically Jewish, although the Jewish people who live in this area do not
attend this school nor would they necessarily recognize me as a Jew since I do not belong to the Jewish orthodoxy. As an antiracist educator, I am an outsider to the staff. There is no explicit antiracist practice which occurs at this school. As an antiracist educator-researcher, I am in a place of risk—challenging status quo and bringing forth new ideas, encouraging questions that have not been asked. My role, in this classroom, is pivotal since Sonja, the teacher whose class is studied in this project, just as the other teachers in the school, did not have the mandate, or the experience, as an antiracist educator. Sonja was willing to be a participant but my role was essential to ensure that a critical perspective was always present in all dialogue and discovery or at least questioned as to its absence.

Ulichny (1997) asserts,

...the membership accorded a researcher may not be that of a total inside. ...The nature of her work, the different obligations within the work structure, and the temporary affiliation often prescribed by the researcher's career keep the action researcher somewhere between insider and outsider. The roles or functions that she can adopt need to be created, negotiated, and multiple. (165)

I may define myself within multiple roles and places but all participants, students, classroom teacher, school principal, add to this role by their own interpretations of who I am and this impacts the project.

**Collaboration throughout the Process**

I recognize my position as researcher is one of power while acknowledging my responsibility in this position of power to share my observations, findings and data with those participating in the study and create a climate of collaboration throughout the research process. The project itself came from my involvement and invitation to the school the year prior by the school principal. The design and direction of the project was determined throughout the process and all participants were invited to participate in naming the direction of the project. It was
through the collaborative process of critical knowledge building that the project developed which ultimately meant compromise in terms of what my aspirations were for the content covered within the social studies curriculum as well as tensions through that negotiation.

All participants—myself, the students, and the classroom teacher—had access to observations through the database notes. There was a view established within the database where concerns, ideas for the direction and development of the project were to be shared among all participants. To account for varying degrees of comfort with the technology, various methods, such as focus groups, classroom discussions and direct instruction on the use of the software and other necessary applications also informed the direction of the project as a way to continually reflect and take action where needed. Through methods of reporting back and continuous dissemination of research observations to the participants through the database, email and discussion, I acknowledged the participants’ role in the project to maintain relevance to the participants’ needs and learning.

As a critical researcher, I must attempt to give voice to participants rather than continue a legacy of silence. One way to do this is through researcher reflexivity which is conducive to the practice of action research in that it is comprised of cycles of action and reflection.

...adopting a position that one should only speak for oneself raises similarly problematic questions. For example, we might ask, if I don’t speak for those less privileged than myself, am I abandoning my political responsibility to speak out against oppression, a responsibility incurred by the very fact of my privilege. If I should not speak for others, should I restrict myself to following their lead uncritically? Is my greatest contribution to move over and get out of the way? And if so, what is the best way to do this—to keep silent or to deconstruct my own discourse? (Alcoff, 1991:1992:8).

Although the teacher/researcher journal view in the database offered the opportunity to post ideas and reflections regarding the process, it was also problematic since students, who did have access to the view, would not necessarily be able to access the content as the discussions
between Sonja and myself were done so at a higher level of discourse. It was for this reason we discussed issues with the students in classroom discussions rather than waiting for them to read our notes. As Alcoff suggests, this is in some ways speaking for others but at the same time, allowing for access to the content and problems in a way that is conducive to the collaborative nature of critical action research but also critical knowledge building. In addition, following the project, the classroom teacher and I met to discuss the major findings to determine if my understanding of the findings was in line with her own. There are times of course, as a critical researcher, that one must “move over and get out of the way” but this is done when the decision is made to tell some stories and not others in order to protect participants and the relationships at the site of the research.

Throughout the project, Sonja and I debriefed following each one-hour classroom visit. These discussions we had changed and became more dynamic following the December break. Sonja and I would discuss what we did that day—what worked and what didn’t work and how we were going to move forward. These discussions extended to the classroom with particular incidents such as inappropriate use of notes in the database, content and the responsibility of student research posted in the notes as well as uses of authoritative texts. We discussed an issue using the knowledge building structure whereby each member would build on the previous person’s contribution or idea. Students were also able to bring in a new idea or opinion. These discussions were also modeled in the focus group sessions. When decisions are made on how to change or move the group forward, it must be a collaborative process supported through dialogue, on or offline. It is through this repeated process of dialogue that the project, as well as my own insights into the project and my role as researcher is reflexive,
reflective and action oriented. The participant gaze is addressed through dialogue with the participant. The very act of dialogue, within the knowledge building framework where all members are listened to and heard, confronts silencing directly.

Harding (1991) suggests, “See the participants in the inquiry as ‘gazing back’” (Quoted in Olesen (2000:230). Again, this must be done in such a way that the researcher does not assume what that gaze will see. Rather, in the context of this project, the reflective process, the observations, and results, will be shared throughout. In addition, the reflexivity of my own role as the antiracist educator/researcher in this project will be addressed through a process of autoethnography.

**Participant/Observer-Relationship Facilitator**

My role was multifaceted in this process. As the researcher, attempting to complete a doctoral dissertation, I was an observer. Reflexivity was addressed through continual reflections, dialogue and actions to move the project forward and to establish an engaged learning environment for the students with which I worked.

As an educator, it was my goal to ensure a positive learning environment for the students but I could not establish this alone. It was a collaborative process with Sonja and the students. In this way, I was a participant.

I was an instructor showing the teacher and students how the software worked and how other applications were implemented to support our knowledge building environment. I was by no means an expert in knowledge building and Sonja had training in her pre-service teacher education in the use of Knowledge Forum, although she had not used the program in three

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40 A further discussion of this change is addressed in Chapter Five, in the section, The Teacher: Building Trust, Building a Relationship and Negotiating with Power.
years prior to this project. In this way, the students, Sonja, and I worked together collaboratively to move the group and the project forward.

As a colleague and a member of the same bargaining unit, Sonja and I were in a place of tension. I watched her teaching practices, and at times questioned them although I could not, as a teacher myself evaluate her practice in any way.

Alongside the other participants, I worked towards a successful experience in this research. Success, from my point of view, means student engagement, professional development for Sonja and the researcher, reflection on practice, a collaborative environment, and a shared responsibility between all participants to reach the goals established. These goals were co-determined and always changing. The project shaped my practice as it did Sonja’s practice. My role was continually developing and changing in that some days I was leading and other days, in the background. It was the goal of this project that expertise and knowledge be shared between all participants, throughout the process. Observations were encouraged from all participants. I was committed to this process with the realization that I would continue to develop as an educational practitioner, as a researcher, and as a student.

**Participants**

**Participant Recruitment and Selection**

This project involved one class in the elementary panel as well as Sonja, the teacher assigned to that class. Participants included students, a classroom teacher and myself, as the participant researcher. The sample size fluctuated throughout the course of the research and was dependent on the size of class. The school had a high student turn-over rate. In the span of the research project, four students left and eight new students joined the classroom throughout the year. On average, the sample size was N=30.
I had a two-year relationship with Lakeview Public School\footnote{This is a pseudonym for the school.} as I had previously volunteered at the school in order to inform my own research project as well as support the implementation of the Apple Learning Project at Lakeview. The project was proposed to the Toronto District School Board. This process was done through application to do research which includes a summary of the research project similar to the research protocol. When applying to the board, this school was proposed in which case, the application to the board was signed by the thesis supervisor, researcher and principal of the school. In this way, the principal’s consent to participate in the research project was secured. I sent the principal an email requesting a phone conversation, prior to application at the board and he offered verbal consent during this phone call to go forward with the application process. The initiatives in this project were linked to school improvement plans at Lakeview Public School, which was already engaged in an Apple Learning Project involving Knowledge Forum software.

Within the class, meeting social studies expectations is a requirement for all elementary students in Ontario. Participation in this research project was voluntary in so far as each student’s parent(s) and/or legal guardian(s) granted consent. Due to the fact that student participants were minors, participation was dependent upon a signed informed letter of consent from parent(s) and/or legal guardian(s) for each student as well as a signed assent script from each student participant. Although the work done by students was in line with curriculum expectations, if consent to participate was not granted, the data produced by those non-participants would not be used in the study. All students and their parent(s) and/or legal guardian(s) granted consent.
Class selection occurred by a teacher on staff volunteering to participate. An informed letter of consent is included for the teacher participant (Appendix 4). Fine, Weis, Weseen, Wong (2000) recognize the informed consent as a "crude tool—a conscience—to remind us of our accountability and position" (113). They suggest that although this tool is created to protect the participants, it is also a tool to protect the researcher, thus continuing the imbalance of power between researcher and participant⁴⁵.

There were not specific inclusion or exclusion criteria other than participants had to be willing to participate in all aspects of the study indicated in the informed letters of consent. Additionally, these letters communicated that participants could drop out of the study at any time without being questioned or penalized in any way. No participants withdrew from the project other than students who left the school throughout the year.

Anonymity of Participants

Only the principal investigator, Debbie Donsky, had access to the initial consent to participate documents. Throughout the project, all participants were aware of which participant has contributed within the database. This was part of classroom work and did not put participants at risk. When reported on, all data remained anonymous and confidential. Data from emails, journals, and focus groups was reported as group or anonymous individual data. Identifying characteristics (participant names) were to be changed by the researcher into codes before any analysis was completed. Students used their real names in the Knowledge Forum database but their names were changed to codes when the entries are transferred to the Analytic Toolkit for analysis. Any quotations used in dissemination of data used pseudonyms. It is important to

⁴² The class selection process and the inherent power which impacted this selection are addressed in Chapter Five, *The Politics of Power and Precarious Places*. 

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note here that the classroom teacher could not be anonymous to those reading the report back to the school as she was the only teacher participant. This “risk” is identified in the teacher letter of informed consent and particular sensitivity and respect were used when reporting on issues related to that teacher. As well, the actions of the school principal also impacted the course of the project. His influence and therefore lack of anonymity is also recognized.

Focus groups were audio-taped. The tapes were subsequently transcribed and notes are stored in locked files and will be shredded and disposed of five years after the conclusion of this study. The focus group audio tapes were erased. Participant identity will remain confidential in all scholarly publications and public presentations. A summary of results were made available from Debbie Donsky by the fall of 2005 to the classroom teacher and students who participated. Throughout the research process, summaries of the implementation process were shared with all participants within the database in the “Teacher/Researcher” view. In this reporting, the participants had the opportunity to comment on observations made by the researcher and provide input to the research process to provide face validity. In this reporting, any observations made maintained participant anonymity.

**Methodological Approach**

Action research has been chosen after much deliberation. This research is designed to be “change-focused, collaborative and an iterative” (Lau, 1998). It takes the “research as praxis” approach (Freire, 2002, Lather, 1986b) to make change from a collaborative process of review, implementation and design. In partnership with students and the classroom teacher, this project aimed to increase student engagement, access to technology, and professional development.
Qualitative Approach to Research

Denzin and Lincoln (2000) suggest that there is a struggle "to connect qualitative research to the hopes, needs, goals, and promises of a free democratic society" (3). They define qualitative research as:

...a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world in to a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in there natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomenon in terms of the means people bring to them. (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000:3)

The qualitative approach of this study falls within the post-positivist paradigm but is hybrid in nature as it brings together knowledge building within the constructivist paradigm and antiracist pedagogy within the critical paradigm (Mertens, 1998). Although these two paradigms may be seen as competing for different realities, both ask that the participants take into consideration their own experiences. Both value multiple realities depending on whose story is told and whose understanding or idea is considered. The critical paradigm takes the context beyond the individual and asks that the participants and researchers consider the historical context of the situation and the various oppressions which exist and are perpetuated through the structures that exist within the setting, the research itself, and the narrative which is told.

Qualitative research recognizes the role of the researcher in creating representations\(^{43}\) of phenomena. It is an interpretive practice and is dependent on the researcher's place and position. By creating space for multiple interpretations and representations from the

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\(^{43}\) The "crisis of representation” is referred to in the section below, *Validity in the Research.*
participants, the researcher responds to the responsibility of the research. Researcher reflexivity is a necessary component to ensure validity and rigour in the project.

**Critical Approach**

Lather (1986b) identifies reciprocity in critical research as a precursor to the collection of rich data because “the researcher moves from the status of stranger to friend and thus is able to gather personal knowledge from subjects more easily” (263). This notion of “friend” is extended by Franzak (2002) in her discussion of the “Critical Friends Group”

In critical research, reciprocity ignites critical friendships,

where researcher and researched share in learning and inform one another’s praxis. This reciprocity is necessary to establish a “dialogic design where respondents are actively involved in the construction and validation of meaning” so that “critical inquiry is a fundamentally dialogic and mutually educative enterprise” (Lather, 1986b, 268). The entrance into a site, collection of data and interpretation of data is a collaborative experience where all participants negotiate meaning, identities and dialogue.

This project engaged in the discourse of knowledge as it is constructed, built, validated and legitimized through power structures and privilege within the school system and specifically in an elementary social studies classroom. It aimed to disrupt and transform these structures through the research process and the building of knowledge through a critical antiracist approach to the social studies curriculum.

By situating this study in the critical approach, the power that exists within the school—the power of the researcher, the power of the teacher and teaching practices, the lack of power that students hold, the power of the school principal—the research asked that all involved

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Franzak’s (2002) concept of “Critical Friends” helps to explain the process that the classroom teacher and I endured, as discussed in Chapter Five in the section, *The Teacher: Building Trust, Building a Relationship and Negotiating with Power.*
look beyond their own experiences into the subjugated knowledges which can inform their learning, their interpretation of truth, and give access to the culture of power and cultural capital to students involved in the project.

**Action Research Approach**

Greenwood and Levin (2000) suggest, “For action researchers, social inquiry aims to generate knowledge and action in support of liberating social change” (94). Kemmis and McTaggart (2000) explain that participatory action research is “participatory in the sense that people can do action research only ‘on’ themselves, individually or collectively. It is not research done ‘on’ others” (597). In this sense, aspects of this project were participatory action research in which I reflected on and analyzed my role as a critical antiracist researcher/teacher. There were points in which this role was reflected on collaboratively between myself and the classroom teacher and moments when I did this individually. “It is a process in which each individual in a group tries to get a handle on the ways his or her knowledge shapes his or her sense of identity and agency and reflects critically on how that present knowledge frames and constrains his or her action” (Kemmis and McTaggart, 2000:597).

One method for reporting and reflecting on my role was autoethnography (see the next section and chapter 8). As expressed by Ramsey (2005), “the telling of ‘my’ story automatically becomes the telling of multiple stories, the co-ordination of these different stories can be clearly seen and the creation of joint action is an obvious process of negotiation and consultation” (282).

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45 Stacey (1991) cautions the researcher in becoming too friendly and thus compromising the validity of the data.
Critical Action Research

In another sense, this project is critical action research which differs from action research in that I have to question my own positionality and bias as well as the power I hold as researcher in this classroom setting and the other power structures which serve to uphold the status quo. Critical action research also recognizes that students have power and can use this power to create change and take action themselves. It encourages students to participate and reflect on their own positionalities within the classroom, the school and the larger community. It is meant to create change by considering catalytic and face validity for the classroom but also for the students as individuals with agency.

When I analyzed the participants’ notes and their discussions in the classroom, I was, according to Smith (1999), “being proactive…becoming involved as an interested worker for change” (147). Noffke (1995) explains that “action research is cyclical…it assumes that understandings and actions emerge in a constant cycle…it is public and collaborative [and that] a result of this process can be the recognition of the power of working together, across the myriad of differences, in building new networks of communication” (pp 4-5). Noffke argues that action research goes hand-in-hand with democratic schooling. Freire’s notion of praxis (2002) is described by Lather as “the dialectical tension, the interactive, reciprocal shaping of theory and practice…at the centre of emancipatory social science” (1986b, 258). It is the notion that researchers cannot speak for those who are researched. There is no absolute, no truth, as would be claimed within the positivist research paradigm, but only “word…work…action reflection” (Freire, 2002:88).

“For researchers with emancipatory aspirations, doing empirical research offers a powerful opportunity for praxis to the extent that the research process enables people to change by encouraging self-reflection and a deeper understanding of their particular positions” (Lather, 1986b: 263).
Kemmis and McTaggart (2000) suggest that participatory action research involves “a spiral of self-reflective cycles of:

- planning a change,
- acting and observing the process and consequences of the change,
- reflecting on these processes and consequences, and then
- replanning,
- acting and observing,
- reflecting, and so on…

In reality, the process may not be as neat as the spiral of self-contained cycles of planning, action and observing, and reflecting suggest. The stages overlap, and initial plans quickly become obsolete in the light of learning from experience. In reality, the process is likely to be more fluid, open, and responsive. The criterion of success if not whether participants have followed the stops faithfully, but whether they have a strong and authentic sense of development and evolution in their practices, their understandings of their practices, and the situations they practice. (595)

They go on to suggest that the reflection can be done collaboratively or individually but that ultimately it is a collaborative process that reflects upon a social process. For collaboration to happen there must be trust. My participation in this process necessarily influences the methodology. Despite the effort to make a collaborative environment, this did not happen until later in the process while the trust between the classroom teacher and me developed.

As our relationship developed, so too did these collaborative reflections. After each classroom visit, Sonja and I would reflect on what we did that day. Through email and the teacher/researcher journal view in the database, Sonja and I would exchange reflections on where we were and where we wanted to go. We had different concerns and yet, when these concerns were brought together, the changes that happened, and the action that ensued was dynamic.
I had expressed concerns around Sonja's level of engagement with the project and she was concerned about the students' understanding of expectations. Through this collaborative process, we came to understand that one hour a week on the computers was not enough to move this group forward. Sonja began reinforcing skills such as how to deal with non-fiction texts, research on the Internet, skills and norms from the Tribes program in the school, and collaborative work skills in her classroom. This began to affect the momentum of the project and the students' engagement with the software, the content as well as each other. They were more attentive in classroom discussions and more respectful of each other's ideas and opinions.

In reflecting collaboratively through discussion, Sonja and I would simply think about what had happened during that session and how we would address both the positive and negative things we saw happening, whether it was how the students were responding to each other or how they were finding information in texts. When online in the teacher/researcher view, scaffold supports were used to direct the reflection. The scaffold supports in this view were: Date, Observations, Theories, Implications, Next Steps, the Plan, Other Ideas, What do you think? and, Putting our knowledge together... These served to guide the reflection and then encourage feedback from each other to again, move us towards better collaboration.

Critical action research "has a strong commitment to participation as well as to the social analyses in the critical social science tradition that reveal the disempowerment and injustice created in industrialized societies" (Kemmis and McTaggart, 2000: 569). It is "self-reflective collective self-study of practice, the way language is used, organization and power in a local situation, and action to improve things" (Kemmis and McTaggart, 2000: 568). This project is action oriented which is in line with the transformative discourses of both antiracism education and knowledge building. The project aims to influence and increase student
engagement; increase access to and integration of technology; and professional development for staff in terms of methods for implementing antiracist strategies in classroom practice. Kemmis and McTaggart (2000) review some of the criticism of critical action research: “critical action research may simply be yet another vehicle for the imperialism of academic (patriarchal) discourses over participants’ own ways of describing and engaging in their own experience” (569). Considering the critical frame of this project and the reflexivity as well as collaborative elements included, it is hoped that it is not another form of imperialist discourse.

Ulichny (1997) suggests that the goal of:

...empowering the teachers to become prime movers in the restructuring process meant implementing the project as a type of participatory action research (PAR), where participants in the field of inquiry are engaged in constructing both the knowledge about their situation and actions to change it. (142)

In addition, in the case of this project, there needed to be a level of trust before the power implicit in my role, as researcher, as experienced teacher, as “friend” of the administration, could be questioned or challenged in any way. I invited the collaboration of the classroom teacher and students but the structures that existed beyond the project and inherent in the project whether by my actions, my identity or the interpretations of my actions or identity, would challenge the authenticity of that invitation.

The research questions were focused in three areas: (1) the curriculum—hidden, explicit and transformative—; (2) dialogue and knowledge sharing; and (3) the roles and relationships which influence this project. Patterns of dialogue and participation as well as what knowledge is valued in curriculum content, the changing roles in the project and the relationships developed within this community are analyzed. Critical action research is suited to this research as the questions look at a change in pattern of participation and change in content and the

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taking up and reaction to antiracist and critical perspectives with the ultimate goal of improving student engagement and classroom practice. The project is local and looks to rupture the status quo in terms of how a grade three social studies program is taught and how it is taken up by the students and the teacher in the classroom. This project aims to transform first at the local level but to ultimately have a broader sphere of influence as the participants of the study, including myself, move into different classrooms and places in their lives.

**Autoethnography—the Reflective Story**

Autoethnography is an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural. Back and forth autoethnographers gaze, first through an ethnographic wide-angle lens, focusing outward on social and cultural aspects of their personal experience; then, they look inwards, exposing a vulnerable self that is moved by and may move through, refract, and resist cultural interpretations. (Ellis and Bochner, 2000: 733).

This is a critical project as it is designed to question power structures which exist in a school system, curriculum, school and classroom through a collaborative and reflective, action research oriented process. The project allows for dialogue and change throughout the project working towards catalytic validity. As I journey through the process of the project and all that affects this project, I know that my interpretation of the events that occurred in this project is telling the story of the project.

Conversations with participants impact the story, but ultimately, there are a series of subjectivities melding together to offer a story—one interpretation of a story. Despite my focus groups, discussions with students and the classroom teacher, reading and writing of notes, interactions with the school principal, ultimately, it is me who writes. Denzin asserts, “Writing is not an innocent practice” (2000a, 256). For each chapter I write and each story I tell, regardless of the recycling of data through the participants, it is still my story. It is the story
of a woman who has struggled through life changing moments, commitments and challenges, to complete this daunting task of a doctoral dissertation. Throughout the data analysis, there were moments that became autoethnographical. I was part of the conversation and therefore part of the story. Hooks writes about silence and suggests that there are the obvious and less obvious silences—the “less obvious are the inner struggles” (1990:340). The autoethnography is an attempt to speak from those less obvious places—the silence of the researcher and the inner struggles I had made obvious through my own reflective process.

**Methods**

Within critical research methodologies, the methods must be reflective of that critical goal, always searching for validity through multiple forms of data collection, and a collaborative effort from researcher to participant to ensure the catalytic and face validity of the project while recognizing positionality and power. The methods by which data was gathered are “the means and procedures through which the central problems of the research are addressed” (Smith, L. T., 1999:143). The choice to use focus groups allows for the collaboration in methods in line with the collaboration throughout the process of critical knowledge building. The methods are in line with both methodology and design, in this case, a critical action research methodology and design.

Triangulation of data was met by using several methods: Electronic mail (email) and journal entries within the database, notes within the database and two focus groups at the middle and end of the research process, as well as observation in the classroom.

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46 A further discussion of validity follows.
Knowledge Forum Notes

All participants posted notes within the database related to topics initially guided by the teacher and myself and then through classroom discussions and responses to the notes themselves. Various functions of the Knowledge Forum software include title, keywords, problem, scaffolds, scaffold supports, build-on, rise-above, and view\(^7\). The use of these functions as well as the content of the notes provided much of the data through discussion threads, the development of views around various topics and themes, and the content of notes.

Electronic Mail

Communication with the classroom teacher and students was in the database itself through notes so that all participants had access to all discourse and dialogue. In addition, email was used as another method of communication offering anonymity in the sense that it would be sent directly to me and could be used to inform my practice as a researcher, adding a level of awareness to the needs of the participants without expecting all participants to share their needs with the entire group. Email was only used between the classroom teacher and me. I requested permission from the classroom teacher to use the information in that email as data for the thesis. The email was not posted in the database but the discussions/dialogue and direction based on some email entered the database obliquely as all communication influenced the direction of the project.

Prior experience using this technology had shown me that professional reflection between me and the classroom teacher was often more informative in email where the teacher-participant felt freer to express him or herself. Often, the issues discussed in these emails were of a

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\(^7\) Explanations of each of these features can be found in Chapter Two, the Literature Review, in the section, Knowledge Forum.
technical nature about how the technology can inform the curriculum. An example was the issue of how to organize notes once the discussion thread becomes too large to be useful or managed. The technology allows for notes that encompass other notes. As the teacher finds a need to manage the information, questions can arise. These types of notes inform the practice and implementation of the technology. This information will be helpful in terms the development of the database as well as the reflective process for myself, the classroom teacher and the students.

Within the database, there was a view allocated for reflections about the process which I have called journaling (see following section). This is a place where the emails between the classroom teacher and me were shared if the participant who created the email had consented.

**Journaling**

Within the database, a view was created for journal notes where the researcher and participants record thoughts about the process. This space provided participants with a constant view and link to the research itself. Although students had access to this view, their reflections regarding the process tended to be within their notes and rose in classroom discussions as well as focus group discussions. Part of the reason this may have been the case is that the classroom teacher and I established a level of conversation that would have been inaccessible to students. Student notes that informed the discussion within this view were copied into the view but no notes were posted by students in the journal view. This view was problematic in that the classroom teacher was acutely aware that she was always being watched by me. Janesick (2000) suggests that journal writing is a tool she requires of her students as preparatory work prior to the research project as well as a:
...rigorous documentary tool. The students keep journals as do the researcher and the participants in the study in their roles as co-researchers on the projects. Often, if students elect to do so, interactive journals between researcher and participants...are extremely helpful for focusing individuals on the project at hand; they also serve as a useful tool for describing the role of the researcher. (392).

Essentially, the entire database acted as a communication journal between all of the participants as we all had access to all notes at all times. I continued journaling the research and process and placed all entries in the database. Other participants were encouraged to build-on to these observations as a way to document triangulation.

Focus Groups (students, teacher, researcher)

Throughout the data collection process, two focus groups comprised of students, the classroom teacher and I as the researcher were conducted as a way to report back initial observations and determine directions for future changes within the database or the research process itself. This was tied to the dissemination of results throughout the process. These results and discussion were shared within the database. This was one way to disseminate results throughout the process, as well as build a community of collaboration and sharing. Madriz (2000) suggests that from a feminist/postmodernist framework, a “focus group is a collectivist rather than an individualistic research method that focuses on the multi-vocality of participants’ attitudes, experiences, and beliefs” (836). She further explains that focus groups “heighten the opportunities for participants to decide the direction and content of the discussion” (840). Depending on the participation of the various stakeholders: (students, teacher), focus groups will be determined in such a way as to provide the most opportunity for expression.
Focus groups occurred twice throughout the research project, in the middle and end of the project, and each time ran for approximately one hour. Volunteer students, the classroom teacher and the researcher were present for all focus groups.

**Observation**

I visited and observed the class weekly. During this time, changes in classroom configuration, classroom discussions and the structures around these discussions, as well as the general classroom environment in terms of displays, changes in literature and changes in student autonomy were observed. These weekly visits had varying levels of participation and observation on my part depending on what was needed and requested by the participants. Angrosino and Mays de Pérez (2000) identify five principles of social interaction as they apply to observation in qualitative research. The five principles deal with issues of power, interpretation, action, negotiation, validation and contextualized meaning (678-690). These principles are of particular importance for this project due to the criticality and reflexivity necessarily included and considered when collected and analyzing the data. The research questions ask that the project investigate how power shapes and distorts knowledge, knowledge sharing, student engagement, and the inclusion of a critical antiracist perspective within the social studies curriculum and the classroom practices in an elementary classroom.

Knowledge building principles (Scardamalia, 2002) are that of a democratic environment where all members are given the same information and therefore the same access to information, ideas and collective knowledge but this is not the case as all participants have varying levels of cultural capital to provide them with the ability to access content. By considering Angrosino and Mays de Pérez’s (2000) five principles of observation, help with my own reflexivity when providing interpretation of what I see and the stories I tell. For example,
my observations of the classroom teacher and her interaction with the students and her colleagues changed dramatically over the course of the project. It was through the negotiation with her and the further validation of the contextualized meaning of her actions that I came to see her practice as completely different, almost echoing the sentiments that she was being pushed out rather than dropping out of the project (Dei, 1997).

Posting of observations and insights offered the opportunity for participants to dialogue not only about the curriculum content but the method of delivering this content within a shared space (Bickmore, 1991:2). This constant sharing and reporting back mechanism was in place so that participants could call attention to being named rather than naming themselves. When students worked on Urban and Rural communities outside of Ontario, student began to represent their understandings of various cultures and other students, with personal experience as a part of that culture, were able to add to the explanation of that culture choosing to name themselves rather than being named. By sharing observations and collaborating in the interpretation of the observations, voice and power can be turned back to the participants regarding observations and data collection in general throughout the process so that misinterpretation is altered to be more inclusive, much like the principle of idea improvement established as a knowledge building principle but as a way to also recognize partial knowledge, partial interpretation and telling of some stories rather than others. The participation and action of the classroom teacher and the students was requested and necessary components of a valid critical research project.

Angrosino and Mays de Pérez (2000) throw caution to the fact that the researcher "may need to realize that what he or she observes is conditioned by who he or she is, and that different [researchers]—equally well trained and well versed in theory and method but of different gender, race or age—might well stimulate a very different set of interactions, and hence a
different set of observations leading to a different set of conclusions” (689). This relates to Fine, Weis, Weseen and Wong’s (2000) interpretation of “different methods, different stories” (118). Within every project, there are multiple stories—invariably, some stories get told and others do not. It is the duty of the researcher to report back to participants in order to create a project that is collaborative and reflexive. In this project, I shared both the stories that were told in this thesis and the ones that were not to ensure that the classroom teacher was aware of my interpretations as well as my obligation to be respectful towards the school where I was a visitor. This reporting back took place throughout the notes in the Knowledge Forum database, through emails with the classroom teacher, class discussions with the students and in the focus groups at the middle and end of the project and the final story was shared with the classroom teacher when I was composing the first draft for another set of feedback and recycling to data for face validity.

Autoethnography

...scholarly inquiry is not assumed to start at the site of one’s own experience. We learn to “receive knowledge” by focusing outward, relying on the wisdom of our predecessors to preview our own experiences and expectations. “Review the literature; see what others have said; stand on the shoulders of the giants,” we are told. Start at the site of what they write and you can at least avoid being accused of stupidity or ignorance. (Bochner, 1997: 423).

Autoethnography was used as a method to reflect and be reflexive about my role within the research project with a particular emphasis on my role as an antiracist educator. There were moments where epiphanies allow me to see participants in a different light, including myself. The power I held within the creation, participation and interpretation of this story was reflected in chapter eight, The Storyteller: Reflexivity in Research through Autoethnography. Taking a description of autoethnography from Ellis and Bochner (2000), I framed this story within the
various processes Ellis and Bochner (2000) have named: *Creating, Negotiating, The World of Others, Obstacles, Interruptions, Contingencies, Turning Points, Epiphanies and Moral Choices.*

Under each of these headings, my role of an antiracist educator was addressed through reflection, dialogue and narrative. Richardson (2000) states,

> Although we usually think about writing as a mode of “telling” about the social world, writing is not just a mopping-up activity at the end of a research project. Writing is also a way of “knowing”—a method of discovery and analysis. By writing in different ways, we discover new aspects of our topic and our relations to it. Form and content are inseparable. (923)

In chapter eight, I address both my struggles through the process of data collection through as well as in the analysis writing of the project. It is through the autoethnography that I address my role and the implications that role has on the project itself. The writing was not a “mopping-up” but a method of data analysis as well.

Autoethnography is a form of narrative whereby the author “tells stories about their own lived experiences, related the personal to the cultural” (Richardson, 2000:931). Although the focus was on my role as an antiracist educator/researcher in this project, the autoethnography looks at how I came to the project and the designation of an antiracist educator/researcher. The chapter investigates key incidents in my career that led me to the practice of antiracist education. It delves into resistance I have dealt with not only as a White antiracist educator/researcher but also as a Jewish antiracist educator/researcher. I reflected on my own role in the project and how power was implicit in my role as researcher, knower, and self-proclaimed antiracist educator/researcher. It was easy to fall into this pattern of knowing and self-righteousness when acting in a way that claims to benefit all and seek inclusivity and shared power when in fact, as an antiracist educator/researcher I must critique my own privilege in the various roles I hold and the knowledge I have. Again, resistance to my role and
the responsibility in entering a site that was shared and where I was a visitor are also inherent in the reflexive practice of an antiracist educator/researcher. I investigated the tensions I experienced knowing that the project I planned addressing the unit on from the *Heritage and Citizenship* strand, *Pioneer Life (1998)/ Early Settlements in Upper Canada (2004)* would not be the project since the classroom teacher had her own needs and the needs of her students and yet, as an antiracist educator/researcher I responded to the teacher's plans to ensure face validity (Lather, 1986b) in the project.

Reed-Danahay (2001) suggests that the ethnographic gaze has long been the goal of ethnographers. Less accepted is the inclusion of the perspective of the ethnographer herself (407). I was included in this project on various levels and ways. I was a participant-observer but I was also the antiracist educator continuing to push the project forward. This role brought me to contentious places where I had information that I would have preferred not to have. However, this role also brought me to a place where my knowledge or bias had to be contained due to my status as visitor in this school and classroom as well as my affiliation with the classroom teacher as an elementary teacher myself.

There were moments using this autoethnography where my interpretation becomes autobiographical because “what [are] represented are insider accounts of how the research evolved and developed: how access and relationships were negotiated and managed: what went wrong: what was rewarding or challenging” (Coffey, 1999:122). In William G. Tierney's article, *Life history's history: subjects foretold* (1998), he uses three projects to investigate the role of life history and autoethnography to understand issues of where he fits into the various projects, where the Other fits into the projects and how he, as the researcher, represents the other and himself in the text. There is responsibility in how the Other and the self are represented, but there is also risk. It is my goal to bring together the standard representations and the
autoethnographic accounts as a way to triangulate the data and bring the verisimilitude (Ellis and Bochner, 2000) to the text.

...we learn to hide our personal self behind a veneer of academic and theoretical detachment, fostering and misconception that it has no influence, no place, no significance in our work. Yet, it is rare, indeed, to find a productive scholar whose work is unconnected to his or her personal history. (Bochner, 1997:433)

Bochner (1997) further suggests that by bringing together the personal and the academic, these stories:

...long to be used rather than analyzed, to be told and retold rather than theorized and settled. And they promise the companionship of intimate detail as a substitute for the loneliness of abstracted facts, touching readers where they live and offering details that linger in the mind. (434)

By including my story, explicitly, through the autoethnography, I communicate the personal struggle, growth, defining that I experienced in the hopes that the reader will engage with the text on a personal level, as an educator, as a critical researcher and recognize me in these words.

The work of a thesis was a collaborative one. This project was designed with the hope that it would be collaborative and multi-vocal. The reality was that it is my writing and where I have included data sources from the classroom teacher, the students and the school principal, it was my choice as to what it was told. Although there were follow-up discussions and informal meetings with the classroom teacher following the end of the research project where her insights have helped with my own interpretation of the events, my voice still prevails. The multivocality came from the changes in direction that resulted from ongoing consultation with the students and classroom teacher, but it also comes from the multiple readings and engagements with this text. It has taken on many forms since its first iteration in May of 2000 when I submitted my first proposal. It is the work of my committee members, my classes, and
my experiences in every classroom I have ever taught. It is one story of a work in progress—myself as an educator/researcher.

Tierney questions the validity of the traditional forms of qualitative inquiry as limiting the opportunities presented to the qualitative researcher:

For example, it is curious that I might spend a great deal of time with someone and interview him or her over a period of months or years, and yet, I would present the text as if the individual dealt with a disembodied interviewer, a tape deck with no person at its controls. Similarly, to call for dramatic changes in how we conceptualize, approach, and work with our research participants and yet to then return to our computer terminals and present their lives in ways that would be familiar to our confreres a generation or two ago seems misguided, at least, and a failure to capitalize on opportunities, at worst. (1998:53)

To limit our inquiry to the Other is to deny our implicit involvement in the project we have designed, participated in, and interpreted.

Validity in the Research

Validity within critical action research is sought through issues discussions of voice, representation, and the role of the researcher in the project. There are various forms and practices of pursuing validity within critical research projects. "Validity in qualitative research has to do with the description and explanation and whether or not the explanation fits the description...in addition, qualitative researchers do not claim that there is one way of interpreting an event. There is no one 'correct' interpretation" (Janesick, 2000: 393) just I suggest there is not a complete answer but rather a continuum of inclusivity. Representation in research is a concept taken up by many critical researchers (Smith, 1999; hooks, 1992; Dei, 1996; Denzin and Lincoln, 2000; Giroux, 1995).

Denzin and Lincoln (2000) describe three recent crises in representation within qualitative research: the first is that "qualitative research can no longer [be thought to] directly capture
lived experience” (17). The experiences portrayed and represented within research accounts are just one story which can be told from the data. The researcher is always interpreting an experience from various locations, inside and outside of the research itself. The second crisis, the “legitimation crisis”, “makes problematic the traditional criteria for evaluating and interpreting qualitative research” (2000:17). What is considered legitimate data and validity in data analysis is questioned within this crisis. The third crisis asks, “Is it possible to effect change in the world if society is only and always a text?” (2000:17) relating to the concept of catalytic validity, summarized by Smith’s questions, “For whom is this study worth and relevant? Who says so? …What knowledge will the community gain from this study?” (1999:173).

Just as the methodology and methods should be reflective of the research project, so too must the forms of validity which are used to confirm the credibility of the study. Creswell and Miller (2000) suggest that within the critical paradigm, the lens of the researcher must be validated through reflexivity, the lens of the participants through a collaborative process and the reviewers through peer debriefing (126). They suggest that the researcher must name the lens and the paradigm where they and the research stand. They further define validity as referring to the inferences drawn from the data rather than the data itself. For the purpose of this study, multiple methods will be employed to determine validity in this project. In line with the critical perspective taken in this study, validity will be established through researcher reflexivity, collaboration with participants, and triangulation of data.

Within the practice of critical research methodologies, Lather argues for a “research approach openly committed to a more just social order” (1986b:258). This openness does not preclude
validity, but rather, includes the researchers' responsibility and the participants demand for it in the determination of validity. The theories, research questions, definitions of terms, data collection and data analysis must all be validated by the researcher and the researched. This sharing of responsibility (reciprocity) distinguishes critical inquiry from other forms of research.

...a culture of doubt permeates academic work in the social sciences. Words such as "reliability", "validity", and "trustworthiness" have become contested terms in a postmodern world, and researchers have sought to reinscribe them with meanings that would have been unheard of two generations ago. (Tierney, 1997:110)

While positivist researchers claim objectivity and truth to their research, post-positivist researchers acknowledge subjectivity which demands reflexivity and participant validity. Denzin asserts:

Despite the fact that ethnography is one of the principle moral discourses of the contemporary period, ethnographers do not have an undisputed warrant to study others; this right has been lost. Self-reflection is no longer an option, nor can it be presumed that objective accounts of another's situation can be easily given. Truth is always personal and subjective. (1997:265-266).

Richardson (2000) takes up the issue of truth in her use of writing as a method of inquiry. She asserts, "The difference is not whether the text really is fiction or non-fiction, but the claim the author makes for the text" (926). The question arises then, around the validity of texts which claim truth when truth itself is impossible.

Ellis and Bochner (2000) suggest that within the method of autoethnography, validity takes on a different meaning: "I start from the position that language is not transparent and there's no

48 Lincoln asserts that it is "the responsibility of the researcher to create narratives of fidelity (validity) and rigor" (1993: 36).
49 "The underlying assumptions of positivism include the belief that the social world can be studied in the same way as the natural world, that there is a method of studying the social world that is value-free, and that explanations of causal nature can be provided" (Mertens, 1998:7).
single standard of truth. To me validity means that our work seeks verisimilitude; it evokes in readers a feeling that the experience described is lifelike, believable, and possible” (751). This also invokes the concept of face validity (Lather, 1986b). When verisimilitude takes into consideration the reading of the research, it asks the reader to confirm or deny the validity of the representation. Face validity asks for the data to be recycled through participants to ensure validity. Analysis is not complete without participant interpretation.

Validity is the strength of any research project. It questions the design, the choice of literature to frame the study, the reflexivity of the researcher throughout the process, the respect to participants, and the claims the research makes. According to Smith (1999), the space of research has been a marginalized space “but they have also become spaces of resistance and hope” (4). As both insider and outsider, I sit in the precarious position of practitioner and researcher. Smith summarizes these issues by drawing attention to critical questions that are asked of researcher: “Whose research is it? Who owns it? Whose interests does it serve? Who will benefit from it? Who has designed its questions and framed its scope? Who will carry it out? Who will write it up? How will its results be disseminated?” (Smith, 1999:10). It is the goal of this project to be catalytic, reflexive, inclusive and collaborative. Researcher and participant share space, voice and roles.

**Triangulation—Multiple Methods for Credibility**

Triangulation is a method which examines “counterpatterns as well as convergence” (Lather, 1986b). The research establishes a variety of measures to ensure credibility in the data. Janesick (2000) refers to four types of triangulation, originally identified by Denzin (1978) including: data triangulation, investigator triangulation, theory triangulation and methodological.

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50 See Gert J.J. Biesta’s (1998) notions of the impossibility of education.
triangulation (391). Tricoglus (2001) calls triangulation in research “knowing the data”. She suggests the “gathering of interrelated data from different sources: interviews; meetings, classroom observations and documentary evidence can be used to establish ‘data trustworthiness’” (144). Denzin and Lincoln (2000) suggest, “The use of multiple methods, or triangulation, reflects an attempt to secure an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon in question. Objective reality can never be captured. We can only know a thing through its representations” (5).

Ellis and Bochner (2000) suggest:

No strong case could be made that human knowledge was independent of the human mind. All truths were contingent on the describing activities of human beings. No sharp distinctions could be made between facts and values. If you couldn’t eliminate the influences of the observer on the observed, then no theories or findings could ever be completely free of human values, the investigator would always be implicated in the product. So why not observe the observer, focus on turning our observation back on ourselves. (747)

As a way to validate the claims or even further question the claims/findings of this project, I will reflect through autoethnography, my place in this project and the influences I have on the collection, analysis and interpretation of the data.

**Construct Validity—Defining the Data**

Construct validity (Lather, 1986b) measures “the extent to which an indicator accurately measures the concept or component of a concept it is supposed to measure” (Hammersley, 1990:121). This is related to what Hammersley (1990) names content validity which refers to the degree to which the data represents the definitions established within the research. He suggests that in order to determine content validity of data, clear definitions of key concepts

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51 This term is from Lather, 1986b.
must be provided. In defining terminology, the researcher must negotiate definitions with participants. Smith explains “what community research relies upon and validates is that the community itself makes its own definitions” (1999:127). This relates to Denzin’s (1978) forms of triangulation in that if the definitions are clear, then the data, the investigator, the theory and the methodological triangulation will be discernible meaning, by including a section which clearly defines what knowledge building, critical antiracist education, and critical knowledge building are, working to compare, contrast and create them can be understood as either accomplished or not.

**Face Validity—Do You See What I See?**

Face validity (Lather, 1986b) or isomorphism (Lincoln, 1993) asks for the researcher to allow for the recycling of “description, emerging analysis, and conclusions” back through the research participants. Tricoglus (2001) calls this making “the process dialogical”. Resulting from this process, the research is redefined by the participants’ reactions (Lather, 1986b:167) thus making it more meaningful for all involved. Lincoln and Guba (1985) refer to this as “member checks” and “peer debriefing”. This form of validity takes into account the need to analyze data throughout the process of the project and involve all members in the community in that analysis. This recycling of data is inherent in the design of action research. “This enlargement of scrutiny demands narratives which are also subject to the scrutiny, inspection, and assent of the researched” (Lincoln, 1993: 36-37).

**Catalytic Validity—Refocusing for Transformation**

Catalytic validity is closely tied to the concept of research as praxis (Lather, 1986b) in that it “represents the degree to which the research process reorients, focuses, and energizes participants toward knowing reality in order to transform it” (Lather, 1986b:272). Tricoglus
(2001) calls for the researcher to “stimulate a process of continuing critical analysis and enlightened action” (146). When considering transformation of a setting the researcher must be wary of what is considered transformable just as the term improvable can be problematic. Dei cautions the conception of “school problems” as being understood “in isolation from the material and ideological circumstances in which the students find themselves” (1996:35). He suggests that issues related to family or home environment pathologize the experiences of the youth in schools rather than recognizing the role of intersecting oppressions on these experiences. Smith (1999) suggests: “For many indigenous communities, research itself is taken to mean ‘problem’; the word research is believed to mean, quite literally, the continued construction of indigenous peoples as the problem” (92).

**Reflexivity—Influencing the Research**

Tricoglus (2001) asserts that knowing oneself or “the ‘reflexivity’ of the research…the ability to monitor [the researcher’s] own role in the gathering and analysis of data, is seen as essential to establishing the rigour of qualitative data” (138). She further suggests that the validity of a research project is both an internal (reflexive) and external (face validity) process (ibid.). The concept of reflexivity considers the importance of the researcher’s influence on the interpretation of the data by “considering alternative interpretations of the data, and by following through the implications of particular interpretations to see if these are confirmed” (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995:227 quoted in Tricoglus, 2001). Denzin suggests, “Constantly working against the sting of memory, the new writer uses personal troubles and lived biography as the starting place for critical ethnography” (1997:267). “Passion of experience” with reference to a “particular knowledge that comes from suffering” (hooks, 1994:91) is an issue of representation for if the suffering is not experienced by the researcher, the validity of representation must be problematized.
Validity is related to the “crisis of representation” (Lather, 1994) within critical ethnographic research. “The ethnographic ‘gaze’ of anthropology has collected, classified and represented other cultures to the extent that anthropologists are often the academics popularly perceived by the indigenous world as the epitome of all that is bad with academics” (Smith, 1999: 67). Apple suggests that reflexivity is representation that “interrogate[s] our own ‘hidden’ motives in those instances when we employ such modes of representation” (1993:127). Michèle Foster (1994) discusses the role of insider versus outsider research. She acknowledges that as an insider, she “cannot capture the total experience of an entire community. But neither can research conducted by outsiders” (144). This discussion leads to the validity of insider versus outsider research.

The critical issue with insider research is the constant need for reflexivity. At a general level, insider researchers have to have ways of thinking critically about their processes, their relationships and the quality and richness of their data and analysis. So too do the outsiders, but the major difference is that insiders have to live with the consequences of their processes on a day-to-day basis forever more (Smith, 1999:137). Challenges to the validity of insider research do not problematize the validity of outsider research.

