DRAMATIC ENCOUNTERS: DRAMA PEDAGOGY AND CONFLICT IN SOCIAL JUSTICE TEACHING

by

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Abstract

This study examines social justice teaching through drama and conflict pedagogies, and diverse students’ responses to these pedagogies, infused in academic curriculum practice in three publicly funded urban classrooms (grades 4-8). Qualitative and arts-based methodologies included teacher interviews, participant observation, and students’ improvised drama workshops facilitated by the researcher. The three participating teachers, working in demographically different (privileged and marginalized) contexts, conceptualized and taught social justice education through drama pedagogies that embraced conflict as a learning opportunity. Each emphasized a somewhat different approach: critical care (learning about Others and interpersonal relationships); critical shit disturbing (questioning to elicit conflict and tools for developing agency); cautious risk taking (eliciting multiple understandings of broad social issues, acknowledging uncertainty). These three teachers addressed justice primarily in affirmative ways, and sometimes set the stage for potentially transformative justice education (Fraser, 2005). Students from each classroom had contrasting interpretations of social justice, and responded to their teachers’ pedagogies with varied, sometimes contradicting, forms of engagement, including humour and silence.
The findings reveal a set of tensions within the pedagogical “dramatic encounter”. 1, Teachers’ perceptions of students’ differences were key to how they taught, and identities also influenced students’ responses to social justice and drama pedagogies. Students with more personal experience with oppression tended to make improvisational drama choices that addressed broader social structural issues, while others tended to remain distant from oppression by dramatizing issues only as generic interpersonal conflicts. 2, Social justice drama pedagogies surfaced danger and potential: conflict in these pedagogies could be (but was not always) generative and agonistic (constructive rather than antagonistic). 3, Carefully designed pedagogies that allocated time to dramatic processes created opportunities for students’ expressed understandings to develop complexity. This study provides complex examples of social justice education through drama and conflict embedded in varied subject areas that were demonstrably feasible in three contrasting public classrooms with young students. This study shows the challenges of seeking one right way to teach conflict, drama, and social justice in all contexts, and recognizes ways students participate in the refashioning of social justice for their own lives.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

An Invitation to Drama Pedagogy and Conflict in Social Justice Education

The term ‘social justice’ has become a catch phrase in some education circles, with many schools, school boards, and faculties of education incorporating it into their mission statements and curriculum documents. Indeed, diverse understandings of social justice manifest themselves through various approaches to education. For example, anti-oppressive, multicultural, and democratic citizenship education all, to various extents and with different emphases, claim to incorporate social justice goals. Such approaches reject current neoliberal trends in education that are manifested through pervasive standardized testing, scripted curriculum, and continued disparities in the educational achievement of groups marginalized by racism and poverty. An emphasis on curriculum standards and testing functions to privilege certain perspectives and dominant groups in society (Kumashiro, 2009). Such neoliberal trends challenge teachers who wish to work through critical engagement with students to address injustice (Ayers et al, 2009; De Lissovoy, 2015; Kumashiro, 2009; Soloman & Singer, 2011). Some approaches to social justice may also reinforce the neoliberal ideal of individual freedom, in which the individual is seen as the sole determinant of their own success or failure, in relation to predetermined standards. Research on the efforts of teachers to teach for social justice risks imposing perspectives rather than acknowledging diverse student experiences and intersubjective constructions of knowledge (Sonu, 2009a). Social justice education is a complicated endeavor, defined and practiced for particular goals, and situated within particular contexts.

Various theories and research on education for social justice have focused on examining pedagogical practices designed to impact positive change in society (e.g., Ayers et al., 2009; Bell, 1997; Cochran-Smith, 2004; North, 2009). Some scholars have emphasized student agency – student responses to social justice oriented schools or teaching that prescribe social action (e.g., Sonu, 2009b; Swalwell, 2013). My dissertation builds on such work in that it focuses on social justice teaching in elementary school classrooms, and student responses to it. In particular, I investigate drama and conflict
pedagogies, integrated in academic lessons in non-drama specific elementary school classrooms, intended to teach social justice. The ways students engage in drama activities can effectively reveal their understandings of diversity and identity (Gallagher, 2007; Neelands, 2006). Such pedagogy may engage students in generative conflict. Generative conflict allows for divergent student perspectives and understandings to emerge (Bickmore, 2008; Mouffe, 2005; Todd, 2012). Public school curriculum in Canada is generally “anti-conflictual” in its representations of knowledge (Bickmore, 2007, p. 161): educators often attempt to avoid, smooth out, and diminish conflict (including contrasting perspectives and simple disagreement). Much drama education in elementary school classrooms also avoids conflict, but may invite young people to confront complex issues (Gallagher, 2007). In social justice classrooms, drama pedagogy may create possibilities for conflicts and tensions to become visible, and to be addressed in productive ways by the teachers and students involved. An examination of drama pedagogies and conflict in elementary school social justice classrooms builds upon and contributes to the already existing theory and research on social justice education.

While some studies have explored relationships between drama and social justice education (e.g., Belliveau, 2006; Freebody & Finneran, 2013; Shelton and McDermitt, 2010), little research examines how elementary school teachers actually use drama to teach social justice especially within academic subject areas lessons. Even fewer studies consider how diverse elementary students in these different contexts respond to, understand, communicate, and enact concepts related to social justice. This dissertation investigates both social justice educators’ drama pedagogies in particular contexts, and diverse students’ responses to those pedagogies, to broaden understandings of social justice pedagogy.

My interest in conducting this study emerged from my work as a teacher implementing social justice education with my own students. In my work with elementary school students (Grades 3 to 8), my approaches to social justice education aligned with critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970; Kincheloe, 2007; Andrade and Morell, 2008). That is, I sought to engage students in societal critique through dialogue, and to foster various forms of social action as responses to the issues we explored. Essentially, I sought to implement transformative social justice education: I taught about social justice
issues, critically explored their underlying causes with students, and facilitated student social action to redress injustices. I often aimed at what Lesko and Bloom refer to as “happy-ever-after endings” (1998, p. 390): I hoped students felt good about our learning, their social action, the money and awareness we raised for particular justice initiatives, and about the people the social action aimed to help. In my teaching, I found drama improvisation activities to be a powerful way to engage students in the complexities of social justice issues, particularly those students who seemed to be disengaged during more traditional instructional approaches. Drama, incorporated in any curriculum subject area, was my way of getting students passionate about an issue, and to foster embodied responses to what I (as teacher) introduced.

I felt at the time that I experienced success in engaging students using drama pedagogies for social justice. I taught in an alternative senior (Grades 7 and 8) school where most of the students identified as White and middle to upper-middle class. Students at this school responded with enthusiasm to my conceptions of social justice education. For example, I often invited analysis and critique of various corporate entities (e.g., based on labour exploitation and the impacts of neoliberal economic globalization), organized community service learning projects, and accompanied students to demonstrations aimed at raising awareness of various issues that students and I associated with local and global injustice. We often discussed the plight of Others. I frequently facilitated dramatic work that aimed to represent the impact of oppression on Others. I began to wonder, however, why my students seemed to be buying in to my pedagogy. I wondered whether or not what we were doing was actually working toward social justice.

When I began teaching at a large elementary school populated by students who had recently immigrated to Canada (many under refugee claims), were racially marginalized, and/or were of lower socio-economic status, this challenged my prior conceptions of social justice education. Many of these students did not seem to respond as positively to what I considered issues of social justice. My new context provoked questions about what I was doing, how I was doing it, for whom, and the role played by my gender, racial and class privilege in my attempts at transformative social justice education. I began to

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1 I borrow Kumashiro’s (2000) use of the term “Other” (intentionally capitalized) to refer to social difference, in particular groups that are typically marginalized in society.
wonder whether my teaching for social justice reflected and valued these students’ lived experiences, and their own understandings of justice. When I became an equity instructional leader for my school board, I continued to question the relationships between my (and other teachers’) experiences, those of my (and their) students, and the realities of people directly harmed in the issues I addressed. I also wondered whether students sometimes performed responses to social justice questions that they thought their teachers wanted to see and hear (Scott, 1990; Sonu, 2012). How did students with different social identities and life experiences interpret my drama pedagogy and social justice subject matter? Why did some students seem to care about issues of justice (as I presented them), and others not?

During my career, I have noticed increased attention to issues of “social justice” in school-based teaching and learning, particularly reflecting the involvement of charities in school-wide and classroom curriculum. I have found myself worrying about limited conceptions of social justice and social justice education that do not reflect a critical or active stance, and that emphasize non-reflexive acts of charity. Along with other critical scholars (e.g., Ayers et al., 2010; De Lissovoy, 2015; Kumashiro, 2009;), I argue that education and action that do not consider questions of power and privilege, the historical (and present) context of colonialism, and marginalization of particular individuals and groups by social institutions might actually inhibit justice. Without such considerations, social justice education may bypass any recognition of how teachers and students are implicated in the very social structures that create and reproduce injustice. I have come to understand that different conceptions of social justice manifest themselves in different ways, in different classrooms, and for different reasons: the present research examines these differences and their implications in three urban public elementary school classrooms.

This study examines the relationships between pedagogy for social justice (particularly teaching that mobilizes drama and conflict) and diverse students’ experiences of social justice education in order to clarify conceptions and implications of such practice in contrasting contexts. Based on my experiences, I suspected that different students responded differently to particular approaches to social justice education. I wanted to learn how these differences manifest themselves in classrooms and student
drama work, and what it meant. In other words, why and how did some teachers do social justice education in particular ways, and why and how did some students demonstrate care about those social justice issues while others responded differently?

**Research Objectives**

Over the course of 14 months, I studied one classroom in each of three urban elementary schools in Southern Ontario. The study involved three teachers, their students, and myself as a drama improvisation facilitator and researcher. This dissertation speaks to the complicated nature of teaching and learning, in particular the dissonance between teachers’ intentions and various students’ interpretations of and engagement with those intentions, in the context of constructive and destructive conflicts inherent in the life of any classroom. The goal of my study is not to measure the transformative consequences of social justice teaching (with drama pedagogy) on the students, but to examine what such a pedagogy looked like, as implemented by three selected, (contrasting) teachers who were committed to teaching for social justice in their classrooms. This inquiry is premised on an understanding that learning and knowledge are constructed socially and in relation to a learner’s previous experiences, history, and social context. My analytical framework applies to educational research the concepts of redistribution and recognition associated with theories of social justice in societies (e.g., Fraser, 2003, Young, 1990). In this inquiry, I occupy the threshold between radical notions of critical theory and critical pedagogy (Giroux, 2004; Freire, 1998; Kincheloe, 2007; De Lissovoy, 2008) and the notions of subjectivity inherent in post-structural thought (Butler, 2003; Britzman, 1998; Ellsworth, 2005). In the classrooms in my study, teachers and students were influenced by social status inequality, by social identity constructs, and by their own unique social locations and experiences. They were constantly evolving as subjects, through their interactions with other individuals and events, in and beyond their classrooms.

The following pages describe how three teachers articulated and implemented their conceptions of social justice education through drama pedagogies in their classrooms (Grades 4 to 8). I analyze the implications of such pedagogies in light of how students in each of these contexts interpreted and responded to them. I also highlight how tensions emerged between teachers’ pedagogies and subject matter choices and how students took those up. The three teachers were selected for participation in this study
because they saw themselves as educating for social justice through pedagogies that included improvisational drama (that is, they used drama as an instructional tool) in various curriculum subject areas.

This dissertation seeks to advance discussions about the possibilities and limitations of particular notions and approaches to social justice education, drama, and conflict in particular classroom settings, thereby challenging standardized policies and approaches that neglect local contextual factors and the subjectivity of teachers’ and students’ experiences. While some social justice education goals seem to have increased in popularity over the past few years, institutional and ideological barriers continue to constrain social justice education. Thus, many teachers navigate rough terrain in order to make a difference for students. This study highlights the practices of three such teachers and aims to inspire hope for the potential and possibilities of doing social justice education, in the context of a realistic picture of the constraints and dangers that may arise in social justice education.

By offering concrete instances of pedagogies for social justice that use drama, and specific examples of the conflictual events that unfold, this study aims to strengthen the application of scholarship on social justice and social justice education to its practice. In order to achieve this broad aim, my dissertation study has four key objectives. The first is to examine how three elementary school teachers committed to social justice education demonstrated their conceptions of social justice through drama pedagogy in various subject areas. Another objective is to learn how these teachers, in contrasting classroom contexts, used drama pedagogy to frame questions, elicit, and facilitate conflict for social justice education. A third objective is to examine how students in these teachers’ contrasting classrooms participated in drama pedagogies for social justice. In addition to regular classroom observations, I pursued this goal by personally facilitating improvised drama sessions with small groups of students, to learn about students’ identity-linked conceptions and responses to social justice education. A last objective is to understand how such drama inquiry methods could facilitate learning about students’ conceptions and responses to social justice education.

In this chapter, I have introduced briefly the study’s context, purpose, conceptual framework and methodology. In Chapter 2, I review theory and research on key aspects
of social justice theory, examining scholars’ varied emphases on justice as a matter of redistribution (equality and equity) and recognition (identity and social location) (Fraser, 1997; Fraser and Honneth, 2003, Young, 1999). Then, applying such political theory to school classrooms, I review research on varied approaches to social justice education, bringing together various threads and tensions amongst associated conceptions, goals, and practices. Based on my review of the literature, I distill my conceptual framework, focusing on key aspects of social justice education theory - particularly critical theory and critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970; Giroux, 1994; Kincheloe, 2004) and post-structuralist thought (Ellsworth, 2005; Britzman, 1998). Acknowledging the tensions between them, but layering these two theoretical perspectives, I frame the concept of the dramatic encounter in the classroom in relation to key notions of drama pedagogy (Gallagher, 2007, 2014; Neelands, 2004, 2009) and generative/agonistic (educative) conflict (Bickmore, 2008, Mouffe, 2005; Todd, 2010). In Chapter 3, I introduce and justify my inquiry methodology: qualitative and drama-based educational research. I also describe and discuss the specific design of my study: its participants, data collection, and analytical procedures.

The next three chapters present data and analysis. In Chapter 4, I introduce the three participating teachers, classrooms, and school contexts, and analyze how each of these teachers described their teaching in relation to social justice, conflict, and drama. In Chapter 5, I analyze my use of improvised drama (as an inquiry method) with subgroups of students from each classroom (improvised drama sessions), and what they helped me to learn about how those students conceived of and responded to social justice and drama pedagogies. Vignettes I selected from the improvised drama sessions I conducted illustrate how students in each site communicated their understandings of social justice in relation to their teachers’ practices of social justice education. In Chapter 6, I present moments of contradiction that illustrate both the potential and the danger of eliciting conflictual (dramatic and associated) dialogue amongst students, and between students and teachers, in two of the three classrooms studied. I explore how students’ humour and silence also exposed moments of contradiction in relation to how they engaged in their teachers’ pedagogies, and how their teachers viewed these students’ apparent (dis) engagement. Finally, in Chapter 7, I conclude the dissertation by summarizing and
discussing the key findings of my research, commenting on the contributions, limitations, and significance of this study.

This dissertation focuses on examining how three teachers teach, and how their students take up social justice education in three contrasting elementary school classrooms. Emphasizing the role of drama and the role of conflict in these social justice classrooms as pedagogies and as a mode of inquiry, I focus on these teachers’ conceptions, goals, and pedagogies, as well as their students’ interpretations of, participation in, and engagement with such pedagogies. Throughout, I examine the dynamic encounters between teachers and students and among students, often elicited by teachers’ (and my own) particular intentions and learning outcomes, but not determined by them. I recognize the work of teaching and learning is riddled with both limitations and possibilities. This dissertation reflects my grappling alongside these teachers and students as we negotiated what it meant to engage in work that strived for justice through the practices of schooling.
Chapter 2: What is Social Justice Education?

Approaches and Concepts

Social justice has been widely named as a goal of various approaches to education that explicitly works to challenge multiple social injustices (Kumashiro, 2009; North, 2008). Social injustice, or oppression, refers to the privileging of some groups and identities, and marginalization of others on the basis of race, class, sexuality, gender, disability, religion, language, and other social signifiers (Kumashiro, 2000). While social justice is a goal, it is also an educational process (Bell, 1997). Conscious or unconscious emphasis on particular social justice goals over others presumably influences the pedagogical means (processes) used in social justice education. As Kevin Kumashiro has articulated, “Schools are always and already addressing issues of oppression, often by reinforcing it or at least allowing it to continue playing out unchallenged, and often without realizing that they are doing so” (2009, p. xxxvi). The question underlying this dissertation inquiry is how could teachers address oppression (in regular academic subject lessons in public elementary school classrooms) in order to work against it?

Across the field of curriculum studies, scholars have developed various frameworks to explain and teach about the causes of, and solutions to, social injustices (e.g., Banks, 2004; Bell, 1997; Carlisle et al., 2006; Kincheloe, 2007; Nieto, 1996; North, 2009; Sleeter & Grant, 2006). Such approaches to education aim to foster particular understandings amongst learners. They conceptualize identity, subjectivity, and conflict in divergent ways. My analysis is based mostly on Nancy Fraser’s (1995, 2000, 2003) theory – distinguishing social justice goals for redistribution of resources and access (for equality and equity) from social justice recognition goals (of diverse identities for pluralist mutual respect) – and the tensions between critical and post-structural theories in education. This chapter brings together the common threads and tensions among approaches to social justice, and applies these to social justice education in Canadian elementary classrooms. I bring to the fore drama and conflict pedagogies as important processes that can broaden current conceptions and practices of social justice in education. In particular, I propose the concept of dramatic encounters – the intersection of
drama and constructive conflict pedagogies within social justice education - to recognize and probe the complexities of doing social justice education in classrooms and schools.

**Social Justice in Theory**

In order to contextualize my inquiry, I discuss the varied ways social justice has been theorized. Fraser (1995, 2000, 2005) highlights the difference between social justice efforts focused on improving equitable distribution of wealth and other resources – redistribution – and those focused on addressing cultural issues of identity – recognition. In the early twentieth century, in social welfare states, struggles against injustice tended to be based on a politics of redistribution: that is, on redressing socioeconomic injustice (e.g., poverty). Such goals included equal access to adequate living conditions and to opportunities such as education (Rawls, 2001), and aimed to create conditions for more equitable participation in society (Fraser, 1997). With the demise of state socialism and the rise of neo-liberalism\(^2\), such efforts toward egalitarian redistribution were often relegated to the background (Fraser, 2004). Neoliberalism views justice narrowly as individual liberty and an ethic of philanthropy and goodwill toward others (Jeffress, 2012). Within redistribution approaches to justice, the recognition of diverse identities had been mostly sidelined as a goal. More recently, struggles for recognition have come to the fore, based on the argument that social identity difference is at the crux of social justice (Honneth, 1995; Young, 1990a; 1990b; 2000). Fraser (1997) refers to this late-twentieth century shift in conceptions of justice, toward a focus on recognition of diverse social identities, as the “post-socialist condition” in political thought (p. 1). Some critics argue that this theory encourages the reification (stereotyping and rigid definition) of group identities and distracts from a critical analysis of the economic system (Fraser, 2000, Rawls, 2001; Sayer, 2007). At the same time, some political philosophers argue that a focus on redistribution alone cannot achieve justice (Tully, 2004). Such hybrid

\(^2\) According to Lakes and Carter (2013), neoliberal reforms are guided by notions of minimal government involvement, allowing market rationality and consumer choice rectify problems in schools. Despite this belief in minimal government involvement, neoliberal policies are increasingly invasive, and aim to create education systems that function as markets (Apple, 2006). Such reforms are characterized by standardized testing, scripted curricula, the deskilling of teachers, and the general underfunding of public education (Lakes & Carter, 2013).
theories of social justice focus on equal representation of difference – as ways of achieving equal protection and equal opportunity (Young, 2001).

Redistribution aims refer to social-structural change toward remedying socioeconomic injustices. In contrast, recognition aims focus on affirmation of diverse identities (remedying cultural injustices). Clearly, such a binary categorization does not completely reflect the complexity of how social injustice manifests in society, nor how people are treated in everyday social interactions (Young, 1990). Questions of redistribution intersect with issues of recognition, because barriers to obtaining economic resources are often linked to identity markers (socio-cultural difference) such as race (Anyon, 2005; North, 2008). Struggles for recognition can support the redistribution of power and wealth, and encourage constructive interaction and participation across difference, and vis versa (Fraser, 2000). Any comprehensive conception of social justice, therefore, addresses both issues of redistribution (equity) and recognition (identity).³

As a way to integrate struggles against maldistribution and misrecognition, Fraser (2003) proposes that injustices may be addressed in affirmative and/or transformative ways. *Affirmative* justice remedies generally respond to unjust distribution outcomes, misrecognition, or misrepresentation of social identities, without challenging (as causal) the social relations at their base. *Transformative* justice remedies aim to correct inequities by addressing their structural and cultural causes. Affirmative approaches are based on an assumption that society is basically good and that specific problems can be fixed. Transformative approaches, on the other hand, view the structure and cultural patterns of society as themselves sources of injustice that need to be changed. The politics and practices of redistribution and of recognition can reflect varying degrees of affirmative and/or transformative remedies to injustice.

Both affirmative and transformative efforts acknowledge that struggles for social justice reflect individual and group contexts, constrained by broader socio-cultural conditions. Some social justice approaches emphasize macro-level processes such as policymaking, and others emphasize micro-level process, such as interpersonal relations. Similarly to North (2006), I maintain that educators need to attend to and connect both

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³ Fraser (2008) later added another dimension to her model of social justice: representation, which I discuss very briefly in the conclusion (Chapter 7).
micro and macro processes to achieve social transformation goals. While social change requires the transformation of macro structures, these also operate through the micro-level of every day interactions – for example those that happen in classrooms. Below I apply the above framework to examine approaches to social justice education, before considering how these would be manifest in drama and conflict pedagogies in particular.

**Social Justice in Education**

In this section, I explore the strengths, weaknesses, relationships and tensions among distinct conceptions of social justice education. I acknowledge my own partiality to transformative conceptions social justice education influenced by critical and post-structural scholarship. I focus on micro processes, even as I argue for macro transformation. I also acknowledge the complexity of such approaches. Approaches to social justice pedagogy reviewed below provide an initial framework for teachers’ understandings and meanings students might construct from classroom and other experiences. The various ways social justice is conceptualized also frame particular understandings of social identity, of subjectivity, and of how conflict and drama are understood in classrooms.

Multiple conceptions of social justice coexist and overlap in schools. Clearly, educational research embodies multiple understandings of social justice goals and processes – theories of oppression and practices to challenge it. These theories and practices are all premised on the notion that many forms of education can contribute to (or challenge) oppression in schools and society (Centre for Anti-Oppressive Education, 2015). Below, I review the literature on conceptions of social justice in education associated with affirmative and transformative approaches.

**Affirmative Approaches: Social Justice for Equal Redistribution or/and Inclusive Recognition**

Affirmative approaches to social justice education are common practice in schools. An example of a redistributive effort would be an initiative focused on ensuring that students in the least wealthy neighbourhoods get access to dental and health care and subsidized breakfast and lunch programs. Such an approach provides services to those in need without addressing systemic injustices that create that need. “Social justice”
approaches that involve schools forging partnerships with charity organizations are not uncommon in North American schools (Jefferess, 2012; Swalwell, 2013). Applying Fraser’s (2003) argument, such affirmative redistributive approaches do not address the structural causes of economic inequality, thus poverty would persist. Charity is dependent on unequal distribution of wealth. Those experiencing poverty may be blamed or devalued for their neediness, while their poverty is the result of (unacknowledged) unjust political and economic policies. Under these conditions, the benevolent are benefitting from their benevolence, deferring their complicity with injustice while claiming to address it (Gaztambide-Fernández & Howard, 2013).

Some forms of multicultural education embody affirmative approaches to recognition. These approaches aim to recognize diversity in the curriculum, generally by adding information about, or highlighting the contributions (to dominant culture) of, marginalized groups (Banks, 2004). A related goal, embedded in some of the same educational paradigms, is to assist marginalized groups to achieve mainstream academic outcomes. These paradigms assume that cultural difference is a deficit, and is the reason for a lack of academic (and subsequently, economic) success (Gorski, 2012; Sleeter & Grant, 2006). Schools attempt to rectify this by focusing on preparing students with the skills necessary for economic mobility and success. Deficit thinking arises when expectations of a person or group’s success are lowered based on their presumed difference from dominant norms and identities.

Tolerance, a stance that predominates in North American schools (Boyle-Base, 1999), focuses on positive cross-cultural relationships and mutual acceptance. In this approach, schools may assume a universalized human experience surrounding social difference (Banks, 2004; Sleeter & Grant, 2006). Students learn about Others, and marginalized individuals and groups if present, may be invited to share information about their histories and experiences (Kumashiro, 2000). Such a human-relations approach (Sleeter & Grant, 2006) aims to build and maintain harmonious relationships and positive attitudes amongst students rather than challenge the social structural inequities or dominant cultural norms by which recognition of particular groups is conferred. Such an approach reveals a tension in social justice education between fostering care and trust amongst students in classrooms, and undertaking more critical, politically transformative
work that necessarily involves conflict. Care is central to struggles for social justice (Noddings, 1984; 1999; Parker, 2003), and is necessary for engaging students in challenging status quo assumptions. Care may challenge notions of tolerance and universalized human experiences if it is applied not only on in an interpersonal level, but in relation to broader social political structures.

Critical scholars critique affirmative approaches to education, arguing that they reflect complicity with on-going domination because they do not address the underlying causes of injustice (Boler, 1999; Kumashiro, 2000). Even when transformative social action is promoted (e.g., Banks, 2004), some such actions may manifest as charity, particularly where whiteness, privilege, and power are not critically examined (Sleeter, 1996). Affirmative recognition attempts to include Others in dominant culture, rather than overcoming misrecognition (and devaluation) in the form of stereotypes, subordination, exclusion, or invisibility. This study explores how teachers and students may employ affirmative (individualist, attitude-centred) understandings of social justice, and/or practices that move toward deeper awareness of the complexity of power relations, informed by critical and poststructural theories.

Transformative Approaches: Social Justice Education as Socio-Structural Critique or/and Action

Critical theorists argue for transformative approaches to justice that attend to the inequitable distribution of resources, ideological dominance, and injustices associated with misrecognition of difference. Marxist social analysis of the Frankfurt School inspired the critical tradition, manifested in educational theory and research published by critical scholars since the 1970s (e.g. Apple, 1971, 1979; Bernstein, 1975; Anyon, 1980). Early critical scholars of education focused on a class-based analysis of schooling and society, and called for resistance to mal-distribution related to misrecognition (Giroux, 2004; Hoy, 2004). Critical theory applied to curriculum practice is critical pedagogy, and is based on the assumption that classroom pedagogy can contribute to social transformation. Critical pedagogy seeks to engage students in interrogating their lived experiences in order to critique societal patterns and structures that cause and maintain oppression, while aiming to foster individual and collective agency to overcome such injustice (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008). Central to critical pedagogy is Freire’s
(1970) notion of conscientization – students’ and teachers’ development of critical self-consciousness through mutual dialogue that critically examines societal problems and barriers (power relationships). Beyond equal distribution of resources or the inclusion of Others’ identities within a dominant paradigm, critical dialogue revolves around attempts to recognize and change oppressive structures that contribute to injustices.

Transformative social justice education based on conscientization may include culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995) and critical approaches to multicultural education (Banks, 2004; Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997). The practice of culturally relevant pedagogy may or may not focus deeply on critical thinking and consciousness (DeLissovoy, 2010; Young, 2010). The goal of developing socio-political consciousness reflecting critique of societal norms and unjust power relationships is considered to be the component of culturally relevant pedagogy most difficult to put into practice (Young, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2011). Paris (2012), based on Ladson-Billings (1995) pivotal work on culturally relevant pedagogy as a foundation, argues for culturally sustaining pedagogy. In culturally sustaining pedagogy, multiplicities of identities and cultures that make up contemporary youth culture are incorporated into a culturally relevant approach focused on critical action against unequal power relations (see also Ladson-Billings, 2014). Attempts to modify curriculum and pedagogy to recognize cultural diversity and address inequities in education may be intertwined with critical consciousness and with developing understandings and skills for social action (Kincheloe, 1997). Ghosh and Abdi (2004) refer to such approaches as redefined multicultural education, Banks (2004) as transformative multicultural education, Westheimer and Kahne (2004) as justice-oriented citizenship education, and Nieto (2004) as critical multicultural education. Dei (2007) challenges even critical forms of multicultural and citizenship education to further foreground racism. He suggests integrative anti-racism, arguing that race and difference provide the context of power in society. Within such approaches, educators and students may examine how certain groups are Othered, how some groups are privileged, and how this marginalization and privilege is maintained by social structures (Kumashiro, 2000). Rather than fostering “passive” individual empathy (Boler, 1999), in which concern takes the form of pity directed at a distant other, transformative approaches aim to develop skills and voice to critique social
structures and to foster awareness of assumptions and biases embedded in dominant culture and social structure.

Such critical pedagogy approaches to social justice have been criticized as positivist attempts to get students to think a certain way, assumed to reflect student empowerment. Thus, post-structural theories in education provide an important layer of insight, particularly by attending to the emotion, unpredictability and uncertainty inherent in teaching and learning (Britzman, 1998; Ellsworth, 2005). Post-structural scholars take issue with the assumption that people can be ‘empowered’ to completely overcome unequal power relations, or to ignore self-interest in the name of justice (North, 2006). Post-structural scholarship theorizes intersubjective identity, foregrounding the subjectivity of relational experiences (rejecting assumptions that identity is fixed). Recognition of diverse identities, then, involves the continual formation of selves in encounters with others. Judith Butler (2003b) explains:

...we are not separate identities in the struggle for recognition, but already involved in a reciprocal exchange which dislocates us from our positions, our subject positions, and allows us to see that community itself requires the recognition that we are all in different ways, striving for recognition. (p. 91)

Thus, recognition need not freeze individuals or groups into previously constructed (essentialized) identities – instead, it may create new possibilities of “collective exchange” (Butler, 2003b, p. 91).

It is important to explore, in actual classrooms and student expressions, what socially transformative and affirmative approaches to social justice education may look and sound like, as well as tensions and relationships between critical and post-structural understandings of such education. My dissertation aims to understand, using this framework, teachers’ interpretations and practice of social justice education incorporating drama and conflict pedagogy in various subject areas, and their relationship to how various students interpret and respond to those pedagogies. Pedagogies that incorporate improvisational drama are opportunities for encounters in which intersecting identities and statuses are performed, negotiated, and (re)created. Such encounters, I argue, have the potential to interrupt oppressive assumptions and societal norms.
**Drama Pedagogy**

Drama education researchers and practitioners, building on and contributing to justifications for the arts in schools, have often argued that drama education can enhance student engagement and/or foster student agency. For instance, some education theorists suggest that drama may allow students to express their deepest emotions or provide opportunities for disengaged students to overcome various obstacles (Davis, 2005; Neelands, 2004). Other theorists argue that arts education (including drama) may facilitate transfer of learning in non-arts subjects (Burton, 2000) and facilitate cognitive processes by engaging the imagination (Eisner, 2002). Gaztambide-Fernández (2013) refers to such arguments employing the “rhetoric of effects” - an unproblematized assumption of causation (p. 216). Indeed, there is a celebratory tone to most arguments for the arts, drama included, in education. In this section, I outline a “reconstructivist” argument (Siegesmund, 1998) for drama in curriculum practice. I show how, on the surface, reconstructivist drama pedagogies dovetail with the goals of transformative social justice education. Next, I outline the tensions within drama education, which mirror the tensions between affirmative approaches to addressing misrecognition, and context-situated drama pedagogies that address more deeply the structural causes of oppression.

The goal of drama education, for reconstructivists, is social transformation: through fostering critical consciousness (Siegesmund, 1998). In a reconstructive approach, drama pedagogy can be an “interruptive” tool – a medium through which injustice can be challenged and social change achieved (Davies, 2014). Maxine Greene (1978; 1991) argues that the arts and aesthetic experiences “provide ground for the questioning that launches sense-making and the understanding of what is to exist in the world” (p. 166). While drama (and the arts in general) is not inherently liberatory (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2009), Greene provides insight into how the drama might play a role in provoking social change, partly by taking advantage of remaining in the margins of education (Greene, 1991; Neelands, 2004). Indeed, such marginality may provide a position from which to create alternative encounters with normative curriculum.

Discourses of the arts (including drama and theatre) in education, even when mobilized for social justice goals, “are constrained by particular histories of elitism and
the current dynamics of social exclusion that permeate the circumstances where discourses of the arts become relevant” (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2013, p. 224). Rather than present instrumental arguments to justify the use of drama for social justice, this dissertation analyzes the “actual interactions among actual people in shared opportunity contexts” (Pollock, quoted in Gaztambide-Fernández, 2013, p. 225). In this study, my inquiry about (and through) drama pedagogy is not about what drama does to or for young people, but about how teachers and students do drama in particular social and material contexts.

The tensions outlined above between critical pedagogy and post-structural thought, and between affirmative and transformative approaches to social justice education, are reflected in scholarship on drama and theatre education, particularly in relation to drama pedagogy. Drama pedagogy is a reconstructivist approach to drama education closely associated with applied drama (Ackroyd, 2000; Nicholson, 2005). It applies the ideas of Paulo Freire (1970), and is motivated by a desire to create positive change in the lives of Others (Neelands, 2007). Such an approach is aligned closely with identity recognition and personal transformation (empowerment) as a means to social change. In particular, the work of Augusto Boal (1985, 1995) applies critical pedagogy to drama. Boal’s Theatre of the Oppressed offers tools for fostering concientization through drama methods that provoke students to examine power relations, conflict, and social injustices, intended as a means of overcoming oppression. An important assumption underlying Boal’s theory is that what is performed dramatically reflects real life situations as well as imagined possibilities, and that individuals have the capacity to influence reality.

Boal’s work has been mobilized in various ways in drama education practice and research. Research that incorporates Theatre of the Oppressed as a method has demonstrated the complexities inherent in drama work with emancipatory intentions, and explored its usefulness not only for the analysis of political structures, but for participants’ inner explorations (McDermott, Daspit, & Dodd, 2004; Howard, 2004; Shelton & McDermitt, 2010). Some research explores student perceptions, understandings, and attitudes expressed through dramatic work. Saldaña (1999) used Boal’s Forum Theatre approach to examine adolescents’ perceptions of oppression,
working with two student groups from various high schools. One of the groups included students from lower to lower-middle class backgrounds, and one of them from upper-middle to upper class backgrounds. Conducting Forum Theatre workshops with each group, he found that students associated justice with relations among their immediate social circle of peers and with fulfillment of personal desires more than with the larger social world around them. Saldaña’s findings show that students of different social classes tended to respond differently to explorations of oppression: participants described as affluent seemed to resist any serious engagement with social issues in favour of engaging in humour, in contrast to Forum Theatre’s intent. In a subsequent study, Saldaña (2005) provides rare insight into how participating young children engaged with Theatre of the Oppressed strategies, finding that Boal’s methods revealed interpersonal, peer-based power relationships within classrooms. The above literature shows how Theatre of the Oppressed provided an opportunity for young people to perform and (re)create their identities and understandings, and to confront (and sometimes disrupt) previous assumptions. What was left unquestioned in these studies, however, were the assumed (static) binaries between oppressors and oppressed, and the tendency to remain focused on individual, affirmative (non-disruptive) ways of challenging injustice.

Boal’s work has been vigorously critiqued because of its emphasis on individual beliefs and attitudes rather than on broader structural (including economic) forces of oppression. According to O’Sullivan, “Emphasis is placed on the realization of people’s desires, needs or release from oppression (as they perceive it), within a theatrical moment” (p. 88). Neelands (2007) maintains a similar critique of Boal-inspired forms of theatre education in applied theatre. Neelands critiques applied theatre’s psychological approach to identity, which displaces attention to social injustices embedded in the misrecognition of identities and social structural (economic) mal-distribution. Such critique influences how I approach the intentionality and practice of participating teachers in this dissertation study: I was cautious about eliciting testimonials of transformative personal experiences from teacher or student participants, to avoid falling into simple models of cause and effect.

Drama practice in schools can be a vehicle for exploring concepts of control, democracy, power, engagement, and identity in relation to broader societal contexts,
instead of a mere vehicle for individual empowerment, although classroom research, by definition, cannot demonstrate whether or not such drama work leads to social change (Gallagher, 2007, 2014). My inquiry is framed by this understanding: I view drama pedagogy as providing a flexible space where identities can shift and characters can take action. At the same time, participants are restricted by the impossibility of ever fully knowing the strategies or limits of others (Gallagher, 2007). Such fluidity and uncertainty may disrupt (simplistic) binary notions of victim-villain or oppressor-oppressed that are common in Boal’s Theatre of the Oppressed and many forms of applied theatre (Cahill, 2011; Osterlind, 2008). I assume that teachers can use drama pedagogy (in various academic subjects) to create opportunities for encounters that may engage unpredictable moments of dynamic tension (conflict).

Building on Freebody and Finneran’s (2013; 2016) work, I argue that drama practice can be a vehicle for exploring complex concepts of social justice. Such potential is dependent on multiple factors, including distinct choices on the part of practitioners. Such understandings of drama pedagogy in relation to social justice education acknowledge its limitations. Drama pedagogy can elicit an imaginative leap: encounters between what participants previously knew and what might be newly, imaginatively known (Gallagher, 2016). The temporary nature of drama encounters means that such pedagogy cannot be invariant (transferable or predictable) across contexts (ibid.). Drama pedagogy, then, creates temporary spaces that can elicit expansive imagination of social justice that might be possible.

As a teacher practitioner with aspirations for encouraging teacher and student activism, I bring to this research a strong belief in the power of conflictual encounters in drama pedagogy to spark young people’s desire and capacity to engage in social action. Drama encounters can be sites of (counter-) cultural exploration, where encounters may transgress some neoliberal pressures of normative curriculum, and standardized expectations (Neelands, 2004). However, as Gaztambide-Fernández cautions, “Engaging in cultural practices of various kinds can result in experiences that are usually not simply positive or negative, diminishing or exalting, but are complex, open to interpretation, and always irremediably particular” (2013, p. 225). This study analyzes how particular learning interactions (as temporary, relational spaces) happen within broader social
contexts and structures. Drama pedagogy as social justice education opens the possibility for encounters that may serve as a starting point from which to encourage and engage unpredictable moments of tension (conflict). It is not a tool for any guaranteed or clear liberatory social change.

**Generative/Agonistic Conflict**

To live is to live politically, in relation to power, in relation to others, in the act of assuming responsibility for a collective future. To assume responsibility for the future is not to know its direction fully in advance, since the future, especially the future with and for others, requires a certain openness and unknowingness. And it also implies that a certain agonism and contestation will and must be in play. It must be in play for politics to become democratic. Democracy does not speak in unison; its tunes are dissonant, and necessarily so. (Butler, 2003a, p. 27)

Agonism and constructive contestation are potentially positive qualities of political conflict. Socially transformative social justice education goals demand social and political change. Change provokes and emerges from uncertainty and conflict (Bickmore, 2008). Conflict means opposing interests, disagreement, or struggle for power and scarce resources (Davies, 2004). While conflict can be defined in various ways, it is not necessarily negative, destructive, or associated with violence, but is an inherent component of struggles for transformative justice. Conflict theorists and critical theorists (e.g., Apple, 1979, 2004; Bickmore, 2014a; Davies, 2004; Lederach, 2004) describe the constructive potential of conflict in learning and conscientization regarding social structures. Channels and processes for dialogue, negotiation, participation, and dissent are key ingredients that may allow for conflict to play a constructive role in democracy and social justice learning (Bickmore, 2007; 2008b). Improvised dramatic encounters are processes that may create such channels for dialogue, negotiation, and participation (O’Toole et al., 2004), and thereby for interruption of status quo assumptions and relationships. Conflict, therefore, is potentially generative in curriculum: it may disrupt the assumed dominance of certain perspectives. It is a means of acknowledging and engaging differences in perspectives, interests, needs, identities and experiences to create meaning, however uncertain for those engaged.

Curriculum mandates in various Canadian provinces tend to avoid conflict and to discourage critical disruption, to varying degrees (Bickmore, 2014a; 2014b). Curriculum
that ignores existing conflicts, or presents them as negative, helps to maintain current societal power relations, and views students as mere “recipients of values and institutions”, not as creators or re-creators of meaning and structures (Apple, 2004 p. 80). Thus, there is pedagogical value in curriculum that acknowledges and engages with conflict, as a means of demonstrating alternatives and thereby enabling students to see and challenge complex and repressive power dynamics. Conflict in curriculum has the potential to create new situations that may challenge assumptions. In North American classrooms, however, pedagogies that explicitly engage conflict to provoke dialogue and learning are infrequent (Kahne & Middaugh, 2008).

Where conflict is explicitly mobilized as pedagogy, the focus is often on dialogue, discussion and deliberation approaches (Bickmore, 2014; Hess, 2009; Johnson & Johnson, 2009). When drama pedagogies, specifically, have been used to address conflict, the focus has often been on conflict resolution and reducing bullying or other violence (Belliveau, 2006; O’Toole & Burton, 2006; Sternberg, 1998). However, there is much potential for the creative, dramatic exploration of social as well as interpersonal conflict. Rather than emphasize resolution of conflict, for instance, teachers might engage students in dramatic explorations that challenge notions of sameness (Gallagher, 2007). Moreover, drama pedagogies can open up possibilities for what Davies (2014) refers to as turbulence – a productive force perturbation that can spark creativity and can challenge injustice. Examining how teachers invite conflict, and how students respond to such invitations, can provide insight into how understandings and practices of social justice in education can be broadened and challenged.

For conflict in curriculum to generate expression and exchange of multiple and dissenting perspectives, democratic pedagogical structures are required (Bickmore, 2014a; Davies, 2004). Democracy involves constructive conflict: “New forms of encounters and the conflicts they inevitably entail are the raw materials that democracy needs to keep itself in the making” (Ellsworth, 2005p. 84). Good pedagogy involves conflict – it is a way to materialize the “space of difference between self and other” (Ellsworth, 2005, p. 85). Such pedagogy is uncertain and unpredictable, and involves facilitating risks. The improvised dramatic encounter is an example of pedagogy that facilitates experiential risks to see what meaning can be created. Conflict, moreover, can
offer “productive irritation” (Benjamin, cited in Ellsworth, 2005, p. 89), which may provoke a reconfiguration of how learners view Others in relation to themselves. Thus, multiple selves are constantly being formed through interactions and struggles in relation to others. Experiences in the world, and in schools and classrooms, involve the risk of irritation and conflict, which may be productively used in pedagogy. Such experiences, in the form of dramatic encounters and ensuing dialogue (in classrooms), open up unpredictable possibilities for the creation of new forms of the self located in social contexts.

Building on Britzman’s (1991) conception of the tensions between received knowledge and lived experience in the ways students and teachers mediate knowledge, this study explores such moments of contradiction between students and teachers, and amongst students, in classrooms. The work of Ellsworth (2005), Todd (2008, 2009) and Mouffe (2000, 2005) facilitate analysis of examples of contradiction in pluralistic contexts. These scholars’ theories of education with social justice goals reject rational conceptions of deliberation for universalized justice aimed at consensus. Instead, highlighting the dissonance between teacher intention and student response using drama as pedagogy and as a mode of inquiry reveals the potentially interruptive, conflictual, unpredictable, and rich possibilities of teaching for social justice.

My analysis of pedagogical instances in this dissertation will be informed by Mouffe’s (2000, 2005) notion of “agonistic conflict” (applied to education, see also Todd, 2009, 2010; Ruitenberg, 2009). This theory is an alternative to deliberative democratic approaches inspired by Habermas (1996), which involve intentional communication of divergent perspectives (dialogue), rationally shared, defended, and analyzed in order to create agreement on how to address issues. Post-structuralists, including Todd (2009, 2010), Ellsworth (1997, 2005), and Lather (1998) critique such rationalist approaches, rejecting their assumption of a common, normative communication standard, over-valuation of consensus, and neglect of passion and emotion. Antagonistic conflict is raw and sometimes violent, and is associated with moral norms of right and wrong. Agonistic conflict, on the other hand, can be channeled into the “vibrant clash of political positions” (Mouffe, 2000, p. 16) in which participants are (constructive) political adversaries rather than (destructive) moral opponents. Conflict is as unavoidable, and can be channeled in
productive, educative ways.

**The Dramatic Encounter – Student Agency and Engagement Within Social Justice, Drama Pedagogy and Conflict**

Tensions exist between social justice goals of redistribution and of recognition, and between affirmative and transformative approaches to achieving those goals. Transformative initiatives for social justice education have often manifested in the form of critical pedagogy. Post-structural scholars question the positivist assumptions often embedded within critical pedagogy. While I have a deep affinity for critical pedagogy, post-structural theory frames my understandings of drama pedagogy and conflict pedagogy as generative within social justice education contexts. I refer to the intersection of drama and conflict pedagogies as dramatic encounters. As in Kershaw’s (2001) concept of “edge phenomenon” – where one ecosystem rubs up against another to create “especially dynamic life forms and processes” (p. 136) – interrelations and exchanges amongst young people and teachers within classrooms have the potential to become dynamic dramatic encounters in which meaning is made. In this dissertation, I view dramatic encounters as meaning making opportunities, and apply two key connected ideas – agency and engagement – to frame how dramatic encounters may operate in social justice education contexts.

As mentioned above, while drama pedagogy is based on the idea that change through art is possible, possibilities of emancipation through such work are limited. Drama pedagogy may provoke questions about who is being emancipated, by whom, and for what goals. Much emancipatory work associated with critical pedagogy, like some drama pedagogy, endeavours to illuminate and critique hidden oppressive conditions and inequitable power relations. Perhaps teachers and students in pedagogical relation can produce meaning through “inhabiting a problem rather than analyzing it” (Rogoff, 2006, p.1). Students are embodied beings living out the very things they aim to (or teachers ask them to) analyze. Rather than finding an answer, the point of embodied criticality in drama pedagogy is to “access a different form of inhabitation…a ‘living things out’ (Rogoff, 2006, p. 2). In other words, teaching for social justice with conflictual (agonistic) drama pedagogy creates spaces for students to live out their experiences and understandings, through drama expressing divergent understandings. Embodied criticality
in drama pedagogy is a way for teachers to support students in making meaning, and in exploring how meanings of social justice, difference, and conflict are created, negotiated, and conveyed. In his theory of relational aesthetics, Bourriaud (1998) argues for the intersubjective potential of art to create dialogue and “inter-human negotiation” (p. 41). Since drama is relational, encounters are collective opportunities for the elaboration of meaning – potential provocations for (agonistic) dialogue. Dramatic pedagogical encounters and connected moments of dialogue are events in which students inhabit/embody situations. Teachers can employ relational techniques within a dramatic event and the interactions that surround it to produce unknown, new realities.

Based on my review of the literature in social justice, drama and conflict pedagogies, I highlight two key elements of dramatic encounters in pedagogy – agency and engagement. Together, these concepts form a foundation for my analysis of social justice education, drama pedagogy, and generative (agonistic) conflict pedagogy from critical and post-structural perspectives. Based on post-structural theory, I view agency as the capacity to both maintain and disrupt norms and identity as fluid and intersubjective, not fixed or pre-defined. Agency can involve disrupting (or reinforcing) essentialized notions of identity. I argue that understandings of student engagement require an exploration of how power circulates within classrooms (and beyond), challenging the teacher-student binary that often frames views of (dis)engagement. Dramatic encounters reflect the intersection of drama pedagogy and generative conflict in social justice education contexts: agency and engagement are enacted and understood in divergent ways by individuals taking part in those encounters.
**Student Agency**

Scholarship in education tends to theorize agency as something students have – an attribute enabled by teachers. For critical pedagogues, individuals are purposeful agents who can critically deliberate what kind of change they consider necessary for society. Critical pedagogy theories argue that curriculum practice should move beyond recognizing symptoms or merely learning about injustices, toward action to transform society (Freire, 1970; Giroux, 2006; McLaren, 2003). Critical pedagogues engage students in sharing and analyzing their lived experiences (connecting to one another and to the curriculum content) in order to recognize and critique socio-cultural oppression. They aim to foster individual and collective agency to overcome such oppression (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008). Critical dialogue attempts to examine, deliberate, and facilitate change of oppressive structures that contribute to injustices. The concept of praxis (Freire, 1970) – in which teachers and students engage in cycles of reflection and action with the goal of transformation – is key to how agency is understood in critical pedagogy. Specifically, praxis in critical pedagogy includes: focusing on teacher and student understandings of the historical, sociological, political, and cultural contexts of inequity (learning about injustices and their roots); questioning received knowledge for conscientization; overtly challenging injustice through action; and reflecting to inform future action.
Approaches to social action education that do not critique power structures could inadvertently perpetuate injustices. For example, Westheimer and Kahne’s showed that a curriculum that used an apparently critical, justice-oriented approach did not necessarily lead to real-life social action. Similarly, another educational initiative that focused on facilitating student action did not necessarily involve or inform critical analysis of the root causes of oppression, as it emphasized participation within established systems and community structures (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004). Such research reflects the complexity of curriculum to address (in)justices. It shows how justice-based intentions and individual agency may unintentionally result in injustice.

Other curriculum studies have engaged young people in action research in schools, to foster praxis among marginalized youth in urban community contexts (e.g., Ginwright & Cammarota, 2002; Cammarota, 2007; Torre & Fine, 2006; Guerrero et al., 2013). Schultz (2008) describes how he and his elementary school students co-developed social justice curriculum with the goal of transforming their own situations. Shultz’s social action education project with his fifth-grade students in a marginalized community in Chicago to addressed the inadequacies of their school building. By engaging in the project, students learned activist skills while meeting state academic achievement standards. Such initiatives create occasions for students and educators to demonstrate and develop agency by engaging in purposeful inquiry learning and action. They address issues in the lives of students – particularly those of marginalized young people in urban contexts. This dissertation study builds upon such research by examining social justice education and student agency in three contrasting urban classroom contexts, one of them marginalized.

