Culturally Relevant and Responsive Practices in Literacy Instruction

By

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A research paper submitted in conformity with the requirements
for the degree of Master of Teaching

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Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto

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Abstract

This qualitative study focused on investigating the ways in which educators utilise culturally relevant and responsive practices (CRRP) in order to improve their literacy instruction. Through a detailed literature review, as well as direct, in-person or telephone, interviews with three experienced teachers from various school boards in the Greater Toronto Area, four important themes emerged. The first theme: recognising, celebrating and learning from cultural diversity in the classroom; describes the need for safe and respectful settings for cultural diversity to be acknowledged. The second theme: teaching literacy skills to students; educators should give their students engaging tasks to spark interest in literacy. The third theme: using culturally relevant and responsive practices to develop literacy; educators should utilise cultural texts within their instruction. The fourth theme: teacher identified challenges (and benefits) to the approach; emphasises that teachers may face lack of support and resources when trying to integrate CRRP into their instruction, but positive relationships are built with students and their families as a result. Through interviewing educators, it was concluded that these practices could be utilised in classrooms but teachers would still need proper training and support. There would be a call for culturally relevant and responsive changes within the current curriculum and proper professional development for educators to be properly prepared to meet the cultural and literacy needs of their students. Based on the findings, this research project expresses how educators can use culturally relevant and responsive practices to guide their own teaching and improve their literacy instruction.

Key Words: culture, culturally relevant, responsive practices, CRRP, literacy
Acknowledgements

Firstly, I wish to acknowledge and thank God for blessing me daily and allowing me to have the opportunities that I have had. I would like to thank my family for continuing to be pillars of support in my life and providing me with guidance throughout the years of my education. My mother, my grandmother, aunt and uncle for keeping me in line and not letting me give up. They have cared for me and sacrificed plenty in order for me to get where I am. I would also like to thank my research instructor, Kenneth McNeilly, for being able to calm me down, talk to me and help revise me revise my work. I want to extend my gratitude to all of my research participants that took the time to reply and provide me with their insight. I would like the thank Doug Prince and Anthony Carnovale, who gave me the confidence to know that I want to teach.

Lastly, I wish to dedicate my research paper to my late grandmother, Gloria Gordon. She was a strong woman and was always interested and invested in my education. I will never forget and will continue to live by some of the last words she spoke to me: “Don’t let your education go to waste.” I will always remember these words and make sure that I can be the best educator that I can be and strive to make a positive difference in the lives of my future students.
# Table of Contents

Abstract ........................................................................................................................................ ii

Acknowledgements .................................................................................................................... iii

Chapter One: Introduction ......................................................................................................... 1

1.0 Introduction of the Research Study ...................................................................................... 1

1.1 Purpose of the Study ............................................................................................................. 2

1.2 Research Problem ................................................................................................................ 2

1.3 Research Question ............................................................................................................... 2

1.4 Background of the Researcher ........................................................................................... 3

1.5 Preview of MTRP .................................................................................................................. 4

Chapter Two: Literature Review ................................................................................................. 6

2.0 Introduction of the Chapter .................................................................................................. 6

2.1 Definitions .......................................................................................................................... 7

2.1.1 Literacy .......................................................................................................................... 7

2.1.2 Culturally Relevant and Responsive Practice ............................................................... 8

2.2 Current Practices and Strategies ....................................................................................... 9

2.2.1 Ministry and curriculum ............................................................................................... 9

2.2.2 Culturally relevant and responsive practice inside the classroom .............................. 10

2.2.3 Cultural texts ............................................................................................................... 11

2.2.4 Teacher attitudes or perceptions ................................................................................. 11

2.3 Challenges Pertaining to the Topic .................................................................................... 12

2.3.1 Teacher comfort .......................................................................................................... 12

2.3.2 Cultural disconnect ....................................................................................................... 12

2.4 Summary of Literature Review/ Conclusion .................................................................... 13

Chapter Three - Research Methodology ................................................................................... 15

3.0 Introduction of the Chapter ................................................................................................ 15

3.1 Research Approach ............................................................................................................ 15
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.2 Procedure/ Instruments of Data Collection</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3 Participants</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3.1 Sampling criteria</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3.2 Sampling procedures</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3.3 Participant biographies</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4 Data Analysis</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5 Ethical Review Procedures</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.6 Methodological Limitations and Strengths</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.7 Conclusion</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Four: Research Findings</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.0 Introduction of the Chapter</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1 Recognising, Celebrating and Learning from Cultural Diversity</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1.1 Cultural diversity in the classroom</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1.2 Cultural diversity in the school community</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2 Teaching Literacy Skills to Students</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2.1 Using engaging tasks</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3 Using Culturally Relevant and Responsive Practices to Develop Literacy</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3.1 Cultural Texts</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4 Teacher Identified Challenges (and the Benefits) to the Approach</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4.1 Struggling students</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4.2 External challenges</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4.3 Improved rapport with students</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4.4 Relationships with families</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.5 Conclusion of the Chapter</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Five: Implications</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.0 Introduction / Overview</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1 Key Findings and their Significance</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.2 Implications........................................................................................................................................36
  5.2.1 Implications for the broader educational research community.................................36
  5.2.2 Implications for my own professional identity and practice........................................37
5.3 Recommendations.........................................................................................................................37
5.4 Areas for Further Research........................................................................................................39
5.5 Concluding Comments................................................................................................................40
References...............................................................................................................................................41
Consent Form........................................................................................................................................45
Appendix B: Interview Protocol ........................................................................................................47
  Introductory Script..........................................................................................................................47
  Background Information.............................................................................................................47
  Teacher Perspectives/Beliefs .......................................................................................................47
  Teacher Practices........................................................................................................................48
  Challenges.......................................................................................................................................48
  Conclusion.........................................................................................................................................49
Chapter One: Introduction

1.0 Introduction of the Research Study

The population of Canada is one that is so very diverse. Each province has its own unique demographic of individuals, where almost one in every five people in Canada identifies as a visible minority (Statistics Canada, 2013). From this percentage of the population, just about thirty per cent of the individuals were born in Canada while 65% per cent were born outside of Canada and now live in Canada as immigrants (Statistics Canada, 2013). This group of visible minorities complies a cohort of the population that is expected to see an increase in numbers in the upcoming years (Statistics Canada, 2006). With just over six million individuals living in Canada identifying themselves as visible minorities (Statistics Canada, 2013), it is expected that these number would be reflected within the classroom as well. Therefore, when examining this information in the context of the educational system, it is essential to consider the cultural backgrounds of the students present in the classroom and for educators to deliver their instruction with methods that respond to the cultural needs of the students, the school and the community.

Literacy is defined as an essential skill that is “vital for the social and economic welfare of individuals and society” (Davidson, 2010). It is a skill that is so crucial the everyday lives and to the success of individuals. Literacy is usually thought of as the ability to read, comprehend and process information but this notion has shifted as society has changed (Statistics Canada, 2003). According to Statistics Canada (2003) just under half of all Canadians meet the basic literacy skills that allows them to function in day-to-day life. These skills are usually evident in an individual who has acquired a secondary school diploma or its equivalent. Therefore, it is important for educators to develop a strong, effective, yet engaging, literacy program to appeal to the interests and needs of their students.
1.1 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the qualitative research paper is to learn more about how educators can utilise culturally relevant and responsive practices to improve their literacy instruction. This is an inquiry that I find interesting and one that I am very passionate about. With the data that is collected from this research, I hope that more is learned about culturally relevant and responsive practices and the ways that teachers can integrate them into their literacy program.