The role the researcher plays is integral to the project. The questions of insider/outside and participant/observer are not dichotomous questions but rather questions of dynamic roles played by both the researcher and the participants. Tedlock describes the precarious role of the researcher: “They are cross-dressers, outsiders wearing insiders’ clothes while gradually acquiring the language and behaviours that go along with them” (2000:455).

52 Britzman, et al (1993) review the problem of representation in teaching multicultural in that knowledge, “when recast from the perspectives of those historically unaccounted for, becomes an ideological haunted house: illusory, evasive, and preying upon the rational-minded ‘victims’” (189).
It is in the messiness of knowledge and the rigour of critical pedagogy that researcher/researched, expert/learner, knower/known transgressed roles, definitions and the quest for “truth” into the arena of uncertainty, imagination and possibility.

Data Analysis Procedures

Data analysis was an ongoing collaborative process informed by participant feedback, direction and interpretation. All data collected was placed within the database for review by all participants. Data collection methods included reading curriculum documents, journaling, electronic mail, observation, Knowledge Forum notes, focus groups and autoethnography. Data analysis methods included the Analytic Toolkit (ATK), document analysis comparing the Ontario social studies curriculum policy documents from 1998 and 2004 as well as the Exemplars for Social Studies, grades three and four from 2002, key-words-in-context (KWIC) and word counts (Ryan and Bernard, 2000: 775-777) to find themes in the notes throughout the database and moments of autoethnography throughout the analysis to document the reflexivity of my role as critical researcher.

In analyzing data collected from each method, participants were encouraged to discuss, negotiate and collaborate in the process of analysis through a continual dissemination of results within the database and in offline discussions. This was done through journaling within the database, discussions through notes within the database, email and discussions before and after classroom sessions.

The Analytic Toolkit (ATK)

The Analytic Toolkit is an online system used to analyze the Knowledge Forum database. This method of analysis occurred throughout the project as a way to monitor the type of participation by each member of the database. The transcripts from the database were analyzed to determine participation patterns, the prevalence of knowledge building principles, and the change, if any, in the knowledge itself as well as the methods for knowledge sharing/building within the database and in offline discussions. The numbers generated from the ATK are helpful to determine who has participated and contributed and to take a cursory look at participant engagement throughout the monitoring of the project. This procedure involved all notes and views within the database. Reports were posted in the Researcher and Teacher Journal view in the database to provoke dialogue, reflection and action in terms of implementation strategies, topics for the class and the development of the relationship between myself and the classroom teacher.

Reports and graphs generated from the ATK were posted within the classroom database and shared electronically with participants. Email was not shared throughout the research project but was reported on afterwards with participant consent. Journaling by the researcher was done within the database after each session. Participants were encouraged to provide feedback to these journal entries, however, only the classroom teacher did so. The students provided feedback through their choice of topic and within classroom discussions and focus groups.

Analysis of patterns was discussed within the classroom and online with all participants. The multiple forms of data collection informed each other and provided validity of data through triangulation of data, reflexivity and collaboration with participants. The initial research questions established were shared and reviewed with all participants to ensure the possibility of multiple forms of validity. Once research questions were established as valid, data was analyzed
with these questions as a starting point. Having indicated this, continual sharing of data and the cycles of action research produced new questions to guide the research process and the project itself.

There are two components that were of interest when analyzing the data—(1) the content of keywords and the way in which they were indicative of emerging themes and (2) the emergence of criticality in classroom practice—knowledge sharing and knowledge building as they related to community development, power relationships and the possibility of critical practice in the elementary classroom.

**Keywords and Word Counts—Finding Emerging Themes**

To analyze the content and themes related to keywords I used the methods described for the analysis of “free-flowing text” by Ryan and Bernard (2000): key-words-in-context (KWIC) and word counts (775-777). These methods are helpful in that they reduce text and therefore make it easier to “identify general patterns and make comparisons across texts” (Ryan and Bernard, 2000:779).

The first method, key-words-in-context (KWIC), is particularly useful within the database work since one of the functions of Knowledge Forum is a keyword indicator54. Notes can be searched using keywords as well as analysis using the ATK. This method provided a concordance which can indicate patterns and linking of concepts across topics within the database. A KWIC can also be done by analyzing transcripts from focus groups to analyze patterns in both online and offline communication.

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54 Refer back to Chapter Two, in the section, Implementing Critical Knowledge Building Pedagogies in an Elementary Social Studies Classroom, for a full review of Knowledge Forum® functionality and procedures.
The second method, word counts, can help to establish “themes in texts” and identification of “important constructs and can provide data for systematic comparisons across groups”. For example, analyzing talk and text between and across various stakeholders (students, teacher, and researcher) distribution of power is analyzed. Also, the changing of themes in text can be analyzed and interpreted based on where the themes arise and who takes up the discussion.

In conjunction with these two methods of data analysis, I also adopted data analysis which included finding emerging themes through multiple methods such as feedback from participants, and research questions (initial and developing) informed the interpretation and indication of themes within the data. Themes were changing and negotiated collaboratively with participants. This project was an action research project and as such, was iterative and cyclical. The direction, collection, and analysis of data were continually negotiated and redesigned throughout the research process and the data analysis and writing of the project.

**Participation and Content—the Database Notes**

Initially, from September until December, much of the analysis occurred through notes I posted within the database. Following the December break, a shift occurred: from then on, a large part of data collection throughout the process occurred through conversations between the classroom teacher and myself. These discussions were related to issues that occurred on the day I was in class and were also reflective of the change throughout the research process and issues that came up with the students as well as other staff members in the school when I was not present. These issues were significant in terms of the changes that occurred throughout the project and influenced decisions made by the classroom teacher in terms of her practice and her role professionally. Communication within the database also changed in the
teacher/researcher view following the December break in that the classroom teacher began posting build-on notes as well as starting her own threads of discussion within this view.

**Document Analysis—the Ontario Social Studies Curriculum**

I compared the two versions of Ontario curriculum policy documents (1998 and 2004) for social studies, history and geography which was done in order to frame the discussion of curriculum expectations, hidden and explicit curriculum, and the Ontario government's attempt to create a more inclusive education system by revising words in the documents themselves. Hitchcock and Hughes (1995) suggest that "one must equally be aware of the importance of understanding the power relationships within any given discourse that 'language gives the conceptual framework which determines the boundaries of each discourse'" (230). They further explain "one would need to place any document within the frame of reference of all the participants within that field of discourse" (230) including government, teachers and all stakeholders affected by that document. Merriam (1990) describes documents as a "ready-made source of data easily accessible to the imaginative and resourceful investigator" (104). Merriam further suggests "documentary data are 'objective' sources of data" (108). In the case of the Ontario curriculum documents, it is a testimony to the limitations of the original documents and the fact that curriculum, although claiming to offer the "essential knowledge" to "develop an understanding of Canadian identity and democratic values" (1998:2), still requires revision.

**Phasing Analysis—a Second Look**

Data analysis following data collection occurred in two phases. The initial phase occurred in the two months following the completion of data collection in May and June 2005 and the second phase occurred from August to October 2005. The reason for splitting the data
analysis was to provide some space from data and allow for a fresh perspective in the hopes for further reflexivity in the analysis of the data as suggested by Bogden and Biklen (1992). Further sharing of insights was also recycled back through the classroom teacher prior to submitting the first draft of the analysis chapters.

Data analysis related to classroom observations and focus groups produced patterns related to power shifts, student engagement and student autonomy as the project progressed. I looked for indications of these changes through increased participation, taking up of marginalized stories and perspectives, the acceptance of indigenous knowledges in understanding history and representation, and the increased power of the classroom teacher in terms of her own ability to function within her classroom and school despite low support from school administration. Further developments in terms of trust were also important as the project developed.

The patterns that emerged from all data sources were discussed with the students and the classroom teacher. This process of face validity occurred throughout the research project through classroom discussion, organization of the database, discussions prior to and following classroom visits, email exchange between myself and the classroom teacher and teacher/researcher dialogue within the database.

Codes were determined through sidebar notes in observation notes and recording during discussions with the classroom teacher before and after classroom visits, during whole class discussions and focus groups. These patterns were revealed and repeated within the database itself as well as the emails between the classroom teacher and myself. Keywords indicated patterns in these notes as well as colour coding and comments included in the actual thesis while writing the data analysis.
Autoethnography and Emotional Recall

As discussed previously, my role as the antiracist teacher/researcher was analyzed through autoethnography. Ellis explains:

I use a process of emotional recall in which I imagine being back in the scene emotionally and physically. If you can revisit the scene emotionally, then you remember other details. The advantage to writing close to the time of the event is that it doesn’t take much effort to access lived emotions—they’re often there whether you want them to be or not. (Ellis and Bochner, 2000: 752)

The process of analyzing the data turned out to be an emotional experience. There were moments when I felt powerless or that my integrity and/or hope for the project were compromised by people or situations out of my control, such as the situation where I challenged Sonja’s participation and commitment to the project55. It was at these times that emotional recall was inherent in the writing. Ellis and Bochner (2000) further describe the process of emotional recall and going back to it when you are more distant and can then analyze what those emotional moments were.

Summary

For this study, various qualitative methods were used within a critical action research methodology to support the collaborative process of negotiating meaning within the research project. My role within the project was critically analyzed through the reflexive process of journal writing and dialogue with research participants as well as through the construction of an autoethnography in the data analysis procedures and writing of the thesis.

My role and positionality varied between participant and observer and insider and outsider depending on the shared expertise, leadership and voice that developed throughout the

55 This is addressed in chapter five, in the section, The Teacher: Building Trust, Building a Relationship and Negotiating with Power.
project. Participating in a critical project and encouraging the collaboration on all levels, I have also recognized my position of power in the interpretation of the data, regardless of the negotiated meanings throughout the project and following the completion of the data collection phase.

The methods used to support this process of collaboration and reflexivity the use of the Analytic Toolkit to determine levels of participation and engagement with the included functions of the Knowledge Forum software; the documentation of emergent themes using the Key-words-in-Context and Word Counts (Ryan and Bernard, 2000); the use of email to increase communication between the classroom teacher and myself; the use of journaling to document the collaborative reflective process for the classroom teacher and myself; the use of focus groups to support classroom discussions, student engagement, establish dialogue patterns for the class and determine the validity of the research for the participants; the use of observations by both myself and the classroom teacher; the use of document analysis of the revisions of the Ontario Social Studies curriculum documents from 1998 to 2004 to determine the depth and impact of the revisions on the newer document in terms of critical practice and finally, the use of autoethnography as a way to reflect on my role and journey throughout the research project.

The following chapters four, five, six, seven and eight provide the data analysis. In Chapter Four, The Curriculum: Hidden, Explicit, Transformative, I discuss the challenges and resistance in implementing a critical program and the additional difficulty of using the Ontario Social Studies curriculum document, despite some of the revisions to support this practice in the 2004 version.
In Chapter Five, *The Politics of Power and Precarious Places*, I introduce the school, the classroom and the participants in this project. These people and places are analyzed from a critical perspective whereby power, privilege and positionality are taken into account.

In Chapter Six, *Knowledge Sharing, Knowledge Building and the Value of Knowledge*, I address issues of power that emerged by examining the database how these issues of power were negotiated in a critical knowledge building. I also delve into the role of antiracist educator/researcher and what the various facets of the role entailed and how eventually, they became shared with students and the classroom teacher. Cultural capital is also analyzed in terms of critical and knowledge building through the use of authentic voice, indigenous knowledges and constructive use of authoritative texts. Patterns of communication and changes in those patterns in a critical knowledge building community are analyzed. How students share or covet knowledge as they begin to understand the concepts of shared expertise, distributed leadership and *community knowledge/collective responsibility* is also taken up in terms of the changing student role within a critical knowledge building classroom.

Chapter Seven, *The Storyteller: Reflectivity in Research through Autoethnography*, addresses the messiness and complexities of my role within the research in defining myself and coming to terms with my own power; the negotiations and compromises throughout the process; the crisis of representation that emerged in the worlds of others; and the various obstacles that have been ever present in my quest to complete writing up this project. Finally, there is reflection on the turning points, epiphanies and moral choices I experienced in this place of power and representation, and how I came to the realization that there is no objectivity in research and that ultimately, it is the story I choose and it will always be my story to tell for each participant will see the story in a different light.
Chapter 4

THE CURRICULUM: HIDDEN, EXPLICIT, TRANSFORMATIVE

The Politics of Curriculum—Meaningful Change or Surface Revision

The Ontario Curriculum documents that were current as this research was being completed were launched in 1997 and are now on a rotational revision schedule which began in 2003. The process of revision involved a variety of stakeholders including curriculum consultants, teachers, students, and faculties of education among others, in content analysis of previous documents.

The Ministry explains,

The ongoing cycle to review the curriculum was initiated in 2003 to help ensure that is current, relevant, and age appropriate for students in Kindergarten through Grade 12. The review process supports students, teachers, schools and boards by identifying targeted areas in need of support, and allows time for development and updated of related materials. (Ministry of Education, 2005: 10)

The first two curriculum guideline documents from this series to be released in the Ontario school system were the Language Arts and Mathematics documents in 1997 for grades one to eight. Following these two documents, were the remaining elementary documents: Science and Technology, Social Studies, The Arts, Heath and Physical Education and French as a Second Language—all in 1998. The first document to be revised in the elementary series was the Social Studies, History and Geography document for grades one to eight, due to the controversial nature of many of the topics and content due to bias and narrow ethnocentric perspectives.

These documents were launched by the Ontario government, the Harris’ Conservatives, claiming to offer accountability of program and a seamless transition for students across the
province. Advertisements created by the provincial government, funded by Mike Harris and his Conservative party, told parents that if they moved in the middle of the school year, they did not have to worry about their children missing any content at school because the same curriculum was being taught in every classroom in the province.

The reality is that most teachers will work within the outline of the Ontario curriculum documents but the lesson plans are always an interpretation of the expectations established in these documents. A teacher may have, as I did, an interest in providing a critical program for students which was technology-enriched. Some teachers may have an arts-based focus, while others may have a focus on experiential learning through fieldtrips. Classroom practice will always be affected by the teacher in the room.

Scardamalia addresses the regulations and accountability barriers, such as, “I’d like to, but we’re required by [our board, the public, my boss]” or “This doesn’t fit with the guidelines” (2003). Another barrier that can impact a project which offers an opportunity for student inquiry although it is outside the prescribed curriculum, are risk barriers for example, “We need to get our scores and production up first, and then we will be ready for something new” or “Let’s stick with the tried-and-true and wait for more date before we make changes” (Scardamalia, 2003). The year this project occurred, a new version of the Social Studies curriculum was released but implementation was not mandated until the fall of 2005, thus it remained optional. Although the hope was that the revisions would offer a way into critical and innovative pedagogies, the reality is that changes were made in the curriculum documents, but not as significant as they could have been. Teachers can raise barriers to transformative practices if these practices appear to veer from the mandated curriculum.
Implementing a Critical Program

In my own classrooms, as a critical educator, the fear of accountability to deliver this curriculum was unfounded. Although there were basic topics that I had to address, there was always room for interpretation and adaptation—the level of flexibility was dependent on the level of restraint the administrator placed on the implementation of a critical program. Giroux recognizes this in school settings:

All school settings generate in non-mechanical ways pressures, constraints, and limits on the nature and feasibility of what teachers and students can do to 'shape their own reality'. Class size, the use of school authority, community influences, and the ideology and strength of a school board all play a crucial role in determining how politically vulnerable human actors might be if they 'innovated' or tried something different in their classrooms. (1981: 106-107)

Certainly, the Ontario curriculum expectations could not be taught the same way at the same time in every classroom in Ontario for every classroom in Ontario was different. I realized this when the Ontario Provincial report card was established. The space provided for reporting on Social Studies would allow for a maximum of three expectations to be addressed. So, from my perspective, over three terms, the remaining expectations could be adapted so that the interpretation of the curriculum could be inclusive and critical. My practice developed from this standpoint, and I was always aware that the curriculum was lacking diverse perspectives and realized that it was my responsibility to critically transform the curriculum.

In order to address the topics mandated by the provincial government, resources had to be critically analyzed prior to introducing them into the classroom, particularly those dealing with the topics of Pioneer Life (Grade 3), Medieval Times (Grade 4), Ancient Civilizations (Grade 5), and Aboriginal Peoples and European Explorers (Grade 6). These topics were biased and one-sided, and did not express the history of the peoples oppressed in each of these eras in Canadian and world history. Those who ran in the antiracist and critical education circles
began work to alleviate the biased perspectives of these topics and sought out new resources to support the topics provided.

In the Toronto District School Board schools, we were advised by our antiracism/equity department to avoid teaching the grade four topic, Medieval Times, for the first year due to the sensitivity of the issues presented through this topic. I was working in a school where students were either Muslim or Christian and I, being Jewish, understood those tensions intimately. There were no supporting documents on how to address this topic. Publishing companies had yet to release age appropriate resources addressing Medieval Times. I began to investigate websites and found that depending on which organization had created the website, a different perspective was established. A Christian website would speak to the holy wars, knights and chivalry, whereas, Islamic and Jewish sites would address issues related to discrimination, oppression, violence and theft. Although I had taught critical reading skills to my grade four students through children's literature the stereotypes inherent in so many of the books in our school library, such as those dealing with the Crusades, the Holy Grail and the Magna Carta, as a Jewish teacher with an audience of Christian and Muslim students, would be like addressing the greatness of Christopher Columbus with a room full of First Nations students.

Teachers found ways around this and support documents were developed to encourage a more inclusive perspective, yet many teachers continued using traditional methods which lacked any criticality to the curriculum delivery, instead focusing on knights, King Arthur, and the perceived romance of the times.

Can Titles Change Perspective?

In 2004, a revised version of the Ontario social studies curriculum was released with full implementation expected by fall of 2005. Topic titles and various expectations were altered in
the document, particularly in the *Heritage and Citizenship* strand—the grade three curriculum changed from *Pioneer Life* (1998) to *Early Settlements in Upper Canada* (2004), the grade six curriculum changed from *Aboriginal Peoples and European Explorers* (1998) to *First Nations Peoples and European Explorers* (2004). In the *Canada and World Connections* strand, topic titles changed in the following ways—the grade four changed from *The Provinces and Territories of Canada* (1998) to *Canada's Provinces, Territories and Regions* (2004); the grade five topic title changed from *Aspects of Government in Canada* (1998) to *Aspects of Citizenship and Government in Canada* (2004); and the grade six topic title changed from *Canada and Its Trading Partners* (1998) to *Canada's Links to the World* (2004). For the purposes of this project, which involved a grade three classroom, I will focus on how the grade three topics, as well as the social studies document *Introduction* which is relevant to all grades included in the document, were revised.

The *Introduction* to these documents was altered significantly from 1998 to 2004 including the addition of a new section, *Some Considerations for Program Planning in Social Studies, History, and Geography*. There are several types of changes in this document including changes to section headings, content changes within the various sections, and political changes such as revoking the *Common Curriculum* created by the Rae government. The tone of the earlier document is more tentative in some areas, with topic headings such as: *What Is Social Studies?*, compared with the newer version where the heading is simply, *Social Studies*. There are some statements which remain unchanged and yet they raise red flags to a critical reader/educator. Statements referring to *essential knowledge* are in both documents and caution towards this type of terminology is necessary because once one form of knowledge is deemed *essential*, it necessarily de-legitimizes other knowledges56 (Minnich, 1990).

56 See section *The Explicit and Implicit Curriculum-Knowing, Learning, Critiquing*, in Chapter 2, Literature Review.
Roles and Responsibilities in the Curriculum

Another concept that is unchanged between the two documents refers to Ontario’s education system as a meritocracy. Within the section referring to the student’s role in the social studies curriculum, the following statement is made in each document:

Students who are willing to make the effort required and who are able to apply themselves will soon discover there is a direct relationship between hard work and achievement, and will be motivated to work as a result. There will be some students, however, who will find it more difficult to take responsibility for their learning because of special challenges they face. For these students, the attention, patience, and encouragement of teachers can be extremely important factors for success. However, regardless of their circumstances, learning to take responsibility for one’s progress and learning is an important part of education for all students. (Ministry of Education, 1998:4-5)

Students who are willing to make the effort required and who are able to apply themselves will soon discover that there is a direct relationship between this effort and their achievement, and will therefore be more motivated to work. There will be some students, however, who will find it more difficult to take responsibility for their learning because of special challenges they face. For these students, the attention, patience, and encouragement of teachers can be extremely important factors for success. However, taking responsibility for their own progress and learning is an important part of education for all students, regardless of their circumstances. (Ministry of Education, 2004:5)

The differences (in italics) between these two paragraphs are subtle and yet, the message is changed. Students in the 1998 document will be motivated to work whereas students in the 2004 document will therefore be more motivated to work. Dei (1996) cautions educators over these…

...neo-conservative modes of thought that unproblematically extol our individual virtues. This can be seen in discourses concerning individual achievement, the power of meritocracy and acceptance of individual responsibility. There neo-conservative reasonings lack critical interrogation of, and deny the role of, structural and system barriers to self- and group-actualization and development. (16-17)

This section is new in the 2004 document. Although the role of various stakeholders is addressed in the 1998 document, it is not a separate section but rather, a part of the introduction. The order in which the various stakeholders are addressed is also altered between
the two documents. In the 1998 version, the order is: parents, teachers, and finally students suggesting that this curriculum was for the voters rather than the students. In the 2004 document, now a separate section, the order of stakeholders is: students, parents, teachers and a new section for principals.

The principal section addresses the principal’s role in developing partnerships with teachers and parents, support student learning, awareness of curriculum implementation, promoting learning teams on staff, facilitating professional development for teachers and ensuring the development and implementation of Individual Education Plans (IEP) for all exceptional students (Ministry of Education, 2004:6). The accountability has changed.

The Introduction—Bold Statements Never Read

Topics covered previously in the introduction of the 1998 document, were divided into two new sections and further developed. In the first section, Assessment and Evaluation of Student Achievement, an explanation for the achievement chart is provided as well as the purpose for assessment and evaluation “to improve student learning” (2004:9). Significant detail is added to clarify the meaning of knowledge and skills including: thinking, communication and application. An explanation of criteria, descriptors and qualifiers is also provided to support teachers in the effective planning of instruction and assessment of students based on the curriculum expectations. In the 1998 version, the only section addressing assessment refers to the achievement levels (levels 1 to 4) and a rubric to identify what each level is. After six years with the curriculum, a clearer explanation was needed beyond the rubric of achievement levels.

The 1998 version has a section called Attitudes in Social Studies, History, and Geography (1998:7). This section states:
Students need to develop the attitudes or "habits of mind" that are considered essential for the development of responsible citizenship in a complex society characterized by rapid technological, economic, political, and social change. These include positive attitudes about learning; respect, tolerance, and understanding with regard to individuals, groups, and cultures in the global community; respect and responsibility for the environment; and an understanding and appreciation for the rights, privileges, and responsibilities of citizenship.

Students’ attitudes towards social studies, history, and geography can have significant effect on their achievement of the expectations. Teaching methods and learning activities that encourage students to recognize the value and relevance of what they are learning will go a long way towards motivating students to work and learn effectively. (7)

In the 2004 version, instead of the above 1998 Attitudes section, there is a new section entitled, Some Considerations for Program Planning in Social Studies, History, and Geography. Teaching approaches, integration, current events and planning are also explained and highlighted. Within the considerations section is a new topic, Antidiscrimination Education in Social Studies, History, and Geography. It states:

The social studies, history, and geography curriculum is designed to help students acquire the "habits of mind" essential in a complex democratic society characterized by rapid technological, economic, political, and social change. Students are expected to demonstrate an understanding of the rights, privileges, and responsibilities of citizenship, as well as willingness to show respect, tolerance, and understanding toward individuals, groups, and cultures in the global community and respect and responsibility towards the environment.

In social studies, history, and geography, students learn about the past and present contributions of a variety of people to the development of Canada and the world. The critical thinking and research skills taught in social studies, history, and geography will strengthen students’ ability to recognize bias and stereotypes in contemporary as well as historical portrayals, viewpoints, representations, and images. The learning activities used to teach the curriculum should be inclusive in nature, and should reflect diverse points of view and experiences to enable students to become more sensitive to the experiences and perceptions of others. Students also learn that protecting human rights and taking a stand against racism and other expressions of hatred and discrimination are essential components of responsible citizenship. (2004:17)
Although there are similarities in these sections, the title itself shows a shift. In the 1998 version, issues of racism, inequity, and privilege were related to student attitude. In the 2004 version, the title indicates a responsibility to recognize and critique anti-discriminatory issues related to the curriculum. Referring to Banks' (1998) model for critical multiculturalism, this shift in the curriculum document raises the bar slightly by recognizing the contributions of diverse cultures, the *contributions approach* (level 1). The explicit naming of anti-discriminatory education as a priority of the curriculum brings aspects of the *ethnic additive approach* (level 2).

There is no indication of the third level, the *transformative approach*, as the overall structure of the curriculum has not changed which is a requirement of the third level. The final level, the *social action approach*, has hints of a changing curriculum structure due to the inclusion of *responsible citizenship* as a requirement for fulfilling the curriculum. Examples given to address this action are not related to antiracism, though, thus lessening the effect. As well, the examples are not mentioned under the role of students but rather under the role of parents in the successful implementation of the curriculum. The following examples were given:

Parents can also provide valuable support for their children’s learning by taking an interest in their out-of-school activities. Such an interest will allow parents to encourage their children to participate in activities that develop responsible citizenship. For example, parents could encourage their children to read to a younger child or run errands for a senior citizen. (1998:4)

Parents can provide valuable support for their children’s learning by taking an interest in their out-of-school activities. This might include encouraging their children to participate in activities that develop responsible citizenship, such as reading to a younger child, running errands for a senior citizen, helping a local volunteer organization, or participating in an environmental clean-up program in their neighbourhood. (2004: 5)

The 2004 version provides several additional examples but none are related to anti-discriminatory efforts or anti-oppression. As well, it is recognized as a parental responsibility outside of the school, rather than modeling social action from within the school.
The 1998 document provides few examples and spends more time describing the IEP and IPRC process than dealing with issues related to students receiving a modified or accommodated program in social studies. Further detail is provided in the 2004 version related to students with Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) as well as an explanation for the difference between an accommodated program and a modified program for students with an IEP. Different types of accommodations are highlighted in the 2004 document, including instructional accommodations, environment accommodations and assessment accommodations. Clarification around modified programs includes a detailed explanation of the role of the IEP and the importance of responsible reporting with modified expectations.

In the 2004 document, English as a Second Language (ESL) and English Literacy Development (ELD), students are also mentioned where the onus for student learning is placed on the team of educators: the classroom teacher, the ESL/ELD teacher and other school staff as well as volunteers and peers (2004:16). There is no reference to ESL or ELD students in the 1998 document. This is a result of the dispute arising from the fact that students are not only ESL/ELD in language class, but in all classes. As well, in 2001, the Ministry developed a support document, The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 1-8: English as a Second Language and English Literacy Development—A Resource Guide to support programming for ESL/ELD students across the curriculum.

Some changes made to the Introduction in the 2004 document are indicative of a positive move towards inclusion, although recognition of the imbalance of power is not explicitly stated. The

57 When the provincial report card was first established, there was much debate around checking the ESL/ELD box in subjects other than Language Arts. By checking this box, it would be an indication that this designation had affected achievement levels in some way and that the curriculum had been modified so that it was the student who was successful. The debate continued that a student who was developing language skills was doing it in every classroom, at all times, and therefore, if a child was ESL/ELD, then he/she would be so in all subject areas.
inclusion of certain sections in the document, such as the section which acknowledges the importance of anti-discriminatory education in the social studies curriculum, is a beginning. Unfortunately, the expectations do not reflect the same commitment by extending the expectations to be transformative in their delivery. It could be a *too little, too late* situation, considering the fact that most teachers will only read the expectations for which they are responsible, rather than the entire introduction to the document when only two paragraphs have been included to address anti-discriminatory issues in the social studies classroom.

**Revisions to the Grade Three Social Studies Curriculum**

Working within the grade three social studies curriculum topics, the teachers must focus on two main areas. The *Heritage and Citizenship* (2004) strand topic is *Early Settlements in Upper Canada* (previously *Pioneer Life* (1998)) and the *Canada and World Connections* strand topic is *Urban and Rural Communities* (unchanged from the 1998 version). The grade three students in this project focused on the *Urban and Rural Communities* topic; however, a review of both strands will be included to give deeper perspective of the social studies curriculum as indicated for grade three students in Ontario.


The title itself indicates a move towards a more inclusive approach to this time in Canadian history. The title is indicative of the second stage, the ethnic additive approach, a name coined by Banks (1998). There is recognition that this time in history involved more than the settlers, but again, there is no indication of the transformative approach since the history of Early Settlements in Upper Canada perpetuates the Eurocentric view of settlement. The First Nation Peoples who are addressed and recognized for their contributions (*contributions approach*, level 1)

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58 Reasons for this choice are further discussed in Chapter 7 in the section, *The World of Others.*
are only seen in light of European settlement in Canada rather than in terms of their own society and settlement patterns. In Beyond Heroes and Holidays (Lee, Menkart, Okazawa-Rey, 2002), the introduction addresses the “myth of the White settler”: “Growing up in the United States or Canada, most of us have learned, consciously or subconsciously, that White men made our country’s history and the other people (forcibly or by choice) helped out. Whites are at the centre” (xi).

The expectations in the Ontario curriculum documents are structured with an overview; a brief paragraph outlining the content to be covered within the topic, followed by overall expectations and then specific expectations. Within the social studies specific expectations, there is a further division of expectations into the following categories: Understanding Concepts, Developing Inquiry/Research and Communication Skills, and Applying Concepts and Skills in Various Contexts (1998) in contrast to the 2004 version which divided the specific expectations into the following categories: Knowledge and Understanding, Inquiry/Research and Communication Skills and Application.

A clear distinction in the two documents used by the Heritage and Citizenship strand is the change in terminology from Aboriginal peoples to First Nation peoples. Both names are problematic in that First Nation implies that there was one nation rather than representing the diversity of cultures that exist under the term First Nations Peoples. Within the Overview paragraphs, there are also changes.

The study of Heritage and Citizenship in Grade 3 focuses on the pioneers. Students examine the lifestyles of pioneer settlers and their contributions to early communities in Upper Canada. They compare the life of the pioneers to their own lives. They also investigate the contributions of Aboriginal peoples to pioneer communities. (1998:19)
Students investigate and describe the communities of early settlers and First Nation peoples in Upper Canada around 1800. They research interactions between new settlers and existing communities of First Nation peoples and French settlers and identify factors that helped to shape the development of the various communities. Students also compare communities of the past with those of the present. (2204:25)

In the 1998 version, the “Aboriginal peoples” are an afterthought. The focus of the unit is explicitly stated—the pioneers. The only mention of the “Aboriginal peoples” is in terms of their contribution to pioneer communities. There is an expectation that students will compare the lives of the pioneers to their own lives but no such expectation address the differences between the lives and world views of the students and the First Nations peoples.

The overall expectations differ between the two documents. The 1998 document refers to the lives and contributions of early settlers as well as their European origins. They are expected to “describe changes that have occurred in their communities since the time of the early settlers” (1998:19) and “identify the contributions of Aboriginal peoples to early settlement” (1998:19). The focus in the second document on the time period “around 1800” may be a response to teachers’ interpretations of Pioneers as a topic. In schools where I worked when the 1998 document was released, teachers interpreted Pioneers to include the vast numbers of families who attended our schools. Many of these students and their families fled their previous countries as refugees. The transformative approach to the curriculum allowed for student engagement and understanding of the concept of Pioneers as it related to their own experiences.

The 2004 document puts the two groups, First Nations peoples and Early Settlers, on a slightly more even footing:

By the end of Grade 3, students will:
• describe the communities of early settlers and First Nation peoples in Upper Canada around 1800;
• use a variety of resources and tools to gather, process, and communicate information about interactions between new settlers and existing communities, including First Nation peoples, and the impact of factors such as heritage, natural resources, and climate on the development of early settler communities;
• compare aspects of life in early settler communities and present-day communities.

The use of “existing communities” to describe First Nations peoples is the first explicit recognition that there was an existence prior to colonization. To take the leap to a transformative pedagogy, the shift would have to be complete. For example, describe the impact on First Nations communities such as Ojibwa and Iroquois Nations in what is now Ontario, when the first European settlers occupied and colonized their lands. The perspective that is clearly addressed in both curriculums is that the arrival of the settlers was a step towards development and in the interim, the First Nations peoples helped these settlers cope with the harsh weather.

The specific expectations have key differences although the message, again, is status quo. Under the heading, Understanding Concepts/Knowledge and Understanding, the main change was that two expectations were removed: “describe the routes pioneers took to arrive at their destinations in Upper Canada” and “describe Aboriginal communities prior to pioneer settlement” (1998:19). There were also changes to the wording of existing expectations. The removal of the expectations may be related to the coverage of these items in the grade six topic, First Nation Peoples and European Explorers, where more detail is expected into the lives of the First Nations Peoples in Canada prior to colonization. As well, the routes that some pioneers would have taken would not differ greatly from the routes of the explorers. The perception of who the pioneers were is changed in the second document where there is an
inclusion of African American settlers in the Chatham area which, if the issue of the routes of settlers were still included in the expectations, would lead to a discussion and inquiry of slavery in the United States and the existence of the Underground Railroad.

The wording change alters the nuances within expectations such as: “describe how the pioneers used natural resources (e.g., water, forests, land)” (1998:19) compared with, “explain how the early settlers valued, used, and looked after natural resources (e.g., water, forests, land)” (2004:25). Another difference noted the following expectations: “describe the influence of Aboriginal peoples and pioneers in the area of farming methods (e.g. the use of crop rotation)” and “describe the contributions of Aboriginal peoples to pioneer settlement (e.g. medicine, food, and exploration)” (1998:19) compared with, “describe what early settlers learned from First Nation peoples that helped them adapt to their new environment (e.g. knowledge about medicine, food, farming, transportation)” (2004:25). By changing “influence” and “contributions” of Aboriginal peoples to “learning”, there is a change in the perspective. It could be that learning indicates something that was intentional rather than something that naturally happened.

The second section, Developing Inquiry/Research and Communication Skills (1998) or Inquiry/Research and Communication Skills (2004), the order of expectations and the examples provided are all altered. In the 1998 version, all examples relate to the routes of the pioneers and their settlements. In the 2004 version, students are also expected to research the First Nations Peoples—their settlements, clothing, innovations, etc.). By placing First Nations

59 Of note is the fact that these early settlers, the “African Americans”, were not considered Americans at all as they were not citizens of the United States of America and would not be granted citizenship until 1866 after the end of the Civil War in the United States with the fourteenth amendment to the American Constitution (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fourteenth_Amendment_to_the_United_States_Constitution, accessed October 5, 2005) which granted American citizenship to anyone born in the United States, including those who were slaves. The term African
examples in the expectations, the direction towards the inclusion of First Nations Peoples is made explicit and mandated.

In the final section, *Applying Concepts and Skills in Various Contexts* (1998)/*Application* (2004), there are further revisions. The 1998 version is exclusively Euro-/ethnocentric in its expectations. The students are expected to investigate the lives led by pioneers, while there is absolutely no mention of the First Nations cultures existing before, during, and after colonization. By omitting anything non-European, the Ontario curriculum serves to perpetuate the myth that Europeans discovered North America and had every right to claim this land. First Nations history and civilization are wiped from memory. Students are asked to engage in this curriculum and yet, depending on their own histories and experiences, may have no way to relate to this curriculum.

To engage students, the critical educator will expand the definition of pioneers to include the experiences of diverse cultures in Canada and what myths or realities brought their families to Canada. When considering the many factors for that led their families to come to this land, students can consider the treatment their family received in their previous country, the promise that Canada offers and how these factors were the same or different for the First Nations Peoples and the European settlers in Canada. This phenomenon is addressed by Minnich (1990): “mere access to schooling has clearly never been enough, and cannot become so, as long as any remnants of the old assumptions that we are by nature inferior and ought to be educated to serve White men remain within the curriculum, however deeply hidden” (18). These remnants are clearly visible, yet implicit in the obvious omission of non-European

[Note: The text contains a citation for Minnich (1990).]
cultures and perspectives related to this time in Ontario's and Canada's history. The expectations in the 1998 document are:

By the end of Grade 3, students will:

- locate and label the pioneers' countries of origin on a world map;
- locate and label pioneer settlements on a map of Upper Canada;
- trace the routes (e.g. England to Upper Canada) taken by early settlers on a world map;
- compare and contrast the lives (e.g. daily routines) of pioneer and present-day children of similar ages;
- compare and contrast life in a pioneer settlement with that in their own community (e.g. with respect to services, jobs, schools, stores, use of natural resources);
- compare and contrast buildings in pioneer settlement with those of the present day;
- compare tools used by the pioneers to today's tools (e.g. hand saw/power saw);
- investigate pioneer diet and compare it to that of present-day people (e.g. production of maple syrup/sugar, lumber, and grain products);
- identify significant heritage symbols on the Canadian coat of arms (e.g. beaver; fur trade; maple leaf; early settlers; Union Jack; Britain).


The focus in the 1998 document is on how the Europeans settled in Upper Canada and how that life differs from the lives of the students today in terms of services, homes, diet, schools, and tools. In these expectations, there is no mention of First Nations peoples.

The 2004 version differs in its expectations in the Application section, due to the inclusion of First Nations peoples. The expectations indicate a recognition of First Nations peoples as having a culture to learn about which, like the early settlers, is complex, diverse and worthy of inquiry. The complete lack of representation in the 1998 version speaks to Minnich's concept of partial knowledge, "...a part defined as a whole leaves no place for anything that differs
from it. All else must, then, be squeezed into similarity with the defining part, or remain Other to it, outside it, in no-place, no-time” (1990:147). The 2004 version’s expectations are:

By the end of Grade 3, students will:

- compare and contrast aspects of daily life for early settler and/or First Nation children in Upper Canada and children in present-day Ontario (e.g. food, education, work and play)
- compare and contrast aspects of life in early settler and/or First Nation communities in Upper Canada and in their own community today (e.g. services, jobs, schools, stores, use and management of natural resources);
- compare and contrast buildings/dwellings in early settler and/or First Nation communities in Upper Canada with buildings and dwelling in present-day Ontario;
- compare and contrast tools and technologies used by early settlers and/or First Nation peoples with present-day tools and technologies (e.g. quill/word processor; sickly/combine harvester; methods of processing lumber, grain, and other products);
- re-create some social activities or celebrations of early settler and/or First Nation communities. (Ministry of Education, 2004:26)

In the 2004 version, students are expected to research and apply their knowledge to First Nations peoples as well as the early settlers. Although the 2004 version includes First Nations peoples, side-by-side with the Early Settlers, in all aspects, the First Nations peoples will continue to be defined, compared, contrasted and researched “into similarity with the defining part” (Minnich, 1990:147). The choice to have early settlers precede First Nation and the choice to include “and/or” rather than “both” when investigating this moment in history suggests that by only investigating one, there is a completion of the expectations for this topic. Suggesting that students can compare either the early settler or First Nations experience in terms of diet, services, homes or technologies with “children in present-day Ontario” can also serve to further isolate many students. A more inclusive way to word that expectation is, “compare and contrast aspects of daily life for both the First Nations children and the early
settlers of Upper Canada to your own experience in Ontario today”. By wording the expectation in this way, those who settled in this land first, are given precedence. The experience of both First Nations and early settler are considered and then compared and contrasted with the lived experience of the students engaging with this curriculum. Furthermore, students should be made aware that the experiences of all First Nations peoples and early settlers were not the same, depending on how much they were impacted by colonization, and for the early settlers, what their status was in their previous country as well as their reasons for coming to Upper Canada and how their reasons for leaving their former country would continue to impact them in their new home.

*Urban and Rural Communities (1998 and 2004)*

The *Canada and World Connections* strand could improve in terms of its inclusivity, engagement and transformation of the curriculum. In general, this strand focuses more on geography than history, and as a result, has fewer controversial topics than the *Heritage and Citizenship* strand. Again, within the various sections of the curriculum, there are changes to expectations.

The overview in the 1998 document states:

> In comparing urban and rural communities in Ontario, students in Grade 3 focus on human and environmental interactions. They compare the communities’ cultural backgrounds, as well as their use of space and services. They also investigate the various interdependencies between the environment and meeting the needs of diverse populations in urban and rural communities. (1998: 32).

The overview focuses on urban and rural communities in Ontario. Cultural backgrounds of communities are addressed in the overview, but upon review of the overall and specific expectations, there is no such indication or expectation related to that statement. A review of Canadian immigration policies throughout the country’s history has been linked to the Canada’s economic and labour needs; people were often granted or denied citizenship based
on racist and oppressive means. In principle, Canadian immigration law has moved from being explicitly restrictive to non-discriminatory. Prior to 1968, the overtly prejudicial law was based on a “nationality preference system” favouring European immigrants (Jukubowski, 1997:10). Chinese immigrant workers settled in British Columbia to build the railroad. Ukrainian immigrants settled in the mid-west to establish farming and agrarian communities. Their way in was to follow the labour needs in Canada (Boyko, 1995; Jukubowski, 1997). There is no reflection offered, nor are there expectations or inquiry addressing the settlement patterns based on immigration and settlement laws throughout Canada’s history in the curriculum document.

The overview in the 2004 document states:

Students describe similarities and differences between urban and rural communities. They investigate geographic and environmental factors that influence the development of different communities. They also examine how communities interact with each other and the environment to meet human needs. (25)

Not surprisingly, the concepts of cultural backgrounds of communities and meeting the needs of “diverse populations” present in the first document are no longer part of the overview in the second. The same pattern is indicative of the overall expectations where any space for addressing settlement patterns and development of urban and rural communities is removed. These expectations differ from the previous document (1998) which explicitly names urban and rural communities in Ontario. The examples provided in the revised document (2004) give examples from Ontario such as Sudbury, Hamilton, Ottawa—but the focus is not limited to Ontario. This leaves more room for interpretation on the part of the teacher to address urban

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60 These topics are dealt with in the grade eight geography curriculum on Migration in the Social Studies, History and Geography curriculum document.
and rural communities in a more inclusive way, though it is not explicitly named as part of the curriculum.

Examples in the final section, *Applying Concepts and Skills in Various Contexts* (1998)/ *Application* (2004), are again, more inclusive. In the 1998 version, an expectation in this section states, “describe the ways in which people interact with other communities (e.g. urban dwellers may travel to rural areas for recreational purposes; rural dwellers may make use of urban services such as hospitals)” (1998:33), compared with the 2004 expectation, “compare the characteristics of their community to those of a different community (e.g. with respect to population density, services, recreation, modes of travel to isolated northern and First Nation communities)” (40).

*The Exemplars for the 1998 Social Studies Curriculum*

The exemplars (2002) were developed to support the 1998 curriculum document, specifically to provide teachers with sample student work which illustrates each achievement level to support their assessment of students. In the exemplars document, it is suggested:

The procedures followed during the development and implementation of this project will serve as a model for boards, schools, and teachers in designing assessment tasks within the context of regular classroom work, developing rubrics, assessing the achievement of their own students, and planning for the improvement of students’ learning. (Ministry of Education, 2002:3)

The Ministry stipulates that parents will also be able to use the exemplar document to gauge how well their students are meeting expectations.

The task for the *Pioneer Life* topic included a series of charts that students were expected to complete. The students were asked to research the contributions of Aboriginal Peoples and explain why these contributions were important to the Pioneers. The second part of the task was to compare “pioneer times” to “modern days”. The charts were completed with a variety
of pictures and words. In the level four sample, the student refers to the contributions of the “Indians” (2002, 32). Although there are older generations within First Nations peoples who still accept this identification, the nomenclature for this term dates to European exploration in North America and the false belief that when Christopher Columbus came to North America, it was actually India. The terminology used in the exemplar representing the highest level (level 4) available in the province should be reflective of antiracist and ethnocultural equity policies, for example, *Antiracism and Ethnocultural Equity in School Boards: Guidelines for Policy Development and Implementation*, 1993, Ministry of Education and Training of Ontario, including the use of inclusive language that is reflective of the community it represents and should have been vetted by “external validations teams and Ministry of Education staff” (2002, 3).

The task is on par with Banks’ first level of multiculturalism, the *contributions approach*, focusing on the contributions of the First Nations peoples to the survival of the early settlers in Ontario. It shares some aspects with Banks’ *ethnic additive approach* as there is content relating to First Nations peoples but only from a Eurocentric perspective. The task lacks any form of criticality, anti-oppressive or antiracist pedagogy. The task involves an investigation of First Nations peoples only in terms of their assistance to the dominant oppressor. For a critical perspective to be addressed in this activity, teachers would have to take it upon themselves to interpret the activity in this way since the level four exemplar does not act as an exemplar from a critical perspective, instead leaving it up to the individual teacher to implement the curriculum in a critical way.

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61 This acceptance of the term “Indian” speaks to the complexities of colonialism and the internalization of oppressive language and definitions.
To make this task critical and representative of Banks' *Transformative Approach* it should be reflective or representative of the First Nations peoples’ experiences throughout this time, as well as how the early settlers impacted the lives of the First Nations peoples who existed for thousands of years prior to the arrival of early settlers. It should address reasons why the early settlers came to Ontario in the first place and the issues of class that would continue in their new home. It should address the negative effects of this meeting of many cultures as well as the positive contributions of all involved. The *Decision-Making Social Action Approach* should empower the students to take action that relates to this topic. For example, students may investigate resources in the school library for stereotypical information related to the time in history. They may reflect on their own lived experiences resulting from colonialism and address current issues in the world whereby a group of people are oppressed due to
colonialism—thus applying the knowledge they have gained from learning about the experiences of First Nations peoples at this time in history to the present day.

The task provided for the unit, *Urban and Rural Communities*, is similar to the pioneer task in that students are expected to complete a chart comparing key features of urban and rural communities. A level of criticality could be added to this activity by asking what urban and rural communities look like in other parts of the world, perhaps where the participants’ families came from. It could discuss the transition for a new immigrant from a rural background to an urban area and the struggles that may ensue. There are stories about the Ukrainian immigrants around the turn of the century who were relegated to rural areas even though they did not have an agricultural background but were expected to know how to live off the land. There could be further discussion around issues that exist now in rural areas in terms of lack of services such as doctors, high school programming, garbage removal, snow removal despite the fact that taxes in many of these areas are equal to if not more than their urban counterparts with an excess of services.