The critical scholarship described above frames agency as resistance – viewing pedagogies as (sometimes) encouraging student agency in the form of resistance against oppressive structures. Resistance challenges passive standards of behaviour (Hoy, 2004). According to some critical theorists (e.g., Giroux, 2001), resistance can take the form of political and moral indignation and is one form of individual and social action for transformation. Critical frameworks that view agency as resistance assume that agency, in the form of resistance or opposition, happens in response to oppression (Sonu, 2009a).
For critical pedagogues, then, power is directional – from authority to subject, from teacher to student – unless challenged as an act of resistance.

A post-structural view of agency conceives of power as fluid – as coursing through everyday life through the discourses of multiple ideologies (Foucault, 1977). Every action and event, therefore, is an exchange in power. Power can be productive and does not necessarily always take the form of domination. It flows in circular relation, even as it is concentrated amongst some dominant groups and institutions in society. Such a view does not mean that resistance is impossible, but that agency (as a form of power) can both resist and re-inscribe dominant discourses in society (Hoy, 2004; Foucault, 1977).

Butler (1995) applies such a conception of power and resistance to the relationships amongst agency, identity and subjectivity. Subjectivity of experiences is a reflection of the social conditions from which they emerge. Identity is performative – a “repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being” (ibid, p. 25). Norms – the “rigid regulatory frame” (p. 33) - are “cited” in discourse or identity performances. A subject’s agency is constrained (though not completely pre-determined) by social conditions (Butler, 1997). Agentic subjects can disrupt chains of citation that maintain norms by revealing and changing, or reiterating, those citations in subversive ways. According to Butler, “To intervene in the name of transformation means precisely to disrupt what has become settled knowledge and knowable reality” (2004, p. 278). Refashioning of such settled knowledge and presumed universal realities is a form of agency. Thus, young people’s agency can both reinforce and disrupt dominant, stereotypical and oppressive misrecognition of marginalized individuals and communities.

Some drama education scholars, particularly in the area of applied theatre, argue that dramatic processes are ideal sites for agency development in young people. (e.g., Aitken, Fraser, and Price, 2000; Conrad, 2005). Within the context of classrooms, agency is often framed as individual power and capability, fostered by teachers. Some drama education scholars (among others) have challenged such individual notions of agency. Building upon a post-structural tradition, these scholars maintain that individuals express
agency intersubjectively in relation to others and to previous experiences (Cahill, 2012; Munday et al, 2016; Wright, 2011). According to Munday and her colleagues, “Agency is both a process and a state – it incorporates personal, social, and collective knowledge and action” (2016, p. 78). Thus, post-structural theory suggests that it is not sufficient for pedagogies to enable the rehearsal of resistance, but that they should question assumptions to “activate the fashioning of new possibilities” (Cahill, 2012, p. 410).

In this study, I build on earlier critical pedagogy work by addressing complex notions of student identity and agency as examples of reinforcement or disruptions of norms. Situating agency within classroom (dramatic) encounters in which student agency was enacted or foreclosed, I argue that agency can (but often does not) enable the rupture (interruption) of structural norms and a construction of new meanings. Students decide how to engage (or not) with the norms created in classrooms. The next section of this chapter builds on this discussion by examining scholarship on the ways students may choose to (dis)engage in classrooms. I consider understandings of (dis)engagement and the possibility for students to enact agency through their participation in dramatic encounters.

**Student Engagement**

Some scholars have called for academic research to better define how students may engage in learning (e.g., Harris, 2008; Taylor & Parsons, 2011). Recent work on student engagement focuses on what schools could do to fit the learning needs of students, rather than on moulding students to engage with schooling (Taylor & Parsons, 2011). However, establishing set criteria for student engagement or disengagement may ignore or impede students’ intersubjective experiences. That is, teachers or scholars may overlook modes of students’ engagement that may challenge their pedagogical intentions – identifying certain behaviours as disengagement, rather than as engaging differently from expectations.

Student engagement comprises both observable behaviours and “unobservable psychological events” (Shernoff, 2013, p. 47). In other words, engagement involves not only visible behaviours, but also intangible emotions, desires, and motivations. Teachers generally see engagement as positive, and associate it with what they would like ‘good’
students to do (Shernoff, 2013). Some scholars characterize student engagement as dynamic and multidimensional, including factors beyond school such as home and community contexts (Fredricks, Blumefeld & Paris, 2004; Furlong & Christenson, 2008; Wentzel, 1998). Gallagher’s research finds that external conditions, alongside in-school factors, affect the quality of engagement inside drama classrooms. Gallagher (2014) observes that, “…engagement is earned moment by moment in a classroom, is contingent upon the social relations in the room and historical ones that precede them, and is enhanced or diminished by teacher and student actions” (p. 132). Thus, engagement is continually negotiated between teachers and students in relation to multiple contextual factors.

Research on student engagement typically has associated it with emotional and/or cognitive investment, care, commitment, and effort behaviours. Disengagement is generally associated with the opposite - what teachers believe students should not be doing. Student behaviours viewed as characterizing “engagement” may at times represent passive compliance to the teacher’s authority, not necessarily an authentic investment in and commitment to the learning opportunity (Shernoff, 2013). Extending Shernoff’s analysis: behaviours that teachers view as characterizing disengagement actually may represent different forms of engagement, meaning different from the responses the teacher expects or hopes for. Gallagher (2014) shows how students may use apparent disengagement strategically and intentionally, for instance as a defense mechanism, when personal understandings or experiences are probed. She argues that students sometimes “perform” disengagement through disruption, and that such disengagement can be productive (p. 123). Students’ behaviours apparently reflecting disengagement may represent pedagogical possibilities for reshaping curriculum with social justice goals. Building on this prior work, my study described below will probe instances of apparent student disengagement as potentially reflecting alternate (agentic) student responses to and participation in social justice oriented drama pedagogies that involve conflict.

Based on the notion of the dramatic encounter, my inquiry interrogates traditional conceptions of disengagement – to consider how particular observed students engaged, responded to, and altered teachers’ pedagogical intentions. In the non-drama specialized classrooms I studied, these interactions happened within a context of particular teacher
student relations that include institutional demands on teachers to cover large amounts of mandated curriculum content. Such demands would tend to reinforce particular (explicit and implicit) behavioural norms within a context of power relations (Foucault, 1980). Teachers attempt to enact power over students in an effort to successfully fulfill the institutional demands placed on them. Particular engagement behaviours thereby become regulatory mechanisms of constraint, which teachers and students play into or resist (Cahill, 2012). Even when social justice teachers aim to facilitate the interrogation of power relations, they generally desire student behaviours that they understand as (welcome forms of) engagement, such as collaboration and relevant vocal participation. Ways in which various students engage with social justice and drama pedagogies can illustrate how power circulates within the classroom and does not reside statically in any one person or group (Foucault, 1980). How students decide to (dis)engage with the norms created in classrooms is an important component of their agency in the dramatic encounters studied in this dissertation.

Conclusion

In this dissertation, critical theories influence my understandings of teachers and students’ conceptual positions and aims, while post-structural theories inform my understandings of identities as intersubjective and relational. By considering critical and post-structural tensions within social justice education, drama pedagogies, and generative (agonistic) conflict pedagogies, my analysis is designed to provide insight into how three different teachers understood social justice education through drama pedagogy, and how their various students made meaning of social justice issues, both during classroom lessons and improvised drama sessions that I facilitated. The intersections of social justice education, drama pedagogy, and generative (agonistic) conflict are what I call dramatic encounters. Curriculum engages students in making meaning of the world around them and in learning about themselves. My study is premised on the idea that curriculum cannot and should not function separately from politics and culture (Huebner, 1976; Pinar, 1988). Curricula are not merely structured plans with predictable outcomes (as in Tyler, 1949), nor are they strictly content and instructional strategies (Schwab, 1970). The analysis of social justice education, conflict, and drama pedagogy practices in classroom contexts connects school and society and is based on the assumption that
My conceptual framework acknowledges the significance of students’ previous experiences, as well as their encounters in schools, as moments of knowledge (re-)creation. Learning involves the relationships between teachers and students, and among students, embedded in place and time. Individuals are simultaneously shaped by, and shape such relational environments. My examination of how three elementary school teachers’ expressed and demonstrated their conceptions of social justice, as well as how students in the contrasting classrooms engaged with these teachers’ pedagogies, is influenced by such considerations. Drama pedagogy in which generative conflict is elicited offers a particular opportunity for students to construct and communicate their understandings. It is also an opportunity to explore the spaces of difference between what they know and what they are coming to know, as well as the space of difference between themselves and others. Exploration of these spaces through dramatic encounters with conflict allows students’ relational identities to emerge and come into play in how they make and communicate meanings and ideas related to social justice. My use of improvised drama methods as an inquiry tool assumes that students form conceptions and respond in varied ways to social justice education based on the fluidity of knowledge creation – influenced by, but not determined by, previous experiences embedded in (unequal) social structures. Any improvised dramatic encounter involves uncertainty and the creative emergence of social expression and learning. Thus, curriculum (and inquiry) unfolds with every learning event. This study is designed to show how three teachers fostered such curriculum for social justice, using drama, how students with diverse socially constructed identities and intersubjective experiences responded to such curriculum and pedagogies, and how drama could be used as an inquiry tool to understand students’ conceptions and engagement with social justice (education).
Chapter 3: Research Methodology

This study is an examination of social justice education (practices and perceptions) through drama and conflict pedagogies in contrasting Grades 4 to 8 classrooms of diverse students. My purpose is to examine variations in and among three classrooms, each with contrasting populations, to understand how the selected teachers applied their conceptions of social justice education through drama pedagogies in the context of various subject areas, their classroom, and how they used (and avoided) conflict in their pedagogies and content. I also examined how students in these classrooms experienced and interpreted their teachers’ pedagogies, both in classroom lessons taught by participating teachers, and within improvised drama sessions that I facilitated with subgroups of students from each class. Building on the tensions between critical and post-structural understandings of social justice education, drama pedagogy, and conflict, my research examines how the participating teachers used drama to teach for social justice, and how students responded to such teaching.

I chose qualitative and drama methodologies, to generate data rich in detail both embedded in each of the classroom contexts explored and centred in the arts-based activities of selected students from each classroom. Alongside participant observation of classroom lessons and semi-structured interviews with teacher participants, I used drama as a mode of inquiry to explore some of the diverse elementary school students’ responses to social justice-based drama pedagogies, and their conceptions of social justice. Research literature reviewed in Chapter 2 used qualitative methods to study how social justice education manifested and its implications in different contexts, and how drama pedagogies and/or conflict intersected with social justice education. My study adds to this body of research on social justice education, drama education, and conflict pedagogies by examining how selected elementary school teachers’ social justice education approaches (using drama and conflict) facilitated or impeded students’ participation in those pedagogies. I compared practices within and amongst three different classrooms in the same school district to respond to the following research questions:
• How do selected elementary school teachers committed to social justice education demonstrate their conceptions of social justice through drama pedagogy, embedded in various subject areas?

• How do these teachers use drama pedagogy to frame questions, elicit, and facilitate conflict for social justice education?

• How do students, in and selected from contrasting classrooms, participate in drama pedagogies for social justice?

• How can improvised drama methods be used as an inquiry tool to understand students’ identity-linked conceptions and responses to social justice (in education)?

In this chapter, I provide a justification for qualitative observations and interviews, and for an arts-based drama inquiry approach in which I conducted improvised drama sessions with small groups of students to learn about their conceptions of social justice as well as their responses to their teachers’ social justice education practices. I describe each component of my methodology below.

A Qualitative, Arts-Based Approach

This research relied on qualitative data gathering tools: participant-observation in the three teachers’ classrooms, semi-structured interviews with the teachers, and arts-based drama methods (improvised drama sessions) that I facilitated with sub-groups of students from each classroom. In addition, I kept a personal journal, and collected some teacher-created materials and (anonymized) student work as supplementary data to further make sense of the information gathered using participant-observation, semi-structured interviews and drama methods. My aim was to maintain an emic approach to the study (Cohen et al., 2011): to capture situations, events, and encounters in order to explore the complexities of students’ understandings and engagement.

My study uses multiple methods as an innovative way to make sense of non-arts subject matter. Barone (2001) maintains that the arts-based researcher must “scrutinize the world, [and] attend with ferocity to the details of life in education settings” (p. 25). My hope is that qualitative methods based on the arts address the role of the arts in generating and maintaining oppressions (historically and at present). My study methodology does not use artistic representations of research findings, such as performed
ethnography (e.g., Denzin, 2003; Goldstein, 2008), ethnodrama (Saldaña, 2008) or readers’ theatre (Donmoyer & Yennie-Donmoyer, 1995). Instead, I used improvised drama workshops as a cultural practice in order to engage student participants in an “active participation of doing and meaning making” (Springgay, Irwin, & Kind, 2005, p. 898). Improvised dramatic scene building and process drama were used to generate data. This data included observations of students’ interactions as they created scenes, as well as the dramatic performances and out-of-role discussions about the dramas they created and performed. Such dramatic inquiry data allowed me to engage with selected students in interpreting social justice and these students’ responses to their teachers’ classroom pedagogies.

Process drama has grown out of the work of Dorothy Heathcote, Gavin Bolton, Cecily O’Neill and others who aimed to activate learners’ imaginations by using drama structures that include the teacher and students working in and out of role. According to O’Neil (1995), process drama opens up classroom spaces for teachers to de-centre themselves by participating in the drama with their students. It also has, as O’Toole (2009) maintains, the potential to suspend, alter, and renegotiate structures of status and power that underlie curriculum in schools. According to O’Toole (2009), process drama includes two key characteristics. First, all students in process drama are involved all the time within dramatic action, and are never a passive audience. Second, participants are given freedom to interpret roles, and are invited to take the lead in planning the drama, even as teachers or facilitators usually create the overall structure. Reflection and discussion are usually built within the action through discussion or writing. For O’Toole, the purpose of process drama is “never just to enact, but to problematize, and to make the students ask questions and interrogate the learning context” (p. 106). By using drama pedagogy influenced by process drama in my facilitation of improvised drama sessions with students, I hoped to create opportunities for students to respond to and ask questions of issues and concepts associated with social justice. The focus of this inquiry is on the moments of interaction and meaning-making in improvised dramatic encounters (including associated dialogue) that I observed in various subject areas in elementary classrooms, and that I facilitated myself in what I term “improvised drama sessions”, described below.
There is precedent for my research method in some drama education research that focuses on drama pedagogy as itself an inquiry process. Beare (2009) uses the notion of living inquiry to explore a play-creating process with secondary students. Conrad (2002), while using ethnographic performance texts as a way to represent her data, calls her work a reflective case study that uses drama as a means of eliciting student understandings toward the media. Shelton and McDermott (2010) combine an examination of literature with drama, mobilizing Theatre of the Oppressed methods to dramatically engage pre-service teachers in examining their own perceptions of justice-based issues. These scholars do not use the language of process drama explicitly, but do provide examples of how the process of drama has been used to elicit student understandings. Winston’s (1998) use of fables with young elementary age children to explore moral issues provides a more explicit example of research that uses process drama. Edmiston’s (2014) work also employs process drama on historical events to work through issues that arise. Importantly for my study, Edmiston (2000; 2014) focuses on the dialogic potential of drama, arguing that people can extend their learning dramatically through ongoing dialogue. In what he terms “dramatic dialogic inquiry, or dramatic inquiry”, learners collaboratively explore and make meaning of real and imagined worlds (p. 41) through the interplay of drama and dialogue. Such work provides insights into how educators may be researchers, how researchers may be facilitators of dramatic encounters, and how drama may be used as an inquiry tool. This scholarship suggests how drama may be used to find out how diverse students interpret social justice. Using drama as an inquiry method also provides another source of insight into how selected students respond to and understand social justice and drama pedagogies.

Similarly, Fels uses the term performative inquiry to frame curriculum as a site of learning: the researcher or educator engages student-participants in dramatic explorations as a way of exploring student understandings (2004). Drama pedagogy methods, used in the improvised drama sessions I facilitated, are examples of performative inquiry (Fels, 2004; Fels & Belliveau, 2008). Such a method is integral to my study because it facilitates moving student participants beyond (interview) discussion and toward enacting using their bodies. As such, “the fictional, active, and even unconscious world of the drama elicits understandings and utterances that would otherwise be inaccessible”


(Gallagher, 2007, p. 128). *Drama as method* (Gallagher, 2007; Gallagher & Lortie, 2007; Gallagher, 2008) incorporates drama pedagogy as a means of eliciting such understanding, while also sparking the creation of meaning in the moment of the dramatic encounter. Acknowledging the need to be cautious of creating rules of conduct to encourage participation that simply produce a performance and adherence to a set of norms, Gallagher (2008; 2009) describes pedagogically-informed research in which she is concerned with creating shared contexts with students and opportunities to reflect together. As part of her method, she devised an improvisation activity related to a key theme drawn from the analysis of her ethnographic data, which she used to engage with student-participants. This created a shared context that influenced future interviews, conversations, and interactions.

I drew on such drama inquiry methodologies to devise improvised drama sessions as part of my methods. I planned that these sessions, which I devised based on my research questions and classroom observation and teacher interview data, would embody drama as a research act (Norris, 2000) to understand students’ identity-linked conceptions, and responses to social justice (education). I also provided student-participants with opportunities to debrief and reflect, to invite them to articulate, embody, and enact what they thought, felt, and understood. The opportunity to debrief and reflect on the improvisational encounters provided a further means for participants to articulate choices, motivations, and understandings of what they enacted and why. Such conceptions of drama as a research act also inform my analysis of the pedagogies and student engagement I observed in classrooms.

My methodological decision to devise improvisational encounters was based on my application of both post-structural and critical pedagogy theories, considering their often-divergent connections to drama education. Similarly to Cahill’s (2011) mobilization of post-structural theory to devise and analyze instances of drama pedagogy, I have applied post-structural understandings of intersubjective, socially constructed identity embedded in power structures to my pedagogical inquiry. Foucault (1980) maintains, as power circulates, individuals are “the vehicles of power, not its point of application” (p. 98). Thus, I sought to create dramatic opportunities for student participants (and myself) to
convey understandings and perceptions of social justice, and to consider how those understandings came to be and how they shaped their imaginations and behaviours.

My affinity for critical pedagogy and related forms of drama work associated with Boal came from my professional experiences as a teacher with the concrete consequences of oppressive structures. Drama is a way to spark interactions that could invites students to imagine the world differently, in reference to actual experiences. Freebody and Finneran (2013) explicitly describe their work as drama for and about social justice. Drama for social justice refers to work that is practical and has emancipatory intent. Drama about social justice explores issues of social justice in order to broaden awareness of socio-cultural issues and develop a deeper understanding of how young people view social issues and their impact on their lives.

As articulated by Henry, “The structures of qualitative research and of dramas take innovative forms in which means and ends, thought and action, intertwine in an unpremeditated, improvisational fashion” (cited in Gallagher, 2007, p. 75). The uncertainty, unpredictability, and possibility of conflict in the dramatic encounter make it a site of meaning making – beyond the meaning that could be gleaned from only interviews and observations of dialogue. This method brings together conceptions of social justice education, drama education, and generative (agonistic) conflict. It is focused on theatre not as a form, but as a process of improvisational encounters and expressions contextualized in particular spaces and times. Methodologically, improvisational dramatic encounters and the bodies involved were part of the text and the data for this dissertation

**My Role as Researcher**

My role as researcher required that I be ontologically aware (Kincheloe, 2006): thus I reflected self-critically on how dominant cultural perspectives had shaped my identity affiliations, and how my position as researcher could inadvertently perpetuate the very injustices my research tried to address (Lather, 1991; Tuhiwai Smith, 1999). My research addresses the relationship between teacher pedagogy for social justice and students’ experiences of it. This research goal is based on my experiences as a social justice educator committed to socio-culturally critical, action-oriented (transformative) approaches to social justice, and to using drama as a means of engaging students in social
justice issues, across the curriculum. I am particularly concerned with how social justice education manifests itself in contrasting classroom contexts, particularly where students’ identities may differ from the teacher and from each other in terms of class, race, and ethnicity. I am also concerned with how students in each context respond to their teacher’s pedagogical and content decisions.

Such concerns are based on my experiences of teaching social justice in various contexts: in an elementary school with a heterogeneous population with respect to class, race, and ethnicity; an alternative elementary school with a mostly white, middle to upper class student population; and an elementary school with mostly racially marginalized students in low income contexts. In each school, I revisited my understandings of social justice education, and how I approached and practiced it in the classroom in relation to my overall context, and particularly my students. Thus, my research is deeply embedded in my experiences as a teacher practitioner.

Looking back, my attempts to revisit my understandings of social justice in relation to the students I was teaching was an attempt to reflect on my power in relation to my students – to question the role of my privilege in my understanding and communication of social justice processes and goals. While my personal experiences of difference in ethnicity, socio-economic status, and gender expression as a young person shape my goals as a practitioner and researcher, my whiteness, maleness, current middle class experience, and identification as straight and cisgender afford me privileges in a society where these identities are deemed dominant.

At the beginning of this study, and as I write this dissertation, I am aware that my privileges are reflected in particular biases that have contributed to decisions I may or may not have consciously made in the research process, and in my decisions regarding what to include and omit in the writing of this thesis. I attempted to engage in constant reflexivity in my role as a researcher, being a position of power in relation to student-participants, whose experiences were very different from my own. I tried to be aware of how my social positioning and bias affected my interpretation of data and representation of participants, particularly being mindful not to perpetuate the oppression that some of my participants might have experienced in their schooling. For example, I have attempted not to judge particular participants’ or communities’ commitments to social justice in my
interpretation of the data. To address this risk, I represent both the researcher’s and research participants’ voices and perspectives in the findings of the study (Milner, 2007). For example, I interviewed teacher participants after my classroom observations. Student participants (especially in the small group improvised drama sessions I facilitated) had opportunities to debrief their dramatic action and interactions, and the video that I took of their drama work and dialogue. My research design brought me closer to learning with, rather than strictly learning from, or imposing theory on, research participants (Lather, 1991). That is, I did not position participants as targets of research, but as co-constructors of meaning and knowledge. I conducted research in an interactive manner. For example, I dialogued with teachers about social justice education practice throughout the observation periods in their classrooms, and asked students to respond and debrief their own dramatic work by showing them video recordings of their dramatic performances. These opportunities informed my analysis of the data, and often supplemented and challenged my own initial analyses of events.

**Overview of Study Participants and Research Sites**

**School Sites**

In my study, I examine social justice education using drama pedagogy (embedded in non-drama subject areas) in three different (Grades 4 to 8) classrooms in an urban public school board. Because of my particular interest in the responses of students to social justice education and drama in different socio-economic and demographic contexts, I situate my study in a large metropolitan area in Southern Ontario. This school district has a comprehensive equity policy and a social justice action plan, both of which articulate goals and commitments for students’ learning of social justice.

The board’s policy clearly addresses anti-racism and ethnocultural equity, anti-sexism and gender equity, anti-homophobia, sexual orientation and equity, anti-classism and socio-economic equity, and equity for persons with disabilities. It conceptualizes social justice as inclusive recognition in curriculum, and also with respect to hiring processes, programs outside of individual classrooms, and operations. The policy embraces strategies that address systems of oppression in schools by naming specific
forms of misrecognition connected to a broad issues of inequitable distribution of resources.

The board’s social justice action plan reflects mostly affirmative approaches to addressing distributive justice goals. Thus, it promotes charity, to address unequal distribution of resources: “social justice” actions are viewed as forms of “giving back” to Others based on the privileges of those doing the giving (School Board, 2009). Social justice is defined in the plan as “a specific habit…that is based on concepts of human rights, equity, fairness, and economic egalitarianism” (p. 3). The document was influenced by strong connections between the board and the charity Free the Children and its partner social enterprise, Me to We, which has been criticized for its commodification of service work, social justice, and global citizenship (e.g., Jefferess, 2012). Indeed, the school board’s action plan focuses heavily on encouraging local and global “responsibility” in the form of charity, service and volunteerism, and participation in “social justice” learning activities, including Me to We clubs in schools. It includes solely affirmative approaches to issues of redistribution on a global level, with little concern for addressing the structural causes of poverty. It promotes consumption of a brand of volunteerism that reflects a “manifestation of benevolence” (Jefferess, 2012, p. 19), in which Others usually far away from North America are viewed as constantly in need, objects of pity, and usually the victims of misfortune.

I selected as a research site a school board with system-wide support for equity and social justice initiatives because I hoped my research could interrogate and contribute to ongoing efforts to challenge systemic injustice, and enhance educational opportunities for all students in this and other school boards.

I conducted fieldwork during 2012 and 2013, after university ethics approval in January 2012 and school board ethics approval in March 2012. I began by contacting teachers with whom I had come into contact in my role as an instructional leader with the same school board. In my application, I identified criteria for selecting schools including key differences in demographic makeup (race, ethnicity, home language), family income, and overall degree of external challenges that could affect student achievement (e.g., parent education).
Teachers

I purposively selected teachers who told me they were committed to social justice education and who used drama pedagogy (across the curriculum) in their classrooms. I selected these three teachers to reflect a diversity of approaches, participants, and contexts, and because they worked with students from different ethno-racial and socio-economic backgrounds. Because I was interested in how teachers viewed concepts of social justice and social justice teaching, and how various factors, including institutions, histories, and lived experiences influenced those views, I did not find it necessary to select educators who fit my own specific criteria for transformative social justice teachers. Avoiding strict criteria for any ideal social justice teacher in my selection process, I was able to investigate multiple viewpoints and practices of what it meant to do social justice education in diverse ways, and to attend to the nuances of personal and institutional contexts. While I did not explicitly seek out teachers who had varied racial, ethnic, class, sexual, and religious affiliations, all three teachers identified differently with respect to various identities, particularly to race and ethnicity. Because of my study’s focus on elementary school contexts, participants had to be teaching students in Grades 4 to 8 within the publically funded school board for which I had received permission to conduct research.

I met with some challenges during my initial search for self-identified social justice educators who used drama pedagogy in the classroom. Colleagues had mentioned the difficulty I might encounter in seeking teacher-participants who met my criteria. The criterion of including drama practice added another level of difficulty in finding teachers who felt they met study criteria. Some felt comfortable identifying as social justice educators, but did not feel comfortable with their ability to facilitate drama work with students. Others were undeniably drama pedagogy practitioners, but did not feel they adequately engaged in social justice education.

I approached particular teachers based on our conversations or interactions in professional learning contexts, and experienced disappointment in some instances with what I actually found in previewing their practice. Indeed, I had to ask myself the question, as my dissertation supervisor reminded me: was I looking for someone who thought and taught like me, or who taught like the teacher I hoped I was? I further learned
that doing any kind of social justice education in the context of a public school board experiencing the pressures of neoliberal government policies is always about aspiration and becoming, not about any perfect archetype of the social justice educator who uses drama pedagogy in their practice. Therefore, rather than insisting on a particular threshold of acceptance criteria, I chose to select teachers who aspired and were committed to teaching for social justice.

**Leading to Participation**

I first met Evelyn when she was a teacher-participant in a collaborative inquiry project about equity and student learning that I had led in the 2010/2011 school year. The project focused on how equity practices might impact student learning, and she was asked by her principal, and agreed, to be part of the project. As part of our first session, the teachers were asked to share some of their current practices that they felt were effective in engaging students, particularly students who were struggling or disengaged. Evelyn had shared her use of drama with students, and spoke of some of the justice-based content she included in her practice, particularly in literacy lessons. In that session, we discussed identity, experience, and power in schools, and while I could not necessarily highlight Evelyn’s active engagement in the discussions, she sent me an email afterward thanking me for facilitating what she mentioned might have been “uncomfortable” discussions about race, class, sexuality, and ability. The more I listened to what Evelyn shared with respect to what she was doing in her classroom, the more I realized that she was a potential participant in my study. I also noted how much Evelyn brought herself (her own experience and identities) into what she taught, particularly as a Black female of Jamaican descent in a school of mostly White students.

I met Andre for the first time as a participant in a teacher working group dedicated to challenging homophobia and heterosexism that I facilitated. There, I found out about the community work he had been involved in before becoming a teacher, particularly in anti-homophobia education, as well as his critical stance toward teaching. Since then, I had encountered him at various equity events, and in our conversations, I learned that he used drama in his classroom often to explore issues of social justice. Further, Andre

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4 All teacher, school and student names are pseudonyms.
attended a series of workshops I facilitated on approaches to social Justice education. There, I continued to learn about the work Andre was doing in his classroom and kept him in mind as a participant for my study. The following year, I found out he had moved to teach Grade 8 at Valley Public School, a school with a very different demographic population (in terms of race and class) from Evelyn’s school. I subsequently invited him to be a participant in my study.

Maureen was recommended for my study by the Vice Principal at Whitfield, whom I knew from previous work within the school board. The Vice Principal felt that Maureen fit my selection criteria, because she was using drama to explore various social justice themes. At the time that I was seeking to recruit teachers, Maureen was just beginning to explore the issue of homelessness with her students. I subsequently met with Maureen to discuss the goals and process of my study. Maureen seemed very interested in participating, and indicated that she hoped to become more effective in what she was trying to do with respect to incorporating social justice issues into her work in the classroom.

All three teachers met the participant criteria, as teachers who aspired to do social justice theory and drama education in various subject areas. I did not know beforehand how social justice education and drama manifested in their classrooms, but came to learn the differences and similarities in their practices, and the reasons for their pedagogical choices.

**Students**

I selected Grades 4 to 8 elementary classrooms in communities and schools very different from each other in terms of demographics including socio-economic status. Considering the similarities and differences among the pedagogies and lessons in the three classrooms provided insights in to how social justice teaching was done in different contexts and how different students responded. The teachers selected for the study taught Grades 4 and 5 (Evelyn), Grade 6 (Maureen), and Grade 8 (Andre). Three classroom sites in three different schools provided varied and rich data that reflected the various complexities of diverse student populations and teaching approaches.

Describing young students’ identities was an ethical challenge. I wondered about how and whether or not to identify students in gendered and raced ways. In a study
premised on contrasting classrooms and difference, I came to the decision that students’ identities mattered with respect to the findings. This did not amount to surveying each of the student participants with respect to self-identification, but did involve providing opportunities for students in the small group improvised drama sessions I facilitated to share how they identified themselves if they wished. For example, these students participated in a short “circles of ourselves” activity in which they wrote down the various ways they identified or groups they felt they had an affinity with. Students could write whatever they chose about themselves that they felt comfortable sharing, and some examples included, “Grade 4”, “girl”, “like to read”, “from Trinidad”, etc. I used these responses to inform how I identified these particular students in the context of the vignettes shared in each of the chapters. In some situations, students themselves shared how they identified in the context of the general discussion and activities we engaged during the improvised drama sessions (with respect to race or religion, for example). For students who did not participate in the improvised drama sessions, I based the demographic information (ethno-racial and gender) below on limited information. For example, I identified the gender of students based on my observations and interactions with them in class activities, even as some of my assumptions may have been inaccurate due to the binary notions of sex and gender on which they were based. I also noted the students’ ethno-racial identity affiliations through my interactions with them, from activities observed in their classes related to identity, and based on conversations with teachers. I felt it important to use the information I had: differences and similarities among sites based on various demographic identifiers were important in relation to my research questions, particularly in examining how contrasting students in contrasting classroom contexts responded to social justice teaching.

Evelyn taught a Grade 4/5 class at Parkview Elementary School, in an affluent area of the city, with nineteen Grade 4s and twelve Grade 5s. There were 31 students in the class: 10 girls and 21 boys; seven students were non-White, including six bi- or multi-racial students; and there were 24 White students. There were 24 students in Maureen’s Grade 6 class at Whitfield Elementary School, in an area of the city in which some parts of the community were affluent while other parts included social housing. In this

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5 Relevant demographic information for the Improvised Drama Session groups from each classroom is provided in Chapter 5.
classroom, there were 12 girls and 12 boys. There were 9 White students and 15 non-White students, including South Asian (8), Caribbean Black (1), Biracial (3), North American Indigenous (1), South East Asian (1), and East Asian (1) students. Andre’s Grade 8 class at Valley Public School in an area of the city dominated by social housing included 22 students – 12 girls and 10 boys. There were 20 non-White students, including South Asian (11), South East Asian (1), Latino (2), Caribbean Black (3), East African (1), and 2 White students.

All students in the three classrooms were included as participants in the study, although only the subgroups of students (from each class) who volunteered to do so participated in improvised drama sessions outside of the classroom observations. All students received a short presentation from me on the goals and processes involved in the study, as well as a letter to them and their families that outlined the goals and research questions. The school board and university ethics review did not require signed consent forms for students participating in classroom observations, although caregivers were informed that they had the option to withdraw their child from participation. None of the caregivers of the 79 students chose to withdraw their children.

Data Sources and Collection

My data collection involved two main components. The first component included semi-structured interviews with the teachers and participant observation in each classroom, to provide context, explanation in the teachers’ own words, and examples of how they each conducted social justice education through drama pedagogy. The second component employed drama methods (improvised drama sessions) with groups of 6-9 students from each class, as a means of inquiry. I facilitated these improvised drama sessions myself, without the teachers’ participation and usually without them present. In these subgroup sessions, I facilitated improvised dramatic (inter)actions (encounters) that involved conflict, to elicit these students’ identity-linked conceptions, and responses to social justice (education).

Classroom Observation and Teacher Interviews

Together, classroom observations and teacher semi-structured interviews elicited each teacher-participants’ “definitions of the situation and their organizing constructs in
accounting for situations and behaviour” (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 466) to contextualize my overall examination of how teachers and students created and communicated understandings of social justice.

**Classroom Observation**

A key data source for this study was participant-observation of a series of drama pedagogy lessons facilitated by each teacher (in any subject area), with their own students. As participant-observer, I observed student responses to teachers’ pedagogies and content, and to each other, in each classroom setting (Cohen et al., 2011). Thus, teachers’ perceptions of classroom events, elicited through interviews (described below), were supplemented by my own observations of those events.

The goals of the participant observation were to: understand and capture the classroom and curriculum context in which each set of students interacted; gain insight into the conceptions of social justice being communicated through naturalistic classroom interaction; examine how conflict was addressed in the classroom; and observe students engaged in dramatic activity in response to their teachers’ social justice education approaches. Thus, participant observations provided insight into how the teachers demonstrated their approach to social justice education using drama pedagogy in various subject areas. Such observations also allowed me to understand how teachers framed questions of conflict and difference in relation to social justice education. They revealed critical incidents where conflict was evident, and how that conflict was or was not elicited or attended to, by both teachers and/or students, in their respective contexts. Moreover, participant observation allowed me to observe the similarities and differences in how students responded to such approaches and situations.

I observed a minimum of six lessons (approximately 450 minutes) in each site, over multiple scheduled periods or days. Some initial observations did not involve the use of drama pedagogy but allowed me to establish a context for each site, and to develop rapport with the teacher and student-participants. I conducted classroom observations primarily during language and social studies lessons because they used drama and addressed social justice topics more during these lessons than in other subject areas. I did not explicitly ask to observe these subject areas, but when making suggestions for my observation visits, teacher-participants invariably suggested that I observe their language
and social studies lessons. For all observations, I took field notes *in situ*, and then expanded upon them as soon as possible after each observation (Kirk & Miller, 1986). Observation notes also provided the basis for the semi-structured interviews with teachers, and helped to inform subsequent components of the study, mostly with respect to the content and reference points for the improvised drama sessions I facilitated with students.

**Teacher Interviews**

Semi-structured interviews with teachers allowed for an interaction between the researcher and the participant that involved a “human-to-human relation…and the desire to *understand* rather than to *explain*” (Fontana & Frey, 1994, p. 366). Such a method permitted me to investigate particular topics with each teacher-participant through basic introductory questions, and also allowed the opportunity to engage in natural conversation that garnered deeper insight into how teachers perceived their own social justice education practice and their students’ responses to their practice.

Semi-structured interviews with each teacher-participant were conducted in order to: gain contextual data for each site; learn about how the teacher conceptualized social justice education; learn about how and why the teacher engaged with drama in the classroom; learn about how teachers used or avoided conflict, and; gain insight into each classroom teacher’s perceptions of how their students responded to their particular approach to social justice education. To meet these goals, each teacher was interviewed formally a maximum of six times: before classroom observations for 30 to 40 minutes (see Appendix A for initial interview guiding questions), after each lesson observed for five to 10 minutes, and a concluding interview (40 to 50 minutes) after classroom observations were complete at that site. All interviews were digitally audiotaped and transcribed, and included supplementary notes.

**Improvised Drama Inquiry Methods**

I facilitated improvised drama sessions with a small group of students from each class. In each session, I engaged a small group of student-participants (six to nine students from each class who had volunteered to participate) in drama work. Data emerged from the improvised dramatic interactions of each group (Cohen et al., 2007),
including preparation, dramatic activity (in-role) and ensuing dialogue (out-of-role). Such inquiry methodology is influenced by prior work in arts-based inquiry, including drama as method (Gallagher, 2007B, 2008), performative focus groups (e.g., Cahnmann et al., 2009), performative inquiry (Fels, 2008), and playbuilding as qualitative research (Norris, 2009).

The purpose of the improvised drama sessions was to facilitate interactions to elicit students’ expression of their perceptions and understandings of social justice through dramatic representation (acting), context building discussions, and debriefing discussions. Through these activities, I aimed to provide a forum through which students could explore how their various (negotiated and fluid) social identities were performed dramatically and through related dialogue. My plan was to explore, through this drama, students’ intersubjective understandings of self, Other, and justice. Each improvisational drama session agenda was linked to my observations of students’ experiences (including interactions, tensions, etc.) in their respective classrooms (e.g., I incorporated related topics and pursued issues touched upon in classroom lessons), and occurred outside of the regular classroom context – during the lunch hour.

Each session was video recorded (with parental permission), and I sometimes presented the video recordings of previous sessions as springboards for discussions and further drama. Video recordings enabled an in-depth examination of the embodied action of the dramatic encounters of participants and were used with students as a catalyst for debriefing their own dramatic work. Thus, videos were used to stimulate student dialogue in subsequent improvised drama sessions in order to clarify understandings communicated, discuss possible reasons for dramatic decisions, and provide opportunities to communicate further understandings. The debriefing of drama work in the small group improvised drama sessions was also video-recorded.

Generally, improvised drama sessions intertwined dialogue with drama work as a means of eliciting students’ understandings and interpretations of social justice. The pretexts for the dramatic work were mostly fictional, and I chose them, sometimes in collaboration with the (relevant) teacher participant, with the goal of enlivening issues of justice and injustice. These dramatic encounters included planning, improvisational acting, scene building, and debriefing of various dramatic scenes developed over the
course of the sessions. I attended overtly to conflict as part of the content and the process of drama work.

Improvised drama sessions took place four times at each site and lasted between 30 and 45 minutes each. An outline of my plans for the improvised drama sessions at each site is provided in Appendix B. All twenty-four students who volunteered and received permission from their caregivers participated in the improvised drama sessions during lunch hours. In Evelyn’s Grades 4/5 class, nine students participated - seven White students and two racialized students. In Maureen’s Grade 6 class, seven students participated - four White students and three Biracial students. In Andre’s Grade 8 class, eight students participated – six racialized students and two White students.

Improvised drama sessions did not manifest in the same way at each site, but changed according to context, level of teacher collaboration, and themes that emerged from classroom observations in the relevant contexts. The variations among sites were quite significant (see Chapter 5), and attending to those variations presented challenges but also strengths for my analysis by allowing me to consider the differences in pedagogical choices participating teachers had made based on their context, and diverse student responses to pedagogical choices.

I used some similar drama conventions across the three sites, influenced by post-structural theories as well as Boalian and applied theatre techniques. For example, I asked students in each site to dramatize social justice issues important to them, based on discussions we had had together, as well as topics they were exploring with their teachers. I also facilitated versions of Boal’s (2002) Forum Theatre approach at each site, taking heed of the Marxist and post-structural critiques of Boalian work by attempting to move past the interpersonal, affirmative approaches that have often characterized the practice of Forum Theatre in classrooms, toward addressing root causes and structural nuances of oppression. This often happened through my probing questions and opportunities to replay scenes differently in light of discussions.

I also dedicated one of the sessions in each school to a process drama in which students and I improvised imagined and real experiences at an airport. The dramas involved students playing the role of individuals and families arriving to Canada for the first time, and interacting with other students who played the role of immigration
authorities. As is a characteristic of process drama, I acted as “teacher in role”, playing the part of an airport security guard. I used my role to prompt, question, and provoke the players in the scene, based on my understanding of conflict as potentially generative. I devised this process drama as an attempt to provide a comparable entry point across the three sites to issues of justice that are related to both redistribution and recognition – both structural impediments to access and identity difference. I realized that, depending on the site, different students might experience varied levels of distance from the context. Indeed, students’ level of (perceived) experience with or distance from particular issues and contexts is a key tension with engaging sensitive issues, worth exploring. The varied distance each of the student-participants had from the immigration process drama context, based on lived experiences, facilitated the creation and communication of very rich interpretations of the contexts and issues through drama and ensuing dialogue. The goals of the improvised drama sessions were to provide students with opportunities to address, challenge, and engage (in school) with how conceptions of social justice education manifested themselves in their experiences, and to create an opportunity for knowledge and subjectivity formation in the unfolding of dramatic events and associated dialogue.

**Data Collection**

Before I began data collection, I provided a research project information and consent letter to teachers (see Appendix D) interested in participating in this study, and their principals (see Appendix F) at each school. Before conducting classroom observations, I orally explained my project to the students as described above, and provided them with information and consent letters (see Appendix E) to share with their caregivers. I assured all participants that their involvement was completely voluntary and that if they wished, they could withdraw from the study at any time.

The schools I studied were not completely comparable, because each school and classroom carried its own unique characteristics based on multiple factors, including demographics and geographic location. There were also significant age differences across the three sites, with students ranging from ages 9 to 13, within the general designation of Junior/Intermediate grades. By studying this broad age category, I hoped to understand how teachers made pedagogical decisions partly based on students’ ages (as part of the
larger context in which they taught), and how differently aged students took up social justice education dramatically. These variations, I believe, provided insights that lent to a more effective response to my research questions.

I collected data at each school separately and consecutively, spending approximately two to three months in each setting (see Table 1 for details).

**Table 1: Data Collection Summary by Site**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parkview Elementary School</th>
<th>Whitfield Elementary School</th>
<th>Valley Public School</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher: Evelyn Manroe</td>
<td>Teacher: Maureen Korneth</td>
<td>Teacher: Andre Velasco</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 4 and 5 class (31</td>
<td>Grade 6 class (24 students)</td>
<td>Grade 8 class (22 students)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>students, 19 Grade 4s, 12</td>
<td>8 classroom observations</td>
<td>8 classroom observations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 5s)</td>
<td>6 teacher interviews</td>
<td>6 teacher interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 improvised drama</td>
<td>4 improvised drama</td>
<td>5 improvised drama</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sessions with students</td>
<td>sessions with students</td>
<td>sessions with students</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Data Analysis**

Analysis of the data was ongoing and commenced during the data collection process. It moved from description to explanation, and from explanation to theory generation (LeCompte & Preissel, 1993). The various conceptions of social justice theory and its relation to social justice education described above in the literature review provided an initial framework for my analysis. My conceptual framework was based on critical and post-structural understandings of social justice education, drama, and conflict pedagogies. Based on these frameworks, I attended to teachers pedagogical and content decisions associated with social justice education and drama pedagogy and how students interpreted, responded to, and engaged with those decisions. I examined the role of conflict and difference in how each teacher practiced social justice education, and considered the interactions between students and teacher, and amongst students in their various engagement opportunities. I also focused on student dialogue and dramatic decision-making during improvised drama sessions.

The transcribed interviews and observations, and the video recordings of improvised drama sessions were analytically coded (Miles & Huberman, 1994) as soon as possible to when transcriptions were created. Initially, codes were descriptive, in order to detect frequency and patterns. I used *NVivo* qualitative data software to facilitate the
management of multiple data sources (Ryan, 2009). The software helped me to manage and sort the data, but I created the codes. Once codes were established, I reviewed them in order to cluster them into domains or themes to find the relationships among them. I continually checked data against the research questions, and attempted to make inferences toward the end of each component of the research process, in order to ensure reliability and inform subsequent phases of the study.

The themes that emerged from the classroom observations and teacher interviews at each site informed the discussion topics and dramatic structures used in the subsequent improvised drama sessions with sub-groups of students at each site. Moreover, the teacher interviews created opportunities for teachers to member check my observation data.

As described above, the improvised drama sessions with students, similar to focus groups but arts (drama)-based, aimed to elicit “respondents’ perceptions, attitudes and opinions…to generate qualitative data” (Wilson, cited in Norris, 2000). The follow-up discussions by student-participants in response to video footage of their dramatic encounters generated further data, and also became a means of member checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) by returning the data to the participants. The sessions with subgroups of students from each classroom helped me to create multi-modal opportunities for students to communicate their interpretations and responses to social justice education, and apply my analysis accordingly.

While there were purposes for each component of the study, the arts-based approach used in the improvised drama sessions was based on my view that meaning and understanding would unfold as events took place (Ellsworth, 2005). Employing drama as an inquiry tool allowed for the possibility of generating theory through spontaneous talk and improvised action (Gallagher, 2007), and to allow me to focus empirical attention on both verbal and embodied data. Such a method reflects the dialogic relationship between theory and practice (Freire, 1970, 2008). Thus, my methodological aim was not to unveil some kind of truth, but to analyze “the productive and performative force of the body” (Fusco, 2008, p. 173). That is, while I had preconceived notions of what it meant to do social justice education and the role drama might play in social justice education, I did not to aim to prove the effectiveness of social justice education and drama through my
research. Rather, I explored and analyzed the views, meanings, practices, and potential of social justice education and drama in particular contexts, and what role conflict played in the encounters provoked by such practices.

**Validity**

The design of the study lent itself to comparisons among sites. Thus, while I aimed to identify sites in which contextual variables such as the grade level, teacher’s claims of commitment to transformative social justice teaching, and the use of drama pedagogy were as similar as possible, diverse contextual factors and community variables (such as location, age of students, the number of English language learners, ethnic and racial diversity, and socio-economic status) affected each classroom site’s dynamics. This diversity contributed to the richness of the data (Cohen et al., 2011).

The multi-stage research design and multiple data collection methods were aimed at providing as many entry points as possible to address the research questions, as a form of methodological triangulation (Denzin, 1997). However, I also attempted to include multiple data sources and theoretical perspectives (Lather, 1986). Moreover, my study is based on the premise of theory construction: construct validity is enhanced through the consistent consideration of the data’s impact on theory. That is, I mobilized *systematized reflexivity* (Lather, 1986) in order to reveal weakness, revisions, and possible extensions to the theories upon which this study is based. Such reflexivity is an attempt to work toward construct validity, and to contribute to building on current theory associated with social justice education. In the improvised drama sessions, the opportunity for student-participants to respond to video footage of their dramatic performances also lent to the face validity (Guba & Lincoln, 1981) and internal validity of the data (LeCompte & Preissle, 1992). Thus, an opportunity was provided for the refining of results based on the reactions of the participants to the data.

**Limitations**

This research design has multiple advantages, but also some major limitations. One major limitation of this study was the short amount of time spent in each of the three sites. The study might have benefitted from more time in each classroom and school context. I found myself desiring further observations and more improvised drama
sessions with students at each site, but constraints of time, both my own in relation to my doctoral program, and that of the teachers in my study, did not allow for a longer researcher presence in the three schools.

An additional limitation was my role as an instructional leader working centrally with the board in which I was undertaking research. To a certain extent, could be considered a potential ethical conflict of interest. Instructional leaders are teachers with no formal authority over their colleagues, but perceptions of my authority could have caused participating teachers to feel as though they were being evaluated, even though this research was not designed to evaluate. To address this, I ensured that the raw data was kept confidential and not available to the teacher-participants’ school administration (or others) and I reminded the teacher-participants that my data would not be used to evaluate their performance. I ensured that teacher participants knew that my research was being conducted under the auspices of my role as a doctoral candidate, not in my role as instructional leader, and that our work together would be a collaborative exploration of their social justice teaching and students’ responses and engagement with social justice education. Maureen in particular appreciated this framing of the research, and openly wished to collaborate with me and engage in dialogue about how students might and did respond to her activities in our discussions.

Time was also a limitation with respect to the improvised drama sessions I facilitated. To increase the likeliness of student attendance, they were scheduled over the course of four lunch hours per school, which were generally 45 minutes to one hour long. These periods had to include time for students to eat their lunch, and then engage with the session. There were sessions in which I began to ask introductory questions or recap our last session while students were still eating, in order to use as much time as possible. Even as the sharing of food lent to an atmosphere of conviviality, I sometimes felt impeded in my attempts to create opportunities for students to talk, engage in drama, and debrief the drama work we were engaged in because of time constraints. The sessions never seemed to be long enough, and at different sites, scheduling sometimes did not allow for the next session to occur the next day, meaning multiple days had passed in some instances before we could meet again to debrief the work in the previous session. Nonetheless, the sessions still seemed engaging for students, and they lent significant
insights into the possibilities and limitations of social justice education and drama pedagogy.

Another major limitation of this study was that I only conducted interviews with teachers, and not individual students, colleagues, or administrators. Therefore, I relied heavily on teachers’ perceptions of their classrooms, their students, and their practice. This component of my methodology allowed me to analyze how teachers understood their own practice and provided insights into how they viewed their particular students. Individual, focused interviews with students, however, would have helped me to further understand the relationship between teachers’ practices and student responses. I used improvised drama sessions as opportunities to gain more specific insights and understandings from the small groups of students who participated from each classroom.

Finally, the fact that I am a novice researcher is a key limitation to this study. As I continue to develop and learn to conduct comprehensive, rigorous, and useful research, it is likely that my study is challenged and constrained by what I do not yet know, as well as the confines and structures of my role as doctoral candidate.