Educators and the educational community need to be making greater strides in addressing and responding to the cultural and academic needs of their students. I hope to find out what is currently being done in schools and possibly identify areas of need or further research or change.

1.2 Research Problem

This study will investigate how culturally relevant and responsive teaching practices can benefit literacy instruction as well as explore whether teachers are aware of the potential advantages of this approach. Teachers may have lack of knowledge or experience working with this pedagogical approach, therefore there is a lack of relevant tasks or practices brought into the classrooms. Students of diverse cultural backgrounds are given instruction with methods and perspectives that are not reflective of their lives and experiences. Students are also given texts to study that are missing narratives, languages and characters that vary drastically from their identity. In context of this research, I believe that teachers can use culturally relevant and responsive practices to improve their literacy instruction.

1.3 Research Question

The main question that wishes to be explored is: In what ways can educators utilise cultural relevant and responsive practices to improve their literacy instruction? In the second chapter, this research study addresses these topics and delves deeper. Different literature sources
are reviewed in order to see what others have concluded about the topic. The literature review provides information and support for teachers and parents of students, enabling them to look for new strategies to improve the literacy skills of their students or children.

In addition to the literature review, several questions will be asked of the interview participants, in order to learn more about the topic. To fully understand how educators can utilise culturally relevant and responsive practices to improve their literacy instruction, the questions must address the beliefs and perspectives the educators have about literacy and culturally relevant and responsive practices, their personal teaching practices and the challenges that may arise when conducting their line of practice.

1.4 Background of the Researcher

The topic for this Master of Teaching Research Project is one that I hold very near and dear to my heart. Literacy is something that I am very passionate about. From a very early age I was able to develop a love for reading. My mother would take me to the library from infancy and would always ensure that I was writing or reading on my spare time as she felt that it was an important skill to practice. Through this interest I was able to become immersed in different styles of literature including poetry. I was fortunate enough to teach several poetry workshops for youth and facilitate poetry events in different settings. Through these experiences, I noticed that the students or youth were able to discover an interest in writing and were able to produce amazing pieces of work. On the other hand, I am fascinated by the use of culturally relevant and responsive practice in the classroom. Firstly, my interest comes from my very own identity as a future educator of colour. This allows me to have very different, direct and personal experiences that can be brought into my future classrooms.
When reflecting upon my own education, I do not remember experiencing instances where I saw my own images or culture reflected in the classroom as most classroom resources and texts were reflective of White and Eurocentric ideologies. Though I had a general love for literacy, it was difficult to relate to language lessons and tasks that I could not relate to. As I am aware of this disadvantage, I am reminded that it is not to be a personal deficit and I remain considerate of the experiences of students that may be hindered by the lack of culturally relevant and responsive practices in their learning.

I have taken any opportunity that I can to bring both culturally relevant and responsive practices. While many curriculum resources and texts may not always reflect me as a female, person of colour, I can only hope that I can show my students that they have a place in their education and their school environment. Their languages, traditions and images are important and worthy of being seen, celebrated and learned about.

1.5 Preview of MTRP

This Master of Teaching Research Project (MTRP) is composed of five chapters. The first chapter includes the introduction to the topic, the research problem, and the purpose of the study, the research questions that will be discussed and a reflection on my position as a researcher. The second chapter is a literature review that takes an in-depth look at what current research literature says about the topic. The third chapter of this research project reviews the research methodology and that provides biographies of each research participant, providing an in-depth outline of the research and ethical review process. In chapter four, the finding of the research is explored and explained; the data is organised into major themes and subthemes and the significance of the data is discussed. In chapter five, I explore the key findings of the
research and examine both the broad and narrow implications of the research findings. The research project concludes with a compilation of references and a list of appendices.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

2.0 Introduction of the Chapter

Ontario is a highly diverse province with just over two and a half million Ontarians identifying as visible minority or culturally diverse (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009). This demographic makes up over half of the total population of Canada. Schools within Ontario are bound to witness student populations that reflect this trend. These students are culturally diverse and require instruction that is relevant and responsive to their needs. Literacy is just one way in which students can have their cultural needs met throughout their educational path. This is a skills that is important for a successful and well-rounded individual to have a handle of. It is possible that many students in classrooms do not benefit from their literacy and language arts instruction as the lessons they are taught are not always relevant or inclusive. Research studies actually suggest that students that identify as a culturally diverse individual claim to experience negative, exclusive and Eurocentric classroom practices that do not align with their cultural circumstances (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Howard, 2001a, 2001b). This may mean that the perceptions of the teacher, the curriculum or the types of texts used during classroom instruction may be contributing factors to this issue (Parhar & Sensoy, 2011).

This chapter examines how teachers can utilise culturally relevant or responsive practices to improve their inclusive literacy and language arts instruction. I will use current literature to discuss the beliefs and perceptions that are help about culturally relevant or responsive practice and literacy instruction, I will look at the current practices that are being used by teachers and I will examine that challenges that pertain to the topic. The purpose of the literature review is to inform and reflect upon this issue and hopefully identify future implications or limitations.
2.1 Definitions

2.1.1 Literacy

According to UNESCO’s *Education for All Global Monitoring Report* (2006), literature was historically defined as an individual’s ability to read and write a variety of text forms. Students must be encouraged, prepared and capable to read or write the various styles of communication. Due to the modernization of our society, literacy goes far beyond the printed book. Teachers and parents should expose children to such a vast amount of literacy forms (UNESCO, 2006). These forms of literacy can come in either print or electronic format and may include: books, whether print or in the form of an e-book; advertisements; video or audio clips; or even newspapers.

Students today are becoming familiar with new types of literacy including media literacy. This is in response to the increased use of technology and media in an individual’s everyday life. To be media literate, an individual must be able to understand the digital media that they consume on a daily basis (Turner, 2012). Students may be encouraged to look at songs and song lyrics, documentaries, video clips, billboards, food packaging and poetry. Being media literate enables an individual to think critically of the media they interact with and observe it on a personal level.

Lastly, it is important to realise that there is a difference between literacy and language arts instruction. Teachers must be able to adapt, switching back and forth between the two as necessary (Melin, 2010; Tierney, Soter, O’Flahavan & McGinley, 1984). Each are separate entities that can be studied on their own or used to study one another. Literature can be studied on its’ own and be analysed based on the quality of the story and the writing style of the author. Language arts can be studied in a way that allows an individual to learn the ways how words
work together and how sentences are forms. Subsequently, teachers can utilise literature and develop literacy skills as a strategy to instruct their student in the language arts. Teachers can greatly benefit their students by choosing quality rich literary texts that supports and enhances the language learning of the class.

Vygotsky stated that literacy is essential to our social history and that learning in itself was a “social activity” (as cited in Pole, 2015, p. 120). This suggests that literacy and learning greatly impact the way an individual develops and the experiences that they may face (Pole, 2015). Vygotsky also argues that an individual must comprehend to compose (as cited in Glenn, 2007). Students must be able to analyse and understand the texts they are presented in order to create their own writing pieces.