Consideration should be given to students who have never seen either an urban or rural community as they will not have the background knowledge or the experiences to engage with the curriculum in the same way. If possible, it is important to provide the experiences that these students would not otherwise have. For example, in many communities in Toronto, the children go to school and spend the remainder of their time indoors, in their apartments, watching television. An authentic experience, even if it were a farming community just outside of a major urban centre, is still better than no exposure to such a place as it will validate the

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62 I worked at a school in the TDSB where the majority of families were originally from rural Vietnam and came to Canada as refugees with no formal education. As a result, families continued to live in poverty and had great difficulty finding work in the city.
experiences of those living in different places and regions—it will demystify and demarginalize the diversity of experiences in Ontario.

**The Curriculum: Pressure to Perform, Not Transform**

**Investment Tied to Achievement**

The expectations in the grade three curriculum documents have a shorter implementation time due to the timing of the provincial testing which grade three teachers in Ontario are expected to administer. The Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO, http://www.eqao.com) distributes standardized testing in the spring of each school year. Whereas all other grades are expected to cover the curriculum by the end of the school year, the grade three students are assessed on their understanding, knowledge and skills as they relate to grade three curriculum expectations six weeks prior to the end of the school year. This creates added pressure for teachers assigned to grade three classrooms. As well, as a relatively new teacher, the stress of teaching itself can be overwhelming.

The results of the EQAO testing are scrutinized and reviewed by the province, the board, the school and the community in general. For a school administrator, the pressure to increase EQAO scores, linked directly to school improvement plans, is extreme. Principals are expected to raise scores above and beyond the provincial expectation of 75% of students at levels three\(^63\) and four within the next year.

At Lakeview Public School, the EQAO scores were raised from 34% at levels three and four to 48% at levels three and four in reading; from 45% at levels 3 and 4 to 54% at levels three and four in writing; and finally, from 31% at levels three and four to 57% at levels three and

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\(^63\) An example of this type of story is the children's book, *Joseph*, by Jim McGugan.
four in mathematics between the 2002/2003 academic year and the 2003/2004 academic year. These increases in student achievement were in line with the promotion and placement of the principal at Lakeview Public School during this study. The low scores in literacy drew enough attention to qualify Lakeview Public School for the Early Years Literacy Project (EYLP) beginning in the fall of 2003, my first year working with the school and the year prior to this data collection.

The Early Years Literacy Project builds capacity in all learners in the school. The intent is that all students in the primary years will read and write at grade level. The ninety-three schools participating are provided with a literacy expert who is in the school to provide support to teachers and manage literacy resources. The project provides each school with a full implementation of Reading Recovery™ such that one to one intervention for at risk readers in grade one is available. These resources give schools the basis to have the various resources needed to run balanced literacy programs. As well a number of resources are provided to schools for professional development. All schools in the project assess students with the DRA assessment tool in the fall and in the spring. Training to administer these assessments is provided annually.

The project has been well received with it doubling in schools participating (47 schools last year and 93 schools this year) and many more schools wanting to be included. It is anticipated that over the four years the number of students able to read and write at grade level in the primary grades will be over 80% with a number of schools reaching closer to 90%. The goal is 100%. (http://www.rdsb.on.ca/newsroom/latebreaknews/Fact_sheet_EQAO_Literacy.htm)

The school’s and board’s commitment to this program increases the school’s and board’s accountability to performance and student achievement due to the additional funding in place for staffing, professional development and resources to support literacy development at the school. These additions are expected to yield increased scores on provincial testing and other standardized testing such as the DRA (Diagnostic Reading Assessment) mentioned above.

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64 A Level 3 in the Ontario curriculum refers to the provincial standard and is equivalent to a B range mark. Level 4 is equivalent to an A range mark.
Although the statistics from Lakeview Public School indicate that from the school year 2002-2003 to 2003-2004 literacy performance increased between 11% and 14% in writing and reading respectively, the increase in student achievement levels still remained well below the standard expected by the board which stipulates that 100% of students involved in this project should be at or above grade level.

Furthermore, at Lakeview Public School, where there are enough students to fill only one grade three classroom, the pressure for the teacher in that classroom to improve those scores is enhanced. The principal is accountable for achievement increases and would then transfer that accountability and pressure to the classroom teacher. The EQAO tests are set to measure the success of students as they complete their primary years and junior years, therefore, it is a reflection not only on the grade three and six teachers in the school but on the school as whole. Although data is analyzed from that point of view in many schools to determine school improvement plans based on student needs and achievement levels, the stress still typically resides with the teachers who are assigned to grades three and six in those years. The school scores, which are subsequently published in Toronto newspapers as well as government publications, show results in that particular school, for better or for worse, and are the results of that one teacher in that school. The scrutiny is immense.

**Transformation before Achievement—Engagement versus Funding**

The pressure on the classroom teacher in the grade three classrooms, in the case of Lakeview, the only classroom participating in an EQAO assessment since the school itself does not include grade six, would be the only public measure of performance and student achievement for that school was significantly higher than other teachers at the school. Although work towards a critical practice will benefit students in terms of engagement with the curriculum,
there is always a risk in moving away from prescribed expectations and into the realm of student-led inquiry as it may lead away from material on the provincial test. The barriers which exist to hold onto these expectations can be blamed on regulations and accountability barriers which address an educator's use of the mandated curriculum as a way to avoid transformative practices; priority barriers which addresses the process by which educators will agree that knowledge building is useful but they or the school/board have other more pertinent priorities; or risk barriers which address educators' need to stick with the "tried and true" because there is comfort in traditional practices (Scardamalia, 2003a). Alternatively, these barriers can be understood within the context of cultural dominance as explained by Giroux:

...dominant culture is mediated in schools through textbooks, through the assumptions that teachers use to guide their work, through the meanings that students use to negotiate their classroom experiences, and through the form and content of school subjects themselves. (1981: 97)

This defines both the explicit and hidden curriculum agendas in the classroom but it also describes the obligation teachers feel to conform to these standards despite the role of the standards to perpetuate power structures within schools.

Critical pedagogy, as well as knowledge building pedagogy addresses curriculum in the schools. Within knowledge building, there is a dichotomy between formal and informal knowledge in every classroom. The formal knowledge is the knowledge gained in the classroom whereas the informal knowledge is the knowledge the students bring to the classroom with them. These same theorists also explain that within a knowledge building classroom, there is both the "intended curriculum", which in the case of this classroom would be the Ontario curriculum guidelines, and the "emerging curriculum".
In a knowledge building classroom, the teacher comes prepared with learning goals but because student inquiry is based on students’ own questions the curriculum becomes an emerging agenda between the teachers’ goals, the mandated goals and the students’ interests. (Lamon, Reeve & Scardamalia, 2001:4).

The challenge for teachers in a public school setting attempting to sustain and support a knowledge building classroom is to accomplish the explicit or intended curriculum while still allowing for time for the emerging curriculum. In addition, to ensure that the curriculum is delivered critically requires still more effort. The result can be a classroom of students engaged in their schooling.

Critical educators address a dichotomy in curriculum implementation in terms of explicit and hidden curriculums. Giroux explains, “To break through the ‘hidden curriculum’ of knowledge, social studies educators must help students understand that knowledge is not only variable and linked to human interest but also must be examined in regard to its claims to validity” (1988:31). It is a risk for educators to challenge curriculum expectations from this vantage point as it may de-emphasize some expectations of the explicit curriculum. Giroux further explains that it is not only the accepted truths in curriculum that need to be addressed but also the interactions in the classroom. Giroux suggests that if educators abstain from engaging in these hidden curriculums with their students, then students “will learn more about social conformity than critical inquiry” (1988:31)—veering from transformative practice.

This need to meet explicit curriculum expectations as well as the endeavour to create a critical knowledge building classroom was a source of tension and stress throughout this project. As students began to veer away from the mandated\(^\text{65}\) curriculum expectations, the topics and

\(^{65}\) The mandated curriculum is also referred to as the explicit or intended curriculum. Within all curriculums, there is a hidden curriculum.
discussion were often harnessed back to be aligned with these documents. This veering away from the explicit curriculum is the transformation moment: “When the curriculum does not reflect the realities of the students, there may be a resistance (either consciously or unconsciously) to the acquisition of any knowledge. This resistance can be further exacerbated by the lack of negotiation within this conservative curriculum.” (Lee and Reitano, 2000:6)

Critical knowledge building can encourage more inclusive and authentic knowledge, multivocality, negotiation through idea improvement and community knowledge, and collective responsibility, when placed within a critical frame. It engages students in the negotiation of ideas based on personal experiences and knowledge.

The grade three social studies topic, Urban and Rural Communities, stipulates that students will “compare the characteristics of their community to those of a different community” (2004: 40). The students belonged to many different communities, either cultural communities or geographic communities where they had lived before. Students were able to understand the differences between urban and rural communities in Ontario but also in other countries. This expanded the definition of urban and rural for the students as they added their own knowledge and experience to this understanding.

Putting our knowledge together Jamaica and Brazil are the same in some ways because they have the same climate. Jamaica also loves to play cricket and Brazil also loves to play soccer in the close to the beach. In both places they also eat so much on Sunday. People in Jamaica they don’t have to where lots of clothes because it is hot and it is hot in Brazil too.

What we did… We worked together and we got lots of information from books and from being friends and we learned about our countries. -Paola, Taina

After reading what Paola and Taina wrote about Jamaica and Brazil, another student who had recently emigrated from Eritrea wrote about her experience living in a rural community:
Eritrea is a fun place. There are a lot of animals there like elephants. My family came from a rural area. In Eritrea everyone knows each other so know one is a stranger. Everyone in Eritrea play games and the most games we play is soccer and keep it the hoola hoop up. If you want to learn more write back. -Sharon

Another student who had emigrated from Brazil to Toronto added to the description of Brazil:

“Brazil is a place that is very hot and I would like to visit Brazil again to see the rainforest and the Amazon River” (Gary). Students have the agency to take the concept of urban and rural communities beyond the explicit curriculum of Ontario’s urban and rural communities and into their own experiences in different parts of the world:

…epistemic agency [has been described] as taking responsibility for personal understanding demonstrated through iterative cycles of revising internal and external ideas to a resolution. Developing epistemic agency includes taking responsibility for learning elements such as goals, motivation and evaluation of understanding that are often orchestrated by teachers in traditional academic settings (Brett, 2002: 3)

Although it was the students who directed their inquiry and experiences, it is the teacher who provides the students with a space to be able to do this. Students were well aware of the shift towards epistemic agency. The same student who wrote about her experience in rural Eritrea also explained the difference between working in a critical knowledge building project and her other experiences in school:

You are like the boss and can control it. When you are the boss, you have to be responsible because a boss is in charge and has power. You have to think about your answers and your questions because if you just write them without thinking, you will have so many people writing you back and saying…that isn’t really what it is. You didn’t think about this or that. So you have to be responsible. -Sharon

The concept of curriculum as transformative is a goal which runs through both antiracism and knowledge building.
Transformative pedagogy refers to interactions between educators and students that foster the collaborative creation of power (Cummins, 2003). Shared expertise, shared voice, and shared responsibility are goals of this transformative space. It is the Freirian concept that education is action and reflection.

Transformative pedagogy turns the lens on social realities. These are, in turn, critically analyzed by students through a process of collaborative dialogue. Using the cultural capital of the students, classrooms become a forum in which students are able to voice opinions which have been silenced within practices of traditional pedagogy. (Lee and Caterina, 2000)

The development of views in the database and the process whereby the emerging curriculum dictated those views was in line with the transformation of the classroom. Students directed their inquiry first within the curriculum guidelines and then outside of it based on their own knowledge and life experiences. Nagda et al. (2003) suggests that transformative pedagogy functions on two levels: the content level and the pedagogical level. At the content level, "transformative education includes previously excluded perspectives and experiences of groups that historically have had marginalized participation in educational settings" (167). At the pedagogical level, "transformative practice engages students as critical thinkers, participatory and active learners, and envisioners of alternative possibilities of social reality" (167). Both aspects of transformative pedagogy necessarily involve dialogue. hooks suggests, "when we practice learning in such a way that it brings us into closer connection with ourselves the classroom is transformed" (2003:173). To be engaged is to be a part of the learning and curriculum in the classroom. It is to be represented and reflected in all that happens in the classroom.
Representation, Reflection and Engagement—the Malleable Curriculum

Transforming the Curriculum—Critical Moments

The range of topics covered in this project include: the local community, features of communities around the world, urban and rural communities, and Canada’s provinces, territories and regions which represent the Canada and World Connections strand from grade one through to grade four. Inquiry and research skills used by students reflect expectations at the grade eight level such as “formulate questions to guide research on issues and problems”; “use a variety of primary and secondary sources to locate relevant information”; “analyze, synthesize, and evaluate historical information”; and “describe and analyze conflicting points of view” (Ontario Curriculum: Social Studies, History and Geography, 2004:61-62).

The expectations of the social studies curriculum were met through inquiry, research and dialogue. The mandate of the EQAO was to administer and report on test results for students in grades three and six in Ontario, report on the quality and effectiveness of education in Ontario, and finally to report on the public accountability of boards. These purposes have been transformed into: accountability, school and system improvement, and capacity building (Wolfe, Childs and Elgie, 2004:25). Schools have the same purpose. At Lakeview, the principal is expected to report on and be accountable for student success, school improvement and the development and support of staff to build capacity within a school to maintain momentum towards continual school improvement.

To encourage students’ engagement with the curriculum, it was the goal of this project to find ways to make this curriculum accessible and allow the students to see themselves in their learning. The range of topics in the database expanded, as the children followed their own inquiries linked to communities. The views in the database were developed throughout the
project to be reflective of the learning that was happening and pattern of notes that were appearing based on their inquiry.

The structure of the database was set up to reflect the topics of the grade three social studies curriculum. In the welcome page, curriculum documents were made available for reference. The first views were developed within the database to link up to key areas in the grade three social studies curriculum, specifically, *Urban and Rural Communities*. The initial view was *Communities*. As the students began to write notes, themes emerged from their inquiry leading Sonja and I to develop four new views: *Communities, Greatest Canadians, Naming Communities* and *Urban and Rural Communities in Canada*.

![Figure 15: The Welcome View](image)

Sonja had seen a television series called, *The Greatest Canadian*, and decided that this would be an interesting way to tie in the various parts of Canada, its communities, and the contributions of diverse groups of Canadians. By the end of the project, the views had been expanded well
beyond the scope of the mandated curriculum into areas of cooperative learning, communities around the world, regional Canada, as well as “how to” notes which the students wrote to explain technological functions they found necessary to understand in order to use the database effectively.

The initial view created in this database was an All About Me view where students were asked to introduce themselves based on particular scaffold supports: How I got my name, I was born in..., My parents were born in..., My grandparents were born in..., I can speak English and..., I think that knowledge is..., I think that learning is..., and I think this project will.... The role of this view was to help me get to know the students but also for the students to better know their classmates by finding out about the various languages they speak, their heritage and their ideas. It is also beneficial, when learning the various components of the software, such as how to login, create a note, create a build-on note, use the scaffolds and scaffold supports, to work with content that is familiar to the students. Asking the students to research their names also helps them to realize the importance of names and the act of naming and that it is not a random act but one that is often given much thought by the people who name them. It is a way to tie children to their past and their heritage, to hopes and dreams.

(How I Got My Name) Everyone calls me Deb or Debbie but my real name is Debra Susan Donsky. I also have a Hebrew name, which is Devorah Leah. Devorah means “the bee”. In the Old Testament, Devorah was the nurse of Rebecca. Devorah also is the name of a heroine and prophetess who led the Israelites in defeating the Canaanites in the Old Testament. The name Leah means “weary”. In the Old Testament, Leah was the first wife of Jacob and the mother of seven of his children. My parents also picked the name Debra after a movie star they liked and Leah was for my grandfather’s sister. My last name, Donsky, is a Polish, Jewish name. -Debbie
From a lady in the Old Testament. She is ninety years old.

how I got my name was my mom decided to name me
my name means popular.

I got my name because my mom said I was brave I even
wasn't afraid of lions

HOW I GOT MY NAME MY MEANES

I got my name from my parents. My name means star. In
Buddhist and Hindu I was named for an astral Goddess, the wife of

Brihaspati

I mean a new born baby

I got my name from a book but I got it from the name of
region in France which means Kingdom of Lothair.

I got my name form a famous girl in Brazil. My name
means a dog, a pigeon and a dove.

my mom gave me my name when I was a baby and my
name means wood

I got my name from my mom and my mom likes my
name and it means White fair and blessed

This discussion of names asked the students to research the meanings of their names on the
Internet. In one case, Wei, who typically used her anglicized name, found the meaning of her
Chinese name and began using it. She was surprised to find her name on a website because she
didn't know anyone else with her name. Students also went home to talk about their names

Student entries here remain anonymous as placing their pseudonyms beside the explanation of the name given to them may
cause a breach in confidentiality.
with their parents which engaged their parents in their learning. Students found out what their names meant and why the parents chose them. They also understood some of the traditions in their cultures around naming a child.

The second view developed was called *Communities*. Although the curriculum focuses specifically on Urban and Rural Communities, Sonja and I wanted the students to first think about what a community was since we were trying to form one in the classroom. We felt that if the students gave us some idea about their understandings of what community was it would help to frame the inquiry around their knowledge and what they still needed to understand. The students were asked to use the scaffold support for KWL: *What I know, What I Want to Know, and What I Have Learned*. It was a place for students to brainstorm ideas they had around the concept of a community. Based on the notes posted in this view, three new views were established: *Naming Communities, Urban and Rural Communities*, and *Communities around the World*.

The idea for *Naming Communities* came about through the Freirian concept of naming—naming as an act of colonization (Tuhawai-Smith) and the practice in research of naming or representing (Angrosino and Mays de Pérez; Denzin and Lincoln). As a critical project, if students are asked to research and develop theories about communities, those they belong to and those they do not belong to, then the awareness has to be raised in terms of naming and being named. Attention was also raised to the fact that although the students and their families may have been born and lived in other countries, while they are living in Toronto, the place they left continues to change so that their representation of that place is one from memory rather than a clear reality. This also relates to Denzin and Lincoln’s crisis of representation.

The crisis of representation addresses how researchers write about and represent the social world. "Researchers struggled with how to locate themselves and their subjects in reflexive
texts" (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000:3). This crisis must be addressed with students who are conducting research, writing about and representing their world (family, class, school, community), the worlds they are linked to beyond their immediate physical location (ancestry/heritage, former places they have lived) or when representing people and places with which they have no direct affiliation.

As students began working with the idea of communities and urban and rural communities, they also began investigating communities to which they felt they belonged. The following notes are part a discussion thread related to Communities around the World. The students who wrote the first note had emigrated from the Philippines when she was a baby.

Tamra: It was named after the Spanish Prince Named Philip - People in the Philippines eat rice, veggies and meat - Snacks are rice, cake, fruit, crackers - Sometimes houses are made out of cool Nippa leaves - Brooms and dusters are made out of dried grass

Debbie: (My theory) When we explain how people live in other countries, we have to be careful not only give one story. What I mean is, when you said, “SOMETIMES HOUSES ARE MADE OUT OF COOL NIPPA LEAVES” I think that NIPPA leaves are banana leaves and they are used in native dwellings. Many people in the Philippines live in apartments and houses very similar to the houses we have here. (New information) It would be the same as saying that all Canadians live in igloos.

Putting our knowledge together What other communities and homes are there in the Philippines?

Kenneth: I just moved from the Philippines last year and I didn’t have a house with Nippa leaves. I don’t even know what Nippa leaves are. I lived in a big apartment building.

The concept of authentic voice is part of this and yet, even those who belong to a particular community or define themselves as belonging to a particular community cannot represent a

67 All student names are pseudonyms.
whole community. Brett suggests that “epistemic agency and community identity are conceptualized as mutually constituting engagement in community discourse” (2002:4). She further suggests that identity within that community may act as a catalyst for engagement with and responsibility for learning. Angrosino and Mays de Perez (2000), suggest, once inside a community, it becomes apparent that these collectives “are defined as much by their conflicts, factions, and divisions as they are by their commonalities” (Angrosino and Mays de Perez, 680).

In this previous example, one student, Tara, claimed knowledge about the Philippines and another student, Kenneth, improved Tara’s representation of that cultural group by adding his own experiences and knowledge to that representation.

When working within an antiracist framework, teachers will hesitate, even when there is a desire to teach within this frame, due to the overwhelming desire to meet all the expectations in the Ontario curriculum, a daunting task to say the least. What antiracist educators know is that regardless of any effort to meet the curriculum expectations, if students are not engaged, learning will be compromised. The challenge then becomes how to engage the students. Students must see themselves reflected in their learning. Urban students learning about rural Ontario without ever seeing it will not entice them to engage with that learning. For students who were born in rural settings outside of Ontario, their definition of a rural community would be quite different than what we would see in Ontario. Those who grew up in cities that have existed for thousands of years would not think of a modern city like Toronto with its paved roads and grid city blocks. Cummins suggests, “…when students take ownership of their learning—when they invest their identities in learning outcomes—active learning takes place” (2005:38). All of these considerations must be taken into account when delivering a critical and transformative project. These cultures outside of Canada, Ontario, or Toronto must stand on their own and not only be considered in terms of the Toronto experience.
The revised Ontario social studies curriculum expectations offer some flexibility around this issue. The students at Lakeview emigrated from many countries around the world including: Jamaica, Eritrea, China, Viet Nam, Korea, Trinidad, Brazil, Somalia, Russia, Philippines, Pakistan, Turkey and Guatemala. Understanding not just what urban/rural is in Canada but what it means in other places around the world, validates their experiences, knowledge and heritage—as in the example mentioned above, with more authenticity than the texts they used to do the research itself. Students were able to redefine what a text was—it wasn’t just printed material that existed in the school. They had knowledge, their families had knowledge, and some students began to recognize knowledge is partial and biased.

Yohance: Books have a lot of information but you can’t talk to them. If you don’t understand something, there isn’t anything you can do to find out more information from a book but with KF, you can ask the person who wrote the note and the whole class can see it and help you with something you don’t understand.

Sharon: So if you are in KF, it is like having a conversation. You can say what you agree with and what you don’t agree with. In a book, the facts are there in Black and White and there is no discussion. You can’t talk about it with a book. You can question in KF and move the idea forward.

Ulan: In KF, you can store information and add information.

The students suggested that the work they did in Knowledge Forum was informed by more sources and was shared with more people than their regular work. The following is from an observation note from the first focus group:
I then asked the kids how the learning they have done has made them want to learn more at home. Kenneth talked about the houses in the Philippines and that when we did this in school he went home to find out more about it. Sharon then started telling us a story about Eritrea and the animals that she used to see there all the time. She said that in Eritrea you don't have to worry about strangers like you do in Toronto because everyone knows each other and everyone is safe. I asked Sharon why she told us this story now and she explained that she wanted to tell it before in class but it was too busy. I asked the kids if they felt this too and Sally and Nathan said that they have more time to say what they want in KF than in the other times in their classes. Sharon explained that in KF, there are not as many distractions and she can type more and do more. (January 20, 2004).

Dei suggests learning through and with community as a collective and collaborative project dependent on multiple and diverse perspectives (1995:33) must be incorporated into antiracist classroom practice. Students were more inclined not only to discuss what was learned in class when we were doing knowledge building, but they would then bring the perspectives and knowledge from home to the classroom to better inform the collective learning in the database and through class discussions.

Summary

In this chapter, I analyze the revisions to the Ontario Social Studies curriculum document between the 1998 version to the 2004 version from a critical perspective by looking specifically at the title changes, changes to expectations and the changes made to the introduction section of the document. The introduction indicates the most change in the document but this section is rarely read by educators, who tend to look at the grade level and expectations they are responsible for in their classroom rather than read how the Ministry of Education chooses to frame the curriculum.

The changes made to the 2004 document are compared with Banks' model for critical multiculturalism (1998) and are indicative of the second level, the *ethnic additive approach*, rather than taking the leap towards the *transformative approach* or the *social action approach*. For those
educators committed to antiracist education, it means they must adjust the curriculum to include these aspects of practice. Leading students toward social action is a necessary component in antiracism education. Antiracism is “an approach which includes a commitment to political and academic education for meaningful social change” (Dei, 1996:11). It is the commitment of the antiracist education to ensure that students have the voice and ability to take action which truly empowers.

Other changes between 1998 and 2004 are apparent in the new document in the representation of marginalized groups such as ESL/ELD students and special education students, recognizing the responsibility of the education team to meet the needs of the students. This section, too, has revisions in that school administration is now held accountable. However, the assumption is that education as a meritocracy still remains as there is reference to the fact that if students take responsibility for their learning and apply themselves, they will be successful. Furthermore, the belief that these documents contain essential knowledge is still present in the introduction of the 2004 social studies document.

Issues of funding and student performance were also addressed in relation to the EQAO scores and the Early Years Literacy Project. Classroom teachers are under pressure to reach students based on standards set by the Ministry of Education through funding such as literacy projects and EQAO assessment data. In the former, funding is related to low levels of achievement and schools who qualify in this “at-risk” category are given extra funding for staffing and resources. The commitment is then to see steady if not drastic improvement in EQAO scores and other assessment data. In the TDSB, these schools are those in the lowest income neighbourhoods with diverse sociolinguistic and ethnical and racial populations. Issues which also arise tied to the EQAO data are the public scrutiny and ranking of schools and therefore the people who attend those schools where results are low or decreasing.
The malleability of this curriculum is addressed through examples and explanation. Whether supported or not, a classroom teacher who is committed to a critical practice can do so while still fulfilling the official curriculum's assessment and reporting expectations. There are opportunities for criticality in the classroom through the way the classroom atmosphere is established by setting up opportunities for students to see themselves in the curriculum. Students were able to define their own inquiry through their own definitions of community but were also enlightened with the importance of naming by first investigating how they were named but also through a discussion of what naming means and the power that is invoked within the practice of naming (Freire, 1970).

In the following chapter, the ethnography of the school is addressed by analyzing the whole school community including students, teachers, parents, volunteers, administration, and support staff. The school's practice towards equity and antiracism education, the transient nature of the school and how this affects community building and finally the relationship and development of trust between myself and the classroom teacher are also addressed.
Chapter 5

THE POLITICS OF POWER AND PRECARIOUS PLACES

Lakeview Public School

The school can be a site of resistance. The classroom, the teacher, the students, the administration and the curriculum itself, can all serve to protect systemic racism and power through resistance to projects that attempt to rupture this power. To propose a project of this nature in a school and to have that proposal be accepted in writing, does not equate to institutional support for the project. An administrator who grants access will do so for many reasons—for example, to refuse a project which resides in the space of critical education and antiracism would be politically incorrect when legislation and school board policies support the implementation of such projects. Resistance is much more subtle than that. You can come into my home but don’t touch anything or I will kick you out. There is a reliance on this access for my project to occur. As such, I must work within the parameters set by the classroom teacher and school principal. In my own classroom, additional possibility exists as I have autonomy within that space—but this was not my classroom or my school.

Consent was granted through the signature of the school principal, the verbal and written consent by the classroom teacher, and the consent and assent by the students and their parents/guardians. Resistance also exists in each of these spaces. Parents can feel pressure to sign a consent form as it is a document sent by the school. Although in the ethical review, I was asked to reword these consent forms to a “grade-six level” so that parents could understand the content, there are still those in this community who do not have English as a first language and may then find the text inaccessible. Fine, Wise, Weseen and Wong (2000) write about informed consent as a tool to protect the researcher as much as it protects the
participant. As well, as identified in Chapter 3, the classroom teacher was asked to volunteer and had expressed interest in the project but there is still need to identify the power imbalance that exists between a school principal and classroom teacher. Resistance to the implementation of antiracist education initiatives can be for many reasons. In this project, the classroom teacher did indicate some resistance which she identified as a need to stay focused on the mandated curriculum but it also could have been a result of her own comfort level dealing with controversial issues. As for the students, they all signed the letters of assent and the project was explained to them prior to this signing. Although all signed the letters, it is possible that they did not perceive that there was a choice.

The School, the Community: The Promise

The school where the research was conducted, Lakeview Public School, is located in Toronto. Lakeview Public School is a Kindergarten to grade five, elementary public school with a population of approximately two hundred and fifty students, a relatively small school for an urban centre. The majority of the student population is in the primary division. Approximately 40% of the students at Lakeview have a home language other than English, although over 90% of the students are Canadian born.

The school is situated on a large site. The school is a single story with one row of classrooms along one side, another row of classes along the other, and the hallway connecting the two houses the gym, the school office, the staff room, and the computer lab and library in the corner. Half the building is devoted to the community daycare. There is one classroom at each grade level.

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68 This information was gathered from the most recent school profile. For reasons of anonymity, the exact reference is not cited.
The building, like most schools in the Toronto District School Board, is in a state of disrepair. The furniture in the classrooms is old. The blinds are broken or missing in many classrooms. Glass in the windows has been replaced by heavy plastic. The windows, also yellowing from age, make the atmosphere inside the classrooms quite dull. On hot days, the classrooms on the west side of the building, as in the classroom I worked in, become unbearable as the afternoon sun hits the windows. There are no screens on the windows, so if they are opened the insects join the students in the rooms.

The community where the school is situated has apartment buildings, detached homes and government subsidized housing. Many families who send their children to Lakeview Public School live in the government subsidized housing or rental apartments. Most families living in the detached homes are either part of the two distinct communities who have lived in this community for many years and no longer have school-aged children or have school-aged children and send their children to faith-based schools rather than the public school. As a result, there is a low student population in the public school—an ongoing issue in the Toronto District School Board that has placed schools like Lakeview on the closure list.

For any community, the school is an essential component. The McGuinty government has publicly stated that “Ontario’s schools should be true community hubs where people can gather to learn, participate in community-based organizations and stay active” (Ministry of Tourism and Recreation, 2004). It is a place where families meet, community events are held, and information and knowledge are shared. Many families living in this area do not own cars, and therefore, are not as mobile as others within this urban centre. There is a considerable

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69 My father’s parents bought a home on a street south of the school when they left the downtown core near College and Bathurst.
dependence on the school for after-school programming, daycare and summer programs. For this school to close would be a great loss to the community. The secondary school, only one block away, was under the same review, also pending closure.

The school principal took it upon himself to move forward with a proposal to save this school and creatively found a way to work with the community needs and resources to keep the school open, although in another location. This represents a significant effort on the part of the school principal to hold this community together and try to save what he refers to as “the best little school in the city”.

The Staff: Reflecting Power not Reality

Lakeview Public School is racially, ethnically and linguistically diverse among its student body, though the staff is not reflective of the same diversity. The school principal is a White man. Of the eleven teaching staff, one is a woman from Jamaica who works in the kindergarten and one is a woman from India, working in a grade two classroom. There is one White man on the teaching staff, and the remaining teachers are White women. There is one secretary who is White and one caretaker who is also White—both are Italian. There are some volunteers at the school from within the community and others who have travelled to this school to be with the school principal since they knew him from his previous school. The volunteers reflect a much higher level of diversity than the paid staff at the site.

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70 It is important to bring attention to the fact that these staff members have self-identified these differences to me. There is power in naming and categorizing people which is done here to exemplify the lack of diversity among staff which is, in turn, not reflective of the student body or the school community. The concept of naming is taken up in Chapter Two, the section, Recognizing Partial Knowledge: Talking Back/Breaking Silence.
Taking on Equity—Celebrations, Tribes and Food

The school profile claims to address issues of equity by "recognizing and learning about multicultural events and celebrations" and to "emphasize staff training in anti-racist education and conflict resolution". The first claim indicates an initial commitment on the school's part to recognize events and celebrations which Banks refers to the contributions approach to multicultural education. This approach is problematic as it "tends to gloss over important concepts and issues related to the victimization and oppression of ethnic groups and their struggles against racism and for power" (Banks, 1998:73). There is little indication in the school of a commitment beyond Banks' contributions approach.

It is simply not enough for an educator to teach, and for students to learn, about other cultures and not engage in a project that unravels the power relations embedded in the construction of knowledge. The antiracism educator must assist students to learn how the dominant culture systematically skews a critical understanding, acknowledgement and appreciation of marginalized groups in the school system (Dei, 1996:37).

Dei explains, "Anyone who seeks to interrogate and understand social relations is confronted with certain fundamental questions about their own histories and identities" (Dei, 1996: 19). Antiracist practices are rarely implemented in this school. The school has committed to implementing *Tribes: A New Way of Learning and Being Together* (Gibbs, 1987) which calls for cooperative learning and valuing people. There are four norms which are on display in every classroom as well as a wall mural devoted to the principles of this program at the school entrance: attentive listening, appreciation/no put-downs, mutual respect, and right to pass. These norms are shared with the children and community through curriculum night, the school website and newsletters sent home. This program does not explicitly name racism, power and exploitation as the underlying cause for bullying and/or disengagement at school.
The school is involved in a snack and soup program. Nutrition for these students is an ongoing concern. The principal devotes much effort to raising funds and coordinating donations of food to provide better nutrition for these students. Summer programs are an initiative which the school principal has developed. The model he developed has been expanded throughout the school board where teachers, along with high school students and graduates, supervise the students. The camp fees are minimal and provide the students with safe activities for the summer months. The principal has now extended this model to schools in northern Ontario where high school students from Toronto run camps with First Nations students and have the great opportunity to also learn from the families there.

School events such as literacy night, curriculum night, or school councils are supported with babysitting services and food. I was invited to attend the curriculum night the year of the project and was introduced as a researcher coming to the school to do work with the students on the computers. The room was fairly empty and the curriculum night was not well-attended. The school principal made the comment that if he had advertised that hot dogs would be served, the night would have been a success.

**Invited to Support a Project in Place—Year One**

My original affiliation with Lakeview Public School began the year prior to the project when the new school board trustee for the Lakeview Public School area was campaigning for the election. He was a parent at the school where I was on staff and he mentioned my name and experiences to the principal at Lakeview. The principal contacted me in search of support for his Apple learning project and had heard I had some expertise not only with technology, but specifically with the Knowledge Forum software he was considering purchasing, at Apple's insistence, to tie to his literacy initiative and the wireless iBook lab. At this time, I was on
maternity leave from my school and agreed to enter into Lakeview as a volunteer but made my research aspirations clear to him. He saw no reason why we couldn’t combine the two needs: mine to find an appropriate school where I could do the research and his to find instructional support for his teachers.

For the first year, I was placed in a grade four classroom where the teacher had shown some interest in working with Knowledge Forum. There was support from both Apple Canada and the Knowledge Forum in two of the classrooms at the school. This support consisted of three sessions with a representative from the Knowledge Forum team and follow-up with the Apple representative. The support was limited to the beginning of the project and followed a modeling approach to implementing knowledge building through the use of Knowledge Forum in an elementary classroom. The classroom teacher had some hesitancy around the lack of the control when there was a “curriculum to be taught”. The teacher’s expression of concern over lack of control could have been related to the students’ ability to follow their own inquiry within knowledge building rather than explicitly and exclusively meeting the Ontario curriculum expectations.

Much of the initial work was focused on questions related to specific expectations within the curriculum documents and specifically linked to the science and technology curriculum, but knowledge building begins with big ideas rather than accomplishment of specific tasks. Scardamalia claims that when work is defined by the teacher or by the student with the goal of acquiring knowledge linked to teacher need\textsuperscript{1}, then this is not a knowledge building classroom. She suggests, “Producing knowledge of value to others is what essentially distinguishes knowledge building from learning” (2003:80). This would be a barrier to implementation in
this classroom. As well, the practice of the classroom teacher was traditional and task-oriented. My goals were at times at cross-purposes to the advice provided to the principal and classroom teacher. I had hoped we would do work with the social studies curriculum but the Knowledge Forum representative suggested that science was a better place to start\textsuperscript{72} due to the nature of theory, inquiry and experimentation within the sciences. Students could observe the properties of matter or how pulleys work and then develop theories as to why this happened the way that it did based on prior knowledge, ideas or opinions. I wanted to try to work with the social studies curriculum in this environment to show that Knowledge Forum and knowledge building lend themselves to critical antiracist pedagogy and critical practice in the classroom. As a visitor and volunteer in this school and classroom, I conceded to the need to deal specifically with the science curriculum rather than a critical approach to the social studies curriculum at this time.

The students in the classroom took an interest in the actual construction of the database through views and notes as well as shared authorship of notes. At one point, the classroom teacher felt that an additional push was necessary to increase momentum in the classroom at which point I began visiting his classroom twice a week. The students began creating a "how to" view for themselves as they learned to do various functions within Knowledge Forum. I would attend their classroom two afternoons a week during which time students began staying in for recess and eventually, arriving early during lunch time to do extra work on the database and move the group forward. The first two topics covered using Knowledge Forum were, \textit{Rocks and Minerals} followed by \textit{Pulleys and Gears}. After several visits, the support from Apple

\textsuperscript{71} Teacher need would include the teacher's obligations to address Ontario curriculum expectations within the classroom curriculum.

\textsuperscript{72} See the section, \textit{Critical Knowledge Building in an Elementary Social Studies Classroom}, in Chapter Two.
and Knowledge Forum ended and the classroom teacher and I, through discussion and
developing a professional relationship, realized we both had an interest in critical social studies
education, and proceeded to do a unit on Medieval Times.

Students began constructing their own views and although the topic was part of the mandated
curriculum, students met and then went beyond the curriculum into other areas of the social
studies and other curriculum areas as well. Links between topics were made within the
database as students progressed in the ownership of the content and the structure of the
database itself. It was a positive experience for the students, teacher and myself. The classroom
teacher’s interest and my interest in history and social studies through critical pedagogy made
this part of the project much more dynamic. I returned to work full-time in the spring and left
the school. The teacher returned to his regular curriculum and classroom practices as he
expressed to me that enough time was spent on Knowledge Forum.

Scardamalia (2002) suggests “Knowledge building is not confined to particular occasions or
subjects but pervades mental life—in and out of school” (11). The classroom teacher’s choice
to “end” Knowledge Forum after my departure is a choice he is free to make as a classroom
teacher but based on Scardamalia’s discussion around pervasive knowledge building
(Scardamalia, 2002:11) the experience the students had with knowledge building would
continue to infiltrate other subject areas and other aspects of their lives. In the second year,
when I went into the grade three classroom, the now grade five students were willing supports
to the project. They would come in and work with the grade three students and assist with not
only the technology but the knowledge building discourse (Scardamalia, 2002:11) as well.
Scardamalia (2002) further suggests, “Knowledge Forum encourages knowledge building as
the central and guiding force of the community’s mission, not as an add-on. Contributions to
collective resources reflect all aspects of knowledge work” (11). The idea that knowledge
building was an add-on was not the experience we had. The classroom teacher explained that without my support, and considering the time necessary to devote to knowledge building and Knowledge Forum, he would simply move on once I left.

Welcome Back—Year Two

During the summer months, new arrangements were made for me to join the school for another year, this time, to do my thesis work. I asked the principal to present this opportunity to his staff to find out whether there was a teacher, preferably in grade three, four or five, who would be interested in participating. In the second week of school, I came to meet the teacher who had volunteered to participate. This teacher, Sonja Neuman, was beginning her third year of teaching and her second year teaching grade three. It was her first year at Lakeview, after being placed on the surplus list at her previous school. She had completed her teaching certificate in a school where Knowledge Forum was used in every classroom. She was thrilled to have the opportunity, through this research, to integrate technology into her classroom practice and to have access to Knowledge Forum. She had been hired by Lakeview Public School with the understanding that technology integration was a key initiative at the school and was linked to many other initiatives including literacy development as the school is part of the Early Years Literacy Project within the board.

Sonja and I discussed my research and the use of Knowledge Forum within the social studies curriculum. The assumption typically is that social studies is fact, rather than interpretation, and therefore does not lend itself to theory building or idea improvement. We discussed critical pedagogy and antiracism education as a critical lens into social studies which does ask for theories and ideas when dealing with “essential knowledge” and “fact”. Sonja agreed, along with her class of 28 grade three students, to participate.
The Classroom

The Students: Struggling, Leaving, and Fresh Starts

When I began the project in September of 2004, there were 28 students in the classroom. Four of the 28 were in a withdrawal special education classroom for part of the day. Two students were fresh starts\(^3\). Fresh start students are placed in new schools and classrooms to give them the opportunity for a fresh start following an expulsion or a series of suspensions. Typically, students in this situation are placed in new schools with the support of the Supervisory Officer in that family of schools. The Supervisory Officer will make a call to the school principal at the receiving end and suggest that the student be registered at that school. An Identification Placement and Review Committee (IPRC) would have met to determine an appropriate placement for the child and a transition plan would be put in place to ensure a smooth transition into the new school. Two of these students received special education support for learning disabilities. Throughout the school year, three more fresh start students were placed in the classroom. Because Lakeview is a small school with one class at each grade level, it was difficult to control numbers in any particular grade level without reorganizing and increasing the number of split grade classrooms. As a result, the grade three class had increased in size and the enrolment was predominantly fresh start students which impacted the behaviour and social dynamics in the classroom.

The principal accepted all students though it was within his right to request a cap on the class size. His actions resulted in high numbers in the class, peaking at 34 students: five with significant behaviour problems and four with learning disabilities in a withdrawal program for part of the day. Although on the surface this open door policy seems positive, it had a negative
effect on the classroom itself. The principal, wanting to provide a place for these students, set in motion a precedent that raised the numbers in the classroom way beyond what is considered acceptable at this level. Ontario Regulation 170, under the *Education Act* (1990) states:

(1) Every board shall ensure that the average size of its elementary school classes in the primary division, in the aggregate, does not exceed 24 pupils.

(2) Every board shall ensure that the average size of its elementary school classes, in the aggregate, does not exceed 24.5 pupils.

With a new premier in Ontario, there is a new commitment to reducing class sizes in the elementary panel:

More than 1,100 new teachers are on the job this year as the government works toward its goal of capping all JK to Grade 3 class sizes at 20 students. Premier McGuinty, joined by Education Minister Gerard Kennedy, visited Grade 2 students at Lancaster Public School who were in a class of 28 last year, reduced to 21 this year. (Premier of Ontario, 2004).

Despite these promises, the class size continued to grow. The principal was placed in a precarious place himself. His Supervisory Officer continued to call on him for placement of these students. He was in the process of negotiating the K-12 school in the board to ensure that the community held onto its elementary and secondary schools due to low enrolment. For the principal to refuse these students may have not been in the best interest of the school considering the process he was going through with the board at the time. For Sonja and the students in that classroom, there would continue to be a struggle but the school principal had to stay focused on the longer term goals for the community in ensuring that he was seen as a strong leader to bring forward the K-12 initiative.

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73 "Fresh starts" refers to students who have received a full expulsion from a school and are allowed re-entry into the school system (*Education Act*, section 312).
Additional minimal support was offered by the administration and the Literacy Coordinator in the school and although the classroom teacher appreciated it, the bulk of the time, she was alone with her students. In a small school, the amount of support available is always minimal. The staffing in a larger school generates additional supports through preparation time teachers and specialty teachers such as music, gym, and library. This school did not have that flexibility.

The role of Literacy Coordinator is a half-time position tied to the Toronto District School Board’s *Early Years Literacy Program*. This teacher was a strong leader in the school and offered as much support to Sonja as possible in her half-time allocation. Volunteer workers were also assigned to Sonja’s classroom but there was never consistent and dependable support on which she could plan her day.

In addition to the “fresh start” students, there was a high turnover rate of students in the school in all classrooms. The transient nature of this classroom will impact on the ability to form a community when its members are always in a state of flux. The continual acceptance of new students into the classroom, and the lack of support available to Sonja through the school began to wear on her—it affected her ability to function effectively in the classroom and provide a program which she felt met her expectations and all of the students’ needs.

**The Teacher: Building Trust, Building a Relationship and Negotiating with Power**

The classroom teacher, Sonja, was a third year teacher in her first year at Lakeview. She had experience teaching special education as well as grade three in her previous school. The school principal had suggested the research project to three teachers, Sonja being one of them. The school principal explained that he felt Sonja would be the best partner in this project as she had received training in Knowledge Forum while attaining her teaching degree. She was keen to take part in the study, as explained by both Sonja and the school principal.
Reflecting on the actual selection of her classroom, Sonja and I discussed that it was impossible for her to say no to this offer due to her new appointment at the school as well as her newness to teaching itself. The power of a school principal to select a participating class inherently has a power imbalance. Due to this imbalance of power, whether the classroom teacher was volunteering or urged to take on the research project, the decision to participate was not really a choice. Stalker (1993) reviews the concept of voluntary participation as myth and that often, the adult who appears to be volunteering, is often directed, either explicitly or not, due to a power imbalance with those who make the decision about who will participate.

The journey that Sonja and I took was a difficult one. To commit to participate in a research project goes above and beyond what is expected of a classroom teacher. In addition to this, working with antiracism education isn’t necessarily a safe place to work. There needs to be a certain level of trust between the participants since it is a place of risk, confrontation and conflict. Within knowledge building, the responsibility lies with the group; within public education, the responsibility to deliver curriculum expectations is with the classroom teacher.

Veering from the prescribed curriculum is a risk in itself. All of these concepts were discussed prior to my entry in the classroom and Sonja expressed a continued desire to take part in the project. When I began in September, Sonja was not yet aware of the extent to which this year would prove to be challenge to her. As she continued to struggle with the challenging students, the transition of students, and the numbers in her classroom, my presence was an additional stress.

When I entered into the class, I made it explicit to Sonja that she was to think of me as support in her classroom. This description of my role was naïve in that my role was much
more central to the project\textsuperscript{74}. I would support her social studies curriculum, through this project, as well as other curriculum areas, depending on where the students took us. I told her that all that I saw, as well as everything we talked about, would be part of the project but that I would only use the data with which she was comfortable. We discussed the use of email, discussions and the teacher/researcher journal as a place to reflect and discuss the project. When the project began, I did not anticipate conflict but rather a professional exchange of ideas and strategies to move the group forward.

Franzak (2002) discusses the concept of “critical friends” with respect to the formation of a “teacher identity”. She suggests that “teachers and students\textsuperscript{75} who are cognizant of their evolving roles reflect openness to transformational experiences and willingness to explore, change, and reveal their identities” (261). This concept comes into play in the developing identities and relationship between Sonja and myself. Although we made the commitment to be open with our reflections and expressed a willingness to explore the various challenges and directions the project entailed, saying this and doing this are two very different things. Without the trust and mutual agreement for open communication, the research could not be reflexive, catalytic and representative of the experience itself. As there are critical friends (Franzak, 2002), there are also critical moments. It was not until we had the opportunity to deal with conflict and tension that the relationship developed to one of critical friends.