Conclusion

The qualitative ethnographic and arts-based educational research methods used in this study reflect my challenge to the current context and educational emphasis on achievement-based standardized tests and scripted curriculum. My hope is that the fact that my study is a form of qualitative inquiry makes a difference in the everyday lives of teachers and their students (Denzin & Giardina, 2009). By observing and talking with teachers about the dramatic encounters they facilitated in their classrooms, I attempted to explore how such encounters could serve as catalysts for creating and communicating meaning about issues of social justice. Rather than suppressing conflict in curriculum, I hoped to promulgate the risk of experience and explore how generative conflict might elicit sometimes-dissenting understandings of social justice issues that invite both teachers and students to navigate socially constructed identities while engaging in intersubjective knowledge creation.

By using participant observation as well as improvisational drama as an arts-based mode of inquiry that values uncertainty and improvisation, this study challenges claims to truth in traditional research (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003). Dramatic encounters and
associated dialogue facilitated by teachers in their classroom lessons, and those facilitated by myself as researcher in the improvised drama sessions, engaged students in generative conflict and were opportunities for meaning making and knowledge creation. In the three classrooms in this study, drama was a way for students to experience a “conscious sense of their own bodies, feelings, thoughts, and words” (Pinar et al., 1995). Thus, while students created meaning in the encounters, they also revealed their understandings of the very issues, roles, events, and actions they inhabited and performed, in relation to others. The following chapter introduces each of the sites, including the teachers, their classrooms, and their schools. Subsequent chapters will further analyze the rich data elicited from the various modes of inquiry employed in this study.
Chapter 4: Setting the Stage(s): Three Teachers’ Contexts and Conceptions of Social Justice Education

All teaching is embedded in context - the complex interplay of physical community, the space of the school, and the bodies that inhabit these spaces. Critical and post-structural theorists have highlighted the relationship between socio-political forces and schools (Foucault, 1980; Giroux, 2003), as well as how such forces play out in the emotions and conceptions of individuals (Zembylas & Boler, 2002). Individuals have distinct positions amidst these forces and systems. The self, therefore, is politically situated and constantly negotiated (Butler, 2003a; Fine 1998). How social justice educators teach, therefore, is also politically situated and constantly negotiated. Teachers’ positioning in relation to societal power structures, moreover, helps shape their teaching decisions (Sonu et al., 2012). Social justice educators are necessarily navigating their pedagogical and content decisions based on an educational context that is not necessarily supportive of such work. Social justice education, drama, and conflict pedagogies are all contingent on the cultural contexts in which they take place. In this chapter, I describe and analyze the contexts that helped shape teachers’ conceptions of social justice education, conflict, and drama teaching, and how those conceptions influenced the learning opportunities teachers created for students.

Drawing from teacher interviews and observation field notes, the three case studies illustrate how each teacher made curricular and pedagogical choices in relation to myriad factors in their contexts – including their own life experiences and their perceptions of their students and the communities in which they taught. Evelyn taught Grades 4 and 5 in a wealthy neighborhood with a mostly White student population. Andre taught Grade 8 in a school with a mostly non-White population in a subsidized social housing community. Maureen taught Grade 6 in a community that is mixed in terms of family income as well as ethnocultural make-up. In all three case studies, I analyze key pieces of data to illustrate the relationships amongst context, teachers’ conceptions, goals, and pedagogical decisions in social justice education, conflict, and drama pedagogies.

The three teacher-participants in this thesis study articulated different and overlapping understandings of social justice education, which manifested in various ways in their practice. In his study of how social actors in an urban school board context (e.g.,
researchers, policymakers, community organizers, youth, etc.) theorize social justice, Dumas (2008) suggests that teachers, as social actors, theorize the material and educational roots of injustice as they attempt to respond to those injustices with their teaching practice. I explore those moments that bring to light teachers’ conceptions and practices of social justice education as responses to injustice, in relation to their conceptions and implementation of conflict and drama pedagogies. I also consider these conceptions and practices in relation to the contexts of teachers’ communities and schools, their identities and experiences, and the identities and experiences of the students in their classrooms.

In what follows, I introduce each school, describing it in relation to the community in which it is situated based on publicly available information from the school and school board, and based on my observation field notes. I then describe how each classroom context seemed to interact with teachers’ and students’ opportunities to engage in social justice education. I also introduce each of the three teachers using excerpts from field notes and interviews that highlight the way I viewed each teacher’s conceptions of social justice to play out in their classroom teaching. I outline how each of the teachers explained to me their understanding of social justice education, how they viewed and used conflict in the classroom, as well as how and why they used drama pedagogies. Finally, I compare and contrast the three cases in order to analyze how the conditions of each classroom encouraged or impeded teachers’ social justice education practices.

**Critically Caring at Parkview Elementary: Evelyn Manroe and Her Grade 4/5 Classroom**

**Parkview Elementary School**

A school board administered parent census for Parkview Public School showed that 75 percent of the students in the school identified as White, and over 75 percent of families had an annual household income of $75,000 or more (School Board, 2008). The school was large relative to others in the same district, particularly considering it was a Kindergarten to Grade 6 school – approximately 550 students. There were 91 students in this school (17 percent) whose primary language at home was other than English, and seven students who had been living in Canada for less than five years. It was a dual track
school that offered an English program as well as a French Immersion program. According to the school website, “Each program enhances the other.”

The following description is drawn from my field notes taken in my first few visits to the school in spring 2011:

I turn off the main street bustling with boutique shops, new restaurants, and fair trade coffee houses, and somehow the bustle of people walking dogs, drinking coffee, and pushing strollers blends into a tree-lined street with wondrous, well-maintained century homes.

I rode onto the sidewalk and walked my bike through the shade of a small naturalized area at the front of the school to one of many bicycle lock rings at the school. It is clear some work has been done in the school in terms of schoolyard naturalization. I rode by the length of the schoolyard, and noticed further evidence of school yard naturalization projects through the fence - small stone seating areas, shaded by trees, and an amphitheater area, created for holding classes outdoors.

As I lock my bicycle, children with those taking care of them pass me to enter the doors. Front doors of a school are locked during the school day, but before 9am, they’re open. Walking in, I notice a colourful “Stop Bullying!” poster on the bulletin board, along with Parent Council and community information. Vibrant student-work adorns the other spaces in the hallway.

It is 8:40am, and I climb the three flights of stairs briskly, excited to connect with Evelyn before the students arrive. At the top of the stairs, I look toward what is referred to as the common area – an open area with a SMART Board and surrounded by classrooms. One of the walls in the common room is adorned with cut out figures, representing people from all over the world – their ‘costumes’ indicate such.

Evelyn teaches Grade 4 and 5 in the English track. I step through the door of the classroom. To the right are class photos from the last few years, including her current class. It is hard not to notice that almost all of the faces looking out from those photographs look a lot like the rest of the students in the school. Just after 8:40 this morning, Evelyn is sitting at a round table stacked with piles of
notebooks and book order forms beside her desk. She is marking, looks up at me from the notebook she was peering at, sighs, smiles, and says, “Good morning!” (Fieldnotes, April 25 & April 30, 2012)

Parkview Public School can be characterized as an affluent school with a mostly White population. Its active school council raised funds from the school’s families to support its schoolyard naturalization program, as well as to attain SMART Boards for some classrooms in the school. Moreover, there had been school-wide efforts to find out about the school climate (through a school climate survey, for example), and the school administration at the time was supportive of bringing programs into the school that aimed enhancing social cohesion and conflict resolution. Evelyn’s class participated in one such program focused on peer relationships and anti-bullying.

**Evelyn Manroe’s Grade 4/5 Classroom**

Evelyn’s classroom was a busy one, even when students were not in it. It was a “split” class, with nineteen Grade 4s and 12 Grade 5s sharing the space. There were 31 students in the class – 10 females and 21 males. Seven students were non-White (six of whom were bi- or multi-racial), and there were 24 White students in the class. The tables were set up in groups of four, five, or six. The class was on a side of the school building that had large windows facing the backs of homes, with treed back gardens. Prominent on the walls was the space dedicated to literacy: grammar rules, different writing strategies, a board for literary genres that student had read so far, parts of a story, how to write a letter, how to write a paragraph, etc. As well, space was dedicated to a multiplication table and labeled geometric shapes.

The carpet area was located in the back of the class, and there, Evelyn had posted various sets of instructions on chart paper, and ideas brainstormed by students. One of the pieces of chart paper included lists of gender stereotypes that were generated from an activity Evelyn had done with the students on that topic. Beside that piece of chart paper was another that listed students’ reactions and challenges to those stereotypes. Student-created, colourful letters that spelled the word “FRIENDS” were taped onto the side of a bookshelf spilling with chapter books. On a wall close to the carpet area, additional brainstorming by students on large pieces of paper was posted – the topics included racism and discrimination. Evelyn told me that she had asked students to define the
terms, and make connections to some of the books they had been reading – the stories of Viola Desmond, Rosa Parks, and Ruby Bridges. Below, bins of books lined the wall – I noticed books from Christopher Paul Curtis like *Bud, Not Buddy*, and *Elijah of Buxton* that explored issues of race, along with Gandhi’s autobiography. Evelyn created a space that reflected high academic expectations for her students, provided the necessary academic supports, and created opportunities for the exploration of difference and collaborative interaction.

**Evelyn Manroe**

Evelyn identifies as Black and of Caribbean descent. She had been a teacher for 11 years, and had taught at Parkview Elementary School, a school with mostly White students in a wealthy neighbourhood, for her whole career. She had taught Grade 4 and 5 for the past couple of years. I visited and observed Evelyn’s class from the beginning of April to early June 2012. I conducted 11 observations of Evelyn’s literacy, art, media literacy, and social studies lessons, and formally interviewed Evelyn before beginning and after completing these observations. I also conducted informal interviews on three other occasions after she taught a lesson.

Evelyn regularly shared personal stories of experiences with her students, and invited their responses and connections. The following description from my classroom observations illustrates how Evelyn negotiated the space of the school and her classroom and how she explicitly used her own experiences, in relation to how she perceived the students’ experiences, to teach complex issues.

*On a Tuesday after a long weekend, I arrived to Evelyn’s Grade 4 and 5 class at 8:50am. Upon entering the classroom, I noticed that she is not wearing hair extensions, nor does she have her hair straightened, as had been the usual way she had worn her hair since I’ve known her. The look on her face as she enters the room is one of bold happiness.*

**EVELYN**: I finally decided to let it be. I’ve been texting my sister about it all weekend, telling her that I was going to leave my hair natural from now on.

*Evelyn shares with me how every one of her White colleagues who has seen her this morning has asked her about her hair, asking if she got a haircut over the*
weekend.

EVELYN: I tell them, this is not a haircut – I’ve just left my hair natural.

She has mentioned her hair in the past, and how it seems to be a point of difference with respect to her place in the school. She’s related stories to me of how she feels many Black and Brown students in the school feel out of place, pointing out an example of how White teachers ask non-White students if they can touch their hair.

Evelyn has also talked about the pressure she had felt growing up to “do her hair” everyday, to meet a certain standard in her family and her community. She has shared that how you ‘did your hair’ was a way of being more ‘White’, and that she felt it was about conceptions of beauty – the “less nappy, the more beautiful”, she had said.

Evelyn seems ready to respond to comments about her hair. Two other staff members enter the class and ask Evelyn about her hair this morning. As they leave, Evelyn turns to me and says, “This is the hair I was born with.”

I hear comments about Evelyn’s hair from other students as they walk in, commenting to each other, not to her. Evelyn takes attendance as usual, and before the announcements and the anthem come on, she asks the students, “How was your weekend? Who went away for the weekend?” All of the verbal responses come from students in class who are visibly White. Examples of responses include: “We went to London [Ontario]”; “I went to my cottage”; “I went to my farm”; “I went to my cottage”; “Went to my cottage, and went swimming, but the water was soo cold.”

After the anthem plays, and the school announcements are made, Evelyn asks students to go directly to the carpet area. She gets to the point: “This is my natural hair. I have never seen my hair like this since I was little. Black people have curly, kinky hair. A lot of Black people straighten their hair because they want to meet a certain standard. Who’s standard? White people’s. People end up judging you based on your hair.”

TAMARA: But why would people judge it? It’s soo pretty.

EVELYN: Well, sometimes when things are different they are not looked at in the
Anyway, I’m really happy about my hair being this way, and I’ve been loving it all weekend! (Classroom Observation, May 22, 2012)

Evelyn advocated the importance of naming race in a context where Whiteness was the norm. The description provides clues as to how Evelyn understood teaching for social justice as something personal – something that had to do with her experiences and feelings of injustice. She rallied those experiences and emotions to drive critical discussions about issues, such as race, with her students.

**Recognition and Relationships – Evelyn Manroe’s Conceptions of Social Justice (Education)**

AG: So, when you hear the term social justice, what comes to mind?
EVELYN: All those ‘isms’ –
AG: What ‘-isms’?
EVELYN: Racism, sexism…homophobia, transphobia – those things come to mind.
The issues that are out there in the world. That sometimes they might not have familiarity with because it’s not part of their own life, but it’s a part of the world. The broader world. So those kind of things come to my mind. And I don’t think that…sometimes when people do those little cultural things, when people get to taste food from this and that country, no. It’s going beyond. It’s looking at issues that people might go through because of who they are. (Evelyn, Interview 1, April 25, 2012)

Evelyn’s explanation of what she meant by social justice focused on how she saw her role as teacher in her particular context. She saw social justice education as going beyond cultural celebrations associated with affirmative approaches to multicultural education, toward addressing people’s experiences of oppression. Her focus seemed to be on specific categories of misrecognition (“-isms”) and she had the sense that many of her students had not experienced misrecognition of their social identities. Many issues were “out there in the world”, implying that she believed that they were outside her students’ immediate experiences. When, during a classroom lesson, Evelyn asked students what the common themes of the books they have read were, one student responded, “They’re all about people who are different” (Classroom Observation, May 15, 2012). Indeed, this provokes the question, different from whom? The books explored themes involving
individuals who were different from most people in the school – who experienced racism, ableism, homophobia, religious discrimination, xenophobia, and violent conflict in the form of war. Notions of difference ran throughout Evelyn’s approach to social justice education. She planned lessons that used issues that were instances of misrecognition as themes in her planning of curriculum, mostly in the area of literacy. She would explore texts based on these themes with students for weeks at a time by planning drama, movement, and writing activities.

Evelyn’s social justice teaching seemed to be about enhancing awareness about problems that were not necessarily part of the life experiences of most of her particular students – who might not have been harmed by racism or classism, for example. I selected Evelyn purposefully as a participant because I knew she created opportunities in her classroom for exploring such issues in her particular context. I aimed to understand how she explored these issues with her students. Evelyn’s class was by no means a homogeneous group, but Evelyn perceived most of her students as being from privileged socio-economic status backgrounds, and framed much of her social justice teaching around that perception. For example, she communicated a belief that part of her role as a social justice educator was to challenge her students’ current ways of thinking and being – to bring to light that oppression exists, and that the world is not necessarily an idyllic place:

I think that kids need to be aware of the outside world, and that people have faced injustice, and that not everything is pretty and pink and roses, and that people have struggled through things. But let’s [also] look at the successes that have come out of those struggles, and what can we do to change things. I keep asking … about how they can be a change agent. I keep saying to them, “What are you going to do to change things?” And I think that the kids are walking away with real life learning, not just textbook learning…. (Evelyn, Interview 1, April 25, 2012)

The above excerpt demonstrates the importance that Evelyn placed upon teaching the histories of what she saw as successful struggles for social justice. Whereas some social justice dialogue, particularly in a privileged context, might lead to a ‘deficit’ understanding of those who experience struggle – where the groups or individuals who were the focus of particular lessons might be viewed as weak or victims that need to be pitied (Valencia, 2010; Zembylas, 2013), by highlighting successful struggles and stories of strength, Evelyn challenged such deficit narratives. Moreover, Evelyn alluded to the
power she believed the students had to make changes associated with social justice – her view of student agency. According to Evelyn, such agency could only be demonstrated through what she called “real life learning”, or learning about issues connected to people and events that students might know about more directly – rather than textbook learning. Missing, however, was how Evelyn invited students to address the issues she taught about beyond the interpersonal relationships students had every day in the classroom.

Evelyn did not shy away from bringing up her own experiences in connection to issues she associated with social injustice. The way Evelyn spoke about the issues that were important to her and the way she addressed them in the classroom, based on my observations, consistently reflected a personal approach. She related in an interview, for example, that racism was important for her to address because of her personal experiences. She also shared how she addressed transphobia by sharing a personal story of a family member who identifies as transgender. She talked about issues “close to [her] heart” in order to help students “see that there are [different] people [from the students] who are in the world” (Evelyn, Interview 4, June 20, 2012). Evelyn, therefore, often brought representations of difference to the classroom on a personal level, such as telling stories from her childhood and experiences as a target of oppression, as a way to help students understand difference.

Evelyn spoke about difference as something that needed to be acknowledged and learned about. To Evelyn, opportunities for talking about social justice issues were important. When students had opportunities to talk through divergent perspectives, they could more effectively approach complex ideas associated with social justice. Such talk about previously unfamiliar issues could constitute a way for students to develop agency to address issues when they happened to them:

Well I know [discussing social justice issues] opened up students feeling comfortable and being willing to talk to us [teachers or administration]…if something is happening to them….I know an incident where a child was discriminated against, it was a friend standing up and saying [to me], “Can I talk to you privately in the hall? This is happening to my friend, and I don’t think it’s right”. So I think because we’ve had all these discussions, they felt safe to come and talk to someone they trust. So if they are seeing someone getting bullied, or if they are seeing somebody being discriminated against, or targeted for something that is not right, they’re doing something, instead of being quiet. (Evelyn, Interview 1, April 25, 2012).
Agency, for Evelyn, was a way to act against, or resist, acts of bullying or discrimination. Evelyn offered many opportunities for talk in the classroom as way to foster such agency. These opportunities were usually organized around the books she read aloud or had students reading. Her strong relationships with students, as well as the opportunities she created to talk about social justice issues in the classroom, she believed, enabled students to stand up for their peers and to tell her about it.

Evelyn’s conceptions of social justice highlighted the potential of teaching about social justice issues, but remained firmly in the realm of the affirmative, based Fraser’s definition of the term (2005). That is, while she focused on difference and fostering awareness of broader societal issues, Evelyn’s pedagogy aimed to influence students’ attitudes toward difference, with the hope that those changed attitudes might lead students to use their agency to resist unfair interpersonal treatment when they saw or experienced it.

**Conflict – Focus on the Interpersonal**

According to Evelyn, the experience of conflict can be a growing and learning opportunity. Conflict was something students could learn to deal with or overcome. Evelyn said that she did not explicitly teach conflict in the classroom in a proactive way, but she understood conflict more as something she responded to during or after it happened, through discussion – “allowing each person to speak and have their voice… I try to teach kids that each person is allowed to have their feelings” (Evelyn, Interview 1, April 25, 2012). She encouraged listening to others’ perspectives, communicating feelings, and understanding how things can be resolved. Evelyn believed working through such interpersonal conflicts “helps [students] grow” and she saw her role as mediating conflicts. She explicitly responded to conflictual events as they occurred, at least with the individuals directly involved. The following excerpt from my field notes illustrates a typical way I observed her handling conflict with students:

*Sandra, a female student of Caribbean descent, and Karen, a White female student, stay behind after others are dismissed for recess to speak to Evelyn about a particular conflict they’ve been having with another girl in the class – Madeline, a Black female student not present in the classroom at the time.*
Sandra is very upset that Madeline won’t listen to her when she tries to share her feelings about how she is being treated. She has told Madeline: “When you do that, it doesn’t make me feel very good”.

Karen seems to be present in order to support Sandra. She stands beside Sandra and nods encouragingly toward her.

Evelyn listens, asks questions: You have a voice - you need to use your voice.

Evelyn proposes that the students get together with Madeline tomorrow morning to share their sides of the story so that they can try to understand what is happening.

Sandra tells about certain things Madeline said, and Sandra’s responses involve many statements like, “That doesn’t make me feel very good”.

EVELYN (Teacher): Are you ok with meeting? Maybe this afternoon? You let me know.

Karen mentions that Madeline is starting rumors about them as well.

EVELYN: Have you ever said anything or done anything to make it stop?

KAREN and SANDRA: No

EVELYN: Have you talked to your moms?

KAREN: No

Sandra said yes that her mother offered to talk to the other student, her mom, and Evelyn.

Evelyn asked Sandra whether her frequent absences and her seeming sad are connected to what is happening with Madeline.

SANDRA: No

EVELYN: OK, we have to use our voices. For now, pull out a piece of paper and write down what you want to say to Madeline this afternoon. This is a way to not keep things inside and use your voice.

SANDRA (Her tone suggests that she may not want the conversation to end): Well, sometimes people are afraid to say anything. (Observation Fieldnotes, May 15, 2012)

Evelyn’s probing about actions that the students had taken to resolve the issue reflects her goal of fostering (interpersonal) student agency – in this case, self-advocacy when one feels they are not treated fairly. Evelyn asked the two students to write down and plan what they were going to say when speaking with the student with whom they
had the conflict as a way for them to develop a capacity to use their voices. This tool for student agency reflects what Beauboef (2002) refers to as a “womanist” approach to teaching in her studies of exemplary African American teachers. Evelyn does not identify as African American, but, similar to the teachers Beauboef studied, she focused on quality relationships as a guide for interacting with students. According to Beauboef, “womanist teachers see themselves as dynamic agents for social justice precisely because they define themselves as having a sense of connection with and responsibility to the human struggle for freedom and justice” (p. 14). Evelyn recognized her power to intervene in interpersonal conflicts, and to use the situations as opportunities to foster student agency – seen in this instance as the ability to resolve an interpersonal conflict by using one’s voice. Evelyn showed knowledge of her students and their families, and aimed to ensure that her students were safe, or at least felt safe, even from each other. Evelyn also used such an interpersonal approach when students were engaged in cooperative group work or dramatic scene building, fostering what she saw as students’ ability to act in order to have positive interactions and complete the task at hand.

Overall, Evelyn addressed questions of conflict mostly on an interpersonal level. She initially found it difficult to name examples of how she engaged on other levels and types of conflict in everyday curriculum: she did not name (in interviews) issues or topics such as war, racism, or gender stereotypes, although I observed her introduce and explore these issues with her students. She mostly responded to interpersonal conflict among students when it happened, and aimed for resolution by encouraging students to talk things through, use their voice to exhibit agency, and understand various perspectives.

Drama in the Classroom

Evelyn’s use of drama in the classroom was rooted in her literacy (language arts) teaching. From her perspective, it “helps students understand what we’re reading.” (Interview 1, April 25, 2012) She alluded to various arguments in scholarship on the benefits of drama in education, including enjoyment, enhanced confidence, and engagement, as well as opportunities to consider diverse perspectives:

And a lot of them enjoy drama because they don’t have to be themselves in that moment – they can take on somebody else, and they can show their creativity. I’ve seen some other kids become more confident because of all the drama that they are doing, and they find that learning is fun. (Evelyn, Interview 1, April 25, 2012)
Evelyn often engaged students in whole-class thematic explorations using movement and individual or group tableaux (creation of a still image using bodies) to interpret the thoughts and feelings of characters in the books they were reading at the time. She also often asked students to work together in small groups to create scenes reflective of the particular topic or issue associated with those books. Evelyn used drama with her students because she felt it engaged her students, particularly those who were not usually engaged. This is a common view of how and why drama should be used in classrooms (Neelands, 2004; Neelands & Nelson, 2013) and is a recurring theme with all three teachers in this study. Similarly to Andre and Maureen, discussed below, rather than focus on theatre’s aesthetic dimension (Jackson, 2007), Evelyn mostly used drama as an instrument to create motivation and spaces for open discussion of the social justice topics she introduced, and hoped that this would allow students to more deeply engage in the work, and even enhance student academic achievement.

In combination with her focus on social justice talk and interpersonal approaches to addressing conflict, Evelyn hoped drama pedagogy would help many of her privileged students learn about the Other and empathize in ways that opened their eyes to experiences they never might have imagined otherwise. While Evelyn’s focus was not necessarily aimed at empowering marginalized students in her class, her focus on teaching about Others reflected applied theatre approaches that aim to enhance awareness and thereby create an internal perceptual change in relation to examples of oppression (Chan, 2007; Nicholson, 2005). She used drama pedagogy to address forces of misrecognition in the life of the classroom and community, but focused on students’ interpersonal experiences without usually attempting to address the structural forces that played a role in the topics she explored. Questions arise about how deeply young (Grade 4 and 5) students can address economic, historical, and political root causes of oppression. At the same time, some of Evelyn’s teaching illustrates some of the possibilities available (dramatically and otherwise) to begin to address the structural causes of injustice with these young students.
Shit Disturbing at Valley Public School: Andre Velasco and His Grade 8 Classroom

Valley Public School

The vast majority of the approximately 500 students at Valley Public at the time of this thesis study were non-White, the largest groups being South Asian (42 percent) and Black (21 percent). 85 percent of students’ parents were born outside of Canada, and 85 percent of families had an annual houseful income of less than $30,000 (School Board, 2008). The following general description of the immediate community surrounding the school, as well as the school itself, is drawn from my field notes taken in my first few visits to the school in the fall, 2012:

I am waiting at the corner on my bicycle to make a left onto Ascot Street from Pelham. On Pelham, a streetcar has stopped and opened its doors to let passengers off and on. The bodies I see have changed over the course of my ride along this street. So have the buildings and homes. There’s a dilapidated building on my right, and I just passed an older apartment building with a rusted swing set out front. On my left stands a new high-rise condominium. At its base is a new bank, attached to a thrift clothing store.

Valleydale is a large and long-standing social housing project. As with some other social housing projects in the city, Valleydale has been in the process of redevelopment. There are multiple perspectives on the benefits of the redevelopment, but one key impact is the relocation of current residents in various stages. This includes the students of Valley Public.

I turn onto the street on which Valley Public School is located. On one side of the street there are some newly constructed town homes. The other side of the street, beyond a high chain-link fence, is a large pit of excavated earth and crumbled concrete, busy with machines. Across the pit, I see the original building that is Valley Public School – the building is undergoing extensive renovations. It looks grand and lonely, and I know the students are excited to move back there. In fact, the Grade 8 students in Andre’s class have spoken hopefully of being able to move into their “real” school building by the time they graduate at the end of the year. The move into the new school had already been delayed once. The pit extends on this street to
an old church on the left, and the school building Valley Public students are housed in on the right. The sounds from the machines are deafening, and the dust at times is near blinding. This school building is not in good shape.

I engage in the familiar task of finding a place to lock my bike, and find a metal rail on the sidewalk directly facing the school doors. One of the poles is detached from the sidewalk. I find one that is still solidly in place, and slide my lock on. The smiling faces of a waiting mother and her young child greet me as I walk to the main entrance. They are waiting for someone to buzz them in, and I wait with them. After a few seconds, we hear the buzz – I always have to guess which door of the many is the one that unlocks with the buzzer. I get it after two tries – the first was a broken handle – and hold the door as my two new friends walk in. I’ve asked the principal before about the disrepair of the school, and her response seemed obvious: “This building is not the board’s priority – why fix anything when they’re going to knock it down anyway.” (Field Notes, October 10, 16, 19, 2012)

Vallelydale was one of those neighbourhoods in major cities stereotyped as “tough”, and branded by the media as “troubled” (see James, 2012 p. 20). Such branding provoked the redevelopment happening in the neighbourhood. The ultimate goal was to turn a neighbourhood characterized by low-income housing, poverty, and crime into a mixed-income community, presumably eradicating any of these issues. Such characterizations, and the implications of redevelopment, had an influence on how teaching and learning happened at Valley Public School – particularly how Andre viewed and taught his students and how they responded to his teaching.

Andre’s Classroom

In October, the class was still new to Andre and his students. It was a Grade 8 class, with 22 students – 12 females and 10 males. There were 20 non-White students, including students of South Asian descent (mostly Bengali), Pilipino, Latino, Caribbean Black, East African, and 2 White students. Prominent on the door as one entered the class was a large Positive Space poster – indicating and promoting the space as positive for individuals who identified as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning (LGBTQ) (see Goldstein, Russell & Daley, 2007, for discussion of positive approaches to anti-homophobia education). Student tables were set up in groups of four or five, with a
teacher desk in the front corner, containing a clutter of papers, permission forms, the school newsletter, and a pile of students’ assignments. The large windows looked out onto a construction site across the street that was used as a parking area for various large machines and construction materials. I noticed that some students looked out of the windows on a regular basis at the school building they hoped to be in by the end of the year, located on the other side of the construction site.

There was a Job Board on the side chalkboard, and a VIP Wall with a student’s photo and name prominently displayed. On the back wall, all of the students’ names were colourfully displayed: Andre told me this had been a first week art project for students. There was a reading nook in the back corner, with bins overflowing with books – mostly graphic novels such as *Maus* by Art Spiegelman, Young Adult novels such as *Monster* by Walter Dean Myers, and non-fiction texts including biographies of Martin Luther King and Nelson Mandela. Two desktop computers were on a table against the back wall, next to large container holding what looked like a class set of notebook size computers. At the time, those computers were used mostly for Internet research, educational games during free time, and word processing. Toward the front was a poster over the chalkboard: “Stand up for what is right, even if you’re standing alone”.

**Andre Velasco**

Andre identified as Pilipino Canadian. He had been a teacher for six years and this was his first year at Valley Public School, teaching Grade 8. Andre had spent time at the school during his practice teaching for his Bachelor of Education, and also had done community work in the area as part of his teacher education. I visited Andre’s class from the beginning of October to early December 2012. I conducted 11 classroom observations of Andre’s literacy and social studies lessons, and formally interviewed Andre before beginning, and after I completed my observations. I also conducted informal interviews, which sometimes took the form of casual conversation, on at least four other occasions after he taught a lesson.

Andre consistently addressed issues of power in the classroom during lessons, and he voiced concerns when he saw power imbalances that he felt impacted his students negatively. The following excerpt from one of my informal conversations with Andre
illustrates his critical attention to issues of power and how they impact his students, who were often the targets of various initiatives in their inner city context:

_The students are having snack and conversing when I walk in this morning. Snack is one of many examples of how community partnerships provide resources for the school. Andre seems perturbed about something this morning. He tells me about concerns he has about a school initiative. A private elite secondary school sought partnership with Valley Public School and weekly visits were organized for the students from the secondary school. Andre described it as, “This idea that these rich kids will come and ‘help’ and ‘teach’ the poor kids”. He shared grave concerns about the whole issue, and had spoken with his school’s administration about his discomfort with the project._

ANDRE: At first they didn’t know what I meant, but then they came back to me with a reworked mode of operating for the project. It sounded like it would involve a more collaborative approach between our students and theirs.

Andre indicates that he is happy about the changes, but that he still has questions about the whole thing. He critiqued the “soft community-building exercises” that the private school students led with his class: name games, and favourite colour and movies type of activities.

ANDRE: Maybe I’m not giving it enough of a chance, but it’s forty minutes where I could be doing other things. The idea was supposed to be that they would be doing something in partnership with the kids, but when they got here, they had something in mind already. It seems like everything was already decided. So it’s not a partnership – it’s them executing something. I really think it will be the private school kids who get something out this, not our students. Overall, it’s been two weeks of this stuff, and I’m not convinced. (Field Notes, Informal Conversation, October 16, 2012)

Andre’s description of the initiative helps to illustrate how his understandings of social justice played out in the context of his teaching, in particular as he considered whether or not the program he described would actually benefit his students, who were often on the receiving end of well intentioned supports. These supports dovetail with _affirmative_ remedies for injustice – meaning those that respond to unjust outcomes.
without changing the structures that create and maintain them. The private school students’ initiative, the subject of Andre’s critique, was an attempted affirmative remedy to maldistribution, attempting to bring together students of different class levels to bridge differences and benefit the inner-city kids. Andre was concerned that the private school students would simply feel good about the work they were doing with less privileged populations. He was mistrustful about their intentions, questioned who would benefit, and was openly critical of the project with his administration.

Empowering for Recognition Embedded in Redistribution – Andre Velasco’s Conceptions of Social Justice (Education)

Social justice for me is an all-encompassing term to describe issues that relate to human rights, issues that relate to equity, issues that relate to equity of outcomes and opportunities… it’s about environmental rights also, it’s about acknowledging the wrong we did to people and repairing those wrongs. It’s about restoring, and trying to make this world a fair and equal place as much as we can. (Andre, Interview 1, October 9, 2014)

To Andre, social justice education involves teaching and learning about issues, but also about taking action on issues. Andre shared with me some of his own experiences growing up in a community that he saw was similar to Valleydale. His family had faced poverty while he was growing up, but never talked about it. He felt that issues of socio-economic class, associated with maldistribution, were a large part of the underlying context for most other oppressions that should be addressed more explicitly in social justice education:

I really think the underlying issue is that of poverty and class and all those things with economics that people know is around. It’s sort of like this big elephant in the room, like nobody ever talks about it because they’re too busy talking about other issues. But it’s always underlying everything that we do, and all the other –isms that we talk about… there are other things too, like racism, sexism, homophobia. Those are always on my radar. (Andre, Interview 1, October 9, 2012)

Andre theorized social justice in a way that called for attention to the politics of redistribution over recognition. He critiqued affirmative multicultural approaches to

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6 The snack program was also an example of an affirmative remedy to maldistribution that is common in inner-city school, where students receive healthy snacks during the day to balance out possibilities that students, presumably because of poverty, might lack nourishment.
addressing issues of misrecognition that leave out attention to the underlying socio-economic causes of oppression. In the classroom, I observed him engaging both redistribution and recognition simultaneously. He explicitly named particular topics that focused on the misrecognition of specific groups (e.g., racism, sexism, and homophobia) while also addressing systemic issues in ways that connected those oppressions, including issues of poverty. He spoke, in one interview, about his need to pay more attention to the intersections of injustice, critiquing what he saw as a dominant tendency in social justice education to focus on one oppression at a time without making connections to intersecting forms of identity and oppression within a particular economic context.

For Andre, social justice education involved acknowledging injustices historically and in the present, and acting to address those injustices. He spoke in general terms about how he believed he implemented his philosophy:

> When I’m talking to kids, the whole idea is about them making change in the world. We talk about fairness, we make them aware of the things that are happening, including the unfairness, and give them the tools to make change in the world. That’s my main thing…. How do we teach and have kids act? Because if we’re part of a system where we’re cogs in the system, are we going to be squeaky, are we going to be the ones who mess things up, ‘cus I think I want to be that part of the system. Because I think when people do that whole charity piece, we’re not making it better for anyone. Kids are still poor. Kids still experience racism. (Andre, Interview 1, October 9, 2012)

Here, Andre shared his critique of a particular form of an affirmative politics of redistribution – that of charity – and alluded to the importance of social action that works to disrupt the system, rather than offer only short-term non-transformative remedies to injustice (Fraser, 2003). Andre’s view of agency moved beyond interpersonal actions toward the possibilities of acting against an unjust system. Similar to his critique of the private school initiative described above, Andre argued that money and pity should not be the tools for action at the heart of social justice education:

> But if they [students] dont have any tools to do something about it, we're not doing anything…. My ultimate goal is to have kids think critically about the world. The world is not just, and I want kids to see that – I want them to examine it, to analyze it, and break it down, and then think about it and do something about it ultimately. Why are they going through school if they can’t change their outcome. If they're about to graduate Grade 12, and they’re still living in poverty, what have we talked about? If they experience all this injustice in the world and they don’t have the tools to do anything about it, then what good is it? (Andre, Interview 1, October 9, 2012)
Andre framed his goals in line with a critical pedagogy approach. He communicated his desire to mobilize education in order to change students’ life outcomes, to help students have the tools to be agents of their own lives, and to support them to do something about their oppressive situation (Freire, 1970; Duncan & Andrade, 2007). He acknowledged that students themselves had knowledge and experiences that contributed to their understandings of what social justice might mean:

[Students] definitely know what it means to be in a situation that is unfair, because they live that experience… and they’ve had people stereotype and discriminate [against them]...Particularly these kids who live in Valleydale, know what injustice feels like, because of the way people speak to them when they say they're from Valleydale…. And they want to make the difference, to make things right, they want to make it better…. They're angry. [Students say,] “What can we do? How can we stop this?....” They want to take an action but they dont know how to go about doing it. And, when someon doesn’t have that experience, they may know through books, or maybe talking to someone about their experience, but I think it's that true authentic real part of their lives. It's real for them. (Andre, Interview, October 9, 2012)

Andre saw social injustice as something that was real for his students, and believed that students could channel what he saw as anger in order to challenge the injustices they faced. While discourses of anger in educational settings, similarly to those of conflict, reflect attempts to repress, manage, or redirect such emotion, Andre’s observations reflect a belief in the potential of anger in enabling challenges to injustice (Freire, 1998; Zembylas, 2007). While anger is not inevitably emancipatory, “Listening to students’ and teachers’ anger about injustices can be constructive and anger can constitute a central part of challenges to any form of domination” (Zembylas, 2007, p. 26). This means that anger, like conflict, can be educative and productive if teachers try to understand and attend to the contextual factors underlying it. Andre recognized his students’ anger toward the injustices that they experienced, and rather than dismiss the anger he observed as a deficit or pathology of the marginalized students he taught, he aimed to mobilize that anger through critically exploring those issues in his classroom. Such anger is what Zembylas (2007) refers to as a political emotion – as central to responses to unjust violations of self and community. Such political expressions of anger are potential examples of generative conflict, and are explored in Chapter 6.
Conflict – Provoking

At the beginning of my series of visits to his school, Andre had a particular view of the concept of conflict that he did not connect to his own work in the classroom. In interviews, Andre distinguished conflict from the critical perspectives he tried to foster. He did not frame instances of disagreement, analysis, or challenging injustice as conflicts. He reflected:

I think if I wanted to cause conflict in my teaching, all I’d have to do is ask questions that were pointed and very critical. And I did this the other day when we were talking about the Valleydale Cultural Centre – I gave the kids an article that described Valleydale in a particular way, and the cultural centre may change the community, and before the community was ghetto and nobody wanted to come to Valleydale, and the kids took a lot of offence to this….

The example I gave, I would say is controversial. Maybe that's a better word….I said to them things like, "But there are lots of poor people here in Valleydale, so is it not a ghetto? There are lots of shootings in Valleydale, does that mean it's a safe place to be? Like if I was walking in Valleydale five years ago at 10:00 at night, would I feel safe, would you feel safe? So those types of questions I use to provoke something. I dont think it's conflict, but it was pointed and direct, and I wanted to stir the pot for them to think critically. (Andre, Interview 1, October 9, 2012)

Andre suggested a relationship between controversial issues and engaging students in conflict. I argue, as do other scholars (e.g., Parker, 2010; Bickmore, 2007, 2014) for engaging students in controversial conversations to break the silence about how race and class play out in perceptions of communities, as an example of social justice teaching using conflict pedagogy. Andre intentionally used critical questioning to provoke conflictual dialogue more than once during my visits to Valley Public. He referred to himself as a “shit disturber”, or “pot stirrer” on many occasions and used such disturbing and stirring to create opportunities for students to have powerful dialogue reflective of conflicting viewpoints. Such “shit disturbing” is a form of “interruptive democracy” (Davies, 2004) that promotes critical disagreement to interrupt unjust views and actions that lend to misrecognition as well as maldistribution.

Drama in the Classroom

Similarly to Evelyn, Andre based his use of drama in literacy instruction as a way to engage students, particularly reluctant readers, in reading. He connected such use of drama pedagogy with social justice – a strategy to keep students from falling behind.
Also, he alluded to the benefit of drama as a different way of knowing – as an alternative to using the written word to communicate knowledge, and acknowledged the possibility that students “might know…through their bodies” (Andre, Interview 1, October 9, 2012). According to Andre, drama was also a way to understand bias, and to elicit empathy for issues and events with which students might have little familiarity.

Andre used his knowledge of his students in how he engaged them in drama exercises, mobilizing his students’ personalities through drama forms like “corridor of voices” (when a character moves through a “corridor” of individuals who voice thoughts and feelings the characters may have), “teacher in role” (the teacher acts in role within the drama in order to challenge students to extend their thinking on an issue), “in role writing”, and “hot seating” (when a character is questioned by the rest of the group). My observation of a dramatic exploration of the text, *Woolvs in the Sitee*, illustrates this point. This book is about Ben, who lives in constant fear of “the woolvs,” with his only support being the character of Ms. Radinsky, who listens to his fears, but also goes missing for three days, leaving Ben to confront his fears alone. The book addresses issues of identity, alienation, loneliness, and various possible issues of justice. It is full of metaphor and symbolism that provokes conflict in the sense that it does not involve a linear narrative with a neat resolution at the end. The reader can constantly negotiate the meaning of what happens in the book. Introducing the “hot seating” activity, Andre invited students to take on the role of a character in the book (not Ben) and to respond, in role, to questions from the audience (the class). In this particular encounter, the hot seat was taken by Yvette who played the role of one of the woolvs, which are never present in any of the book’s illustrations. Karlo asked the questions:

KARLO, quickly, loudly to Yvette: Why are you terrorizing the city? Did you realize what you’ve been doing?
YVETTE, raising her voice: Do you know what I go through? You don’t know my side of the story. All these people coming around, we have nowhere to go.
KARLO: How many of you are there?
YVETTE: We have a pack.
KARLO: How do you feel since you’ve destroyed so many people?
YVETTE: Do you know what I go through (speaking loudly, rising from her seat as she looks at Karlo)? I get terrorized every day by people. You don't know what I go through.

Some back and forth shouting happens between Yvette and Karlo and Andre allows it to continue. All students are watching, captivated.

KARLO: How many people did you take?

YVETTE: We’ve taken about a thousand residents, and most of them are [pause] gone.

(Classroom Observation, October 19, 2012)

Andre engaged dramatic conflict in the classroom by consistently inviting multiple perspectives on text through drama. Students considered various life circumstances for the protagonist, Ben. For example, that he is homeless or that he has mental health issues. Some students responded to the conflictual nature of the text: they shared imaginative possible stories for the protagonist, and what brought him to the situation he was in. The story provided few answers to their many questions, and this provoked their imagining of possibilities, as in this interaction between Karlo and Yvette in role. Andre discussed with me the above student interaction:

I purposely chose those two [students] because I knew they would take it on no matter what I gave them. That conflict that they had...I thought it was a bit much, but at the same time I thought, well this is ok, because she was in role, and she was coming up with this story of the wolves, and he was trying to persuade, and being really pushy and try to get it out of her. I kind of like that actually, but I had to facilitate it at the same time. (Andre, Post-Lesson Interview, October, 19, 2012)

This interview excerpt indicates that Andre makes a connection between his perception of his students’ personalities and how he believed they would engage in conflict. He viewed the ways these students engaged in real conflict (when they are not performing dramatically) as relational. Here, rather than trying to elicit empathy for the protagonist or for the wolves, Andre created an opportunity for students to play out their personalities in a dramatic, and conflictual, way. At the same time, he stated that he had to facilitate the encounter. This suggests that Andre, while he consciously elicited the conflictual dramatic encounter between Karlo and Yvette, saw the possibility that such encounters required facilitation, presumably acknowledging the risk that such conflict
could become dangerous if not facilitated by the teacher.

**Cautious Risk Taking at Whitfield Elementary: Maureen Korneth and Her Grade 6 Classroom**

**Whitfield Public School**

At the time of this data collection, Whitfield Public School had approximately 500 students from Kindergarten to Grade 6. According to Maureen, the population was “mixed…both economic wise, and ethnic wise” (Interview, January 29, 2013). The two largest racial groups of students in the school were White (41 percent) and South Asian (34 percent). 51 percent of students’ parents were born outside of Canada. Just over 40 percent of families had an annual household income of $75,000 or more, and just over 45 percent of families had annual household income of $49,999 or less (School Board, 2008). The school had a Junior Extended French (as a second language) Program for Grades 4, 5, and 6. According to the school website, students spoke over 15 different languages, and the school is described as “rich in cultural diversity”. Below, I provide a general description of the community and school based on my field notes taken in late January and early February 2013:

>You can see the school across the busy street as soon as you exit the subway station. It’s grand – an old brick building, dating from the early 20th century; it takes up a whole block with its size. I cross the busy street, thinking that it must be a safety nightmare for the school and families. School has just been let out, and a throng of students and their families are exiting the school, with some parents waiting outside in the cold. The crossing guard is kept busy, ushering children and adults across the street with loud whistles.

>It’s an eclectic mix of folks here. I notice the White mothers and Brown mothers crossing the street together or waiting just inside the doors for their little ones. I pass many adults and students, and walk around multiple strollers in the entrance to where the hall opens up into a lobby.

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7 According to the school board website: Extended French programs are designed for students who do not speak French at home.
Inside, the ceilings are high, and the hallways are wide. I’m headed to room 212 and find the stairwell. Students are still in the hallways – some talking in small groups, and some walking past me. Some smile, some don't notice. I find room 212, where students are exiting. Maureen is talking to a couple of students. It sounds like she’s clarifying some homework for them. She sees me. “Hey. Antonino?” she asks. I’m relieved she said my name correctly. Pointing to her desk at the back of the room, “You can drop your stuff by my stuff back there; I’ll be done in a second.” (Field Notes, January 29, 2013)

Whitfield was a school within a community that defied simple categorizations of affluent or marginalized. Racial and socioeconomic differences were reflected in the community by where people lived within the neighbourhood. These differences were reproduced in the school, for instance, in terms of the demographics reflected in the Extended French and regular English program. The group of students in Maureen’s class, however, was a microcosm of the overall school population and the wider community.

Maureen’s Grade 6 Classroom

Maureen taught a class of 24 Grade 6 students. In the class, there were eight South Asian students, one Caribbean Black student, three Biracial students, one North American Indigenous student, one South East Asian student, one East Asian student, and nine White students. The classroom had high ceilings, and very large windows that looked out onto the busy street at the front of the school. There were some teacher-created chart paper posters up on the walls from past lessons – success criteria for paragraphs and reference (anchor) charts. Some student work was up on the walls when I first arrived, and the walls became more and more covered with student work over the time of my visits.

The first thing I saw was the carpet area, where much of Maureen’s teaching happened. There, she engaged in informal talking circle processes every morning to begin the day, an exercise she had begun previous to this study and continued consistently throughout the period of my visits. To one side of the carpet was an old upright piano, which Maureen played occasionally for the students. The class library, set in bins by the windows, consisted of some very old books, including some from the 1970s – nothing from the past few years.
Maureen’s desk was in the back corner of the class, by a line of desktop computers. As I stood behind Maureen’s desk to visually survey the classroom from that point of view, I noticed a poster on the main door of the classroom. It showed an image of a para-olympic athlete, and stated in bold lettering: “She doesn't want your sympathy, but her opponent might.”

Maureen Korneth

Maureen is a White woman of Austrian descent. She had been a teacher for 14 years, and at Whitfield Elementary School for the last six years. She had taught Grade 6 for the past two years and had spent most of her career as a primary (K-3) music teacher. I visited Maureen’s class from the end of January to early March 2013. I conducted 11 classroom observations of Maureen’s literacy and social studies lessons, and formally interviewed Maureen before beginning my observations of her classes, and after I completed my observations. As with Evelyn and Andre, I conducted informal interviews on at least four other occasions after she taught a lesson.

Maureen addressed issues of oppression that could be sensitive or controversial in her classroom throughout the school year. At the same time, she seemed to constantly question how far she could go with such discussions based on her perceptions of what her students could handle. Maureen’s emotional responses, and those of others to some social justice issues she addressed, did not keep her from pursuing issues that were important to her, but, rather, provoked Maureen’s reflexivity. The following excerpts from a classroom observation, post-lesson interview, and an email illustrate the uncertainty in Maureen’s approach, as well the role of emotion in Maureen’s teaching.

Maureen had just completed an exploration of the text Shi-Shi-Etko by Nicola I. Campbell with her Grade 6 students, using improvised dramatic role-play. The story is about a young First Nation girl interacting with her grandmother, mother, and father during the few days before she goes to residential school. It is made clear in the story that Shi-shi-etko does not know the gravity of what awaits her, and is excited to be going to school. Maureen explored the book dramatically with students before sharing any explicit information with them about residential schools. That is, students did not have an opportunity to explore what residential schools were and
their historical context before reading the book. Moreover, Maureen did not let her students know in advance that Shi-shi-etko would be going to a residential school in the story. Instead, she planned to do a parallel dramatic exploration of the story and characters after teaching about residential schools in general. To give this context, she read aloud a page at the beginning of the book that the author had provided as context for readers.

The students looked to be listening attentively (students looked directly at Maureen or the book she was holding) as Maureen read, “But now Shi-shi-etko has to go to Indian Residential School. It is the law…. Once she arrives at school she won’t see her parents for many months or even years, she will lose her traditional name, and she will be forced to speak English – a language she doesn’t know.” Lisa called out, “So, the cattle truck! It was kind of like being carted off to a concentration camp.” Maureen continued to read. Once finished, Colleen said, confused, “But Shi-shi was so excited.” Lisa hardly let Colleen finish what she was saying: “Her family was sheltering her, and tried to make her feel comfortable.”

(Classroom Observation, February 7, 2013)

Students in Maureen’s class seemed surprised at the subtext of the story. Colleen expressed disappointment and Lisa made connections between residential schools and a concentration camp, highlighting for some students the gravity of what initially had seemed to be a story about a girl who was excited to go away to school. Maureen told me how these moments in the lesson described above had made her feel. She was cautious about how students’ understandings of Shi-shi-etko’s story, which she perceived as initially “innocent”, would change:

It was so impactful to read the context page. I had a tingle [pause] a shivering, kind of a sad, impactful tingle. I think it’s because of watching some of the students express a kind of more naïve take on what was going to happen with Shi-shi-etko, and imagining how those ideas might change. It kind of made me sad in terms of how that naiveté would be gone… I think it’s also a sadness that they might not fully get it, and that time somehow takes over. Like all of a sudden, it’s recess, and boom, they’re gone. The moment was there, and then it just disappears. (Post-Lesson Interview, February 7, 2013)

After reflecting further, Maureen later sent me an email message:
I was thinking more about that whole shivering incident…. I'm not saying that I shouldn't have talked about residential schools, because I do think it's important for us to make our students aware of injustices …but there's the thing of them [students] still just being kids and are we exposing them to too much too soon…. once in a while I'd think "am I putting too much on their shoulders?" Or maybe I'm just idealizing what life is like for an 11 year old and they aren't as innocent as I'd like to think they are. (Email Correspondence, February 7, 2013)

Maureen was clearly concerned that her Grade 6 students might have been too young to explore the issue of residential schools. She also, however, questioned her own cautiousness in a way that demonstrates her reflexivity and willingness to negotiate her own beliefs and practices. She continued to negotiate her sense of caution and concern for her students over the course of my observation period and interviews with her. Maureen later expressed similar beliefs about the age of her students when she explored the theme of homelessness with them. This speaks to a common concern amongst some educators with introducing young students to sensitive or controversial issues. Kelly and Brooks (2009) found that even explicitly social justice-oriented novice teachers’ conceptions of childhood innocence and developmental appropriateness mediated whether or not, and how, they engaged in equity education. Maureen’s feelings and decisions to explore topics that highlighted oppression reflect how she was grappling with such conceptions of childhood innocence and appropriateness in relation to her teaching. Maureen’s concerns reflect a fear that she could not know how her students would respond to the social justice issues she introduced, although such fear did not always prevent her from addressing those issues with her students. Teaching for social justice necessarily involved classroom discussions of injustice, and Maureen acknowledged the uncertainty that such teaching entails.