### 2.1.2 Culturally Relevant and Responsive Practice

Culturally relevant and responsive practice (usually noted as pedagogy) is terminology used to discuss the various ways that educators can introduce a student’s cultural background and experiences into their teaching and learning within the classroom (Ladson-Billing, 1994; Gay, 2000; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Educators are encouraged to acknowledge that their students learn in different ways and can learn according to the context of their languages, cultural backgrounds and social identity (Ladson-Billings, 1994). These cultural differences are to be recognised, celebrated and learned about within the classroom in order to nurture an inclusive and supportive learning environment.

There are three main dimensions that are central to culturally relevant and responsive practice. These dimensions include: the institutional dimension, the personal dimension and the instructional dimension (Richards, Brown & Forde, 2006).
Institutional

The institutional dimension alludes to the fact the leaders and administrators of the education systems. It examines the ways in which the values and mission of the school system is reflected with its policies and methodologies. Educators are encouraged to become knowledgeable of the various ways that students are potentially oppressed or marginalised due to the practices of the institution.

Personal

The personal dimension alludes to educators committing to cultural relevant and responsive practices and how they teach in order to support the cultural and social needs of their students. Culturally responsive educators must be reflective of their own biases and yearn to learn about their students and their needs.

Instructional

The instructional dimension places the responsibility on the educator to be knowledgeable of the students that they have in their classrooms. With this knowledge basis, educators should develop classroom ideals and practices that promote cultural relevance.

2.2 Current Practices and Strategies

There are many instances where teachers are effectively utilising culturally relevant or responsive practices in their classrooms, and specifically during literacy and language arts lessons.

2.2.1 Ministry and curriculum

Teachers should be looking for ways to integrate culturally-relevant methods into their instruction in order to bridge the gap that has been caused the disparity of cultural and “Eurocentric” educational ideologies (Parhar & Sensoy, 2011). The curriculum is projected
through a lens that is white privilege and Eurocentric perspectives. The perceptive that are assumed to differ from those of the majority are typically ignored or diminished (Behm, 2008). There is a need for increased, valid and meaningful representation of narratives and leaders from a variety of individuals of different cultural backgrounds.

The persistent Eurocentric educational ideologies presented in the curriculum perpetuates the assumption that those views and narratives are more valued as opposed to those that do not align (Ghosh, 2010). Teachers and educational systems are likely to use these curriculum documents and teach through the lens of Eurocentric ideologies because that is what is available and changes will not be viable until other perspectives are validated and represented within the curriculum.

2.2.2 Culturally relevant and responsive practice inside the classroom

Children need to be able to see their identities reflected in their classroom resources (Celinska, 2015). This can mean a number of things. Children are expecting to see their race, ethnicity, culture, traditions, languages, beliefs, values and abilities. Celinska (2015) states that teachers needs to create communities of learners within their classrooms where their unique identities are accepted, reflected and praised.

While it is important that educators find and utilise different ways to address the cultural needs of their students it is essential that it is not mistaken for “tokenism” (Ladson- Billings, 1994). Culturally relevant and responsive practices go beyond the notion of a cultural celebration or display, and it is not to be defined solely as multiculturalism (Gay, 2000; Villegas & Lucas, 2002).
2.2.3 Cultural texts

A selection of culturally relevant texts and writing activities would greatly benefit the reading and writing skills of students, especially students who are English language learners or students who identify as minorities. Every culture has some form of literature that they value and students should have the opportunity to study a variety of cultural texts (Melin, 2010; Pole, 2015). There are two main ways that cultural texts can greatly effect a student’s learning. The first way is that student can explore texts that are culturally relevant to them or from a culture whose literature is rarely studied in schools (Melin, 2010; Park, Simpson, Bicknell & Michaels, 2015). According to researchers Barrett & Bower (2011) students can become empowered by making connections with texts and they can expand their knowledge of different cultures. When students are empowered and engaged in their learning then the effort that they put in their writing will increase. Cultural texts may also be useful to English language learners hoping to improve their literacy skills. Teachers can use works of literature written in their original language or a student’s native language and have the student translate (Park et al., 2015). Students, through the translation of texts, become immersed in the English language and familiar with its intricacies. Students learn how some phrases, when translated, lose their meaning, have multiple meanings and how turn of phrases or slang would work.

2.2.4 Teacher attitudes or perceptions

There is a correlation that is present between the attitudes and perceptions held by teachers and student engagement with the literacy lessons. Teachers mold and adapt their pedagogical approaches to teaching based on their interests or biases pertaining to literacy (Fang, 1996). Teachers who show interests in certain activities or subjects will essentially enjoy teaching the subject, or find ways to make the subject engaging since they have an interest in it.
2.3 Challenges Pertaining to the Topic

Without the effective use of culturally relevant or responsive practice, culturally or ethnically diverse students find that their experiences in school are quite exclusive and devalue their identity (Fordham & Ogbo, 1986; Howard, 2001a, 2001b). Students that are not part of the majority or dominant culture feel that they are not given the same opportunities as their peers or were not being instructed with lessons that are relevant to them (Parhar & Sensoy, 2011). There is still a need for all educators to be trained and prepared to calibrate their practice to respond the vast diversity of their students.

2.3.1 Teacher comfort

Obviously, just like the diversity of the population of Canada, teacher demographics will also share cultural uniqueness. Both teachers and students have the opportunities to be exposed to individuals from a variety of cultural backgrounds. While this exposure may happen, not all educators are comfortable or find that they are prepared to teach about different cultural perspectives and views (Chandler, 2007; Parhar & Sensoy, 2011). Teachers may not have sufficient knowledge about cultures or cultural issues that their students face. Due to this discomfort or lack of confidence, educators may find themselves becoming “silent” or hesitant about addressing certain issues to avoid possible conflicts or backlash (Chandler, 2007). These silenced perspectives are left ignored and students are not exposed to narratives and cultures due to the biases or comfort of their teacher. Valuable stories are left untold and important lessons are not taught.

2.3.2 Cultural disconnect

While there is an increasing number of teachers, both pre-service and experienced, being trained and educated in the use of culturally-relevant practices, there are possible challenges
concerning the school system and the curriculum. When examining curriculum documents in a Canadian context, educational instruction seems to have Western or Eurocentric influences or interests (Parhar & Sensoy, 2011). Students seem to be disconnected and disengaged from school and feel that their cultural or racial identity is dismissed in some cases. It has been indicated in research studies that students, specifically those of Afro decent, experience lower levels of academic achievement and engagement when their identity or performance do not align with the expectations of the school systems (Celinska, 2015). Historically, students of diverse backgrounds find themselves struggling with their schoolwork or over-represented in special education classes.

2.4 Summary of Literature Review/ Conclusion

Current research literature can provide a basis of knowledge when examining the ways in which educators can utilise culturally relevant and responsive practices to improve their literacy instruction. Having a basic knowledge and familiarity of the issue is important and essential to the process of making possible changes in the future of the education field. Literacy and culturally relevant and responsive practices must be defined to act as this basis. Currently, there are different practices and strategies that educators are using in order to bridge both literacy and culturally relevant and responsive practices. Changes can be made within the curriculum and the Ministry to challenge Eurocentric ideologies and better respond to the needs and cultures of the students. Educators should be mindful of their efforts to utilise culturally relevant and responsive practices within their classrooms while also utilising cultural texts. Educators must also be reflective of their own attitudes and perceptions regarding teaching literacy. Lastly, it is crucial to be aware of the challenges that teachers face as they enact their practice in their classrooms.
Educators are to be mindful of their own comfort levels when teaching but also reflect on the ways that there may be a possible cultural disconnect present between them and their students.