Over the winter holidays, I began going through the notes in the database more thoroughly. I also ran a report from the Analytic Toolkit and the results showed at this time that Sonja had

\textsuperscript{74} A further discussion of my role is addressed in Chapter Six, Knowledge Sharing, Knowledge Building and the Dialogue of Value, in the sections, Establishing a Culture of Sharing—Distributed Leadership in the Classroom and The Role of Students in a Critical Knowledge Building Classroom and in Chapter Seven, The Storyteller: Reflectivity in Research through Autobiography.

\textsuperscript{75} When referring to students, Franzak refers to student teachers while in their pre-service programs.
written very few notes and did not respond to or read many of the notes posted by her students either. I began to panic. The project was outlined in the information letter and the letters of consent. I had been clear about her participation in the database and the need for her dialogue about the process. She had signed the consent form giving her consent for “participation in the research project including reading, responding and creating journal notes within the database and having those notes analyzed and reported on for this project” and “participation in the research project including posting notes and have those notes analyzed and reported on for this project” (See Letter of Informed Consent: Classroom Teacher, Appendix 3). My own concern, after reviewing the content of the database, led me to address the situation immediately.

I was concerned on many levels at this point. First, the dialogue that I had hoped would occur between Sonja and myself was critical to the development of the project and yet, there was very little happening. I would post my observations and reflections in the teacher/research journal view and there was no dialogue. Second, her response and reading of the notes by her students was necessary because she was the person who would be evaluating her students and she was not taking the responsibility, from my point of view, for her students’ acquisition of curriculum expectations. As of January 1st, Sonja had only read 28% of the notes. Third, my concern was that if the students had one hour with me a week, the momentum would not increase and the project would go nowhere unless Sonja became more involved. I decided to deal with this issue.

I posted a rise-above note stating the following: “The participation in the database seems to have stalled. Further investigation must follow to rectify this situation and stay true to reason
for research in the first place...democratic learning environments and student engagement.”

(January 1, 2005) Within this note, I placed the results from the ATK which showed the low level of participation from Sonja as well as the majority of the students. I felt that the way I had set up the project was not working although, in re-reading this note, the tone was anything but that of a friend. We had established a comfort with each other. I was warm and friendly when I went to her class and the tone of this note was similar to slapping her on the wrist. This could have been handled differently. A conversation would have been more appropriate so that dialogue would have resulted rather than the criticism of her practice. I never stopped to think about what she was going through during this time.

The classroom visits, although an hour had been allocated, rarely worked out to be the full hour. The students were late coming in from recess and once they were back inside, passing out the computers took away at least ten of those minutes. If there was a class discussion related to where we were and what direction people were taking, there was very little time spent actually using the database. I was so concerned with getting it in writing, that I lost sight of everything else that was happening. I was so concerned about my one hour a week and what I envisioned for myself that I forgot that there were so many other things that were happening to support this project in the classroom. Other supports included her work with students on how to use a non-fiction text, access to the computers to do research and practise their skills, viewing videos linked to the social studies curriculum and all other activities associated with Sonja’s lessons for the students linked to the social studies curriculum we were addressing in the project. Above all else, I forgot the stress of being a new teacher, in a new school, completing report cards, and trying to meet the curriculum expectations laid out in the curriculum documents. I also did not even begin to take into account, up until this point, the
enormous amount of pressure I was placing on Sonja and adding to her already stressful teaching situation.

Four days after posting my note and numerous logins from my end to see if Sonja had either read or replied to my note, Sonja replied with the following:

This class has taken a great deal of time being able to work as a community of learners and to treat each others’ ideas with respect. This is the fundamental basis of KF to me, and something I have spent a GREAT DEAL OF TIME working on last term. Through TRIBES activities, organized group work and class discussions we are growing. I feel that we, as a class, are turning a corner. It is very difficult to build a knowledge base about communities when you don’t feel part of a group.

While progress can be slow, the kids have made tremendous progress since Oct. when we started. They are posting notes, reading others’ ideas and getting a focus for their knowledge building. All important steps. They are keen, but we have not given them much guidance, or explained what it is you are really looking to find in the database. (January 5, 2005)

Sonja’s reaction was warranted. I was at home and did not know what to do next. I re-read my note and realized that although I was seeing myself as a “critical friend”, she was not yet in a position to trust me, nor did she see me as her friend in any way, critical or otherwise. I had to step back and really examine where I was and how I was perceived in terms of my own power in this situation. Hayes and Kelly (2000) address the power relations which exist in developing collaborative relationships between researchers and elementary teachers. They suggest that “power was a portion of the relationship that was managed, negotiated, and contested in various ways as [they] struggled to work together” (p. 452).

From Sonja’s perspective, she had a woman in her classroom who was working at the Ministry of Education. I would start my visit to Lakeview each day with a peek into the principal’s office for a brief hello and a conversation on the way out. He would tell me about all of his accomplishments and I would listen, intently. I could not believe what he had accomplished in
such a short time at this school. I would spend the time in between in Sonja’s classroom. The students would come in after recess, where she was often on duty, and we would get as much done as possible in our brief time together.

I replied to her note with, “When you said A New Approach, it really hit home. I think that you are right. It is difficult to build community when the members (me) are there sporadically. I think that after our talk yesterday, we have to focus on the little successes along the way. (January 14, 2005)

Sonja had been a critical friend to me as she critically examined my role as researcher and the position I held in this project. I apologized for the tone of my email and became much more aware as to how I came across in my emails, notes, and dialogue in light of the position of power I held. I called her at home and she explained to me the amount of stress she had been under preceding the winter holiday. She also explained that the school principal had continued to add more students with a history of behavioural problems to her classroom. When she approached him about the difficulty she was having in the classroom he said that the teacher who had these students in grade two said that they were never a problem76 so it must be her. Sonja had expressed a concern regarding a lack of support by the administration and my apparent friendship with the principal was a threat to her considering how she felt in terms of her relationship with him.

I decided to support Sonja as much as I could and make her realize all of the wonderful things she was doing in her classroom to support her students each and every day. I also decided that I would approach the school principal in a neutral way and slowly reduce my visits to the

76 This statement was made without considering the other four students who had been added to the classroom having been expelled and/or suspended from other schools due to behavioural difficulties and also implied that he had discussed Sonja’s situation with another teacher, breaking collective agreements.
office and instead, spend this time with Sonja on her yard duty prior to my classroom visit and spend more time debriefing with her following my visit. This would redirect the project, increase trust between Sonja and myself, and allow us non-instructional time to further develop the type of relationship necessary to move the project forward as well as improve practice for both of us. This was a critical moment in the project.

I continued to visit the principal but lessened the length of the visits. As I walked past the office, he would try to catch me in the hall for a brief chat or again in the hall, on my way out. During my visits with the principal, he would ask me informally about my job and on several occasions, asked me if I could give him some funding for his technology project, as I was part of a technology group at the Ministry. I would consistently tell him that I was not in a position to do so but he persisted. At one point, he informed me that he had been nominated for a prestigious award and asked that I write him a reference letter for this award and I obliged. He asked that I put it on Ministry letterhead and I again, told him, that I was unable to do that and gave him the letter on my own letterhead.

I began to see these chats as quite intrusive and actually a conflict of interest for the project and Sonja’s trust of me. This became glaringly clear to me in late January. The principal called me into his office and closed the door. At this point, he was aware that I had applied to the York Region District School Board to be an administrator and proceeded to say the following:

Principal: So how do you think Sonja is doing in that classroom?

Debbie: I don’t know that I can answer that, as a teacher.

Principal: Well, you want to be a vice-principal, don’t you? If you are going to do that, you have to be able to evaluate teachers. Do you think she is doing a good job? Is she able to handle those kids?
Debbie: "I think she struggles some days but I also think there are a lot of difficult kids in the group. These kids change the whole dynamic in the group.

I left his office and went home. This was on a Friday. On the following Monday, I called the school. I asked for the principal and told him how uncomfortable that conversation made me. Although I was interested in being a vice-principal, I was not a vice-principal yet nor was I Sonja's supervisor. I was still a part of the same teachers' federation as Sonja and had no right to even say what I did. I apologized to him for saying anything and told him that I felt I had broken a confidence. Following this conversation, the school principal would greet me in the hallways but any other conversations ceased.

Following March break, I was offered a position with the York Region District School Board as vice-principal to begin the first of May. I came into Lakeview for my Friday visit and went in to tell the school principal. He congratulated me and I went to the classroom. Sonja was already aware of my promotion as I had called her at home to tell her. At this point in the year, we had developed a special relationship where we both learned from each other and had great respect for each other. She would confide in me about ongoing issues at the school and this only added to her trust in me and her effort towards the project. We began celebrating small successes and improvements rather than expecting perfection. We saw it as a process, always moving forward rather than looking for a point of arrival. My friendship with Sonja continues as she moves forward in her career. Her confidence has been reinstated and she has decided to stay in teaching although she was ready to leave in December last year. She reduced her position to half time to pursue her own tutoring company.

77 It is important to note how uncomfortable I was feeling at this point; I could feel my face blushing.
Summary

This chapter included an ethnography of the school where the research took place as well as the community in which it resides. The staff members, both paid and voluntary, that make up the school were also described to bring light to the varying levels of power and privilege that exist at the school. An analysis of equity initiatives, such as cultural events and the implementation of the Tribes program as indicated on the school profile were placed within the context of this study as a way to contextualize the various levels of resistance which exist in the school and the surface level of equity strategies in the school.

The state of disrepair in the classroom and the school, a situation common to schools in the Toronto District School Board, was addressed to highlight the environment in which students and teachers work. The classroom was described in terms of the students and class population in terms of diversity and the transient nature of the classroom and how this impacts the development and sustaining of community in the classroom.

The increased levels of accountability in the grade three classrooms due to provincial test data from the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) and the commitment to the Toronto District School Board’s Early Years’ Literacy Project (EYLP) impact both the expectations on the classroom teacher and students for high levels of achievement, at times, focusing the instruction on the test rather than student engagement, limiting the willingness for the classroom teacher to work towards transformative practices such as critical knowledge building.

Legislation related to class size and fresh starts in Ontario support the description of not only the school and the classroom, but the role the school principal plays in terms of establishing the atmosphere, and his reputation within the school and board.
The role of relationships and trust within this project were addressed in terms of the classroom teacher and myself and how my power and changing roles within the project impacted this relationship and the research itself.

In the following chapter, Knowledge Sharing, Knowledge Building and the Dialogue of Value, specific examples from the data are used to investigate the concepts of how knowledge is shared and which knowledge is valued in a critical knowledge building classroom. This data is organized by the developing of a critical community, the power structures in the technology, the fluidity of and resistance to student and educator roles and finally, the role of indigenous knowledges in the critical knowledge building classroom.

The role of antiracist educator/researcher is also placed within the discourse of power but also that of shared leadership and shared voice throughout the project. The various stages of this role, from modeling practice to relinquishing control to students who begin to critique their understanding and the understandings of their classmates, are exemplified within the data.
Chapter 6

KNOWLEDGE SHARING, KNOWLEDGE BUILDING AND THE DIALOGUE OF VALUE

The Production of Knowledge, Reproduction of Bias and Community

In this project, my role as the antiracist educator/researcher was a determining factor in the development and patterns of knowledge production in this classroom. The modeling that I created, whether through practice or through the reflexivity of my actions in a position of power, framed the antiracist practice within a knowledge building environment. The reproduction of bias passed through institutionalized schooling via curriculum documents and the resources and teaching practices to support them was ruptured through the engagement of students with the curriculum and the possibility of transforming the existing pedagogy of this classroom.

Grossberg (1994:18) suggests that within the realm of the classroom there exists a pedagogy of “articulation and risk” which allows for a possibility to transform practice. “Such a practice, while refusing the traditional forms of intellectual authority, would not abandon claims to authority.” Grossberg further proposes:

This is an affective pedagogy, a pedagogy of possibilities (but every possibility has to risk failure) and of agency...It is a pedagogy which aims not to predetermine its outcomes (even in terms of some imagined value of emancipation or democracy) but to empower its students to begin to reconstruct their world in new ways, and to rearticulate their future in unimagined and perhaps even unimaginable ways. It is a pedagogy which demands of students, not that they conform to some image of political liberation nor even that they resist, but that they simply gain some understanding of their own involvement in the world, and in the making of their own future. (18)

Grossberg suggests that the role of the teacher within this practice of possibility is one where the teacher must still take responsibility for the production of knowledge in the classroom but
is not expected to “provide an ethical model of authority” (19) but a “model of
thoughtfulness” (19). It is in this shared responsibility and modeling of thoughtfulness in the
classroom, that students can “reconstruct their world”.

Both knowledge building and antiracism education ask for community and sharing of power to
address knowledge sharing. Fullan (2001) suggests:

School systems...would be well advised to name knowledge sharing as a core
value—to label it explicitly, which they do not now do—and to begin to work
on the barriers and procedures to dramatically increase its use. (105)

In defining knowledge building, Scardamalia and Bereiter suggest that “building implies that
the classroom community works to produce knowledge” (1996: 254). Students must be taught
how to deal with information critically—both the content and the sources they use to address
the curriculum. The students were encouraged to seek out their own interests with respect to
the overarching theme of communities, relating to the social studies curriculum, Urban and
Rural Communities.

Creating Space for Community Building

The concept of community was discussed in the group as well as in the database. Students
were asked to write what they knew about community using the KWL scaffold (What I Know,
What I Want to Know, and What I Have Learned). This was the first attempt to introduce the
students to knowledge building through build-on notes and idea improvement. Responses
included:

Shalinda: (What I Know... A community is a lot of families put together.)

Shauna: (What I Know... Communities are people working together. -Communities are everybody cooperating.)
Damian: *(I need to understand)* which people? Black people? Poor people? People with different feelings.

Darya: *(I need to understand)* I mean I don’t get because I did not understand what you are saying here.

Debbie: Problems: What does Damian mean when he asks about which people are in communities?

*(My theory)* I think that people belong to different communities.

*(New information)* I belong to a community in Armour Heights because I live there. I belong to the teaching community because I am a teacher. I belong to the Jewish community because I am Jewish. I belong to the community of my temple. I belong to the community at this school because I come to work with the grade three class.

Julia: *(New information)* I think a community is a place where people learn together in a big space. I learned that you can not say the country is better then the city and you can not say the city is better then the country.

Kaeli: *(What I know...)* communities are a safe place to live like Canada is one.

Julia: *(New information)* Communities are wonderful things without one you will be lonely and people all over the world are in your communities. Also all people can be communities.

The students understood that a community involved a grouping of some sort, whether by race, class, kinship, space, or geography. They questioned each other and challenged each other to clarify concepts and improve ideas to be more reflective of a definition that incorporated all of their ideas about what a community is and is not. This is reflective of several of the principles of knowledge building including, *idea diversity, epistemic agency, community knowledge/collaborative responsibility,* and *democratizing knowledge.*

The diversity of ideas expressed by the students extended the definition of community. Community was expressed as a group of people defined by culture or geography. Community
was thought of as a place where people learn as well as a place that is considered safe—a place of belonging. They also added that people can belong to more than one community at a time. Based on their definitions of community, students set forth on their own inquiry and directed their learning which taps into their epistemic agency. The collaborative effort to build knowledge and better define what community is exemplifies community knowledge and collective responsibility. The participation and expression of ideas was shared among most members of the class as all students had a place in the dialogue, working towards a democratic learning environment.

hooks (2003) cautions, “All too often we think of community in terms of being with folks like ourselves; the same class, same race, same ethnicity, same social standing and the like” (163). The students understood that a community offers support or friendship in some way and expected a community to be a safe place and yet, community bonds stronger when there is a willingness to risk safety for transformation. When we reflected on all of these key ideas, we talked about what we expected from our classroom community. Sonja asked them to think about what they learned in Tribes and how the norms would help us to think about community and our expectations of a classroom community.

The Tribes program addresses the task of building community as a place to begin the cooperative groups. It is suggested that when building a community, “it is the teacher who is the leader, directing all the activities” (1987:36). It is also suggested that “what is talked about during a community circle session is usually less important than how the group interacts together” (1987:36). These parameters for discussion and classroom management strategies directed at building community work well within the knowledge building classroom to a point. Within the critical knowledge building classroom, the role of leader must be shared. The teacher must model and set parameters, but once the norms are understood—the how of group
interaction—students must be allowed autonomy with respect to the direction of their inquiry: (real ideas/authentic problems), idea improvement, and epistemic agency.

Dei (1986:29) cautions the claims that agency is equivalent to power. He suggests that those with agency can act but they must still act within the structure of the institution. “Individual agency as such is tied to and constrained by institutional power”. To truly share power, he explains, “does not necessarily mean to have less power, if social power is read as complementary and enabling in human relations” (29). The function of the teacher within the institution of schooling is still one of power. Power can be shared but ultimately, the teacher must grant that power and choose to share it. Bickmore (2001) explains that although some schools promote democracy as an ideal, there are limits to implementing a true democracy within a school:

Unevenly distributed expertise plays a special role in classrooms; classroom “citizens” are not equal. Furthermore, students, unlike full democratic citizens, do not have the opportunity to choose their own leaders from among peers in the classroom, nor are they allowed to withdrawal from collective activities of which they disapprove... the hidden curricular socialization derived from modeling and practice was (to some degree) contradictory to democratic citizenship. (139)

In Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope, hooks (2003) suggests, “dominance is altered when knowledge is shared in a way that reinforces mutual partnership” (74). It is within this partnership that she suggests finding “spaces of openness...search for the place of possibility”.

Sonja used the Tribes program in her classroom to help support discussions through the four Tribes norms: attentive listening, no put-downs, right to pass and mutual respect (1986:21). When discussions began in the classroom, many students would often take advantage of the “right to pass” to avoid answering the questions or participating with the group and leaving only three or four students to participate in the dialogue. Introducing a full class discussion continued to
be less of a struggle as the project developed throughout the year. Sonja expressed frustration that as soon as she felt the group had taken a step forward, a new class member was brought into the group, changing the dynamic and drawing attention away from the group and requiring additional support to integrate into the room. As mentioned previously, most of these new students were leaving their previous schools after a series of suspensions and in one case, an expulsion due to severe behavioural problems.

By working within the norms of the Tribes program, the “right to pass” gives participants the ability to opt out of an activity, but this norm remains the most controversial of the four norms. The right to pass is understood as a “protective agreement” which is described as the “essence” of a democratic system. Students who pass are still understood as actively participating through attentive listening and being a silent observer. Gibbs (2001) explains that many teachers are “anxious that if this agreement is used in classrooms, students will pass on learning subject matter” (96).

Problems: Building a community and creating tribe

Keywords: Inclusion, Tribes Group

I would like to add that this group of students has come a long way - we have had a pretty constant influx of new students in the class - and that always changes the dynamic of the classroom - we have been following the tribes agreements and doing activities to encourage inclusion in the group, but we have not gotten to the point of creating Tribes. I have not felt that we are ready as a group for that.

If these students can honour their differences and respect one another's opinions (because they actually are starting to listen to each other now) they will have had a successful year.
One of the goals of this project was to establish a community and yet, in November, Sonja decided that we should split the class into two separate rooms. Half of the students stayed with Sonja in her classroom using the wireless iBooks and the other half came with me into the library lab. I expressed my concerns to Sonja about this arrangement which I felt could hinder the development of a community, but Sonja insisted that a quieter workspace was more important at this point in the project.

This arrangement did provide students with a quieter work space and more room to function. Students were more likely to get onto a computer since we were using the library. As well, the library had larger tables where the students could work together in a small group to research and discuss directions for their inquiry. It was also possible that Sonja chose to split up the group to remove me from her classroom. The timing of this decision to split the class coincided with my comments about Sonja’s reduced involvement in the database as well as reduced time on the project in general. It also fell at the same time as report cards which is traditionally a time of stress for teachers. The class remained split until after the “critical moment” when I explicitly questioned Sonja’s involvement in the project.

Once students understood the benefit of working collaboratively in the smaller groups, we were able to bring the group back together but until this time, we worked in the library lab and used the iBooks along with the iMacs in one room, still having the benefit of the additional workspace since the library lab offered more functional space for the students. By the end of the project, students were respectful during classroom discussions, focused, and anxious to share their ideas and build on the ideas of others.
Community Building and Access

The goal of developing and sustaining a critical community is one of those images of “political liberation” about which Grossberg writes (1994:18). Sonja and I had articulated to the class our desire to create this community and set up the structure to do so but the need for community was not authentic. Establishing shared space was not enough because unless the participants have a need for that community, the space will exist but the dynamic will not. Like all new skills and ideas, the process of creating community, knowledge building and a critical space had to be taught and explicitly addressed in the classroom. It was a process and this process was new to the students.

Sonja and I had made our teacher/researcher journal view accessible to all members of the group; they rarely accessed this view. I also posted notes in the views where the students posted the majority of their notes and yet still, very few students were reading my notes. Sonja and I decided that if there were key notes to review, either written by students, Sonja or myself, and these notes brought our knowledge forward or raised new problems, then these notes would be highlighted so that students could have the opportunity to reflect on and respond to them. In some cases, specific notes would guide some of the work the students would do for that day and throughout the week. Sonja drew attention to the fact that although she felt the discussion around stereotypes in the database was important, she didn’t feel that the students had access to the language or concepts I was using in my notes.
Debbie,
I understand your concern about stereotypes, but I don’t think your notes in
the database are going to clarify the concepts to the kids. Writing in !!!!! is not
going to help the kids with the concept. Why don’t we create some stereotypes
for the kids about things they know and then have them dispel them (i.e. all
grade 3’s love math best) and get their opinions? Let’s discuss the issues a bit
more. They are only 8-9, so it is hard for them to get past the idea that “books
are the almighty”

Trust and Ownership in a Classroom Community

I have been reading a lot about community development and I think we have
come a long way since September. I am reading the book, “Teaching
Community: A Pedagogy of Hope” by bell hooks.

“The single most important realization has been the need to establish a
genuine sense of community based on trust...and not just expertise and
knowledge.” (109).

Scardamalia writes about and “community knowledge, collective
responsibility” (page 10) and “democratizing knowledge” (page 11) in the
article, “Collective Cognitive Responsibility” but there is no mention of the dynamic of trust in allowing for these two
indicators of knowledge building to occur. It is okay to say that we all have
voice and access to the content but if there is no trust within that community,
then speaking one’s voice or exercising the right to access that knowledge, is
futile.

Also, you have mentioned that my notes dealing with stereotyping and biases
do not quite meet the needs of the students which I think raises
many issues. First, you have the trust and comfort level with me to tell me
what your students need which is important.

Second, if the students cannot access the content of my notes for a variety of
reasons (they are too verbose, too filled with jargon, etc.) I need to know that.
It is simple to say that if the note exists then the students have access to it but
if the language or concepts do not resonate with them, the note and the
information in that note, in their minds, does not exist.
Third, the way you addressed the issue of stereotypes within the classroom was wonderful. The students responded and gave examples. They were engaging with that information and took it as their own. That is a great accomplishment.

Fourth...and probably not final...you have taken control over this project. I can see your confidence and the improvement in student engagement with this project. You have made a marked change and I am happy to back away and see you bloom as the great teacher you are. Your energy and excitement towards the possibilities with this project are amazing and they are your own. You have made this your own and I am thrilled.

This process of community building does not just happen. It takes time, trust and conflict. Sonja and I had to first determine what the boundaries to participation in this community were before we could involve the students in community building. As I stepped aside and Sonja stepped up, the dynamics of the project changed as did the capacity to building community based in trust.

Changing the Dynamic: Classroom Dialogue and Sharing

Establishing Momentum in the Critical Knowledge Building Classroom

At the beginning of the project, Sonja had expressed concerns to me about the class’s inability to sit for very long and have discussions. She didn't want to keep the kids on the carpet too long because their attention would falter. Sonja believed that many students still needed to learn the rules of discussion such as “one person speaks at a time”, “wait your turn” and “raise your hand”. For example, my first day in the classroom, Sonja and I tried to get the students started with their All about Me notes and hand out the computers. This exercise took up most of our first hour together. Both Sonja and I were concerned that the hour we allotted for each week would not be enough time to do what we had planned if passing out the computers continued to take so long.

We experimented with different approaches and organizations in each session to find the best way to pass on information while still maintaining momentum and not losing valuable time.
together to move the group forward. By the time the winter break arrived, I realized I would need a commitment of class time beyond the one hour a week I had been spending there to get the students accustomed to the expectations in a knowledge building classroom and also to using the technology itself. Although, upon later reflection I believe the way I went about getting this commitment was aggressive, Sonja and I agreed that it was a significant turning point in the project.

In January, Sonja began preparing for our Friday visits by doing research during the week with the students and doing explicit teaching of the various ways to conduct Internet research effectively. Sonja would post notes in the Teacher/Researcher journal so that I would know what had passed while I was not with them in the classroom.

Sonja:
Keywords: Building on others knowledge

The kids have all posted their questions under the Regional Canada view. I moved all relevant notes into REGIONAL CANADA. They read their questions to the class and I modelled how one answer might overlap and BUILD ON to someone else’s answers

 Putting our knowledge together We need to focus on the research and looking on the web for information as well as in books. We also need to help them to look JUST for answers and put it in their own words. We also discussed sharing information - not just asking people to "tell them more".  

Sonja held conferences with the students to discuss their research interests and helped them to develop questions to guide their inquiry. Through the conferences Sonja held with the students, she realized the need to have shared and guided reading lessons about how to access non-fiction text so that they could access the content of these texts independently. She expressed concern about students using the Internet and felt that it would be more productive to have them only use the books in the classroom and school library to find their information.
Sonja: The students paired up on computers and read the notes of their classmates. Working in pairs with good readers and kids that need support seems to be more productive. We also did some more research on the Internet; however I am finding that the sites they are finding are too difficult to read or are inappropriate for the kinds of information they want. I think that maybe we need to stick to books that they can read independently. (Last modified: 2005, January 27 (17:16:03)

Debbie: "I need to understand" the connection you make to teaching how to navigate through a non-fiction text would apply to Internet research as well. They can scan a book as well as a website for information. They need to know terminology and how to find what they are looking for rather than being overwhelmed by information and too much text... (Last modified: 2005, February 16)

Sonja:"My theory" The kids are really getting more comfortable looking through the non-fiction texts and they are having fun exploring Types of Print, Glossary's, Cutaways, pictures and captions, labels, comparisons and Tables of Contents. I just did a non-fiction reading comprehension task with them today and some of the kids really understand that the subheadings and vocabulary help to understand the text and answer questions. Some of them are still struggling with how to tackle a non-fiction text. I really thing that this focus on BREAKING THE CODE OF NON-FICTION will really open some doors to how they can then think about the text. (Last modified: 2005, February 24)

The communication between Sonja and myself increased and improved between my weekly visits. I had challenged her participation in the project and she responded by taking my challenge to heart. She explained to me that initially, when I had brought the project to her, I had explained my visits as a time when I would prepare and do the planning. I figured that by offering her this, it would alleviate the stress of having additional responsibilities through the project. In the end, that centralization of power in my role was detrimental to the project. I expected her involvement but I took away her power to plan and be responsible for the learning in her classroom—something I had no right to do since it is she who was responsible for addressing curriculum expectations, assessment and evaluation of her students. It was Sonja's classroom. Once we decided that her involvement and commitment to the project had
to include time beyond my weekly visits by including both follow-up and preparation during the week, the students increased their activity in the database.

In Figure 16 below, the number of notes posted is indicated. The students are represented in (G1) and Sonja and I are (G2). This data was helpful in determining the number of notes Sonja and I were posting compared with the students. Figure 16 illustrates the changing patterns of participation throughout the project.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>View name, followed by the number of notes from each group:</th>
<th>(G1)</th>
<th>(G2)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>'How To' View</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All About Me</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communities</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communities Around the World</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooperative Learning-Community Building</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Documents and Images View</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greatest Canadians</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naming Communities</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional Canada</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researcher and Teacher Journal</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban and Rural Communities in Canada</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welcome</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 16: Increasing Activity with Further Support

In the Regional Canada view, the student involvement was significantly more than in the other views, whereas, the involvement in terms of posting notes was not significantly higher for Sonja and myself which indicated that students were able to sustain themselves without my or Sonja’s note posting. The only other view which had numbers that compared with the Regional Canada view was the Communities view. The notes posted in the Communities view were posted over a five-month period, while the notes in the Regional Canada view were posted over six weeks. The content of these notes and the threads of discussion within the Regional Canada view were also higher than the other views. As students had more support in the classroom, as well as further understanding and use of the software, they began to post more notes with greater detail and also started to use the information created by their classmates to inform their own inquiry.
Sonja: Over the past few days the students and I have been reading and discussing the parts of Canada and their differences. The students have decided what they want to learn more about and how they are going to discuss it.

They are going to need a great deal of support in learning how to read and understand their information and in using different sources. It will be important to encourage them to use their own words. Research and report writing is a GR. 4/5 skill. It is important to keep in mind the level and age of the students we are working with and their experiences.

I think we need to get them to give their ideas orally (as a sharing time like we did today) and then link that to writing on Fridays. Writing always seems formal to kids - like it should sound in a book. That change in ideology won't change overnight.

I told the kids that they will become the experts and then they will teach the class about their area. They will learn from each other on the database and then they will orally present their information as a team as well.

They kids are excited about the topics and who they are working with. We will generate computer partners based on their interest areas. (Last modified: 2005, January 05)

Sonja addressed aspects of non-fiction and had the students create their own examples of non-fiction including: a table of contents, an index, as well as proper uses of illustrations, captions, headings and subheadings. Students took time to develop questions so that when I arrived on Fridays and the computers were out, students were focused and knew what their questions would be. Sonja attended a conference, Reading for the Love of It, in February, and the session she attended regarding non-fiction guiding reading inspired her to make these connections in the classroom.

Sonja: I think that since my demographic of students rarely has access to non-fiction outside the classroom – this is going to be my focus over the next few weeks. We will create a notebook and explore our Social Studies (provinces) non-fiction and introduce 10 different conventions of non-fiction. We will then do a variation on the KWL chart and explore how we BUILD ONTO our existing knowledge through sticky notes and physically BUILDING onto our past knowledge.
We have discussed the difficulty the kids have with the concept of adding to one another's knowledge. I feel this process might be the missing link we need to see really progress on the site. If we can then physically print out some examples of BUILDING ON from KF that the kids have done and have them demonstrate it then we are really going to see progress. The information is being found — we just have to help them make the link from learning to building on. Should be exciting.

Following that I hope to explore better questioning and research. (Last modified: 2005, February 16)

The opportunity for professional development combined with the change in our trust in each other and growth of the relationship between Sonja and myself allowed her to move beyond her frustration. She had felt so unsupported and had expressed to me a concern that she was unable to see her value as a teacher. She questioned whether or not she had anything to offer this group of students. Following the project, Sonja expressed her gratitude to me, saying that my support during the year convinced her to stay and see the small successes rather than being focused on the struggles and barriers to success.

Sonja had recognized the struggles as a process towards student engagement. She was able to measure the successes, however small, rather than focusing on the barriers that prevented her from becoming the teacher she expected to be.

Ownership of Content, Community, Responsibility

Problems: How do we move forward? Why have we stalled?

Keywords: meaningful, forward, reading, response, audience, participation, communication, dialogue

When you said A New Approach, it really hit home. I think that you are right. It is difficult to build community when the members (me) are there sporadically.

I think that after our talk yesterday, we have to focus on the little successes along the way.
Our focus in the classroom had changed. There was time set aside for posting notes but students were also asked to take time to read each other’s notes. Students had difficulty understanding what it meant to build onto each others’ notes.

Debbie: *(Putting our knowledge together after our talk on the weekend I realized how important it is for the kids to have concrete examples of how knowledge building works and what it looks like. We need to show them with post it notes or the actual notes they have produced as a class. The post it note idea you talked about sounded like a great place to start...particularly around misconceptions and stereotypes as they further investigate different regions of Canada.)*

The students knew it did not mean that they had to ask for more information but rather add to the information. This extended discussions to understand that they were not doing someone else’s work if they added to the ideas presented in a note. The role of teacher, or sharing the role of “teacher”, to them meant that they could not say things like, *add more here and give me more information, I don’t understand what you are saying.*

Debbie: *(Opinion the responses are for the most part, not building knowledge.)*

*(Elaboration The students are looking at each other's notes and asking for clarification or for the original writer to add to the note or add information.)*

*(Elaboration I think that the student should only respond if they have something to add. If they do not have something to add, they should begin a new note and a new conversation.)*

The students began to add onto each other’s ideas within the *Communities* view. There was very little direction as to what to write about, but rather to use the KWL scaffold to determine where their interests were in terms of the topic of *Communities* in general. They were asked not to repeat what someone had written. If there was an idea that was presented in a note and they agreed with it, students could annotate a note or they could quote the statement and then add to it in a new note. If they did not agree with the statement, they were asked to explain why they did not agree in a build-on note and provide an explanation of their view using supporting
evidence. This expectation was practised in classroom discussions. Sonja and I would have a
discussion about any topic and agree or disagree and model the process with the students. This
expectation for notes and build-on notes then began to develop in the database.

The Classroom Dynamic and Patterns of Sharing/Coveting

Students will often hear warnings about cheating in class. Those who see themselves as
“smart” will often hide their answers for fear that a classmate may try to “steal their answers”
or “cheat off of them”. In a knowledge building classroom, knowledge is shared. In October,
the first month of the project, students had to be encouraged by Sonja and myself to read
notes and respond to them. The first responses were limited to comments to peer note writers
like, “I don’t understand what you are saying” or “Write more”. Although these questions or
responses were in build-on notes, they were not actually building onto the content of that
particular note. There was very little evidence of students reading notes for information, or to
guide their own inquiry.

Sonja and I modeled how to build onto each others notes by posting our own notes. We also
talked about what types of responses were actually adding to the knowledge in the database
and collectively taking responsibility towards that knowledge building.

\[I\ need\ to\ understand\ What\ is\ the\ difference\ between\ an\ urban\ and\ rural\ community?\ Where\ would\ you\ rather\ live?\ Why?\]
Opinion I love Toronto. I can’t imagine living anywhere else. I love the city and yet, when I go to quieter places, with my family, I also enjoy myself...but I don’t think I could for too long. Before I had children, I used to go out a lot and see the city. Now, I don’t go out as much, so does it really matter where I live when I only really ever go to work and home? I ask myself that question but there are so many things about Toronto that I love. I have never lived anywhere else...except London, Ontario when I went to university. I didn’t like it much.

Elaboration It is much less expensive to live in a rural area except it is harder to find work and you have to go a lot further to get the things you need...whether it is groceries, getting to school, going to university, seeing friends or seeing family. It would be hard for my kids to play with their friends and they would have to take the bus to school instead of walking. Of course, I probably wouldn’t have to work because the cost of living is so much less so I could always drive them to where they wanted to go. They would also be stuck at home a lot more in the winter because the roads wouldn’t be cleared and they couldn’t go to school. There aren’t as many snow machines in rural areas like there are in the city. But one of the greatest things about living in a rural area is, I would get to see my children more.

Example One of the reasons I would not like to live in a rural area is that I am Jewish. Traditionally, in North America, Jewish people tend to live in urban areas. Urban areas, because of the large amount of work opportunities, draw diverse people to them. I would not like to be the only Jewish person a town (or the only Jewish family). It is important for me to be in a place where my children can be exposed to their Jewish heritage.

Evidence What are some things that you think make Toronto a great place? What are some things that you think could make Toronto an even better place? Why did your family choose Toronto as their home?

Different opinion Talk about these questions with your family. What do they think?

In the note above, I tried to show the students how to use the information previous students had posted and then to add their own evidence or examples to extend the thinking. I used scaffold supports to frame my answer. I also challenged them to talk about urban and rural communities with their families and why their families chose Toronto as their home. By including these components in the build-on note, I modelled the function of the note to
extend thinking and encourage further inquiry. I also took the time to add my own thinking, thereby working with the whole group to help define urban and rural communities, and specifically, the community in which we all lived.

Rather than leaving the dialogue about communities as one of defining what a community is in generic terms, I modeled how personal knowledge and opinions can be considered valid and informative. Following the above note, the discussion thread changed from one of “community is” to one which brought in varying understandings of community based on the experiences of the students in their diverse cultures and diverse heritages.

Tevin: How do people work together?

Darya: What I Know... What I know about communities that people work together.

Julia: I think a community is a place was people learn together in a big space. I learned that you can not say the country is better then the city and you can not say the city is better then the country.

Figure 17 below illustrates the view in the database where these notes were posted and the discussion thread that followed my note, “What is the difference between an urban and rural community?” Students began including their own stories in the notes such as the notes about the Philippines, Brazil, Jamaica, Eritrea and China. Students began to include their own stories and identities exemplifying Cummins’ work on “identity texts” (2003).
Another way to model knowledge building and building on each other’s knowledge was in the focus groups. There were two focus groups throughout the project. The first one was in January and the second in April. These focus groups differed from class discussions because there were fewer students. All students were invited to participate in the focus groups but only a few chose to do so. The first focus group had nine students, Sonja and me. The second had thirteen students, Sonja and me as participants. There were some students who participated in both focus groups but there were also some who only participated in one of the focus groups. Having fewer students in the focus groups allowed for fewer classroom management issues. As well, these students then continued to model the method for discussion in the whole class discussions.

In the first focus group which was held in January, the students discussed how they got their work and what happened to it once they got it. When we extended the questions to think about how it was different when we used Knowledge Forum, the students explained that in a...
regular classroom they got their work, did their work and returned it to the teacher to get marked.

Tevin: “We hand in our book and our teacher checks it and we get it back after recess.”

Kenneth: “Ms. Neuman tells us what we learned and when we can learn.”

Tevin: “Building on Kenneth’s ideas, it is different because with Knowledge Forum, we can add onto our answers and make them better before we get a mark. Everyone tells us what we can learn.”

Once their work was marked, they got their work back. At this point, the students explained that they took their work home to show their parents or they kept it in a folder and then took it home when the unit was done.

When we talked about how Knowledge Forum was different, students said the following:

Kenneth: “The teacher doesn’t always tell us what to do. Sometimes we decide what to do or the other kids in the class help us.”

Shalinda: “It is like working in a community. We all have a job and we work together to get the community working. When we do our other work, we all work alone and only the teacher sees our work.”

Sharon: “It is about communicating with everyone.”

Sally: “You get information from everything, your friends, classmates, family, just people you know and books and the internet too.”

We tried to show what all of this would look like if we made a diagram. As the students described the way the regular classroom worked, I drew the first diagram based on their description. The student described the process whereby they were assigned work, they used their ideas to complete the work which was typically completed in either worksheets or workbooks and then the work was submitted to their teacher. Once the teacher marked the work, it was returned to the students to be either put into one of their many subject folders if
it was worksheets or returned with comments when it was their workbooks. Following this exchange, the next assignment would be handed to them. Students all worked on the same work at the same time although there were accommodations made for students with special needs.

The second part of the diagram (Figure 18), *Our Knowledge Building Classroom*, was developed in the same way. The students explained that with knowledge building, they got their ideas from many different places such as their own experiences, the teacher, their friends, their family and also books and the Internet. The ideas that they chose to pursue were again the product of notes posted by their teacher, themselves or their friends. The ideas were always recycled back through those in the database but also with their family and friends when they would talk about what they were doing in the classroom. They also explained that when they would learn something new from their classmates or teachers, they would then look at the books and the Internet in a different way since they knew that the ideas in those places were not always the whole answer, as with the notes about the homes in the Philippines and life in Jamaica. Sonja had talked to the kids about truth in statements and said to the students, “When you read something you think it is truth, but it is not always truth for all”.

![Figure 18: Regular Classroom versus Our Knowledge Building Classroom Dynamic](image-url)

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As students named places where valid knowledge can be found, we added to the diagram. They said that it wasn’t just from all of these sources to the students but they recognized that Sonja and I were also learners in this context, therefore adding us to the box in the middle. As knowledge builders, we would then create notes and views which would be informed by these ideas we had collected and shared with the whole group. These ideas would again go through the process either by further dialogue with classmates, going home and talking to their families, or in the way they would now look at text, either print or electronic. The also said it was important to show that all sources of ideas were equal because they now believed that what they knew about the various communities to which they belonged was sometimes better than what someone else wrote in a book.

In the first focus group, momentum increased and the students began to build onto the ideas of others in the group. The pattern of communication changed where it no longer needed an adult to affirm the response but rather provide a space in which to speak. By the end of the first focus group, the students began building on each other’s answers as to what was knowledge building. The answers were: information, knowledge, details, solutions, problems, and ideas—concepts in line with Scardamalia and Bereiter’s description of this process.

**Collaborative Dialogue in the Final Focus Group**

Sonja had ongoing concerns over the students’ inability to sit in a group, let alone contribute to a class discussion. The first time I went to the class, I saw that this was going to be a challenge. The students’ desks were arranged in a U-shape around the room with four groups of tables with eight desks at each group along the outside. Surrounding the carpeted area were eight desks, separated in a row. Sonja had placed the children with some behavioural components at these desks to help them concentrate and remove them from the group.
On the first day of the project, October 8, Sonja and I called the students to the carpeted area and we asked them to sit in a circle. We did not get onto the computers the first day because the board had not yet provided access to this website. The plan was to discuss the project and its expectations, as well as to give them some insight into various ideas.

Debbie: *(The Plan for the day included talking about what knowledge building is and what learning is. We were also going to talk about how we are going to work together on this project. I was going to introduce KF to the group and talk a little about it.)*

In line with the curriculum expectations and discussions that had already happened in the classroom, we were going to talk about what a community is. Following this discussion, we were going to discuss what a right answer is\(^7\) and how we get to putting our knowledge together to get the best answer. Further to this, we were going to then talk about the fact that all ideas are improvable.

While I worked through this discussion, we had to stop several times to re-focus the group. Several of the students had great difficulty sitting still while others continued to call out and interrupt people who were speaking. It was clear that we had a long way to go to set up successful discussions and decide how they would be run. Sonja and I discussed parameters that were established in other knowledge building classrooms (Messina, 2001) and felt that we needed to set up our discussions in the same way. We decided that it was best if we modeled how to do it before handing over the discussions to the students as they had a long way to go.

Debbie: *(Observations I went into the class and the teacher invited the kids to sit down on the carpet. She said that they had just received the carpet and were not used to sitting in a group on the floor. It took some managing. I suggested that the kids move into a circle so they could see everyone’s faces. We talked about why sitting in a circle was different than sitting in rows. Answers included that they could see each other, hear each other, and understand better.)*

\(^7\) This discussion entailed addressing the fact that there is no “right answer” but rather a more inclusive answer. By working collectively, we can strive for inclusion instead of correctness, thus limiting answers to either “right” or “wrong”, rather than improvable and from multiple perspectives.
The students had typically sat on the carpet in rows—their spots on the carpet were assigned in a similar pattern to their seating arrangement at the desks. Their backs were to each other and the teacher spoke at the front. I suggested to Sonja that sitting in a circle was more conducive to the kind of talk we were going to have when we were knowledge building. Sonja and I also discussed that the need for the structures set during my visits should also carry through into her classroom when I was not there. When Sonja and I addressed the group, we modeled the language we expected and the courtesy and respect expected during these discussions. There were no interruptions and ideas were built upon and acknowledged. Sonja found that the *Tribes* principles worked in conjunction with the parameters we were hoping to implement.

Change happens slowly and it was clear to Sonja and me that once we had our final focus group in April, the students who had participated in it had modeled their understanding of what was expected in a class discussion. *Figure 18: Regular Classroom versus Our Knowledge Building Classroom Dynamic* indicates the change in discussion patterns the students were aware of during knowledge building compared with their understanding of a “regular classroom”. The pattern changes that were understood by the students included that the input towards ideas and knowledge sharing came from a variety of sources and was re-circulated through the classroom and outside sources to continually inform class ideas and knowledge building.

Not only had the parameters for a knowledge building dialogue been exemplified in the class but the continuous talk without adult direction increased as well. Moving away from the standard pattern of “teacher questions—student response—teacher acknowledges response”, the students in the final focus group took control of the discussion with little adult intervention. Prior to the beginning of the focus group, I gave students explicit directions on how to maintain focus in the discussion while still respecting what each classmate had to say.
In one case, there were nine opinions/ideas voiced by students without Sonja or myself providing any direction. Students continued to build on each other’s ideas and challenge opinions while continuing a respectful and constructive tone.

Initially, new topics/questions/ideas were raised by either Sonja or myself but as the discussion progressed, students began asking their own questions and directing them at the group rather than towards a teacher. The students in the focus group continued to use knowledge building language such as, “I would like to build onto so-and-so’s idea…” During the final focus group, I tried to change the conversation to include some ideas that I wanted to be raised and discussed. I tried to veer the discussion away from the pros and cons of conducting research on the Internet or with books and more towards the difference between an idea and an answer, a problem raised by one of the students. Despite my efforts to do so, the students indicated through their own dialogue that they were still intent on debating their preferred method of research.

Debbie: I asked certain questions and then Ms Neuman asked a question and some of you asked questions and then the conversation moved. You kept talking about what was better...books or computers...and that had absolutely nothing to do with what I wanted to know but what I did see was that when I tried to change the subject, as the teacher, you guys said...actually I think it is what Damian said, “Actually I didn’t want to build onto what you said but I wanted to build onto what somebody else said.” You kept the conversation where you wanted it to be. Instead of the teacher saying, “this is what I want you talk about”, you guys really wanted to talk about what was better, Internet or books...because that was really important to you.

I had to step back and realize that giving the students the space to discuss the ideas they found most engaging was part of being a teacher in a critical knowledge building classroom. By providing the space for this to happen, the content may not have been as critical as I would have liked. The act of discussing a topic the students chose rather than the topic I wanted them to discuss is an act of freedom the students practised. The goal of sharing the role of
teacher is raised in both the knowledge building discourses (Scardamalia and Bereiter, 2002:260) and within the antiracism education discourses (Dei, 1996:29). At that moment, what was talked about was not as important as how it was talked about. The students were conducting their own debate on an issue that was important to many of them and based on their actions, required further debate. The nuances of idea versus answer were of interest to a few of them but far greater was their urge to support books or the Internet as a reliable and effective source of information. Included in this debate was conflict. There was conflict in terms of opinions and what the students valued or did not value but there was also conflict for me as the dialogue was not moving towards the content I was most interested in hearing. My ability to let the students control that conversation could be considered to be a risk. As Bickmore asserts, “...conflict is dangerous. It provokes risks in terms of authority, planning/predictability, and emotional climate” (1991:3).