Uncertain Desires – Maureen’s Conceptions of Social Justice (Education)

When I asked Maureen to share her understandings of social justice, she did not have an immediate response. She more easily gave examples of the types of issues she associated with social justice and how she addressed them in her teaching. For example, she led work in her school, with her students, on the Day of Pink – a day against bullying, discrimination, homophobia, and transphobia. At the same time, she related that she felt nervous about addressing such issues with her students: “Even though I knew how I
felt…directing [Day of Pink activities] with kids of that age” was difficult for her. Homophobia was something that she named as an issue that was particularly risky to talk about with students, because she was unsure how her students would talk about it when they went home.

Maureen associated social justice education with “integrity”. When I asked her to explain what she meant, she said, “The idea of wanting to learn more about…social justice…. Continually want[ing] to educate yourself about how to be better at talking about it with kids. And it’s not necessarily a value, I don't know.” She continued:

If they [students] ask something I’m not sure about, what do I say? What if I say something that’s actually opposite to what I should be saying? Like, what happens? Then I back track…. For me, that goes back to my, “What you think about when you think about social justice” [response]. It’s the uncertainty, probably, because I don’t know how to always, you know? And we’ve had this discussion at school, when it’s presented like sometimes, “You should know this” or like if someone says, “That book, you should use that book.” Like, I didn’t know that. Like instead of, “You should know that.” Instead then you feel even worse cause you don’t even wanna attempt it. (Maureen, Interview 1, January 29, 2013)

Maureen clearly acknowledged how much she felt she did not know when it came to social justice education. Her comments demonstrated her uncertainty (an alternative to the apparent certainty of many published social justice education approaches). Similar to critiques of critical pedagogy (Ellsworth, 1998), Maureen questioned the presumptions associated with social justice or equity education. For Maureen, justice was not reducible to guidelines, or to specific principles such as those suggested by Lalas (2007) and others. Such rigid ideas of what “should be known,” and what social justice education should look like, sometimes kept Maureen from wanting to attempt to explore some social justice issues in her classroom.

According to Maureen, some of her students were more aware of social justice issues than others because of their opportunities to speak about those issues at home. She attempted to mobilize their knowledge in the classroom:

I’ve had some very strong… females in my class who have had a lot of those discussions – whether they be about homophobia, transphobia, gender equity – at home. Or they’re very, like, aware. So it hasn’t been totally me having to lead the conversation. So I’ve been lucky that way…where some of the kids I don’t think are
even aware at all. So it [having some students who speak about issues at home] gives them someone to draw on. (Maureen, Interview 1, January 30, 2013)

Here, Maureen referred to one student who spoke often in the class and whose views were not necessarily based on her direct experiences with issues, so much as on the opportunities she had to dialogue about those issues outside of her formal schooling. Maureen perceived that many of her other students were unaware of particular issues, or had not had much of an opportunity to address them beyond the opportunities Maureen provided in class. Such perceptions of her students’ awareness and opportunities framed what (topics and content) Maureen decided to address in the classroom and provoked her uncertainty as to how to address social justice issues. In other words, she was unsure about whether or not to address particular issues for fear of possible family reactions. Even when she decided to engage such issues, she was uncertain about her approach. Caution and uncertainty were consistent themes in how Maureen spoke about doing social justice education.

**Conflict – Avoidance and Potential**

Maureen made clear, from the first interview with me, that she was uncomfortable with conflict. She considered herself “an avoider of conflict, a big avoider in all areas of my life.” Like the other two teachers in this study, Maureen insisted that she did not “do conflict” in her class, and that she used strategies such as talking circles on a regular basis in order to build community, value student voice, and minimize possible conflicts amongst students. All of the circles I observed her facilitate were sharing circles in which students shared, for example, what they might do in hypothetical situations, what they did on their weekend, or other topics not associated with conflict. In our first interview, Maureen spoke about various conflictual social issues she had addressed without using talking circles, however, such as homophobia and protection of the environment. I asked her why she had not avoided those topics:

Because interestingly, in those situations, if I feel strongly enough about something….If I feel that it has to be done, then I will discuss it until I have my viewpoint be known. And probably with kids, it [confronting conflicts] is a lot easier to do than with adults, to a certain degree. (Maureen, Interview 1, January 30, 2013)
She told me that her preference was to use her power as teacher to shut down instances of discriminatory speech or actions, particularly when she feels strongly enough about an issue. Feeling strongly enough was a criterion for Maureen to exercise her power as a teacher and intervene, although she expressed that even in such a situation, she might remain unsure. Her interventions would be, “More of a short thing, a power thing, as opposed to a conversation because… if it became uncomfortable, then I don’t know where to go from there” (Interview 1, January 30, 2013). Maureen’s understanding of conflict was that it was something to be avoided. Therefore, she did not initially connect the idea of conflict to any of the work she did in the classroom with students. In the above interview excerpts, Maureen mentioned discomfort with conflict often, including discomfort around how to challenge oppressive beliefs or acts, and discomfort with asking students to engage in explicit dialogue about issues.

Maureen’s fear of not knowing what to do, saying the wrong thing, or potentially communicating a deep-seated bias she herself might have held was demonstrated in her conversation with me about a lesson on homelessness based on the book *Trupp*. *Trupp* was a storybook about an encounter between Trupp, an imaginary creature who left its mountain home, and Bernice, a homeless person in the big city. The story includes a character referred to as “Mad Moe”, who overturns Bernice’s cart full of her possessions for no explained reason. A student referred to Mad Moe as “crazy” and Maureen quickly challenged the student’s use of the term to describe people with mental health issues. However, when another student communicated negative stereotypes about people experiencing homelessness – that all homeless people used the money people gave them to buy drugs or alcohol – Maureen did not challenge her. Other students agreed openly with this stereotype. After the lesson, I asked Maureen what had allowed her to challenge the use of the word “crazy,” but not to challenge students’ negative stereotypes of people experiencing homelessness. She responded:

To me the use of the term “crazy” is a very black and white thing...in the sense that it's a negative term. But to me, with [the student stating her belief that all homeless people take drugs], well, any biases or views I have come out. I think, my own belief is that certain people will use money for food, but others don’t, and it makes me feel uncomfortable with my own views of what this all means. (Post-Lesson Interview, February 13, 2013)
The above quote shows Maureen’s reflexive awareness of her biases, and sense of inner conflict about certain issues. It suggests that Maureen was not always willing or ready to publicly (with students) acknowledge her biases or privileges. Many scholars with social justice goals maintain that non-acknowledgement of a teacher’s bias, power, and privilege serves as a key obstacle to engaging critical, transformative forms of social justice education (Delpit, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Kumashiro, 2000; North, 2009). Even as Maureen acknowledged her biases and privileges, however, those very biases remained a key obstacle to her willingness to engage in social justice education on any level. Maureen expressed a tension between her desire to do critical forms of social justice education, and her discomfort in doing so, and her biases played a role in such discomfort.

**Drama in the Classroom**

According to Maureen, drama in education was “a way for [students] to experience and feel, that they might not through another way…. It’s also because some can’t express themselves on paper as much as they can through…role-playing” (Maureen, Interview 1, January 13, 2013). To Maureen, drama was an alternate mode of communication that engaged students in exploring various texts with social justice themes, by taking on the roles of characters in the books or of individuals in newspaper articles on various issues. She engaged students in hot seating and dramatic deliberations (see Chapter 6 for example and explanation) to elicit various perspectives, and possibly to challenge her students own perspectives at the time. Maureen alluded to the limited power of drama to elicit empathy (understanding and caring about others’ perspectives) in relation to sometimes-controversial social justice issues:

> Feeling what it’s like to be in that position. And to me drama [and specifically] role-playing is the best way. Not that they actually feel because they go back 10 minutes later to their regular lives. But, at least they start to get a sense of what it’s like, maybe – as opposed to just talking about it or reading about it or writing about it. (Maureen, Final Interview, May 13, 2013)

Maureen had questions about empathy in drama: “Are they ever really that character? Or, are they always their perception of that character?” Such questions are reflective of a desire to move toward using drama to facilitate learning about oneself in relation to the Other, rather than assuming one could understand what it was like to be the Other.
Indeed, Maureen expressed awareness that some events or issues “must retain an unimaginable status” (Boler, 1997, p. 266). Such questions manifested in Maureen’s cautiousness about addressing social justice issues. She did, however, use drama strategies to engage students in issues such as homelessness and residential schools using picture and chapter books, poetry, and newspaper articles. These texts were sources beyond her own experiences, in a sense, and the analysis they presented offered opportunities for students to bridge between their own experiences and the issue. The texts did not suggest that students could know exactly what those directly impacted by the issues they studied were feeling.

**Discussion: Cross-Case Comparisons**

Teacher-participants in each site shaped their pedagogical choices differently based on their perceptions of their students, their contexts, and on their own understandings of social justice, conflict, and drama education. In the ways that these teachers articulated their conceptions, three distinct yet fluid themes emerged: critical caring to elicit recognition of others; critical questioning to elicit tools for agency; and confronting uncertainty to elicit multiple understandings. These three teachers’ conceptions and approaches sometimes mapped easily onto Nancy Fraser’s theorizing of justice as a matter of distribution and/or recognition, and educational goals of affirmation and/or transformation (2005). However, a key limitation in attempting to apply such axes is the difficulty in accounting for how social justice education may analyze systemic power and privilege, while simultaneously acknowledging and attending to the idiosyncrasies of individual thought and experience (Sonu et al., 2012). Moreover, the challenge in mapping these teachers’ conceptions onto axes of redistribution-recognition, or affirmative-transformative, parallels the challenge of how teachers confront the dissonance between their aspirations for social justice and their reality of every day teaching within the conditions of an education system. These conditions often constrain education approaches aimed at social transformation. Constraints of time and pressures to meet (pre-set, standardized academic) curriculum demands were not always discussed explicitly by teachers in their interviews with me, but I often arrived to classrooms ready to observe a social justice lesson only to find out that teachers had changed plans because the previous day’s lesson (not necessarily associated with social justice) had not been
completed. Lessons were often cut short based on schedule changes. All three teachers articulated fears of repercussions from teaching for social justice from some of their colleagues and students’ families. These teachers responded to those constraints in similar ways – mostly by remaining in the affirmative, interpersonal realm of practice. Institutional constraints also influenced how the teacher-participants practiced conflict and handled conflict in their classrooms to varying degrees, ranging from avoidance (Maureen), to a focus on interpersonal conflict resolution skills (Evelyn), to intentional elicitation of conflict (Andre). The teachers’ understandings of drama and why it mattered in their practice were also reflected in practice by their comfort levels, and their teaching and justice goals.

These three teachers communicated conceptions and goals of social justice deeply tied to how they saw their roles and their particular students’ ages and presumed or known lived experiences. Two of the three teachers communicated connections between their personal experiences as targets of injustice and the ways they organized their content and pedagogical processes. Below I analyze the similarities and differences in the three teachers’ conceptions and reported practices of social justice education goals in relation to how they perceived their students, and the content and processes they decided to use. I weave connections amongst teachers’ social justice education understandings and practice, and how understandings and practice of conflict and drama play into those social justice education approaches.

**Social Justice Goals Tied to Perceptions of Students**

Evelyn, Andre, and Maureen’s perceptions of their students clearly influenced their social justice goals in their specific contexts. Evelyn Manroe perceived her Grade 4 and 5 students to be very privileged and distant from direct experiences as targets oppression. Evelyn’s goal was to help students to see beyond their own experiences and to challenge their lack of exposure to the realities of oppression. She believed that social justice could be achieved in her context by raising her students’ awareness of the existence of injustice, and improving their attitudes toward others. Andre Velasco found it particularly important to acknowledge the experiences of his Grade 8 students who had had very real experiences with, and as targets of, the oppressions they were discussing.
He was teaching in a physical space that was crumbling – the school building was in disrepair and was a temporary space as he and his students waited to move their permanent school, which was being redeveloped. The students, their families, and friends were also the impacted further by the revitalization project that saw many community members displaced over the course of a few years, and left many of the students and families wondering when they would be asked to move out of Valleydale into another social housing location. Andre acknowledged the anger that some of his students might have experienced in the face of this injustice, and wanted to help students mobilize that anger to challenge those injustices.

Maureen Korneth taught in a context of mixed family incomes and racial diversity. Her perceptions were that some of her Grade 6 students had had limited experiences, and others more extensive experiences, with discussions of social justice issues. Even as Maureen demonstrated reflexivity and awareness of her own biases, her assumptions about particular students and families, mostly racially marginalized, Muslim, and recently arrived to Canada, came through with some of her comments about who engaged more effectively in social justice education. This reflected a context in which there seemed to be some division between White students, many of whom were more affluent, and South Asian students, whose families had more recently arrived in Canada, and most of whom were Muslim. These tensions were implicit most of the time, but arose more explicitly a few times during my classroom observations, and also manifested in non-representative sample of students who volunteered to participate in my improvised drama (inquiry) sessions. This demographic context seemed to shape how and what Maureen taught. Importantly, Maureen’s concerns and discomforts seemed to reflect of her fear of losing control over how and what her students would learn based on their relatively young ages (11 years old) and assumptions about how particular students and families would react to the topics she introduced. These fears limited her willingness to engage some issues with her students.

Each of these teachers seemed to aspire to transformative social justice, but articulated their approaches in different ways. Underlying Evelyn’s approach was a focus on relationships with and among students. Evelyn’s focus on fostering these relationships involved using her power as a teacher to intervene in interpersonal conflicts, and address
injustice in ways that supported students in advocating for themselves on an interpersonal level. Her approach was one of critical care (Dow, 2005). Rólon Dow (2005), in her study of the educational experience of middle school Puerto Rican girls, describes teachers who try to understand their students’ lives, translate race-consciousness into pedagogical approaches, and use caring and critical approaches to fostering relationships with students. Evelyn demonstrated a politicized analysis of racial dynamics in the school, particularly with the few racially marginalized students in her classroom. Andre focused less explicitly on fostering interpersonal relationships amongst students and instead aimed to help students to challenge harmful representations of themselves and their community. He encouraged students to challenge how they and their community had been represented (in the media and arts for example) and perceived by others outside the community. Similar to the work of Shultz (2008), Andre facilitated opportunities for students to critically analyze issues important and relevant to them, and aimed to foster the possibility for them to act on those issues, as well as to have the tools to change their own outcomes. Andre also taught social justice by exposing his (less-privileged) students to experiences beyond what he perceived they had known previously, and mobilized a discourse of empowerment connected to what he saw as students’ personal familiarity with injustice.

In contrast to Evelyn and Andre, who seemed more certain of their social justice education work, Maureen conveyed doubt about how to address particular issues with her students in her interviews. Maureen was thankful for some of the students in her class who brought in knowledge gained from talking about some issues with their families. Her interviews demonstrated her discomforts with introducing certain issues to students she viewed as young. It is common for teachers, even those who identify as social justice educators, to avoid exploring conflictual social justice issues with young students (Bickmore, 2014; Kelly & Brooks, 2009; Myers, 2007). Kelly and Brooks (2009) cite some novice teachers’ perceptions that children would be uninterested in current issues or that they lack analytical skills. Maureen’s communicated perceptions also show that some teachers consider certain issues to be beyond students’ ages when deciding whether or not, or how, to engage them in social justice issues. As discussed above, while Maureen had concerns about her students being too young, she also expressed concerns early on
about how specific students and their families might have taken up some of the social justice issues she wished to introduce.

One way Evelyn tried to raise awareness and foster relationships with her students was by sharing in the classroom her own personal experiences – which she perceived to be very different from those of most (not all) of her students. Like one of the social justice educators in a study by Sonu and her colleagues (2012), Evelyn mobilized her personal experiences as a target of oppression to teach her students about issues that she cared about. Such discussions in Evelyn’s classroom commonly focused on those who endure discrimination, but Evelyn also often drew attention to Whiteness as a norm, and challenged its invisibility, as when she spoke about her decision not to straighten her hair. For Evelyn, that decision challenged the historically created norms that she drew attention to in her discussions with students. Such an attempt to make Whiteness visible in a mostly White community reflects what critical race theorists (e.g., Delgado, 1995) and other scholars who study the operation of Whiteness (Segrest, 2001; DiAngelo, 2011; Ahmed, 2007) have called for in work to challenge oppression. Andre Velasco also shared personal experiences of exclusion from his childhood apparently to highlight connections he perceived between his experiences and some of his students. Andre’s experience of poverty as a young person informed his conception of social justice education; he considered it as a matter mostly of structural economic issues, connected to issues of misrecognition. Based on this understanding, Andre focused on supporting students to improve their situations. In contrast, Maureen did not share personal experiences related to justice issues in classroom lessons I observed. Instead, justice issues came from current and past historical events, and she left open the possibility for students to draw their own connections to their own experiences.

How these teachers’ social justice education goals manifested varied and depended on their perceptions of students in their classrooms – particularly in relation to their perceptions of students’ experiences as targets of oppression, or not. Especially for Evelyn and sometimes for Andre, their practice of social justice education was based on their own perceived differences or similarities with their students. For Maureen, how she spoke about her view of her students related directly to age rather than experiences with oppression, as well as her assumptions about particular families.
Implemented Curriculum, Content and Processes – Social Justice, Conflict, and Drama

All three teachers in this study used texts, and specifically storybooks, as springboards for the exploration of social justice content. For example, Evelyn used only fiction storybooks to explore justice issues with her Grade 4 and 5 students, in the most privileged and youngest classroom of the three studied. When she tried to elicit text-to-self connections with students, only some of them shared knowledge of instances of discrimination (mostly those they had only heard about). I initially observed Maureen (Grade 6) to use picture books as well, but during the observation period she began to use other texts that reflected contemporary and divergent views on issues. Andre (Grade 8) also used picture books with his students, and often asked students to read newspaper or Internet news articles and other non-fiction texts connected to their community, as well as to global issues. Not surprisingly, texts were a means of establishing context and collective reference points for exploring conflicting viewpoints in dialogue and drama work. The older the students, the more diverse were the forms of text used (fiction, non-fiction, and other media texts).

Social Justice Content

The three teachers in this study organized their social justice content differently from each other, even as some of the texts and pedagogical strategies they used were similar. The content Evelyn used in the classroom reflected specific focus on distinct oppressions which, based on her perception, were not reflective of many of her students’ experiences. Her apparent politics of recognition (Fraser, 2003) reflected her goal of enhancing awareness of identity-based bias (prejudice) and discrimination (Kumashiro, 2000). Evelyn taught about Others and about instances of oppression through fiction and non-fiction story books, and used drama and dialogue in an attempt to foster critical consciousness (Ladson-Billings, 2006) amongst her students.

Andre organized students’ explorations of social justice topics differently from Evelyn. Rather than highlighting one oppression at a time, he used books that were open-ended and metaphorical, offering opportunities for students to derive their own connections to the characters in the books based on their personal experiences. Andre strove to bring questions of class and economics (maldistribution) into his class’
conversations about misrecognition of identities. He did so by introducing non-fiction texts (in addition to fiction) based on issues directly connected to students’ lived experiences, as well connecting to issues considered more global in nature.

Maureen’s approaches to the way she organized students’ exploration of social justice issues were varied. Explorations mostly emerged in relation to themes in storybooks (mostly historical fiction). Each storybook connected to a particular social justice issue, such as homelessness and residential schools, rather than distinct oppressions. She would ask students to name analogous experiences or knowledge about the issue brought up in the book, and then introduce further texts to help organize drama and talk activities, moving forward or redirecting based on student responses and her comfort level, as she told me in her interviews. The issues she introduced were not always directly related to the students’ or Maureen’s own personal experiences. Maureen’s acknowledged uncertainty regarding her approach to social justice education was reflected in the emergent and fluid approach she used in the classroom. She did not communicate a rigid vision of “how things should be” and aimed to have students explore multiple perspectives on various issues.

To varying degrees, Maureen, Andre, and Evelyn focused their content on social justice issues of misrecognition even as they organized their content differently from each other. Evelyn focused on particular forms of discrimination in isolation. Andre used more distant (imaginary) fictional characters to address intersecting forms of injustice. Maureen introduced broader issues and events associated with injustice. Two of the three teachers delved into connected issues of redistribution, and also addressed divergent perspectives on social-structural issues in explicit ways compared to Evelyn – particularly Andre, and (toward the end of period of observation) Maureen. When these teachers addressed the connections between misrecognition and maldistribution, rather than focusing solely on misrecognition, the potential for moving from affirmative, interpersonal approaches toward transformative possibilities became more apparent.

**Conflict**

All three teachers facilitated opportunities for students to engage with conflict – that is, with disagreement and struggle at various levels. They explored curriculum content involving divergent viewpoints, and sometimes offered explicit opportunities for
student dialogue, negotiation, and dissent – more often in Andre and Maureen’s cases than in Evelyn’s. Andre had not initially considered his fostering of disagreement or asking of pointed, critical questions to be examples of addressing conflict. His dialogic methods reflected the work of Freire, described in the context of urban schools by Reyes, Duncan-Andrade, and Morell (2008). As in Freire’s theory, Andre’s dialogic teaching involved engendering dialogue among students and between students and the social world. Andre consciously attempted to be a self-described “shit disturber” in the way he addressed issues in the classroom. He aimed to provoke conflict dialogue amongst students as a tool for “interruptive democracy”, which according to Davies (2011, p. 1) has the power to help students gain the capacity to interrupt unjust patterns in society. Andre created multiple opportunities for whole class discussions in which he asked purposefully dissonant questions – questions that could challenge the dominant narrative of the Valleydale community, for example. Even as some students remained usually silent, many students in his class often engaged in open, passionate disagreement. There were also dramatic opportunities to engage in conflict dialogue in role. Andre sometimes selected students purposefully (confident students, for example), in order to encourage tension-filled scenarios, as learning opportunities for all students.

Maureen, while she considered herself a conflict avoider, organized an increasing number of opportunities for conflict dialogue in class during the observation period. In particular, her class dramatically explored various perspectives on issues such as homelessness and residential schools in relation to historical fiction storybooks and non-fiction texts (such as newspaper articles and historical documents). Maureen told me in interviews she was unsure of how to respond to instances of discriminatory talk, and expressed her desire to be able to address such instances of justice conflict more effectively. Maureen’s willingness to take on (sensitive) social justice issues (likely to elicit conflicting viewpoints) increased during the period in which I observed in her classroom. She found ways to introduce conflict into her pedagogy about social justice issues, particularly through process drama activities and related discussion (preparation and debriefing).

Evelyn, on the other hand, spoke in very positive terms about conflict as a learning opportunity in her interviews. However, in the classroom interactions I observed
during this study, she seemed to engage conflict only minimally as a pedagogical approach to teach for social justice. Evelyn addressed conflict in small group or individual interactions, mostly outside class lessons and usually (in my observations) not explicitly raising social justice questions in these interventions. Thus, Evelyn’s teaching and addressing of conflict was minimal and focused on interpersonal goals of social cohesion and consensus. Maureen also focused on interpersonal goals of social cohesion in her classroom (even as she later increasingly offered opportunities for divergent perspectives to be shared in whole class lessons). This observation is consistent with Bickmore’s (2014) research on conflict dialogue learning opportunities in public school classrooms, which found that the participating primary teachers were more likely than many of the participating secondary teachers to emphasize norm and skill development for interpersonal (more than social-structural) conflict resolution and communication. The relatively young ages of Evelyn (Grades 4/5) and Maureen’s (Grade 6) students seemed to affect how these teachers taught and addressed (or avoided) conflict. Even so, Evelyn and Maureen did bring conflictual social justice issues into their implemented lesson content, as described above.

Evelyn’s social justice teaching aligned with her conflict pedagogy focus of fostering positive interpersonal interactions by attending to the psychological effects of misrecognition without much attention to the broader root causes of those oppressions. At the same time, even though mandated curriculum in Canada provides limited opportunities for teachers to address conflictual issues (Bickmore, 2006), Evelyn (and the two other teachers in this study to varying degrees), managed to facilitate student learning opportunities that involved generative conflict. Evelyn often asked students in her class to work in small groups. This often created spaces for interpersonal conflict to occur in relation to particular tasks, but little substantive conflict arose in relation to divergent perspectives on social justice issues. In these group tasks, conflict often occurred across gender groups, and mostly involved practical decisions about dramatic action or content. Maureen, as mentioned, used talking circles, but not to intentionally facilitate productive conflict. She increasingly created opportunities for whole class passionate discussion and disagreement on social justice issues. Such opportunities for whole class passionate disagreement were commonplace in Andre’s class. Andre often introduced an issue that
he thought would elicit educative conflict, and would allow the discussion to unfold. In whole class discussions in Andre and Maureen’s classes, some students were more vocal than others, and in some cases would dominate the discussions. In Maureen’s Grade 6 class, a small group of girls seemed to dominate many of the whole class discussions. In Andre’s Grade 8 class, a small group of students also dominated discussion most often, but these voices were not gender specific, although not in all instances (see Chapter 6).

Drama Pedagogy

All three teachers in this study took an instrumentalist view of drama education – drama was a medium through which to engage especially academically struggling or frequently disengaged students, and enhance their learning. These teachers used drama pedagogy processes that reflected their social justice goals. That is, they communicated reasons for their use of drama based on addressing issues of misrecognition, empathy, engagement, and achievement. For example, all three teachers viewed drama as a way of creating opportunities for students to imagine what it would be like to be someone else – that is, to empathize with Others. All three teachers communicated a central goal of empathy in their drama pedagogies: this could make it difficult to move beyond affirmative approaches to social justice education. Empathy alone as a goal may not address the emotional complexities or social structures involved in histories of injustice, and may even trivialize suffering (Zembylas, 2013). Unlike Evelyn and Andre, Maureen questioned whether drama pedagogy could embody or elicit true empathy. She seemed critical of some of the presumed benefits of drama pedagogy, and she complicated the relationship between drama and empathy in how she talked about how drama might matter in social justice education.

In keeping with a selection criterion for teachers in this study, Evelyn, Andre, and Maureen focused on improvised drama embedded in language and social studies lessons rather than on teaching specific theatrical skills. They did not, according to interviews and observations, facilitate the creation of pre-scripted performances, or stage performances outside classroom lessons. It was clear that these three teachers focused on social goals – what Neelands (2004) refers to as “para-aesthetic” drama education – rather than on development of theatre skills, which Neelands calls “intra-aesthetic” (p. 50). They implemented drama pedagogies, as described above, mostly by using fiction (in
all classrooms) and non-fiction (in Maureen and Andre’s classes) texts as springboards for students’ improvised dramatic exploration.

Evelyn created multiple opportunities for students to role-play characters in the books they explored. Students often had to work together in small groups to create scenes reflecting conflicts within the narratives of the books they were discussing, usually focusing on protagonists who experienced an injustice. Drama pedagogy, for Evelyn, was a way to foster student cooperative relationships while they worked in small groups, and for the students to communicate their comprehension of the books they were reading. Drama was used to learn with peers about Others, and she hoped that these opportunities were preparation for times when students would experience interpersonal conflicts or injustices themselves.

Andre also connected drama to the books his Grade 8 students read in language class, but as mentioned above, the texts were open ended in a way that encouraged students to make multiple and diverse connections to the characters. Students did not often have the opportunity to work in small groups to create scenes in Andre’s class. Instead, he implemented much process drama – large group drama that involved role-plays aimed at illuminating and even fostering tension by eliciting divergent perspectives, followed by subsequent in-role writing (for example, reflecting on the events of a drama from the point of view of a character they portrayed). Andre intended that this combination of texts and drama forms be opportunities for students to learn about themselves and about Others.

Maureen’s Grade 6 class made connections to picture books as well as other text forms, such as articles and poems, also explicitly connected to social studies curriculum topics. She organized opportunities for small group drama scene creation, individual improvisations and large group drama. Maureen used drama pedagogy to create opportunities for students to express their understandings of concepts and Others’ experiences. She also increasingly engaged students in dramatic conflict to challenge their own understandings and perspectives (see Chapter 6).

Maureen and Andre took on actor-teacher roles in their classrooms. Winston (1996) argues that taking on a dramatic role enables teachers to harness and explore the emotional energy of their students in response to issues and texts. Maureen and André’s
willingness to take on actor-teacher roles created a collectivity amongst students that was observably different from Evelyn’s class. For example, when Andre acted in-role as Ben from *Woolvs in the Sitee* (described above), he was able to elicit critical questions from students about the main character’s life, sparking what I observed to be affective participation on the part of most of the class. When Maureen acted as the reporter in a dramatic deliberation on homelessness (described in Chapter 6), she used her dramatic role to challenge students to deepen their improvised dramatic responses by asking analytic questions and holding them accountable to their dramatic talk. These teachers were able to harness their students’ emotional energy by participating dramatically in the moment of performance. They also, implicitly, were letting students know that they were willing to take some of the same risks associated with improvisational dramatic performance that they asked students to take.

All three teachers demonstrated a commitment to drama pedagogy as a tool for personal transformation for the students, whether it was to improve their reading and writing, to engage deeply in social justice issues, to change their attitudes toward Others, or to challenge instances of misrecognition - dominant culture’s derisive view of particular groups (Fraser, 2000). Drama pedagogy in these classrooms was mostly affirmative and interpersonal – it usually did not aim to challenge the root causes of injustice. All these three teachers, to various degrees, used drama pedagogy as a way to bring “unfamiliar knowledge into knowing engagement” (Neelands, 2009). Teachers used drama to enhance students’ awareness of unfamiliar issues. For Evelyn and Maureen, drama pedagogy was a possible opportunity to help students become more familiar with the experiences of Others unfamiliar to them. For Andre, drama pedagogy was an opportunity to help students make meaning of abstract curriculum topics by applying them to their own contexts, and a tool for challenging others’ (dominant) negative representations of themselves and their community. Evelyn, Andre, and Maureen all aimed to use drama as a way to have students explore how they regarded others and themselves, with different depths of attention to broader social structures.

The teachers in this study had social justice goals that manifested differently in what and how they taught. They also addressed questions of conflict differently from each other. Clearly, affirmative approaches to recognition were reflected in interpersonal
understandings of conflict (Evelyn). Affirmative (with aspirations toward transformative) goals of addressing misrecognition and inequitable distribution were embedded in pedagogies eliciting explicit conflict (Andre). In contrast, Maureen’s varied and cautious vision of social justice seemed to reflect her preference to avoid of conflict (see interview excerpt above). She told me she was not sure how to go about doing social justice education in her classroom, even as she knew she wanted to. Because she was experimenting in variable ways, Maureen’s conceptions were most difficult to map onto either or categories of recognition or redistribution.

For these teachers, drama pedagogy was one of the ways in which their social justice education goals could manifest. With various emphases and degrees of confidence in their drama facilitation abilities, these three teachers attempted to use drama in pro-social, para-aesthetic ways, focused mostly on affirmative goals of personal transformation. They each facilitated particular dramatic encounters that differently weaved together their roles and goals as social justice educators, and how they saw and used conflict pedagogies in relation to their particular personal, school and community contexts. In many ways, the work of these teachers did not address the root causes of injustice or focus explicitly on systemic oppression. Instead, these case studies reflect teaching social justice and drama on an “achievable scale…. That on the level of the classroom and teachers and young people who use it, it ought to be possible to offer some working and active idea, at least, of what democratic civic life might look like” (Boyd, quoted in Neelands, 2009, p. 184). While it is difficult to claim that any of the dramatic encounters I observed these classrooms were transformative – that they directly challenged systemic oppression and created just relations - they did offer some working ideas as to what social justice education that uses drama and conflict pedagogies might look like, and offered students opportunities to imagine possibilities for more just relations. The collaborative as well as conflicting interactions amongst individuals in classrooms when social justice, conflict, and drama are interwoven – in dramatic encounters – are micro-experiences reflective of macro possibilities.

**Contexts Encouraging and Impeding Dramatic Encounters**

Teacher-participants in each site constantly negotiated the material and symbolic constraints that shaped their teaching, and their self-understanding in relation to their
students. All three teachers, within the context of one publically funded school board, experienced pressures to implement an extensive mandated curriculum within constricting, pre-set timetables and top-down initiatives. Even as some school board policies and resources supported the teaching of social justice content and encouraged the acknowledgement of days of significance (e.g., Day of Pink, Black History Month), few supports existed for teachers to engage students in approaches that challenged systems that perpetuated oppression. Even as I selected participating teachers who aspired to socially transformative social justice education, the three teachers in this dissertation study focused on affirmative approaches to social justice education. That is, they mostly implemented short-term strategies to addressing injustice that focused on inclusion and celebrated diversity, and that were fairly accepted approaches.

In the most affluent (and youngest) Grade 4/5 context, Evelyn often cut short many opportunities to explore issues that she had introduced, mostly because of time constraints, and also because she did not often connect the social justice explorations to other subject areas outside of her scheduled literacy time. Evelyn prioritized timed control of lessons and student behaviours in order get through her social justice and other content. At the same time, her views that students needed to expand their experiences and learn about different people’s experience of oppression motivated her to infuse social justice content when she felt she could, and to use drama pedagogy to encourage students’ participation and to imagine what it might be like to be Others.

Maureen created time despite timetable constraints, to engage students in talking circles, and strongly supported days of significance (social justice awareness activity days and days of cultural significance) with related lessons. She told me that she experienced discomfort with some (conflictual social justice) topics. She viewed her Grade 6 students as too young to engage in some issues, and viewed specific students in her class in ways that made her cautious about what to pursue and how. These perspectives were obstacles to engaging some issues deeply, especially in the early days of my observation period in her classroom.

Andre, in the least affluent and most racially marginalized student/community context, experienced support from his administration and colleagues in pursuing his approach to social justice education that included eliciting divergent perspectives and
drama. His perceptions of his students’ experiences, as well as their grade level impacted his view of their agency. He told me in interviews that he thought his students had great capacity for agency in the form of acting against oppression. Andre especially spoke about his sense of responsibility for preparing his students for high school, which they would be entering the following year. He feared not providing his students with the academic tools to be successful. Even as he found ways to implement social justice teaching through drama to meet the academic demands of the curriculum, there were times that he did not include a focus on broad justice topics in areas such as math and science, and focused instead on academic subject area skills alone.

School context factors encouraged or limited teachers’ opportunities to implement social justice oriented curriculum, the degree to which their social justice teaching addressed conflict, and how and why they used drama pedagogy. A key difference among these three teachers seemed to be how each of them interpreted their role and experiences in relation to their perceptions of their students’ life experiences (based on their perceived degree of privilege or marginalization), as well as age level. This study examined three contrasting classrooms, and found that no particular context necessarily completely impeded their social justice pedagogies, but no context fully or directly supported approaches that embraced socially (rather than personally) transformative and/or productively conflictual social justice curriculum either. I observed teachers address content with socially transformative possibilities consistently in each classroom. I did not, however, observe practices (beyond content) with socially transformative possibilities consistently in each classroom. Productive opportunities for conflict dialogue and drama work was not often extensive, particularly when students in the classrooms were younger and perceived to be more affluent.

Conclusion

This dissertation pays close attention to how the teachers themselves understood their contexts and their students, and how these views shaped their pedagogies. Throughout this chapter, I have analyzed each teacher-participant’s conceptions and reported practices of social justice education (including the use of drama and views of conflict) in relation to Nancy Fraser’s distinction between a politics of redistribution and a politics of recognition. Fraser (2000) argues that we need both kinds of politics in order
to address social injustice. These teachers’ conceptions and practices, however, did not always map easily onto Fraser’s categories, pointing to the complexities in how teaching for socially transformative social justice may actually happen within the institutional contexts of publically funded schools. For both a politics of redistribution and recognition goals, Fraser advocates the value of “non-reformist reforms” (2003, p. 79), to address immediate needs while envisioning a more just future. This is similar to Boyd’s concept of working at an “achievable scale” – adapting what ought to be in society to the material realities of teachers and students in classrooms. Non-reformist reforms, on an achievable scale, include affirmative approaches to addressing injustice. Such approaches might be strategically used to create conditions for social transformation, as a step toward addressing the (root structural) causes of and structural factors associated with injustice.

The three teachers’ conceptions and practices of social justice education reflect the challenges of engaging socially transformative approaches to social justice education in contemporary public school institutional contexts. While these three teachers challenged either-or conceptions of affirmative and transformative approaches to their contexts, their articulated conceptions did not, in practice, move into a socially transformative realm. As noted above, Evelyn, Andre, and Maureen’s conceptions of social justice education varied, but mostly focused on personal attitudinal change that addressed justice goals of recognition. In the most affluent context, Evelyn focused on recognition based on care and awareness. Underlying Maureen’s pedagogies was a similar focus on care and cohesion, even as her practices became more complex over the course of my observations. She began to challenge her own conceptions of conflict, and took increasing risks in creating opportunities for generative conflict using drama pedagogies. By addressing broad issues in her content area and pedagogies, she created opportunities for issues of misrecognition and maldistribution to be addressed. Andre also focused on community building. In contrast to the other teachers in this study, however, he fostered such community building to ensure a safe environment for engaging in explicitly conflictual dialogue and drama opportunities. He touched upon discussions of individual attitudes as well as structural causes of injustice, integrating issues of misrecognition and maldistribution, within a belief in his role as teacher to empower students.
Generally, all three teachers in this study responded to the immediate needs of the students in their context in ways that aimed to make a difference in their lives. These teachers strategically responded to their conditions by mobilizing affirmative approaches, and in some ways touched upon or aspired to more comprehensive social transformation. The cross-case discussion demonstrates that drama and conflict pedagogies (even when the teachers did not label them as such) can be powerful ways to engage students in social justice topics. Teachers’ social justice education teaching was influenced by the political and social contexts of each school, the communities in which they were located, and their conceptions of the students who attended them. The three case studies provide eclectic, complicated, and powerful stages on which various unpredictable dramatic encounters unfolded. They sometimes reflected the positive possibilities as well as the disappointments of social justice education. In the following chapter, I build on this foundation to explore how students in each of the three sites understood social justice, and how they took up their teachers’ understandings, pedagogical approaches, and learning opportunities based on small group drama inquiry (improvised drama) sessions I conducted with sub-sets (6-9 students) from each class, and observations of classroom lessons led by each teacher.
Chapter 5: Improvised Drama Inquiry Outside of Class: Student Interpretations of Social Justice (Education)

In this chapter, I explore how selected students from the three contrasting classrooms communicated their understandings of social justice during improvised drama inquiry sessions I facilitated. I explore how these students’ conceptions of social justice related to each of their teachers’ apparent social justice learning goals (shared in the previous chapter), probing the space between what teachers taught and what the various student understood or expressed (Ellsworth, 1997, 2005; Kumashiro, 2000; Sonu, 2009b). These students’ interpretations of their teachers’ pedagogies were sometimes similar, and sometimes very different from, their teachers’ observed or narrated pedagogical intentions.

In the improvised drama sessions (as in the teachers’ classroom lessons), talk was an important part of the encounters. Student dialogues were important as a means of articulating particular understandings in combination with, and sometimes separate from, the dramatic action. Out-of-role talk can allow students to explore and negotiate ideas that could be used in future in role drama work (Freebody & Finneran, 2013). In dialogic meaning making, knowledge is created through the meeting of different ideas that come into play (Gallagher, 2014). The participating students (small groups removed from their regular classroom context) communicated their understandings of social justice, both explicitly as oneself (in talk) and in role through imagined expressions (drama). The arts-based drama method I used was pedagogically informed: I was concerned with creating shared contexts with participating students, and providing opportunities for these students to reflect collectively on those shared contexts. Thus, I viewed both students’ talk (context building and debriefing discussions) and students’ improvised dramatic performances as integral to these improvised drama inquiry sessions. I focus attention on both verbal and embodied data – offering multi-modal opportunities for students to communicate their interpretations and responses to social justice education.

Post-structural understandings that identities are a reflection of the subjectivity of relational experiences, informed both the activities I facilitated and my analysis of the data. Moreover, I assumed that power circulated in collective work of the improvised drama sessions; and the students and I as facilitator were being shaped by norms we had
learned, that were reinforced by school structures. I acknowledge my own power as facilitator and researcher, but I also assume students themselves had agency in the spaces of the improvised drama sessions.

Critical pedagogy and the drama work of Boal also influenced the drama work I facilitated. I hoped the weaving of drama and discussion during the sessions, as a form of drama pedagogy (see Chapter 2) that held the promise for encouraging societal change. However, student empowerment was not the goal of these sessions; they were opportunities for students to communicate their conceptions, and to have input in my process of creating knowledge (through this thesis inquiry). I pre-planned each session for the groups at each school, but also left room for uncertainty and change within each session based on student responses to questions and activities, and emergent ideas. Thus, I did not standardize each session in each site. Allowing processes to take their course allowed for some differences in how the sessions looked at each site. In my design I brought together conceptions of social justice education, generative conflict, and drama education so as to focus on the process of improvisational encounters contextualized in particular classrooms with particular students.

During the first session with the sub-groups of participating students from each classroom, I began by facilitating introductory improvisational drama exercises (icebreakers). I then asked students about their understandings of social justice, and asked them to dramatize those understandings using tableaux (still images using their bodies). During the second session with each sub-group of participating students, I introduced a dramatic prompt (pretext) that involved a child who did not want to go to school. I asked students to create and perform scenes in response to the prompt. During the second session with the Grade 8 students from Andre’s class at Valley Public School, we also engaged in Forum Theatre based on the scenes they created. For the third session with Grade 4/5 students from Evelyn’s class and with Grade 6 students from Maureen’s class, students engaged in video analysis of their previously created scenes, followed by hot seating or Forum Theatre activities. Grade 8 students from Andre’s class participated in the airport process drama described in Chapter 3 during their third session. Grade 4/5 students from Evelyn’s class, and Grade 6 students from Maureen’s class participated in the airport process drama during their fourth improvised drama session. Grade 8 students
from Andre’s class analyzed a short film during their fourth improvised drama session, improvising talkbacks in-role as the characters in the film they viewed. They also performed improvised talkback as themselves (out-of-role). More detailed agendas for the four improvised drama sessions I facilitated (with a small sub-group of students at each site) are outlined in Appendix B. Below, I present key vignettes from each of the sessions that show how I used drama as an inquiry tool to examine students’ identity-linked conceptions (and voiced and/or dramatic representations) of social justice.

As I consider the similarities and differences between session sub-group students’ and their teachers’ conceptions of social justice, inevitably, my own intentions and positionality as a researcher, a participant observer, and a workshop facilitator also influenced how and what students communicated, as well as how those understandings are represented in this dissertation (see Methodology, Chapter 3). My intention as a researcher facilitator in these separate improvised drama sessions was to invite these sub-groups of students to communicate their views of social justice outside of classroom lessons. Students in each group gave clues as to how they saw themselves in relation to others, how they interpreted social justice goals, and what the achievement of such goals might entail.

The group participating in my improvised drama sessions from Evelyn’s Grade 4 and 5 classroom included 9 students, out of 31 in the whole class. The group included seven White students, and two non-White students (the only two Black students in Evelyn’s class). Evelyn’s (classroom) social justice pedagogies addressed awareness of the world outside students’ own experiences and encouraged students to do something about their own and others’ experiences of injustice. The group of students participating in the improvised drama sessions from Maureen’s Grade 6 classroom included 7 students, out of 24 in the whole class. The group included four White students and three Biracial students. Even more than the other two subgroups, this group sample was not reflective of the rest of the class population – none of the South Asian Muslim students from Maureen’s class volunteered to attend the sub-group sessions, though they represented a significant percentage (36 per cent) of students in the class. Maureen’s (classroom) social justice pedagogies addressed broad issues such as homelessness and First Nations, Métis, and Inuit rights, integrated into the (academic) curriculum. The group of students
participating in the improvised drama session students from Andre’s Grade 8 classroom included 7 students, out of 22 in the whole class.

The group included five non-White students and two White students (the only two White students in Andre’s class). In his classroom, Andre focused on critical engagement with social justice issues and on helping students to attain the tools necessary to enhance their own situation as well as that of Others.

I begin below by examining how students participating in the improvised drama sessions spoke about their conceptions of social justice. I describe and analyze how students communicated their understandings of what and who social justice was about, and how it might be achieved. Students from Evelyn’s class communicated understandings that were both similar and different from Evelyn’s intended social justice education goals (expressed in interviews). They communicated perceptions of social justice as knowledge about Others and framed themselves as benevolent helpers. Similarly to the students from Evelyn’s class, the subgroup of students from Maureen’s class focused mostly on Others’ struggles, but framed themselves as distant witnesses to those struggles. Participating students from Andre’s class communicated understandings of social justice that seemed to be linked to classroom discussions of social justice issues. They spoke about and dramatized misrecognition problems animating (in)justice. Some students explicitly presented their own identities as targets of such injustice – framing themselves as disrupters of personal, and sometimes broader, injustice.

Next, I proceed to describe and discuss (sub-group) students’ improvised drama performances to probe their interpretations of social justice, examining how students’ dramatic interpretations were similar or different from the ways they spoke about social justice, and how their interpretations related to their teachers’ conceptions and practices of social justice education. Students’ verbalized understandings of the relationships between themselves and others, in relation to social justice, were, in some instances (in all three sites), inconsistent with the way the same students dramatized their understandings of social justice during the improvised drama sessions I led. During the second improvised drama sessions, for example, students from Evelyn’s and Maureen’s classes created dramatic scenes that applied social justice to peer-group interpersonal relations, but not with discrimination or broader social contexts that they had brought up
in our initial discussions. In contrast to the way Andre’s Grade 8 students dramatized and spoke about their understandings of social justice, where clear instances of discrimination were dramatized, a bullying discourse predominated amongst students from Evelyn’s Grade 4/5 class and Maureen’s Grade 6 class, even though I did not observe instances (or discussion) of bullying in either of their classrooms.

I also describe below how students responded to and communicated their conceptions of social justice during a process drama I facilitated with each group of students. Specifically, I consider how students named stereotypes, in role, in order to elicit challenges to those stereotypes from their peers, or used parody in order to mock the stereotypes they enacted. Finally, I describe a particular improvised drama session activity that I facilitated with the group of students from Andre’s class at Valley Public School, analyzing how those students interrupted dominant representations of themselves, and challenged fixed ideas of identity. These instances of social justice drama improvisation and discussion embodied notions of social justice and offered alternatives to positivist notions of student empowerment.

**Initial Expressions and Conceptions of Social Justice**

I began the first improvised drama session at each site with various drama games as warm up exercises aimed at helping the students feel comfortable with each other and with me. I planned to create an atmosphere conducive to students’ willingness to take risks with their bodies and ideas, as well as informally practice drama skills that they could use in later improvised drama sessions with me. These start-up activities were not directly related to issues of social justice. For example, at each site, we began with informal warm-ups in a circle such as “making faces” (facially expressing different emotions), and “gift giving” (each student mimed an object that they were to give to the person beside them; each player who received the gift could transform it into any object they wished, with no verbal explanation). I also asked students to improvise scenes in pairs based on contexts of their choice (e.g. the movie theatre, amusement park), and then encouraged them to explain their dramatic choices. These initial dramatic exercises often ended with students’ and my own laughter and much smiling.

Next, in this first session, I turned to a discussion of participating students’ experiences with drama, potential connections they had experienced with issues of social
justice, and the purposes of my study. At this point, I asked students directly, “What is social justice to you?” I let their responses guide the ensuing discussions. I also asked each group of students about what I knew of what they were exploring in their regular classroom lessons with their teachers, and incorporated them into discussions and exercises. Time was limited in these sessions, as they occurred during the lunch hour. For each first session, my intention was to have students create tableau scenes (still images with their bodies), individually or in pairs, based on our discussions about social justice. I asked them to enact how they defined social justice or what social justice issue(s) were important to them in order to collect both dramatized and talk data on this question. At each site, this was often rushed and interrupted by the bell indicating the end of lunch. Depending on timing, some scenes remained in tableaux format at some case study sites, while in others, students also had opportunities to animate and discuss the scenes, to allow for exploration of why the students had selected the issue, and how other group members understood the scenes created.