In chapter three, the research methodology for the study is examined and discussed in depth. The research approach and procedures for data collection will be described. A thorough analysis of how the research will be conducted will be provided and the ethical protocol will be described. In addition, the sampling procedures and criteria for choosing interview participants will be addressed and the biographies for the participants will be provided. Lastly, the limitations and strengths of the research will be stated.
Chapter Three - Research Methodology

3.0 Introduction of the Chapter

The third chapter of this research paper provides an in-depth look at the methodology of the research process. Through this, I will examine the research approach, the procedures that were used and the instruments of data collection. Next, I will specify how the participants were chosen. I will explain the procedures of the data analysis and the ethical review. I will also describe both the methodological limitations and strengths. Lastly, I will conclude the chapter with a short summary of the main points that were discussed.

3.1 Research Approach

Creswell (2013) states that there is no one way to design a qualitative study. This enables a sense of freedom when considering this form of inquiry. Effective qualitative researchers should generally keep three concepts in mind when conducting their own inquiry. The qualitative research that I completed consisted of reviewing the current literature and research completed by others and conducting interviews with two teachers. These interviews were semi-structured and conducted in person. Questions were formulated before the interview and were made to be open-ended in order to promote conversation and elaboration. Both the researcher and the participants are vital to qualitative research.

3.2 Procedure/ Instruments of Data Collection

The primary instrument of data collection were semi-structured interviews to obtain information on my research topic from experienced teachers. Semi-structured interview protocol allows the researcher to design the interview to fit the need of their research. These semi-structured interviews took place face-to-face with the participants chosen. Interview questions
were designed to be open-ended which encouraged the participant to discuss freely and elaborate where needed. Creswell (2013) states that qualitative research approaches tend to have emergent design properties. This would allow the researcher to build upon new findings as they are uncovered. Creswell also suggests that the researcher can be utilised as an instrument of data collection. The researcher frames their study based on their perspectives, possible biases and the general characteristics of qualitative research. These interviews were fairly brief, an average of forty-five to sixty minutes in length, and were recorded on an electronic device.

3.3 Participants

I will use this section to explain how I select my participants and how I will figure out the different methods to recruit teachers to assist my research. I will also include a section that enables me to introduce each of my research participants and to conduct future alterations in this MTRP.

3.3.1 Sampling criteria.

For my research, I conducted individual interviews with a small sample of teachers. This small sample consisted of three elementary division teachers. I found it essential that these teachers are or have been certified by the Ontario College of Teachers. Teachers with more than three years of teaching experience were preferred but not required. Teachers who have been teaching for longer will have been exposed to more in the classroom and experienced changes in the different cohorts of students that pass through their classroom every year. It was also important that the teachers had a positive, personal relationship with literacy and had experience teaching literacy in their classrooms. To further align the qualities of the teachers to the purpose of the research study, the teachers must have had an interest in culturally relevant and responsive practice or experience with teaching with this approach.
3.3.2 Sampling procedures.

In order to pick the teachers for the semi-structured interviews, I relied on contacts that I have made throughout my time at OISE. I sent out emails and phone calls to teachers and principals that I had made contact with and I had assistance from my classmates and instructors. In addition to these forms of contacts, I also enlisted help from educators online from teacher forums. This allowed the teachers to contact me, privately, if interested rather than them feel obligated to participate. In all cases, my participants were made aware of the breadth of the research, the questions, and the sampling and ethical procedures.

3.3.3 Participant biographies.

This section is used to provide the biographies of the three interview participants

George has been teaching for nine years in the Greater Toronto Area and at the time of the interview was teaching a grade one and two split French Immersion class. In previous years, George has taught students from grades one through five.

Venice was a teacher from Eastern European heritage. They were born and raised in Romania and lived there until the age of thirty-three, when they immigrated to Canada with their family. In Romania, Venice was already an English teacher for seven years. When they moved to Canada they realised that they had to get recertified as a teacher to align with the requirements for teachers. Venice enrolled in teacher’s college at York University and has been a primary/junior division teachers since 2004. At the time of the interview, Venice was teaching a grade one and two split class but stated that they have taught grades one and three in the past. They described their relationship with literacy as a positive and memorable one where they were exposed to a variety of text from a young age. Through this, they were able to grow a love for reading.
Abi was a teacher of Armenian and Turkish descent. They have been formally teaching for ten years and at the time of the interview was teaching a grade one and two split class. Abi had experience as a primary specialist with a literacy focus and previously completed their degree in Early Childhood Education prior to their teaching education. They believed that literacy is a great form of personal expression and creativity.

3.4 Data Analysis

Data analysis is an ongoing process in qualitative research studies (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). This process, if illustrated, would resemble and function just like a funnel. At the top of the funnel, or at the beginning of the research, ideas are very broad and general. As time and research progresses or as one moves to the bottom of the funnel, findings become much more specific and detailed. When reviewing the data collected during the semi-structured interview process, recurring themes will be identified. Similarities and recurring themes or ideas will be noted and compared to research found in current literature (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). The findings collected from the data collection and comparison should result in more explicit research. Through this process new questions emerge and the cyclical motion of research continues. These identified themes are to be further discussed in the fourth chapter of this research project.

3.5 Ethical Review Procedures

There are many concepts that must be considered as I review my ethical review procedures. These concepts will include things like: gaining consent and ensuring confidentiality, informing the participants of the right to withdraw, the risks that may arise from their participation and data storage. Creswell (2013) suggests that researchers should be aware of these issues throughout the process of research. Issues can arise at any stage of research and are constantly evolving due to researchers remaining sensitive to the needs of the participants.
In order to protect the participant I had to ensure the confidentiality of their identity. To fulfill this, there are several aspects that needed to be addressed. All of the teacher participants were assigned a pseudonym to protect their identity and each was informed of their right to withdraw their participation from the research study. This right to withdraw was valid throughout the whole process and participation could have been withdrawn any stage of the research. Not only were the identities of the participants protected, with the use of pseudonyms, but any identifying markers that may have indicated a school or student was excluded from the research. Any audio recordings of the interview were stored and protected on an electronic recording device. Each participant was provided with a copy of the transcript that corresponds with their interview. This was done to ensure accuracy of what was said and is a common courtesy to the participant as it allowed them to view their words and make any appropriate changes. The data was protected by password and all copies will be deleted five years after the date of the interviews. At the time of the interview process, there were no known risks for participating in this research study. If any risks were discovered, then they were minimised by ensuring that the participant was informed of the research, that the interview questions were reviewed with the participants before the interview and by making sure that they were given access to the transcripts. All participants was provided with a consent letter which they were to sign. This consent letter outlined the research study, described any ethical issues and stated participation expectations.