This was another important moment for me in understanding that critical knowledge building was more than content based—it was based in the practices of the classroom—the hidden curriculum of the classroom that silently shows students whether or not they will be respected, whether or not this is a critical classroom or one where no questions are discouraged, there are clear distinctions between right and wrong answers, and knowledge is always complete and presented by the classroom teacher and supported by the various resources in the classroom.

**The Power of a Community**

A key issue emerged at Lakeview in the spring, when garbage became a problem in the school field at recess. The school principal made the decision that students were no longer allowed to eat theirs outside. As a result, either instructional time would be lost while students ate the recess snacks prior to the actual recess break, or teachers lost their recess break supervising
students eating their snacks in the classroom and ensuring that garbage was disposed properly. It was decided by the group that this solution did not work well for either the students or the teachers at Lakeview so the students decided to come up with a new solution and present it to the school principal.

The students suggested that they use the Knowledge Forum database as a place to collectively work on a solution to this issue. This exemplifies several of the knowledge building principles, including real ideas, authentic problem, since the students came up with the idea to solve this community problem through the knowledge building process. Students read the notes posted by their classmates and built upon the ideas of their classmates. Then set out to improve the ideas as they considered each situation and what would work best for their school, thus working with improvable ideas and idea diversity to take action and “reconstruct their world” (Grossberg, 1994:18). Students were not asked to address this issue but felt, through this space, that they could effectively work through the problem at the school and solve it, collectively, addressing both epistemic agency and community knowledge/collective responsibility. Students found that they, as a collective, could approach the school principal with their ideas to improve the school and do something about a perceived problem. All students were involved and engaged in this process, therefore working towards democratizing knowledge.

Observations When I walked into the school, it was recess time. I went down the hall and the kids were all dressed in their winter clothes, running in and out of the classroom, eating their snacks. I could hear the principal talking and realized that he was standing in the doorway to the field outside. He goes out for recess most days that I have been there and he was supervising outside as well as the hallway. I went into the classroom and Sonja was sitting at her desk with that look...the look of complete and utter frustration.
Apparently the principal had made a new rule that the kids cannot eat their recess snacks outside because they are making a mess outside and not picking up their garbage. Sonja needed some down time. I know those days when the noise just doesn't stop and all you need is not to hear your voice or the students' voices just for a few moments. It is amazing how 15 minutes can make such a difference. Just some time to breathe. With this new rule, it just won't happen. The kids can't find their mittens, their hats, their snacks...whatever it is...Sonja just needed to shut down. I took the snack bin and the garbage. I put in the hall and told the kids they were not allowed to come back into the room until the bell went. Sonja and I then had a few moments to talk.

When the kids came into the room, Sonja gave them a few moments to hang up their coats and sit in their seats. She challenged them to come up with an idea to deal with the recess snack problem. The kids began putting up their hands and they were really excited about it.

Although the content of the actual notes had little to do with the mandated curriculum, the concept of community and community building was in line with the themes we had already addressed linked to urban and rural communities in Ontario. Furthermore, as a critical educator, witnessing a student-led process for knowledge building was phenomenal. If a justification was necessary for this process, within the Language Arts curriculum are expectations in the Oral and Visual Communications strand which address group skills such as “contribute collaboratively in group situations by asking questions and building on the ideas of others” as well as, “work with members of their group to establish clear purposes and procedures for solving problems and completing projects” (Ministry of Education, Language Arts, 1998a:47).

Students realized that in this classroom, they had a voice and decided, on their own, to use the database as a place to share their ideas and come up with a solution beyond the classroom and into the entire school community.
Figure 19: Solving a School Problem-Collectively

Above is the view which was developed after the students decided to solve this problem through the knowledge building process. Some of the notes were written collaboratively with two or more members of the class. Students began by explaining what the problem was and coming up with solutions.

Shauna: We had a problem about snack that we weren't allowed to bring snack outside because the people were throwing their garbage on the pavement and the birds were coming to eat the unfinished food. After a while, the principal was getting tired of picking up the garbage that the students were throwing on the pavement. So he made a new rule that we weren't allowed to eat snack outside. We solved the problem in our class by getting ideas from the students from Mrs. Neuman's class by voting on the ideas. The most people voted for to eat snack before recess. That's how we solved the problem. THE END

THE SNACK PROBLEM

It was Friday and the class had a huge problem it was about the snack. One of my solutions was that we should put a hole in the middle of are desks with garbage bags and put tape on the desks to hold the bags up.
The principal was cleaning up the mess the students made and people were throwing garbage on the floor. He should not have to clean up after the students. All the students should clean up after themselves.

(\textit{Ideas} Students should not throw garbage on the ground or on the floor. They should throw it in the garbage cans. There is one garbage can where the grade 1 students line up. The other one is at the side of the school near the Kelly program. But there are never any teachers at the side watching us so we shouldn't go there also it is near the parking lot which is dangerous.)

(\textit{Solution} We think that there should be one garbage can at each door at the back of the school. There are three doors. So, there should be three garbage cans at the back and the kids will always know that and put their garbage there.)

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\textbf{The Snack Problem}

\textit{Problem} The snack problem...litter in the school field

\textit{Ideas} You can eat your snack before recess but you still have to clean it up. If someone wants to stay behind, like a classroom helper, then they can stay behind to clean up. That would be a problem though because the teacher then doesn't get a break. Also, if the kids eat their snack before recess then we will miss our reading time because we will be too busy passing out the snack and eating. If we don't eat a snack, we could be hungry and we won't be able to concentrate. Jarelle said that he hates food and he can concentrate without eating. Michael needs to eat a little to be able to concentrate.

\textit{Solution} The best idea is to have a snack bin at every table and when everyone is done their snacks, they can dump it in there and throw away the garbage when it is finished. Another idea could be if you have a litterless snack because that is good for the environment too.

\textit{My Role} To eat the snack and make sure that the teacher has a recess break and I get outside for recess.

\textit{My Responsibility} We should not litter because then the birds come to eat the food and then more kids will get bird poo on them but at least the birds get food and they can clean up the mess.)
I need to understand Michael and Jarelle made a really interesting point about how sometimes we need food to help us concentrate and some of us don't. I have been really frustrated with kids sneaking food and drinks out after gym because they are hungry. We have had many spills and there is always food being stepped on in the classroom. I don't think it's fair for the caretakers and me to have to clean up after you guys.

However - I need to acknowledge that you guys might be really hungry at that time of day. How can you guys get to eat when you need to and I don't have to get frustrated about the mess you leave?

As the students worked through the problem, a solution was eventually decided upon and presented to the school principal who subsequently changed his mind and followed through on what these grade three students had suggested. If the situation had persisted, either students would have continued to lose instructional time or teachers would have been able to grieve to the teachers' federation regarding additional duty time beyond their sixty minutes. Students collaboratively came to a solution, presented it, were heard and change happened. They suggested, in a meeting with the school principal, that there should be a garbage can at each of the three entrances so that students will always know where to find the garbage cans. Also, they suggested contacting the companies that donated the food and asking for litterless snacks or at least with reduced packaging. Finally, they asked the principal to let all of the students and teachers know that this is what was going to happen so that everyone understood the expectations.

Other issues that arose in the classroom began to make their way into this view. In one instance, the classroom teacher, Sonja, appealed to her students for a solution to their behaviour:
I need some help from the class to come up with some strategies to keep the class on task when a supply teacher comes in. I am very frustrated with getting negative reports from supply teachers, when I know that you guys can be such a great class. What do we need to do to ensure that everyone is respectful on days when I am away? (Sonja, last modified: 2005, March 18)

This reflects the knowledge building indicator of community knowledge, collective responsibility. The students are asked to be accountable for their behaviour and rather than deal with the behaviour with a punitive tone, the teacher has chosen to appeal to their collective responsibility for upholding the values of the classroom community.

The classroom’s creation of the view, Cooperative Learning-Community Building, was an important step for the class. It was the first view which the students explicitly asked for, rather than implying an interest through their inquiry. The students realized that the database, and the practice of critical knowledge building, offered a place for social issues in the classroom and school and not just for curriculum based inquiry. Dei (1996) addresses the importance of bringing together both antiracism principles and practices. Antiracism education cannot just be the inclusion of various perspectives through curriculum content. It must also be the practice itself as it impacts dialogue and discourse within the classroom:

...antiracism teacher education cannot be effective if teachers and schools do not value to congruence between antiracism principles and practices....Students should not feel any dissonance in terms of what their teachers speak about theoretically in the classroom, and what they actually do outside the school walls. Progressive educators practice what they preach (e.g., matching their theoretical exhortations against oppression, their intellectual criticism of social injustice and their political affirmation of social difference within community political action). (Dei, 1996:86)

There were bigger issues that existed in the class. With the constant influx of students, the revolving door was in perpetual motion. Sonja had requested support from the school principal and received very little beyond a few volunteers which then led to the need to find something for them to do in her classroom as well. As a way to support this need, we turned
to some of the theories around community that we had applied through this project in the classroom.

At this point in the project, we had been through our “critical moment” and had moved on to a much more dynamic dialogue around what could work and what was working in the classroom to support the development of community.

The Technology and Negotiating Space, Voice and Power

Negotiating with power, whether my power as the teacher/researcher, Sonja’s power as the teacher in the classroom, or the various levels of power the students hold in the classroom based on achievement in school or popularity among their peers, is always present. Hayes and Kelly (2000) suggest:

Power in not a commodity that is owned and wielded at one’s discretion but is inscribed upon all relationships as individuals appropriate social, cultural, and historical resources to construct their relationship. When viewed through the lens of power, relationships are seen as sites of negotiation in which meaning and identity are constantly contested and struggled over. (455)

Although power can be upturned in a critical knowledge building classroom by placing value on personal experiences and knowledge, power imbalances still exist. It may be based on the role participants hold, the skills they have in terms of technology or skills in keyboarding or writing, or it can also be the power which is inherent in the structure of the software itself.

Creating New Views and Navigating Notes/Ideas

At a certain point in a view, the notes can become unwieldy. Students have to scroll up and down through the view to see the notes. A note can be posted and the thread that steps from that original note can lose the context of the first note. Also, enough notes can be posted
linked to a similar theme or idea that a rise-above note can be created or a completely new view can also be created to better organize the existing notes.

In the Communities view, various discussion threads had developed. These threads then became their own views. The naming of views was done collaboratively in a class discussion with the students, Sonja and myself. We went through the notes in the initial view and tried to determine what the main areas of interest were. The structure of further inquiry was developed by the interests of the students and their responses to the ideas their classmates presented.

Once the students organized the notes in the generic Communities view according to the other views, they began to think further about ways to work with the information in the database. This led to a further discussion on how to create titles for notes and how to conduct searches in the database for information. The database has functions to help users find information, including a search feature which asks that the user identify the search criteria based on a number of choices. Once the user clicks on the magnifying glass, the search and notification window appears.

![Search Button](image)

Figure 20: Search Button
The user can search by any word, author, keyword and title, among others. This offers the user the ability to search for notes that may be related to the theory, idea, or concept that this user is developing and he or she can therefore search and review the existing notes to determine if there are similar ideas present. Students began playing with this tool to learn all of its functionality and power to support their own process as well as the process of the group.

When students searched for their notes under “author” by putting their usernames in the search, it was surprising to some how little they had contributed when they compared it to what other students had written. They were also surprised by the titles they had written in the database and how hard it was to determine what was in the note based on the title. They decided that if the title was a search criterion in the search tool, they had better make their titles clearer and more reflective of what was in the note or no one would ever find their ideas.
As illustrated above, one student, Damian, realized that by adding clear titles, his notes would be more accessible to the other users in the database. Many of the note titles were addressed to other students with their names, as if the note was an email addressed to one particular recipient. In other cases, the title would be a statement such as: “I don’t understand what you mean” or “Please give more information” which carried no intrinsic meaning when looking through the views.

Sharing Technology and Ideas

Due to the low number of working computers we had access to the students often shared the iBook computers and co-authored notes. Initially, the partnering of students was random and not linked to the topics they were developing. Students would share the time so that half the time was used to research and discuss ideas with peers or using books and then they would switch off and the other person would have access to the computers. As students developed their inquiry, they became aware of others who were investigating similar topics. One student explained in the second focus group in April: “I learned a lot from Paola because from KF we found out we had the same topic so we learned from the books together and then started to write notes together and make our knowledge together.”
Other technological issues arose where students wanted to ensure that they were getting credit for the notes they wrote but also to ensure that others were not using their login names and thus escaping the responsibility of posting certain notes. When they co-authored notes, students first did so by logging into one person’s account and writing the note together without using the co-authoring tool in Knowledge Forum. This led to a number of notes that were co-authored but appeared to have only one author.

There were also notes where there was one author indicated but that author did not actually contribute to writing the note. Students logged onto the database using one login and then the person who logged in would move on but did not logout. This resulted in some students writing inappropriate notes under the guise of someone else’s login and authorship. We had to address this issue by discussing the appropriate use policy which all students in the board must sign, along with their parents, as part of the school’s code of conduct. One issue came up where a series of notes were sent between students where the language became quite harsh. The first note shows the contents of the rise-above which addressed this issue.

![Rise-Above from note "Language and Ownership in KF"](image)

Figure 23: Constructive Uses of Rise-Above Notes

The first note which was written by Wardah built onto a note in the Greatest Canadians view about Tommy Douglas. The entire note said was “cat” which for me, had no meaning, but the response by Sharon, which was actually by Damian, said, “I’ll kick your butt!!” Students were told that they could not threaten another student on or offline; the other issue was that Sharon
and Damian were working as partners with the computer and Damian wrote this note under the guise of Sharon's authorship.

With the students involved in this incident, I pulled the notes out of the views and put them in a rise-above note so that they would still exist within the database but not within the context of the students' inquiry. This note shows the explanation of the rise-above note which was written with the students involved.

*Evidence* I thought that Wardah wrote this note and that Sharon wrote a note back. The language was inappropriate so I wrote a note about that and sent an email to the teacher.

Ms. Neuman talked to Damian privately about how to use language in KF. Damian didn't realize that everyone could read the notes and thought that he was just sending it to his friend and that is was a joke. He also signed in on someone else's name because his sign in wasn't working so Debbie thought that it was Sharon but it was Damian.

*Conclusion* Damian said that he would not use that language because it is bad and it is a put down and at Lakeview there are no put downs. Even though everyone could read the note, it still would be wrong to do if no one else could see it but Wardah.

The other thing we have to remember is that when we sign on using someone else's name, we should always write a co-authored note so we know who wrote the note.

When Debbie came in on Friday, Damian went to her right away and apologized.

This issue began when two students, sharing a computer, had worked under one login rather than signing off and then signing back in under a new user. This group of students, Sharon,
Damian and Wardah, determined that it was fine to write notes together but then decided that both names should be on the note. This situation was turned around by reframing it as a learning opportunity rather than a punitive exercise. Damian and I co-authored a note in the How To view on how to co-author a note.

Problems: How do you make a co-authored note?

(This procedure is about... how to make a co-authored note. This means that more than one person has written the note.)

(First... Create a new note by clicking on the icon that has a pencil on it.)

(Second... In the new note, on the top left corner, is a button that says “advanced”. You have to click on that button.)

(Third... Scroll down or make your note window bigger. There will be a section called “authors”.)

(Then... Click on “select author” and choose a name from “students” or from “teacher researcher” depending on who is writing the note with you. You can choose as many names as you need to choose.)

(Next... Once you click on the name, it will be added in the box.)

(Finally... Write your note and don’t forget to “close and contribute”!!!)

(This came up because... because of the inappropriate language and the person who did it was signed on under someone else’s username. Also, we have to share computers because there are not enough for everyone to have their own so a lot of the time, we write co-authored notes. It is very important to share the responsibility and ownership of who did the work.)

The issue of misrepresentation and the use of another person’s user name in a note were irresponsible on both sides. The first person should have logged out and the second person should have realized they had not logged in. Further, it was made clear to all students that writing notes to each other that were not respectful at all times would not be tolerated.

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79 This event happened at the beginning of November. The students had used the Knowledge Forum database for a total of four weeks.
Co-authoring notes then became an interest to the students. They wanted to know how to build a note together rather than wait for one person to post and another to respond. A How to view was established where students wrote notes about specific functionalities of the technology so that if an expert wasn’t available, participants could choose to become their own expert using the information in this view. Topics included how to make a rise-above note, how to create a co-authored note, and how to add a picture to a note.

The Leap from Email to Shared Space

When first exposed to the database, students often ask if the notes are like email. Clarification of the difference is necessary. With email, the person writing the email can send it to specific recipients. The email is sent and although it can be passed on from the original recipient, it is still not considered a public note.

Yohance: Sometimes when you start using KF you don’t really know that everyone can see your notes and you might write something silly and didn’t know that everyone could see the silly thing you wrote because you think only the person you sent it to can see it but everyone; even the teacher can see it.

In Knowledge Forum, a note posted can be read by each person who has access to the database, providing the users are given access to all of the notes\(^{80}\). In the case of the Lakeview database, all users were given access to all views and all notes. This means that all students, the classroom teacher, and I had access to all views and notes within the database. This is a concept that proved to be difficult to clarify with the students. Initially, when students posted their notes with ideas, they did not realize that all participants had access or if they did, they still continued to address notes to a specific recipient.

\(^{80}\) There are varying levels of permissions for types of users including visitors, readers, writers, and editors. Visitors and readers can only read published notes and views. Writers and editors can access all notes and views. All users, other than readers, are considered authors as they can all contribute notes.
In this discussion thread, a series of notes have titles such as, “To Damian”, “To Darya”, and “To Sharon”. The contents of these notes were, “What do you mean?” and “Can you explain what you are trying to say?” In order to alleviate this, I posted a note as an example showing the students what a proper response could be and the concept of building on each other’s ideas rather than asking the original writer to come up with more information.

Problems: What does Damian mean when he asks about which people are in communities?

Keywords: people, communities, community

(My theory I think that people belong to different communities.)

(New information I belong to a community in Armour Heights because I live there. I belong to the teaching community because I am a teacher. I belong to the Jewish community because I am Jewish. I belong to the community at Lakeview because I come to work with the grade three class.)

The notes which followed mine were again notes of clarification. The discussion continued in the classroom where students explained that they did not understand Damian’s note and the
fact that he felt that certain groups were not allowed into a community. Damian wanted to understand community by its members rather than the actions that make a community. We talked about how we can all belong to different communities for a variety of reasons including geography, religion, race, and work. All of these reasons were addressed in the note above as well as in the class conversation.

The content was one of the issues but the way they built onto each others’ notes through questions of clarification rather than finding the information they were seeking themselves and posting it in the note was the other issue we addressed as a class. The students explained that by questioning each other they were helping their classmates move forward. They believed this was their role in knowledge building because they were also the teachers and this is what teachers did.

**Rise-Above Notes and Power**

One of the more explicit ways that power enters into the database through the functionality of the software is through rise-above notes. The rationale for rise-above notes is that information that is similar in some way, or can be used to inform the idea or theory in another note or notes, is brought together into a new note, rising above the previously stated theories/ideas. In terms of this project, the rise-above notes were created by the classroom teacher and myself with students or for our own purposes. The students required some support to make a rise-above note in terms of the technological function but also to see how ideas can come together to support idea improvement. They did not take it upon themselves to make their own rise-above notes. This pattern is replicated in other studies involving Knowledge Forum and knowledge building.
Law and Wong (2003) found that rise-above was one of the last principles to be accessed. They developed a hierarchy of Scardamalia’s knowledge building principles and found that some were used much more frequently than others. The rise-above function was used the least. They suggest that this may result from students’ lack of epistemic agency to “undertake ‘rise above’ efforts regularly throughout an inquiry/learning process and not just as a task-driven activity” (9).

Myiopoulos (2001) found that the function of rise-above was limited in its use and further suggests that additional research should investigate ways to implement a more dynamic model of rise-above use in Knowledge Forum (62). In Åhlberg et al. (2001), similar findings were addressed. This study was with a group of in-service teachers using Knowledge Forum for professional development on how to address environmental education in the classroom. Participants were asked to pose problems in working with environmental education and discuss opposing views in a Knowledge Forum database with the intent to “build knowledge collaboratively” (2001:227). In their study, only the coordinator of the project used the rise-above function despite the fact that it was taught to the entire group. Many participants felt that the idea of rise-above was worthwhile but that they did not have enough time with the software to establish the use of rise-above.

Scardamalia explains that rise-above is one of the knowledge building principles because it is “working toward more inclusive principles and higher-level formulations of problems…By moving to higher planes of understanding knowledge builders transcend trivialities and oversimplifications and move beyond current best practices” (2000:10).

It is an organizational function of the software that a user can bring together ideas that work towards idea improvement. When the notes are brought together into a rise-above note, the
note exhibits the authors contributing to that rise-above note, by showing all authors of the previous notes that are embedded in that rise-above. A caution must be made that the notes pulled together into the creation of a rise-above note do not exist anywhere else unless they are purposefully copied into another view. Although the goal is community knowledge, collective responsibility towards increasing the cultural capital and idea improvement of the particular knowledge building community, a very strong possibility still exists that the knowledge created by one member is digitally subjugated into the idea of another note through the rise-above function.

For example, if a student expresses an idea and another student decides that this idea is relevant to the improvement of his or her idea, the original note will be physically removed from the location the author intended. Thus, sometimes Knowledge Forum users are taught to ask permission from the authors of the notes before placing the note into a rise-above note. This is done so that all members understand the obligation to receive permission before moving a note into a rise-above note, or at least, always ensuring that the note exists in its original place and context to allow for the expression of the original author's ideas and its original context.

In this particular database, the function of rise-above was only used a few times and only done so in conjunction with either Sonja or myself. Scardamalia suggests that although these functions exist, “These capabilities only become effective, of course, if the social practices of the classroom make use of them. Thus there has developed along with the technology a knowledge building pedagogy, where the embeddedness idea comes to pervade the very culture of the classroom” (2002:82). The notes that were placed in the rise-above notes were always copied into them and remained within their original context. Organization of the
database was done predominantly through new views—the naming and development which
was decided on as a group through class discussions.

The note below speaks to this issue. In this case, Sonja had placed my *All About Me* note into a
rise-above note and then wrote her own *All About Me* note within the rise-above note.
Although this was a case where this function was used accidentally, the result was that my note
disappeared from the view and only existed within Sonja's note. In the *All About Me* view, the
first note appears to be co-authored by Sonja and myself.

![Figure 25: The First Rise-Above Note](image)

When this rise-above note is opened, all that appears is the title and the rise-above folder icon.
There was no explanation of the rise-above note or why it was created. This is why I assumed,
in my response to Sonja's note, it was done accidentally.

![Figure 26: Inside the Rise-Above Note](image)

Once the rise-above folder icon is clicked, the contents of the folder are revealed. In this case,
it is my *All about Me* note.
To read the *All about Me* note I created, it now takes four clicks to access that content and the note still resides in the original view I placed it in. If the note was placed in another view, the note would be much less likely to be accessed, particularly because the rise-above note appeared to empty.

![Rise-Above from note "All about Me"](image)

**Figure 27:** One More Click to View the Note

If this content was all about a student in the classroom who for the first time was asked to write about herself and began to share her identity, she would most likely have no responses to her note and would wonder why no one read her note.

Typically, the rise-above note is introduced once there is an expressed need for it, either through organization of ideas and notes or because there are ways to bring ideas and notes together. Sonja and I decided that the students could use this function as easily as she did, so we decided to let them know quite early in the process that this function existed, what its use
was and what the protocol was for getting permission to use someone’s note in a rise-above note.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problems: When do we use rise-above notes?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Keywords: knowledge, rise-above, power</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(My theory) When you use rise-aboves, it is to put similar ideas together to help organize the information. By doing this, new knowledge can be created by making these connections.

(I need to understand) Why you put my "all about me" note into a rise-above?

(New information) By putting someone’s note in a rise-above, the note disappears. The rise-above shows all the authors of the notes inside of it as composing the rise-above note. For this reason, it is really important to get permission from each person whose note you are putting in the rise-above note.

(A better theory) I am sure that this was an accident but it brings up many important points around power and control within the database in terms of whose ideas are seen and how the knowledge is organized and viewed.

Figure 29: Using Rise-Above Notes

There could be many reasons why students do not tend to use this function to its full capability. Epistemic agency and time with the software were suggested by Law and Wong (2003) and Myiopoulos (2001), respectively. Students may have difficulty using the software as there are several steps that must take place for a rise-above note to be created, such as locating notes with a common theme, placing these notes in the reader, moving the notes to the rise-above note and writing an explanation in the rise-above note. In addition to these steps, students must also ask permission from each author, therefore possibly adding the step of copying the notes back to the original views and contexts. Depending on a student’s skill with the technology, the actual process of creating a rise-above note could be quite onerous.
As we continued to work with Knowledge Forum and the content of communities, there was a need to address critical reading skills with students as some information they posted served to perpetuate stereotypes about various communities around the world. This was an opportunity to bring these notes into a rise-above note, with an introduction explaining the reasoning behind the rise-above note. The process was first discussed as a whole group discussion followed by the creation of the note with a smaller group of students.

![Figure 30: Rise-Above on Stereotypes in Research](image)

Students were researching various regions in Canada and began writing about *Tolem Poles, Fast Food in Nunavut* and the reason that *Canada formed Nunavut*. Questions were posed and some answers were provided by students but for the most part, they did not show a commitment to *Community Knowledge, Collective Responsibility*. Students would read the information in the notes and would build-on the note by drawing attention to the partial knowledge but would not seek out the information themselves. In the note below, the student, Paola, referenced both the note of the other student, Alex, as well as the content of the note she was building onto.

"The tips of food in they artic that they eat are raw seal meat they also drink nice cold water from the melted snow. "FOOD IN NUNIVITE but you have to eat different food too!!

![Figure 31: Food in Nunavut](image)
By addressing the missing information, students saw themselves as playing the teacher role rather than a knowledge building role. They would draw attention to the incompleteness but by addressing the knowledge building principle, *Community Knowledge, Collective Responsibility*, students would move beyond this definition of teacher and begin to collaboratively create knowledge and be collectively responsible for the knowledge in the database.

![Image showing Rise-Above notes](image)

**Figure 32: Notes inside the Rise-Above**

I modeled how the rise-above note could be used to collaboratively work towards responsible research. The rise-above note was focused on the acceptance of partial knowledge as the answer rather than seeking to find a more inclusive representation of the knowledge, in this case, First Nations Peoples in Canada. This process of creating inclusive knowledge, which is still partial knowledge, can be done with our fellow knowledge builders with the understanding that even with our collective creation of knowledge, our representations are always incomplete and partial.

I continued to model how the software and the content could be used to increase knowledge sharing within the database as well as within class discussions. My role as an antiracist educator...
was pivotal to the project as students began to take on the role in the knowledge building context.

Establishing a Culture of Sharing—Distributed Leadership in the Classroom

Students in a traditional classroom will receive assignments or tasks to be completed. They will submit their work to the classroom teacher who will either assess the work or not and then return it to the student or not. Occasionally, there is an opportunity for an audience\(^{81}\) in the classroom or school but typically, the teacher is the one who is the audience and students remain outside of their classmates learning. This is a pattern established in the Socratic dialogues of Plato. The teacher questions, the student answers, the teacher evaluates the response (Scardamalia and Bereiter, 1996:257). The concept of dialogue then “comes out against the ‘knowledge = belief + logos’ theory” (O’Hara, 2002:13). Logos is a concept that has proved to be complicated. It is considered to be “true knowledge” and yet, within a critical frame, there is no “true knowledge” but only partial knowledge. For this reason, to gain a deeper understanding or knowledge, the dialogue would benefit from the diversity of participants and it being democratic in nature allowing for multiple perspectives and experiences. “Democracy also requires structured opportunities for investigating problems, for airing and substantiating different viewpoints, and for discussing solution options” (Bickmore, 2001:149).

To open a classroom up to the practice of knowledge building is to ask the students to enter into a culture of sharing—sharing of ideas but also sharing of expertise. It is no longer the teacher’s sole responsibility to respond and affirm—students now share that role as well.

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\(^{81}\) Delpit (1988) writes of the need for “real audiences” (288) whereby audiences are engaged with each other in peer conferences.
Scardamalia and Bereiter (2002) suggest that by engaging in knowledge building, the dynamic changes in that "information should flow freely among participants, without having to pass through a central authority" (260). In the case of the Ontario curriculum, the teacher is responsible for delivering the content to the students at a particular grade level. The teacher will monitor the notes and the directions that inquiry moves, at times, steering back to the mandated curriculum but leaving space for inquiry beyond the constraints of the mandated curriculum. For example, in my own role as antiracist educator/researcher, I took it upon myself to call attention to notes which perpetuated stereotypes or opened up the discussion to multiple ways of knowing. This method of challenging students to think critically was then echoed by other students in the database as we moved through the project in the form of notes in the database. Initially, these build-on notes were addressed to the original author of the preceding note but still, all participants could read these notes and could also question the content and build onto the knowledge presented.

The role of the antiracist educator in a knowledge building classroom changes as the dynamic in that classroom changes. At first, the role is one that is explicit, naming the bias that is present in discussion, the classroom planning, or in the notes themselves. This role changes as participants begin to see that they too can question, challenge and clarify their own perspective and take ownership of these aspects of the role. The role in this project was multidimensional and messy. There are "the complexities involved in simultaneously speaking to, speaking for and speaking out against participants in the setting, a result of the interwoven positionalities" (Ulichny, 1997:165). One aspect dealt with modeling the practice with the classroom teacher and another aspect was modeling the role with the students.
Modeling Practice and Decentering Normal

The project began with momentum as the beginning of the school year often does. It is a time of possibility, learning and improving practice. Sonja was ready for the challenge and was looking forward to getting back to using technology in the classroom as she had done in her pre-service teacher education program. Sonja’s decision to use the television series, *The Greatest Canadian*\(^{82}\), was a way to incorporate media and television programming into the discourse around *Urban and Rural Communities* and was well-received by the students. I had concerns over this as a way to begin the project due to the bias already represented in the show which further promoted White men as representative of the greatness of Canada.

The space between teacher and researcher is a negotiated one, particularly in a critical project within an antiracist framework. I had to be respectful of her position within the classroom but at the same time, my project, the questions associated with it, and the goals were made explicit to Sonja prior to starting the work. The understanding of antiracist education and the practices associated with it are always a place of resistance. Concerns also existed in terms of the validity of the project as the critical antiracist perspective was explicitly my project whereas the knowledge building was the school’s project.

In this note exchange, Sonja and I were expressing our places within antiracist education. Students had posted notes that perpetuated stereotypes as they were investigating various regions of Canada\(^{83}\) and I wanted to caution the students about notes such as these.

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\(^{82}\) This television series ran in the fall of 2004 on CBC television. The premise was that people appeared on the show to advocate for the person they best felt was represented Canada as the “Greatest Canadian”. The show began with ten finalists out of 140,000 nationally. Of the top ten finalists, all of them were White men other than David Suzuki. ([http://www.cbc.ca/story/arts/national/2004/11/29/Arts/TommyDouglasGreatestCanadian041129.html](http://www.cbc.ca/story/arts/national/2004/11/29/Arts/TommyDouglasGreatestCanadian041129.html))

\(^{83}\) This was addressed in the previous section, *Rise Above Notes and Power*, in the rise-above note, Stereotypes in Research or Lack of Responsibility in Sharing Information (Figures 30-32).
Sonja: Debbie, I understand your concern about stereotypes, but I don't think your notes in the database are going to clarify the concepts to the kids. Writing in!!! is not going to help the kids with the concept. Why don't we create some stereotypes for the kids about things they know and then have them dispel them (i.e. all grade 3's love math best) and get their opinions? Let's discuss the issues a bit more. They are only 8-9, so it is hard for them to get past the idea that "books are the almighty".

Debbie: [Opinion] I think that the way you addressed it starting with an easy stereotype (by easy I mean not linked to race, ethnicity, class, religion, ability, gender or sexual orientation) is a good place to start with the kids. They really understood the concept and it was a safe place to start this conversation. Having said that, I also think they are quite capable of understanding stereotyping and bias linked to the intersecting oppressions listed above. Many of the students left their home countries for persecutions linked to these oppressions or continue to fight these oppressions in their daily lives (class, race, ethnicity, gender).

Sonja’s ability to challenge me in this context was evidence of her conviction as well as the format of the project which encouraged dialogue. When she stated that bias and stereotypes were my concern, this indicated to me that she did not share this concern.

Sonja was willing to talk about diversity and contributions of diverse peoples through the Greatest Canadian series. However, the diversity addressed in The Greatest Canadian program was limited to geographic diversity within Canada other than the nomination of David Suzuki, the only non-White nominee. The following is an example of a note posted by Sonja and my build-on note within the Teacher/Researcher view:

Sonja: Our first show was about Tommy Douglas, Premier of Saskatchewan and the father of Universal health care, union rights, human rights and minimum wage. The kids are super excited about the changes he made to Canada as a country and we are exploring what is most important to us as Canadians. When we have seen all the biographies we will vote on the CBC website www.cbc.ca/greatest and the kids can have their say!! ["I" Oct. 20.2004 and the students are really into it.]
Debbie: I am hoping to see some ties to the curriculum through this discovery. I also think that we have to be careful and aware that to date, the three Greatest Canadians are Tommy Douglas, Pierre Trudeau and Terry Fox...all White men. Although these men were all great, I hope to see more diversity in terms of gender and race as CBC continues with this series. It is important for the students to see themselves as possible great Canadians.” Last modified: 2004, October 26

Furthering this conversation, I offered a review of curriculum documents as a way to tie the use of *The Greatest Canadian* series to the curriculum expectations:

Debbie: *Opinion* I think that using these videos is a great way to get at the importance of urban and rural communities in the make up of Canada. It shows that there are different understandings depending on where you are from and these ideas can impact a whole country.

In the Social Studies Curriculum from 1998, one of the overall expectations is: "demonstrate awareness of the possible similarities and differences among people, places, and environments"

In the 2004 version, there is a specific expectation which states; "explain how communities interact with each other and the environment to meet human needs". These two expectations can be investigated through the *Greatest Canadians* series. A question may be, “Why did these people become who they are and how did their communities help to create the people they became?”

Sonja did not reply to this note. In fact, she did not post another note until January. This was the beginning of the tension between Sonja and me. As an antiracist educator/researcher, it was my role to push the envelope and challenge the students and teacher to question privilege and systemic racism. Sonja and I did not have the same definitions of antiracism. In hindsight, it was apparent to me that by having a definition of what antiracism looked like in the classroom, I was projecting my principles onto her and her practice, a problem on several levels. First, my role as an antiracist educator/researcher was one of colleague, not supervisor. I told her that I was not evaluating her and yet, I had. Second, by having a definition and seeing an end to becoming an antiracist educator, I close off any other understanding of what this type of classroom practice looks like, limiting the dialogue and exploiting my own
power—thus silencing her ideas from the dialogue. Also, I was so concerned about doing something meaningful in this classroom that while Sonja tried to make meaning for herself in this project, I shut her down. Although Sonja was open to the idea of antiracism in the classroom, in practice, she was not in the same place that I was. The openness was a point of entry and deserved space. I was so concerned about moving the group forward that I did not handle this appropriately. Hayes and Kelly (2000) reflect on the relationship between university researcher and elementary teachers:

In exploring my experiences at this school, I suggest that the development of a collaborative relationship was constrained because, in a number of instances, I inappropriately overstepped the boundaries demarcating my world as a university-based researcher and the world of teachers.” (pp. 451-452)

In Sonja’s note about *The Greatest Canadian* series she was excited about the research and the students’ engagement in it. Following my note, pushing her towards an antiracist perspective, she was silenced.

**Addressing Sensitive and Controversial Issues**

Within most schools, systemic racism exists. Dei’s principles of antiracism education address issues of privilege and power, and marginalization of certain voices resulting in “the delegitimation of the knowledge and experiences of subordinated groups in the education system” (1996:28-30). Nagda et al. (2003) echo Freire (1970) in that to transform pedagogy and practice, the content of the curriculum must be coupled with action. Critical inquiry must be addressed through a dialogue: a collaborative exercise leading towards engaged learning (167-169).

various demonstration lessons that ask the teacher to assess his or her own bias and self-knowledge prior to addressing any sensitive or controversial issue. The document states, "Learning flourishes when the lesson is connected to the learner’s life…A classroom that is relevant to student lives cannot help but include sensitive issues about work, family, and society. Controversy is a natural part of the process of knowing…” (5). The main message in this document is the constant work towards action. The document recommends that to effectively and sensitively deal with issues that arise in the classroom, teachers should always reflect and debrief thinking towards the future and what actions must be taken to ensure that the issue is dealt with effectively.

Controversial and sensitive issues arose throughout the project at Lakeview Public School. Once the class decided to develop a view for Cooperative Learning-Community Building, a space existed for issues such as the garbage problem at recess. New issues began to show up. For example, among several of the girls in the class, a disagreement arose when one White student (the only White girl in the classroom) made a comment about the hair of one of the Black girls. Subsequently, a group of five Black girls in the classroom began to ostracize that White girl, Sally. Sally explained to me following the incident, that she tried to tell them what she meant and that she wasn’t able to express her opinions because she was outnumbered. The conversation we had was several days after the incident. The day this event occurred, there was an occasional teacher in the classroom. Sonja was away. Sally had told the occasional teacher about the event on the day it occurred and was told not to talk about it. Sally decided that this view in the database would be a good place to talk about it. Sonja and I posted notes in the teacher/researcher journal about this event:
Problems: Who is the Outsider?

HAIR PROBLEM BY SALLY

Sally told me that she wanted to write about a problem that she had with some of the Black girls in the classroom.

It was at this point that the teacher announced that all the kids should write about the snack problem. Some of the kids had other problems they wanted to write about...like this one. Sally continued to write about it but her note did not save properly so the content was lost.

Sally explained that she was told by the girls that she said something rude to them about their hair and she claims to not have said anything. I was unsure of what else happened in relation to this issue.

This might be a good place for these issues to be raised and discussed.

Again, there was no response to this note nor was it addressed in the classroom. Although Sonja was somewhat willing to take the leap to discuss stereotypes in the information that the students provided about various regions of Canada, when an issue arose in the classroom, the discussion was silenced. Sonja and I discussed the issue and she did not feel that it was something that needed to be addressed in the class. She felt that it was something that happened when she was not at school and that the occasional teacher who had been present that day had dealt with the situation effectively.

This is a place where my role as the antiracist educator/researcher once again became visibly tenuous. This was not my classroom and there was a distance created not only by the limited time I had each week with the students but also by the authority I did not have to address issues that the classroom teacher had no interest in addressing. In my own classroom and in my own practice I would always acknowledge racial slurs and social conflict through open and sensitive class discussions. These comments do not disappear, nor do the actions or reactions of those who were involved. But, this was not my classroom. My role was to encourage Sonja
to reflect on the situation and how it could be managed differently to allow for discussion and refuse marginalization of any voices. Unless Sonja was willing, I could not explicitly discuss these issues in the classroom or the database, although, my quiet resistance strategy was to approach the students who were involved individually to ensure that they were clear about what had happened.

In this case, the one White child, Sally, in a group of four Black girls, Ulan, Shaundra, Taya, and Savina, had asked if their hair was soft. Although she claimed that she simply asked the question and did not intend to hurt anyone’s feelings, the Black girls had taken offence to it. They had their own reasons, such as their own past experiences with racism which would make their reaction to the question warranted as was the need for adult intervention to facilitate a discussion about it. Further to this incident, Sally had been threatened by the girls and told she was racist. She was afraid when the girls told her this and thought she would get into trouble but did not understand the reaction the girls had. The occasional teacher in the classroom on that day ignored the issue and it continued to fester in the classroom, resulting in Sally being unable to concentrate on her work and the Black girls, feeling hostile towards her, excluding her and feeling justified in their treatment of her due to their feelings about Sally’s comment. I tried to discuss this event with Sonja but she felt, having not been at school on the day that it occurred, it was better left in the past.

Sally’s move to post a note about this event in the database set a precedent that this could be a space where a silenced student could find a voice. It changed from a situation where the student would tell the teacher and the teacher would choose to handle or dismiss a situation to an open, public forum, where the class could be accountable for actions, problems and solutions. Although Sonja and I had the opportunity to clear notes, these notes remained
present. A space was provided, though due to limits placed on the content, it was not used to its maximum antiracist potential.

Judgement and Bias, a Different Power to Name

When recognizing bias, the antiracist educator must also ask why we judge cultures based on values that represent the culture in which we live. For example, when reporting on life in Nunavut, a student reported that “they don’t even have fast food in Nunavut”. I questioned this statement on more than one level. First, on further investigation, I found that there was a fast food chain that existed in Nunavut but more importantly, I asked the question, why do we judge a society based on the existence of fast food in their culture?

Fast Food in Nunavut edit
Last modified 2/28/08, 12:01:42 AM

Keywords: Nunavut, fast food

I think we first have to ask why fast food is important to us and what it represents.

Then, I think you should find out if there is fast food there.

If you go to this site... http://atlas.gc.ca/site/english/learningresources/facts/nunavut_communities/pangni.html ...you will find that there is a fast food restaurant in Nunavut called "Quick Stop".

After I posted this note in response to Kalel’s note, he changed what he had posted. This action caused me to reflect on my role in the classroom. My response to this was the following:

Changing our notes: where do ideas go?

Problems: What happens when we change the contents of a note and erase our ideas?

Keywords: knowledge, information, changing, removing, improve, responsible, sharing, KWL, change
I was going through the database and I realized that the note about Canada and Nunavut was changed... where is the stuff about the fast food?

(I need to understand Why did Kalel take out the original note?)

(New information If you erase the contents of a note, the built on notes do not necessarily make sense... for example... I am asking about Fast Food in Nunavut in my build-on and yet Kalel's original note does not have any information about this anymore.)

(Opinion It is important to never take out the contents of a note. If your ideas change, it is important to show that change by using the KWL scaffold.)

(Elaboration The KWL scaffold has: WHAT I KNOW, WHAT I WANT TO KNOW, WHAT I LEARNED... This means that you can change your ideas and show that the idea changed. It is okay to have incorrect information, as long as we always seek to improve the accuracy of the information or the ideas we present.)

(My theory I think Kalel removed the information because he may be concerned that he would either get in trouble, would get a bad mark, or someone would be disappointed in him (either me or Ms. Neuman.)

(A better theory If we have the wrong information and we seek to improve the information we have, we are responsible for our learning, and the learning and sharing of knowledge within the class.)

Knowledge building has as one of its goals idea improvement. Students are encouraged to take risks as there may be a better theory or better knowledge to support a claim. Students will be questioned about their ideas and theories and will also be asked to support them. This can prove to be difficult with young children as they tend to take this personally and have concerns regarding wrong answers or getting into trouble for saying or writing something wrong. Once again, I had to take a step back. Practising as a critical educator/researcher was not the same as practising as a critical educator in my own classroom. In my own classroom, the level of trust and understanding was consistent and ongoing. In this classroom, I had to move with slower steps and yet at the same time, try to increase the pace of the project to see results.
We once again addressed how to do critical research and how to question text. In this case, it is also the role of the antiracist educator to not only call attention to false representation, bias, and stereotypes but also to suggest and model ways to find authentic representation of a culture. The following example pulls bias from the notes students contributed but also offers websites which are a truer representation of totem poles as well as offering additional information to broaden this understanding.

Sonja had directed her students to ask questions as a place to start their individual inquiries on Regional Canada. I had cautioned the students that they should to think carefully about the questions and if they found that the questions steered them towards information they thought they already knew, it was important to acknowledge the misinformation rather than continue down that path. The first note in this thread was a note posted by Damian where he outlined the research questions he was going to pursue in his inquiry.

I like Yellowknife because it has a lot of trees and nature.
1. Does it have 3 or 2 or 1 forests?
2. Do they live there or camp there? Community or camp?
3. Do they have electricity & water & town?
4. Do they have shops?
5. Do they have danger in that place?
6. Why did they call it Yellowknife?
7. Does it have lakes or some total poles?
8. Is Yellowknife closer to Nunavut or Ontario?

Students responded to each others’ notes and did so with the beginning of a critical eye by questioning the content in the notes. Sonja and I explained to the students that it was a big step to begin reading each others’ notes and to question them, but that if we were modeling collective knowledge and community responsibility, they also had to take responsibility for the
notes and ideas of their classmates. It was a beginning of a way for the students to question the content but the next step was to seek out the information for a build on note.

The first response to Damian’s note was from Taina, “Why do you think they have danger in Yellowknife?” Taina explained later that she asked this question of Damian because she did not understand why this question would define Yellowknife differently from other parts of Canada and questioned his choice in including this in his inquiry. In the next note in the thread, Julia responded to Taina’s question, “I don’t think they have danger there.” Julia had never been to Yellowknife nor had she done any research about Yellowknife. She did not base this response on any knowledge that she had but rather as a way to support Taina’s line of questioning. The first note raised questions for inquiry. The second note questioned one of the questions and third attempted an answer to the second. The next note was posted by Shauna:

(New information Yellowknife is closer to Nunavut. They do have shops and towns and lakes but I’m not sure if they have totem poles. But maybe some people camp there and they do have danger. They do have electricity and I think they camp there.)

Shauna looked at an atlas, did some internet research to back up her claims and again questioned if there were totem poles in Yellowknife.

To model collective knowledge and community responsibility, as well as a critical stance towards the questions asked and the knowledge presented, I produced the following note:

Problem: How can we investigate other parts of Canada without stereotyping people and places in these regions?
Totem poles are objects which represent a Native family kinship and stories (http://users.imag.net/~sryjkkramer/nativetotems/) Totem poles are part of the culture for Northwest Pacific Coast Native Peoples on the western coast of North America from BC to Alaska. Aboriginal peoples in Yellowknife do not use totem poles.

The Maori people of New Zealand also create Totem Poles. For more information on "Truths and Falsehoods" about Totem Poles...go to http://users.imag.net/~sryjkkramer/nativetotems/ It is important to investigate stereotypes about other cultures and places. For example, not all First Nations groups make totem poles and in the Northwest Territories, there is electricity.

This discussion thread was brought to the class's attention in a group discussion. The students, Sonja and I talked about how we know who has posted the information on a website. In our class discussion, we talked about uses of the Internet, for example, searching websites for information about the organization, who the authors of the websites are and who this website claims to represent. For books, the class also discussed the importance of finding out about the author and the sources used for the information in that text.