**Students From Evelyn’s Grade 4/5 Class: Helping Others and Performing Being Good**

The students from Evelyn’s class at Parkview Elementary School who participated in the improvised drama sessions I facilitated looked both confused and eager when I asked them what they thought about when they heard the term social justice. To one student, Madeline, social justice was when people are “extending themselves and being brave.” Another, Annette, talked about how social justice was something to be fought for, associated with freedom. Other students talked about human rights, and the idea that justice has to be amongst people – as a literal interpretation of justice being “social”. These attempts to define “social justice” sparked a discussion of peace and war (students had just begun reading *The Little Yellow Bottle* in class). After a peer mentioned war as a social justice issue, Katherine said: “Undeveloped countries?” When I asked how “undeveloped countries” and war were connected, the following discussion amongst students occurred:

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8 The story of Marwa and Ahmad in an unnamed country, who encounter a shiny yellow bottle while playing soccer. Ahmad picks up the bottle, and the resulting explosion leaves Ahmad with the loss of two limbs.
KATHERINE: There's usually, umm, not enough laws or rules [pause] and people are a bit like [pause] yeah.
NADIA: And they kind of have people that fight other people and….
KATHERINE (while Nadia is speaking): Yeah, there's always, like, conflict.
NADIA: And people like doing stuff to people and like…Its not that safe.
KAREN: About the undeveloped countries, its kind of like they don’t have [pause] like people are kind of messed up because they don’t have much of everything, and some of the richer countries are getting it from the poorer countries. But then, some of the poorer countries are having some problems, and also, there's not enough money or not enough food so people are just trying to steal stuff, and it leads to a lot of problems.
AG: How did you learn about that?
KAREN: I kind of like to help people because I also support a charity in Kenya….I know someone who owns an orphanage there. So I kind of learned a lot about that. And – I love watching documentaries….
AG: What do all of you think about what Karen has said?
MADELINE: I agree… and I also think of poverty.
KAREN: ….Its all this money thing. And the people who are rich, they get richer and richer and richer, and the people who are poor, they get poorer and poorer.
(Improvised Drama Group Session, May 17, 2012)

These students’ perspectives related a narrative about “undeveloped” countries that assumed perpetual violent conflict, a lack of safety (“not enough laws”), and (extreme) poverty. Such stereotyped representations would have been promulgated by various sources inside and outside of school. Karen and Madeline’s analysis pointed to the issue of poverty (maldistribution), and Karen’s further comments about richer countries and poorer countries may suggest an emerging insight into global power dynamics. In the context of this discussion on social justice, students communicated a partial view of the Other, as people needing to be saved (partly by the people in the room). Karen further described the Kenyan orphanage she mentioned above, and how she tried to enact justice:
…my aunt… asked all the kids to tell about what they had before they came to the orphanage. And…all of the kids came off the streets. And some of them had parents living, but they didn’t live with their parents because they were too poor, and [pause] there’s this one boy…I thought it was really sad what happened to him. Basically, he's really small, and he lived on the streets with his grandma. And it's really hard to get clothes...so his grandma had to travel so far just to get one shirt for him, and that's the only possession he's ever had...and it was ripped and torn by the time he came to the orphanage. And half of the kids, before they came to the orphanage, they got sick [pause] And, with the police there [pause]: they don’t really like the poor. (Improvized Drama Session, May 17, 2012)

Here, Grade 5 student Karen projected an understanding of social justice within an ethos of charity, as helping marginalized communities far away (Jefferess, 2011b, 2013). Her stance was similar to that of some of the privileged students in Swalwell’s (2013) study of adolescents’ conceptions of social justice and citizenship. Karen embodied here a benevolent benefactor stance: here apparent goal is to be seen as “good person” (Swalwell, 2013, p. 6) by engaging in charitable acts toward others who are perceived to experience hardship. Parkview Public School had promoted various charity drives that year – for example, humanitarian relief efforts for Haiti. Some of the students in Evelyn’s class (including 7 of the 9 students in the improvised drama session subgroup) were very involved in those efforts, and in the school Me to We social justice club and Ecoclub. Such co-curricular awareness and fundraising campaigns are common occurrences in Canadian schools, particularly as manifestations of global citizenship education (Bickmore, 2014a). These students evidently had learned this stance by age 10, perhaps reflecting the affluent context of their school. The hardships they presumed and described were far from their personal experiences, but many of these students expressed the belief that they could help improve the situations of Others. Karen in particular was proud to share her knowledge and presented herself, as Gaztamide-Fernandez and Howard (2013) put it with regard to privileged adolescents, as “caring, engaged, and generous” (p. 2). These Grade 4 and 5 students communicated an incomplete, deficit view of the Other, tied to their view of themselves as charitable “helpers” of Others in the name of justice (Jefferess, 2011b). This notion of moral goodness is further reflected in students’ views on race and racism, which I describe next.

Notions of being a “good person” were also reflected in how some of the students in the improvised drama session from Evelyn’s class spoke about issues of identity,
particularly race, specifically in relation to Others. For example, Nadia said that she liked learning about social justice issues because, “it makes me wonder how people are going through that...like for Black people. I imagine how they feel. I don’t know how they feel, so ....” (Improvised Drama Session, May 17, 2012). Here, Nadia expressed empathy and acknowledged that she did not know how racism felt, indicating some awareness of her racial privilege. Other students continued to communicate further their understandings of justice, specifically how race and racism played out amongst them as a group of peers. For example, Martina and Olenka, both White students, expressed an awareness of racism in relation to the racial make up of their school and community that I had not fully expected of 9 and 10 year olds:

MARTINA: Well...If you notice, people like, say, there's not a lot of racism here, but there is. Like, see right now, there's like two girls in our class that are Black [referring to Sandra and Madeline], and Ms. Manroe (Evelyn) and also, our community, there are not a lot of people who are Black.

OLENKA: Like...this area. There are a lot of White people. It seems like when you go outside, you don’t see as many Black people, so it’s kind of like...and then some communities, you see only Black...so it's kind of weird.

Martina and Olenka’s comments reflect class discussions about racism taught by their teacher, Evelyn. Evelyn told me in interviews that she encouraged students to pay attention to diversity, and to consider how, in their affluent community, there was not much racial diversity at all. These students conveyed this awareness of difference clearly in the discussion above.

Martina’s reference to the only two non-White students in the improvised drama session subgroup, drew attention to their racialized difference. These two students, Sandra and Madeline, inserted short comments throughout the discussion. In quick response to Martina and Olenka’s comments, Sandra stated, “That’s because of discrimination”. Madeline then mentioned the story of Ruby Bridges, the first Black child to attend a particular all White school in the U.S. (as it was being desegregated by law), a story that Evelyn had introduced to the class. After Sandra and Madeline shared their

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9 Evelyn had focused on issues of racism throughout the school year in her classroom and had explored the stories of Viola Desmond, Ruby Bridges, Rosa Parks, and Martin Luther King.
insights, another student, Nadia moved the discussion to what she saw as her personal connection with the issue of racism as a White person:

NADIA: So [with racism] people judge people by their skin colour – but I am very against that, like (pausing to put an arm each around Sandra and Madeline, who are on either side of Nadia) these two are [Madeline: in pain] like sisters to me, and they're both Black.

Sandra covers her face with her hands. Everyone begins to giggle, including Sandra and Madeline, who look visibly embarrassed. (Improvised Drama Session, May 2015)

Whereas Sandra and Madeline had responded to Martina and Olenka’s observations with their own insights (building on their peers’ ideas), I read Sandra and Madeline’s response to Nadia’s performance above as discomfort, even embarrassment. Similarly to Karen in the previous section, Nadia projected herself as knowledgeable about Others’ experiences, and as a good person because of her close relationships with some marginalized people. Whereas Ahmed (2006) discusses the use of familial metaphors to associate with members of the same race, Nadia used a familial metaphor to express likeness with her racialized peers. Nadia’s performance here seemed to presume a familiarity with Sandra and Madeline. Nadia had developed her ways of being in a space that was mostly White – where whiteness “is inherited through the very placement of things” (Ahmed, 2006, p. 155). This familiar space apparently had offered Nadia a sense of privilege to be able to refer to her racialized peers as “sisters” – while her own whiteness remained unspoken. Thus, some students stood in different relation than others to marginalization. Amongst these students, whiteness was not invisible, even as Nadia and others highlighted difference (“…they’re both Black”). Indeed, a “good” whiteness was made visible in relation to Others.

The overall social, political, and demographic context of the classroom and school, and the level of diversity in the improvised drama session sub-group, presumably influenced such views. As Ahmed argues, “spaces acquire the shape of the bodies that inhabit them” (2006, p. 156). The mostly White and affluent space of Parkview, as well as Nadia’s actions, might have influenced the discomfort Sandra and Madeline demonstrated. As mentioned, Evelyn had explored and discussed her own experiences as
a target of racism, as well as other forms of oppression, explicitly in her classroom. Such open discussion about racism had likely helped some students to feel more comfortable speaking about and dramatically exploring the issue. Most students in Evelyn’s class verbally discussed various forms of oppression in connection to classroom explorations (I had observations). While Evelyn could never be sure of how students interpreted the issues she explicitly brought into the classroom, students from her class who participated in the improvised drama sessions shared interest in exploring the experiences of Others in relation to themselves.

Some students, for example, made connections between racism and classism. As the discussion continued, Olenka asked why their school [Parkview] was considered a “good school”, highlighting the fact that “there are a lot of White people here”. She also wondered why it was that, in the school where her father taught, students were “not as well off as this, and there are more Black people there”. I read her comments as an attempt to understand the connections between misrecognition (denial or misunderstanding of identity based issues such as racism) and maldistribution (class based discrimination such as poverty). Nadia also shared an insight into who she thought benefited from racism, stating, “people who have white skin get better jobs, [pause] and I think that’s horrible,” looking around to ensure that everyone present had heard her. Her comment reflects some awareness of privilege and general impacts of racism. Along with her accompanying action, it also reflects what I read as a desire to convey herself as a good person.

The above excerpts from an improvised drama session with a few of Evelyn’s grade 4 and 5 students illustrate their constant engagement and grappling with conceptions of social justice. This discussion (as a context for drama work in this session) show that students’ had multiple sources of information about social justice issues, and reflected Evelyn’s possible influence on their understandings and confidence in approaching questions of race. The discussion also demonstrated that these students interpreted social justice in ways that their teacher may not have intended. Such a contrast between teacher intention and student interpretation can sometimes surface (make visible) the risk of perpetuating oppressive ideas. In her classroom lessons, Evelyn taught students about Others, Othering (oppression), and about being good to each other. For
some students, being a good person meant being able to save Others, to be knowledgeable about justice issues, and to express familiarity with those perceived to be marginalized. The students also seemed to have communicated what they presumably thought I expected of them, given what they had been taught about social justice and their responsibility for achieving justice.

**Students From Maureen’s Grade 6 Class: Others’ History and Struggle**

Multicultural discourse in schools has commonly focused on historical events and heroes, inclusion and equality. The Grade 6 students in the improvised drama group that I facilitated from Maureen’s class at Whitfield Public School seemed to have been influenced by this heroes and equality discourse when talking about social justice, while also infusing contemporary examples of struggle and resistance to the status quo. In the first session with students from Maureen’s class, for example, Sadie described social justice as “everybody getting a chance.” Andy mentioned equal human rights – how “everyone gets treated differently” whereas they should be treated equally. For Lisa, who was quite outspoken in the lessons that I observed, “[j]ustice means what’s right…. And social is, like, with each other.” To Elia, social justice is “deciding what’s fair and right. Every side gets their say. And every side has their own story, so social justice is kind of fairness so everyone has a voice.” The theme of voice continued as students began to name issues they associated with social justice. Many of the issues named were framed as a struggle, “fighting for” needs, and “protest” against not being heard amongst those deemed “different” or seen to not have a voice. Discussion about Indigenous rights, and particularly reference to the Idle No More movement, reflected a view of social justice work as “fighting” for rights and justice, particularly against the government – “they [Indigenous groups] want a say, and are fighting to make things fairer.” Sadie, who initially mentioned the Idle No More movement, framed it as an Indigenous struggle, for voice (in Fraser’s (1996) terms, a struggle for recognition).

Bruce brought up war as a topic, and he did not articulate why. The mention of war, however, provoked Lisa to say, “Maybe wars are about social justice.” She went on to say, “Well, maybe not wars, but like, protests. So people protest mostly the

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10 A peaceful movement that “calls on all people to join in a peaceful revolution, to honour Indigenous sovereignty, and to protect the land and water.” [http://www.idlenomore.ca/vision](http://www.idlenomore.ca/vision)
One student mentioned the uprising in Egypt that began in 2011 as an example, and another mentioned G20 protests that occurred in their city the year before. The theme of challenge reflected some students’ view that issues of social justice were a matter of engaging conflict in order to work toward change. Elia also talked about Martin Luther King as a prominent figure in addressing racism.

These Grade 6 students conceived social justice as a matter of struggle – mostly struggles that Others experienced in order to achieve equality. They referenced historical and contemporary struggles, some of which had not been addressed in their regular classroom. These were associated generally with struggles for equal rights, connected not only to issues focused on achieving recognition, but to economic redistribution as well. Similarly to some of Evelyn’s Grade 4 and 5 students, students from Maureen’s class conceived of social justice as about Others. In contrast to both Evelyn’s students and Andre’s Grade 8 students, this group of students did not verbalize connections between social justice and their own experiences as social actors who could themselves address injustice in any way. Nor did they (in this session) give examples of how injustice manifested in the school or broader community.

Students in the improvised drama session group from Maureen’s Grade 6 class differed from each other with respect to their views of what constituted a social justice issue. For example, when Jocelyn mentioned, as an example of injustice, the time when women could not vote in Canada, Lisa responded with, “Ya, so now women can vote, but maybe women’s rights is still an issue.” Apparently, Lisa had interpreted Jocelyn’s comment as a suggestion that women’s rights were no longer an issue, and challenged that viewpoint. In contrast, when Sadie mentioned homelessness as a social justice issue, Lisa responded quickly: “Ya, but there’s shelters. And some people want to be homeless.” For some of these students, particular issues were matters of continuing injustice, and others were less so. When I offered the opportunity to name social justice issues that students knew of, these students also expressed such evaluation (and disagreement) of what constituted a social justice issue. Lisa’s response to Jocelyn’s comment implied that Lisa felt that some justice issues could not be placed in the past (as
if resolved). That struggles continued despite gains, while others could be considered to have been resolved or irresolvable.

The above episode reveals the complexity in how participating students conceptualized social justice. Some students clearly thought some issues constitute issues of justice, and challenged the “justiceness” of others. Lisa’s comments provide an example of how some students constantly negotiate their understandings of social justice. This challenges Hess’ (2009) categorization of controversial political issues as either settled or unsettled. Settled issues are those that teachers believe have only one acceptable answer, in which there is no longer legitimate controversy. Forms of overt discrimination such as racism might be considered a settled issues, according to Hess. Unsettled issues are those deemed to include legitimate alternative viewpoints — Hess notes the death penalty and abortion as examples of unsettled issues. Such dualistic categorization, however, does not take into account the complexity of social justice questions: presumably settled issues could be embedded in ostensibly unsettled issues, or vice versa.

The binary of settled versus unsettled political issues does not acknowledge the unexpected, complex, and fluid views students might have as they navigate their own stances on issues in relation to their own identities and experiences, whether or not their teachers viewed them as “settled”. Discussion of whether or not issues were continuing matters of justice did not arise prominently among the improvised drama session students from Evelyn’s Grade 4 and 5, or from Andre’s Grade 8. The subgroups from each classroom sometimes disagreed on how particular issues should be addressed, but only the Grade 6 students from Maureen’s class raised questions about what kinds of issues were currently “justice” issues.

**Students From Andre’s Grade 8 Class: Interrupting Norms by Affirming Identity**

The small group of students from Andre’s class who participated in the improvised drama group I facilitated at Valley Public School spoke about social justice primarily in relation to identity and voice. After a drama energizer activity in which I had asked students to improvise different scenes based on random contexts that they selected (e.g., being on a roller coaster, being in a store when a robber enters), I asked students (now sitting in a circle) what they thought about the experience of participating in and
viewing drama improvisation. Amina responded: “Well, what you do in drama, it is kind of part of who you are. You have to figure it out in the moment.” Hamsa added his perspective: “It’s cool when you don’t know what’s gonna happen. I didn't know what I was going to do, and I just did it.” I wondered aloud with the students how their improvisations might reflect who they are when the topics are a little more intense than some of the scenarios we quickly came up with early in the first session – like the topics they were exploring in class. At the time, these included issues of identity using the metaphor of walls. Students did not respond verbally, although their silence did not necessarily indicate that they did not have responses. I saw smiles from Amina, Shila, and Julian, and other students looking pensive. It looked to me as though some of the students were excited about the possibilities of dramatic exploration of potentially sensitive issues close to them, even after participating only in quick, fun introductory improvised dramatic activities, seemingly unrelated to issues of justice.

When I asked this group what they thought of when I said social justice, Amina was again first to answer – social justice was “making things fair for everybody, and everybody gets to talk and have a chance around the table.” Michelle connected terms “justice” and “social” and thought aloud that social justice was “about people in society getting their turn to talk and people getting the justice they deserve.” Hamsa thought justice was something that “takes away from the negative talk” – perhaps it challenges talk associated with stereotypes and discrimination with positive talk. Social justice for some of the students in Andre’s class was a resistance to the suppression of some voices and “negative talk” about Others.

In class, Andre had explored with students the book The Bear Who Wasn’t – a story of a bear that was told it was not a bear by everyone (humans) it met. The bear was constantly told it was something else that suited human needs in the moment. During our first improvised drama session, a discussion about social justice became a discussion about the bear in the story. After Hamsa stated that characters in the story had “pushed their view of what it was to be a bear,” Amina continued:

It's something I can relate to. When I was in Grade 4, when I was in public school, then I went to Islamic school, but then I came back. What happened during that time was I had friends [who] weren’t Muslim, so I didn’t understand my religion, so I would go to school, and I would wear my Hijab… kids would come up to me
and ask me, “Why do you wear that?” And I had no answer, so I was like, “I don’t know?” And they would say, “Why don’t you just take it off, you don’t even know why you wear it…” So…I went to my father and I was like, “Why do I wear this?” And he was like, “OK, my daughter doesn’t even know why she does something.” If I didn’t go to Islamic school in Grades 5, 6, 7, maybe I could have taken it off because I didn’t know what it meant, and I was wearing something and I don’t know why I’m wearing it, so I might as well take it off. So to connect it to the bear, he didn’t have a fur coat. It was him…it was his own identity, but the people would just push him into believing something, like some people were pushing me out of doing something that I was supposed to do. (Valley Public School, Improvised Drama Session, October 25, 2012)

Thus, Amina felt as though others had tried to tell her what she was or was not (like the bear in the story). For her, wearing a Hijab was an outward expression of her Muslim identity that, before attending Islamic school, she had not been able to provide reasons for. The way she enacted her Muslim identity (for example, by wearing a Hijab) was questioned by others who did not share Muslim identity. Peers’ questioning had provoked her own curiosity about the religion with which she identified. This is an example of a student’s constant negotiation of identity in response to social encounters, even as she sought affirmation for who she was.

Shila, also Muslim, spoke next about identity (recognition) in relation to the bear in the story:

The people kept saying words, and those negative words built up and built up and they become like a wall that blocked him from his real identity, so then he became what they wanted him to become. Soon after everything shut down and went away, that wall broke down slowly, and then he realized what he was. (Valley Public School, Improvised Drama Session, October 25, 2012)

Shila made similar personal connections to the metaphor of the bear, and demonstrated understandings of struggles to negotiate and maintain one’s identity and to have it affirmed. Both Amina and Shila mentioned that words could block individuals from creating and recreating their identities: these understandings of social (in)justice are struggles against misrecognition (Fraser, 2005) through the construction and representation of difference. Amina and Shila seemed to argue that the expression of one’s identity in the face of normative challenges might be a way to disrupt these norms that devalue those identities. Discriminatory norms in society are maintained by their citation – their repetition of the conventions of the social world. Like Amina and Shila,
Butler (1990) argues that one way individuals can exhibit agency is by disrupting the repetition of citations that maintain oppressive norms. For Shila, someone’s expression of identity might be a way of politicizing it, to challenge and supplement how that identity and the ‘normal’ are represented. Butler also argues for an “illimitable process for signification of self” (1990, p. 143) – a critique of clinging to identities as categories of self. However, Amina and Shila exercised their own power (agency) to disrupt stereotypes of how Muslim females should/do act beyond the wearing of a Hijab. Below, I will further pursue the theme of students challenging perceptions of themselves and their community, and their perspectives on discrimination, in improvised drama sessions that I facilitated. Such attempts to challenge and reframe perceptions were calls for recognition of identities, the supplementing of representations, within a context of difference.

This subgroup of Grade 8 students from Andre’s class at Valley Public School generally conveyed understandings of social justice that focused issues of misrecognition. Grade 4 and 5 students from Evelyn’s class at Parkview also focused on issues of misrecognition. Similarly to some of Andre’s students, some of them saw themselves as social actors who could not only detect injustice, but also possibly do something about it. However, the way the mostly affluent, White students from Evelyn’s class spoke about identity-based injustice differed from the conceptions of the mostly less affluent, non-White students from Andre’s Grade 8 class. Most of Evelyn’s Grade 4 and 5 students spoke only about Others’ (not themselves) as targets of marginalization. Their sense of agency manifested in what they saw as good actions ‘for’ Others, viewpoints sometimes compatible with maintaining deficit conceptions of those Others. Most of the Grade 6 student volunteers from Maureen’s class also spoke only about Others’ experiences, and (unlike the students in the other two groups) did not address how they themselves might try to address injustice. These students saw agency as a matter of challenging or resisting injustice, but they presented themselves as not involved, or not able enact agency against injustice. In contrast, the Grade 8 students from Andre’s class described and acted out their own experiences as targets of injustice, and their aim to challenge the injustices they themselves experienced. They viewed themselves as having agency to disrupt dominant norms. The spoken views of these Grade 8s seemed to have been at least partially sparked
by some of the work Andre was doing in classroom lessons in relation to the book, *The Bear Who Wasn't. The Bear That Wasn't* provided a form of distance for students that allowed them to make connections to their own experiences. This narrative inevitably became part of the improvised drama session discussion. This theme continued in these students’ dramatic performances throughout all of the improvised drama sessions I facilitated with them, in which they associated injustices with experiencing misrecognition (on various levels).

**Dramatizing Injustice**

I began the second session at each site by asking students to recall our previous session, aiming to highlight some of the nuances of our discussions, and giving students the opportunity to fill in any gaps with respect to their drama explorations. I then implemented a common drama structure in all three sites: One student played the role of a child who lay in bed and who did not want to go to school in the morning. I, as researcher/facilitator, played the role of the parent who tried to convince the student to go to school (caring, yet confused as to what the problem was). I asked each group of students to consider the possible reasons and events that might have occurred at school in the days before the interaction between the child and parent at home. Next, groups of three to four students were asked to improvise a scene that illustrated one of those events in consideration of previous discussions we had had in the first session about social justice. With the Grade 4 and 5 students at Parkview, our debrief took the form of reviewing the digital recordings of the scenes (in the following session), and having some of the characters take the hot seat to be questioned, in role, by their peers. With Grade 6 students (from Maureen’s class) at Whitfield, there was not enough time to review the video footage with students, or to engage in hot seating; we engaged only in a debriefing discussion of the scenes they created. With the Grade 8 students at Valley Public, I responded to students’ expressed desires to have an opportunity to challenge some of the characters actions in the scenes, and so I facilitated Forum Theatre with students using their initial scenes as starting points.
Bullying as Injustice: Dramatizing Peer-to-Peer Hostility

The students participating in the improvised drama sessions I led, from all three classrooms, spoke about social justice in ways that alluded to how they saw identity in relation to themselves and Others. They mostly talked about such issues in relation to the broader world – only sometimes also associating it directly with their own experiences. During improvised drama sessions that I facilitated, subgroups of students from each classroom addressed broader injustices in their talk by discussing social issues, identity, and discrimination. When students were asked to dramatize instances of injustice during our second session, however, students’ scenes mostly reflected what Sleeter and Grant (1994) refer to as a “human relations” understanding of social justice – promoting positive relationships by encouraging acceptance and unity (p. 10). In session 2 with students from Evelyn and Maureen’s classes, injustices they dramatized and spoke about were often interpersonal instances of bullying. Similar to what Bickmore (2011) found in her study of anti-violence strategies in schools, students from two of the three classrooms participating in the sessions often used the language of bullying to discuss dramas they themselves created that were aimed at highlighting instances of injustice.

At Parkview, Grade 4 and 5 students from Evelyn’s class had participated (as a whole class) in presentations by an organization that focused on conflict resolution and anti-bullying efforts, and that were offered to all Grade 4-6 students in the school. Moreover, morning announcements often focused on issues of anti-bullying, and Evelyn’s interpersonal approach supported such efforts, even as she did not explicitly use the language of anti-bullying in my observations. At Whitfield, I did not observe Maureen use the language of anti-bullying in her teaching, and to my knowledge, students had not participated in any whole school anti-bullying education. Even though I did not observe explicit classroom lessons about bullying in Evelyn and Maureen’s classroom lessons, students from their classes who participated in the improvised drama sessions most often after chose those examples as instances of injustice to dramatize – they focused on peer disputes or teasing, and not on broader contexts of bias-based harassment. The following examples reflect how students communicated their conceptions of social justice through the drama work we engaged and ensuing discussions.
After I and a volunteer student performed the scene, described above, that would serve as the pretext for students’ improvisations, I asked Evelyn’s Grade 4 and 5 students to improvise a scene that reflected a possible reason the child did not want to go to school in small groups, and to focus on an event that might have occurred the day before the scene we had just performed. One group of 3 students (of the 9 in the overall drama group) created a scene that involved two children in a cafeteria asking another for money. When the student who was asked for money stated that she did not have any, the other two children attempted to coerce her into stealing cookies for them, increasingly teasing her as the scene progressed. In the third improvised drama session at Parkview, the participating students viewed a video recording of the scene performed in the second session. I asked one of the students who acted as one of those trying to coerce the child into stealing cookies to take the “hot seat” so they could respond to questions from the group. Nadia volunteered. I framed the goal of this exercise as an attempt to better understand the character’s view of what happened, and the motivations of the character they portrayed.

OLENKA: Why her? Why do you always pick on her?
NADIA (in-role as one of the children who was trying to coerce another): Well she's shy and weak.
ANNETTE: How do you feel after you bully?
NADIA: I feel good inside – it makes me feel strong.
SANDRA: Have you ever bullied anyone else?
NADIA: Ya – when this one person was annoying me – I kinda punched them in the cheek. I'm a bad girl!
KAREN: Why do you ask for things? Just to annoy them or for some other reason?
NADIA: To annoy them, and it makes me feel good. And I want those things, like money to buy candy, lunch, and…. Cookies [laughter].

(Parkview, Improvised Drama Session, May 22, 2012)

In the above exchange, Annette used the term “bully” and Nadia performed a common representation of bully behaviours, even though “bullying” had never been mentioned in our initial discussions of what social justice was. When Mary, the other student who
portrayed the “bully” in the scene responded to the group’s questions in role, she referred to herself as the “bully”, and to Nadia as the “sidekick bully”, to the amusement of the participating students. Bullying discourse seemed so pervasive in their school, as evidenced by the anti-bullying presentations that all Grade 4-6 students in the school participated in, as well as regular morning announcements that addressed anti-bullying efforts, that to some of the students involved in this exercise, a child’s only imaginable reason for not wanting to go to school would be peer-based bullying.

I asked students to connect the scene to previous discussion we had had about social justice (in session 1), including the issues they had discussed in class about racism and gender stereotypes. Some students in the group responded that the student might have been bullied because of how they expressed their gender (one student referred to the book, My Princess Boy, which tells the story of a young boy who expresses himself in gender non-conforming ways, such as liking pink and wearing dresses). Martin mentioned how the bullies themselves might not have had enough money for their food that day, and so they tried to make the other student steal the cookies for them. Such responses reflected a more nuanced interpretation of the scene, which developed after we took time to reflect (through discussion) on the possibilities of the dramatic performance beyond straightforward peer-based bullying. Martin’s insight specifically challenged the binary categorization of bully and bullied, in which the bully is always the villain, the bullied is always the victim. In his interpretation, the apparent bully was driven by multiple fears and desires, complicating assumptions about power, and the well recognized storyline.

A small group of Grade 6 students from the improvised drama session at Whitfield (Maureen’s class) presented a scene of two children making fun of a third because of the way she played the piano. Another group from Maureen’s class performed a scene in which two children made fun of another, called him ugly, and then violently beat him in a way that seemed intended to illicit the laughter of peers. In the debriefing of these dramatic scenes, bullying discourse was again prominent:

AG: So, what would you call the two examples if you had to give them a name?
ALL: Bullying.
AG: Interesting. What do you mean by bullying? And, why specifically would someone get bullied?
ELIA: Umm, sometimes you've been bullied a lot in your life, and you start to do it.
AG: Why might someone get bullied at all?
LISA: Cuz they’re different – they might be black, different skin tone, gay, or don’t wear trendy clothes.
SADIE: Maybe it’s about money. My mom says that uniforms are a good idea because it helps mix the poorer people and the richer people. Because if you're poorer, you might not have the nicest clothes, and if you're rich, you can have really nice clothes.
(Whitfield, Improvised Drama Session, May 22, 2012)

In the above excerpt, Lisa and Sadie both talk about the role of difference in bullying, something that had not arisen in their dramas. Lisa explicitly names identities that are marginalized (based on race and sexuality), and Sadie picks up on the class implications of what might have been initially interpreted as a comment about clothing preferences. This debriefing discussion was an opportunity for students to deconstruct the meanings implied in their and peers’ improvised dramatic encounters. Similarly to the improvised drama session with some of Evelyn’s students, these students seemed to be drawing on limited knowledge about social roles and patterns (Edmiston, 2000; Winston, 1998). The immediacy and spontaneity of improvised drama sometimes resulted in simplified responses (as also found by Freebody & Finneran, 2013). Because representations of events are always incomplete, opportunity for dialogue was important. This “aesthetic of talk” (Gallagher, 2014, p. 173), aimed at self-other awareness and communication across and about difference, linked closely to the dramatic work. For students from both Evelyn and Maureen’s classrooms, their discussion to verbally deconstruct the improvised scenes they had created reflected the incompleteness of what they had dramatized. They had the opportunity to further analyze possibilities that were not immediately clear within the context of the improvised drama performances, and to place their initial dramatic responses into social context.
In our discussions of bullying, the issue of power on an interpersonal level emerged as important to students. As researcher/facilitator, I asked questions to probe students comprehension and assumptions about social justice, beyond what seemed like surface-level examples of peer-hostility, to try to include an analysis of how and why power is exerted in particular contexts. At the time, I felt disappointed with the dramatic scenes that students developed - I saw them as disconnected from the conceptions they had initially voiced in relation to social justice. Perhaps I had failed to create a strong enough imagery or setting, as Warner (1997) states is important for dramatic commitment. Time was also a limitation. Students seemed to be playing out what was familiar to them – given the pretext of instructions, and minimal allotted amount of time. Looking back, I might have found ways to further deconstruct the scenes dramatically in order to challenge typical representations of bullies and victims. The dominant and sometimes sensationalized stories students portrayed could not be erased, but they were (and could have been further) a reference point for dramatic deconstruction - perhaps challenging and recreating the initial scenes (Cahill, 2011, 2012). The scenes presented by Grade 6 students from Maureen’s class, similar to those created by Grade 4 and 5 students from Evelyn’s class, showed how young people could conflate anti-bullying and social justice discourse. Drama pedagogy as inquiry elicited scenarios that were entry points, rather than conclusive deconstruction of dominant discourses. Students demonstrated some nuanced interpretations of social justice when they had the opportunity to talk through their and peers’ dramatic scenes – that is, when they had opportunities to question, be questioned, and analyze their own and each others’ drama work. Their dramatic performances were an opportunity for them to perform their initial interpretations of justice, from which they continued to further create meaning.

In a different way, some grade 8 students from Andre’s class at Valley Public School, presented with the same structure and set up, developed a scene that dramatized a student protagonist experiencing an explicit racist comment from a teacher, (not a peer). “Bullying” was not mentioned directly at all by this student subgroup during the second improvised drama session at Valley Public School. Instead, they dramatically demonstrated an interaction that was like bullying but reflected a social pattern of injustice: bias-based harassment by an authority figure.
The following dramatic scene responds to the dramatic prompt I had provided each of the sub-groups: a child does not want to go to school, their parent does not understand why, please dramatize a possible event that would reflect the reason the child did not want to school. Julian, who is of Colombian descent, played role of teacher. Hamsa, of Bengali descent, played the role of Marco, the young person in the initial scene who didn’t want to go to school. Hamsa made clear before beginning the drama that the character he was portraying was also Brown, like him. Michelle, who is White, played the role of a White student talking to ‘Marco’ during class:

JULIAN (as teacher: dramatizes writing on the board, he turns suddenly and yells): Marcolina!

HAMSA (as Brown student) puts his head down, while Michelle turns away laughing): My name is Marco!

JULIAN: Whatever. Go to the office. Why were you talking?

HAMSA: What? She was talking too!

MICHELLE (as White student): No, I wasn’t!

JULIAN: No she wasn’t, she's a good girl. She's not Brown. Now go to the office. Amina, watching the scene, laughs. Another student, Franco, who rarely participated verbally in the improvised drama sessions, watched intently. Hamsa visibly tries to stay serious and in role even as he hears Amina’s laughter. Hamsa gets up angrily from his chair and begins to walk around it.

JULIAN (turning back around to the imaginary chalkboard, sighs loudly): Ugh [Pause] Brown people.

Hamsa walks out of the classroom and slams the door behind him. Michelle remains, smirking in her chair.

Aaron, watching the scene, says "Whoa".

(Valley Public School, Improvised Drama Session, October 30, 2012)

This scene clearly contrasts with scenes performed by improvised drama session students from both Evelyn’s Grade 4/5 class and Maureen’s Grade 6 class, in response to the same dramatic prompt. Instead of scenes that reflected peer-based bullying, these Grade 8 students portrayed an instance of racist discrimination by an authority figure at school.
The Grade 8 students did not bring bullying into the conversation, and in debriefing the scene explicitly named the racism, framing the teacher as oppressor and the student as oppressed. As in the improvised drama subgroups from Evelyn’s and Maureen’s classes, the verbal deconstruction (debriefing) of the scene, after the drama, revealed these Grade 8 students’ nuanced understandings regarding power (in the classroom). I asked these students whether they thought the scene had been realistic: would a teacher say that they were sending someone to the office for being Brown? Some students said it was likely. Julian articulated that, even if a teacher would not say it out loud, sending kids to the office because of their race did happen, in his experience.

Some students wanted an opportunity to challenge the teacher, in role, noting that Hamsa, as Marco, could have challenged the teacher instead of storming out of the room. These students commented not on whether or not Marco had agency in this instance, but on how he used it. I proposed a Forum Theatre method to consider other possibilities for how the scene might have gone. I saw the moment as an opportunity for students to communicate how they understood power (or lack of power) and agency in the classroom as a matter of justice. When Shila performed the role of Marco in the scene, for example, she challenged the assumption that power was only in the hands of the teacher, and confronted his racism directly. Even as Julian (who continued to play the role of teacher) ignored her, Shila persisted, and threatened to get the principal involved. Shila’s and others’ in-role attempts to challenge the power of the teacher in this scenario sparked discussion about strategies for overcoming misrecognition and provoked discussion of what was realistic, why people sometimes do not stand up for themselves, and how others could support those targeted by discrimination.

Some students from Evelyn’s and Maureen’s classes who participated in the improvised drama sessions, seemed to have had limited knowledge and experiences of injustice to draw upon. In these contexts, many students’ improvisations reflected common discourses of peer based bullying. Other students, in contrast, especially in the improvised drama session group from Andre’s class, seemed to draw on a greater repertoire, given their older age and apparently identity-linked life experiences as targets of injustice. These Grade 8 students portrayed examples of bias-based harassment that reflected their broader understanding (compared to students from the other schools) of
why such harassment might occur. The focus in all three sites remained on interpersonal level conflict and injustice, but in different ways. The improvised drama session groups demonstrated how further time for analysis of scenes developed by students, through both dialogue and further drama work, offered opportunities for students to develop and communicate more nuanced conceptions of issues of justice than they had in a briefer episode, or in any one form of communication (drama or talk) alone.

**Process Drama – Distance and Familiarity**

In a process drama I facilitated during improvised drama sessions in all three sites, I invited participating students to portray, dramatically, individuals arriving and aiming to immigrate to Canada, interacting with other students whom I invited to portray border agents. The scenarios were based on encounters that might occur between such individuals in the setting of an airport customs and immigration inspection area when prospective immigrants were arriving in Canada for the first time. I invited students to choose their in-role country of origin, the reasons the people they portrayed would leave their countries to come to Canada, what they would have in their luggage, and what their interactions with an border agent might look like. I used the strategy of “teacher in role” and played the role of a security guard in all of the scenes. As described in my methodology (Chapter 3), I devised this process drama as a mode of inquiry into how students might communicate their interpretations of social justice dramatically, particularly in relation to structural issues of access and difference. I chose the setting of an airport because I hoped to create some distance from the context of schools or classrooms. The airport, to me, also reflects an institutional space in which structural issues of justice and injustice show intersections between misrecognition and maldistribution. The dramatic context of the airport allowed for improvised portrayals of multiple injustices, depending on students’ awareness and interpretations of social justice. I wanted to see if students would enact any particular injustices, as well as how they would respond dramatically to those injustices that could arise.

In consideration of the content and pedagogies I had observed in their classroom lessons, as well as our previous improvised drama sessions, I analyzed students’ dramatic choices. For those who played the role of individuals or groups newly arrived to Canada, I paid attention to the characters students created, where they were from, what they chose
to have in their baggage, and how they explained their desires and reasons for coming to Canada to the border agents. For students who played the role of the border agents, I paid attention to how they responded to individuals and groups and why. I intended these details to help me learn about these students’ identity-linked conceptions of social justice, and how they understood and potentially applied the concepts we had been exploring in the improvised drama sessions and that they had been exploring in regular classroom lessons with their teachers. As mentioned in the description of my methodology (Chapter 3), I realized that different students in the improvised drama session groups would experience varied levels of distance from the context. I believed the varied distance each of the student-participants had from the dramatic context could lend insight into the connections between students lived experiences and their dramatic interpretations in relation to justice.

Before beginning the process drama with each group, we reviewed various improvisation skills we had engaged during our sessions. We also discussed the various ideas and concepts we had explored during the improvised drama sessions, and connected them to classroom lessons they participated in with their teachers. I also asked students to consider and respond to various questions before beginning the drama: Why might people come to Canada, and wish to immigrate here? Where may people be coming from and why? What stories do you know of such experiences? What might individuals or families bring with them when they leave their home to come to a new home? What might they experience when they arrive to a new country? What could they be feeling? How may others’ feel about them? How are people treated differently or the same when they arrive to Canada? How might some of those differences look? I asked them to consider their various understandings of social justice, and to apply them to how they improvised.

**Naming the Stereotype - to Elicit a Challenge and to Parody**

Each of improvised drama session groups demonstrated a different level of response and commitment to the process drama I introduced. Grade 6 students from Whitfield initially responded positively to the idea of the drama, and we engaged in a lively discussion about the questions outlined above. When the process drama began, however, with students in role as newly arrived individuals and groups lined up and waiting, and border agents behind a desk ready to ask for passports and to check luggage,
the process drama quickly became a sensationalized comedy for many of the students. I had intended for students to engage in some form of dramatic conflict with each other. I had spoken with the students who played the role of border agents, before we began, to consider what the role might involve, and the possible views that those attempting to immigrate to Canada they might have. I asked those in role as newly arrived individuals to consider how they could respond to the potential challenges they could face in the scenarios, and how they would navigate those challenges. With these Grade 6 students, dramatic conflict between border agents and the newly arrived individuals emerged, but student participants seemed motivated by enacting conflict itself, and comedic effect, without necessarily considering issues of justice associated with social identity or economic structures. One group of students portrayed British soccer players attempting to get in the country because they wanted more money than they were already making. Another group portrayed a family from Portugal that, while dramatically getting their baggage examined by the border agents, alluded to having a gun. Out of role, when I asked why they would have a gun in their luggage, they responded with laughter and indicated that it was because it was funny.

Similarly to students from Maureen’s Grade 6 class, Grade 4 and 5 students from Evelyn’s class also created interactions they found humorous. Here is an example of a dramatic interaction toward the end of the session, after a particular pair of students were waiting in line for their turn with the border agents:

MADELINE (in role as border agent): Next!
Mary and Martin walk from their place in line to the table behind which Madeline and Katherine are sitting, in role as border agents.
KATHERINE: Passports and bags please.
MADELINE: Where are you from?
MARY: We're from Cuba.
MADELINE: And what are you coming here for?
MARTIN: Well, we want to look for better opportunity.
MADELINE: Where did you get this luggage? They look very expensive.
MARTIN: We are a wealthy family.
MADELINE: How do you have wealth in Cuba? I thought people were poor
there.

MARTIN: Not all people are poor in Cuba. There are some people who have money.

KATHERINE: I don’t trust this, go sit over there (pointing to waiting area)

[Martin lifts his arms in exasperation]

Martin and Mary told me that they had selected Cuba as their place of origin in the drama because Katherine had been there over her March Break. Martin expressed the common narrative of immigration to North America – that of seeking a better opportunity. Madeline made the improvised choice to complicate the narrative by introducing the “expensive” luggage – which I read as a way to bring an important conflict into the narrative of the scene, perhaps an attempt to elicit and enact a stereotype in order to provide an opportunity for another actor to challenge it given the subtext of social justice. Madeleine, in our discussion after the drama, told me that she did not believe all people in Cuba were poor, and that she was not trying to be funny, but that she wanted to give the scene a “little twist” – that she named the stereotype to create dramatic tension. What I came to realize, in analyzing the interaction above, is that students’ words and experiences are a place to begin inquiry, and that dialogue is necessary both before and after drama work.

What I read as the use of a stereotype to challenge a stereotype also occurred, in the improvised drama session group of Grade 8 students from Andre’s class, albeit with a more explicit subtext of dramatically performed racism. During the process drama set at the airport, Julian and Silvia chose to portray a Colombian couple wishing to immigrate to Canada. Silvia and Julian spoke mostly in Spanish during the scene, and spoke in English with a South American accent. As the border agents, Natasha and Jordan, asked Silvia and Julian to see their luggage, Julian found humourous ways to resist having them check the luggage – by claiming to not have the key and arguing that there was no need. When the border agents finally opened the luggage, Julian dramatized hiding something that remained undisclosed, and that the border agents did not detect. Finally, the border agents asked the pair to go to the waiting area to be investigated further based on their overall suspicion of the couple. Both Julian and Sylvia loudly resisted their request. I performed the role of security guard who escorted Julian and Sylvia to the waiting area,
calmly responding to their performed anger at the prospect of possibly not being admitted to Canada. Even as I performed as researcher/facilitator in role, I wondered why Julian, who was born in Colombia, made the dramatic decision to hide the undisclosed item, presumably drugs - why he would intentionally play out such a stereotype. After the improvisation, while debriefing with the whole session group, I asked Silvia and Julian about their dramatic choices:

AG: Why did you choose to be Colombian in this context?
SILVIA: Cus I wanted to use the accent.

[Laughing from participants]
JULIAN: I wanted to because [pause and laughter] I'm from Colombia, and it's much easier to speak my language.
AG: Did you feel like you needed to resist the immigration officers?
JULIAN: Yes, because [pause] I mean, no [laughter]

[Laughing from participants]
SILVIA: Yes [pause] Julian was pretending that he had something hidden in there...some, like, drugs or something.
AG: Is that what you were thinking as you were acting?
Julian nods to indicate “yes”.
AG: [To both Silvia and Julian] What made you think about that?
Silvia: I don’t know, it was him.
Julian: It's a stereotype. So I kinda wanted to show the stereotype of what the border agents might think. (Valley Public School, Improvised Drama Session, October 30, 2012)

Julian made a dramatic decision to reiterate a stereotype. I read this as a form of parody humour – to mock, and therefore interrupt, normative representations of Colombians that existed in the media and in society in general. From his point of view, the immigration officer would have likely had the negative stereotype of Colombians as drug smugglers, and so he played to it. He wanted to “show the stereotype of what immigration officers might think” – to reveal his own perceptions of the stereotypes others hold of Colombians. Winston (1998, 2005), based on Bahktin’s theory of folk humour (“carnival”), argues that characters in drama and literature have comic power and
ethical positioning (1998, p. 113). Generally, carnival can use mockery, through which official ideology and oppressive norms and taboos can be parodied. Carnival laughter, according to Bakhtin, can be defined as “a specific ethical attitude to reality that allows no ideal to ‘ossify in one sided seriousness’” (quoted in Winston, 1998, p. 127). For Julian, an ethic of carnival seemed to be at play: through his acting, Julian exaggerated the stereotype and attempted to make it appear ridiculous and elicit laughter. Julian and Silvia’s use of humour in the scene was a strategy that made light of an emotive issue, and that provided a playful, yet serious, commentary on issues of identity.

Indeed, Julian’s decision, like Madeline’s above, was a dangerous one. Dramatic representations of stereotypes can reinforce the stereotype represented (Cahill, 2011). Students in the improvised drama group laughed at various points throughout the scene, and Julian himself approached the drama with much humour. Because of what I had observed about the relationships amongst the group of student-participants in the improvised drama sessions, I interpreted his peers’ laughter as provoked by the familiarity of the stereotype. That is, I felt that they understood that Julian, similarly to past experiences, was attempting to provoke their laughter to ridicule the stereotype. The laughter signified a recognition of what was previously known – a kind of irony. Alternatively or concurrently, some psychological studies suggest adolescents may use humour as a coping mechanism, a form of self-protection (e.g., Erickson 2007; Fuhr, 2002). Julian may have pre-empted the potential stereotype against Colombians – enacting it before anyone else could represent it - thus saving face.

Madeline’s “twist” on the scene as a border agent, and especially Julian’s reenactment of a stereotype through humour, seemed to constitute attempts at what Davies (2014) refers to as educative “turbulence”. Such turbulence, Davies argues, opens options “To break up rigidities embedded in conflict and inequity…to spark creativity that rebuilds new landscapes” (p. 452). While such educative turbulence did not occur frequently among student participants in the improvised drama sessions in all three schools, the examples of process drama from these sessions showed how some students could dramatize stereotypes as a way to name them as injustice, to challenge and even ridicule them.
Talking Back – Performing In-Role as Oneself

In the fourth session with the drama group from Andre’s class at Valley Public School, Grade 8 students refashioned my attempt to have them analyze stereotypes of others, and insisted that they instead talk back to stereotypes they themselves had faced. The plan for this session did not take place with students from the other classrooms studied, as the other drama activities (described above) took more time with those groups. I considered dramatically further unpacking students’ previously created dramas in our final (fourth) session. I decided instead to build on these students’ concerns about identity and stereotypes, by presenting the short film *Silent Beats* created by Jon M. Chu as a pre-text for further dramatic work. The film explores two characters’ (one White, one East Asian) perceptions of and assumptions about a Black boy as he enters a convenience store. Students provided their analysis and connections to film in a discussion after watching. They spoke about and named the various stereotypes the characters in the film had of each other. Silvia connected the film to the murder of a young Black man, Trayvon Martin, in the U.S. in February of 2012:

> It’s kinda like the situation of that boy who got shot cus somebody thought he had a gun on him, but he only had [ice tea] and [candy]. So, I guess, they were thinking on the video that Black kids steal and are bad. (Valley Public School, Improvised Drama Session, November 1, 2012)

Hamsa added a stereotype that he connected with:

> It's kinda of like how most people automatically assume how, Muslims when they're in the airport and everything, when they're trying to catch a plane or something, when they go through security and all that, they automatically assume their terrorists or something. So it's like as soon as the Black guy walked in, both the Asian man and the [White] lady automatically thought that he had a criminal record and that he slept on the street. (Valley Public School, Improvised Drama Session, November 1, 2012)

Interestingly, Hamsa did not comment on the airport scenes from the previous improvised drama session. When I asked him why he thought such a scene was not dramatized in the previous session given the setting of the drama, he did not respond. Hamsa, Silvia, and others’ responses, however, showed their awareness of stereotypes, and I thought students could use the film, as well as their discussion of the film, as a starting point from which to dramatize how they, in role, would talk back to (challenge) those stereotypes. I
asked students to individually select one of the three characters – the young Black man, an older White woman, and an East Asian male store clerk – and to think about the assumptions of the character they had selected.

I asked students to improvise a “talk back” (hooks, 1989) to the stereotypes projected toward the character they had selected. Most students were reluctant to volunteer a performance. After much encouragement, some students volunteered to take part. After a few attempts, it was clear from their body language and reluctance that some of the students did not wish to engage with the exercise. As one student finished a short performance of talking back as the store clerk, Amina and Shila shouted out to me as facilitator almost impatiently, “Can we do it about us?!”

Students’ drama and talk about the film reflected their own struggles with the content, and it became clear that the students in this group at Valley Public School wanted to rewrite stereotypes using improvised performance drawn from their own experiences. It was like they felt they did not need to learn about stereotypes by hearing about (or addressing dramatically) stereotypes some people have of others. They were uncomfortable portraying others talking back to stereotypes: they had their own bodily knowledge, based on their own experiences, that they wished to perform. This was process of recognition – whereby the students saw themselves reflected in the film, but still wished to remain separate (Butler, 2003a). The videorecorded performances of these improvisations focus on each student’s face and upper body, sitting in a chair, with students facing and talking directly into the camera. Julian, the student described in the parody scene above, excitedly indicated that he wanted to perform first. He sat, initially with a smile on his face, and proceeded to stop smiling after a few seconds and perform the following in an animated, indignant way:

Do you think I eat burritos and tacos everyday watching novellas in Spanish? Do you think that all Spanish people get pregnant at the age of 16? Do you think we cut our baby's stomachs and put drugs in them and take them to the airport as real babies? No we don't. Do you think we're all in gangs, and we sell drugs and all these things?  [Pause] Do you think that just because I speak Spanish, that I'm from Mexico? Mexicans are not the only people who speak Spanish in this world. There's Columbia, El Salvador....There's Cuba, Puerto Rico, and .... [out of breath and smiling]. (Valley Public School, Improvised Drama Session, November 1, 2012)
Hamsa, a Bengali Muslim male student, was encouraged by his peers to go next in the group. He was reluctant, and began and stopped two times before he improvised the following:

You think I'm a curry eater? I don’t eat curry all day with my family. Everybody thinks I'm Indian. I'm not Indian alright. There are Bengali, there are Sri Lankan and Pakistani. You know I don’t sit at home and eat rice and curry and all these things that you people say I eat. I play soccer with my friends. I play with my friends everyday. I'm not a poor kid on the street asking for money. C'mon guys! (Valley Public School, Improvised Drama Session, November 1, 2012)

Hamsa’s performance took the form of pleading with those who made assumptions about him. Shila, a Bengali Muslim female, volunteered to perform immediately after Hamsa did. She also started and stopped a few times before performing what is excerpted below. She performed with what I interpreted as an indignant smile throughout, using her body to emphasize her words by rising from the chair at times, and using varied intonation as she spoke:

Do you think just because I'm Brown I eat curry all day? Or I'm from India? No. Do you think my parents beat me just because I'm Brown? No. [rises slightly from her chair, then sits] Do you think my dad beats my mom, and doesn’t let her do anything or go anywhere? [rises again from her chair as she speaks and sits again] No. I go to school, my mom goes to work. We do what we need to do. [Pauses. Laughs] Do you think that I'm a terrorist just because I'm Muslim? No. Do you think I wear this same scarf everyday? No. Do you think....uh...ya. [Laughter.] Do you think all I play is cricket [getting up from chair moving toward camera, and swinging a pointed finger at it], No! [shouted]. (Valley Public School, Improvised Drama Session, November 1, 2012)

All three of these students’ improvised talking back to unjust (stereotyped) assumptions and representations that, in their experience they had found repeated by peers, media, and others. They sought affirmation that they really were not what those others assumed. Their improvisations reflected the complexity of identity - students strategically named typical representations in order to challenge practices and views that impacted negatively their lived experiences. In some cases, they did so by differentiating “between different kinds of difference” (Yuval-Davis, 2006, p. 194). Shila, in particular, highlighted the intersectionality of identity – placing importance on how her identities were constructed, interrelated, and how they affected each other - as she addressed not only cultural
artifacts such as food (curry) and sport (cricket), but also race and gender relations in families. She also talked about Islamophobia, specifically her experience as a Muslim young woman wearing a hijab. Her performance, sparked by her and her peers’ desire to enact their own talk backs during an improvised drama session showed how improvised drama methods, as an inquiry tool, became a point of departure for them to communicate their identity-linked conceptions and responses to social justice. When they saw an opportunity, students recreated how they understood others viewed them. As hooks (2004) maintains:

> We are rooted in language, wedded, have our being in words. Language is also a place of struggle. The oppressed struggle in language to recover ourselves – to rewrite, to reconcile, to renew. Our words are not without meaning. They are action – a resistance” (p. 28).