3.6 Methodological Limitations and Strengths

There were limitations and strengths present in this research study. A limitation for this study was the small sample size. Due to time restraints and approved ethical parameters, only a few teachers were selected for the semi-structured interviews. Approval was not given to
interview students, parents, or to make observations within the classrooms. In regards to the small sample size, the data collected from the interviews may be perceived as generalizations. It will be essential to remember that all teacher experiences are personal and may vary based on the individual. The data collected is not to be deduced as the only possibility or answer.

Strengths are also apparent in this research study. Due to the nature of the semi-structured interviews and the use of open-ended questions, the participant responses will be varied and personal to each person. This allows the participant to have the freedom to speak and elaborate their views as they see fit. Different data will be collected from each participant as it stems from different perspectives and experiences. There is room for discussion and the interviews are generally informal. The participants can be relaxed and better communicate their views on the research topic.

3.7 Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter summarised and outlines the methodology for this research study. This research study utilises a qualitative research approach, in the form of a literature review and semi-structured interviews to examine findings. This chapter concludes with the ethical review procedures along with the methodological limitations and strengths.

The fourth chapter discusses the findings that were concluded from the research. The information taken from the interview are discussed, major themes are identified and subthemes are presented.
Chapter Four: Research Findings

4.0 Introduction of the Chapter

In this chapter, I will report and discuss the research findings that were drawn from the three structured interviews that I conducted with my participants. The data from the interviews are connected to the literature found in the second chapter of this research paper. As mentioned in the previous chapters, this research was conducted in order to further examine the ways in which educators can utilise cultural relevant and responsive practices to improve their literacy instruction. The three participants, referred to here using the pseudonyms: George, Abi, and Venice, are experienced educators who have taught in the Ontario school system for a period ranging from nine to twelve years. The data that was collected from the three interviews was transcribed, coded into themes and sub-themes, and analysed for the sake of the chapter.

Through the analysis of the data, I was able to identify and organise the information into four major themes. These themes and sub-themes were identified within the data and consistent among the participants and aim to answer the main research question: how can educators utilise culturally relevant and responsive practices to improve their literacy instruction. The themes include: 1) recognising, celebrating and learning from cultural diversity in the classroom, 2) teaching literacy skills to students, 3) using culturally relevant and responsive practices to develop literacy and 4) teacher identified challenges (and benefits) to the approach. Throughout this chapter, I will report in depth on the findings drawn from the interviews and I will merge these findings with the current literature that pertains to the topic of culturally relevant and responsive practices and literacy instruction.
4.1 Recognising, Celebrating and Learning from Cultural Diversity

Classrooms comprised of students of various cultural backgrounds are quite common; with Ontario being one of the most culturally diverse provinces in Canada (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009). Just over two and a half million individuals living in Ontario identify as a visible minority and that makes up over half of the visible minority population within Canada (Ontario Ministry of Canada, 2009). Teachers are to be prepared to acknowledge, celebrate, learn and also teach their students about the cultural similarities and differences of others. This is completed in a variety of ways and students truly benefit from it when it is implemented effectively in the classroom setting. Within the theme, two sub-themes were identified, including: 1) cultural diversity in the classroom; and 2) cultural diversity in the school community.

4.1.1 Cultural diversity in the classroom.

Students need a learning environment where they can feel safe, learn openly and be accepted by their peers and educators. Classrooms have become so much more culturally diverse and this change has caused positive influences on the learning experiences of students. When students see their cultures, their languages and their traditions or values reflected positively in their learning environment, they experience greater rapport and trust through the shared or similar life experiences (Celinska, 2015). As stated in the interview with Venice, “teachers should provide students… opportunities to share their cultural stories and traditions in an atmosphere of respect and acknowledgement”. The emphasis of using this approach in the classroom is to not engage in the “tokenism” of a student’s culture but to integrate culturally relevant and responsive practice into the curriculum and truly create work that is meaningful to
the students. The participants were very adamant about the need for mutual respect in their classrooms.

During the interview, Abi mentioned that even the act of working in culturally diverse communities ensures that the demographics of the classroom become “so unique and special”. The students are able to be surrounded by classmates that may different culturally form themselves. “Students are able to work with other students from all over”, Abi explained. The slight microcosm that occurs within the classrooms ensures that this happens. Students become more comfortable and open to working with others but at the same time, their curiosity is sparked. Children are naturally curious and this curiosity “should be used as a learning opportunity for everyone in the class, parent and teacher included.”

4.1.2 Cultural diversity in the school community.

Beyond the classroom, students must be able to witness their cultural background within their school community. The participants commented on the relevance of celebrating cultural diversity within the community surrounding the school that a teacher’s students are from. Abi directly suggested that:

Many schools have already begun offering school documents in various languages to help translate necessary texts. As well, as a school community, we need to acknowledge the cultural diversity and celebrate it. We realize how special it is to have people from all over the world in our classrooms and learn from their experiences.

Students need to see that their community supports them and acknowledges their purpose within it (Celinska, 2015). Yet on another hand, the benefits of diverse and culturally supportive communities are great. Individuals are exposed to different cultures, languages and traditions; this makes it familiar to them. Certain aspects of culture no longer are “weird” or “strange”.
These attitudes, beliefs and actions, when strengthened within the surrounding communities, makes their way into the classrooms where students can replicate them.

Relationships can also be built amongst the parents and guardians of students. Venice expanded upon this issue in their interview:

I believe that creating a strong connection with the parents will definitely help students of diverse cultures. Just as we get to know each child and their needs, we should also get to know individual families and understand their needs and cultural priorities.

Venice found that it was important for teachers to start with a strong foundation of trust with the parents and guardians of the students. This relationship can only truly happen, if the lines of communication are established and maintained appropriately by both parties. Journals, “Chai and Chats,” notes in the agendas, calendars or online communications forums are popular methods that teachers currently utilize.

4.2 Teaching Literacy Skills to Students

Every educator has their own unique method of teaching literacy to their students. During the interview process, the teacher participants all identified a major factor that guided their practices. Each participant stated that their personal love and perception of literacy allowed them to create a basis for literacy instruction in their classrooms. Each of the interview participants felt that they generally had a positive relationship with all the aspects of literacy. As Abi stated in their interview, “Literacy opens doors in all directions, whether it be communicating in relationships with others, strengths within the school setting, or in the future employment opportunities for people. Literacy is also a great form of personal expression and creativity.” This participant’s perception of literacy was that it was stepping stone or gateway to practicing and improving a variety of skills. Abi acknowledged that they have “a very personal relationship
with literacy.” where they felt that they were able to show their love with reading and writing with their students. This positive relationship is vital to literacy instruction as it shows the students that literacy can be fun and exciting as well (Fang, 1996; Turner, 1995). Abi suggested that students want to be able to see that their teacher liked literacy as even the students who claimed to dislike reading or writing would be open to trying if their teacher seemed excited. This positive perception and relationship with literacy acted as a foundation for literacy instruction and truly guided the practices and methods of the educators.

4.2.1 Using engaging tasks.

The teacher participants also suggested that students needed to be engaged or interested in their tasks, as that usually predicted great student understanding and success. Abi stated that “having such a wide range of literacy levels and academic abilities, it makes it more challenging to keep all students engaged in daily tasks.” Abi spoke about how, despite the breadth of factors that they encountered in their classroom, they were passionate about creating lesson plans and activities that appealed to all of their students.