Sonja and I explained that students should decide whether they felt the information was complete in the book/text/website or if the source contained bias or partial information. If they personally, or in discussions with their families, had experience that informed any discussion, that information was welcomed as a viable source as well. Students were also continuously cautioned that even if we try to get reliable sources and information, each of those sources has a certain perspective. As researchers, we must always try to see things in a different way and understand that our ideas are improvable.

Messina, Reeve, Scardamalia (2003) addressed this issue through improvable ideas:
The metaphor of a ball of clay to represent a theory during a KB talk was an attempt to prevent students from becoming emotionally attached to their theories, that is, to create a psychologically safe culture. Students need to be comfortable receiving and giving criticism about theories on the database and during KB talks. (23)

Safety in a critical knowledge building classroom represents a place where ideas can be expressed but there is a need to be a critically aware and show respect for those present and those who are not present. As we moved through the process at Lakeview, student notes began with notes about themselves in the *All about Me* view and moved into prescribed topics tied to the Ontario curriculum in the *Urban and Rural Communities* view. Students began expanding the definition of community in the *Communities around the World* view where they expanded the definitions of urban and rural to include their own lived experiences in other countries such as a rural community in Eritrea and homes in the Philippines. Going back to the curriculum, in the *Regional Canada* view, students had developed a comfort with questioning their classmates and challenging the knowledge presented in notes. The questions were a first step but we had to explicitly address the knowledge building principles of *improvable ideas* and *community knowledge, collective responsibility* to understand that the next step in the progression of ideas and expansion of partial knowledge was to seek out the information they felt was partial, such as in the case of the notes on Yellowknife and totem poles.

*Improvable ideas* is a central goal of knowledge building and yet, to improve an idea that works towards community knowledge and collective responsibility can also mean that despite the collective goal, individual participants may have difficulty with their ideas being improved—particularly when the idea is based on their own experiences. Improvable ideas can also mean that the students, who traditionally do not have power, can have the power to express their opinions, ideas, and knowledge. Key to this expression and sharing of ideas is the collective responsibility of the group. I expressed concern over those “half-baked notions” (Scardamalia
2003:9) expressed about other cultures such as those in northern Canada. Students provided answers to Damian's research questions without doing the research themselves. They had to understand the difference between that action and the expression of lived experiences such as Kenneth's in the Philippines and Sharon's in Eritrea. In my response to Kael's note on Nunavut, I expressed concern over his incomplete information and, due to the power I wield, Kael felt compelled to erase his ideas.

In terms of critical knowledge building, the opinions or theories of the individual students may very well be "emotional" and students may have an "attachment" to these theories/ideas/opinions based on their personal and lived experiences. When rising above or building on notes, there must be an acknowledgement and respect for where the students are and the knowledge they present. In the case of "fast food in Nunavut", it was important for me to recognize the statement not just in terms of the values that it places on fast food and the stereotypes it suggests, but also the rich discussion that follows due to these "half-baked notions".

In my calling attention to statements of bias and the perpetuation of stereotypes within our discussions or database work, I continued to exercise my power as an educator to inform participants of incomplete or biased information. As I continued to model critical inquiry, students began to take on that role themselves by questioning each other. Yet, when I questioned similar concepts in Sonja's notes, tension increased and discussion ended. In my aim to open dialogue, I silenced it.

The Role of Students in a Critical Knowledge Building Classroom

The role of students in a critical knowledge building classroom is varied and constantly developing. Students can play the role of expert, mentor, learner, theorist, researcher, and
teacher. Their understanding of the messiness of these roles and the fluidity of these roles develops over time. Students develop their understanding about their role throughout the process.

**Being Teachers...Needing Redefinition**

The idea that all members of the database are responsible for moving the group forward and improving the ideas of the group took some time to grasp. When the students are told, “We are all teachers in this database”, some of them then initiated what they felt the role of the teacher usually is, rather than practising distributed learning and leadership. They would ask for more information, criticize incomplete work or give an empty comment such as “good job” or “neat idea” with no further interaction.

Additionally, the students were accustomed to responding to the teacher and handing in their work without dialogue and without community access. Through this project, they understood the access to information they had by posting notes in a shared space rather than through email to individuals.

Sharon: KF helps us communicate with other people. We go onto KF and see other people’s ideas instead of just handing them into our teacher and not knowing what the other people in our classroom think about stuff.

Yohance: KF lets everybody see and read everybody else’s ideas.

Shauna: KF is like a newspaper but you don’t have to cut down trees to share with people because you don’t have to use paper to share your ideas.

The students expressed in this exchange that they understood their audience had expanded beyond the classroom teacher. Students then began addressing the role of teacher first through their responses and then explicitly through discussion about the role of the teacher and their roles as teachers in a critical knowledge building classroom. When questioned about this,
students explained that as a teacher, they were supposed to encourage each other to correct or encourage other students to extend their answers rather than providing the answers. They understood the "giving of answers" to be cheating. They also expressed a belief that by choosing their own subjects, they were vulnerable in a traditional classroom whereby they might even "get into trouble".

Julia: I think that in a normal class, KF is different is different than in a normal classroom because in a normal classroom you have to do what the teachers says or you might get into trouble but in KF, it is your decision to choose the subject you want to talk about… and you still must listen to the teacher.

Alex: It kind of makes me feel like I am the teacher…and I think it makes other kids feel like they are teachers too because you can choose the subject and we are not going to get into trouble and we can help other students with their subjects because we might help them make their answers better.

Ulan: I would like to build onto Alex because we have to tell the teacher what we want to do and the teacher can say yes or no to what we want to do and in KF we can listen to the whole class and everyone can tell us yes or no we agree or we don’t agree and this is why. So everyone is like a teacher and everyone can say yes or no to agreeing or not.

Kenneth: In a normal class you hand in your work and the teacher marks it and sometimes you put it on the wall and sometimes other people see it but in KF everyone sees your ideas and everyone can learn from your ideas. Sometimes in a normal class the teacher will write a question on your work and you will read it and add to your work or just not read it and then that is your mark but a whole class can ask you questions on your work in KF and then you can tell how many people have read your notes and who has built onto your ideas in the notes.

Sharon: I would like to build onto Alex… In a regular classroom the teacher always asks the questions and when you are using KF you are actually asking the questions and finding the answers. You are like the boss and can control it. When you are the boss, you have to be responsible because a boss is in charge and has power. You have to think about your answers and your questions because if you just write them without thinking, you will have so many people writing you back and saying… that isn’t really what it is. You didn’t think about this or that. So you have to be responsible.
Students expressed the opportunity for *epistemic agency* so that they could review the ideas of others and find a place where their ideas either diverged or converged with the ideas of the group or individuals and direct their own inquiry. Students also began to express the responsibility to themselves, their classmates and the process by working towards knowledge building together rather than coveting their knowledge as individuals. By taking risks and contributing to this shared space, the students found that knowledge building can occur. As suggested by Scardamalia, (2002), knowledge building is pervasive meaning that this occurs throughout the day, in the database, as well as in the classroom discussions. These sentiments were expressed in a focus group setting. In fact, although Knowledge Forum is used to support a knowledge building community, it is the community itself which creates this change in understanding teacher roles and student roles in the classroom. In particular, in a primary classroom, students are better oral communicators rather than through written means. Although Scardamalia and Bereiter (1994) suggest that students can use graphic representations, this too can be challenging requires the use of a different version of Knowledge Forum which incorporates a draw tool, or either that students create their graphic representations in another program and attach it to the note or draw this image by hand, scan the document and then attach it to the note, thus leaving them in many instances, dependent on adult to accomplish this task and again, limiting their ability to express opinions and ideas. The changes in the role of teacher and student speak to a change in power and the ability to express, echoing Cummins’ definition of transformative pedagogy—interactions between educators and students that foster the collaborative creation of power (2003). For some students, writing in an open space such as Knowledge Forum, can be a liberating experience due to the asynchronous nature which allows them time to work through the information and formulate a response or build onto a concept.
The role of teacher began to be a shared role and the leadership in the classroom began to be distributed among many of the students. Distributed leadership “highlights leadership as an emergent property of a group or network of interacting individuals…where people work together in such a way that they pool their initiative and expertise, the outcome is a product or energy which is greater than the sum of their individual actions” (National College for School Leadership, 2003:7). This concept is the teaching dynamic that is hoped for within a critical knowledge building classroom.

Setting Up for Shared Expertise

Initially, it is up to the teacher to help the students understand their increased responsibility in the classroom through explicit roles such as expert in a particular area:

Debbie: Several of the students completed their notes quickly and without prompting from an adult, began helping the other kids around them to complete the note. I drew attention to this and invited these students to be experts. I told the rest of the class that everyone can be an expert and today we can rely on these particular students to help with the work. There was no discussion about this...both the experts and the learners fell into this naturally. It is wonderful to see. There was also one student, Shaundra, who was sitting beside me, and took on that responsibility. She was effective and supportive of her peers. The two students working on the teacher laptop, Ulan and Taya became the first experts on how to make a co-authored note.

In this case, and as other technical issues arose, I would teach students how to complete these tasks such as co-authored notes, uploading pictures into notes, conducting searches on the Internet, and the students came to know who to go to for help in these particular areas. Eventually, the expertise moved from just being technical to experts on content based on the research they were doing or their own lived experiences\(^4\). This moves the students from a

\(^4\) Cautions were always given to students who claimed to be experts about a particular place or culture to draw attention to the possibility of essentializing through a narrow and single representation of that culture or place.
place where I name them as experts to where they begin to feel and act like experts, confidently sharing their ideas, opinions and experiences.

**Dialogue and Debate**

Students began discussing how they do research and find the information they need. They debated whether there was a preference for using books or the Internet to find information. How to find information and the ease with which they could do this was raised:

**Yohance**: Books have a lot of information but you can’t talk to them. If you don’t understand something, there isn’t anything you can do to find out more information from a book but with KF, you can ask the person who wrote the note and the whole class can see it and help you with something you don’t understand.

**Paola**: It is sometimes easier to find answers and questions on a computer because you put in the words or questions into Google and you get your answers but in a book, it is sometimes hard to find the right spot and you can’t search it the same way. The problem is that sometimes the internet has too much information and it is hard to find the right stuff.

**Damian**: Um, I would like to building on Shauna’s idea and Yohance’s idea—Google does the work for you. You don’t even have to look into the index or the contents because the words you do in a search in Google find the answers for you. That is right what Yohance said. And Sandra, the books give the right spelling but in books you can go to books and know how to spell it so you can read it.

Damian was an ESL student, new to Canada from Russia. He found that the feature in Google, “Did you mean this?” where it offers an alternative spelling, quite helpful as he developed skills in English. The students had difficulty working through all of the information that the Internet offered, but through lessons on how to do a search and sharing sites that were helpful to the students, they began to improve their online research skills. At times, the amount of information on the Internet became overwhelming, but at other times, it provided them with the information they needed:
Taina: When I went to Google, I didn’t find any answers and that is what I think. Books are easier.

Paola: I would like to build onto Taina’s idea. In a book, you can look up ideas but you might not find what you are looking for but you always find what you are looking for on the computer. Google does the work for you because you just click on it.

Sharon: Well, when someone asks you a question and then you can give an answer that you think is the answer but maybe then the person has a question about your answer like, “how do you know this or that” and then the answer turns into another question.

Wardah: The computer has the answers and the books have mostly the ideas.

The concept of an idea rather than an answer within the context of our discussion and knowledge building suggests that there was a different value placed on an idea rather than an answer. To conduct research, teachers guide students to find answers to their inquiry by seeking these answers in books, the Internet and a variety of other sources. In a critical classroom, students begin to see the information in texts as partial. The possibility of an idea and the incompleteness of it were not valued less but rather offered areas for further understanding and growth.

Alex: I think that ideas are always right because it is what you think. You aren't looking for an answer but an idea or theory that you will then try to find out if it is right but the finding out is just as important because then you will have another idea.

Paola: An idea isn't an answer so you can always make it better and question the idea of another student. If the student writes an answer then that is right and there is no more talking or asking.

The students expressed concern over the amount of time it took to find the information they wanted and began to realize that when they did find the information they were looking for, it often led to more questions:
Paola: When does an answer become a question? Like when you have an answer, can it actually turn into a question?

Students grappled with this and realized that answering with a question is like an idea. They work with the idea and question whether or not it makes sense or if they need to pursue further information to get a more complete question, always realizing that there is more to learn and always the possibility of idea improvement. They understood that although the information can come from the Internet or from books, finding information in the database or from people through discussion was more interactive:

Yohance: Books have a lot of information but you can't talk to them. If you don't understand something, there isn't anything you can do to find out more information from a book but with KF, you can ask the person who wrote the note and the whole class can see it and help you with something you don't understand.

The students' roles were diverse and changing throughout the course of the project and for the remainder of the year. One student even explained that even though she was in grade three, was able to help her sister at York University with Knowledge Forum. This was empowering for her. Students used this confidence of expression and knowledge they had acquired to move the group forward.

Whose Knowledge Counts?—Cultural Capital and Indigenous Knowledges

If the rules of what is considered to be cultural capital change in a classroom, the class enters into what Bourdieu named “a space of possibility” (1993:176). Initially and slowly, what is of value was redefined within the classroom at Lakeview Public School. Bourdieu further suggests that the process of encoding individuals with cultural capital occurs through three forms of education: family education, diffuse education and institutionalized education (1993:7). Family education refers to the pedagogical action by the family or group members
(1993:7). Diffuse education represents pedagogical actions that are reproduced through the actions of a cultural group but have not necessarily passed through discourse (Bourdieu, 2003: 200) and, institutionalized education represents the mandated education by institutions, in this case, the Ministry of Education and all that fall within its jurisdiction such as school boards, schools, and teachers. The parents of the students were educated under a system of institutionalized education where European/American values were imposed, a system under which education became the colonizer. This system continues to exist, yet within the spaces of possibility—in this case, a critical knowledge building classroom—family education can take a higher precedence.

**Finding Indigenous Knowledges in the Classroom/Community**

Within a classroom, certain conversations are taken up while others are not—and in many cases, certain conversations never happen. When new voices or perspectives are heard, the value placed on multiple knowledges can begin to challenge institutionalized education and alter the value or cultural capital to allow for success and engagement in the classroom. Bourdieu writes of a crisis of diffuse education whereby education is passed “from practice to practice without passing through discourse” (1977: 200). Students are involved in the discourse and dialogue and inform knowledge through their own experiences and knowledges.

Delpit (1988) suggests that two qualifiers are necessary to allow for multiple perspectives and shared power in the classroom: shared expertise and access to a real audience (288). Through critical knowledge building, both can exist. Students discuss ideas in an open forum and create dialogue online where all participants can read and respond—build onto—the ideas of others. If students are believed to be experts “at what they know best” (Delpit, 1988:288), then the
shift for what is considered to be cultural capital transforms within this classroom environment.

The shift of cultural capital towards including the indigenous knowledges of those in the classroom as both valid and necessary sets apart the critical knowledge building classroom. Dei (2002) suggests that indigenous knowledges “encapsulate the common-good-sense ideas and cultural knowledges of local peoples concerning the everyday realities of living” (4). He further suggests that these knowledges encapsulate “cultural traditions, values, belief systems and world views that, in any indigenous society are imparted to the younger generation by community elders” (5). Dei explains that the “term/notion” indigenous “signals the power relations and dynamics embedded in the production, interrogation and validation of such knowledges” (5). Engaging in a discourse, within an institutionalized educational setting, with multiple perspectives and explicit valuing, interrogating and building on of these perspectives, knowledges, or ideas to better inform the production of knowledge in the classroom setting is transforming and transgressing (hooks, 1994) traditional practices in the classroom.

**Authoritative Texts as Commodity for Cultural Capital**

Within knowledge building, Scardamalia (2000) suggests “to know a discipline is to be in touch with the present state and growing edge of knowledge in the field. This requires respect and understanding of authoritative sources, combined with a critical stance toward them” (11). This speaks to the ability of knowledge builders to access and critique authoritative sources within a particular body of knowledge. Although there is a call for criticality, there is no extension of transformation—the students should be able to critique these texts/sources, but if they do not agree, or if they themselves hold knowledge that can add to these authoritative sources, where is the place for this dialogue? Within knowledge building, students can develop
and share theories/ideas with the group but when do these theories count as authority? Scardamalia further suggests that students should “critically evaluate information sources and recognize that even the best are fallible” (2003). It is in this space that critical reading and inquiry can occur.

Critical reading is one of the skills I brought to this project. I raised awareness about stereotypes in information, false information, or the values placed on information. Questioning the use and acceptance of texts or published materials as truth is an initial step which must be taken with students. They are taught that in research, one must review the information from a variety of sources and then summarize and report on findings. At the same time, the curriculum states that students “learn to evaluate different points of view and examine information critically to solve problems and make decisions on a variety of issues” (Ministry of Education, 2004:2). Students read from the text and report their findings. The teacher, who may or may not be aware of bias having not done critical research, will accept the answers as truth. In a classroom such as the one at Lakeview, false representations can be targeted through those who hail from that culture. The following is an example where a student questions the representation of homes in the Philippines:

Debbie: The use of the cultural profiles has sparked some discussion around communities in the Philippines. One example is in Tara’s note. Tara used the information in the book rather than her own information and therefore resulted in posting a stereotypical view of the way people in the Philippines live. Keith then explained the type of home he lived in when he lived in the Philippines and it was a different type of home than described by Tamra. Other children began sharing what they knew based on their experiences, the experiences of their families or of friends (Constructive Uses of Authoritative Texts, Last modified: 2004, November 14).

Critical knowledge building recognizes personal histories and experiences as authoritative texts.

The note below was posted in the Knowledge Society Network (KSN), a Knowledge Forum
network which spans the globe. The KSN holds virtual meetings in which its members are encouraged to participate. The views where these meetings take place remain open for ongoing dialogue on the topics raised. The meeting where I posted my note was the November 8, 2004: Virtual Meeting #25 entitled “Diverse Student populations and Knowledge Building.” I also copied the note into our own database at Lakeview.

Debbie: I need to understand what defines an Authoritative Text and what is considered a constructive use of one? I know that the meaning as identified by KB theorists involves the process of the student choosing a text based on their own inquiry rather than being assigned the text by a teacher, but the question I have is, how is the use considered constructive when the knowledge or information gained is stereotypical, and only represents one viewpoint or one experience? Furthermore, how is that use constructive if it perpetuates stereotypes and the promotion of primitive bias towards other cultures and how they live? (Constructive Uses of Authoritative Texts, Last modified: 2004, November 14)

It is not realistic to suggest that this situation exists in every classroom, nor is it reasonable to suggest that a child in grade three could necessarily advocate or find voice to advocate for a more inclusive representation of his or her culture, but the space must exist for that possibility to happen. It was my role as the antiracist educator/researcher to call attention to these moments and guide students through this process of reclaiming their history, experience, knowledge and voice.

The response I received was from another participant in the KSN database:

"My theory is we need to redefine what an authoritative text is within a critical KB environment." Authoritative Texts Can Perpetuate Stereotypes

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Absolutely! But I think this means expanding our concepts of what might be considered an authoritative text so that greater diversity gets represented at the table. Once at the table each of the broader range of texts that arrives there can be considered on its own terms.

Consider how the students' authoritative texts weave themselves among what might be considered more conventionally acceptable texts below. I think so...

In another note, Sam addressed the constructive use of authoritative sources as a way to affirm identity, by addressing Cummins’ (2001) concept of identity texts, referring to student texts in which students invest their identities. Texts can be written, spoken, visual, musical or multimedia. Cummins’ research suggests that when these texts are shared with multiple audiences, they will receive affirmation with respect to their identities which will then impact their interaction and engagement. “For students from marginalized groups, these identity texts can challenge societal patterns of power relationships by presenting self in a positive light that repudiates broader societal stereotypes” (2005:34).

The constructive use of authoritative sources can also provide a form of identity affirmation in diverse contexts. If students are working on problems to which traditional knowledge is relevant, they can use elders and/or their parents as their authoritative sources. In a context such as Iqaluit, where the elders spoke Inuktitut for the most part, that meant moving back and forth between two languages. The students' first language became an indispensable tool to access valuable knowledge, thereby affirming its status. (KB and Identity Texts by Sam, Last modified: 2004, November 08 (06:22:17) by Sam: http://ikit.org/KnowledgeSocietyNetwork/notelink?DB=KSN&NoteID=4650)

Cummins suggests “English language learners’ cultural knowledge and language abilities in their home language are important resources in enabling academic engagement” and “English language learners will engage academically to the extent that instruction affirms their identities in learning” (2005:40).

Dei’s (2002) definition of Indigenous Knowledges suggests that these knowledges are always relevant and always present. Dei explains the current trend to speak of “the ‘hybridity' of
knowledges. The fact that different bodies of knowledge continually influence each other shows the dynamism of all knowledge systems. The ‘Indigenous’ is never lost” (4). Even when that knowledge has been colonized and appropriated, it still exists, and informs all knowledge.

This following discussion thread was linked to the students’ discussion about the Philippines within the context of the _Communities around the World_ view. The discussion was driven by students first reproducing stereotypes of the people who live in the Philippines and then by other students, who had lived in the Philippines, speaking from their own personal lived experiences and expanding the images originally portrayed.

![Discussion Thread and Build-On Notes](image)

Figure 33: Discussion Thread and Build-On Notes

Following this incident, students began questioning the texts, and what they considered to be viable texts in their research. This is further reflected in other discussion threads in which the titles of notes are indicative of this change in perspective. For example, one student, Ulan, contributed a note called, “What my dad told me about Jamaica”, and Sharon’s note addressed how rural Eritrea differs from rural Ontario.

Ulan wrote about Jamaica prior to our discussion about the Philippines discussion thread. She had used one of the cultural profiles to write about Jamaica, a country her parents had lived in and one she had visited many times.
Jamaica to Canada. Your interest in reading this profile may come from being involved in an organized host program or your work may bring you.

Ulan had copied directly from the resource she used. I approached her about this and asked her if she knew why she shouldn’t copy straight from a text without saying where she got the information. In a journal note, I relayed a discussion Sonja and I had around the shift to understanding family knowledge as legitimate knowledge:

Debbie: We also discussed that a lot of the ideas and information they have been provided is from a limited amount of resources and the students are beginning now to use their own and their family’s knowledge to move the group forward. We will have to talk about where we can get knowledge and information including the following: books, posters, TV, internet sites, family, and friends.

The students should begin to branch out in terms of where they are getting their information from and we will provide them with the support to do so. Caution must be raised around copying from text books and there are a few examples of this already.

After speaking with Ulan, Sonja and I asked her permission to use her note as an example with the whole group. She agreed. She opened the note where she had copied the information and told the students that she thought that if it was in a book, it was right. She then told the other students why it was not right just to copy without saying where they got information. She then told them everything she knew about Jamaica from her visits there and what her father had told her about Jamaica. Following this class discussion, Ulan created a new note about Jamaica.

In Ulan’s note, about Jamaica, she extends her writing and her use of the scaffold supports to write her note. This note was composed after the class discussion about plagiarism and the importance of our own and our family knowledge.

What I Know... In Jamaica, they swim and the colour of the water blue and the sand is pink. When the sets and the sun rises on the blue water, the water turns to pink.
In Jamaica, they eat sandwiches for lunch and in the summer they have ice cream and milkshakes. For dinner they eat rice, chicken curry and goat and vegetables and meat and this salty beef. On the holidays they don't celebrate Christmas. They celebrate their children's birthdays and celebrate Jamaican holidays by dancing, going to clubs and having fun.

When the children go to school, they have to wear uniforms and when the child has a mom, the mom is the child's teacher. Some of the kids go out with their father and the father goes to places and they have fun together. Some of the Jamaican people are poor and they have to work by hand and sell ice cream and peanut butter and jam sandwiches for the people and when the people don't have money they give them different Jamaican money.

If I went to Jamaica and I didn't have Jamaican money, some one would come to give it to me.

“What I Want to Know... How did the Black people come to Jamaica? I want to know more about the African roots of Jamaican people.”

“What I Learned... I learned that I know a lot of things in my head and I don’t have to copy from books.”

There is a value placed on the indigenous knowledges and the diversity of experience informing the knowledge production within this class. Rather than indicating what she learned about Jamaica, the key insight she gained in this note was that she had knowledge in her own head and she didn’t always have to copy from notes. There was evidence in these notes of a shift whereby students began to see their own knowledge as valid and as a source to question, critique, challenge and inform the printed text. Ulan also wanted to find out more about her own history and heritage. The What I Want to Know...statement speaks to her engagement.

Summary

This chapter presents and discusses data that reflects the practices of knowledge sharing through dialogue content and patterns as well as knowledge building and the value of knowledge in the classroom.
My role as an antiracist educator/researcher, moving between modeling practice and then enabling other participants in the classroom to take on the role themselves is analyzed. In this context, the role of students can be understood as seeking their own inquiry, having the agency to negotiate their own power, and to participate in debate and dialogue with all participants in the database. Students begin to understand that they have increased levels of autonomy not only to pursue their own interests, but also to support others in their own pursuits. It is a space that is provided which occasionally expands beyond the classroom to a point where students have the knowledge, skills and confidence to act as mentors to family members and others within their communities.

Whose knowledge is shared and whose knowledge is taken up is also addressed through a recognition of power within the database either through the functions of the software, such as rise-above notes, through the accessibility of language such as in the notes written by the classroom teacher and myself, or through the placement or titles of particular views where students may feel they are not permitted to enter such as the Teacher/Research Journal. The technology can be a limiting factor, as can a student’s previous experience with chat rooms or online databases such as Knowledge Forum where all participants have access to all content. Explicit teaching regarding the software is necessary but so too is the teaching of responsibility within these open spaces.

Certain types of knowledge are taken up by the classroom teacher while others are not. The classroom teacher expressed resistance to taking action based on racial issues. This created additional tension for the student who was involved in a racialized predicament as well as confusion around my role. I wanted to support the student but I also had to remember my place as visitor to this classroom and school. The concept of stereotypes was introduced to the class as a way to add criticality to their research claims regarding “fast food in Nunavut”. Sonja
began the conversation with the non-racial example, "all grade three students like math" and asked the students to respond to this false information and overgeneralization. It was a good place to start in that it was a safer place to begin the dialogue. I responded in my own way by indicating where the knowledge shared in this particular example was partial and that we must question why we feel fast food adds value to a culture.

I also argued that indigenous knowledges were closely linked to the critique of the knowledge building principle of *Constructive Uses of Authoritative Text* by including indigenous knowledges through the inclusion of personal experiences of the students and their families, as examples of authoritative texts. The idea that the definition of what is considered an authoritative text should be redefined to include *Indigenous Knowledges*, such as the example of when the student had more accurate information on housing in the Philippines than the authoritative text used for research on this topic. This is also framed within the discourse of cultural capital whereby what is considered capital in the classroom can be changed, thus enabling students to be more engaged in learning.

The development of relationships resulting from this project was placed within the classroom context of community building within the classroom and curriculum content—and eventually, the formation of a critical community whereby students took action to improve the school. The issues of dialogue and participation in the critical knowledge building classroom compared with what students understood to be the participation and dialogue patterns a regular classroom. Establishing a culture of sharing involves empowering students to take on leadership within the classroom online and offline. It requires a level of trust with the participants but also a level of understanding of what this role means and how it looks. Students described their new agency as "we are all teachers", but this may bring about an
understanding of the role of teacher that, at first, may not be indicative of a critical knowledge building teacher.

Modeling the expectations of online dialogue in structured focus group sessions positively impacted not only the participation in the online database with increased notes, but also through the content and structure of the notes. Notes became more reflective of a knowledge building discourse where students explicitly and purposefully built on each others notes and ideas but also participated in debates and critiques of each other’s work.

Changes in participation and distributed leadership in the database and classroom discussions were also positively impacted by the classroom teacher’s commitment to the project. There was a shift in this commitment after we confronted some of the tensions that existed between Sonja and myself and discussed Sonja’s participation in professional development activities which in turn informed her classroom practice and provided her with new energy to move forward.

The frustrations with technology, for example, not enough working computers, resulted in catalytic change in the sense that it promoted collaborative writing with and between students. Initially, students wanted their own computers so they could post their notes. As the project progressed, the students began to find links among other students’ inquiries and partnered on the computers to co-author notes and support a shared and collaborative inquiry. Rather than having partnerships established by the classroom teacher based on skills, students chose partners based on similar interests and inquiry. This is an example of enacting community knowledge/collective responsibility (Scardamalia, 2002), increased collaboration (Dei, 1995:33) and student directed inquiry (Dei, 1996:33). Thus, diverse perspectives were voiced and considered as a way to support antiracism pedagogy in the classroom.
The following chapter is an autoethnography which delves into my role as an antiracist educator/researcher and looks at the impact this role has had on the project as well as both the impact the project has had on my role. It represents the subjectivity of my research as relationship based and personal. Despite all attempts for validity, another concept more clearly defines my own reflexive research. It is "verisimilitude...[which] evokes in readers a feeling that the experience described is lifelike, believable, and possible" (Ellis and Bochner, 2000:751).
Chapter 7

THE STORYTELLER: REFLEXIVITY IN RESEARCH THROUGH AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

...we...feel compelled to produce narrative, evocative, dialogic texts that show human beings, including our selves, in the process of creating, negotiating, and performing meaning in a world of others, making our way through a world that poses obstacles, interruptions, contingencies, turning points, epiphanies, and moral choices. (Ellis and Bochner, 2000: 748)

My role was crucial to this project in several ways. I created this project and presented it to a teacher and class of students. I guided these participants towards discovering a voice, pedagogy of hope, and ways to empower each other through trust and community building. At the same time, I also fought with myself, sacrificed time with my children and my husband, and friends. My free time, as little as I have, has belonged to this project. There is no part time or half commitment. This has been a struggle, from my first doctoral course to the creation of this dissertation. The role of autoethnography for me is to capture and enhance the reflexivity of my role as it transformed from researcher, to writer, to teacher, to friend. It is my way of recognizing my place in this project and to explicitly name and identify my role and my own biases which I brought to this project. Research is personal. It is the culmination of my studies after years of university. It is a model for democracy and inclusion, anti-oppression and antiracism, community building and empowerment.

My declaration of myself as an antiracist educator is what brought me to this project. I often think about that declaration and what it means. When I was younger, my teachers used to tell me I was an artist, leading me to wonder when someone really becomes an artist. Is it someone who paints or draws and has the skills to do so? Is an artist someone who can sell
her art? How does my declaration of myself as an antiracist educator make me one? There are some who would say that as a White person of privilege, I have no place in this discourse and therefore could not possibly be an antiracist educator. Fulfilling the call to action of what I believe to be the role of an antiracist educator, whether in a doctoral thesis or in my everyday practice as an educator, allows me to lay claim, with confidence, that I am truly an antiracist educator.

My desire for knowledge and access to it brought me to knowledge building theory and the Knowledge Forum database software package associated with knowledge building research. Antiracism education necessarily involves the multiple perspectives and messiness of education and knowledge. Knowledge building theory, although complex, is naïve in the sense that it does not recognize how power and privilege impact all discourse and dialogue. It is a serious challenge for knowledge to be shared and accessible.

The degree I seek is a Doctorate in Education, a practitioners’ degree. I would like this text to be accessible to all educators in the hope that they will read these words and find something to make them reflect on their own practice and seek out ways to transform the curriculum to empower their students and themselves as lifelong critical learners.

I hope, in some way, that this chapter brings together the story of this project: how it came to be and the challenges along the way; how students work to express their ideas despite the powers that exist in the classroom; how I struggle with my role(s) and the power inherent and inflicted upon these roles; and how a teacher can lose sight of her reason for being a teacher and how easily confidence can be swayed when challenged either by the students, the school or the school administration. I hope to achieve cohesiveness and coherence in this thesis through filling in those spaces—the self-reflection and self-narrative in autoethnography.
Coherence is an achievement, not a given. This is the work of self-narration: to make a life that seems to be falling apart come together again, by retelling and “restorying” the events of one’s life. At certain junctures in life, this narrative challenge can be a terrible struggle, and we do not always succeed. (Bochner, 1997: 429).

Creating—an Antiracist Educator and the Students

Dei (1999) explains that “moving toward an emancipatory discourse that interrogates the hegemonic project of knowledge production must start with the self and experiential reality…the subjective is part of knowing”. He further states, “Subjectivity is the understanding of one’s inner self and thoughts, an of one’s complicity and role in working for change. To know the subject(ive) is to appreciate the power of individual agency” (1999: 397). This exercise in subjectivity, or reflexivity, is recognition of that individual agency.

To place myself within the identification of antiracist educator is to claim my status as ally. I have come to this place through witnessing injustice to others as well as myself. I have come to this place through studies, research and reflection. I have come to this place by advocating for others and recognizing blatantly racist actions and practices in the school system in many schools across the Greater Toronto Area. I have also come to this place with the hope that there is the possibility of transformation. I come here too with the recognition that there are some who feel I have neither claim nor place in this dialogue.

Every school I had taught at was culturally, linguistically and racially diverse. In Toronto, unless alternate contexts are purposely sought out, this is the norm. There are moments in my teaching career that remain salient which remind me how far we must go and how clearly we must articulate the oppressive and discriminatory actions of others in order to transform our practices as educators in Ontario.
My first foray into anti-Semitism occurred in my first year at University of Western Ontario in residence...I am staying in Alumni house which is a new concept for residence. There are four bedroom apartments. I am staying in this apartment with three girlfriends—one from summer camp and two from school. We are all Jewish. In fact, just to remind us, someone carved the word “Jew” out of the freshly painted door to our apartment. I am studying for my first university exams and hear noise in the hall. I leave my room to see that there is a Christmas party for the floor. I wasn’t invited. When I asked why, I was told that they didn’t want to offend me because I am Jewish. I explained that I would be happy to celebrate with them and try my first sip of eggnog—and my last.

I am a student in the Faculty of Education at York University...We are learning about how to be sensitive to the diverse cultures that will be in our classrooms as we transition into the world of teaching. A White professor is lecturing us about this and uses the example of speaking to a Black child in his classroom and the understanding of diverse cultures which is necessary to be respectful of differences. He explains: I was working in a grade four classroom. One of the kids was misbehaving so I called him up to the front of the room. This was a Black boy. I called him up to my desk and be looked at the ground. I told him that he should look at me when I was talking to him. When I told one of my colleagues about this, I was told that it is part of Jamaican culture to look down out of respect for your elders...Before the professor could complete this story, a Black woman in my class stood up and called out: That isn’t Black culture. It’s White culture! That is because Black slaves were taught to look to the ground when their masters spoke to them. They were not allowed to look into the eyes of a White man! The class was silent. My mind was racing. It made sense. I wondered about other misconceptions which existed. What else is portrayed as sensitive but really has a legacy in slavery, colonialism and imperialism? The stage was set for me. I began looking for these inconsistencies everywhere...and they were everywhere.
It is my first year of teaching...A grade four boy arrives in Toronto from Sri Lanka. He knows no English. He is sent to the ESL classroom where the teacher follows the ESL curriculum. Students are given the initial vocabulary they will need to function in Canadian society—mittens, snow, hat, igloo...He still does not speak. I partner him with another child in the room who speaks Tamil. I invite him to draw a picture. He draws war and death. With his partner we go through the picture and I ask him, “What is this?” and he writes the word in Tamil. I then write the word in English—bomb, fire, gun, blood, father. He begins speaking English and he, as well as his mother who is widowed, remain in touch with me for years to come.

It is my second year of teaching and I am now working in the third board of education since my graduation two years prior...A grade four Rastafarian boy is called Octopus Head on the school yard. He approaches me, as his teacher. I am a new teacher and I go to the office for support in this matter. I hope that the children who said this to him will be punished for the racist comments. The advice provided by the school principal and guidance teacher to this boy is, “Why don’t you cut off your dreads already?” I am alone with him and comfort him. I call his mother and encourage her to support him as will I in maintaining his identity and traditions of his culture. She tells me that her eldest son already cut off his dreads. He couldn’t stand the taunting. It was hard for her and her husband to accept this but they understood why he wanted to do it. She wanted to stop this cycle of bullying.

It is now my third year of teaching and I have returned to North York, the first board I worked in and where I would remain until amalgamation of the five Toronto boards to create the Toronto District School Board...A grade five girl has arrived as a new resident in Toronto from Jamaica. Her mother has lived in Toronto for six years while her daughter remained in Jamaica with an aunt during this time. Her mother is a dressmaker and has
established herself to the point that she could sponsor her daughter to live in Canada. This girl writes prolifically—poems, songs, stories—anything. There is a grade five writing assessment that year and she writes a story about her arrival in Toronto but she writes in Patois. I think her writing is exceptional and encourage her to hand it in like that. It is returned and she is asked by the anonymous evaluator to please resubmit using “standard Canadian English”. I give her Marlene Nourbese Philip’s novel, Harriet’s Daughter—a book which uses Tabagoan language throughout the dialogue: together, we go through her work and put quotations around all the “speaking parts”. I write a note in explanation when we resubmit and it is returned with a high grade. I give the girl her own copy of the book as a Christmas gift, along with a winter coat that I can’t wear anymore, as she does not have one to wear. She continues to write songs and poems.

An Antiracist Educator and the Challenge

I completed my Masters of Education degree in the summer of 1996. That year I took an additional qualifications course in special education with an elective in learning disabilities. Upon completing the course, I decided that I wanted to return to OISE/UT to pursue my Doctorate in Education. I applied and enrolled in my first two courses in the summer of 1997.

The course started like any other although I felt different now, as a doctoral student. I was excited but like all changes and challenges in my life, I felt like an impostor. The insecurities were rampant. The course was not defined as a doctoral level course and yet, I felt that more would be expected of me since the completion of my Masters degree.

The professor begins...“We are going to go around the room and introduce ourselves. Please tell us your name, the degree and department you are in, the number of courses you have completed and explain to the group why you have an interest in this course.”
Easy enough—I had done this many times before—but this would be the first time I introduced myself as a doctoral student.

We went around the room and it was different than I had expected. Typically, the professor will ask that you introduce yourself and explain which department you are in, your years of study and the degree you are working towards. This time, students introduced themselves by their race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, religion, marital status, and citizenship status in Canada. I could already see where this was heading, but figured that being Jewish would be my site of oppression.

The students work around the class circle introducing themselves to the class...

“I am a White woman but I come from a rural, working class home.”

“I am a Black woman living in the Jane-Finch corridor. I am a trustee for the North York Board of Education and my salary has just been cut to $5000.00 per year”.

“I am hard to define. My mother is Jamaican. My father is Guyanese but mixed too and is part East Indian. It would be impossible to name who I am since my people have been colonized so many times there is no way to define it.”

There was a class of about twenty. Three were men. Three were White—myself, the working class woman, and the man sitting next to me—though, once I introduced myself, no one would know he was White or Jewish. I realized the pattern of the introductions and decided that I should say that I am Jewish. Everyone else was saying who they were and it was clear to me that by not identifying in some way, my introduction would stand out.

“Hi, my name is Debbie Donsky. This is my first course for my Ed. D. I am in the Curriculum department and completed my masters last summer. I am also Jewish.”
The professor jumped on that. She asked me why I was interested in taking a course on theories of resistance since I probably had no reason to exhibit any form of resistance in my life. She made it clear enough that the fact that I had identified myself as Jewish was enough to challenge me in front of the class and enough for the man sitting next to me, someone who was also Jewish, to pass with the following introduction:

"My name is Bob. I have been teaching on a reserve in Brantford for the past three years. This is the first course I am taking for my masters."

The professor responded: "Oh, isn’t that interesting. It must be very challenging working with your people seeing how they are placed on these reserves with inadequate living conditions."

He agreed. He never let her know he was Jewish, and for that matter, came from an extremely wealthy family. He continued, throughout the course, to pretend that he was a member of the First Nations peoples. We lived near each other and continued to carpool throughout the course. He knew what was going on but was not willing to sacrifice his own reputation, or his grade, by speaking with or for me. He would admit this to me in the car and I really didn’t blame him at the time.

This same professor continued to ostracize me in class and on one paper gave me a B-, a mark low enough for me to ask permission to re-write the paper. This was the only grade lower than an A that I had ever received at OISE/UT, or in any university course I had taken since the first year of my undergraduate degree. I went to her office and asked her what was going on.

"I don’t understand. I do all the readings. I have spent considerable time on all of the papers, reading and researching the terminology I am not yet familiar with. I am doing everything I can. What am I missing? What else should I be doing?"

Her response was simple, "How do you know I am not anti-Semitic?"
My response, “I guess I don’t.”

At the end of our meeting that day, she suggested that I drop out of the doctoral program.

At first I felt quite defeated but I focused my attention on the other course I was taking at the time, where the same thing was not happening. I was achieving grades that I felt were fair and reflective of my knowledge and effort. I decided that if I was going to define myself as an antiracist educator, despite my privileged upbringing, I was going to have to further understand the right of anyone, in this case, a Jewish woman, to not only be seen as an ally but as an antiracist educator. I believed and continue to believe that I had a right to be there as myself, not only in the role of advocate of others. I did not have the tools to advocate for myself, as a Jew. Having gone to school in the public school system myself, I had very little knowledge about Jewish history in Canada or internationally. There were certain stories passed through my family but these seemed like stories rather than history of any significance. My peers who had gone to Jewish parochial schools had a much clearer sense of their Jewishness. I did not identify with Israel nor did I identify with the Holocaust. More importantly, I did not understand the connection between the two.

I knew that my family had immigrated to Canada at the turn of the century as a result of the Pogroms against Jews in Eastern Europe and Russia, but this had meant very little to me. I knew that six million Jews were murdered in the Nazi Holocaust years. I knew that I had had pennies thrown at me in London, Ontario in my first year at the University of Western Ontario. I knew that my father-in-law had been orphaned in the Holocaust and came to Toronto on his own when he was fourteen years old after living in the Black Forest in

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85 This speaks to my own devaluation of my history and culture due to a lack of recognition in my schooling to address my identity and acknowledge the importance of this part of myself.
Germany for many years as a child, in hiding. I knew that my grandfather had entered the School of Pharmacy at the University of Toronto rather than medical school because in the 1920s, there were very strict quotas related to the number of Jews who were allowed to enter the medical school. I knew that my mother was one of about five Jewish children who went to Lawrence Park Collegiate and the slanderous comments that were made to her as a child still affect her. I knew that my teaching colleagues would make comments when I was away from school on the Jewish high holidays such as, "Why do they take these days off? They take our holidays too!" I knew that I had to find out more about Jewish oppression in the last century and the changing definitions of Whiteness in Canadian history.

The history of equity in Ontario explicitly names Jews as a race in the Racial Discrimination Act, 1944, which states:

1. No person shall, --

(a) Publish or display or cause to be displayed on lands or premises or in a newspaper, through a radio broadcasting station or by means of any other medium which he owns or controls,

any notice, sign, symbol emblem or other representation indicating discrimination or an intention to discriminate against any person or class of persons for any purpose because of the race or creed of such person or class of persons.

This act was created to combat the "Whites Only" and "No Jews Allowed" signs which were displayed in stores, beaches and other public places at the time. The title of the act indicates the understanding of Jews as a race rather than merely a religious group. Then, of course, does a group need to be defined as a race to make their history of discrimination more salient?
...contemporary European views of Jewishness neither as a religion (Judaism), nor as a political movement (Zionism), nor as an ethic identity (as an “Austrian or German of the Mosaic Persuasion”), but as a race (the Jews). It is, to quote the German proverb of the time, not religion, but race which defines the Jew: “Was der Jude glaubt ist einerlei/in der Rasse liegt der Schweinerei!” (“The Jew’s belief is nothing/it’s race that makes him swinish!) Or as the displaced Austrian painter and politician Adolf Hitler rephrased in his Mein Kampf (1925): the whole existence [of the Jews] is based on one single great lie, to wit, that they are a religious community while actually they are a race—and what a race!” (Gilman, 1991:202).

This pursuit was inspiring and necessary for my continuation in the doctoral program. To understand my privilege, but also to understand my right to speak within this conversation, was necessary for me, as a White, Jewish, middle-class (if not upper middle class), woman.

Negotiating...

Identities

Kathy told me to name myself and to define my place in this project.

“What is your role?”

“Well, I don’t know. I mean, if this was my classroom, I would be teaching an antiracist curriculum. I would be making the decisions and that would be that. But I am not the teacher in the classroom. I don’t know what my role will be. I will observe and I will support the kids and the teacher. I am sure it will be fine.”

“But, what is your role? How will you, as an antiracist educator and researcher, impact this project? You need to name it—identify with it.”

“Well, I am a teacher too so I can’t really tell her what to do. I can only encourage the changes if they are needed. I can’t make someone teach a certain way in a classroom. I will model the practices that I know work. I will push the envelope and ask the hard questions.”
This role and how I chose to identify myself would change throughout the project. As the research developed, so too did the relationships with those in the school, changing my perspective, my role and my identity within that building.

Entrance

In early July, 2004, I was offered a position at the Ministry of Education and had to make arrangements to change the location of the project from the school where I taught, to Lakeview. I sent the following letter to the school principal at Lakeview…

I hope the end of your year went well. I am in a situation right now where I may be going back to the Ministry of Education to work with OKNL again. http://oknl.edu.gov.on.ca. My one concern about going back is that I will not be able to complete my Ed. D. After working at Lakeview last year, I was able to write my proposal in a much more informed way having learned so much from the experience.

I wanted to talk to you about continuing to work with your school. I have my thesis proposal in at OISE/UT and until this point, I assumed I would be doing my research project with my own school. We had a proposal into our parents' association (separate from school council) to help fund an Apple project of our own (modeled after your project). They were on board until they realized that there were no funds from the school/board at which point they chose not to fund it. Although I decided that I would make it work, regardless of this most recent development (if I can call it that), if I were not at the school, the support required to put this into place would not be possible. I have not spoken to my current principal about this change yet but I am sure he will be fine with it.

If I am at the ministry, I think it would work a lot better if I could do the research at your school if you would have me again. The project looks at the ability for Knowledge Forum to create an antiracist classroom including issues of equity in the curriculum, democratic learning environments and shared space and voice. My manager at the ministry has assured me that he would support me in completing my research.
I thought that since there was experience using KF in your school, plus the added advantage of having the technology in place, would make the process a lot more successful. Please let me know if you are interested in this proposition and I will get the ball rolling (in terms of altering my proposal and review and application to do research in the TDSB). If you want to talk about this further, I would be happy to.

I would be happy to work with any staff member using KF this year or to continue working with the teacher from last year if he wanted to continue with his new class. I have not spoken to him about this at this point as I figured it should go through you first.