These students’ talk backs reflected places of struggle and revealed their conceptions of how they could enact their agency for social justice in relation to intersecting notions of identity. Misrecognition of their identities could not be atoned by simply celebrating their cultures, but by challenging dominant representations of themselves in a way that drew attention to injustice, and that reflected some of their pride and anger. When Shila was finished her performance, Amina, an Ethiopian Muslim female, who chose not to perform that day, could be heard singing off camera, as Shila walked away from the performance chair:

> AMINA [singing]: I'm a Muslim girl and I'm proud and I'm free.
> SHILA: I'm a Brown princess.
> AMINA: I'm a Muslim girl and I'm proud and I'm free.

(Valley Public School, Improvised Drama Session, November 1, 2012)

Thus, the challenge to misrecognition, or the devaluing of one’s identity (Fraser, 2003), in Shila’s performance sparked explicit identity affirmation for and from Amina, which Shila shared. The words Amina sang challenge any assumption that she, as a Muslim girl, was not “proud” and “free”.

At the end of the improvised drama session with these six students, the rest of Andre’s students began to enter the classroom. As I was thanking everyone for another great session, Julian asked me to turn the camera on to him one more time. I did not know
what he wished to do, but I began to video record. He improvised a talk back that focused on another of his identities – being a member of the Valleydale community:

Do you think that just because I live in Valleydale that my mom's a prostitute and my dad's a drug dealer? Do you think that I don’t go to school? And that I'm in gangs, and I sleep with cockroaches and rats? No. I have a proper mattress and… [Julian laughs while falling off his chair and other students’ laughter can be heard off camera]. (Valley Public School, Improvised Drama Session, November 1, 2012)

These “talk backs” communicated students’ struggles for recognition, and particularly this final talk back from Julian communicated how issues of recognition are intertwined with issues of redistribution. These young people demanded the opportunity for self-representation, in order to challenge the stereotypical representations they believed that others held of them based on race, ethnicity, religion, gender and class. Most of the students in this improvised drama session group, while they refused to take on the roles of characters in the film, Silent Beats in the way I had planned (as researcher facilitator), insisted that they play a role in “making themselves”:

We do not represent ready-made selves to one another: we do not encounter the other and then simply present or re-present what is already true about us, what is already constituted in us, what is already known about us. In the encounter with the other, we are perhaps always somewhat strange to ourselves, for the other addresses us in ways that make assumptions about who we are, what we stand for, what the limits of our thinking and commitments might be. But if we undergo the experience of dialogue, then we enter the conversation as one kind of person but emerge as another kind. (Butler 2001, p. 82)

As a kind of summary of all the talkbacks, Julian challenged misrecognition of not only his ethno-racial affiliations, but also his identification with another diverse political collective with shared identity – the Valleydale community, with its shared socio-economic characterizations. These young people’s talkbacks simultaneously affirmed and dislocated them from their subject positions. As Butler maintains, “community itself requires the recognition that we are all, in different ways, striving for recognition” (2003a, p. 93). Social justice for these students was about their response to the material and symbolic conditions that made up their everyday experiences. Julian, with his performance, made clear the fact that they were part of a community that was frequently marginalized by forces attempting to revitalize or redevelop it. Many friends and family members of the students had been asked to leave their homes recently, and
watched as their homes were demolished, not sure where they might be going, nor when or if they would be coming back to the Valleydale community. Moreover, the students were studying in a temporary school building that was in disrepair. It was within these conditions that the young people at Valley Public School created their talkbacks. Andre, their teacher, also responded to such conditions through his approach to social justice education in the classroom, provoking all his students to consider their experiences in relation to the topics they were learning about, and to challenge the injustices they were already aware of, as well as those they might not yet be aware of.

Students’ talk-backs were an opportunity for them to engage in dramatized dialogue, particularly with those who would make assumptions about who they are. Similarly to at-risk urban high school students of colour in Nelson’s (2011) study who engaged in playmaking using applied theatre strategies to explore questions of identity, belonging, and power, these Valley Public School students took risks and spoke about their personal experiences of discrimination, and supported each other in their collective struggles for recognition. They not only related their personal stories through the talkbacks, but also initiated an interruption of stereotypical representations of themselves. Many young people (especially those marginalized by dominant society’s response to their community, race, gender, language, ethnicity and other identities) feel misunderstood by people outside their school and community (Gallagher, 2014). These talkbacks had not been not part of my plan. The students took it upon themselves to challenge the stereotypes they experienced with their improvised words. In many ways, they performed and (re-) created their identities simultaneously in those moments – through their performances, they made meaning in ways that I could not have predicted.

Discussion

Improvised drama activities I conducted during sessions with small groups of students from three contrasting school contexts involved opportunities for both drama and dialogue, and revealed the complex and contrasting ways students conceptualized social justice. In some instances, students communicated interpretations of social justice that had the potential to foster oppression or at the very least leave the status quo unchallenged, particularly some of the affluent students in the improvised drama session student groups from Evelyn’s class at Parkview, and some of those from Maureen’s class
at Whitfield. Other students’ interpretations of social justice reflected potential disruption of the status quo, particularly in relation to their own identities, such as the participating students from Valley Public. I presume that the understandings of social justice the students communicated may be partly attributable to their teachers’ pedagogical and content decisions. However, many other factors also presumably contributed to their interpretations. The students’ understandings of identity – their own and others’ - and goodness, seemed connected to myriad factors, including school clubs and their non-school experiences.

The mostly affluent White Grade 4 and 5 student participants from Evelyn’s class focused their notions of social justice on Others’ experiences as targets or victims. Many showed an awareness of oppressions that impacted Others – such as instances of racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, and poverty. Awareness sometimes manifested, however, as partial, essentialized narratives of Others’ experiences that could perpetuate oppressive views (Mohanty, 2003). These essentialized views were embedded in the solutions to injustices some students perceived, such as charity work for those “in need” or the maintenance of close personal relationships with Others. Most students saw themselves as involved with resisting social injustice, mostly conveying images of being helpful, good people who showed responsibility for and connection to Others. Some students communicated the notion of a morally good Canadian they must have learned in and outside of school, in the context of affluence. Also, some students’ familiarity with their particularly White space allowed them to express views of personally knowing about and overcoming injustice more confidently than others. Some expressions of affinity to Others, an important component of an affirmative, human-relations/interpersonal approach to social justice emphasized in Evelyn’s Grade 4/5 class, presumably had different implications for students of colour in the class.

Similar articulations of learning about and accepting Others (as justice) manifested among the selected Grade 6 students from Maureen’s class. For these students, social justice had been achieved by struggle and protest only by those targeted by injustices. They mostly associated injustice with the silencing of voices and instances of discrimination. Their partial stories may have been learned from their experiences in previous grades, from their families, or in the news. None of Maureen’s Grade 6 students
involved in the small group improvised drama sessions associated experiences of injustice with themselves (as targets, or witnesses), nor did they talk about what they themselves could do to address injustice. This was different from some other students in Maureen’s class who did not participate in the improvised drama sessions I facilitated (see Chapter 6): in the whole class context, some Grade 6 students did connect issues of injustice with their personal experiences as targets of injustice. The different demographic make-up of the improvised drama session student group from the rest of Maureen’s class may have influenced how each set of students spoke about social justice. Demographics may have also influenced the drama group’s representation of justice as about Others, their minimal personal connections to those issues, and how they determined what they deemed to be social justice issues.

The students from Andre’s Grade 8 class who participated in the improvised drama sessions, living in a marginalized community, mostly related understandings of social justice to their own experiences. They critiqued how others perceived their own identities. Students did not use explicit language associated with racism, classism, or Islamophobia in the first improvised drama sessions, but their articulations of identity reflected their own experiences with such discrimination, particularly in relation to how they were perceived as individuals and within their community. These understandings might have been associated with Andre’s use of metaphorical literary texts from which students created their own understandings, distinct from explicit lessons on particular types or axes of discrimination (like Evelyn) or on broad social issues (like Maureen). These Grade 8 students seemed to have a deeper repertoire of experiences from which to draw in relation to issues of justice. When a group of these Grade 8 students portrayed an instance of racism by a teacher in the second improvised drama session, all of the students in the group participated in the discussion of motivations and possible responses from some of the actors. They also participated excitedly in replaying the scene, and in considering how the racism portrayed might be most effectively challenged. Social justice, according to these students, could be achieved if they themselves challenged discrimination, such as imposed stereotypes. While these students identified strongly with particular social identities, they were also creating those identities in multifaceted ways, and challenging others’ representations or impositions of themselves. This reminds me of
Butler’s (1995) concept of performative identities, and how individuals have the potential to disrupt the citation of oppressive practices. Particularly in Valley Public School, students demonstrated that they navigated their identities in ways that sought affirmation. How they spoke about their identities foreshadowed how they mobilized their identities to disrupt norms, as they did in their talk back performances described above.

Students in improvised drama sessions in all three sites communicated understandings of social justice using concepts of self and Other. I saw some clear similarities, as well as some important differences, between students’ articulations of social justice and teachers’ understandings and pedagogical intentions in student talk. When I elicited student understandings of social justice and oppression (in all three improvised drama sites) in the dramatic context of the child who did not wish to go to school, students’ scene-creation and dialogue were similar to Saldaña’s (1999) findings about adolescent perceptions of oppression using Boalian theatre methods. Saldaña found that when he asked adolescents in his study to develop dramatic scenarios about an oppression or power imbalance that they portrayed predominantly “horizontal hostility” (p. 15) – instances of exclusion, intimidation, or ridicule amongst peers, primarily in the school setting. Moreover, he found that some affluent students in his study seemed to negate his (and co-researchers’) attempts at socially conscious theatre work in favour of comedic scenes. According to Saldaña, other students seemed “arrogantly proud” of discussing “grown up” issues in their classroom (pp. 17-18). Similarly, after I had asked small groups of students to create scenes associated with social justice, and after in-depth discussion of definitions and understandings of social justice, most students in the affluent contexts created scenes about peer-group membership and general belonging (not discrimination). Particularly with groups from Evelyn’s and Maureen’s classes, some students created scenes with apparent comedic intent. The social justice issues they had discussed earlier did not manifest in some of their improvised drama performances, although further opportunities for talk about their dramatic performances sometimes elicited their more nuanced understandings of social justice. Their performances were starting points (in combination with initial discussions) for how they interpreted justice, rather than conclusions. Students in Andre’s class at Valley Public School described conflictual instances of discrimination in the first two sessions in their dramatic
performances. As mentioned above, Andre’s students introduced in their improvised dramas characters who were not peers – they portrayed discrimination-based conflict with adults such as teachers. Students with more distance from (or fewer) experiences of oppression (that is, the younger and more privileged students) more often dramatized horizontal interpersonal peer hostility, compared to students participating from Andre’s Grade 8 class, who were older and generally less privileged.

Whether students portrayed generic peer-based hostility or explicit discrimination by an adult against a child, they portrayed binaries between villains and victims, oppressors and oppressed. I prompted students to interrogate those binaries by asking them to infer the experiences, personality traits, and identities of some of the characters they had developed, in order to convey further conceptions of how they understood social justice. I recorded student responses on the chalkboard as we discussed the context of each character, and created opportunities for some students to be hot seated in role to interrogate motivations and past experiences. While this exercise broadened how they communicated their conceptions of social justice, as with some students in Evelyn’s class when they had the opportunity to ask questions of the “bully” character, I might have created further opportunities to interrogate how the students chose to portray perpetrators in the scenes, possibly further deconstructing the binaries they reflected (Cahill, 2011).

These improvised drama sessions clearly implemented a mode of inquiry that relied on both dramatic (in-role) and dialogic (out-of role) modes of communication, and demonstrate that drama-associated dialogue offered opportunities for continued communication and meaning making about social justice issues.

Students, overall, were more familiar with communicating through talk rather than dramatically, and therefore were more clearly able to articulate more detailed nuances of social justice in initial conversations as well as in their debriefing discussion. Their dramatic performances may have reflected more authentically how they interpreted social justice issues. When time allowed for further opportunities to reflect, analyze, and deconstruct each other’s dramatic work, more nuanced discussions (beyond interpersonal relations) sometimes occurred. Further supporting previous scholarship that mobilized drama methods (Fels, 2004; Gallagher, 2008; Norris, 2000), the drama methods as inquiry in this study showed how drama and talk – different modes of communication –
together can illuminate students’ identity linked conceptions and responses to social justice.

Drama pedagogy aimed at resolving conflict and fostering social cohesion (or stopping bullying) is common in the literature (Belliveau, 2005; 2006; Sternberg, 1998; Beale, 2001). Clearly, the level of peer-to-peer hostility that does exist in many schools needs to be addressed (see Peplar & Craig, 2008, 2009). However, the effectiveness of particular anti-bullying strategies in addressing violence and competitive and hostile school climates has been questioned (Bickmore, 2011). The improvised drama sessions involving subgroups of student participants from each classroom reveal some participating students’ propensity to conflate anti-bullying with issues of social justice, particularly in more affluent contexts. They also reveal students’ initial representations of peer-to-peer, interpersonal conflicts as social justice issues: these concerns may be starting points from which to further deconstruct the connections between micro and macro injustices (North, 2006), and between misrecognition and maldistribution (Fraser, 2005). With student participants from all three classrooms, and particularly with those from Evelyn’s and Maureen’s classrooms, after opportunities to make connections between individual experiences and broader contexts of oppression, they expressed more nuanced interpretations of social justice than they had revealed in their initial drama work.

Some of the evidence discussed above illustrates that students, despite their teachers’ understandings and pedagogical intentions, create their own interpretations based on multiple factors, including and beyond teachers’ pedagogical and curriculum content choices. Such findings reinforce Sonu’s (2009a) work with youth who challenge imposed institutional social justice norms by enacting their own forms of justice and resistance. My findings also resonate with Swalwell’s (2013) findings regarding youth in an elite secondary school who interpreted social justice education goals in different ways from what the teacher had intended. Riviere (2005) and Gallagher (2007) found in their studies that students communicated intersecting identities in the secondary drama classroom, and that schooling played a role in students’ identity construction processes as they navigated issues of race, gender, sexuality, and class. The words and actions of younger and, in some instances, more privileged students in this dissertation study also
suggest that schooling had played a role in their identity construction processes in relation to each other as they grappled with their understandings of, and connections with, issues of justice.

Interestingly, even when diversity is mandated through policy and official curriculum, Peck, Sears, and Donaldson (2008) found selected Grade 7 children “had very little understanding of many of the facets of ethnic diversity identified in the curriculum standards” (p. 74). Thus, the classroom is only one socializer in students’ lives and students do not necessarily learn what teachers believe they teach. As with some of the studies (mostly in secondary school contexts) referenced above, the vignettes presented in this chapter point to the unpredictable ways that ideas may be taken up and translated by students. It may not be enough to simply introduce issues associated with oppression into classrooms without providing opportunities for explicit dialogic and dramatic explorations about how social justice issues are defined, and why. Further, without attending to the divergent ways students take up social justice issues, intended social justice education may produce unjust relations – as occurred among some students from Evelyn’s classroom, who communicated conceptions of social justice based on pity, highlighting difference in order to present themselves as good person.

At Valley Public School, some of the participants in the Grade 8 improvised drama group expressed feeling misunderstood by broader society. Uncertain and unpredictable spaces that are opened by drama work might be difficult and risky for some students, particularly those who are marginalized by various societal forces (Gallagher, 2014). Such uncertainty can be challenging for teachers in the face of the academic structures reflecting neoliberal agendas (such as pre-defined standards-driven curriculum). The young people in the improvised drama group at Valley Public School seemed to thrive within such unpredictability, challenging particular goals and structures I had tried to impose as facilitator/researcher to create space to reshape representations of themselves and their communities.

Throughout this study, students interpreted, altered, and responded to teachers’ pedagogies in ways that reflected their identities, subjectivities, and experiences. My use of drama methods as a mode of inquiry provided a way for students to play and experiment with their perspectives, their identities, and to become, as Gallagher (2007)
states, “co-authors of their cultural narratives” (p. 86). In dramatic encounters, students communicated their understandings of identity – who they and others were. Consciously or not, the encounters within the improvised drama sessions were reflections of the context within which students performed. As Butler (2007) points out, “the act that one does, the act that one performs, is, in a sense, an act that has been going on before one arrived on the scene” (p. 193). That is, the dramatic encounter is a reflection of social contexts and the (implicit or explicit) conditions it places on individuals. The ways in which students negotiated their understandings of particular issues through drama and associated dialogue reflected the conditions placed on their behaviours and performances. Students’ use of parody as a means of ridiculing dominant representations, for example, and performances of talk-backs to interrupt dominant representations of themselves, challenged fixed ideas of identity. These instances of parody and talking back also embodied opportunities for social justice drama pedagogy that resist or replace positivist notions of student empowerment.

Even when my intentions were to find answers, the student-participants negotiated the simultaneity of their knowledge and experience, pointing to the ways they were shaped by broader institutions and culture. The improvised drama sessions created spaces for students to simultaneously live out their experiences and understandings through drama, challenge familiar narratives, and challenge dominant assumptions. They provided a possibility that helped begin to “uncobble the mindmaps that prescribe and limit what is possible for ourselves and others” (Cahill, 2009, p. 18).
CHAPTER 6: How Students Dramatize Subjectivities: Conflict on the Edge of Danger

“The reality of doing social justice, versus what I think needs to happen [pause], well, it’s different.” (Maureen, Post-Lesson Interview, February 13, 2013)

This chapter explores moments of surprise, contradiction, and conflict that arose amongst students and between students and teachers during observed lessons in the three social justice classrooms in this study. My analysis of these moments builds on my examination of each teacher’s conceptions of social justice and pedagogies for social justice (see Chapter 4) by linking specific examples of these teachers’ practice to their conceptions. Moreover, I broaden the lens with which I explore how diverse students in these contrasting classrooms participated in drama pedagogies for social justice: beyond the subgroups of students from each class who participated in the improvised drama sessions I facilitated, focusing here on episodes from my classroom observations.

In any classroom, tensions and contradictions presumably exist between students’ received knowledge and their lived experience. The sometimes-contradictory ways that students and teachers mediate knowledge reflect the tensions between critical and post-structural understandings of social justice education, drama education, and conflict. Where critical pedagogues may work to unveil and critique ‘truths’ associated with struggles for justice, post-structuralists argue that teachers should leave room for surprise and uncertainty (Britzman, 2003; Ellsworth, 2005). Rather than a universal vision of justice based on notions of rational deliberation, post-structural scholars (also Davies, 2004; Todd & Säfström, 2008; Todd, 2009) argue that pedagogy can highlight the tensions that arise as divergent viewpoints are revealed, as well as the dissonance between teacher intention and student response. Mouffe’s (2000; 2005) notions of antagonistic and agonistic conflict provide an alternative theory to rational deliberation. According to Mouffe, antagonistic conflict is raw and sometimes violent, and is associated with moral norms of right and wrong. Agonistic conflict, on the other hand, can be channeled into a clash of political positions in which participants are political adversaries rather than moral opponents (Mouffe, 2000). Conflict is agonistic when it is channeled in constructive, educative ways. In this chapter, I employ Mouffe’s notions of antagonistic and agonistic conflict to analyze episodes in which encounters happened in
ways teachers did not expect or intend – in ways that reflected the possibility for pedagogical encounters to breakdown into antagonism, as well as their potential to be generative (agonistic).

Scholarship in drama pedagogy tends to examine teacher practice for facilitating personal transformation (Ackroyd, 2000; Conrad, 2002; Neelands, 2004). Based on post-structural thought, I investigate how drama pedagogy might create spaces for social justice education that could open opportunities for uncertainty. As discussed in the previous chapter, improvised dramatic encounters can be, or can serve as possible starting points from which to engage, generative (agonistic) conflict. Dramatic encounters involve drama intertwined with dialogue – dramatic performance feeds the dialogue, and dialogue feeds dramatic performance (Gallagher, 2014). Such linked drama and dialogue constitute opportunities to engage in educative conflict that may have the potential to disturb and challenge the status quo. All three teachers in three case study classrooms mobilized conflict to varying degrees through their drama pedagogies as they sought to teach for social justice. Students in their classrooms responded in unexpected ways to these opportunities. The teachers’ facilitation of those moments of contradiction revealed that eliciting conflict had the potential to be both educative and dangerous. Moreover, some students participated in social justice education, drama, and conflict in ways that did not reflect what teachers might have hoped.

In relation to vignettes of drama pedagogy (including dialogue) for social justice education observed in the three case study classrooms, I analyze in this chapter how explicit episodes of conflict occurred, because of and/or in spite of teachers’ pedagogical intentions. I examine instances where social justice education lessons broke down, or came close to breaking down, in two of the three of these classrooms. Students engaged in explicit conflict with one another and/or with the teacher in response to pedagogy and content introduced; emotion rubbed up against norms established by teachers. Britzman (1998) describes such moments as instances when “feelings break down, take a detour, revise their content, betray understanding…. .” (p. 84). In some situations, “affective meanings become anxious, ambivalent, and aggressive” (Britzman, 1998, p. 84) even when teachers have intended to achieve consensus or smooth out differences. Vignettes selected from two case study classrooms illustrate approaches to social justice education
that challenged consensus-building approaches to social justice education. They reflect moments of breakdown, ambivalence, and in one instance, antagonism.

Teachers’ pedagogies and students’ responses and interactions with each other demonstrated how conflict pedagogy operated in these classrooms to challenge injustice. Teachers’ pedagogies and students’ responses did not necessarily involve “rational” deliberation, but emotive political exchanges without fixed identities or straightforward solutions to complex issues. These instances also reflect the potential dangers of eliciting conflict in social justice education: facing tensions has the potential for both transformative opportunities and oppressive consequences. Social justice education that involved conflict, therefore, was risky for these teachers. Evelyn, although she told me in an interview that she thought conflict in the classroom was a good thing, did not often welcome open disagreement in her classroom. In contrast, Andre elicited open expression of conflict in his social justice teaching. Maureen also, (increasingly over the time I observed her classroom lessons) invited conflict through her teaching, although more cautiously. Such conflict risks sometimes challenged these teachers’ willingness to move beyond affirmative realms of social justice education. In the first section below, I examine three instances of conflict. Two of these instances involve students and their teacher in conflictual dialogue that the teachers had intended as a pretext to drama explorations. One instance involved dramatic conflict that the teacher facilitated within a structure of a dramatic deliberation about homelessness. In the second section below, I examine moments of contradiction between teachers’ expectations of students’ participation in their social justice education and drama pedagogy lesson, and how students actually participated. Specifically, I focus on instances of student humour and student silence, and what these forms of participation can mean for social justice education that uses drama pedagogy and conflict.

**Conflict: Breakdowns and Imaginings**

**Struggles for Intelligibility: Sexism and its Response**

In what follows, I examine an instance in which social justice education broke down in Andre’s Grade 8 classroom. As mentioned in Chapter 4, Andre used critical questioning to provoke students’ affective participation and generative conflict in relation
to particular issues. A key component of his approach to social justice education, according to Andre, was his goal to build a sense of community in the classroom. Andre saw the class’ sense of community as a necessary condition upon which to introduce topics that could provoke perspectives that could disrupt that community. Andre told me in an interview that he believed his students’ ability to deal with tensions was enhanced when they felt they were part of an inclusive classroom community. Although full safety for all members of a community may not be possible, it was clear that Andre’s questioning and introduction of particular issues opened up space for dissonant views to be voiced, and to be responded to, in his classroom.

In one lesson, Andre invited students to discuss the treatment of women in Canada and around the world, to set the context for later dramatic exploration on the issue. Andre had chosen to address this topic because of the then-recent attempted murder of a young woman activist (Malala Yousafzai) in Pakistan who had vocally challenged the Taliban’s refusal of women’s right to education. Students had read and discussed various articles about the Malala story, and were preparing to complete an in-role writing and performance assignment on gender equity and sexism. These young people, participating in a discussion linked to drama, were given opportunities to share, develop, and challenge their own and others’ ideas and understandings. Andre challenged the idea that gender inequity, sexism, and misogyny existed only in other, “distant” places. He began by asking students to consider whether or not they thought such issues existed in Canada. Opinions were aired and challenged openly – by students and the teacher. Next, Andre asked the class, “In Canada, how are women and girls treated?”

SYLVIA: Oh, you really want us to argue.
SARA: You know how people say that men are stronger than women, and how they belong in the kitchen?
RICHARD: They do.

Much of the class erupted into anger. Many females in the class react angrily to Richard’s comment, and Richard and other males react to their reactions. Some males remain silent.

SILVIA: That’s what you think about your mom, your sister?
ANDRE (Teacher): [Pausing until it is quiet enough for him to be heard] Richard, that is a sexist comment, and that is not appropriate. Richard does not look at Andre as he is talking, and repeatedly tells other students who are mumbling things to “shut up.” Discussion of Richard’s comment continues:

RICHARD [under his breath]: It’s true.

Silvia continues to say things to Richard.

RICHARD [responding directly to Silvia]: You [said with emphasis] belong in the kitchen.

I felt tension as the researcher (observer) as to whether or not to intervene in the discussion. I told Richard, “That’s enough,” in response to his direct comment to Sylvia.

KARLO: What he [Richard] said is not sexist! It’s his opinion.

NATASHA: No, it still is sexism; clearly Richard…We actually all need each other. It doesn’t matter who’s stronger.

SHILA: [speaking quietly, not to the whole class] We all have our own strengths.

KARLO: Man still has to provide everything; you guys [to the females in the class] just want to go shopping and want your diamond rings.

Many of the young women seem very upset, and say various things to Karlo that I cannot make out. Natasha gets up and asks to go to the washroom, visibly angry.

ANDRE: Opinions are important, but what if they really are offensive? Like, what if I used the “N” word with Richard, if that was my opinion? Would that be ok? [Richard looks away, says things under his breath [inaudible]]

KARLO: That’s not an opinion

Many students speak loudly to each other and to Karlo, who is responding loudly. Karlo, who’s had the floor often and for long periods, tells the class repeatedly that he’s talking, it’s his turn, so everyone should be quiet.

RICHARD [under his breath]: Some women belong in the kitchen.

Andre asks everyone to quiet down and hands the floor to Amina.

AMINA: We are all different. We can’t say that we’re the same, but that there is a difference between genders, but also amongst us. Like, you can’t judge all women
because of one woman and the same with men. We’re all different even as women.

AARON: Men treat women like they’re better than them [women] or superior, and that’s not cool.

JULIAN: …Like, both women and men could be construction workers. And, there are men in my sister’s cosmetology class. Things don't have to fit into perfect rules. (Valley Public School, Classroom Observation, October 24, 2012).

There were antagonistic exchanges throughout this episode. Some of the male students seemed to hold oppressive positions on the role of women, and on sexism, and misogyny. Since agonistic conflict was Andre’s goal, this excerpt provokes questions as to what teachers might do in such situations. When teachers create opportunities for divergent perspectives to be aired, they invite private convictions of (vocal) students to be made public. Some of the students in Andre’s class had private convictions that were sexist, and the dialogue was an opportunity for them to express those convictions. Within this dialogue, many students did not recognize others’ positions, as is necessary for agonistic conflict to occur. Richard and Karlo, specifically, did not seem to be listening to their peers’ responses to them. Richard repeated his initial statement a number of times throughout the episode, and Karlo did not show that he acknowledged his peer’s positions. At the same time, some student voices (mostly young women, and two young men) did challenge Richard and Karlo’s misrecognition of specific identities, disrupting oppressive viewpoints and fixed understandings of women and girls.

Intervention in the face of oppressive comments seems to be an obvious response, but the question of how to intervene most effectively remains. When Andre intervened, naming Richard’s comment as sexist, he did not use his role as teacher to entirely silence Richard’s (or Karlo’s) speech in class. That is, he refrained from imposing procedural norms beyond naming what Richard had said as sexist, allowing dangerous antagonistic comments to continue. Individuals seemed hurt, both as members of a group (young women) and individually, as targets of oppression: this was revealed by some of the young women’s responses to Richard and Karlo, including Natasha angrily leaving the room. Andre’s post-lesson interview reflected his view that students needed opportunities
to clearly communicate their biases, in order for productive challenge to take place. According to Andre:

[The dialogue] was purposeful. I like that they [referring to students who spoke in the exchange] were conscious of what I was trying to do…and that they were ok with it, and that they were open and willing to take a risk, and even though Richard said something that wasn’t appropriate, he was taking ...he put himself out there. It was inappropriate, but at least I know where he stands. (Andre, Post Lesson Interview, October 24, 2012)

The whole episode allowed many of the students to communicate where they stood on the issues of gender equity and sexism. I wondered whether or not Richard and Karlo had had enough information previously to inform their one-dimensional views. In the interview, I let Andre know that I was troubled by the predominance of male, antagonistic voices in the discussion. I asked Andre whether he thought the discussion had been generative for those in the room with less gender privilege:

I think it was a combination. There was stuff that wasn’t ok. And there was discussion that was really productive and really thought provoking…. But then [pause] maybe because it was so emotionally charged, that it wasn’t as productive as it should be. Like some of the stuff that Karlo said was not productive, but you see some folks like Aaron and Julian [pause]. Julian, even though he wasn’t articulating himself so well, he was thinking about it. It was really thoughtful. (Andre, Post Lesson Interview, October 24, 2012)

Such comments demonstrate Andre’s thinking that it is worth creating spaces where students can challenge each other’s and one’s own clearly held views. He recalled how some students had attempted to disrupt peers sexist thinking by directly challenging their perspectives. For example, multiple young women in the room and at least two males (Aaron and Julian), vocally challenged the sexist beliefs of the more vocal males. Andre, as the teacher, intervened in the discussion by asking Richard to compare the issue to his own experiences as a target of discrimination, only after multiple students had an opportunity to express their own challenges. Andre allowed various students’ comments to continue, not silencing even dominant voices in the classroom. In these ways, the encounter was a turbulent exchange, in which “offensive views [were] aired and picked apart in a relatively safe setting” (Davies, 2014, p. 5). According to Davies (2014), “speech should not be silenced: far-reaching mistakes have been made in silencing in the name of “respect.”” (p. 5).
As the observer, I felt some very strong tensions around my own silence and the relative safety of the space, as I objected to the way some male student voices dominated the space with discriminatory language. I continue to question how to value struggles for intelligibility (Todd, 2012), and yet (when) to intervene when those struggles for intelligibility become harmful – or dangerous. Richard (and some other students) may have held the sexist perspective whether or not they had an opportunity to articulate it. Because Richard expressed his viewpoint aloud, he heard objections to his view. Even as many of the exchanges in the above vignette remained antagonistic, these students (and the teacher) had the opportunity to channel viewpoints in agonistic ways and to hear divergent viewpoints – including viewpoints that challenged sexism. At the same time, Andre struggled with his responsibility to resist the positioning of some of his students, and could have found ways to further intervene, and/or to develop pedagogical context for the encounter. Such scaffolding may have allowed for the encounter to unfold differently without silencing the dialogue. Finding the delicate balance between intervention and silencing within the classroom in such moments of potential danger is challenging. Danger is at the heart of social justice education – it involves the risk of loss of control for the teacher, but also the willingness of the teacher to be open to and ready to facilitate the surprises that come with such risk.

Conflicting viewpoints and oppressive ideas and opinions exist whether or not there are opportunities to engage with them in the classroom. The above vignette reveals the need for well-designed pedagogy that scaffolds students’ (unpredictable) engagement with social justice topics. Design of pedagogy could offer students multiple reference points to draw from beyond stereotypical representations. As shown in Chapter 5, pedagogical design may allow for opportunities for students to create and communicate nuanced understandings of complicated issues. The vignette analyzed above reveals some of the (disproportionate for less dominant students) risks of passionate dialogue. Below, I examine another instance of conflictual dialogue (again a preparation for dramatic exploration) observed in Maureen’s Grade 6 classroom.

**Bin Laden and Other Stereotypes**
In a socioeconomically and racially mixed context, as in Andre’s classroom, Grade 6 students in Maureen’s classroom exhibited unexpected and divergent emotive perspectives during a classroom discussion. Maureen asked students to discuss the government of Canada’s official apology to First Nation, Métis, and Inuit peoples (for its development of and support for residential schools) as a preparation for a dramatic response to that apology. In the discussion, many students did not consider the government’s apology valid. Maureen prepared and asked her students critical, analytical questions. Aside from asking questions, Maureen mostly stayed out of the ensuing conversations, sometimes encouraging students to think more deeply about their own thoughts and comments. Maureen’s goal was for the students to critically analyze the text of the apology, and to have a dialogic forum in which students could develop their own viewpoints both on the apology and on First Nation, Métis and Inuit people’s responses (at the time) to the apology.

MAUREEN (Teacher): Why did it take so long for [the government] to apologize?
ZAHRA: It doesn’t matter that they apologized because their lives are so affected and ruined in so many ways.
CARLA: I think it’s important because it’s a way to show the government actually cares.
SADIE: Well, I don’t know if they care or if they cared.
MAUREEN (Teacher): How might the words, “We apologize for failing to protect you”, reflect bias?
SADIE: How can they protect you from something they did in the first place?
LISA: I “failed to protect you”… from my fist!
JOCLYN: When you’re trying to protect something, you usually protect them from something else. And so the way they wrote [the apology], it makes it seem like the residential schools were something else.
CARLA: Maybe the people in the schools didn’t really want to be bad and they tried to help the kids, but the government forced them to do what they did.
ROBERT: Ya, they didn’t know at the time that what they were doing was bad.
SADIE: So it took them 120 years to realize it was bad? And if they [the adults] weren’t OK with what was happening, why were they smiling in the pictures we looked at?
CARLA: Maybe the government didn’t know they were hitting the kids.
MAUREEN (Teacher): But is it only about the hitting? Why did the schools open in the first place?
CARLA: …to change them?
LISA: This kind of thing happens all the time. People always think they’re doing things for good, but sometimes you just need to let things be.

The dialogue began with expressions of divergent views regarding the government apology. The vignette shows how two teacher questions can elicit such dialogue. Some students expressed their critique of the government, and some expressed possible reasons such abuses had happened. As the conflictual dialogue Maureen had planned continued, she had not expected a student to connect colonialism and racism against Indigenous peoples to the experiences of many Muslims in Canada. Zahra, a South Asian Muslim, expressed the negative impact of what she saw as the stereotypical view of Muslims as terrorists. The encounter continued as another student, Lisa (White and not Muslim), added her own analysis of why stereotypes of Muslims occur:

ZAHRA: This is kinda like how people think that Muslims are terrorists.
MAUREEN (glances at researcher; asks Zahra): What makes you say that?
ZAHRA: Because we’re different.
SADIE: If you listen to the news, they say only “Muslims”, they never say anyone’s name and they do that kind of thing with other people or groups.
MAUREEN: What are those views examples of?
LISA responds quickly: Stereotypes.
MAUREEN: How does this all connect to stereotypes?
LISA: It connects because the view of First Nations was, or is, that they are weak and can’t take care of themselves.
ZAHRA: Ya, how for Muslims, everyone thinks we’re all bad….
LISA, interrupting: Ya, but I’m sorry, it’s because of Bin Laden….
ZAHRA, pointedly: Why does one person all of a sudden represent everyone from that religion? Why does it happen only for some people, and not others?

MAUREEN asks students to return to their desks from the carpet area and write a short reflection on the discussion they just had. As Zahra walks by me, she says, “I don't know how to write all the stuff that's in my head.”

(Classroom Observation, March 1, 2013)

Zahra’s comment brought to light a tension between Muslim and non-Muslim students that lay just beneath the surface of this classroom community. Issues of Islamophobia were on Zahra’s mind. In Maureen’s classroom, though almost half the students were Muslim, the issue had not been pursued. I perceived Maureen to be uncomfortable addressing such an issue, based on our early interviews that demonstrated her cautiousness with some issues (found unfamiliar). When Zahra saw the connection between the content Maureen introduced and her own experience, she took the opportunity to address the issue, despite her teacher’s pedagogical intentions. Maureen asked questions of Zahra and her classmates to reinforce the connection to Maureen’s intended topic. While Zahra’s introduction of this analogy disrupted the teacher’s plan for the discussion, the subsequent student comments fulfilled Maureen’s general intentions for the lesson – critique and detection of bias, as well as addressing the underlying attitudes of non-Indigenous people toward Indigenous peoples in Canada that had allowed residential schools to exist.

When Lisa made her comment about Bin Laden, however, the direction of the discussion was upset. The targets of critique became some of the people in the class, rather than the apology they were analyzing and the reasons oppression occurred. Lisa’s comment seemed to justify negative stereotypes against Muslims: I believe Zahra read it this way as well. Maureen (teacher) did not have to comment on Lisa’s statement because Zahra did so effectively. Zahra framed her response as two questions: “Why does one person all of a sudden represent everyone from that religion? Why does it happen only for some people, and not others?” inviting further open dialogue open dialogue, but also forcing difference to rise to the fore. Zahra used agency, based on her self-perception as “different”, to disrupt what might have become “settled knowledge” (Butler, 2001, p. 278) - a dominant but inaccurate representation of Muslim people that existed not only
outside her school, but also amongst her peers.

Both Andre’s and Maureen’s approaches to social justice education in these instances were to provide opportunities for students to engage in passionate discussion including to express disagreement guided by purposeful, critical questioning on an issue. In Andre’s class, the conflictual dialogue quickly became (antagonistic) about the people in the room – Andre did not ask questions in relation to a specific text, but referred to an event and asked an open question to elicit his students’ general perspectives on issues of gender-based discrimination. Maureen, in contrast, asked questions in relation to a specific text – a government apology. The latter, created, at least initially, a focused discussion about the validity of the apology. However, when Zahra made the connection regarding stereotypes against Muslims, the discussion became more linked to the identities of some of the students in the room. In both episodes, conflictual dialogue became more emotive when the discussion involved students in the class as potential direct targets of the injustices being discussed. As such, these dialogues became more dangerous. They became public opportunities to publically communicate, as well as to challenge, one’s own and others’ views about social justice issues relevant to people in the room.

“Imagining the Experiences of Others” Through Dramatic Conflict

“Drama is essentially about problem finding, not problem solving.” (Winston, 1996, p. 118)

The following excerpt is an example of how Maureen, in her diverse Grade 6 classroom, purposely set the stage for dramatic conflict. Maureen asked students to take on roles of individuals who would have divergent perspectives on the issue of homelessness. Students were asked to imagine and enact what they thought those perspectives might be. Maureen used a structure of “dramatic deliberation” to encourage students to attempt to reach consensus on the issue of homelessness. The dramatic deliberation structure had particular rules of engagement: students prepared “position statements” to express (in role) the opinions of “stakeholders” – characters from the book Trupp, as well as non-fictional characters from the school’s community (e.g., mayor, residents, business owners, etc.) – on homelessness. Students were to respond to the question: What should be done about homelessness in this city? Maureen created groups
of three to four students and assigned each group a character (stakeholder). Members of each group prepared a written position statement together (shared in-role writing from the perspective of the stakeholder character they were assigned).

When the dramatic deliberation began, one student from each stakeholder character group sat in a circle and performed their position statements in role, in turn. After the position statements were performed, group members could replace the person representing their character in the circle at any point when they wished to add to the discussion, respond to a question, or ask a question of others. Maureen played the role of reporter – she acted as critical questioner, similar to the role of the Joker in Boal’s Forum Theatre approach (2002). Thus, she played Devil’s advocate, challenging the thinking expressed by the students in their roles. Such deliberation, as a drama pedagogy approach, normally aims for agreement, and is sometimes contrasted to debate, which usually only involves two perspectives and whose goal is to have one winner. Despite Maureen’s goal to have students reach agreement on the issue of homelessness in this instance, this drama activity also reflected Maureen’s valuing of agonistic conflict – an exploration in which students could imagine others’ perspectives as they explored their own. Maureen, in setting the stage for improvised dramatic conflict, expected divergent viewpoints to emerge, but did not know ahead of time how those interactions or viewpoints would unfold. Such an opportunity to improvise dramatically transcends rationality and creates space for students to become passionate and express emotion in the classroom – challenging tightly structured official curricular expectations. The deliberation structure that Maureen used in the vignette below offered a springboard for emotions to be unleashed.

The excerpt below begins at a point when students had already gone through the more formalized part of the dramatic deliberation process (presenting each stakeholder character’s position statement). One student representative from each stakeholder character role was sitting on a chair in a circle, while other members of their group stood or sat behind them. After students performed their position statements, Maureen, as the reporter and moderator, did not try to maintain a more formalized deliberation process of having students speak in turn, around the circle. She opted to have students continue their cross-talk and questioning without much intervention. The students’ in-role questioning
below is based on a section of the book *Trupp* that describes how Bernice, the “homeless” protagonist, visited the back of a restaurant where the owners gave her leftover food every evening. Nadil (as Bernice) and Crystal (as city councilor) interrogated the students in role as restaurant owner in the dramatic deliberation about why they kept Bernice at the back of the restaurant, even as they gave her food.

LISA [in role as business man who gets mad at a homeless character in *Trupp* ] to Sherri [in role as restaurant owner]: Do you like when homeless people come to your restaurant?

SHERRI: We enjoy giving food at the back of the store.

NADIL [in role as homeless character in *Trupp*, Bernice]: Do you think we give you a bad image?

SHERRI: Yes, so we give, but they have to be outside, in the back.

CRYSTAL [in role as city councilor]: Why do you make them eat outside?

JOHN [takes over for Sherri as restaurant owner]: It’s a restaurant – we want them to eat, but we don’t want to scare away other customers.

LISA [takes over for John as restaurant owner]: Well, we give food, but we know there are shelters and heated places. (Whitfield, Classroom Observation, February 12, 2012)

Some students’ in-role questions to the restaurant owner directly related to notions of distributive justice and its relationship with Fraser’s principle of parity of participation – in which all members of society should be in a position to interact with one another as peers (2003). Their questions problematized the restaurant owner’s willingness to give - to distribute food that they no longer needed - as a way to address injustice, all while denying Bernice’s equivalent status with other customers. That is, the restaurant owners gave charity, as long as Bernice stayed out of sight. Sheri, John, and Lisa (who took turns in the role of restaurant owner all responded to questions) in ways that reflected notions of inclusion, on the restaurant owners’ unequal terms. As John stated, in a matter of fact way, “It’s a restaurant – we want them to eat but we don't want to scare away other customers.” Further tensions were highlighted with respect to perceptions of homelessness, and possible ways to address homelessness:
SADIE [takes over for Crystal as city councilor, asking Lady on Bench who had yelled at homeless character in Trupp]: Do you avoid homeless people when they’re around?

SAL [in role as Lady on Bench]: I don’t really respond to them.

SADIE: Don’t you find that hard?

ESTHER [takes over for Sal as Lady on Bench]: Before it was hard, but now there are shelters and things, they can use those.

TAMARA (White, female) [in role as shelter director]: Why do you feel the need to ignore them?

CARLA [in role as businessman]: Well, they don’t do anything for us – they’re not that important, so why pay attention to them?

LISA [back in role as restaurant owner]: Well, saying that you don’t pay attention or ignore them, do you do that for everything else in your life – like global warming, are you going to ignore that?

MAUREEN [in role as reporter/moderator]: Well, how about the fact that you tried to hide the homeless in the back of the restaurant and don’t let them come to the front? Isn’t that that same thing?

LISA: But we give them free food!!??

[Recess bell rings, but most students do not leave their chairs]

[Amidst the many voices, Nadil’s – in role as Bernice – voice is heard, speaking to Elia, playing the role of businessman]

NADIL [in role as Bernice]: If you were homeless, would you want people to think the same way about you as you do about us?

[Everyone goes silent.]

ELIA [in role as businessman]: I don't know the answer to that.

CARLA [taking over for Elia (in role as businessman), asks Nadil (in role as Bernice)]: Have you ever thought about going to a shelter?

NADIL: I prefer to stay on the street.

MAUREEN [in role as reporter/moderator]: Why do you prefer to stay on the street?
NADIL: The shelter is sometimes stinky, and I’m free to do what I want on the street. (Whitfield, Classroom Observation, February 12, 2012)

In the above dramatic deliberation, these Grade 6 students took on roles (sometimes voicing opinions contrary to their own) and engaged in conflict through questions, voicing opposing viewpoints, and engaging in critical dialogue. Drama’s emphasis on action and emotion distinguishes it from other forms of discussion. According to Winston (2005), “What matters more than what is said is what the words do to the characters to whom they are spoken or who speak them. What counts is their effect on the way they see their situation and how this vision defines or will redefine their subsequent actions” (p. 113). The themes in the discussion seemed to reflect students’ individual attitudes and actions toward homeless people. The dramatic dialogue built to a point where the complexity of the issue came to light. Nadil (Bernice) framed a question to Elia (businessman) about what it might feel like to be disrespected that caused the whole class to pause and reflect. This episode shows that these students’ interpretation of homelessness as a social justice issue was embedded in individual perceptions and attitudes toward homeless people rather than broader issues of poverty. Some students expressed recognition and affirmation of homeless people as equal members of society. Like the approach to redistribution evident in the dramatic dialogue involving the restaurant owner, this was an affirmative approach - it did not address the root structural causes of homelessness, but focused on individual responses to people who were homeless.

Attending to the structural root causes of homelessness and poverty could have more explicitly been a next step. Maureen, as the reporter/moderator, encouraged the affirmative notions of fairness and perceptions amongst the students with her questions, such as asking the restaurant owner to consider their own well-intentioned action (providing food, but only outside and behind the restaurant) as they criticized another character’s general attitude toward homeless people. Toward the end of the activity, Maureen, as teacher-in-role, used her role again to build on Carla’s (as businessman) question about shelters and Nadil’s response, to raise for students’ consideration structural questions about whether shelters were a solution to the causes of homelessness. As I interpret this observation, Maureen’s provocations enabled Nadil (as Bernice) to
bring to light a complex issue that had not yet been brought up in the class’s exploration of homelessness – the perspective that affirmative, short term remedies to homelessness (such as shelters) do not provide easy answers to the issue.

This vignette from Maureen’s classroom shows how dialogue (agonistically) addressing divergent perspectives may replace competitive (antagonistic) debating and not assume universal concepts of right and wrong. In this episode, students articulated (in role) political differences, not just moral stances. That is, students used political referents that had to do with social relations. Political referents “seek to establish a certain order and organize human coexistence in conditions that are always potentially conflictual because they are affected by the dimension of ‘the political’” (Mouffe, 2000, p. 15). Such forms of conflict are deemed agonistic. Students communicated conflicting political positions within the context of an organized ensemble of practices, discourses, and institutions (that is, a social context) associated with homelessness. In this dramatic deliberation activity, students expressed and analyzed dramatically opposing political positions (in relation to this social context). In my view, conflict in this instance was agonistic – it was an opportunity for students to imagine, enact, and challenge others’ views while considering and confronting their own.

This dramatic deliberation vignette also illustrates an alternate way of deliberating – unpredictable, complex, and passionate – without forcing consensus. The initial structure of the activity was based on particular norms of communication outlined by Maureen: the developing and then sharing of position statements, one at a time, followed by students, one at a time, asking questions of each other. Later, the deliberation unfolded in an unpredictable way - students engaged in agonistic political conflict, in role, in order to raise questions about poverty, homelessness, and existing power relations. The students expressed divergent perspectives (from each other and sometimes from their own), and expressed themselves with passion evidenced by most students’ unwillingness to stop the drama when the lunch bell rang.

When Maureen debriefed this dramatic deliberation with students, they indicated how imagining the experiences of others had helped some of them to better know themselves (see Britzman, 2001). Dramatic conflict (acting) was a way to put students’ ideas and feelings in conflict with what they had thought they thought.
MAUREEN: Was there something you wanted to comment on based on what people said in role?
TAMARA: I felt like I wanted to add on to almost all the groups – cu’s while I was thinking about my group’s thoughts, I had tons of thoughts on the other positions as well.
MAUREEN: Was there something that someone else said in role that you disagreed with?
CARLA: When Elia said that it was their decision that they were homeless…[not included in above excerpt]. I was thinking that … ‘I don’t think so…. That probably isn’t the case’.
TAMARA: With shelters, they might be open only at certain times and in certain situations, and sometimes they’re full.
MAUREEN: Why would some people not want to use a shelter or want to be alone like Nadil mentioned in role.
JOCLYN: Well, they might not like them, or sometimes it’s dangerous.
(Whitfield, Classroom Observation, February 12, 2012)
The students’ initial views of homelessness, and some students’ apparent view of shelters (as a solution to homelessness), were put into question by what peers said during the dramatic deliberation. Carla indicated that even as she was thinking about how she would frame her character’s position (as businessman), she was simultaneously developing opinions about conflicting perspectives expressed by other students in role. She reflected that while she was in role, she was critically analyzing the various other positions from her own personal perspective.