Teachers can only reach all their students and appeal to them if they offer their instruction in a variety of instructional methods. George, a grade one teacher, states that they have to adapt their instruction to meet the needs of their students who are coming out of kindergarten, many at different levels or abilities. They suggest that finding out where every student is academically is a good place to start:

I like to start units or lessons with mind maps. I want to be able to assess where my students are, what they already know and what we need to work on. From there, I am able to create further lessons and respond to the needs and interests of my students.
Educators need to look for ways to assess where their students are and to build upon their interests (Barrett & Bower, 2011; Fang, 1996). With this method, the participant felt that the students were able to have “personalised” tasks or lessons that met them where they were academically and enabled them to grasp the concepts being learn in class.

4.3 Using Culturally Relevant and Responsive Practices to Develop Literacy

All three teacher participants spoke not only about the importance teaching literacy, but also the significance of reaching out to all students on a cultural level. As stated above, students perform better in environments where they can view their cultures, traditions or languages displayed (Celinska, 2015). Even though George stated that their school did not have a very culturally diverse demographic, they felt the need to teach their students about the various cultures that are in the City of Toronto. “We have a few cultures in our school. I try to work with the librarian to teach the kids about different cultural stories and expose them to so much more than what they are used to,” suggests George. They felt that it was important for students to learn literacy through different cultural perspectives.

Abi found that they were able to engage their students in culturally relevant literacy practices by having them participate in creative writing lessons and journal writing. Utilising these tasks allowed the students to “context of their work to their own personal culture” where students could write and reflect upon their own experiences. Students gain the ability to “learn and bring other cultural traditions into our classroom celebrations.”

4.3.1 Cultural Texts

Cultural texts can be utilised during literacy instruction in a variety of ways. In all actuality, cultural texts are not solely considered literature. These texts can include: musical pieces, photos, and other classroom resources. One participant, Venice spoke about how they
developed the literacy program for their students: “I strive to recognize and honour the various cultural differences in my classroom and use texts that reflect stories, histories, and characters that students will be able to relate to.” Parhar and Sensoy (2011) discussed this within their research, as they suggested that students need classroom resources and texts that relate to them culturally. These resources should move away from the “Eurocentric” ideologies or perspectives that are typically utilised (Fordham & Ogbo, 1986; Howard, 2001a, 2001b).

The participants felt and responded to the immense responsibly to react and meet the needs of their students. Venice spoke about how they used time during their literacy blocks to explore cultural texts that were not usually used in “typical” classrooms. They hoped that by conducting their classes in this manner, they would be able to “connect with families and bridge the gap between the students’ personal and school lives.” Venice wanted to create a sense of familiarity, culturally speaking, for their students. The participants spoke about the ever-changing demographics of the students in their classrooms and the vast diversity within the Greater Toronto Area.

4.4 Teacher Identified Challenges (and the Benefits) to the Approach

This theme is a direct response and a summary to the questions found in the “Challenges” section; that were provided to the interview participants. Throughout the interview process, two major challenges and two major benefits of incorporating culturally relevant and responsive practices into their literacy instruction were discussed by the teacher participants. The challenges include: dealing with struggling students, and various external challenges that teachers face, and the benefits include: improved rapport with students, and increased relationships with families.
4.4.1 Struggling students.

Students develop their literacy skills at different rates and some may be progressing slower than their peers in their class. When working with these students, teachers need to adapt their instruction to benefit and accommodate their students. During the interview, this issue was discussed and the participants described different ways that they reached out and appealed to the struggling students in their classrooms. Abi felt that their approach worked well with their students:

I think the best approach is modelling. Model the love and enjoyment of reading and writing and often students will find that joy within themselves as well. If students are encouraged with a positive voice, and have their needs met, then they will be set up for personal and academic success.

This participant used this method during their instruction and found that their students responded well to it. It is closely related to the perceptions that are held by the interview participants. Through modelling and voice, the teachers can display a positive and excited demeanor regarding literacy tasks (Turner, 1995). The participant felt that when they were engaged and happy about the tasks in class, the attitudes of the students soon followed.

Venice also had their own ideas about this during their interview. They enjoyed giving their student choices where they would be able to work according to what they are interested in. Research shows that when students are given this freedom, they are more likely to become engaged in their work and be more accountable for their learning (Fang, 1996). This promotes a sense of curiosity in the students, as they become more excited to learn and more eager to complete different tasks. Venice indicated this during their interview:
Students will be more interested in writing if they are allowed to write about what interests them, instead of imposing a certain topic. Trying different forms of writing like poems, short stories, songs, plays, and reports might excite their curiosity and make them more willing to put things on paper.

Venice also urged that not all the responsibility was to be placed on the students, they felt that teachers should be good “tour guides” of literacy. They felt that it was important that they showed their students different stories from various cultures, genres and possibly even languages. This exposed the students in their class to different types of texts that they might not have been aware of or have access to. The participant also felt that their students appreciated read-aloud time. During this time, teachers should be sharing reading strategies, accommodating for struggling readers by verbalising the book and by choosing new books that appeal to the students. Lastly, the simplicity of being honest with students is something that truly benefits the class, especially struggling readers and writers. “Share you reading experiences with the students”, suggests Venice. Students really enjoy knowing that they can relate to their teachers and may be comforted in learning that their teachers may have also had the same struggles with reading and writing.

4.4.2 External challenges.

There are apparent challenges that teachers face that are completely out of their control. They cannot usually be easily rectified and sometimes make instructional time difficult to prepare for or execute. Nonetheless, it is still the responsibility of the teachers to adapt and work with what they have available to them and to the best of their abilities. The participants cited challenges this included: lack of resources and support, large class sizes, behavioural needs of their students in the class and “not having enough time to do what you want with your students.”
George explains, “One can hope that you have a good library in your school. Not all schools have the privilege to have fully stocked libraries.” They suggested that, given what they have, teachers are trying their very best to make their students successful and sometimes they have to be very creative to compensate for the challenges that they face.

4.4.3 Improved rapport with students.

Building strong and positive relationships with one’s students is something that the teacher participants felt was very important. This meant that teachers are encouraged to learn about their students on a deeper level. Educators would be knowledgeable of the interests, cultures and needs of their students. Using this method allows the teacher to build not only better, more trusting relationships with their students but to establish safe and inclusive classroom environments (Parhar & Sensoy, 2011). George spoke proudly of their practice: “This is our classroom. It’s not my classroom only. It’s not just yours. It’s not just a specific child. It’s ours, we need to work to make sure that everybody feels good, and feels happy in wanting to learn.” They felt as that students play a large part in making the classroom work. It was not solely the responsibility of the teacher or the student but for everyone to do their job to make the classroom successful. George wanted to create these safe and inclusive learning environments for their students. They felt that if the students felt safe then learning would happen easily and that the students would feel comfortable enough to speak to their teacher. George stated that:

The main thing is you want your kids to feel comfortable. When they feel comfortable, then they’re able to learn the best that they can. Establishing classroom rules, there has to be some structure. Creating a rapport is making them feel like they belong there, like they’re useful, like they have a voice, like they can try things out. Encouraging making mistakes as opposed to trying to be perfect.
4.4.4 Relationships with families.