Please let me know what you think about this when you have a chance. (Sent June 30th, 2004)

I enter into the school the week before school started in late August to meet with Sonja, the prospective teacher with whom I will most likely be doing the research. We sit down in the principal’s office where he also sits waiting.

The principal is over six feet tall, White skin, White hair. He has pictures of his family hanging on the wall and all over his desk. He has a wife and two daughters. In the photos, they are at their cottage. I had sat in this office many times before, as I volunteered the previous year during my maternity leave, awaiting the approval of my proposal. The principal and I had developed a nice relationship.

The year prior, I would always stop in to say hello and if I didn’t, he would catch me in the hall on the way to the grade four classroom and invite me in to hear more exciting tales—everything he was doing for “the best little school in the city”, as he called it. Realizing that my thesis proposal would not be complete for that school year, I had had every intention of doing the project at my home school until I had received the offer to work at the Ministry. So here I was, at his doorstep again, and on my way to the Ministry of Education for another year. I needed a site and Lakeview was the obvious choice. The principal welcomed me back with open arms.
So here we were again with Sonja, a teacher just beginning her third year who had been moved to Lakeview as a surplus teacher. Sonja was also quite tall, about five foot eight, blond hair and of German descent. She had heard about my involvement at Lakeview with the Knowledge Forum and technology projects and based on the stories she heard from the principal in the interview, she felt this would be like being at her alma mater where she first used Knowledge Forum. She expressed interest in working on this project.

I introduced myself to Sonja: “Thank you so much for working with me on this. As you know, my name is Debbie Donsky. It was a surprise to me to be here because I thought the project was going to be at my own school but the situation has changed and your principal is kind enough to welcome me back. Anyway, I am working on my thesis for my doctorate at OISE/UT. I did my proposal last year while I was volunteering here. I am really excited about the project. I think it is really important that we develop a sense of trust with each other. First of all, as a teacher, I am not in a position to evaluate you in any way, and I want you to know that I am not here for that. Whatever happens outside of this project will not be reported on. I know that teaching can be stressful and nothing is ever perfect—I don’t expect you to be. I also don’t want this project to add stress to you so please look at it as time when you don’t have to plan. That way, hopefully, it won’t be like an added responsibility for you.”

After the project was over, Sonja told me that the explanation of the weekly visits as “an hour when she didn’t have to plan”, translated to her as, “I will do this and you don’t have to”. She explained her lack of engagement with the project as a barrier that I put up when I made that statement.\footnote{This dynamic is addressed in Chapter 5, The Politics of Power and Precarious Places in the section, The Teacher: Building Trust, Building a Relationship and Negotiating with Power.}
Although I did not know this was how she felt at the time, the “critical moment” where I challenged Sonja’s participation in the database allowed for the lack of trust and access to the project to be highlighted to me. Our dialogue increased and Sonja’s ability to take ownership of the project increased.

I began my visits to her room before the Knowledge Forum database was set up. That setup required the approval of the school principal since we were asking for a “hole” to be put into the firewall at the board level to accommodate the software. This process of persuasion took several weeks and much insistence on the parts of both myself and Sonja.

Her room is hot. The blinds are broken and the windows are cloudy. The windows are not glass but seem to be a form of yellowing plastic. The school building is slated to close so very little money has been spent on the upkeep, even though there still would be students in the building for at least another two years. Sonja has the four Tribes group interaction norms on her wall: No put downs/Appreciations, Attentive Listening, Mutual Respect, and Participation/Right to Pass. She has photo albums across the ledge on the chalkboard displaying the diversity of her travels with her husband. She has a circular table where she tells me she does student conferencing. There is also a carpet area on the floor but students can see the front of the room from their desks—where, for most classroom discussions, they would remain.

**Compromise**

_I join the class for the first time in the third week of school. Sonja and I discuss the project... “My project is about using Knowledge Forum in the Social Studies curriculum. The theory behind the software makes claims of democratizing knowledge but they never talk about power imbalance in the database or in the classroom. I think that we have to look at these powers that exist_
before we can claim that there is democracy. If kids are afraid to express an opinion, or if they can’t understand what the content is, then every one does not have access.”

Sonja: “But what do they theorize about in Social Studies?”

Debbie: “Well, that is an interesting question. Many people feel that when you do Social Studies, or history, that we are learning from facts. It already happened so there is nothing we can theorize about or have an opinion about, it is just the way it is. In my view, if you take a critical stance towards the topics in the Social Studies documents, there are many theories and ideas that can come forward. For example, last year, we did Medieval Times with the grade fours. The kids, by the end, were asking why they never knew that Muslim people were involved with this history. They wondered why art and the Church were so closely tied together. They wondered why it is taught as this romantic time with kings and knights but they don’t talk about the Crusades as a bloody war but as a heroic quest. All of the questions and ideas led them to talk about why certain stories are not told and why the curriculum doesn’t ask us to learn about them.”

“I thought that if we did the Pioneer Life unit, we could talk about similar ideas. Why the unit is called Pioneer Life as if that was all that was going on at the time? Why aren’t we engaged in learning about First Nations peoples and the impact that the early settlers had on them and their cultures and ways of life rather than the contributions of the First Nations people to the settlers? I also thought that we could investigate the term Pioneer and relate it to the journeys the kids in this class, or the journeys their parents or grandparents took to Canada. That way, they may find a way to connect to the history—a way to see themselves in it.”
Sonja: “Okay, I understand what you are saying and I think it makes sense but I was planning to do Urban and Rural Communities with Knowledge Forum. I was going to do a short unit in the spring with Pioneers and I have already booked a trip to Pioneer Village.”

Although it wasn’t my first choice, I realized that even though the Pioneer unit would have given me more to work with, it wasn’t just the curriculum that had to be addressed, it was the strategies implemented in the classroom and the school as well as the culture of the classroom and school that had to be considered. We would work with it. It was more important for me to be respectful of Sonja’s choices for the project to ensure face validity as well as being respectful of Sonja’s choices in terms of her own long range planning.

The World of Others...

The Knowledge Society Network

I asked the question, Can knowledge building be critical? I place this question into the Knowledge Society Network in Virtual Meeting #25: VM25: Diverse Student populations and Knowledge Building and I get one response:

(My theory In answer to the question posed in the preceding note, I would offer that KB can help foster critical antiracism in elementary classrooms.)...

(My theory I think this is an example of how a group of minority students given the time and space to deal with a very challenging issue on their own terms can come to a far better understanding of it than they would in most other contexts.)

(Putting our knowledge together Carl mentioned in our VM that we couldn't hope to solve all the problems of education, nor should we try. What I find interesting, though, is that KB is not incongruent with the problems we were trying to solve... (Sam I think so... Last modified: 2004, Nov 16)
I shout in the dark asking for response from this great global network brimming with academics and practitioners who think outside of the box. I ask my well designed question, showing that I have researched this notion and provided my theories clearly and asked the opinions of these people. I get back one response. His tone is emphatic...“Yes, KB can help to foster critical antiracism in an elementary classroom”. But the title...it is like the titles in the Ontario Curriculum...so misleading. I ask a bold question and the title, the words that underline my question on the page are...I think so...tentative, wavering, not supporting and afraid to commit.

I know this man...at least I have met him several times. My first Knowledge Forum summer institute I sat beside him. He was asked to join the room of new users to show us the way. He sat beside me. I told him my background and why I was here...

It is August 2001 and I introduce myself (identify myself)... “I am here to understand this program. I am working at OKNL and we have been asked to participate in a project, the Barcelona Project. I am not sure exactly what it is but I know it has something to do with a ‘Cultural Olympics’. At least that is what I am told. Anyway, somehow, the Ontario Curriculum Unit Planner is going to be used with Knowledge Forum as a way to create a learning community. I just sort of ended up here because I was the one picked to implement the electronic report card at my school and now I am with a technology group at the ministry. I also go to OISE. I am doing my doctorate in antiracist education. You know, a lot of this theory really makes me think about what I hope to achieve in my classroom—sharing space, giving voice, democracy...all that. It really makes sense.
Sam: I have been using Knowledge Forum, formally CSILE, since it started. I work in Nunavut right now but I have also worked in the North West Territories, Baffin Island and Prince Edward Island, working predominantly with the Inuit and other First Nations peoples. I can see why you are attracted to the claims of Knowledge Building. It is incredible to see this in action.

Debbie: So if it makes sense and you have seen it work, why isn’t it more prevalent in the discussions or poster sessions in the conference?

Sam: Well, Carl always says, “we aren’t here to solve the problems of the world.”

Debbie: But maybe we could start?

The Students

It is October…

Shaundra sits beside me the first day. I have the computer hooked up to the data projection screen and the class is ready to start. She is keen to begin and wants to be in charge of pushing the buttons on the computer. There is already a leader. I hand over the reins and stand at the front of the room where I can show the students the different features of Knowledge Forum. Shaundra follows my instructions and navigates easily and independently through the database.

It is lunch time and Shaundra’s mother is at the classroom door. I go out to tell her what a great day Shaundra had. She helped me with the lesson and used the computer in front of everyone. She was really helpful. Her mother looks at me, confused. “Are you serious?” she asks me. “Yes”.

Sonja squeezes past me to talk to her mom. I walk away as this part isn’t my business. After the brief conversation, Sonja informs me that this girl is one of the students who had been expelled from her last school after a series of suspensions. She has a lot of behaviour problems. I hadn’t noticed. I am silent—remember…no judgement.
It is January…

The halls are wet from the melted snow, slush and ice on the kids’ boots and snow pants. The coat racks are in the back of each classroom so the kids have to remove their boots, coats and snow pants in the hall so they don’t track in the wet, of course, they are all standing in it with their socks anyway. They clutter against each other in the halls trying desperately not to fall in the puddles of freezing, dirty water all over the floor. It smells damp and musty in the school. I am entering the school now as my hour starts after recess. The caretaker is walking through the hall, taking in the chaos and the mess, knowing his job will never be done until the seasons change. A boy trips on his friend and lands in front of the caretaker. The caretaker shoves the boy away with his foot and tells him, angrily, “Watch where you are going!” The boy is in grade one. The caretaker is down the hall and never looks back. I help the little boy out of his snow suit. He is tangled in his mitten string.

Why are adults allowed to talk to children this way? If he does it so easily in front of me, he must have done it before. I am silent.

It is now April…

Three students are sitting outside the office at a desk. Two of them are from Sonja’s class and one is from the class I worked with the year before. There are no adults in the office. There is a grade five student on the phones. I ask the student in the office: “Is anyone supervising these students?”

The grade five student covering the phones responds, “I am.”

I ask the students in the hall, “Why are you here?”
One of them answers, “We got in trouble for talking so we have to sit here and write lines about talking in class.”

No one is talking to these children. No one will read their lines. They will be taken from them without any explanation of why their behaviour is disruptive or more importantly, what they were trying to say when they were told not to talk. I smile at them and walk away…again silent.

The Teacher and Administration

Is this what Sonja sees? Is this the subtext? This must be the hidden curriculum of relationships in schools. When I say hello to Sonja each day after speaking to the school principal, is that what I should be saying instead:

“Hi, I am from the Ministry of Education and your principal really likes me. He asked me to be here and I go into his office before and after every visit to this school to talk about how wonderful he is and how many things he has done. Sometimes we talk briefly about me and what I do at this ministry but usually it is just about him. You know like, hey, did I tell you about the proposal to do the first K-12 school in Toronto? Or...Did I tell you that the director is taking my summer camp idea and using it in 22 sites across the board? Or...Did I tell you that I have a meeting with the Honourable James K. Bartleman? I am going to go to Sioux Lookout to see how badly those kids need books. Or...Can you write me reference letter for the Canada’s Greatest Principals award? Or...I won the award; I am one of Canada’s greatest principals! Oh, and one more thing, while I am so busy telling you about these great talks that I have with your principal—I NEED YOU TO TRUST ME”.

Is that what it looked like, sounded like? How can someone trust me if I am beginning and ending every visit with a trip to the office?

I don’t know that I trusted her. I was frustrated. How could a teacher commit to a project and sign an agreement but not fulfil it? She said she would read the journal view in the Knowledge Forum database and give me her impressions. The teacher last year did it and there was no obligation. I was just in his classroom helping out and yet the professional dialogue we had the year before had helped me to see him more clearly and to move forward in my understanding
of knowledge building. This year, there was nothing. So I confronted her I first posted the note about the number of notes read by all participants which indicated that she had read less than twenty percent of all the notes posted in the first three months. In my mind, no wonder it wasn’t moving at the pace I expected. In her mind, she explained after to me, I told her that all this project would be was an hour a week in which she did not have to plan anything. I did say that but I guess I didn’t mean it. Either way, in Sonja’s words, whatever happened, it lit a fire and we began moving forward.

I know I judged. I know I didn’t agree with all of her teaching methods. I didn’t always agree with her classroom management or the way she spoke to her kids. But then I saw her, that day in January, at her desk, crying, her face was red and puffy and she finally told me what she had been dealing with at school. She explained to me the lack of support from the office and the judgement passed on her. I am thinking while she tells me this…I know this is true because he has asked me himself about how I think you are doing. He questioned me about your ability to be a teacher. For him, a teacher who does not ask for help is a good teacher. Sonja had high expectations for herself and her students. She reflected constantly and was frustrated by her own lack of ability, in this situation, to provide a substantial enough program—to meet the needs of her students. She asked for help—any help. She was judged and turned away.

Home

After this awakening, I couldn’t sleep. I had judged Sonja but I had also judged the principal. I saw myself as empowering, enabling and yet, I had shut down Sonja by the expectations I had for her as much as the principal had. It was another critical moment.

I am in bed with my husband and I can’t sleep…

“Jeff, I am worried about Sonja.”
“Why do you have to get so emotionally involved everywhere you go?”

“I can’t help it. It is just who I am. You should see her. She looks like she is always on the verge of tears. I can’t believe that I didn’t see it before. I think if she could see herself clearer, she could get through this.”

“Deb, just go to sleep.”

“I can’t. I am worried about Sonja.”

Jeff rolls over and I do too. Only for me, it is over and over and over. All night…

Ellis and Bochner (2000) suggest, “not everyone is comfortable or capable of dealing with emotionality. Those who aren’t probably shouldn’t be doing this kind of research in the first place” (754).

So then it is okay that I become involved.

The Teacher

It is February…Sonja has attended a conference…“I went to Reading for the Love of It last week and it was amazing. I got so many ideas. I am going to go through with the kids about how non-fiction text works. I think it will really help them understand how to do research and how to get through all of this text.”

Debbie: “You seem different since you went to this conference. There is a different energy about you. I am so happy to see you so excited.”

Sonja: “I just get so bogged down at school. There is no support. I get frustrated because I started with all of these ideas that I was going to do and they usually don’t get done. I have to spend so much time telling the kids to listen and stop fighting and do their work that we never do anything creative, fun. I ask for help and all I get is, The kids weren’t a problem last year. I don’t
know why you are having so much trouble with them.' Anyway, I don't care anymore. I don't care what he thinks. I am just going to spend the rest of the year doing whatever it takes to make these kids understand and be successful. I am done asking for help. I am just going to do it on my own because that is the only way it is ever going to happen."

Obstacles, Interruptions, Contingencies

Family, Babies, Finances, Work ...Get Off the Pot

To my left, in my peripheral vision, are two shelves of books about women and writing—and not writing, because they lack time, space, energy, expectations of unfettered days. Serious writing brings you to unexpected places in your psyche. Once there, you cannot predict how you will feel; once there, you do not want to leave—or cannot. Do I have the time—uninterrupted time to go inside? To engage my interior landscape? (Richardson, 2000a:468).

In May of 2000, my thesis proposal is submitted. I am eight months pregnant. I go into Tara's office with the hope that what I have submitted will be good enough. I have big plans. I am going to be approved and begin my data collection in the fall—with my one month old baby. I will just strap her to me in a baby carrier and go about my business. I am registered for my comprehensive exams in December and I will be done that year. The proposal is approved...everything according to plan.

Only it wasn't.

Once Rachel is born in July of 2000, I go to the library to get articles from the list of suggested reading for the comprehensive exams which I planned to take in December of that year. I would find the articles and sit down while she was strapped to me in the baby carrier. She would wake up and cry. I would breastfeed her in the library, in the periodicals, in the study carrels, in the stacks. She would fall asleep. I would put her in the stroller. I would try to read. Someone would come up and comment about my baby...how small she was, how cute she
was...smile...thank you...smile. I could feel my heart racing. I knew I only had an hour to get through this but I had to keep moving her, to go to the computer to find the articles/books and then go through the stacks. She would always wake up. No help. No way. I couldn’t do it. I knew I couldn’t do it. This is ridiculous. But I have already spent so much time and money. I can’t give up. I know. Maybe I can take a leave. Yes! They have maternity leave. I can do it. But then I can always do my intermediate qualifications and my principals’ courses while I am taking the “time off”.

Over the next two years, I continued attending Tara’s thesis study groups, somewhat sporadically, but I was still there. After one of the sessions we went around the room as usual and everyone said where they were in the process.

“I just finished the comps and I am done the proposal.”

“I just got a job in a faculty of education and my thesis isn’t done yet, but it will be.”

“I just got approved from the ethics committee.”

“I just handed in my first draft.”

“I just won an award for the best thesis.”

And then there was me…

I just found out I am pregnant again so I guess I better give up here and now. There is no way I am ever going to get done.

Tara told me what she thought. She told me to do it now or give up. No more excuses. Do I want this or not. Okay, that was reasonable. It has been six years since I started. I drove home that night from OISE and cried the whole way. I couldn’t see the street through my tears. So
much work. So much time. So much effort. So many promises to myself—to Jeff. I wasn’t a quitter so what was I doing?

I came home to Jeff, my husband, and cried to him. I phoned my mother the next morning and cried to her. Their responses were, “If you didn’t care, you wouldn’t be crying. Find a way to do it. We will be here for you. You will do it. We know you will.”

How come we can never see ourselves the way others see us?

This has been a long journey. Since the beginning of my doctoral program I got married, had two children, lived in four different homes, worked in four different schools, worked at the Ministry of Education for two years, completed my intermediate English qualifications and my principals’ qualifications and received my first appointment as a vice-principal last spring.

**Time...What If After All This...**

The fear is always there, the fear that after the investment, the stress, the sacrifice, the time—this won’t happen. The fights. The frustration.

Rachel: “Mommy why are you always at the computer? Why do you always have to do your work?”

Debbie: “I have worked very hard and I really want to finish. I like writing. Do you want to see how much I have written?” I reduce the pages to ten percent and show Rachel what it looks like...the pages...

Rachel: “Wow mommy. You are really smart for writing all of those pages. Are you almost done?”

The next day...
Mom: "So on the way home from Karate yesterday Rachel told me that you’re smart because you are writing a book. She said that you are going to be a doctor when you are done but not one that gives needles but you are a doctor of words. She said she was really proud of you. I am proud of you too."

Debbie: "I know mommy but it is so hard to keep writing when the kids are beside me and they need me and I am working such long hours. I feel terrible. I know Jeff is losing his patience too. I feel so guilty when I ask for some time. Sometimes I just sneak downstairs and try to get a few words written. It is like when I was a kid and I would sneak to eat the doughnuts. Now I am sneaking to write."

Mom: "I know you are going to finish. I know you are going to do it. I think you are my smartest child."

Debbie: "If I am so smart then why do all of my brothers and sisters make so much more money than me? I can’t even pay my tuition this year. I have only paid for five hundred dollars of it. I am so tired. I have been going to work at 5:30 every morning to have time to write. I am waking up at four now just because I dream about my thesis and I have anxiety about it and the money. I don’t see the kids in the morning. It is impossible for me to write on the weekend. I always feel so guilty."

Mom: "I know you can do it. You will be fine. I am so proud of you. What do you want for your present? We will take you out for dinner."

Oh, well then, it is all worth it.
Turning Points and Epiphanies

Life...Small Steps Forward

My second thesis proposal meeting and my second proposal...

After working at the Ministry of Education, I had been exposed to Knowledge Forum. The ideas shared at the Summer Institute and in the literature that surrounded the ideas of knowledge building made sense to me. It seemed like a natural fit with the anti-oppressive work I always did in my classrooms. I now had a new baby and a new thesis proposal. I tried to salvage as much as possible from the first proposal during the first few months of my maternity leave but it was useless. I handed it in and knew it wasn’t my best work. How could it be when I was functioning on very few hours of sleep? I had the plan again and again it failed. With this second maternity leave I was going to re-write my proposal, do my comprehensive exams in December and do my data collection from January until June. Perfect. You think I would have learned. The proposal needed work. That was it. I was done. I called my friend to tell her that I was dropping out. Her father answered. He happens to be a retired professor from OISE. He was babysitting and usually didn’t answer the phone when he was babysitting, but today he did.

Debbie: “Hi Harry. Is Dara there?”

Harry: “No Deb. Are you okay?” (He has known me since I was seven years old so I guess he heard my anxiety through the phone.)

Debbie: “I am going to drop out. I can’t do it anymore. It is too much money. We are going to lose our house. I can’t afford to pay anymore. I can’t study. I can’t concentrate. I can’t do this anymore. I have tried and tried and I just can’t. I was going to do my comps in December and
now I have to redo my proposal and I know that I can’t do both and I am going to have to pay another year of tuition and I thought I would be done.”

Harry: “Breathe Deb. Now listen…a doctoral program is an adult program. The university knows this. You will get an extension. You have other responsibilities and they will respond to that. In an adult program you have adult responsibilities. Don’t give up. You can do it. Just do one thing at a time. Put your thesis away right now. Concentrate on the exams and get them out of the way. Don’t look at the proposal for one more minute until you have completed those exams.”

Debbie: “I just don’t know if I can do it.”

Harry: “You wouldn’t be this far along if you couldn’t. No one ever said it was going to be easy but I know you can do it. At some point, you should realize that too.”

Debbie: “I’ll try.”

The comprehensive exams completed and I approach my committee with a revised proposal. I am commended with the work I have presented and the comment that has kept me going through the four in the morning writing sessions and then off to work for a fourteen hour day is from Clare…“Small steps forward is still forward.”

Moral Choices

Writing, Speaking and Acting

“Moral choices” has religious overtones to it. Who judges my morality more than I do? By keeping silent am I compliant? Does breaking silence have to be spoken? Don’t actions speak louder than words? When I argue with people about how I think the world should be or the classroom, or the school, I know that they all think I am self-righteous. I have been told so
many times: "know which battles are worth fighting". If I am to be moral, and I define this morality based in my role as critical educator and researcher, I must act ethically in all spaces—with friends, with family, with colleagues, with students, with parents, with others. It does not matter if I am in the role; I have to be the role. How can I be one to make moral choices if I myself am able to turn it on and off as I see fit?

Michael Fullan (2001) writes about the moral purpose in educational leadership.

Moral purpose is about both ends and means. In education, an important end is to make a difference in the lives of students. But the means of getting to that end are also crucial. If you don’t treat others (for example, teachers) well and fairly, you will be a leader without followers. (13)

In writing stories representing the experiences of those who were part of the project, there is a recognition of the power that exists in the structures inherent in the school system, in my many roles—the power in which I am implicit and the power that impacted me.

I toss and turn, worrying about the words I am writing and what do they offer to this discourse...a critical schooling discourse? Trying to implement a critical project in a non-critical space—a space of dominance, oppression and intimidation.

**Action Research as Collaborative Dialogue with Participants and Myself**

The research project, although claiming to be part of the school improvement plan and direction for the school, was not placed within the same definitions of critical pedagogy, antiracism and critical knowledge building. The goals of the research were to impact change in terms of increased student engagement, teacher professional development, and dialogue. Action research was placed within the framework of Freire’s concept of praxis in that action and dialogue transform learning environments.
In order to be reflective of the needs of the classroom and school where this project took place, this project, already conceived, had to be negotiated to fit where the participants were in terms of knowledge building and critical antiracist discourse. This project was as much about the process of engaging students and the classroom teacher as it was about my own role as an antiracist educator/researcher. Through autoethnography, a collection of stories and dialogues frame my place within this research and the constant struggles with understanding my own power and privilege, negotiating between my life in various roles of teacher, ministry employee, mother and new vice-principal. The autoethnography permeates the project throughout and is an exercise in reflexivity to know my own place better and the influences I have had on this project.

**Trust and Relationships in Research**

Fullan (2001) states, “...the single factor comment to every successful change initiative is that relationships improve. If relationships improve, things get better. If they remain the same or get worse, ground is lost” (5).

Abma (2000) reflects on the role of researcher in forming trusting relationships:

> I see myself as a process consultant or facilitator. I will not present solutions but [rather] assist people [in solving] their own problems by redefining them. I do not claim to be objective. Knowledge requires situatedness and a critical reflection on the main filters that shape our findings. Furthermore, it is important to check the credibility of our interpretations—the so-called “member check.” “Prolonged engagement” enables one to build a relationship of trust with the participants. These are commonly accepted quality procedures among qualitative researchers. (138)

The role of critical colleague involves changing, developing, compromising. If a relationship forms and trust develops, this will impact the research, but does it impact the validity of the research? There is a level of face validity that is assured, in best cases, catalytic validity—when
there is a shared understanding of the research, there is triangulation of the various data sources. The analysis of the data and the conflicts are understood differently and from different perspectives. If I see a situation differently than the classroom teacher, does her interpretation have more credibility? There is a responsibility to express multiple perspectives but all perspectives are subjective, whether a participant or a researcher.

I doubt whether the project will offer me the opportunity to show the theoretical argument I am trying to make in my dissertation. At the same time, I feel a little bit ashamed. Isn’t my personal agenda dominating the interests of the client? And what about the interests of the participants in the project…Finally, we discuss the conflict that has arisen. Will this dispute define our work, will it shut us down, will either or both of us struggle for control… (Abma, 2000: 140)

When Sonja and I debriefed after the project was over, she said that my relationship with the principal did not bother her and had nothing to do with the trust she had in me. It may not have impacted her but I know that once I reduced conversations with the school principal, the trust Sonja and I had blossomed. She agreed that the “critical moment” when I challenged her lack of participation and she in turn challenged the way I set up the project, did what it should have done, it moved the project, her practice and the students forward. Research is relationships (Ceglowski, 2000). With relationships, comes responsibility:

Although I present the administrators’ viewpoints, my sympathies are with the teachers. I sometimes wake up at night in a sweat worrying about what would happen if she or the executive director would read the article. It is published in a journal. I do not tell her. Head Start directors do not read research journals, but the uneasiness stays with me. (Ceglowski, 2000: 90)

Summary

This chapter focuses on my negotiation of the difficult situation of defining my roles and seeking an identity within the discourse of critical knowledge building. I review the challenges and successes along the way and the meandering path that has led me to this place. It is about
the relationships that have laid down my path but have also placed barricades in my way. It is about my choices to include certain stories to place this project in its place—a critical project in a non-critical space—a project of resistance in the classroom and in the discourse of knowledge building.

Research is personal and it is about relationships. It is a dance between the participants and the researcher—my past, present and future. It is deciding if certain stories should exist and why; risking these stories is important to the big story—a story of struggle and strife—for students, for the teacher and for myself as I negotiate my roles and my own story as it is woven into this thesis.

This chapter also engages in a reflective and reflexive dialogue with the participants in this project and those who have influenced me and in turn, this project—they are scenes of me and my own responses to the tensions of conducting research in a space that was not my own—in someone else’s classroom and someone else’s school. Despite all attempts for validity, Ellis and Bochner’s concept of verisimilitude (2000) more clearly defines what reflexive research is: “verisimilitude; it evokes in readers a feeling that the experience described is lifelike, believable, and possible” (2000:751).

This chapter is the context of the thesis. Every action, every interpretation, is framed in dialogues with myself and others who have influenced me on this journey and will continue to do so as I move into my role in educational leadership.

Rachel: Mommy, what are all those papers stickin’ out of your book?
Debbie: They show the chapters and places where I have to move some of the words.
Rachel: Oh, I see...chapter 3, chapter 6, chapter 8...ch...a...pt...er (She sounds out the word now that she knows what it says and smiles at me because she knows she can read)...Mommy, I think your book is going to be brilliant!
I smile at her…my almost six year old daughter who was there…from start to finish…

Rachel: What mommy, is it the wrong word? Is brilliant the wrong word?
Debbie: No honey, it is the best word there is. I love you…

Bringing this last analysis chapter to a close, I reiterate the quote which begins this chapter…

…we…feel compelled to produce narrative, evocative, dialogic texts that show human beings, including our selves, in the process of creating, negotiating, and performing meaning in a world of others, making our way through a world that poses obstacles, interruptions, contingencies, turning points, epiphanies, and moral choices. (Ellis and Bochner, 2000: 748)

This chapter is the telling of my story. Although I use my reflections and observations to write the stories in the previous chapters as well as the words of the students and the classroom teacher, this chapter is me. It is my voice, rather than the more traditional academic voice. It is the voice of a critical educator/researcher who realizes that the academic voice of the autoethnographer is one of reflexivity and vulnerability.

This chapter tells how my writing, my experiences, and my choices, serve to create and drive me towards the beginning, the middle and the end of this journey. Ramsey (2005) suggests “the telling of ‘my’ story automatically becomes the telling of multiple stories” (282). In telling my story, my narrative, I tell the stories of the classroom, the school, and the many stories that brought the participants together. It tells the story of one classroom and yet my experiences stem from multiple classrooms where I taught, my challenges with my graduate work, my understandings of antiracism and the way I am implicated in that work as a white “ally”, the voice of a working, studying mother and wife.

To see the world through a critical eye is to question, challenge, and negotiate—it is to expect that level of reflection, respect, action and commitment in all places and spaces.
The job of education is to change the world—it is to make possible what was once not possible. It is to give access to all children, while still empowering them with the understanding that challenging and questioning will lead them on the pathway towards critical knowledge building—a practice which will critique that which is oppressive,

biased,

and discriminatory

while creating a place which recognizes...

democracy as complicated,

freedom as responsibility

and

safety as the right to expression.

The autoethnography also recognizes that even in the traditional academic voice of the previous three chapters, a narrative still exists. Research is relationship and research is personal. It would be impossible for an exercise this consuming not to be personal. I would even have to say that this final analysis chapter was something I was compelled to do for without, this story was not complete…working towards a continuum of inclusivity—voices of the students, voices of my children, voices of my past, present and future...

The findings focus on curriculum (explicit, hidden and transformative); the implementation of a critical program; the power inherent in dialogue and participation and the roles and relationships that develop, are hindered, and are created through this project and research in general. This autoethnography represents the story that brought me to this point but also the
personal narrative—the stories behind the data—how I came to this project; how I came to this practice; how I came to be me. In this way, this chapter is very personal but still true to the promise of responsibility.

The following chapter addresses the implications of this project from creating a space for critical knowledge building to be possible through curriculum implementation, dialogue and knowledge patterns and explicitly defining roles and the power inherent in these roles with all participants in the project. The implications review how taking a critical stance towards knowledge building, critical knowledge building, that knowledge building can be more effective and come closer to the claims such as democratizing knowledge and epistemic agency for students. As well, it offers insight into how a project such as this can impact antiracism education in the schools but also in teacher education.
Chapter 8

IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Creating a Space of Possibility—Critical Knowledge Building

The intent of this study is to challenge knowledge building theorists and practitioners to realize that the goal of fixing the “problems of the world” is attainable and represents pedagogy of hope, community, democracy and transformation. In this project, it means adding a critical perspective to knowledge building to provide a framework from which to understand inequities of power within the school system: the classroom, the school, the curriculum. It is the recognition that differing abilities and performance in the classroom are a result of hierarchies that exist to maintain current power structures and to covet the knowledge which provides access to the cultural capital which is the key to entrance into dialogue for all people, in all places.

This study indicates that criticality is a possibility within a knowledge building environment but it requires the intervention and questioning by an educator who is willing and trained to take up that educated discourse. My role as “critical colleague”, as described throughout, is implicit in the criticality of the study, the curriculum implementation, and the questioning of power within all aspects of the study. When working with young children or adults, who have not been exposed to this form of critical pedagogy, the critical antiracist educator must first model the modes of questioning and inspire the desire to see the world not just “as they know it” (Scardamalia and Bereiter, 1999: 286), but as others may know it and as others may know them. It also means that despite the beliefs and actions of the antiracist educator, there are still times when silence serves to protect those with less power but intervention is quiet in its strength as with Sonja’s struggle with the administration in her school.
Knowledge building theory in classrooms provides a space for discourse, discovery and critical dialogue but in order for this to happen, teachers and students must share expertise. Democratic education and critical education strategies call for both a delegation and a giving up of power from those who have power. In this setting, the educator can enable a classroom that is actually more powerful through empowerment and shared power. This is no simple task for even those willing to hand over and share power and access to knowledge. People still imbued with power and privilege, chosen or not, by virtue of who they are or their position in the hierarchy of the school system as a whole—this power is thrust upon them. Explicit strategies, including critiquing the mandated curriculum discourse within the classroom, on- and offline, must be deconstructed. Naming of this process must be done throughout all classroom interactions—social and/or academic, with students, teachers, parents, administration and the larger classroom community.

For one classroom to take on this project would not be as effective as an entire school, family of schools or board of education. If students move between classrooms knowing that critical knowledge building is the premise in the classroom, the practices will be instilled and they will continue to have agency and access.

If the research is transformative and critical, it must also critique the place in which it occurs—the online space, the classroom, the school as well as the roles people play in schools, whether supportive or non-supportive. This project documents two practices that traditionally evoke resistance from teachers: antiracism and technology. To be an antiracist teacher is to know how one is implicated in the inherent struggles and inequities in the school. It is to understand that celebrating difference or promoting pluralism is only beginning stages working towards social action. Technology is often met with resistance as many teachers feel intimidated by the technology and don’t know how to problem solve within it, particularly when their students
do. Knowledge building must exist within an environment where expertise is shared and as such, power is shared. Antiracism asks that multiple perspectives and collaboration are central to any type of critical understanding within the classroom. The feasibility of a project of this nature must be problematized within the school/classroom where the project takes place by considering the practices already in place in the classroom by the teacher, students and school administration. Forms of resistance which were at cross purposes to this project included power and control from the administration, the classroom teacher’s choice to refrain from involvement in issues of racism that arose in the classroom between her students, and the curriculum itself which frames the social studies topics in an ethnocentric view and limits the teacher’s willingness to see past the list of expectations.\(^7\)

**Challenging Resistance**

Resistance is a complicated concept in the schools. Racism is explicitly forbidden in policies of the board and legislation in this province and country and yet it exists. It would be against board equity policies for an administrator to turn away a project that claims to reside within the framework of antiracist education. Resistance has more power than that. The project is accepted with words but not explicitly supported by administration. First, ensuring the access to the database which was submitted prior to the beginning of the school would have been a start. Another key difference would be if antiracism and ethnocultural equity policies which are stipulated by the district school board were explicitly upheld in the school, the practice of critical pedagogy and antiracism education would be the norm, rather than the exception. Practices in the school which did not effectively deal with instructional leadership to promote

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\(^7\) See Chapter 4, *The Curriculum: Hidden, Explicit, Transformative*.  

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the knowledge and voice of all students and their families and communities serve to perpetuate stereotypes and lack of access to knowledge for the students.

This project was accepted by the classroom teacher, but she did not see the goals of the project aligned with the Ontario curriculum documents, and she was not be motivated to pursue it. In the section referring to the Ontario social studies curriculum and the revision to the 2004 document, it addressed this issue in the section named, *Antidiscrimination Education in Social Studies*, (2004:5), where it explicitly names bias, stereotypes and representations as areas of caution when addressing these curriculum expectations. Yet the expectations themselves remain virtually unchanged. It is these expectations which the teachers refer to when planning their delivery of this curriculum—not a commentary in the introduction. Unless a teacher has his or her own goals towards critical practice, it will not happen.

All of these forms of resistance serve to sabotage the effort to bring criticality to any classroom. It is in the role of the researcher and antiracist educator, my role, that these forms of resistance must relinquish—though not only for this project to work, but for all participants to have an opportunity to work within a classroom that has as its mandate inclusivity, criticality and knowledge—all knowledge.

...resistance is an exercise of power in reaction to an act of control. Resistance is a response to an institutional definition or dominant narrative, both of which are power in terms of meaning-making and shaping discourse....resistance is most likely to occur when the institution attempts to control identity, goals, values and assumptions, and when the institution threatens the individual’s identity. (Langhout, 2005: 125)

In my own experience, implementing technology projects as well as critical projects can result in serious push-back from the staff at schools. Neither is seen as compulsory parts of the teaching/learning process and both are viewed as “add-ons” to the regular curriculum, although both technology and anti-discriminatory education are named within the curriculum.
documents. The school will raise barriers and can be resistant to change that asks for an abdication of power. Technology projects give up a sense of power and instil trust in the students who have access to vast amounts of knowledge.

Resistance is typically discussed in terms of the push-back or the "gaze" of the oppressed towards the oppressor. hooks (1990b) states, "...the mind that resists colonization struggles for freedom of expressions..." (342). She writes about the margins as a site of resistance:

Silenced. We fear those who speak about us who do not speak to us and with us. We know what it is like to be silenced. We know that the forces that silence us because they never want us to speak, differ from the forces that say speak, tell me your story. Only do not speak in the voice of resistance. Only speak form that space in the margin that is a sign of deprivation, a wound, and unfulfilled longing. Only speak your pain.

This is an intervention. A message from that space in the margin that is a site of creativity and power, that inclusive space were we recover ourselves, where we move in solidarity to erase the category colonized/colonizer. Marginality as a site of resistance. Enter that space, Let us meet there. Enter that space. We greet you as liberators. (343)

Resistance is resistance against the colonizer, power, or as Lorde defines, "White, thin, male, young, heterosexual, Christian, and financially secure" (1990:282). This would also define the school principal at Lakeview and his undisputed power by students, staff and the larger community.

When the classroom teacher is part of a critical process of committing to the implementation of antiracist pedagogy, the resistance is towards the norms that exist in a school system and the school administration to perpetuate stereotypes, racism and oppression. What if the change agent is the researcher visiting the site? If the researcher is the one who provides the access to critical and antiracist pedagogy, then questions of validity in the research are raised. What is the

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88 Further discussion on the curriculum documents is in Chapter Five.
face validity of the project if the classroom teacher is not a willing participant or perhaps, a willing participant on only some levels but not all? If the school administrator continues to raise barriers through lack of support, then what is the hope for the project or any critical project in that site? The resistance raised by the school administration was not overt. Recognition of Sonja’s efforts to address all of the needs in her classroom and participate in this project was not addressed by the school principal. If Sonja had not confided in me regarding her feelings of frustration at her current situation, I would have just thought that the lack of presence and involvement was due to the demands of being a single administrator in a school. The principal’s resistance to the project could be expressed by his apathy towards it. hooks addresses this resistance: “Often the anti-racist White person must endure social isolation, rejected by racist White folks and by people of colour who may either fear being betrayed or who, may simply be enacting dominator power via exclusion” (2004:64). As I worked through the multiple layers of resistance I came to realize that in this situation, being as I was in the classroom was the way to support Sonja and to ensure that students had a meaningful experience in this project. As a teacher, regardless of who my administrator was, I always knew that what I did in my room, provided it was supporting students and their learning, was fine. I found ways to manipulate the curriculum to be more inclusive and more critical—in this way I became more of a team teacher with Sonja rather than the researcher. The relationship changed as did the momentum of the project. We began sharing ideas and growing together rather than having the feeling that I was observing her and her practice. As for the administration, I exchanged pleasantries but did not go out of my way to discuss the project with him unless he pursued me for the information, which never happened. As an antiracist researcher, it is important to find your place by creating trust with the participants.
To work as collaborative colleagues rather than researcher and participant. As the lines blur, collaboration can occur.

Sonja verbally committed to working towards a critical practice through knowledge building and yet certain barriers were raised. Giroux addresses this by comparing a teacher's ideology with teaching perspective:

A teacher's ideology refers to relatively high level of abstractions about the purpose and nature of teaching itself. The concept of teaching perspective, on the other hand, refers those sets of beliefs and practices that manifest themselves under actual conditions of teaching....teachers operate under conditions that reinforce deep-seating and often unrecognized biases and myths. (1981:105-106)

Sonja offered an engaging program with modifications and accommodations to address student needs within her classroom but she continued to pathologize the students and isolate their situations from the very structures of schooling that serve to perpetuate “their problems”, thus raising Dei’s ninth and tenth principles of antiracism education (1996:35). Sonja may be at the beginning of that journey as a White educator who had her teaching practice at a school where students are invariably from privileged backgrounds. She is open and this is a start. If I had continued to work with Sonja, I would have encouraged other teachers to join into the project to provide a support network and a community of practice with an explicit focus on critical pedagogy whether it was with knowledge building, or any other perspective in which the teachers chose to engage.

Despite the barriers, restraints, fighting back and pushing back, the project still manages to give voice, provide a space of possibility, encourage reflection and build relationships. The database was a place where students could set their own directions for learning and include their own voices and those of their families and communities as authoritative texts. They could begin to reflect not only on the content and how it differs from the content they have
traditionally addressed in the classroom but also the processes where this content and knowledge was shared. It provided an opportunity for students to understand the backgrounds, opinions, ideas and theories of their classmates whereby this information is shared in an open context, whether online or offline, through the practices of critical knowledge building. It began that transformation, the move along a continuum towards knowledge building and critical education.

Critical Knowledge Building in the Accountability Era

Accountability to Whom?
Accountability has been a buzzword in Ontario since the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) opened its doors in 1996. The provincial Conservative government set a process in motion to completely change the education system in Ontario. At this stage, accountability spoke to student achievement and although that has not changed as a focus for the province, there has been a shift to also include the term accountability: issues such as teacher education; assessment and appraisal; curriculum; and funding.

The Ontario Ministry of Education introduced Bill 74, The Education Accountability Act, in June of 2000. This bill is described as “an Act to amend the Education Act to increase education quality, to improve the accountability of school boards to students, parents and taxpayers and to enhance students’ school experience” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2000a) and dealt specifically with co-instructional activities, class size, instructional time, and student focused funding (Ministry of Education, 2000). Once the teachers’ federations reviewed this bill, they challenged much of the content. (Ontario Teachers’ Federation, 2000) With the Liberals at the helm, there were repeals of certain sections and revisions to lower class sizes in elementary schools, pull away from instructional time indicated for secondary school teachers, and alter
the student focused funding to be more reflective of the schools' needs. Additional funding has been put towards literacy and numeracy strategies across the province such as the Early Years' Literacy Strategy in the Toronto District School Board.

In the end, accountability should be to the students. However, the reality is the accountability is often towards power, either to the school principal and the school board, or inevitably in the form of attaining votes in terms of the Ministry and the bureaucracy it supports. In the curriculum documents and all official documents, the stakeholder that is always first in line is the student. School improvement plans and district plans are always directed towards the students—regardless of whether the priority is community involvement or professional development for teachers—and all are focused on the goal of increased student achievement. The measures so often used in this province are the test scores produced by EQAO which measure the students' ability to master the mandated curriculum. This curriculum is a representation of what the province views as essential knowledge which may or may not represent the experience and lives of the students learning it. This is not to say that what the history students are mandated to learn is not of value and that students should not be required to learn Canadian history, but the history they should be learning should not be taught from a Eurocentric perspective but one of multiple locations and perspectives.

Pressure to meet expectations and achievement levels cannot look past school atmosphere and the demands on teachers to meet these goals regardless of the students’ access to the cultural capital necessary to excel within the standards set in Ontario. Dei suggests that “teachers can lead the way to resurrect the 'subjugated knowledges; of their students... [and that] classroom instruction could encourage students to find their own voices” (1996:86). This is a space for critical knowledge building. Schools become focused on appearances and numbers rather than the needs of the students and support for teachers to deliver an inclusive and engaging
program. Dei's commentary states that teachers are the strength of antiracism education in the classroom. It is the classroom teacher who can “lead the way” since the province does not. Within the standardized curriculum, interpretation and practice will always add comment and perspective on the content served up in order for the students to meet the thousands of expectations necessary for them to fulfil by the end of their elementary years. In this project, adding multiple voices and perspectives to the interpretation of social studies expectations, allowed the students, the classroom teacher, and me as the researcher to expand our own understanding of the curriculum, and the ways it can be transformed both in content and classroom practice and strategy.

**Working Towards Inclusive Curriculum Content, Shared Power and Multi-Vocality**

The changes and revisions to the new social studies document are not enough. Interpretation is still made and critical antiracist pedagogy is optional. Commitment to resources, exemplars that indicate a commitment to a critical approach to learning, changing and transforming the perspective so blatant throughout the curriculum document would create a mandated change. The revisions to the social studies document do offer further possibility for transformation for within the discourse of domination, is also the counter discourse. Giroux states:

> ...by recognizing that reproduction is a complex phenomenon that not only serves the interest of domination by also contains the seeds of conflict and transformation...to recognize this is to begin the task of developing an educational theory informed by indictment which is found at the heart of all forms of resistance, an indictment whose central message is that things must change. (1981:109)

To implement a critical antiracist pedagogy, teachers must transform perspective, content, and practice in the classroom. Resistance serves to push back on some level but mandated curriculum changes provide a path. Freire suggests that word alone is not enough; it must be accompanied by action for transformation and praxis. The word must be spoken by all peoples
and must be dialogic. It is through discourse that words and meaning are negotiated, and inclusivity is a possibility: “Inclusive schools cultivate sustained institutional support for the development of minority students’ cultures, events and interests (Dei, 1996: 34). For this reason, critical knowledge building, implemented on a divisional or school-wide level will provide a school environment of possibility but also the support network teachers need to implement such a program.

Transformative pedagogy through antiracism and knowledge building within this critical practice provides a location for multiple perspectives to exist and be challenged, improved and defended. The accountability to students should be to improve their learning and access to knowledge. It should be to ensure that all students learn and all cultures are valued. To measure a student’s achievement based on a biased curriculum is not to measure their successes but is an exercise in measuring their assimilation and indoctrination into what this province believes to be essential.

Teachers and students should develop their own knowledge and ability to question what would once have been considered fact and look at these texts as representative of only one perspective, while searching out other perspectives. As illustrated in this project, if the teacher is unwilling to go certain places with the students, the students will, as a result, be limited in their abilities to react to these situations, content, and experiences introduced through certain resources. The goal of critical practice must be taken on by teacher education programs; the ministry, through teacher performance appraisals (TPA); and school boards and school administrators, for the instructional leadership and implementation of the TPA, to ensure that these practices take place in our schools.
Preparing teachers to construct a democratic learning environment for students of all racial and ethnocultural backgrounds will be a challenge for teacher-education institutions... Another major task of teacher-education institutions is to help educators work effectively and sensitively with race and ethnocultural knowledge-forms, and develop relevant instructional strategies for all groups represented in the school. To encourage teachers to develop a firm ethnocultural knowledge-base and to use it in pedagogically effective ways is a complex undertaking. Teachers should be sensitive to the risk of stereotyping students according to assumed racial and ethnocultural group characteristics. (Solomon, 1997)

The lesson should be that even though a text has been published, that fact alone does not make it authoritative. Lived experiences of families are authoritative texts. Personal histories are authoritative texts and when these are given value and made a part of the cultural capital in the classroom, students become engaged with the curriculum. Having the ability to look at a website and determine the perspective of the knowledge presented on the page is a skill beyond reading. Dei (1996) suggests, “We need new and alternative teaching and learning practices that initially help students in diverse school settings to critically re-read and re-think how Eurocentric knowledge is reproduced through negation, omission, denigration and misrepresentation of alternative ways of knowing” (85). This should be extended to include all schools, not just diverse schools. If the power structures are not critically analyzed, then those who hold power will never see the effect that power or privilege has on others.

Both resources and classroom practices should reflect an inclusive environment and atmosphere. The classroom should promote shared expertise, leadership and opportunity. Resources must not only be reflective of the world’s diversity and experiences but students must also be given the skills to critically analyze those that are not inclusive and authentic. Knowledge must always be presented as partial and improvable through the multiple perspectives that inform it. Knowledge is not an end but a means of understanding. Production of the knowledge valued and recognized in the school must be a collaborative
exercise including “students, parents, community workers and care-givers as genuine partners” (Dei, 1996:87). Their voices must also be heard when they critique the knowledge that is viewed as essential by the Ontario curriculum documents. Critical knowledge building opens the dialogue and content of the classroom to diverse partners, including parents and caregivers for when these expanded definitions of community are recognized as not only those who care for children but also those who teach them and share knowledge, then the knowledge will enter into the classroom obliquely as it will affect interactions on a larger scale.

Community and Shared Leadership—on the Path

Sharing Knowledge in the Critical Knowledge Building Community

The concept of community was used on several levels within this project. The classroom and school exist as a community, however dysfunctional. The students involved in this project studied *Urban and Rural Communities* as well as communities around the world and the ways in which community can be defined. An attempt was made to establish a community of learners which would also then result in a critical knowledge building community to support critical antiracist practice within the classroom. It was hoped that the project would also impact the school and the teachers’ own professional development. Brett (2004) suggests that “the experience of defining a new community [can] allow the participants to develop greater comfort and a more flexible perspective…” (84). A space for community must exist but the concept of community must also be collectively established and understood—it is more a set of guidelines than a constant state of being. Communities change, but in the critical knowledge building community, the concepts indicative of knowledge building are placed within a critical frame.
Knowledge building addresses the importance of shared knowledge and expertise in order to facilitate knowledge building and *idea improvement*. Power and privilege dictate who has access to this cultural capital. When knowledge building becomes critical, cultural capital within that place can be transformed whereby students begin to value their own knowledge and experiences and that of their parents and grandparents. Knowledge brought forth as valid is no longer limited to published texts, either electronic or print, but family knowledge, and indigenous knowledges. Having access to indigenous knowledges is an asset when critically addressing ideas, opinions and knowledge presented in a critical knowledge building classroom. Various knowledge building principles can begin a path towards this transformation but the principles must be understood within the framework of critical antiracist pedagogy.

*Idea improvement* is the central goal for knowledge building. *Authoritative Sources* were redefined to include personal experiences. Knowledge was understood as fluid and changing, much like the Knowledge Forum database. Students explained that the database was dynamic because they could work with the ideas and question them, but when the ideas are printed, as in a book, the conversation ends. Students began to recognize partial knowledge and biased knowledge (and all knowledge falls into this category).

The value of this discourse/inquiry should be recognized as a way to move the group forward but also as a way to build on the concept of *Community knowledge, collective responsibility* in that together we are better and our knowledge is more diverse and therefore more representative. The incompleteness of knowledge building in its quest for idea improvement rather than arrival to correctness allows for the space of multiple perspectives to exist. Within critical knowledge building, indigenous knowledges and personal experiences must be understood as authoritative and can be more representative of truth than published and biased texts.
In order for *community knowledge, collective responsibility* to exist, the development of the classroom into a community of shared voice and shared expertise must be fostered through the established parameters of discourse, trust and space. The power must be explicitly shared and relinquished by those who hold power within the space. In this project, power sharing would involve the school principal, the classroom teacher and myself.

Student empowerment is dependent on the ability or choice of those who hold power to share it. There are multiple layers in this power that are intertwined and dependent on each other to function. The classroom teacher has power in the sense that the classroom is her space. She makes the final call if she is willing to move into a critical space and whether or not certain conversations will happen. The teacher has no power when it comes to her place in the school when the school administrator does not explicitly support her efforts or her growth as an educator. This then limits her ability to resist with confidence.

When there is support by the school administrator, resistance is sanctioned and is more effective for a variety of reasons—the teacher does not feel threatened when she resists, the teacher will know she is supported within a school community and the resistance will be community resistance. The school administration can support the resistance thus making it organized and structured and framed within the school improvement as a whole. The school administration also holds power. This power can be used to focus on achieving transformative school initiatives or it can be used to focus on power for power’s sake—for personal recognition rather than student need.

As previously explained, I, too, hold power as the researcher in this scenario as I own the story and I present the story. I am also an experienced antiracist educator who is not being evaluated by the school principal and therefore can take more risks in terms of resistance. However, I am
still constrained by the power of the school principal and through my affiliation with the school board and the teachers' federation in that I am limited by my name and the threat of removal from the project site. As an experienced educator, I also have the power to develop trust with the classroom teacher and support her as she struggles under the power of her principal. As trust develops and expertise is shared, the role of critical educator can be shared as well. This role was shared not only between the classroom teacher and me, but also with the students who were able to raise their voices in debate towards the quest for idea improvement.

As antiracist researchers and educators, to know our power is not always enough. It is also necessary to know our power through the experiences and interactions with those participants who make our work possible. To know our own power is to hear from others about it and to recognize resistance as an indicator for further reflection and reflexivity.

**Embracing/Sharing the Roles of Critical Educator/Researcher**

Working within the structure of a school system among changing federations and grievances, promotion and networking, reputation and risk, I struggled with my changing roles of the critical educator/researcher but eventually began to understand these roles through reflection and reflexivity, collaboration and dialogue. All of these roles implicate an exchange, dialogue, conversation, modeling, an audience of some sort. Where there are others, we must always be aware of our power under, over or with a particular group, be it students, teachers, parents, fellow researchers or administrators.

The role of an antiracist educator is one of resistance. To be a researcher coming into a class can be an awkward place to be. My own desire to move forward in understanding and practice was always tempered by the place where the students and teacher were ready to be. In my own classroom, I am able to facilitate and encourage critical dialogue and pedagogy. Within
someone else’s space, there needs to be more negotiation and at times, silencing to remain in this space. For some, the moving from Banks’ *Contributions Approach* to the *Ethnic Additive Approach* is an easy move but once there is a suggestion that transformation or even more so, social action, is a possibility, the level of resistance becomes more intense and can threaten the existence of the project as well.

Reflecting upon my own roles in this project, I see the varying roles of the antiracist educator/researcher include modeling of critical pedagogy; making space for and engaging in critical discourse; responsible reflexivity to inform not only the research but also to ensure that power is shared and recognized; encouraging dialogue with all research participants throughout the project and following the analysis with the goal of responsible research through catalytic and face validity; working towards a classroom community, recognizing partial knowledge and encouraging the critiquing of statements of "truth"; and most importantly, being willing to explicitly share these roles with all participants “in the service of educating students to be thoughtful, active citizens” (Giroux, 1988:122). By sharing these roles, the antiracist researcher also has to reflect on that process in addition to the content addressed in the project.

In this project, my first role as an antiracist educator/researcher was to establish the project itself. Who I am and became, as an antiracist educator/researcher, was developed through autoethnography. This process was an arduous one and one that cannot be done in isolation but rather in consultation with those who are affected by the project, in this case, the students, the classroom teacher and the school principal. Even at this point, over a year since the data collection was completed, I continue to reflect on my roles in the project and the way I understood the various roles the participants played. Reflexivity requires dialogue with participants but also time and space from the project.
My second role was to function as a leader within the school/classroom/project. I would model the practice I expected but I also had to be sensitive to the definition of what an antiracist practice is—a definition that differed from the classroom teacher with whom I was working. I would look for critical moments with the students, the teacher and others in the building to model reactions, statements and ways of resistance—critical moments in curriculum or practice. If the classroom teacher chose a strategy or knowledge base that was biased, such as the Greatest Canadians show which highlighted White male Canadians, then rather than putting her on the defensive, I would model how, despite the bias inherent in the show, we could still find diversity in terms of geography but we could also question why all candidates were White males. It also means that if the classroom teacher prefers to enter the conversation about stereotypes in research by using an example that moves away from the issues of race or any of the intersecting oppressions because there is safety in using this example, at least she is addressing stereotypes in her classroom where she otherwise would not have addressed this concept at all. The antiracism educator/researcher role may look at enabling the classroom teacher and students to also learn from the modeling and become active in a critical process but it also means that when the classroom teacher cannot or will not deal with an issue where students feel marginalized, the educator has to quietly support that student, because someone has to.

Creating a space, for example, by creating a new "view" where the participants could address issues that were related to the development and sustaining of a classroom community, rather than formal a curriculum, or by creating an opportunity for open classroom discussion, was another role I fulfilled. The beauty of this aspect of my role was a significant change through the course of this project in that the classroom teacher and students also began to share this role. By the end, we were working together to improve issues in the classroom and school as a
whole through shared discourse. This addresses the need for the antiracism educator/research
to move in and out of leading this practice and sharing the space with participants—be it
teachers, students or administration. There is a need for the antiracism educator/research to be
respectful of the place where people are in their practice but to always encourage further
development not just with the participants but with development of the self as well.

Challenging Limiting Structures and Opening Spaces

Certain functionalities that exist within the Knowledge Forum database may work to support
knowledge sharing, but they can also create barriers, depending on how they are used and what
the level of responsibility is in using them. Organizational structures that exist in Knowledge
Forum, such as rise-above notes or the creation of views, can frame a particular concept or
series of notes. This can help to put knowledge together, gain diverse perspectives and provide
a space where ideas are openly shared and all participants can have access to the
content/ideas/theories/opinions. These structures can also place limits on how this content is
shared and accessed.

Despite my effort to make this database as open as possible, students did not access the
journal view, create views or use the rise-above function unless they were working on it with
Sonja or me. One factor that may have contributed to this limited use is that the language
Sonja and I used when we dialogued within this journal view may have been inaccessible to the
students. When we brought the notes to the class through class discussion or directly wrote to
the students by building onto their notes, they were more likely to read the notes. As well, the
title itself, the Research/Teacher Journal, did not make the students feel welcome to join in even
though they were often encouraged by Sonja and me to go into this view.
Another issue which may have contributed to the students' limited use of the views when they were working individually is the rise-above note which is linked to the concept of idea improvement. By using the ideas/opinions/theories or research of others, there is still a need to acknowledge the work of others by asking permission to place notes into a rise-above note and/or still allowing the note to exist in its original context, if the author requests this. Our ideas are always framed within the context of what we know or have experienced. When notes are literally sucked into a rise-above note, all that clearly remains is the author of the original idea or note. It takes several clicks and some navigation to get back to the original note. The principle of community knowledge, collective responsibility means that students are expected to realize that the ideas they present or notes they contribute belong to all participants. They are encouraged to let go of emotional attachment to their ideas, but if the ideas are personal and emotional it is impossible to tell students not to feel attached. When we address issues related to personal histories and experiences or address issues that arise in the classroom that are emotional, as they relate to power and the lack of it, students will take it personally and become emotional. When someone finally speaks, they do not want their ideas or notes to be placed into a different note and be hidden within the framework or idea of another person or people. If the function of rise-above is not used responsibly and respectfully, it can be a function, along with the principle of idea improvement, which can subjugate knowledges of marginalized voices. Clear parameters and protocols must be established when working in a critical knowledge building community. To use rise-above as a way to structure and organize ideas and knowledge, participants must also consider that ideas and knowledge are not just framed within the structures of databases but within histories and experiences.
Pathways towards Critical Knowledge Building—A Comparison of Principles

The following table is a summary of how the knowledge building principles (Scardamalia, 2002) and the Antiracism Education Principles and Concerns (Dei, 1996) work together to inform the practice of critical knowledge building. This table differs from the table, *Common Themes in Knowledge Building and Antiracism Education* (figure 1) in the literature review in that the first table lists the principles of antiracism education as defined by Dei (1996) as well as the principles of knowledge building as defined by Scardamalia (2002) but following that, it indicates the concerns for antiracism education (Dei, 1996) and my own “common themes working towards critical knowledge building” by comparing the principles of Scardamalia and Dei to bring a critical frame to knowledge building. This table below, summarizes the principles in all three practices: Knowledge Building, Antiracism Education, and finally Critical Knowledge Building.

|---------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|
| **Real Ideas, Authentic Problems**                      | Marginalization of Voices, Identity and Engagement, Confronting Diversity and Schools as Working Communities, Schools Reproducing Inequities, Student Engagement and the Pathology of Home  
  Multiple roles of individuals, Support for collaboration, Space for “subjugated knowledges”, All school community members are legitimate contributors of knowledge. | Knowledge is Partial and based on Shared Understandings and Problems |
| **Improved Ideas**                                      | Identity and Engagement, Schools Reproducing Inequities  
  Support for collaboration, Space for “subjugated knowledges”, Achievements and contributions of all groups, Use and access to resources, All school community members are legitimate contributors of knowledge. | All Ideas and Knowledge are Partial and Can Always Work Towards a Continuum of Inclusivity |
| **Idea Diversity**                                      | Marginalization of Voices, Identity and Engagement, Confronting Diversity and Schools as Working Communities, Schools Reproducing Inequities  
  Support for collaboration, Space for “subjugated knowledges”, Achievements and contributions of all groups, All school community members are legitimate contributors of knowledge. | Many Voices, Marginalized Voices and Shared Space |

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Knowledge Building Principle</th>
<th>Anti-Racism Education Principle/Concern</th>
<th>Critical Knowledge Building Principle</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Constructive Use of Authority Texts</td>
<td>Marginalization of Voices, Identity and Engagement, Confronting Diversity and Schools as Working Communities, Schools Reproducing Inequities</td>
<td>Authoritative Sources Include Indigenous and Family Knowledge and Experiences with the Recognition that All Knowledge is Partial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Epistemic Agency</td>
<td>Marginalization of Voices, Identity and Engagement, Student Engagement and the Pathology of Home</td>
<td>Students are Able to Seek Their Own Inquiry and Work Collaboratively to Do So</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rise Above</td>
<td>Marginalization of Voices, Schools Reproducing Inequities Multiple roles of individuals and the impact on the reproduction of inequalities in schools, Support for collaboration, Space for “subjugated knowledges”, All school community members are legitimate contributors of knowledge.</td>
<td>Rising Above Necessarily Involves Power...To Honour this Power, Students Must Ask for Permission and Create Rise-Above Notes Collaboratively and Respectfully</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Knowledge, Collective Responsibility</td>
<td>Marginalization of Voices, Schools Reproducing Inequities, Student Engagement and the Pathology of Home Multiple roles of individuals and the impact on the reproduction of inequalities in schools, Support for collaboration, Space for “subjugated knowledges”, All school community members are legitimate contributors of knowledge, and Students have a “sense of responsibility to a larger global citizenry”.</td>
<td>Students Work Together to Create, Challenge, and Share Knowledge...All Knowledge is Socially Negotiated and the Responsibility of the Community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democratizing Knowledge</td>
<td>Marginalization of Voices, Identity and Engagement, Confronting Diversity and Schools as Working Communities, Schools Reproducing Inequities, Student Engagement and the Pathology of Home Support for collaboration, Space for “subjugated knowledges”, Use and access to resources, All school community members are legitimate contributors of knowledge, Students have a “sense of responsibility to a larger global citizenry”.</td>
<td>The Ideal of Democracy is a Place Which Allows for Conflict, Negotiation and Enabling of Shared Voice</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

![Figure 34: Pathways towards Critical Knowledge Building](image)

This table is meant to provide a brief synopsis of how the three practices can be compared and inform each other. For example, the column addresses the principle real ideas, authentic problems (Scardamalia, 2002) which she defines as "knowledge problems arise from efforts to
understand the world. Ideas produced or appropriated are as real as things touched and felt. Problems are ones that learners really care about—usually very different from textbook problems and puzzles” (9). Several of Dei’s principles inform this principle by understanding these real ideas, authentic problems, as perhaps contributing to marginalized voices, issues of identity and engagement in schooling, confronting diversity and schools as working communities, the role of schools in reproducing inequities and the questioning of student engagement by pathologizing the home.

If a child raises a problem in class, such as the one which was entered into the database by Sally and her social exclusion from her peers due to a comment which was perceived as racist, then this is a problem that by Scardamalia’s definition, is one the learners really cared about and was definitely different from those present in grade three textbooks and yet she still had to endure it, without critical deconstruction of the event by a teacher or other trusted adult. Due to the teacher’s inability to engage in this real problem because of its sensitive nature and her lack of comfort addresses such racialized events, the student was left to fend for herself. By considering Dei’s principles, the incident evokes the educator’s power to marginalize student voice, an inability to support this student through a defining moment where she was called a racist and then subsequently excluded and bullied by her classmates thus leading to Sally’s disengagement from school.

The critical knowledge building principle suggests, “Knowledge is partial and based on shared understandings and problems”. Just as ideas are understood to belong to the community, so too do the problems. This particular event affected many students in the classroom and needed a space to be openly discussed and worked through so that there could be a shared understanding of the partial knowledge which acted as a catalyst to this event.
All three columns are necessary to provoke a discussion on the ways the three practices of knowledge building, antiracism education and critical knowledge building work together to inform each other.

Patterns of Dialogue—the Classroom, Research and Self-Talk

Accounting for Power in Positioning and Social/Political Discourse

In a critical space, the social is political. Content raised and practices used to engage participants are necessarily social and this space is necessarily political. Students will not question the methods in a classroom because these are the practices they know. There is an assumption, with all power, that it is the norm. There may be moments, as participants in a critical knowledge building project begin to know themselves, where they feel something when the classroom does not feel right. As an eight year old child in a grade three classroom, these feelings may exist but the language, forum or opportunity to express them may not. In the space of this project, Sonja and I asked the students what they thought learning was and how the classroom worked. Sonja and I asked the students to think about how they learn and what the role of the teacher is in this process. The hidden curriculum in these discussions was, “your opinion matters and it makes this process work”.

There were barriers to the expression of this social/political critique within the classroom as well as the school as a whole. Barriers existed in terms of student comfort with online environments, specifically Knowledge Forum, as well as access to the technology with limited hardware available to them. Their lack of experience not only with the software but working in a truly collaborative environment created a barrier as well. Knowing that they were allowed to speak, write, or express opinions as an authority within certain topics rather than relying on “correct answers from textbooks” was a new place for the students. Relinquishing power in a
classroom which has high numbers and a variety of special needs among the students was a new place for the classroom teacher to be. Questioning the choices of a school administrator is not typical for a grade three classroom and yet, their ability to do so stemmed from the discourse of possibility. It was a positive space where realities were questioned, debated, and solutions to benefit the school were addressed.

Sonja’s role as the classroom teacher was debated first through her withdrawal from the project followed by critical moments and finally through a new understanding of a classroom based in shared expertise and distributed leadership. The way I explained Sonja’s role at the beginning of the project was aimed at reducing stress due to her agreement to participate in this project. This deterred her from expressing her opinions and taking on responsibility for the project. Each role in the school, student, parents, teacher, researcher or school administrator, has either privilege or powerlessness attached to it and exists within a political space. Each action taken on by a participant is framed within the place where this participant resides.

When the hierarchy of power is ruptured in the classroom, those who have less power may begin to take on leadership and responsibility for the group—this changes the dynamic of power and interaction. Students begin to understand the classroom in a different way. They no longer see the classroom as a place to conform and answer but to inquire, challenge and question. They understand that their role is one of teacher but not in the sense that they are there to give meaningless feedback to peers. Rather, they understand that their role is to work towards better understandings in any area they are pursuing, be it based in social studies curriculum, expertise using software, or solving issues in the school yard. All participants like all learners, will work from different places. In this project, the students surpassed the teacher in many ways as antiracist educators—a function of their access to the new cultural capital—
personal experience beyond the classroom walls. This requires an examination of the role of the antiracist educator/researcher to respect the place where each participant starts as well as where they go during the course of the project and beyond. Negotiating space for social action and solving of “real problems” is inherent in this aspect of the role of the antiracist educator/researcher.

Structures within the Knowledge Forum software, such as navigation and search tools, enable participants to draw ideas together and to find information. The need also exists for participants to understand how to provide access to the knowledge and notes by using informative titles, accessible language, and organized threads of discussion. Effective responses by all participants encourage engagement. Brett (2004) suggests “engagement may have had more to do with participants’ sense of agency as substantive contributors” and “the importance of beliefs rather than knowledge alone, as critical in determining the level of community engagement” (92). All participants need to feel as though they are contributing to feel engaged. Critical knowledge building offers an audience to ideas as well as a space to express them. As Sharon said:

In a regular classroom the teacher always asks the questions and when you are using KF you are actually asking the questions and finding the answers. You are like the boss and can control it. When you are the boss, you have to be responsible because a boss is in charge and has power. You have to think about your answers and your questions because if you just write them without thinking, you will have so many people writing you back and saying...that isn’t really what it is. You didn’t think about this or that. So you have to be responsible.

Participants realize that the act of stating an opinion or contributing to the group works towards sustaining and building community, as the students showed through the changing dynamic in the critical knowledge building classroom. To say that students can have a voice, lead and share is very different from simply showing them that those possibilities exist as in the
example where inappropriate exchanges within the database and the use of someone else's login turned into collaborative note writing to work towards further collaboration within the database.

In this case, the antiracist educator/researcher uses incidents such as these to model for the students how to challenge inequity and false representation but also the lack of responsibility inherent in these actions. Rather than act from a punitive voice of educator, the antiracist educator/researcher acts from a critical framework where each incident can be one of learning and challenging to work towards shared understanding and inclusivity.

**Setting the Parameters for Talk to Influence Dialogue in the Classroom**

The focus groups were a place to move the group forward in terms of knowledge building discourse which, in turn, affected the online exchange. Scaffold supports were used in dialogue and the rules of collaboration were applied within the framework. Students were not limited to what they could express in writing or what they could say. Clear directions and expectations for the focus group led to engaging discussions and in the end, a completely shared dialogue where students no longer looked to the participant teachers for ratification or repudiation of an idea but to their peers. The ideas that Sonja and I presented within the focus group did take precedence at first over the ideas that the students expressed, until we explicitly asked them to prevent this from happening. A teacher’s raised hand did not take precedence over a student’s raised hand. The concepts of power and control in the classroom, and right versus wrong, were overthrown in favour of a dynamic dialogue with all participants as equal and legitimate contributors. It was hard to believe that this was the same class where, six months prior, students could not sit still on the carpet or listen to each other speak.
Students took this power and used it to impact the school environment, classroom discussions and their whole classroom environment even after this project was complete. My own ability to relinquish control during the focus group allowed me to see the importance of how things were said rather than always focusing on what was being said.

The dynamic that ensued was one where real ideas, authentic problems were expressed. Students were reflecting on their experiences using Knowledge Forum in the classroom but also their use of authoritative texts and how they could best access information. They recognized that idea diversity and improvable ideas inform an idea or concept to make it more representative of diverse ways of knowing rather than cancelling previous concepts out in the hopes of achieving correctness. The goals were shifted from arriving in a familiar place where they had knowledge to move towards shared knowledge with the understanding that knowledge is always partial and never complete. They were provided a space where idea diversity allowed them epistemic agency to think through how their ideas fit with the ideas of others in their classroom, their school, and the broader community. It allowed them to see that their families were voices of authority in their own experiences and that they had a right to redefine what authoritative texts could be. Students were respectful of different opinions and used the dissonance between what they believed or knew and what others believed or knew to move the group forward. It was at these junctures that real ideas, authentic problems became most prevalent. There was a sense of community knowledge, collective responsibility due to the process of democratizing knowledge through shared space and shared voice.

It is in this space that the skill of the antiracist educator/researcher to be reflective of the role and that the power of this role is to stand aside when students have reached this level of community building through critical knowledge building.
Limitations of Study

Limitations of the study may be related to the sample. For example, only certain participants chose to be involved in the focus groups used to triangulate data. This source of data provided by those comfortable enough to participate in that exercise. One observation I made was that students who typically achieved higher grades were slower to share knowledge, fearing that other students would “cheat off of them”. Also, the fact that classroom had many students who did not have English as their first language coupled with the age of the children, eight years of age and in grade three, limited the amount of text produced in notes resulting in inconsistent levels of information provided in verbal methods such as class discussion and focus groups.

Although an attempt to challenge power relationships is central to this study, students had not had many opportunities to participate in studies such as this and were hesitant to express opinions. This type of dynamic takes time to create and with weekly one hour visits and the fact that I was not the classroom teacher limited the development of this classroom dynamic.

Sonja and I ensured that accommodations to support ESL students were in place. For example, we had such students working with partners, in many cases, partners who spoke the same first language as they did. Students with learning needs were also placed in groups where they could be supported. Students who needed scribing or typing support were provided this support while they dictated their ideas orally. These accommodations served to support and encourage involvement for some of the students.

Sensitive issues related to several participants, including the classroom teacher and the school principal, were shared within the project with some hesitancy and with some removal of data collected. These issues are central to the themes of rupturing power and knowledge sharing.
and the valuing of knowledge; the risk to the participants does not allow for a full report related to these issues.

At times, my place in this project did not feel secure due to Sonja’s minimal involvement in the early stages of collaboration. This relatively passive role was later revealed to be caused by her feelings of inadequacy as a teacher due to a dynamic with her principal. My knowledge of this relationship limited my status in the school as the relationship between the school principal and myself became quite distant. I chose to share fewer opinions and dialogue with the principal, and as a result, the classroom teacher’s trust in me increased. Ceglowski (2000) suggests that when there is tension in a researcher/researched relationship we should talk to those who are involved. She writes, “We bring skills and talents associated with the research process, but that does not prepare us for the task of developing relationships with those at the research site” (101). Although I understand her point in terms of the power of the research, it does not recognize the power of the researched, in this case, the school principal.

Although these issues created a level of emotion in the project, the details were not necessary. These issues were initially a barrier to the trust Sonja and I developed but eventually, through persistence on both of our parts, we worked to further support the development of the project.

The use of the technology activities, which is central to the study, also takes time to understand. The data collection process took place from September 2004 until April 2005. Students had access to the database during this time but due to other obligations, such as sharing the computers with the rest of the school and meeting all curriculum expectations in the grade three program, it was difficult for the classroom teacher to provide much access to
the database beyond the times I was there to support this project. Certain functionalities such as problems, keywords, and rise-above notes were not used to their full extent.

Wong and Law (2003) found that a hierarchy of knowledge building principles exist and that this may be tied to issues of time with the software, the need to access these functionalities to establish these principles or the understanding of the role of students which may be tied to culture. As in their study, the limits which determined the use of these functionalities and principles of knowledge building may have been the result of the amount of time the students had with the software, their experience in school with this pedagogy, as well as their age and skill level in grade three.

My own bias could have been limitation to the study although I designed this study with multiple methods and collaborative procedures with both students and the classroom teacher throughout the project through class discussions, journal entries, and focus groups to ensure the validity and reflexivity of the project.

**Future Directions**

A longer study with the same students or a study in a school where more than one class takes part in these processes would be effective since there would be consistency from year to year within the school. This type of study can prove to be difficult when school populations due to declining enrolment of students and staff, are inconsistent. Consistency of practice and initiatives linked to the school improvement plan with administrative and board support will invariably be more successful. Another consideration for future research is to examine the power relations within already established knowledge building communities, for example, Rose Avenue Public School, the Institute for Child Study or the Knowledge Society Network (KSN). This would then represent a community of knowledge builders who have some experience
with it and due to consistent use within the schools or with the participants such as with the KSN, the dynamic could be better studied over time.

A study done with the *Knowledge Society Network*, a model of knowledge building across borders, to ascertain the taking up (building on) of conversations (dialogues) within this database would show a commitment on the part of this group to consider power as an influence in the development of knowledge building communities and knowledge itself. The study could examine and determine the patterns of communication and which ideas are built upon and by whom, and would impact this data found in this study.

Further studies which look at power relationships and the changing dynamic of critical knowledge building would help to understand how online communities serve to protect identities through anonymity and the opportunity to define oneself outside of appearance.
Concluding Remarks

This study has provided a space for voice, reflection, professional development, student engagement and resistance. I have learned a great deal about my role as an antiracist educator/researcher as well as how defining myself in this way will continue to be a place of resistance and challenge. I have come to understand my power not only in terms of the privilege I bring based on how I am identifies in terms of race, socioeconomic status and sexual orientation, but also in terms of my role as researcher in this project. I have come to understand that naming trust as an integral ingredient in the success of a critical project is not enough to establish trust. In this project, trust came through critical moments.

Curriculum, whether the mandated (explicit) or hidden curriculum of the Ontario provincial government, the classroom, and the school, is malleable depending on the educator’s willingness to take risks and find those spaces of possibility. There is also a curriculum of teachers’ professional development—one that is explicit in terms of learning software, teaching literacy, and understanding the curriculum documents. There is also a hidden curriculum to teachers’ professional development—one that educates teachers about hierarchies in the school and board, one about silence, one about power and one about exclusion. It is the lesson that to stay silent in the school but to speak in your classroom is a beginning the start of and modeling critical practice for students. It is in this transformative discourse that students begin to truly see themselves and start to engage with curriculum that would otherwise have little to do with their cultural capital, understanding, and knowledge.

This study examined the relationships that either worked to support or create barriers to these transformative practices—students, teacher, researcher, school principal, family and community—barriers that are negotiated through curriculum, classroom practices, access to
resources and school environment. Although family members were not involved in the posting of notes or the classroom discussions, family knowledge pervaded the classroom knowledge and altered what was considered knowledge of value.

Knowledge building was placed within a critical frame to acknowledge that this practice opens possibility of providing space, keeping a record of shared discourse and collaborative efforts. It recognizes the principles of knowledge building, real ideas/authentic problems, improvable ideas, idea diversity, epistemic agency, community knowledge/collective responsibility, and democratizing knowledge (Scardamalia, 2002) as principles that are in line with Dei’s (1995) parameters for critical antiracist practice. This practice calls for learning through and with community as a collective and collaborative project which is dependent on multiple and diverse perspectives (1995:33) and the understanding of the notions of “what is acceptable and what is not acceptable; what is valid knowledge and what is not valid knowledge” (Dei, 1996:21). Dei asserts “schooling and education must proceed from the understanding that everyone in school has something to offer, and that diverse viewpoints, experiences and perspectives should be heard and valued” (1996:33). Knowledge building offers this place but must be informed by critical practice to find the silenced voices and the knowledge considered not to be valid.

Minnich (1990) asserts, “There is no more powerful position than that which dominates while appearing not to, no more influential position than that which sets the standards for and informs cultural meanings and their expression as knowledge” (161) and that we must recognize “now that the knowledge established by the dominant tradition is indeed partial” (1990:148).

Knowledge building stems from idea improvement which indicates that knowledge building is not a place to arrive but a continual advancement towards clearer understanding and more
informed theories, opinions and knowledge. When this is brought to an elementary classroom, students begin to see that their ideas and opinions are valued and that their experiences and the experiences and knowledge of their families are valid and inform their understandings, dialogue and discourse within the classroom and the school.
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Appendix 1

LETTER OF INFORMED CONSENT: STUDENTS AND PARENTS
Critical Pathways towards Antiracism in an Elementary Knowledge Building Classroom

Overview of the Project:
I, Debbie Donsky, will be conducting a research project in your child’s classroom. Using a Knowledge Forum® database (www.knowledgeforum.com), we will be looking at ways to promote antiracism education through learning environments. Since the Knowledge Forum® database is an online learning environment, all participants have access to the same information at all times. It is believed that this ensures a place where all ideas are valued and are aimed at moving the group forward by creating new knowledge to that group. Within any learning environment, there are different levels of participation. By looking at these levels of participation, and questioning whose ideas are valued, taken up within the group, and built upon, the concept of democracy will either be supported or denied. This project aims to improve engagement of all students in the knowledge building and learning processes by directly looking at these different levels of participation and acceptance within the knowledge building classroom, both online and offline.

The classroom teacher has chosen to implement this project within the social studies curriculum. This research will take place as part of normal course work and assessments within school. Data collected for this study will only be used from participants with a signed consent form and signed assent script (see reverse).

Procedures
There is a range of activities, which students may engage in as part of this research. The full range of possible activities is:

- Students will contribute to a shared Knowledge Forum class database. Activity in this database will be analyzed by the researcher and teacher using a suite of tools designed to assess patterns of database collaboration, number and extent of database contributions, and measures of knowledge building. (http://analysisilk.org/ak/akdlocht.html)
- The researcher will participate in classroom teaching and learning activities and processes. After such participation, the researcher will create journal entries within the database to which all participants will have access.
- Students may be invited to participate in three focus group sessions which will be comprised of the students, the classroom teacher, and the researcher. These focus groups will be audiotaped to allow for accuracy of transcription. All audiotapes will be destroyed once transcription is complete.

Rights of Participants
- Participation is voluntary. Participants are free to ask questions, to clarify statements, to not answer particular questions, and to withdraw from this project at any time without penalty or adverse effect, at which point any data pertaining to that participant will be destroyed.
• The researcher will respect the confidentiality of individuals participating. All data collected for this project will be stored in locked files and will be destroyed within five years of the project completion.
• All database entries will remain within the database and only participants will have access to this database. Only the classroom teacher, principal and researcher will have editing rights to the database. All other student participants will have writer access to the database. All participants with editor’s rights will sign consent not to alter or delete notes within the database. Students will not be able to alter or delete any notes.
• The researcher will describe issues and events in ways that are not evaluative of individual performance and which do not attribute blame to any individuals or groups.

Benefits to Participants

• Student access to computer hardware provided by their school board.
• Access to Knowledge Forum software to students both in class and at home.
• Opportunities to work collaboratively with students, classroom teacher and researcher.
• Opportunities for student voices to be heard in planning how to use technology in their school.
• Opportunity to engage in deep inquiry and theory building

If you have any questions, need further information or at a later time wish to withdraw from the study, please contact one of the following:
Debbie Donsky, Teacher and Doctoral Candidate, OISE/UT, (416) 352-8861,

Prof. Tara Goldstein, Thesis Supervisor, (416) 923-6641 ext. 7781, tgoldstein@oise.utoronto.ca

For Parents/Guardians of Students under the age of 18 years:
Your signature on the attached “Student Consent Form” indicates that you have read and understood the objectives and methods outlined in the proposed research, that you agree to allow your child to participate with the above terms of reference, and that you give permission for release of the completed report in which your child is involved.

For Students under the age of 18 years:
Your signature on the attached “Assent Script” indicates that you have read and understood the objectives and methods outlined in the proposed research, that you agree to participate with above terms of reference, and that you understand that you can withdraw at any time without repercussion.

Thank you very much for considering this request. Your participation would be greatly appreciated and could help improve the experiences of future students, parents and teachers.

Debbie Donsky, B.A. (Hons.), M. Ed., Ed. D. (Candidate), Curriculum, Teaching and Learning, OISE/UT
STUDENT CONSENT FORM

To be signed by legal parent or guardian:

Participant Name: ____________________________________________

School Name: _______________________________________________

Parent/Legal Guardian: ________________________________________

On behalf of the above named participant, a minor, I hereby agree to allow my child’s database entries including notes and journal entries and/or responses in focus groups, to be used for the purpose of this study (see reverse side).

Please check the following to indicate consent or refusal to participate in the following activities related to this research project:

a) ☐ Yes, Permission is granted for my son/daughter to participate in the research project including posting notes and have those notes analyzed and reported on for this project.

☐ No, Permission is not granted for my son/daughter to participate in the research project including posting notes and have those notes analyzed and reported on for this project.

b) ☐ Yes, Permission is granted for my son/daughter to participate in the research project including reading, responding and creating journal notes within the database and having those notes analyzed and reported on for this project.

☐ No, Permission is not granted for my son/daughter to participate in the research project including reading, responding and creating journal notes within the database and having those notes analyzed and reported on for this project.

c) ☐ Yes, Permission is granted for my son/daughter to participate in the research project including participation in the focus group discussions which will occur throughout the school year, three times, for a maximum of one hour each time.

☐ No, Permission is not granted for my son/daughter to participate in the research project including participation in the focus group discussions, which will occur throughout the school year, three times, for a maximum of one hour each time.

Parent/Legal Guardian Signature: ____________________________________________

Date: __________________________

Assent Script: I have discussed the proposed use of my database entries with my parent(s)/guardian(s) and agree to their use.

Participant Signature: __________________________ Date: __________________________
Appendix 3

LETTER OF INFORMED CONSENT: CLASSROOM TEACHER
Critical Pathways towards Antiracism in an Elementary Knowledge Building Classroom

Overview of the Project:
1, Debbie Donsky, will be conducting a research project, with your permission, in your classroom. Using a Knowledge Forum® database (www.knowledgeforum.com), we will be analyzing strategies to promote antiracist education through democratic, equitable and inclusive practices in a knowledge building environment. Since the Knowledge Forum® database is an online learning environment, all participants have access to the same information at all times. It is believed that this ensures a place where all ideas are valued and are aimed at moving the group forward by creating new knowledge to that group. Within any learning environment, there are different levels of participation. By looking at these levels of participation, and questioning whose ideas are valued, taken up within the group, and built upon, the concept of democracy will either be supported or denied. This project aims to improve engagement of all students in the knowledge building and learning processes by directly looking at these different levels of participation and acceptance within the knowledge building classroom, both online and offline.

It must be acknowledged that since there will be only one classroom participating in this study, the remarks, notes and reflections of the classroom teacher will not be anonymous at the school level when reporting back during the research process or when a copy of the study is provided to the school, since there will be only one classroom teacher. In either of these cases, regardless of pseudonym, the identity of the classroom teacher would be obvious.

This research will take place as part of normal course work and assessments within school. Data collected for this study will only be used from participants with a signed consent form and signed assent script from students (see reverse).

Procedures
There is a range of activities, which students/teachers may engage in as part of this research. The full range of possible activities is:

- Students/teachers will contribute to a shared Knowledge Forum class database. Activity in this database will be analyzed by the researcher and teacher using a suite of tools designed to assess patterns of database collaboration, number and extent of database contributions, and measures of knowledge-building. (https://analysisikit.org/atk/atkdoc.html). Parents may be invited to also take part in the database.
- The research will observe classroom teaching and learning activities and processes. These observations will be recorded using note taking and providing summaries in journal entries on the database.
- Students/classroom teacher may be invited to participate in three focus group sessions which will be comprised of the students, the classroom teacher, and the researcher. These focus groups will be audiotaped to allow for accuracy of transcription.
Rights of Participants

- Participation is voluntary. Participants are free to ask questions, to clarify statements, to not answer particular questions, and to withdraw from this project at any time without penalty or adverse effect, at which point any data pertaining to that participant will be destroyed.
- The researcher will respect the confidentiality of individuals participating. All data collected for this project will be stored in locked files and will be destroyed within five years of the project completion.
- The researcher will describe issues and events in ways that are not evaluative of individual performance and which do not attribute blame to any individuals or groups.

Benefits to Participants

- Student/teacher access to computer hardware provided by their school board.
- Access to Knowledge Forum software to students both in class and at home.
- Opportunities to work collaboratively with students and researcher.
- Opportunities for student voices to be heard in planning how to use technology in their school.
- Opportunity to engage in deep inquiry and theory building
- Opportunity for professional development.

If you have any questions, need further information or at a later time wish to withdraw from the study, please contact one of the following:

Debbie Donsky, Teacher and Doctoral Candidate, OISE/UT, (416) 352-8861,

Prof. Tara Goldstein, Thesis Supervisor, (416) 923-6641 ext. 7781, tgoldstein@oise.utoronto.ca

A summary of the research results will be available in the fall of 2005. If you wish to receive a copy, please contact Debbie Donsky, Teacher and Doctoral Candidate, OISE/UT, (416) 352-8861, or at

For Teachers:

Your signature on the attached “Teacher Consent Form” indicates that you have read and understood the objectives and methods outlined in the proposed research, that you agree to participate with the above terms of reference, and that you give permission for release of the completed report in which you are involved.

Thank you very much for considering this request. Your participation would be greatly appreciated and could help improve the experiences of future students, parents and teachers.

Debbie Donsky, B.A. (Hons.), M. Ed., Ed. D. (Candidate)
Curriculum, Teaching and Learning, OISE/UT

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Appendix 4

TEACHER CONSENT FORM

Participant Name: _______________________________________________________
School Name: __________________________________________________________

I hereby give my consent for my database entries including notes and journal entries and/or responses in focus groups, to be used for the purpose of this study (see reverse side).

Please check the following to indicate consent or refusal to participate in the following activities related to this research project:

a) _____ Yes, Consent is granted for my participation in the research project including posting notes and have those notes analyzed and reported on for this project.

_____ No, Consent is not granted for my participation in the research project including posting notes and have those notes analyzed and reported on for this project.

b) _____ Yes, Consent is granted for my participation in the research project including reading, responding and creating journal notes within the database and having those notes analyzed and reported on for this project.

_____ No, Consent is not granted for my participation in the research project including reading, responding and creating journal notes within the database and having those notes analyzed and reported on for this project.

c) _____ Yes, Consent is granted for my participation in the research project including participation in the focus group discussions which will occur throughout the school year, twice, for a maximum of one hour each time.

_____ No, Consent is not granted for my participation in the research project including participation in the focus group discussions which will occur throughout the school year, twice, for a maximum of one hour each time.

Participant Signature: _________________________________________________
Date: ____________________________________________________________________
Appendix 5

INFORMATION LETTER TO SCHOOL PRINCIPAL AND TEACHER PARTICIPANT

Title of Study: Critical Pathways towards Antiracism in an Elementary Knowledge Building Classroom

Student Researcher: Debbie Donsky, B.A. (Hons.), M. Ed., Ed. D. (Candidate): Curriculum, Teaching and Learning, OISE/UT, (416) 352-8861,

Thesis Supervisor: Prof. Tara Goldstein, Thesis Supervisor, (416)923-6641 ext.7781, tgoldstein@oise.utoronto.ca.

Summary of Project:
This study, Critical Pathways towards Antiracism in an Elementary Knowledge Building Classroom, examines and assesses strategies for implementing antiracism education, integrated with online knowledge building activity in elementary social studies program. The context of the study is one elementary classroom in a high needs school in Toronto. The study's approach is critical action research and it is intended to help bring about changes such as increased student engagement, collaboration, and development of antiracism dialogue within both the hidden and explicit curriculum and the development of knowledge building through the integration of technology within the classroom. The data will be analyzed in relation to conceptions of knowledge and cultural capital, meaning that the study examines the ways student participants acquire and wield their powers of comprehension. Furthermore, the study will examine how, and to what degree, this classroom develops characteristics of a democratic learning environment and a learning community.

This study is designed to inquire into the strategies for implementing knowledge building as a way to foster antiracism education and develop democratic learning environments in an elementary social studies classroom through shared space, voice and community building in a Knowledge Forum® database. These practices will be evaluated in both the online and offline classroom environments through focus groups with students and the classroom teacher and through correspondence in emails, and through student, teacher and researcher journal entries within the database.

This research project will investigate the following:

Curriculum: Hidden, Explicit and Transformative
How do the hidden and mandated curriculum influence, create opportunities for or barriers to transformative practice through critical knowledge building?

In what ways do knowledge sharing patterns contribute to critical knowledge building in terms of inclusive curriculum content, shared power and multi-vocality?

Are the knowledge building principles of Real Ideas, Authentic Problems; Improvable Ideas; Idea Diversity; Epistemic Agency; Community Knowledge, Collective Responsibility,
Constructive Use of Authoritative Texts and Democratizing Knowledge supported through this process? In other words, can knowledge building be critical?

Roles and Relationships in Research
How does my negotiation with the various roles and relationships (the role of and relationship with the classroom teacher, the role of and relationships with the school administrator, and the ability to redefine the role of students) change throughout the project and how does this change affect the project?

How do my role as researcher and my own positionality affect dialogue and participation?

How, if at all, do roles change throughout the knowledge building process?

How do I identify with my role of researcher and use my knowledge and power in this process with myself and with others?

Dialogue and Sharing Knowledge
In what ways do dialogue and participation proceed in a knowledge building classroom?

Are matters of social/political critique and racism or antiracism taken up in the class’s online discourse? If these matters are raised, do they encourage further inquiry and critique through extended threads of discussion or creation of new ideas or are they peripheralized and marginalized within the discourse and not taken up at all?

What type of resistance ensues if the researcher, classroom teacher, and/or students encourage these lines of discourse?

What knowledge is shared and whose knowledge is considered influential?

Potential Risks of the Study:
- There are no reasonable foreseeable risks to participants.

Potential Benefits of the Study:
- Student/teacher access to computer hardware provided by their school board.
- Access to Knowledge Forum software to students both in class and at home.
- Opportunities for student voices to be heard in planning how to use technology in their school.
- Opportunity for professional development.
- Opportunities to work collaboratively with students, classroom teacher and researcher.
- Opportunity to engage in deep inquiry and theory building

If you have any questions, need further information or at a later time wish to withdraw from the study, please contact one of the following:
Debbie Donsky, Teacher and Doctoral Candidate, OISE/UT, (416) 352-8861,
Prof. Tara Goldstein, Thesis Supervisor, (416) 923-6641 ext. 7781, tgoldstein@oise.utoronto.ca
A summary of the research results will be available in the fall of 2005. If you wish to receive a copy, please contact Debbie Donsky, Teacher and Doctoral Candidate, OISE/UT, (416) 352-8861, or at debdonsky@rogers.com.

Thank you very much for considering this request. Your participation would be greatly appreciated and could help improve the experiences of future students, parents and teachers.

Yours truly,

Debbie Donsky, B.A. (Hons.), M. Ed., Ed. D. (Candidate)
Curriculum, Teaching and Learning, OISE/UT