The interplay and sometimes conflict between dramatic perspective and individual perspective is invited by pedagogy that blends drama and conflict for social justice. Gallagher (2007) describes such interplays in her research as “the dialogical relationship between the material subject (and [their] histories) and the imagined one” (p. 85). Such a relationship also involved a balance between the “role and the real” (Booth, 2005, p. 105). Students participated and made decisions within the drama about their character’s views toward a real issue (homelessness), while also considering the impact of the issue on their own real lives and the world. While balancing the role and the real may allow
students to make complex meaning, tensions also existed amongst the issue of homelessness, students’ previously held views, and what happened in the drama. Maureen, in a post-activity interview, highlighted the conflict some students experienced when they had to play a role that reflected a perspective very different from their own convictions. Within such struggles, students negotiated their own conceptions and positions. Movement in students’ perspectives on homelessness may not have happened over the course of this one activity, but it was an opportunity to provoke students’ thinking and further dialogue. The tensions within the dramatic encounter invited students to question their own understandings, and modify their existing understandings from both inside the drama experience and out of it.

Evelyn’s pedagogy and content were less explicitly conflictual, and less directly related to the political realities of societal structures than those of the other two teachers. That is, the conflicts that I observed in Evelyn’s class were mostly interpersonal – there were not many opportunities for passionate dialogue amongst students, either dramatically or out of role, about social justice topics. Social justice topics were addressed in small group discussions in relation to specific tasks, such as scene building. For various possible reasons (including the older ages of their students), I observed Maureen and Andre facilitate more instances that involved asking students to inhabit problems (Rogoff, 2006) more explicitly in the realm of politics, rather than only analyze and critique from a distance. In the dramatic encounters described above in Maureen’s Grade 6 and Andre’s Grade 8 classrooms, meaning unfolded in moments that were unpredictable and uncontrollable. Thus, these dramatic encounters had the potential to disrupt students’ (and teachers’) assumptions about issues and each other. At the same time, these open conflicts were more dangerous for some students – targets of oppressive talk – than others, as with young women in Andre’s class, or Muslim students in Maureen’s class. Andre and Maureen elicited conflict in order to challenge oppression, but this was also an opportunity for oppressive views to be expressed. Well-developed, contextualized dramatic dialogue, like the dramatic deliberation described above, was a way to elicit students’ participation in conflict and drama in ways that could mitigate such repercussions.
Moments of Contradiction: Humour and Silence

Humour

In this section, I present and discuss examples of how some students used humour and laughter when participating in social justice lessons that used drama and conflictual topics. I examine how each of the three teachers viewed and handled such instances and highlight how each teacher’s conceptions of “successful” drama pedagogy played out in their handling of student humour in their classroom. Humour and laughter were common amongst students, in all three sites. Students used humour and laughter during drama explorations of social justice issues in observed classroom lessons, and during small group improvised drama sessions that I facilitated (see Chapter 5). All three teachers, and I as a researcher, (initially) saw such student behaviours as forms of disengagement that were in conflict with social justice teaching goals. The three teachers expressed to me in interviews disappointment when students did not seem to take seriously what they (and I) saw as “serious issues.” For instance, some students laughed as they explored issues of war, mimicked voices to elicit laughter when exploring mental health issues, or giggled and contributed seemingly irrelevant responses when they were asked questions while playing a role.

Later, I rethought students’ humour and laughter in the contexts that I had observed. I began to view humour as one way students participated in drama pedagogies for social justice, in ways that did not perpetuate injustice. How did instances of laughter and humour challenge these three social justice educators’ (and my own) assumptions about students’ “buy-in” to exploring “serious” social justice issues? In the pedagogies observed, students were sometimes left with few alternatives to express divergent views, or to communicate discomfort with an issue or perspective. Students’ laughter and desire to evoke humour also might reflect their attentiveness to difference: confronted with the demand to dramatically portray someone they viewed as very different from themselves, some students chose to divert attention from that difference. Instead, some students reenacted what they found to be most familiar to them, and laughed when they recognized dominant storylines many of their peers enacted. Such laughter was what Cahill (2009) refers to laughter of recognition, in the context of drama work. This also occurred during some improvised drama sessions described in Chapter 5. Teachers, in
deciding how to handle such laughter and humour, could consider alternate interpretations of responses, rather than view such modes of participation as necessarily being in conflict with social justice education goals. My readings of these instances challenge what I interpreted as participating teachers’ prevailing notions that explorations associated with social justice are only successful when they are serious. Below, I examine how students participated in social justice education with humour in three contrasting classrooms, how such humour was viewed by participating teachers, and what such insights contribute to theory in teaching for social justice.

The frequency of student humour and laughter episodes in all three sites shows that teachers created opportunities for students to work through their reactions and interpretations to social justice issues, rather than merely demanding outward compliance with their expectations of engagement. In a post-activity interview excerpt below, Evelyn describes how her Grade 4 and 5 students had explored the topic of war using a drama activity. Evelyn had asked students to close their eyes and think about the word “war,” and to consider words that “war” would use to describe itself – that is, to complete the prompt, “I am war, I am….”. Evelyn then asked students to move slowly around the room and take on the movement of “war” personified. After about thirty seconds, she asked students to vocalize their thoughts using the prompt as they continued to move slowly around the room. She also instructed them to move their bodies in ways that reflected the words they were vocalizing. Evelyn reflected on how her students engaged in the lesson:

I think the hardest part for them was the line, because it was a serious topic, but for some of them, they did not know how to bring that seriousness to it…[They would be dramatizing] “I am War”… “I am dying”… but they would be laughing, and then because (through repeated practice, and saying to them, this is a serious topic, “how do you think that might be expressed?”) [Pause]…they started to realize “oh this is something serious. How should I be saying it?” So that when they did perform, it was a lot better. The seriousness of it came across more so than it did in practice. Because in practice, it was still a bit of the giggles, and not getting that yeah, this is serious…and I think, seeing in the book [Little Yellow Bottle], a person who lost a leg. I mean the possibility of that possibility that someone can be injured…but still live, I don’t think they have a concept of that, because they think their world is perfect…. I think that book opened their eyes. (Evelyn, Final Interview, June 20, 2012)

Evelyn attributed what she saw as students’ lack of seriousness to the limited experiences
they had had with the issue of war. When students had discussed the book Little Yellow Bottle and the topic of war as a whole class previous to the drama activity mentioned above, however, students had engaged seriously, with little laughter. The drama pedagogy Evelyn implemented (in comparison to talk-only pedagogy) seemed to make a difference in how students responded. I noticed that Evelyn made little reference back to the initial discussion about war, and asked few probing questions about the context of the narrative in the book, during this drama activity.

At Whitfield Public School, laughter occurred often among the Grade 6 students when Maureen facilitated a hot seat activity that involved students taking the role of Bernice, a homeless character from the book Trupp. In hot seating, one person plays a character in role, and audience members have the opportunity to ask the (in-role) character questions. In this instance, Maureen asked students to think about objects that the character, Bernice, might have had with her (e.g., photo, driver’s license, hat, etc.), and describe one of those objects, using mime, in the hot seat before audience questions could begin. When Maureen herself took on the role of Bernice to model this exercise, students asked Maureen insightful questions about her (Bernice’s) life story and her experiences of being homeless. Even as some students smiled awkwardly while watching their teacher act like a homeless character from a book, they were inquisitive.

When some students took on the role of Bernice, audience members remained inquisitive, but I observed that those who volunteered to play the role of Bernice looked uncomfortable and consistently made jokes unrelated to the task or topic. Jarrod, for example, laughed and provoked laughter throughout much of his performance. Albert decided to mime a hat as his (Bernice’s) possession. He told the audience that there was an A on the hat, and when asked what it stood for, he responded, “Well, it’s ‘A’, like Albert” sparking laughter amongst his peers. When asked by a student, “What happened to your husband?” Albert responded in a loud manner with a smile on his face, “I don't have a husband!” seemingly offended. Maureen did not address these students’ use of humour directly, but she changed the activity structure to a (more directly teacher-monitored) role-sharing circle process: rather than having students volunteer to take the “hot seat” in front of the class and act as Bernice, students sat in a circle and played the role of Bernice in turn. All students had the opportunity to participate, or to pass if they
did not wish to take on the role of Bernice. Maureen expressed later to me that she believed her students felt more comfortable in a circle-based exercise. She said it had helped some students stay focused on the immediate goal of the exercise, which was to build, in role, a story of Bernice that is not told in the book *Trupp* in order to better understand the potential causes of homelessness. Most students in the class had not been familiar with the hot seating strategy. While their joking behaviours might have reflected their insecurities with playing the hot-seat role, these students seemed to interpret the drama activity as play. Play, like humour, is not a problem. Within the context of drama pedagogy, play can be a tool to be attended to by teachers and used by students to discuss and analyze social justice issues.

At Valley Public School, Grade 8 students had discussed mental health issues, including the possibility that the character Ben, the protagonist in the fiction storybook *Wolves in the Citee*, had experienced a mental health problem. Andre facilitated a corridor of voices with his Grade 8 students: he asked students to stand in two parallel lines, facing each other, about a meter apart. The two lines formed the corridor, and members of the corridor were to think of advice that they would give Ben, the main character. One student at a time would play the role of Ben and walk through the corridor, while the members of the corridor were to express their advice to him. When Andre asked students to begin, some of those in the corridor began to shout their advice, some of which was clearly unrelated to the story or to previous discussions, and apparently intended to provoke laughter amongst peers. Andre told me in a post-lesson interview that he was disappointed and referred to those students who had provoked laughter as saboteurs. Some students’ responses to the corridor of voices activity did not match Andre’s intentions and I wondered whether what he called sabotage might be students’ “call for multiplicity to be recognized rather than shut down” (Wessels, 2009, p. 144). While Andre felt his use of the drama pedagogy offered the possibility for a multiplicity of voices to be recognized, it is possible that the drama became, or was interpreted by some students as, a mechanism of conformity (Wessels, 2009). Similarly to some of Maureen’s Grade 6 students, Andre’s “saboteurs” saw the drama as an opportunity to play – and to challenge the limits of the corridor of voices exercise, and possibly even the seriousness of the issue being explored.
Students also engaged in laughter and used humour during the improvised drama sessions I facilitated. In one improvised drama session that I facilitated with some students from Maureen’s Grade 6 class, a small group of students created a dramatic scene that represented extreme violence toward a victim of racism: contrary to my plan, everyone laughed. Similar to Andre’s communicated feelings in his interview, I was confused and disappointed. Jackson (2007), Neelands (2009) and others remind me that the confusion and disappointment that I and the teacher-participants often felt reflected our own tacit goals to change student behaviours – the feeling that we had somehow failed to harness drama for individual transformation - every time a student laughed or joked during our facilitated activities addressing “serious issues”. When educators attempt to suppress play or humour in the name of social justice goals, we risk imposing dominant cultural norms we have tried to resist (Jackson, 2007; Sonu, 2009b). That is, we risk pedagogical practices associated with knowledge imposition and injustice, even as social justice educators may claim to challenge power relations that create unjust circumstances. My facilitation of improvised drama groups supported what I learned in my classroom observations and interviews with teachers – that some students’ laughter was a way to play with the material presented, thus challenging their teachers’ or my attempts to impose particular norms and to make our explorations too serious.

Through laughter and humour, students also expressed their insecurity and discomfort with communicating emotions and understandings with their bodies and voices. This occurred even when students had volunteered to perform dramatically, including participating in the improvised drama groups I facilitated. Humour was often students’ mode of experimentation with working through the content of uncomfortable topics such as war, homelessness, and mental health. The laughter I observed among students was often a strategy to mitigate their discomfort in those situations. The social justice lessons I observed addressed what Britzman (1998) calls difficult knowledge. Learners responded to learning opportunities in ways that looked like resistance (or sabotage) “because the knowledge offered is dissonant…so that the response can only be a working through….” (p. 118). Moreover, as Mayo (2014) has theorized, humour helped students to negotiate difficult concepts and situations. Laughter can be both a function of frustration with didactic pedagogies, or recognition of biases that teachers may not
initially intend to elicit in their pedagogies.

As described in Chapter 5, many of the students from all three classrooms were observably more comfortable in talking about topics than in dramatizing them. Thus, it is possible that the knowledge sparked by particular social justice content became more difficult when students were asked to communicate their understandings in dramatic ways. Drama, as an embodied and emotive form of communication, seemed to enhance the difficulty, in Britzman’s sense, of the conflict involved in the issue being explored. Student responses, as a way of “working through” those issues, especially at the initial stages of a drama opportunity, took the form of laughter and humour. When the teachers used drama pedagogy to address social justice topics, they asked students to not only put their thinking on the line, but their bodies as well (dramatically, and in front of their peers), in their responses.

Hence, laughter and humour were ways that some students in these contrasting schools mediated social justice content embedded in drama pedagogy. These forms of participation were often in conflict with teachers’ social justice goals. Drama pedagogy did create spaces for students to engage in generative conflict, to play, and work through difficult knowledge, in ways that dialogue alone does not allow. As with some of the youth in Gallagher’s (2007) research, drama pedagogies afforded these students the space to “goof off” – not always as a way to resist knowledge or to be “disengaged,” but to experiment with their understandings of the relationship between the familiar and unfamiliar. That is, many social justice concepts presented students with the opportunity to learn about something that was often unfamiliar to them. They seemed to seek and enact what they found most familiar and funny, even as the humour could have become a starting point to shifting their ideas beyond what they initially found familiar. In other words, humour was part of the process of knowledge creation – a process of experimenting with ideas and identities - a potential means by which to diffuse potentially antagonistic conflicts surrounding social justice issues within classrooms. How humour might contribute to those moments deserves further exploration, as humour and laughter are not always in contradiction to teachers’ social justice goals.

Silence

Silence can be a consequence of oppression (Weis & Fine, 1993) and/or a form of
resistance to oppression (Burbules, 2004). In educational contexts, silence reflects the complexities of participation in relation to injustice, and has been framed around pedagogical processes that silence students (e.g., Fine, 1991). In contrast, scholars such as Li (2004) and Shultz (2010) encourage a reconceptualization of silence as a valid, useful, and even powerful mode of participation. How might students in contrasting classrooms participate in ways that include silence, and how did teachers elicit and view such participation in their classrooms? In schools, silence is often viewed as a form of compliance or disengagement, although, as Shultz (2010) points out, it is rarely thought of as intentional. Along these lines, I observed, in one particular Grade 8 classroom, examples of silent participation. This silence, on the surface, looked like disengagement. However, I found some students’ silence as a valid form of participation in social justice classrooms where drama was used and conflict elicited by teachers.

In some situations in all three case study classrooms, teachers imposed an expectation of silence. For instance, teachers asked students to write reflectively, silently, after their own drama performances or to prepare for drama work. Of the three teachers, Evelyn most often asked students to write reflectively to debrief something that they had just engaged with their bodies, and mandated silence during these tasks as a way to help students focus on their inner thoughts. Evelyn, Maureen, and Andre also all mandated silence by audiences when students performed dramatically for each other, or were speaking in turn.

In other situations, teachers’ attempts to elicit dialogue and/or dramatic action were met by some students with silence. In these three classrooms, where dialogue and vocal participation were very much encouraged, some students’ voices clearly dominated most of the discussions before or in response to dramatic action, as mentioned above. Other students participated in more subversive ways. For instance, in all three classrooms, small groups of students who generally remained silent on a whole class level spoke only with peers sitting near them in response to drama activities and debriefing discussions. I also noticed individual students who spoke very little (even to peers) or who remained silent throughout most discussions and drama work. Such silence happened less during improvised drama sessions that I facilitated, where students volunteered to participate. Even given the voluntary nature of the improvised drama sessions, however, some
students consistently remained silent even as they remained attentive to and participated dramatically (with their bodies) in the various activities. These students spoke and reacted to particular topics when they so chose. When they did so, they were usually shorter contributions than those of peers in each of the groups. The rest of the groups, however, seemed to attend to the shorter vocal contributions by these quiet students when they did occur.

In all three classrooms, particular students spoke often and in dominant ways, and others hardly spoke at all. In Andre’s Grade 8 classroom, dominant voices were demonstrated clearly in the conflictual dialogue about sexism described above, and reflect an example of how some students were silenced by others, as studies by Fine (2001; Fine & Weis, 2004) have demonstrated. However, other instances in Andre’s class reflect intentionally silent forms of participation in social justice, conflict, and drama pedagogies. For instance, in a lesson framed by the book *Woolves in the Citee* that involved a dramatic hot seat activity, students in the hot seat took on the roles of characters from the book. With peers seated in a circle, students in role responded to peers’ questions in animated ways that reflected their interpretation of the perspectives of characters they were playing. Voices were loud and overlapping, and some students rose from their seats as they spoke to emphasize what they were saying. During all this sound and movement, I noticed students who were much more physically still than the others. One of these students, Tina, was sitting in the circle amongst her classmates, but seemed disconnected from the action around her as she read her magazine. She did not participate verbally in the drama or discussion, and mostly kept her head down, seemingly focused on the magazine. However, as I watched, she would sometimes smile, shake her head, or nod in reaction to what was being said or done by her peers or Andre. Tina was silent, but peripherally engaged in this drama pedagogy.

The following excerpt from a post-lesson interview demonstrates Andre’s thoughts on Tina’s engagement:

AG: People were engaged in different ways.
ANDRE: Ya – One wasn’t for sure [referring to Tina] [pause] Um [pause] I think she's going through things right now. But, the fact that she is actually in the circle
is a success, and she participated in the first activity, that's a success too. Because, that shows some engagement. (Andre, Post-Lesson Interview, October 19, 2012)

To Andre, Tina was disengaged compared to most other students in the class, and seemed to be resisting the task. He based this interpretation on her silence and apparent attention to the magazine. However, Andre viewed Tina’s voluntary presence in the circle as a success given what he knew of her personal circumstances and compared with other lesson contexts in which he had viewed her as completely withdrawn. Andre believed that Tina’s proximity was a step toward successful vocal participation, which he valued. From observing her body language, I interpret Tina’s participation as “peripheral” (Anderson, 2004; Gallagher, 2007). That is, Tina participated from the periphery of the dramatic action. She did not vocalize her thoughts and feelings in the moment. However, her subtle body language indicated that she was still part of the dramatic encounter happening around her, even as she flipped through a magazine. She exhibited her own agency in choosing how to participate (or not) in that moment. In my observations of Andre’s class, Tina never really actively participated in the dramatic action, but consistently seemed to be attentive to what was happening. Warner (1997) might have referred to Tina as a “Listener/Outsider” (p. 27) – someone who never really engages directly in a drama, but watches in order to get enough information to complete a task. I perceived Tina to be processing the dramatic action she observed or heard, performing behaviours some educators associate with disengagement while subtly indicating her engagement through looking up and smiling or nodding in the direction of the speaker. Andre’s insights regarding Tina’s life outside the classroom suggest that Tina’s silence was less about resistance to her teacher’s task and more about self-protection. In her study, Schultz (2010) describes a student who, similar to Tina, had a commanding presence and was well liked by peers, but who remained silent, suggesting that this silence was possibly intended to protect her home life from exposure. Andre, thinking Tina might be “going through things,” took a listening stance (Shultz, 2010), honouring Tina’s choice to be silent. Here, there is a distinction between attending to silence and detecting acts of silencing in social justice classrooms. In the above instance, Andre reflected on Tina’s engagement in a way that allowed him to interrogate why she was
silent, reflecting on the initial assumption that her silence was a form of resistance, a lack of interest in the issue being explored, or an inability to engage.

The following excerpt from my observation of the same lesson also illustrates how Andre created a dramatic contextual frame to elicit unpredictable student responses, including some that were not vocalized. Andre himself was in role as the character Ben from the book *Wolves in the Sitee*, with the rest of the class seated in a circle around him.

ANDRE: You’re in role. We are at a press conference. All of you are reporters. You hear about Ben’s story, and you hear about the wolves. Andre indicates he is in role by putting on a baseball cap, and says, “I’ll take questions.”

One student yells out. Andre stops and says, “When I call names” (in role). Various (an approximately equal number of girls and boys) students ask multiple questions, and eagerly await Andre’s in-role response to their questions. The pace is quick. Three female students are sitting at the furthest point in the circle, away from the action, and not asking any questions until the very end of the exercise.

After a pause in the questioning, one of them, Salimat, asks a question:

SALIMAT: “Who can you count on?”

ANDRE (in role as Ben): [pause] No one. Maybe you. Do you think you can help me?

The bell rings.

(Classroom Observation, October 19, 2012)

Thus, many students were participating vocally, and some, while silent, were watching intently. I was curious about the three silent students’ responses to the dramatic action.

In an interview, Andre communicated his general perceptions of these students’ engagement:

They weren’t engaged in the role-play, but [Pause]. It was surprising when I was in role, and there were a couple [of the more silent students] who put their hands up that I didn’t expect to put their hands up, and they had some of the more thoughtful questions… I knew one of them would have really thoughtful things to say, because she always has those deeper questions…. I think they find it intimidating to speak up sometimes, and I’m trying to get them to have that voice, to try to empower them, but I know that they’re often silenced by some of the
louder voices in the class…. I know that they're listening, and I know that they are engaged. (Andre, Post-Lesson Interview, October 19, 2012)

I interpret Andre’s comments as a reflection of his desire to ensure that his students all had a voice – vocal agency – and his view of his role as a social justice educator to empower his students. I did not ask Andre directly at the time about what he meant by “empowering”, although such a view clearly aligns with critical pedagogy. Andre’s efforts to try to “get them to have that voice” reflect what Boler (2004) describes as affirmative action pedagogy - strategies to help more silent students speak and be heard. Distinct from most affirmative approaches to social justice education, which minimize conflict and focus on equality, affirmative action pedagogy aims to directly challenge power relations where they are inequitable. As in affirmative action pedagogy, Andre reflected aloud to me about whether he might more actively limit certain students’ dominant voices for the sake of foregrounding the voices of those usually more silent in his classroom.

In many ways, Andre’s pedagogy promoted classroom discussions that were risky and (possibly) explosive. He placed a high value on dialogue, and he reflected upon how acceptable it was for him to silence some students so others could speak and be heard. This did not always go as planned, as seen in the above-described instance of conflict dialogue, but Andre was looking for ways to ensure his Grade 8 students could “bear witness to marginalized voices in our classrooms, even at the minor cost of limiting, dominant voices” (Boler, 2004, p. 4). Salimat was silent before and after her insightful, brief, contribution to a whole class drama. Nonetheless, Salimat’s contribution influenced the discussion, and Andre recognized the power of her vocal contribution.

Toward the end of the period of observations in his class, Andre communicated some paradoxical feelings about the engagement of some of the young women, particularly young Muslim women, in this class. On the one hand, he acknowledged that some of these students might have spoken in ways that he had not initially heard. On the other hand, he also viewed those students as having been previously voiceless:

I think....a lot of the young women speak out in ways I didn’t hear initially. They were very voiceless, but now, it feels like they’re very much having a voice....They have a space...a safe space, and I think they might not feel that in the beginning. Whereas now, with that relationship building and that community
building they know that they can speak up and they know that they have a voice. (Andre, Final Interview, November 19, 2012)

I cannot verify whether or not all the young women in Andre’s Grade 8 class, where passionate discussions and emotive drama were commonplace, felt that they could vocalize their perspectives because of Andre’s relationship building efforts. Based on the sexist opinions expressed by some of the male students in the class (described above), I question such a claim. I also question whether or not the female students in his class were “very voiceless”. This would assume that voice is something given. From a dialogic perspective, voice is not given by anyone (Bhatkin, 1981). What Andre’s comment demonstrated, however, was this teacher’s willingness and desire to attend to silence, and to value it. He also viewed the silence exhibited by some of those students, and particularly one young female student, as reflecting a particular agency: the choice to listen first, then insert an insightful question at the right moment, rather than merely performing what teachers often see as engagement (speaking up in class, in relation to the teachers’ task).

Some seemingly voiceless students could be considered processors (Warner, 1997) – those who listen and think about the perspectives that other participants offer, and then decide to vocally engage (or not). Andre’s and my own observations of engagement are consistent with Warner’s finding that “processors” often brought new depth or a different perspective to the drama pedagogy. Salimat’s silence, for example, was a form of power and agency in the class, not provided by the teacher – the teacher and peers listened closely to her words when she did decide to speak.

Vocal and embodied participation is widely seen as successful engagement in drama and social justice pedagogies, whereas silence is something teachers and researchers might not value. In this section, I used two examples of silent engagement to challenge the assumption that silence is always a sign of students’ disengagement, disempowerment, or resistance to teachers’ pedagogies. The examples demonstrate instead how silence could be a form of agency – intentional decisions by students that reflect their engagement (not disengagement) with topics and learning opportunities. Andre continued to be self-reflexive in order to decenter his authority in the classroom. He acknowledged the power he had to intervene when some of his students were
silenced, and was negotiating how he could make space for - “empower” - students who were often silent to speak, especially to reduce their discomfort. For Andre, encouraging students to share their often divergent perspectives and decentering his own authority did not involve shying away from asking difficult questions, exploring controversial social justice topics, or challenging oppressive norms.

**Conclusion**

Teaching for social justice by acknowledging the productiveness of conflict in drama pedagogy, is difficult. It is far easier to (while claiming to teach social justice) avoid conflict altogether, by diverting conflict when it occurs amongst students. Likewise, challenging one’s conceptions of meaningful student participation in social justice classrooms is hard to do. Judging students’ responses as disengagement when they seem to be in conflict with a teachers’ pedagogies or intentions is often more comfortable. The role of conflict in social justice education that incorporates drama pedagogies, and how students participate in such situations involves complex pedagogical processes. This may require new ways of conceptualizing both social justice and student participation. In the three classrooms in this dissertation, drama pedagogies for social justice, especially when conflict was invited, enabled a wide range of student participation, including humour and silence, as well as both antagonistic and agonistic interactions. The instances above suggest that conflict permeated these classrooms, whether it was elicited, attended to, or ignored by teachers.

What kind of conflict, and how much conflict, makes good social justice pedagogy? These teachers’ drama pedagogies did not always acknowledge that their students’ particular subjectivities sat within structural contexts that had different implications for differently located individuals and groups. These teachers intended their pedagogies to create opportunities for agonistic conflict. On a small group level in Evelyn’s Grade 4/5 class, and on a whole class level in Andre’s Grade 8 and Maureen’s Grade 6 classes, teachers designed opportunities to allow for students to probe and express their subjectivities in relation to social justice issues. The communication of some of these understandings, however, sometimes became dangerous: that is, conflicts about social justice issues were not always agonistic – in which conflict would be confronted and channeled as a clash of ideas, without aiming for personal attacks (antagonism) or
consensus. Nor did students’ participation in such discussions necessarily shift from antagonistic (where conflict is hostile and based on moral opinions of right and wrong to agonistic. Further inquiry could illuminate various means of pedagogical intervention in conflictual exchanges that would not suppress divergent perspectives. Conflict is a necessary part of social justice education, and how teachers might mitigate the risks of conflictual conversations or in role actions oppressing particular groups or individuals in the classroom is also worthy of further inquiry.

Dramatic deliberation is one way students might engage in agonistic conflict pedagogy for social justice. Without the expectation for consensus, this dramatic conflict in Maureen’s class provided a forum for students to participate in a clash of (dramatic) complex perspectives, including a clash with their own prior held views. Representations of events, characters, perspectives and issues in drama are always incomplete (Edminston, 2000), and leave much to be explored. Such incompleteness and uncertainty are opportunities to air, build upon, and create multiple perspectives. Compared to out-of-role dialogue, a well-designed and scaffolded dramatic encounter includes an in-role clash of ideas and emotions that can mitigate the dangers of mobilizing conflict in the classroom.

At the same time, as shown in Chapter 5 and this chapter, students tended to dramatize a range of roles that were most readily familiar to them based on their life experiences. The immediacy of improvised drama sometimes resulted in simplified responses in which humour and laughter seemed to become the primary goal for some students. This occurred both in classroom lessons and in improvised small group drama sessions that I facilitated. Teachers in all three classrooms (and I) were leery about humour and students’ laughter when facilitating drama work with students. Such instances of humour and laughter were reminders of the danger of social justice educators imposing cultural norms. Humour, laughter, and play were possibly ways some students challenged teachers or peers ideas or coped with the discomfort of doing drama or engaging in controversial, unfamiliar and possibly frightening content.

Some students in Andre’s class demonstrated silent participation that reflected their agency. They decided when they would speak (or not), and engaged in ways that were silent, but attentive to the dialogue ensuing around them. This is not to say that all
instances of student silence are forms of engagement. Students might remain silent for a range of reasons, some more intentional than others, including personality characteristics, desire to safeguard one’s experiences, and/or as a way to resist the learned teacher-student power binary. Instances of humour and silence demonstrate, however, that no one approach to social justice education and drama pedagogy can ensure broad participation (Gallagher, 2014). Students in these classrooms were constantly navigating the physical space of the classroom, while also negotiating their perceptions of others’ expectations of them based on their past experiences and identities (within and beyond school), and their peers’ reactions to what they did. Students were also responding to their teachers’ intentions and actions (reflective of their agreement or disagreement with their teacher’s conceptions of social justice).

Teachers’ elicitation of conflict in social justice classrooms, and students participation in pedagogies associated with social justice, drama, and conflict required time to explore the socio-political context of any issue, and to play with and discover roles. The conflictual dialogue in Andre’s classroom in which some students made sexist comments was only an initial discussion on the issue. Andre had intended future activities to further explore how sexism manifests in Canada and on a global scale. He was planning to take more time to build a context for students to understand the complexities of gender inequity, as well as issues of homophobia and cissexism. At the same time, as argued in Chapter 5, it may not have been enough to simply introduce issues associated with oppression into the classroom without providing opportunities for explicit context building and explorations about how particular social justice issues are defined, and why.

In Maureen’s class, initially time was not taken to address some key tensions about difference that lay beneath the surface: Zahra took the opportunity to put the issue of Islamophobia into the space of the classroom dialogue, where it had not ever been addressed before. The dramatic deliberation that Maureen facilitated, in contrast, had occurred after many prior discussions and dramatic explorations the issue of homelessness using the fiction storybook Trupp and multiple news articles conveying various perspectives on the issue. Time (for the development of contextual understandings) sometimes seemed to make the difference between agonistic conflicts versus conflicts that became harmfully antagonistic. I argue that drama is an important
tool for inviting subjectivities to come into play in ways that are characterized by risk, but are also opportunities for the construction and reconstruction of identities and understandings. Such opportunities take time. Drama pedagogies, compared to dialogue alone, might mitigate the “danger” associated with (conflictual) social justice education engagement by creating spaces for play, for silence, and for exploration of clashing perspectives.
Chapter 7: Conclusion

“We have perpetual mobility, essential fragility or rather the complex interplay between what replicates the same process and what transforms it.” (Foucault, 1997, p. 58).

“….we confront a key paradox in learning to teach: there can be no learning without conflict, but the conflict that animates learning threatens to derail the precarious efforts of trying to learn.” (Britzman, 2003, p. 3).

I came to this study with the intention to show how teachers in contrasting contexts implemented transformative social justice education using drama and conflict pedagogies. I believed that improvisational drama pedagogy and the elicitation of conflicting perspectives were means of engaging, motivating, and building the agency of students for social justice work. The findings of my study show that the facilitation of conflictual dramatic encounters on social justice themes is a promising approach to (potentially transformative) social justice education. At the same time, this study has illustrated the vast challenges of teaching for social justice, and the elusiveness or folly of seeking and one “right” way to do social justice education for all students.

Throughout my study, I show how social justice teaching involved moment-by-moment negotiations between teachers and students, informed by social conditions, personal experiences, identities, and perceptions. I had sought to categorize practices and conceptions of social justice within the framework of redistribution and recognition, and affirmative and transformative approaches to achieving such justice. Fraser’s (2005) work did provide a useful first step to understand goals and processes of social justice as applied in education. This dissertation, however, demonstrates the complexity of social justice education in classrooms, particularly in relation to dramatic encounters involving conflict. Tensions are constantly at the fore – with respect to power relations, teachers’ views of students and their engagement, the ways drama and conflict are used to facilitate social justice, and how various students respond to all these factors.

My dissertation demonstrates that critical pedagogy and related forms of transformative social justice education theory are inadequate for understanding the way teachers, along with their students, may problematize, reshape, and interact with the situational events that arise within such pedagogies. Post-structural theory, particularly the work of Britzman (1998), Ellsworth (2007), and Butler (1999, 2003a) provided a
compelling way to reflect on the social justice understandings and practices of the three teacher-participants in this study (as well as myself), and the ways in which various students took up these ideas and their teachers’ approaches in different contexts. Post-structural theory also helped me to frame and analyze how students communicated their identity-linked conceptions and responses to social justice (education) through improvised drama inquiry sessions. These complicated my own initial understandings of social justice education, in particular my notions of cause and effect, in which students would simply learn about an injustice, and act to address it. The conceptions participating teachers and students held of social justice and social justice education defy clear mapping onto a recognition/redistribution or affirmative/transformative axis. All three teachers voiced and implemented a mix of redistribution or recognition goals. However, as argued in Chapter 4, a key limitation in attempting to apply such axes is the challenge for social justice educators to simultaneously analyze systemic power and privilege, attend to the idiosyncrasies of interpersonal relations, as well as take into account individual thought and experience. All three teachers confronted the dissonance between their aspirations for social justice and their reality of every day teaching within the conditions of their institutional contexts. The larger social/cultural contexts of schooling contributed to shaping the micro-level, everyday interactions in classrooms that resisted clear categorizations. Fraser’s concepts of redistribution-recognition and affirmation-transformation were useful in identifying particular conceptions and practices that these teachers and students communicated and practiced, even as they embodied multiple and hybrid approaches to social justice. Fraser (2005) did not maintain that social justice categories were necessarily fixed. Teachers and students conceptions and practices reflected a constant negotiation of what social justice meant and how it looked within and beyond these categories, for their particular situations.

In Chapter 4, I illustrated how the three selected teachers communicated overlapping differing conceptions of social justice, conflict, and drama in the contexts of their classroom teaching. Interviews and observation data show that these teachers were constantly negotiating their own priorities and meanings in social justice teaching. Evelyn practiced critical care – a focus on learning about Others and applying it to interpersonal relations - to elicit recognition of others amongst her students. Andre practiced critical
questioning in his classroom lessons to elicit tools for agency. Maureen confronted her own uncertainties to elicit multiple understandings amongst her students. Perhaps partly because of various contextual influences (economic, spatial, temporal, and demographic), the conceptions teachers described to me in interviews did not always or entirely manifest in episodes of observed classroom practice. Institutional barriers included a vast mandated curriculum, pre-set timetables and top-down initiatives. Micro-conditions also facilitated or impeded their social justice drama pedagogy, in particular their use of conflict as a social justice learning opportunity. Further, each teachers’ own desires and motivations, their views of their students (and their families), and their commitments, comforts, and capabilities all contributed to how they taught social justice through drama and conflict. Each teacher worked through social justice concepts and issues on an achievable scale: they considered, with their students, the possibilities of what society could be. As I argue in Chapter 4, therefore, I cannot categorize the dramatic encounters I observed in Evelyn’s, André’s, and Maureen’s classrooms as clearly transformative. They did, however, offer students opportunities to imagine possibilities for more just relations. These teachers also offered ideas as to what social justice education through drama and conflict pedagogies might actually look like, as entry points to envisioning future practice.

In Chapter 5, I described how I used improvisational drama methods (in sub-group sessions) as an inquiry tool, to elicit and understand the identity-linked conceptions, and responses to, social justice education of a small volunteer group of students from each case study classroom. I learned how these students’ interpretations of social justice issues (or identities) could reinforce oppression as well as disrupt the unjust status quo. Some students, particularly those living in less privileged contexts, connected social justice issues closely to their own lives: they applied their agency to changing their own circumstances. For some students in more privileged contexts, in contrast, agency was expressed in relation to challenging injustices Others experienced. Thus, consistently or inconsistently with their teachers’ (and my own) understandings and intentions, each student created their own interpretations of social justice based on multiple factors, including prior experiences and notions of difference.
More privileged students, in particular, sometimes explicitly attempted to convey themselves as “good” people in their relations to different Others. They showed an awareness of oppression and its negative impact on Others. However, their narratives of Others’ experiences were partial and essentialized, thus could perpetuate oppressive perspectives. Some privileged students also tried to convey themselves as informed and knowledgeable about issues of justice. In contrast, this study shows that some students in less privileged contexts were very emotionally aware of unfairness in the form of misrecognition and maldistribution, as demonstrated by their dramatic performances and discussions during improvised drama sessions that I facilitated. Consistent with the findings of other scholars (e.g. Weiss & Fine, 2004), I argue that, in the small drama workshop groups in my study, students from more challenging circumstances tended to have a deeper and more personal sense of structural injustice (oppression as a social pattern, not merely an individual bias), compared with the students from more privileged circumstances. Improvised drama sessions reflected a mode of inquiry that relied on both dramatic (in-role) and dialogic (out-of role) modes of communication, and demonstrated that drama-associated dialogue offered opportunities for constant communication and meaning making about social justice issues amongst students in contrasting classrooms.

In Chapter 6, I showed how many students responded affectively to dialogue and encounters involving conflict. I analyzed three instances (vignettes) of conflictual drama pedagogy – two in dialogue leading up to drama work, and one in dramatic (in-role) activity - to show the agonistic (constructive rather than competitive or aggressive) potential of such encounters (Mouffe, 2005). These events demonstrated the potential educative power, as well as the potential dangers, of eliciting conflictual dramatic encounters as pedagogy. They revealed the importance of teachers’ decision-making regarding the timing and extent to which they chose to intervene, or to support student peers to intercede, in moments when oppression (in the form of harmful interpersonal speech or action during classroom activity) occurred or seemed imminent. Chapter 6 also showed how some students responded with humour or with silence to conflictual social justice and drama pedagogies. These students’ responses challenged teachers’ and my own initial interpretation of such responses as disengagement. Students in all three sites employed humour and laughter to mediate the seriousness of the issues they explored.
Based on specific instances of students’ use of humour in each of the three classrooms and in the improvised drama sessions that I facilitated, I came to the conclusion that these episodes did not always reflect resistance to or disengagement from social justice education. Instead, humour and laughter were ways that some students in these contrasting classrooms found ways into social justice content embedded in drama pedagogy. Humour was part of the process of experimenting with ideas and identities and a way for students to diffuse potentially antagonistic conflicts. For some students, it was also a way to cope with potentially difficult knowledge surrounding the issues. Further, some students, particularly in Andre’s Grade 8 class, chose to engage silently with their teacher’s social justice and drama pedagogies. This was not equivalent to disengaging from those pedagogies, because these students, through their silence, exhibited agency by choosing how to participate (or not) in particular activities. Students responded to various factors around them in any given moment, including the teacher’s apparent expectations of them and their perceptions of peers’ expectations. My observations revealed that students’ varied responses (including their levels and types of engagement) seemed to depend on what had happened before, during, and after particular learning events. Thus, students responded affectively to drama pedagogies (compared to pedagogies relying on talk or dialogue alone), as opportunities for play, for engaged silence, and for the exploration of clashing perspectives.

In this dissertation, I inquired about how three elementary school teachers who were committed to social justice teaching (Evelyn, Andre, and Maureen) demonstrated their conceptions of social justice through drama and conflict pedagogies. I also examined how students, in those three classrooms and in improvisational drama workshop groups extracted from those classrooms, responded to and interpreted their teachers’ pedagogies in each context. The latter activities demonstrated the use of improvised drama methods as an inquiry tool to understand students’ (intersubjectively and relationally created) identity-linked conceptions and responses to social justice (and social justice education). I considered and compared observations of whole class lessons taught by the participating teachers, as well as improvised drama sessions with small groups of students from each class facilitated by me. In the following sections, I respond to my research questions in relation to a set of connected tensions: Difference, Danger
and Potential, and Design and Time. Through these three themes, I draw together evidence from the previous chapters. This set of tensions illuminates the relationships among social justice, drama, and conflict pedagogies in elementary school classrooms.

**Difference: Social Justice For the Marginalized? For the Privileged?**

An important theme within the case studies is how notions of difference manifested in the dramatic encounters, and what this meant for teaching students in contrasting contexts. Teachers’ perceptions of the students in their classrooms greatly affected how they (planned and) implemented social justice education. As I listened to Evelyn and Andre speak about their visions for social justice education and its benefits for their different student populations, I noted the similarities to my views at the time – that students in affluent contexts should be taught about Others’ oppressions and that those in marginalized situations needed to be empowered to improve their own oppressive situations. Interviews with these three teachers showed that their own experiences in relation to power, desires and motivations had helped to shape how they viewed their students, and how they enacted social justice education in their contexts.

Teachers’ conceptions of “empowerment” were related to the differing ways they understood the identities of and differences amongst their students. Evelyn hoped that her privileged Grade 4 and 5 students would learn that not everything is “pink and roses” (Interview, April 25, 2011). She also tried to empower the less privileged (racially marginalized) students she felt were in need of help in navigating the predominantly White space of Parkview. In contrast, Maureen did not necessarily acknowledge the marginalization that presumably existed amongst her Grade 6 students. She did not use empowerment discourses in her talk about the non-White or less affluent students in her class. Instead, she addressed issues of justice that she viewed as not necessarily directly related to the life experiences of (most of) those in her class, such as homelessness. Addressing broader issues sometimes allowed for some relational interactions amongst students to arise as unexpected moments of conflict. For Andre, empowerment was a key goal of his work with students, who were mostly in lower socio-economic situations and racially marginalized. These students’ responses to Andre’s teaching, and to opportunities to articulate difference, indicated that they wanted more than academic skills for successful test-taking and community-building. The students in Andre’s class challenged
notions of empowerment in the ways they enacted their agency in relation to each other, to Andre, and to the injustices they experienced in their lives. Their experiences with injustice lent to their agency in voicing their responses to injustice. They also, however, sometimes communicated understandings of social justice as solely based within their own experiences. Nonetheless, when they had their own experiences of marginalization to draw from, and when they felt safe doing so, some of these students took advantage of opportunities talk back against oppressive stereotypes of them and their community. Instead, students in Evelyn’s and Maureen’s classrooms were asked often to enact the roles of unfamiliar Others dramatically. For Evelyn and Maureen, their students’ empowerment was dependent on recognizing and understanding the suffering of “different” Others’ whose stories they learned about during classroom lessons.

Even within seemingly homogenous classrooms, students reflected diverse levels of privilege. The language about marginalized Others of two students in Evelyn’s Grade 4 and 5 class - Nadia and Karen (Chapter 5) – suggested what they thought it meant to be ‘good’ citizens in relation to those perceived as different from or less privileged than themselves. Evelyn told me she introduced issues of justice and difference in order to “[pry] open the eyes” (as Swalwell, 2013, put it) of her privileged students. In her classroom, some non-White students were often typecast by their peers (in small group scene building exercises) into dramatic roles of the victims of oppression. For instance, Sandra, one of the few non-White students in Evelyn’s class, was encouraged by her peers to play a protagonist targeted by racism during at least two drama scene-building activities. Once, she resisted this typecasting by insisting that she play the role of a “bush” so that she would not have to speak during the scene. Such typecasting also occurred during the improvised drama groups, of which Sandra was a part. For example, she was placed in the role of a victim of bullying during one of the small group improvised drama sessions she participated in. In combination with some of the understandings of racism communicated by some White students in the same class, these instances demonstrate how social justice teaching can further marginalize students already deemed “different” within affluent, mostly White contexts. From my observations, some non-White students were not comfortable with having their difference
highlighted by well-intentioned White peers, presumably because their class learned about racism.

In her Grade 6 class, Maureen did not explicitly relate drama work or discussion about different identities to the students in the class. In one instance (see Chapter 6), however, in a discussion Maureen facilitated about stereotyping Indigenous peoples in North America, Zahra volunteered a connection to her own experiences as a Muslim. Despite the large population of Muslim students in that classroom, such discussions had never come up during my observations. Zahra’s intervention provoked one other student to make connections to Bin Laden, which Zahra then challenged. Such social justice teaching teaches implicitly and explicitly about students of different status and identities inside the classroom, not just about Others somewhere else.

Thus a key element of how social justice education happened in each classroom, and how students responded, was how difference was viewed and highlighted (or not), and who did the highlighting. In Evelyn’s classroom, some of her privileged students highlighted difference, and those considered “different” responded in self-protective, less vocal ways. In Maureen’s and Andre’s classes, in contrast, apparently marginalized students highlighted their own difference from the norm and the associated injustices. For instance, Zahra in Maureen’s Grade 6 classroom introduced connections between issues of stereotyping and experiences of Islamophobia. Julian in Andre’s Grade 8 classroom used parody to mock stereotypes about Colombians, and many of the students in the improvised drama group from Andre’s class talked back to stereotypes about their (communities’) identities.

These teachers and students’ views of difference – their own and others – influenced the dramatic encounters in their classrooms. Evelyn’s and Andre’s perceptions of their students and what their students needed in contrasting contexts shaped how their conceptions and goals for social justice education manifested. These teachers acknowledged the different experiences of their students and planned their teaching accordingly. When students’ different experiences were not directly acknowledged pedagogically, as was apparent in Maureen’s classroom, tensions went unnoticed, and sometimes rose to the surface unexpectedly. Moreover, how students highlighted difference, and who did the highlighting, happened differently in each classroom context.
Such highlighting of difference matters for how teachers decide to teach for social justice. These teachers, and particularly Evelyn and Andre, seemed to engage difference as an asset, as a “fund of necessary polarities” (Lorde, 1984, p. 111). My findings show, that such acknowledgment of difference may be insufficient – particularly if such acknowledgement involves presumptions about what students may need to be aware of injustice, or empowered. Acknowledging that identities emerge within systems of power, that identities are produced in specific historical contexts, means that they emerge more as the product of difference than sameness (Hall, 1996). When social justice practice, which includes drama and talk, does not include such acknowledgements of difference, it runs the risk to be oppressive even while being well intentioned.

**Danger and Potential: Symbiosis of Drama and Talk**

Dramatic encounters in social justice education include varied forms of student agency and engagement. The teachers in this study believed strongly in fostering student agency, such as enhancing their ability to use their “voices” to address injustices. Thus participating teachers intended to encourage students to speak their views — to engage in conflictual dialogue. At times, this valuing of student voice allowed the unfolding of situations in which oppression occurred (see Chapter 7). Drama and conflict embedded in social justice teaching can create opportunities for agonistic (constructively critical) political exchanges, but evidently such results are not automatic.

All three teachers tried to create and sustain classroom conditions in which encounters would be critical and respectful, but with sometimes unexpected results. Perhaps focusing on the agency of students in the face of oppressive encounters even placed undue burden on those students who already felt marginalized or disempowered by oppression. At the same time, the three teachers’ pedagogies invited students’ affective engagement, in part through drama. Clearly, dramatic encounters can be opportunities for meaning-making that challenges oppression: both teachers and students can (but don’t always) play roles that disrupt the oppression emerging through dangerous talk, in and around improvised drama episodes. When these teachers communicated that they felt confident and supported, the pedagogies I observed seemed to elicit and facilitate encounters that allowed for issues to be addressed in proactive rather than reactive ways.
Maureen expressed caution about where introducing particular social justice issues might lead (see Chapter 4). The danger of ignoring or trying to avoid difference and tensions that existed in these classrooms was that those tensions rose to the surface in ways that may have caused more harm than would have proactively working through those tensions (dramatically and/or in dialogue). Maureen and her Grade 6 students for example, during a dramatic deliberation, were able to speak in role in agonistic (rather than antagonistic) ways; therefore they mobilized conflict as social justice learning opportunity.

As I point out in Chapter 6, drama pedagogy made visible the constructions of identities and acts of storying. Interweaving drama with dialogue mitigated some of the danger associated with social justice education, by creating spaces for both play and thoughtful exploration of understandings. The young students in Andre’s and Maureen’s classrooms had opportunities to engage agonistically in talk and drama in affective, critical ways. These were opportunities for students to deconstruct the issues introduced by their very participation in the encounter. Thus the vignettes and analyses in this dissertation show how social justice education can go beyond “polish[ing] problems with the shine of attention” (Cahill, 2009, p. 30), to deconstruct these problems with the risk of disrupting initial conceptions.

Similarly, drama pedagogy as inquiry (especially in the small group improvised drama sessions I led) elicited dramatic scenarios that functioned as entry points to, rather than conclusive representations of, the deconstruction of dominant discourses. In these workshops, students whose life experiences apparently were more distant from experiences of (being targeted by) oppression often chose to dramatize generic interpersonal peer hostility (bullying), whereas those students with more apparent personal experience with oppression chose to dig deeper into specific social-structural conflicts. Chapter 5 showed how participating students accessed in-drama work that was readily available to them (and perhaps felt safer), particularly bullying discourses. My findings reinforce the findings of other scholars who show that including opportunities out-of-role talk (dialogic, divergent meaning making) is important in drama pedagogy (Edmiston, 2000; Freebody & Finneran, 2013; Gallagher, 2014). My improvised drama sessions with subsets of students revealed some nuanced interpretations of social justice
when students had the opportunity to discuss their and their peers’ dramatic scenes. Distinctions between talk and drama are false, to the extent that drama pedagogy involves the symbiosis of talk and dramatic performance: it is the combination of drama and talk (within dramatic encounters) that allows deep opportunities for meaning making. Such a finding is reflective of early drama education scholarship that describes drama talk as “a means of giving shape to thought, both within and without drama” (Booth, 1991, p. 100). This study builds on such early scholarship by revealing the relationship between talk and drama within intentional social justice education contexts. Thus, this study contributes further to understandings of dialogic and divergent out-of-role talk in relation to in-role dramatic performance as a way to support the intersubjective exploration of critical questions of social justice.