The educators suggested the importance of having family involvement in a student’s education. The participants felt as though it was just as important to maintain relationships with the parents and guardians as it was with the students. Venice stated that “teachers should be welcoming and approachable, which helps to build a sense of belonging and trust for students and their families.” They spoke about how teachers should really be looking for ways to respond to the vast cultural diversity within their school community, which happened to be in Toronto. Teachers should provide students and their parents’ opportunities to share their cultural stories and traditions in an atmosphere of respect and acknowledgement. Creating that strong connection with the parents helps the students of diverse cultures. Educators are encouraged to “get to know individual families and understand their needs and cultural priorities,” as Venice suggests. They were passionate about the involvement and direct lines of communication that they worked hard to maintain with the families of their students.

4.5 Conclusion of the Chapter

In conclusion, throughout this chapter I reviewed the findings presented in the data as collected from the structured interviews that were conducted with three primary level teachers. The findings of the research supported what was suggested by current literature yet also highlighted various challenges faced by teachers. Abi, George and Venice all felt that culturally relevant and responsive practices allowed for effective literacy instruction. All three used different cultural practices such as journaling and utilising various texts to guide their practice and felt that their students benefitted greatly from it. The foundation of their practice came from a general love of reading and positive perception of literacy. All felt that their passion for literacy
was shown in their classrooms and encouraged the students to also be excited about it. Students became engaged in literacy tasks when their teacher showed interest.

Students became engaged in literacy tasks when their teacher showed interest, and even more so when the methods and texts utilised recognised and celebrated cultural diversity. Teachers can ensure that this happens not only in the classroom but in the bigger school community. Students yearn to see themselves and their cultures within their educational paths. This would call for teachers to move beyond the “tokenism” of what may be considered cultural acknowledgements and celebrations. It goes further than that and calls for teachers to really and truly engage in tasks that respectfully encourage learning and discussions about other traditions, cultures and languages. With this, teachers should also be establishing and maintain open lines of communication with the families of their students.

Every teacher face a number of challenges and factors that may affect their teaching. These may include factors that can be changed or worked with and things that may be easily fixed or even controlled. Teachers may be able to start by ensuring that the attitudes or perceptions that they hold about literacy do not inflict negative influences on their students. Students benefit when their teachers show them that learning is fun and engaging. These challenges, as the teacher participants suggest, make it difficult for educators without adequate support or resources to effectively integrate culturally relevant and responsive practices into their instruction.

Next, in the fifth chapter, I will discuss the importance of my research findings. By doing this I will look at the ways in which my research potentially impacts me, as a future educator, and the teaching community. These implications will be thoroughly examined in both broad terms and more specifically in terms of their implications for teachers, administrators, and
teacher education. Furthermore, I will identify areas for future research and suggest recommendations based upon my own research findings.
Chapter Five: Implications

5.0 Introduction / Overview

The present study was designed to learn more about how instructors utilise culturally relevant and responsive practices to improve their literacy instruction. The finding serves to support the extant literature pertaining to the literacy instructional practices of educators and how culturally relevant and responsive strategies are used throughout it. The findings also specifically tell us more about the experiences of educators within their practice. This chapter summarizes the research findings, highlights the present study’s implications for various stakeholders, provides several recommendations and suggests directions for future research.

5.1 Key Findings and their Significance

The present study was generated to gain knowledge and further understand how teachers utilise culturally relevant and responsive practices to improve their literacy instruction. The collected data supported current, existing literature yet also raised challenges that teachers faced when incorporating culturally relevant and responsive practices into their literacy instruction. Upon the completion of the interviews with the three experienced educators, a rigorous analysis revealed four important themes that were identified within the data. The emerged themes included:

1. Recognising, celebrating and learning from cultural diversity in the classroom;
2. Teaching literacy skills to students;
3. Using culturally relevant and responsive practices to develop literacy; and
4. Teacher identified challenges (and benefits) to the approach.

The first theme, recognising, celebrating and learning from cultural diversity in the classroom, served to remind us of the importance of students witnessing their cultures being
recognised, discussed, learned about and celebrated in respectful and meaningful ways. The various cultures of the students should be recognised and celebrated in both the classroom and the larger school communities. Educators can work towards building rapport with their students and student benefit as they see their cultures reflected within the educational environment (Celinska, 2015). The findings provide important information as to how students and their families specifically benefit from the environment of respect and communication that teachers can foster.

The second theme, teaching literacy skills to students, served to describe the current ways in which teachers taught literacy to their students. While there is no one way nor one correct method that should be utilised to teach literacy, it is noted that a basic, positive perception of literacy, held by the teacher, benefits the students; as students become excited about topics that their teachers show interest in (Fang, 1996; Turner, 1995). During their interviews, all three participants affirmed that their personal relationships with reading and writing was positively modelled in their classroom and the students were able to work on literacy tasks that they were interested and eager to work on. Educators are able to appeal to their students by creating a variety of tasks for their students to work on. Tasks should be differentiated and “personalised” to fit the educational needs and interests of the students.

The third theme, using culturally relevant and responsive practices to develop literacy, reminds us of the ways in which educators can teach literacy skills while meaningfully incorporating cultural pedagogy into their practice. Students learn better when they see their own cultures, languages, images and traditions reflected within the classroom (Parhar & Sensoy, 2011). Educators should look for ways to bring the cultures of their students into the classroom.
The fourth theme, teacher identified challenges (and benefits) to the approach, served to explain the advantages and disadvantages that educators faced when actually trying to incorporate culturally relevant and responsive practices into their literacy instruction. Teachers find that they are not always supported in their classrooms and school environments to respond to all the learning needs of their students. On the other hand, this teaching approach benefited many students and their families as it created safe and inclusive learning communities when rapport is built and maintained between all parties involved.

5.2 Implications

This research study was able to highlight issues that educators may encounter when teaching literacy and issues that policymakers should be made aware of. The implications will be described below as followed: first; implications for the broader educational research community and second; implications for my own professional identity and practice.

5.2.1 Implications for the broader educational research community.

The research study includes vital implications that would call for educational reform. In broad strokes, this study should serve as a reminder to policymakers and curriculum developers that culturally relevant and responsive practices should be incorporated into literacy instruction. Educators must be looking for ways to respond to the students that they have in their classrooms and the cultural demographics of the school communities in which they are situated.

Consistent with the research of Parhar and Sensoy (2011), students have been facing a cultural disconnect from what they are taught in their classrooms. Students may find themselves unable to locate themselves within the resources used in class and do not see their cultures or interests reflected in their tasks and the school communities. This causes a sense of disengagement with school and the tasks that they are given. Students then become disinterested
in their work and find it difficult to complete said tasks. This approach would be a direct
response to the changing demographics of our Ontario school system and to the cultural needs of
our students.

5.2.2 Implications for my own professional identity and practice.

The research findings hold important implications for all educators, including myself.
Through the data collected, a safe, inclusive learning environment is needed to properly instruct
literacy skills with a culturally relevant and responsive approach. At the current time, teachers
may find that the curriculum, though revisions are occasionally made, still hold onto
“Eurocentric” ideologies and perspectives that may not be conducive or reflective of the
community in which the students and the schools are located. It would be important that students
are able to see themselves within their task and resources so they can better connect and remain
engaged with it.

Moreover, teachers need to be vigilant and reflect upon their own practices, biases and
perception and the effect that they may have on their students. All three participants cited that
their positive relationships with literacy guided their instruction. I can ensure that I maintain a
positive relationship with literacy and do not let my biases or dislike for certain task be the
forefront for my practice. Students find it difficult to enjoy task when their teachers do not show
a sense of excitement or interest in it. In my own practice I would ensure this.

5.3 Recommendations

The implications of the present study point specifically to several recommendations for
ministries of education, school administrators, and teachers. Four recommendations will be
outlined below:
1. Improving the ways in which educators are prepared to teach with a culturally relevant and responsive approach;

2. Curriculum changes to provide more cultural perspectives;

3. Improving educational support within schools; and

4. Responding to the needs and interests of the students.

The first recommendation highlights the importance for improving the ways in which educators are prepared to teach with a culturally relevant and responsive approach. This would first call for teacher education programs to better prepare their teacher candidates in learning about the basics of culturally relevant and responsive practices. In-service educators should be exposed to frequent professional development and must be trained in the different ways that they can respond to the culturally needs of their students. It is important that this training is mandatory and is not left only as the onus of the educator. Educational institutes and school administration should be doing their due diligence to ensure all teachers can utilise culturally relevant and responsive practices in their instruction.

The second recommendation, curriculum changes to provide more cultural perspectives, suggests that policy changes need to be made on a boarder scale. The Ontario curriculum can and should be revised to reflect the diverse population that the province consists of. Ideologies and perspectives promoted within the curriculum would support a more multicultural approach and boarder communities would be reflected. With these changes, the resources, texts and images used in class would also start to be mindful of the multiculturalism of our schools. This approach, of course, speaks to the Ontario curriculum, but similar changes to curriculum documents across Canada would be beneficial.
The third recommendation is important as it calls for improved educational supports within classrooms and school environments. The interview participants suggested that teaching literacy to their students was sometimes difficult because they found that they were not properly supported. Though this recommendation may also call for budget reform, which is another issue altogether, it is important that teachers get the support through educational assistants, professional development, or better resources like texts and images. Without the proper training or tools, teaching literacy, and especially incorporating culturally relevant and responsive practices, would be difficult and almost impossible for some educators.

The fourth and final recommendation is for teachers to actively respond to the needs and interests of their students. Educators are called to teach the students they have and not the ones that they want. Students should be able to feel comfortable and welcome within their classrooms. Teachers should be looking for ways to ensure that their students see themselves within their classrooms through a variety of cultural texts, images, and languages. While the recognition and celebration of the students’ cultures is important, it is vital that teachers refrain from tokenism and cultural appropriation while doing so.

5.4 Areas for Further Research

The experiences and data collected from the teachers showed that culturally relevant and responsive practices can improve an educator’s literacy instruction. This data also provided information on how various stakeholders can better support educators and the literacy and cultural education needs of the students. While this is important and benefits are apparent, the topic as a whole is relatively understudied. The present study has served to expand upon the extant literature and has highlighted the need for further research. Through examination and data collection, it was evident that there was a minimal amount of research conducted that looked at
both culturally relevant and responsive practices and literacy instruction. Luckily, the interview participants utilised these skills in their practice but the literature review indicated an apparent lack of research connecting the two topics. In future research, it would be useful for researchers to look at, analyse the connections and benefits between culturally relevant and responsive practice and literacy.

5.5 Concluding Comments

The discussion and research surrounding how educator utilise culturally relevant and responsive practice in their literacy instruction is one that is emerging yet important. This study was able to address the major findings of how three experienced elementary teachers used said practices within their instruction in their classrooms. The participants discussed the different ways they have used culturally relevant and responsive practices, how they conducted their literacy practices and the challenges and benefits of following that approach. Upon the completion of the data collection, it is still apparent that more needs to be done and there is a lack of literature that demonstrates the connection between the two.

The findings from this research study is important for the various stakeholders within the educational community to comprehend that culturally relevant and responsive practice and literacy go hand in hand. Teacher must be utilising this approach in order to effectively respond to the cultural needs and interests of their students. Of course, the teachers cannot do this alone. Better preparedness and training must be provided in order for teachers.

To conclude, this present research study acts as it is also important to remember that more research needs to be conducted and that culturally relevant and responsive practices are vital yet beneficial to effective literacy instruction.
References


Appendix A: Letter of Consent

Date:

Dear ________.

My Name is Denessa Ricketts and I am a student in the Master of Teaching program at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto (OISE/UT). A component of this degree program involves conducting a small-scale qualitative research study. My research will aim to examine the ways that teachers utilise culturally relevant or responsive practices in their literacy instruction. I am interested in interviewing teachers who are experienced, and certified or have been certified by the Ontario College of Teachers. I think that your knowledge and experience will provide insights into this topic.

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

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

Sincerely,

Denessa Ricketts

Phone Number:

Email:

Course Instructor’s Name: Kenneth McNeilly

Contact Info:

Consent Form

I acknowledge that the topic of this interview has been explained to me and that any questions that I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I can withdraw from this research study at any time without penalty. I have read the letter provided to me by _____________ and agree to participate in an interview for the purposes described. I agree to have the interview audio-recorded.

Signature: ________________________________________

Name: (printed) ________________________________________
Date: ________________________________
Appendix B: Interview Protocol

Introductory Script

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research study, and for making time to be interviewed today. This research study aims to learn more about how you may have use creative writing strategies in your literacy instruction for the purpose of gaining knowledge and seeing if you saw an improvement in the literacy skills of your students. This interview will last approximately 45-60 minutes, and I will ask you a series of questions focused on literacy instruction strategies and literacy. I want to remind you that you may refrain from answering any question, and you have the right to withdraw your participation from the study at any time. As I explained in the consent letter, this interview will be audio-recorded. Do you have any questions before we begin?

Background Information

- How many years have you been teaching?
- What is your cultural background, if you are comfortable sharing?
- What grades are you currently teaching or have taught in the past?
- What is your definition of literacy?
- What is your personal relationship to literacy?

Teacher Perspectives/Beliefs

- Do you think creative writing is used in the classroom enough?
- If so, in what ways?
If not, then why do you think it is this way?

How do you feel about using creative writing activities in your classroom?

What subjects do you find there is an emphasis or a sense of importance placed on?

What types of literacy are promoted in your school? Media, tech, text?

**Teacher Practices**

Can you tell me how you were prepared in teacher education programs or how you were prepared in your own practice to teach literacy?

How can teachers celebrate the cultural diversity of their students?

How can the schools, school documents, school community help students of diverse cultures?

Have you ever used culturally-relevant practice or are you aware of it?

What are your experiences with it?

Can you tell me about your experiences teaching literacy in your classroom?

What types of instructional methods did you use to teach literacy?

What types of writing tasks would you usually assign in a class?

What types of texts do you usually use?

How can we improve the literary experience for our ELL students?

**Challenges**

How do you think teachers can connect with their students?

What types of challenges have you encountered when teaching literacy?

How do you think teachers can support their students that dislike reading or writing?

How do you think teachers can promote the diversity of all students?

How can future teachers become more prepared or comfortable with teaching literacy?
Conclusion

Thank you for your participation in this research study. Your experience and participation have been very valuable. My contact information has been listed on the letter of consent that has been provided for you. If there are any concerns or any addition comments that you would like to add about literacy and creative writing, please feel free to contact