**Design and Time**

Challenging the familiar requires time – time to attend to the broader structural forces that contribute to interpersonal forms of misrecognition or oppression. This study showed that students tended to reenact dominant, often stereotypical, narratives in their drama performances, particularly during the improvised drama sessions that I facilitated. I was often disappointed with my own facilitation and students’ responses during these drama sessions: I found that inviting students to improvise potentially sensitive issues, without having taken prior time to explore the socio-cultural and political context, sometimes encouraged students to (merely) shape their drama performances based on their inevitably limited knowledge of the issues. I observed this repetition of biases more often among the more privileged and younger students from Evelyn’s and Maureen’s classes than among student workshop participants from Andre’s Grade 8 class during improvised drama sessions (see Chapter 5). Before I began other activities in the improvised drama group sessions, I elicited what students understood about social justice as a concept (based on their work in the classroom and other experiences). In those sessions, I asked students to create open-ended scenes based on broad social justice topics. Students from Evelyn’s and Maureen’s classes responded by representing interpersonal, peer-based bullying. In particular, students from Evelyn’s and Maureen’s classes had had few opportunities in their classrooms for explorations of the social contexts shaping the social justice issues their teachers introduced. This, in combination
with other factors outside of the classroom, left these students’ drama creations in the improvisation workshops with a tinge of simplicity, and with little time to follow up.

Finneran and Freebody (2013), in their study on drama education for social justice with young students, found that the potential for social justice education through drama was often dependent on how the practitioner chose to use their roles, to disrupt (or not) the stereotypes that emerged in the dramatic context. My finding, that carefully considered pedagogies that allocated time to a dramatic process (including dialogue) created opportunities for students’ representations to develop complexity, is consistent with their finding. Carefully considered pedagogy is also reflected in the facilitation of out-of-role (non-drama improvisation) dialogic exchanges on social justice issues, as is reflected in the encounters amongst students in Andre’s Grade 8 class (Chapter 6). In an instance of sexist talk, Andre negotiated and struggled with how to use his role to disrupt the oppressive talk that emerged during that lesson. I argue, however, that it was worth the risk to invite conflictual improvised dramatic performance and associated talk, as long as it was as a point of departure (for further study and discussion) rather than a conclusion. As Cahill (2009) maintains, simplistic or stereotypical representations can be points from which to begin analysis. Such deconstruction takes time.

Some of the drama pedagogy I observed toward the end of my observation period, especially in Maureen’s Grade 6 and Andre’s Grade 8 classes, challenged simple notions – that either drama or talk could (by themselves) cause transformation, or challenge dominant discourses. Andre and Maureen often tried (amid constraints) to ensure that there was sufficient lesson time to address socio-political contexts, to debrief drama, and to “re-do” drama activities. This time allocation allowed them to mingle improvised drama with dialogue in symbiotic ways in their pedagogies. Drama explorations in Andre’s and Maureen’s classrooms were unpredictable opportunities for conflict to occur. They provoked additional questions that required time to pursue, in order for students to have the opportunity to (rethink or) challenge oppression.

Aitken, Fraser, and Price (2007) maintain that arts (including drama) pedagogy is multidimensionally relational:

…the relational nature of learning and teaching in the arts is not solely one of teacher-child or even subject child. Such paired notions of relationship miss the constellation of ongoing encounters children are having while learning –
relationship with the art medium, relationship with their peers, relationships with themselves and combinations of all of these in the flux of classroom life. (p. 15)

Dramatic encounters, therefore, involve multiple decisions by multiple actors within the classrooms. The dramatic encounters analyzed in this dissertation involved intersections of social justice education, drama, and conflict in which teachers and students made multiple decisions — demonstrated agency and engagement intersubjectively with unfolding pedagogical events. They were organic learning opportunities that, while usually initially elicited by adults through the design of the activity, continued based on students’ unpredictable, ongoing encounters with the dramatic representations, each other, the teacher, and themselves.

Unpredictability in the pedagogical process does not mean that anything goes. As Cahill (2009, 2011) argues in her post-structural analysis of her own drama facilitation, drama pedagogy work is a matter of design and intent, even though teachers cannot ensure particular outcomes. In my own study, the three teachers’ pedagogical mingling of drama performance with dialogue demanded time — space for encounters to emerge and to move from the simple to more complex — that was sometimes scarce in the institutional frameworks of their schools (see Chapter 4). Such constraints impacted their design of learning opportunities for students, for instance in Maureen’s class (Chapter 6) and in the small-group workshop students’ performances of talkbacks by students from Andre’s class (Chapter 5).

Another time consideration was at when in the school year I observed each classroom case. At Parkview Public School, in Evelyn’s Grades 4/5 class, I collected data in the spring of 2012, toward the end of the school year. At that point in the year, students were well acquainted with each other, and Evelyn’s relationship with them was well formed, creating a particular dynamic of familiarity in the class. The students were also familiar, by then, with various social justice issues that Evelyn had introduced over the course of the year. Thus I arrived as researcher at a point when a climate had been well established to explore sometimes-intense social justice issues. However, the end of the school year also brought other pressures; Evelyn often could not extend explorations of topics that arose because she needed to move on to the next subject areas in order to “cover” areas of the mandated curriculum.
At Valley Public School, in Andre’s Grade 8 class, I conducted my research in the fall of 2012, when students were in the initial stages of getting acquainted with each other and with Andre. Andre was also just beginning some of the critical social justice teaching he had planned. He expressed to me his wish that I had visited his class toward the end of the year, once he had had a chance to become more familiar with his students and to establish a climate in which both he and the students could feel more comfortable in pushing boundaries with respect to social justice topics.

At Whitfield Public School, in Maureen’s Grade 6 class, I conducted research in mid-winter to early spring, 2013. Maureen was fairly well acquainted with her students, and the students with her and each other. Thus the differences in time of year among the three cases likely affected teachers’ pedagogical choices and how students responded to them.

Students’ dramatic encounters with social justice conflicts were not just facilitated by the adults, but were created by the students themselves. How teachers demonstrated their conceptions of social justice education and elicited conflict in their teaching, and how students participated and interpreted social justice, reflected a complex interplay of multiple, ongoing relationships within the three temporal and spatial contexts. The potential for socially transformative moments coexisted with multiple constraints and limitations to any teacher-planned notions of how transformation might occur. For these teachers, and for myself as a facilitator of improvised drama sessions, design of lessons/inquiry activities and time mattered more than intentions. Student responses and interactions were sparked and continued through students’ unpredictable, ongoing encounters with teachers’ pedagogies, student-created dramatic representations, each other, and their own on-going individual experiences within their contexts.

Reflections on Methodology

My research design employed qualitative and arts-based (drama) methods to elicit and collect evidence embedded in each of the cases. Alongside participant observation of classroom lessons and semi-structured interviews with teacher participants, I used drama as a mode of inquiry, particularly to learn about how three sub-sets of students conceptualized social justice. I compared practices both within and amongst the three
classrooms. I also analyzed similarities and differences in students’ expressed conceptions and engagement with social justice topics, between observed classroom lessons taught by the participating teachers and the improvised drama sessions that I facilitated with a few of the students from each classroom.

A methodological strength of this study is the use of drama as an arts-based mode of inquiry that valued, encouraged, and coped well with uncertainty and improvisation. Such methodology, along with my analytical framework, challenges notions of truth associated with traditional research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). My study demonstrates how drama can be used as a pedagogical inquiry tool, to facilitate generative conflict and to elicit various students’ understandings of social justice. My interactions with student participants during improvised drama sessions productively supplemented my participant observations and interviews with teachers. My experience facilitating and analyzing the improvised drama sessions (with some of the same students who participated in each classroom) helped to strengthen the clarity of my analysis of teachers’ pedagogies and conceptions of social justice education, students’ responses to pedagogies and interpretations of social justice, and the relationships between them. The improvised drama session inquiry method relied on both dramatic (in-role) and dialogic (out-of role) modes of communication, as each were opportunities for communication and meaning making about social justice issues.

My involvement as researcher-facilitator of the small group improvisation sessions also helped me to clarify my own conceptions of social justice, and why I was conducting such research in the first place. In particular, my experience facilitating and analyzing these inquiry sessions made apparent (to me) and challenged my desire for socially and personally transformative pedagogies (and pedagogical consequences), as well as my hope for students to convey critical insights on social justice. The improvisational drama inquiry sessions I facilitated also provided an extra layer of contrasts in the thesis research data as a whole — between observing students engaging in social justice education with their teachers, and experiencing their work in small group learning situations (comparable for each group of students) that I planned and facilitated myself.
The demographic differences between the subgroups of students participating in the improvised drama sessions and the general population of their regular classrooms also seemed to make a difference in students’ communicated interpretations of social justice. The contrast was most apparent with the students from Grade 6, in which almost half of the students in Maureen’s class were Muslim, but no Muslim students from that class participated in the improvised drama sub-group. The tensions between groups and individuals in Maureen’s class (see Chapter 6) may have influenced students’ decisions about (non)participation in the small workshops. The improvised drama sessions, in comparison with classroom observations, were opportunities to (vary and) learn about such dynamics that apparently encouraged or impeded diverse students’ participation in various learning activities.

One key limitation is that in this research I did not interview students individually. Improvised drama sessions were opportunities for me to ask some students questions about their understandings of social justice and of what had occurred during observed lessons, but interviews with more or differently-selected students (especially those who did not participate in the improvised drama sessions with me) might have allowed for deeper insight into their interpretations and responses to their teachers’ pedagogies. Moreover, follow-up interviews with individual students who did participate in the improvised drama sessions also could have led to deeper insights into some of my findings.

Another key learning for me was the importance, particularly in a study that prioritized recognition of difference, to give all student participants an explicit opportunity to self-identify (regarding their own social identities). I had such opportunities with the students in the improvised drama sessions I facilitated, but not with all the students in the three classes. Instead, I relied on what I saw as identity markers (particularly for gender and race), as well as on teachers’ knowledge (particularly for ethnicity or place of birth). Any mode of identification is inherently partial and flawed, but collection of such information could have facilitated analysis and helped to ensure that the research would not misrepresent participants.

Having the teacher-participants come together at least once to share (and perhaps debate) their insights regarding their contexts and their teaching would have provided a
reflexive opportunity for them (and for me as colleague-scholar): this was an opportunity missed. Indeed, having the teachers meet (perhaps regularly) for collaborative inquiry might be quite powerful for them (and for me), and could yield additional analytical power to future research. This might have enabled further attention to the intricacies of how each teacher participant saw (and resisted) what was possible in their particular contexts, and gained further insight into what motivated and constrained them.

My research methods did allow me to collect powerful evidence for how three teachers conceived of and practiced social justice education, and how their students understood social justice and participated in social justice, drama, and conflict pedagogies. Interviews with teachers, classroom observations, and small group improvised drama (inquiry) sessions provided a well-rounded methodology to collect powerful descriptive data reflecting the nuanced ways in which teacher and student participants negotiated and expressed their conceptions of social justice in classrooms and beyond. In particular, the improvised drama sessions strengthened my methodology by providing a space for students to communicate and make meaning, outside the constraints of narrow curriculum expectations that operated in their classrooms. By facilitating these sessions, I was reminded that research, like teaching, is not unidirectional or exempt from resistance. As I planned, facilitated, observed, and negotiated my next steps, questions, and activities, I learned that educational research benefits from specific attention to the voices of young people who engage with pedagogies and negotiate meaning in shared spaces.

**Scholarly Implications**

My study challenges predetermined understandings of social justice education. Generic criteria for what social justice teaching requires (e.g., Darling-Hammond & Bradsford, 2005), or what students must learn (e.g., Adams, Lee, & Griffin, 2007), offer important points of departure for developing and analyzing education for social justice, but may reflect deterministic understandings of how social justice education should look in classrooms. In particular, social justice education practices that align with critical pedagogy are often associated with (or, claimed to be) transformative approaches (see Chapter 2). In many studies framed from this perspective, teachers, students, and
researchers name a particular social issue, and then present how educators and young people consciously address and act against the injustice(s) inherent in the issue. These studies hope or assume that social justice education would embody resistance to injustice. While grounded in such critical pedagogies, this thesis is further informed by poststructural conceptions that challenge such straightforward views of social justice education (as based on set goals and set means to achieve those goals). The evidence presented in this dissertation demonstrates the impossibility of predicting outcomes, even as it shows how the design of pedagogy did matter. Teachers’ conceptions, intentions, and practices were influenced by a myriad of contextual factors, and varied in dynamic ways. None of the cases consistently represented any one affirmative or transformative approach to social justice education.

Evelyn, who taught Grade 4 and 5, and Andre, who taught Grade 8, communicated their social justice goals confidently in interviews. Evelyn, teaching in the most affluent context among the classrooms studied, framed her pedagogy around (identity) recognition based on care and awareness. In improvised drama sessions with a sub-group from Evelyn’s class, it was apparent that some of her students were influenced by her goals and pedagogies. However, these students’ expressed interpretations and intentions seemed to have negative implications for some of the students in the class.

Andre, in the least affluent context of the three cases, told me he intended to engage his Grade 8 students in conflictual dialogue, and to address various forms of injustice on both personal and social-structural levels. He consistently used a discourse of empowerment, aiming provide his students with the tools to change their situation. The sub-group of students from his class also seemed to be influenced by Andre’s pedagogies, and many (although not all) of them communicated critical stances on justice, during improvised drama sessions as well as during classroom lessons. In improvised drama sessions, the group of Grade 8 students from Andre’s class welcomed and insisted on opportunities to challenge dominant narratives (in particular others’ apparent perceptions of the social groups with which they identified). These students expressed critical understandings of social (in)justice, while remaining within the realm of their own lived experiences. Dangerous (potentially oppressive) talk happened mostly in Andre’s
classrooms, and sometimes in Maureen’s classroom (see Chapter 6), but there were also opportunities in these classes for such opinions to be challenged.

Maureen, teaching Grade 6 in a mixed income community, did not articulate in interviews such clear (or confident) goals for her social justice teaching. Her pedagogy and her own learning seemed to be constantly fluctuating as she navigated her own emerging understandings of social justice education in relation to the ways she viewed her students. For students in Maureen’s class who participated in the improvised drama sessions, social justice was directly connected only to Others’ struggles against injustice. They did not connect many of the issues they explored in the improvised drama sessions, some of which reflected topics addressed in their teacher’s classroom lessons, to their own experiences of injustice or to any roles (agency) they might take in addressing injustice. These students seemed detached from the issues—differently from some of the students in the same class who did not participate in the improvised drama sessions. Apparently these students’ experiences beyond the classroom had affected which of Maureen’s students chose to participate in the improvised drama sessions. Thus the connections between Maureen’s teaching and various students’ interpretations of it cannot be crystalized into a cause and effect narrative.

This study showed how three teachers strategically responded to their conditions, to set the stage for affirmative and potentially transformative justice education, in ways that were achievable in their particular classrooms on a day-to-day, encounter-to-encounter basis. Similarly, students strategically responded to their conditions, both within improvised drama sessions and in regular classroom lessons — sometimes differently within each context — based on myriad factors. Such findings contribute to further understanding the potential applications of Fraser’s (2005) theory of social justice to education contexts. Teachers’ conceptions and practices of social justice education and students’ interpretations and enactments of social justice did not always map clearly onto dimensions of redistribution or recognition. Even so, analysis of teachers’ conceptions and practices revealed that when teachers addressed both issues of misrecognition and redistribution, the potential for transformative education that could attend to structural causes of injustice seemed more apparent.
Fraser (2008) later added a third dimension (alongside recognition and distribution) to her theory articulating the complexity of social justice, that she called representation. Representation is political in nature, rather than primarily economic (as in distribution) or cultural (as in recognition). It represents who has access, voice and influence in deliberations and decision making about the substantive dimensions of justice: distribution and recognition. Misrepresentation means that some individuals or groups are excluded or marginalized from participatory (democratic) parity. Because this thesis research examines curriculum and pedagogy (school learning opportunities), I focus on (affirmative and transformative approaches to) the substance of social justice — redistribution and recognition — rather than the process (representation) in the wider society. However, future research, probing diverse students’ development and exercise of agency (including voice and decision-making), might benefit from taking up this third analytical dimension of justice.

Whatever their teachers’ understandings and intentions were for social justice education, my analysis of students’ responses to social justice education, in classroom observations and during small-group improvised drama sessions I facilitated, shows that they created their own interpretations of justice based on multiple factors, including and beyond teachers’ pedagogy. The improvised drama group sessions revealed participating students’ frequent conflation of anti-bullying with issues of social justice. They also elicited some students’ tendency to represent social justice in terms of peer-to-peer, interpersonal conflict. These representations of injustice may be starting points from which to further deconstruct the connections between micro- and macro-level injustices (North, 2006), and between issues of misrecognition and maldistribution (Fraser, 2005). Teachers’ pedagogic design, and my own inquiry design during improvised drama sessions, was important, but it was not definitive in how students communicated their understandings. Design may have created a place of entry for students and teachers to interact with each other and with the pedagogy and content - to simultaneously mould and be moulded by events as they unfolded.

Building on the work of Cahill (2009; 2011), this study does not attempt to demonstrate ways to examine social justice issues per se, but examines the three teachers’ dialogic, dramatic and deconstructive approaches used to address and explore those
issues, and how various students participated in those approaches. I observed Evelyn, Andre, and Maureen implement varied degrees of creative and critical dialogic social justice education using drama pedagogy, each in a different. Many studies have focused on how such pedagogies should look in the context of working with students in marginalized circumstances. This study contributes substantive insights into how (conflictual) drama might matter for social justice education in such context, as demonstrated by the instances described and analyzed with students from Andre’s Grade 8 class. At the same time, this study also shows what social justice education using drama pedagogy may look like in a mixed income and an affluent school in an urban context.

Like some earlier research (Swalwell, 2013), this study addresses explicitly how social justice was taken up in privileged contexts, (sometimes) without further marginalizing and oppressing others. Swalwell, in her case study of eleven high school students at an elite private school, found that participating students had decidedly different interpretations of their teacher’s teaching goals associated with justice-oriented citizenship. Her findings reveal disconnects between these students’ conceptions of social justice, and some key principles that “undergird social justice education” (p. 1). Such findings assume a clear vision for social justice education, which may ignore the complexities and potentially deterministic notions of what social justice education is in practice. This dissertation study takes up Swalwell’s call to “understand the possibilities and challenges of this work” with privileged students, but complicates her implied advocacy for benchmarks for social justice. My study, while focusing on younger students, similarly shows how some privileged students attempted to convey themselves as “good people”. As Gaztambide-Fernández and Howard (2013) argue, the symbolic role that disadvantaged groups play in the imaginations of privileged students illustrates some of the complexities of social justice. In this study, the symbolic role of Others seemed to be influenced partly by Evelyn’s social justice teaching. Some privileged students’ conceptions, manifested in classroom lesson observations and especially in improvised drama sessions, carried direct implications for particular ‘Other’ students in the class.

Clearly, the unpredictability of drama pedagogy (especially when it confronts conflictual issues) exceeds any predetermined or standardized curriculum expectation.
Embracing such uncertainty builds a post-structural understanding onto the insights of curriculum theorists such as Apple (1979) who advocates curriculum attentive to conflict to surface and resist the hidden curriculum of conformity. My study also applies Mouffe’s (2005) and Todd’s (2009) theoretical distinction between antagonistic and agonistic conflict to vignettes of classroom practice, to illuminate how drama pedagogy can elicit and value emotional and unpredictable examples of pedagogically constructive (generative) conflict. Rather than teachers suppressing conflict embedded in curriculum, generative and agonistic conflict means eliciting disagreement and dissenting understandings of social justice issues to invite students to engage in intersubjective knowledge creation. This study applies these, and conflict theories that challenge the possibility and limits of rational deliberation to classroom practice.

Open expression of divergent viewpoints in classrooms is especially risky when young students are involved. Such riskiness was reflected in the sexist talk in Andre’s class (described in Chapter 6), as well as the apparently Islamophobic talk in Maureen’s class. This study describes these concrete instances of how elementary teachers in different contexts elicited and facilitated conflict, pointing to the dangers as well as the potential of such instances. In the process, I challenged understandings of “transformative” social justice education. For example, the instances described and analyzed, particularly in Andre’s and Maureen’s classes, reflect the difficulty in making clear distinctions between antagonistic (destructive) and agonistic (potentially constructive) conflict. This is a priority for my own work that has morphed and persisted through this research: I plan to conduct further research on the emergence and provocation of potentially antagonistic exchanges among students, and how teachers may initiate or intervene in such dramatic encounters (to protect the safety of their lowest status students) without suppressing divergent perspectives. A related theme is that my case studies demonstrate the symbiosis between students’ dramatic action and opportunities for talk: thus I hope to continue to study this drama-talk relationship in classroom pedagogies, focusing specifically on eliciting (diverse) student perspectives. I would supplement (group) drama pedagogy methods with interviews with students, to inform how students experience those risks, and how teachers can mitigate the risks of
further oppressing particular (lower status) groups or individuals in the classroom when they purposefully elicit and/or facilitate conflict pedagogies.

In future work, instead of implementing broad social justice frameworks to analyze the pedagogical vignettes in this (and future) research, I would like to mobilize more specific theoretical lenses, such as a feminist post structural framework, to examine further how teachers may respond to discriminatory incidents (such as repetition or citation of stigmatizing narratives) in their classrooms. I hope to further analyze encounters, such as those that arose in Andre’s classroom (sexism) and Maureen’s classroom (Islamophobia), to more deeply understand the pedagogical dangers and possibilities of such moments. For example, Sykes (2004) used a feminist post structural framework to interpret how physical education teachers dealt with expressions of homophobia. She described three (types of) pedagogies participating teachers had used to respond to homophobic name calling: a pedagogy of censorship (policing and ultimately stopping students from using discriminatory language), a pedagogy of injury (teaching students that discriminatory language can cause harm), and a pedagogy of masochism (in which teachers are prepared to take on the risks of further harm in order to intervene). Inspired by this work, I wish to use a feminist post structural framework to further analyze vignettes from my own case studies, to interpret how teachers took risks by eliciting (surfacing) conflict (in the context of persistent social injustice) in their social justice teaching. I also hope to examine teachers’ personal experiences with particular forms of discrimination and how they may (or may not) influence how they respond to dangerous, antagonistic moments. Moreover, I would like to examine various students’ experiences, when confronted with such open moments of conflict, particularly when teachers leave them (freedom and responsibility) to respond for themselves. My investigations of how students respond to and interpret such moments may further inform teachers’ pedagogical choices and my own re-evaluation of the risks associated with some forms of social justice education that welcome open conflict. Further research is necessary, when well-intentioned “social justice” pedagogies may risk further harming students (and teachers). At the same time, silencing conflicts and ignoring problems of bias may also risk harm. Thus I would like my future scholarly work to further complicate notions of critical pedagogy in relation to difference, and to more deeply
inform practical applications of post-structural theory in public classrooms with young students.

Furthermore, I would like to re-examine the vignettes described in this study from a decolonizing framework that complicates notions of social justice by foregrounding Indigenous struggles. Such a framework moves beyond notions of resource redistribution and identity recognition by placing a focus on land, history, and recognition of sovereignty (Dei, 2008; Tuck & Yang, 2012). Significant within a decolonizing framework is the notion that marginalized groups are subjects of their own experiences and histories, and that struggles for social justice should aim to challenge the basis of institutionalized power that reproduces the violence of both economic and social cultural injustices inherent in colonialism (Dei & Asghardzadeh, 2001; Fanon, 1963). Influenced by the work of Tuck and Yang (2012), I acknowledge the incommensurability between decolonization and many social justice projects because of these projects’ different locations in relation to the structure of settler colonialism. As Tuck and Yang (2012) explain:

[Decolonization] is not converting Indigenous politics to a Western doctrine of liberation; it is not a philanthropic process of ‘helping’ the at-risk and alleviating suffering; it is not a generic term for struggle against oppressive conditions and outcomes. The broad umbrella of social justice may have room underneath for all of these efforts. By contrast, decolonization specifically requires the repatriation of Indigenous land and life. Decolonization is not a metonym for social justice. (p. 10)

Thus, social justice claims may conceal the need “to give up land or power or privilege” (p. 10). Indeed, decolonization requires an approach that changes the very foundations upon which society (both culture and social structure) is based. I would like to revisit specific vignettes within my study, specifically Maureen’s pedagogies addressing residential schooling with her students, by considering the implications of a decolonizing framework and its relationship, or incommensurability, with social justice education approaches. From the position of an ally, I hope to mobilize what I have learned from the work of scholars such as Marie Battiste (2013) and Susan Dion and her colleagues (2010), who have studied the processes of decolonization in schools and the implications for pedagogical practice, to re-examine instances of so-called “social justice education” from a decolonizing framework.
At the same time, this dissertation illustrates the educative power of conflict in teaching, well beyond the mediation of interpersonal conflicts – engagement with unresolvable political conflict while acknowledging the role of passion and emotion. Dramatic deliberation, as occurred in Maureen’s class (described in Chapter 6,) is one example of how teacher may guide students to engage in agonistic conflict as a social justice learning opportunity. Dramatic conflict, in the form of deliberation without intending consensus, provided a forum for students to participate in a clash of (dramatic) perspectives, and thereby to challenge their own prior views.

This study demonstrates the contributions drama pedagogies may make to social justice education in classrooms, to facilitate student engagement with conflict as a generative learning opportunity. Teachers in this study provided various examples of how drama pedagogy may be facilitated for social justice education, in various elementary school grades and subject area contexts (e.g., Language and Social Studies). Further, the analysis builds on scholarship that highlights the significance of “talk” in relation to embodied dramatic action, as well as vis versa—the power of facilitating dramatic action in relation to talk (Edmiston, 2014; Fels, 2004; Gallagher, 2014). At the same time, dialogic teaching and drama pedagogies are not inherently benign. While this dissertation describes vignettes of (dramatic and dialogic) which provoked dialogue, future research is needed to explore alternatives in social justice and drama teaching that investigate and address the potential dangers of such encounters.

My dissertation demonstrates how researchers might use drama as an inquiry tool to learn about students’ conceptions, and responses to social justice (education). Multiple studies on social justice education argue for a focus on students’ understandings of social justice in order to lend insight into how social justice teaching might occur, or how narrow notions of social justice might be challenged (Sonu, 2009a; Swalwell, 2013). This dissertation study, particularly the improvised drama sessions, extends such work in social justice education. In combination with scholarship that does not focus on drama pedagogies, this study also builds on work by drama education scholars that describe and engage drama pedagogies as methods (Cahill, 2009, 2011; Gallagher, 2007, 2014) to reveal students’ understandings and interpretations of their teachers’ conceptions or pedagogies. My use of such methods, as demonstrated in Chapter 5, shows how drama
methods can provide opportunities for initial dramatic interpretations of social justice conceptions. Improvised dramatic performance were entry points into further interrogation of what social justice meant for students. I relied on both dramatic and dialogic modes of communication in my use of drama as a form of inquiry. These activities offered opportunities, not just for the communication of set understandings of social justice through drama and talk, but for further deconstruction and meaning making about social justice issues in ways that complicated students’ initial understandings. Thus, my methodological design allowed multiple points of entry for understanding how various students interpreted and participated in social justice education in relation to teachers’ social justice drama and conflict pedagogies. These multiple forms of data resisted my initial attempts to distinguish interpretations and modes of participation in either/or categories: recognition or redistribution, affirmative or transformative, and engagement or disengagement. This points to the complexities and problematizes attempts to measure the transformative-ness, or social justice-ness of any one approach to social justice education.

Professional Implications

Understanding how teachers approach social justice in particular contexts, and how students generate ideas about social justice issues, informs my own and others’ work in teacher education and professional learning regarding (future) social justice education. My study’s conceptions of social justice education are holistic, reaching well beyond specific criteria or practices teachers might implement, or performances students might create. Many studies outline what specific approaches to social justice should look like (see Chapter 2). The case studies in this dissertation, in contrast, consider the lived experiences of students and teachers in relation to classroom practice, without imposing predetermined ideas of social justice or education.

How some Grade 4 and 5 students interpreted Evelyn’s social justice teaching, for example, reveals implications for Evelyn’s own teaching. Students’ multiple influences had implications within and beyond the classroom. Opportunities for multiple interpretations to be articulated, beyond meeting imposed curriculum expectations, might have addressed some of the well-intentioned partial stories and actions of some privileged
students. Maureen’s teaching and her students’ interpretations and participation in social justice education revealed the opportunities that present themselves when teachers become comfortable with taking risks. While the danger of oppressive talk and stereotypical dramatic representation seems perpetual, whenever such risks are taken, the opportunities that arise to address those initial representations may constructively complicate initial conceptions, and reveal tensions not previously evident. Where Andre took initial risks, the dangers associated with wide-open or aggressive (antagonistic) conflictual approaches became evident. I would like to work with teachers to investigate tangible ways to support diverse students’ development and practice of agency – to explore how teaching can support such agency without teachers’ speaking for students.

I argue that the risks of conflict pedagogy are worth it, although further research is needed on possibilities of how teachers might respond in situations when talk and drama become dangers. As discussed above, drama pedagogies apparently make a difference in how students engage with controversial issues. Teacher education make use of case study vignettes like mine to consider the risks and potential of the intersections of social justice education, drama, and conflict, to broaden pedagogical conceptions of social justice education. Broadening concept of social justice education challenge notions of scripted curriculum, expanding possibilities for how teachers play with mandated curriculum expectations in ways that can challenge the status quo.

The notion of pedagogies as (multiple) “entry points” is a key insight emerging from this study. Improvised drama sessions revealed participating students’ propensity to conflate and anti-bullying with issues of social justice, particularly in younger, more affluent contexts. At the same time, they showed that students’ initial representations of peer-to-peer, interpersonal conflict as social justice may be starting points from which to further deconstruct understandings. As such, this dissertation reinforces and builds on scholarship showing that elementary school students are capable of engaging in complex and constructive (agonistic) conflict dialogue under particular conditions, especially when teachers scaffold content and processes with multiple entry points (Bickmore, 2002, 2014; Parker, 2011).

Of importance for teachers and teacher-educators, this study also demonstrates the need for sufficient time allocation for process-oriented pedagogies that involve conflict,
including drama pedagogies, to address the complexities of situational events within frameworks aiming for broader structural change. This thesis suggests that students may reveal more nuanced interpretations of social justice concepts if time and process are dedicated to working through the complexities of social justice conceptions. This study will help teachers to consider students’ potential evolving interpretations as they plan their instruction, while acknowledging that their curriculum design provides only entry points as opportunities (no guarantees) for further meaning making.

This dissertation illustrates pedagogical moments in which young students engaged with each other as political friends (Parker, 2010) as well as adversaries, addressing conflict in ways that were (sometimes) educative (rather than merely antagonistic). The findings of this study challenge teachers and school boards to move beyond controlling through scripted curriculum and standardized outcome accountability. Indeed, all three teachers told me and showed me they were at times unsure how to effectively teach social justice using drama and conflict in the contexts of their schools and curriculum mandates. This suggests that both practicing and pre-service teachers need professional learning opportunities to embrace and enhance their efficacy with engaging students in dramatic (and dialogic) encounters. This requires practice in engaging with conflict rather than only managing or avoiding it. When conflict is suppressed in the name of efficiency or student safety, it inevitably exists below the surface and may emerge in dangerous ways.

**Conclusion**

When I began this study, I suspected that different students would respond differently, in different classroom/community contexts, to particular teacher approaches to social justice education. Even though this may seem obvious, much theory and research tends to generalize about students and pedagogical principles, whereas I found that each teacher did social justice education differently in each context, creating different openings for diverse students’ diverse responses. My findings challenge my own earlier presumption of the automatic superiority or effectiveness of social justice, drama, and conflict pedagogies in addressing injustices (at whatever scale). Indeed, I learned that my own and other teachers’ social justice, drama, and conflict pedagogies showed much
potential, but also sometimes risked reproducing harmful oppression. I hope to conduct further research into student understandings and interpretations of their teachers’ pedagogies. My hope is that such research can inform pedagogies that may mitigate the harmful risks that may arise when open conflict is invited in the name of social justice.

I appreciate and admire the ways the three teachers in this study brought their own understandings of their societal positions, and their subjective experiences, to their teaching. These teachers interpreted their students, as much as the students interpreted them and their practices. The teachers brought to school, and continually created, their understandings of how best to teach their students. They also constantly developed their understandings of the social justice issues (and potential learning opportunities) embedded in their (subject area) teaching. Their conceptions of what social justice education was, and whom it was for, defied any predetermined criteria in theory or mandated curriculum. Yet their thoughtful reflections did help to shape their implemented curriculum. Maureen continued to negotiate her understandings of social justice education through drama and conflict during the period of time I conducted observations in her classroom. She indicated to me that our dialogues helped her to become more willing to take risks with her teaching. Andre and Evelyn seemed to be confident about what they did and why they did it. My time in these teachers’ classrooms and our conversations reflected and provoked a reflexive process of becoming that I view as ideal in teaching.

In the context of social uncertainty and demanding work, it is understandable that teachers and teacher-candidates (including those with whom I have worked) have often demanded pre-made lesson plans – recipes — for social justice education. However, the teachers in this study have shown that a teacher does not need recipes in order to know how to cook. It is clear that any teaching and learning for social justice is a culturally situated practice: it is ever changing, and constantly mediated and reshaped, by students and by teachers as well. Both teachers and students negotiate their understandings during every pedagogical moment. Teachers’ understandings and enactments of social justice education were shaped and limited by the various political and social contexts of each school, the communities in which they were located, and the students who attended them. One form of social justice education, based on particular practices and goals, does not
apply across all contexts. At the same time, my study does illustrate some tensions that may reflect key principles. These include an attention to how teachers and students view and engage with difference, and the difference that improvised drama pedagogy, which includes dialogue and conflict, can make in social justice education.

The case studies in this dissertation provide eclectic, complicated examples of the potential of social justice education through drama and conflict in three different public school contexts with relatively young students. They illustrate the unpredictability of such education, as dramatic encounters unfold in real time amongst subjects/bodies. The case studies demonstrate how social justice, drama, and conflict pedagogies require careful consideration and attention to design and process, beyond intent. They also show the brilliant ways various students take up and translate pedagogies and content, participating in the refashioning of social justice for their own lives.
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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Initial Teacher Interview Guiding Questions

Contextual Information
1. How long have you been teaching?
2. Why did you become a teacher?
3. Describe the school in which you work?
4. Describe your classroom and students?

Ideas about Social Justice
5. When you hear the term “social justice”, what comes to mind?
6. What social justice issues are important to you?

Practice
7. What are your goals as a teacher?
8. How would you describe your teaching?
9. Why do you use drama in the classroom?
10. What is the relationship between drama and social justice?
11. How do you view conflict?
12. How might you use conflict to engage students in learning?

Perceptions of Student Understandings
13. How do you think your students understand social justice?
14. What do you think contributes to your students’ understandings of social justice?
## Appendix B: Improvised Drama Sessions – Plans/Outlines by School Site

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Session</th>
<th>Parkview Public School Grade 4/5 Classroom - 9 Students</th>
<th>Whitfield Public School Grade 6 Classroom - 7 Students</th>
<th>Valley Public School Grade 8 Classroom - 7 Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>* Introductory improvisation activities</td>
<td>* Introductory improvisation activities</td>
<td>* Introductory improvisation activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>* Tableaux: students portray/represent social justice issues important to them</td>
<td>* Tableaux: students portray/represent social justice issues important to them</td>
<td>* Tableaux: students portray/represent social justice issues important to them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>* Drama Prompt: Shared dramatic prompt performed involving child who does not want to go to school</td>
<td>* Drama Prompt: Shared dramatic prompt performed involving child who does not want to go to school</td>
<td>* Drama Prompt: Shared dramatic prompt performed involving child who does not want to go to school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>* Scene Performances: Students create and perform scenes in response to question - What event may have happened the day before this interaction that influenced the child’s refusal to go to school?</td>
<td>* Scene Performances: Students create and perform scenes in response to question - What event may have happened the day before this interaction that influenced the child’s refusal to go to school?</td>
<td>* Scene Performances: Students create and perform scenes in response to question - What event may have happened the day before this interaction that influenced the child’s refusal to go to school?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>* Dialogue: Scene debriefing</td>
<td>* Dialogue: Scene debriefing</td>
<td>* Dialogue: Scene debriefing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 3       | * Video analysis: Students view video recordings of student-created scenes from Session 2  
  o Inference Opportunity: character identities?  
  Personality traits?  
  * Hot Seating: Main characters from scene questioned in role to explore motivations | * Video analysis: Students view video recordings of student-created scenes from Session 2  
  o Inference Opportunity: character identities?  
  Personality traits?  
  * Forum Theatre: Students not initially in a scene have the opportunity to enter scene as protagonist and change the outcome | * Airport Process Drama: students, in role as individuals or groups lined up at airport, waiting to meet with Canada border agent, indicating their intention to immigrate to Canada. Roles: Border Agents, Families/individuals aiming to immigrate to Canada, Security (played by Researcher) |
|         |                                                          |                                                        | * Airport Process Drama: students, in role as individuals or groups lined up at airport, waiting to meet with Canada border agent, indicating their intention to immigrate to Canada. Roles: Border Agents, Families/individuals aiming to immigrate to Canada, Security Guard (played by Researcher) |
| 4       | * Airport Process Drama: students, in role as individuals or groups lined up at airport, waiting to meet with Canada border agent, indicating their intention to immigrate to Canada. Roles: Border Agents, Families/individuals aiming to immigrate to Canada, Security Guard (played by Researcher) | * Airport Process Drama: students, in role as individuals or groups lined up at airport, waiting to meet with Canada border agent, indicating their intention to immigrate to Canada. Roles: Border Agents, Families/individuals aiming to immigrate to Canada, Security Guard (played by Researcher) | * Short Film viewing: Silent Beats by Jon M. Chu |
|         |                                                          |                                                        | * Dialogue: Film Debrief                            |
|         |                                                          |                                                        | * Hot Seating: Students play role of main characters from film, and questioned in role to explore perceptions and motivations |
|         |                                                          |                                                        | * In-Role Talkbacks: students talk back, in role as characters in the film, to the stereotypes portrayed of that character |
|         |                                                          |                                                        | * Out-of-Role Talkbacks: students talk back to stereotypes they themselves have experienced |
## Appendix C: Three Teachers, Three Contexts, and Varied and Similar Conceptions of Social Justice, Conflict, and Drama Pedagogies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Population</th>
<th>Social Justice Education Goals</th>
<th>Perceptions of Their Students</th>
<th>Social Justice Content</th>
<th>Pedagogies</th>
<th>Conflict</th>
<th>Drama</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Evelyn Manroe, Parkview Elementary, Grades 4/5</td>
<td>Affluent school with a mostly White student population</td>
<td>Critical caring: to elicit awareness and recognition of Others</td>
<td>Students are mostly privileged in need of awareness that injustice exists, and to learn about Others</td>
<td>Distinct oppressions addressed one at a time</td>
<td>Interpersonal: focused on conflict resolution between individuals outside of class time</td>
<td>Small group scene building exercises, or whole class teacher guided movement and drama</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andre Velasco, Valley Public School, Grade 8</td>
<td>Less affluent, mostly non-White student population</td>
<td>Critical questioning: to foster social critique and develop tools for agency</td>
<td>Students are mostly marginalized, and should be empowered to change their own situation</td>
<td>Open-ended metaphorical texts to allow students to make connections amongst intersecting identities</td>
<td>Shit-disturbing: use of critical questions to elicit conflicting perspectives within whole class discussions/ dramas</td>
<td>Whole class process drama and applied theatre techniques</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maureen Korneth, Whitefield Public School, Grade 6</td>
<td>Mixed income, racially diverse student population</td>
<td>Confronting uncertainty to elicit multiple understandings</td>
<td>Students may be too young to engage in some social justice issues. Some students bring more knowledge and acceptance to the classroom than others.</td>
<td>Broader events or issues addressed, and connections to various forms of injustice and redistribution within broader issue explorations</td>
<td>Ranged from conflict avoidance to use of broad issues to elicit conflicting perspectives within whole class discussions/ dramas</td>
<td>Small group scene building exercises and whole class process drama</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Focus: Issues of recognition and redistribution through metaphor and broader issue explorations.

Focus: Issues of recognition and redistribution within broader issue explorations.

Whole class process drama and applied theatre techniques.

Focus on empathy and drama as alternate mode of demonstrating learning.

Focus on empathy and drama as alternate mode of demonstrating learning.

Drama to elicit conflictual perspective taking.

Increasing opportunities for dramatic conflictual perspective-taking.
Appendix D: Information and Consent for Teacher Participants

Information and Consent for Teacher Participants
Dramatic Encounters: Examining social justice teaching and student responses through drama pedagogy and conflict

Thank you for your interest in my dissertation project, entitled Dramatic Encounters: Examining social justice teaching and student learning through drama pedagogy and conflict. This document supplements the attached Research Project Information Letter — describing how you might participate in this research project, and requesting your agreement to participate.

If you decide to take part:
• I would INTERVIEW you (20-40 minutes) about your perceptions of the students in your class and how they understand social justice, and about your own perceptions and approach to social justice education in practice. If you consent, this would be audio-recorded. 5-10 minute follow up interviews would take place after observed lessons (see below).
• I would OBSERVE four to six social justice education lessons that incorporate the use of drama.
• I would ask for your input in selecting willing student participants for improvised drama activity sessions, and work with you to help plan the improvised drama activity sessions that I will facilitate.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You are also free to withdraw from the study at any time, simply by informing me of your decision, without negative consequences. All individual schools will be anonymous, in order to protect the confidentiality of individual participants. My research data will not be used to evaluate you, and your anonymity will be protected in all research transcripts and documents (through use of pseudonyms instead of real names, and deleting or masking of other details about individuals or sites that might make you identifiable).

The only direct cost of participation for you would be the time in individual interviews and co-planning for the facilitation of the improvised drama activity sessions with students. The benefit of participation will be the opportunity to discuss and learn together about this work, to learn and implement effective practices of social justice education, particularly through the use of dramatic conflict.

If you agree to participate in this study (interview, observation, and co-planning), please signify your consent by signing in the spaces provided below. There are two copies of the attached project information letter and this consent document — one for you to keep, and one for me.
Thank you kindly. Your help with this study is greatly appreciated!

Antonino Giambrone
PhD Candidate
OISE/University of Toronto

CONSENT FORM:

I agree to participate in the study, Dramatic Encounters: Examining social justice teaching and student learning through drama pedagogy and conflict, according to the expectations set out above and on the attached Research Project Information Letter.

Signature of research participant, and today’s date:

_______________________________________________________________________

Please mark with ✓ all research activities in which you agree to participate:

✓ Private interviews, and observations of social justice education drama activities I facilitate

✓ Collaboration to develop improvised drama activity sessions with a group 5-7 students

Would you like to receive a copy of the interim and final research reports?  __Yes (or)  ___No

Signature and date:

_______________________________________________________________________

Full name printed, and full contact information:
Appendix E: Information and Consent for Parent/Guardians of Student Participants

Dramatic Encounters: Examining social justice teaching and student responses through drama pedagogy and conflict

My name is Antonino Giambrone. I am a Doctoral Student at OISE, University of Toronto, and I am also a teacher and Instructional Leader with the Toronto District School Board. Thank you for your interest in my dissertation project, entitled Dramatic Encounters: Examining social justice teaching and student learning through drama pedagogy and conflict. This document supplements the attached Research Project Information Letter – describing how your child might participate in this research project, and requesting your agreement for them to participate in particular components of the research.

I will observe classroom lessons in which your child will participate in order to understand how teachers demonstrate their conception of social justice through drama pedagogy, as well as to observe how students respond to such teaching. I will attend a minimum of six classroom lessons, possibly over multiple periods or days. This will not change anything about your child’s experience in class.

In addition to the above observations of regular classroom activity, I, the researcher will provide an opportunity for a few willing students (on the condition that their parents/guardians consent) to participate in 2 – 4 improvised drama activity sessions and will last about 40 minutes each. I plan to select 5-7 students from among those for whom parents/guardians provide consent in consultation with the classroom teacher: my aim is to ensure broad participation of students with a range of abilities and other diversities such as gender, class, ethnicity. I will facilitate the improvised drama activity sessions outside the regular classroom lessons, but under the supervision of the classroom teacher. Sessions may take place during class (in the regular classroom), at lunch hour, or after school, depending on participants’ scheduling needs.

These improvised drama activity sessions will involve drama activities about issues that arise from classroom experiences and social justice lesson topics being explored. They will include the planning, improvisational acting, scene building, and debriefing of various dramatic scenes developed. The classroom teacher will be involved in the co-planning with me these drama activity sessions.

If you and your child consent, these improvised drama activity sessions would be video-recorded: this video would be private: viewed only by the teacher, the students involved in the improvised drama activity sessions, my thesis supervisor, and myself.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. If you and your child consent to participation in the improvised drama activity sessions, and your child withdraws, I will make the best effort to delete any in information that could have been gathered from them, and any video footage would be blurred or not considered.
All individual schools will be anonymous, in order to protect the confidentiality of individual participants. My research data will not be used to evaluate students or teachers, and their anonymity will be protected in all research transcripts and documents through the use of pseudonyms instead of real names, and deleting or masking of other details about individuals or situations that might make your child identifiable. Clearly, the other participants in the project in the same class as your child will know her or his identity; however, all participants will agree to protect one another’s confidentiality.

The only risk of participation for your child is that she or he might be made a little uncomfortable for a researcher to observe, and possibly video-record lessons and dramatic performances about social justice issues, in which your child will participate. The benefit of participation will be the opportunity for your child’s perspectives to be shared, and to improve teacher’s practice of social justice education through drama.

If you agree to allow your child to participate, please signify your consent by signing in the spaces provided below. Your child is also asked to signify their consent by signing in the appropriate space provided below. There are two copies of the attached project information letter and this consent document – one for you to keep, and one for me.

Thank you kindly. Your help with this study is greatly appreciated!

Antonino Giambrone, PhD Candidate, OISE/University of Toronto

CONSENT FORM:

I permit my child to participate in the improvised drama activity sessions component of the study, Dramatic Encounters: Examining social justice teaching and student learning through drama pedagogy and conflict, according to the expectations set out above and on the attached Research Project Information Letter.

Signature of the parent/guardian, and today’s date:

________________________________________________________________________

Signature of student, and today’s date:

________________________________________________________________________

Please mark with ✓ if your child agrees to participate, and if you permit your child to participate:
Video-recording of *improvised drama activity* sessions (for internal project use, and to be shared with Improvised drama activity Session participants and teacher participant only)

Full name of your child, printed:

____________________________________________________________

Your (parent/guardian) full name, printed:

________________________________________________________

Name of your child’s teacher:

________________________________________________________
APPENDIX F: Information and Consent for Principals

Dramatic Encounters: Examining social justice teaching and student responses through drama pedagogy and conflict

Thank you for your interest in my dissertation project, entitled Dramatic Encounters: Examining social justice teaching and student learning through drama pedagogy and conflict. This document supplements the attached Research Project Information Letter — describing how one or more teachers in your schools, and their class(es), might participate in this research project, and requesting your approval for them to participate.

This project will examine how these teachers demonstrate their conceptions of social justice through their drama pedagogies; examine how these teachers frame, address, and/or avoid questions of conflict in these pedagogies; examine how these teachers’ students respond to dramatic approaches to transformative social justice education; examine the role of these students’ intersecting identities the ways they speak and act about social justice in such contexts

In each school, the research will include:

- Open ended INTERVIEWS with teacher participants (20-40 minutes) about their approach to social justice education, the use of drama to do social justice education, and their perceptions of how students respond to such approaches. 5-10 minute follow up interviews would take place after observed lessons (see below).
- Participant OBSERVATION of four to six social justice education lessons that incorporate the use of drama.
- IMPROVISED DRAMA ACTIVITY SESSIONS with willing students whose parents give consent, in which I will facilitate improvisational drama activities and subsequent debriefing sessions about issues being discussed in class with students. With parent consent, these improvised drama activity sessions will be video-recorded and seen only be myself, the teacher, and the students involved in the improvised drama activity sessions, and will be used as catalysts for discussion within the sessions

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. Any school and/or individual participant are also free to withdraw from the study at any time, simply by informing me of their decision, without negative consequences. All individual schools will be anonymous, in order to protect the confidentiality of individual teachers, and student participants. Although one or more of your staff may know the identity of individual teacher participants who choose to participate in this study: (1) these individuals will not, and must not, be pressured to participate; (2) the research data will not, and must not, be used to evaluate them; (3) their anonymity will be protected in all research transcripts and documents (through use of pseudonyms instead of real names, and deleting or masking of other details about individuals or sites that might make them identifiable).
The only direct cost of participation for you would be the time of one teacher to participate in individual interviews and co-planning to develop improvised drama activity session activities. The benefit of participation will be the opportunity to discuss and learn together about this work, to learn and implement effective practices of social justice education, particularly through the use of dramatic conflict.

If you agree that selected participants in your school may participate in this study, please signify your consent by signing in the spaces provided below (two copies — one for you to keep, and one to be given to me).

Thank you kindly. Your help with this study is greatly appreciated!

Antonino Giambrone
PhD Candidate, OISE/University of Toronto
CONSENT FORM:

_____________________________  ______________________
(name of school)               (date)

agrees to participate in the Dramatic Encounters: Examining social justice teaching and student learning through drama pedagogy and conflict study, according to the expectations set out above and on the attached Research Project Information Letter.

Please mark with √ all research activities in which you agree designated participants from your school may participate:

___ Basic study only (private interview, and observation of a facilitated conflict dialogue activity)

___ Improvised drama activity sessions with students

___ Video-recording of above activity (for internal project use only)

Would you like to receive a copy of the interim and final research reports?  ___Yes (or)  ___No

Signature(s) of principal or school leader(s):

____________________________________________________________________

Full name(s), printed, of principal or school leader(s):

____________________________________________________________________

Name of liaison to research project (if different from above) and full contact information: