An Exploration of Anti-Oppressive Education

in the High School ELA Classroom

by

Kelly Fewer

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Abstract

In the past three years, the province of Manitoba has been implementing a new curriculum in English Language Arts (ELA), starting at the elementary level and more recently voluntary implementation at the high school level. An important change to the curriculum is the addition of the practice of power and agency, which can be viewed as an attempt by this curriculum to be anti-oppressive. Anti-oppressive education is the practice of teaching to *all* students by embracing their diversity, and creating safe spaces to actively work against various forms of social oppression (Kumashiro, 2000). The goal of this qualitative research study, that garnered data through interviews, is to discover how some high school ELA teachers in the province who self-identify as taking an anti-oppressive stance do so in their approach to students, curriculum and materials, and pedagogy. The findings show that these educators' motivations for taking such a stance are grounded in their experiences teaching, their identities, and their professional learning. While their objectives for their teaching focused on the selection of resources, building relationships, and having meaningful class discussions. The implications of the study could guide teachers in their selection of resources, teaching and assessment tools, and pedagogical decisions in high school ELA.

Keywords: anti-oppressive, Manitoba, ELA, power and agency

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter One: Introduction

Purpose

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to learn more about the experiences of secondary English Language Arts (ELA) educators in Manitoba who self-identify as engaging in an anti-oppressive stance. In defining anti-oppressive education in today's classrooms, this thesis draws largely on the work of Kevin Kumashiro who defines anti-oppressive education as the practice of teaching to *all* students by embracing their diversity, and creating safe spaces to actively work against various forms of social oppression (Kumashiro, 2000). Kumashiro (2000) argues that there are two approaches that educators might take in order to address oppression. The first approach is to improve the experiences of students who are part of marginalized groups and not considered part of the norm, and the second to integrate knowledge into the curriculum about groups who are marginalized that is frequent and in-depth, not simply a token text or lesson. However, Kumashiro (2000) points out that teaching about the "Other" is not the end goal in the classroom because it "does not force the privileged students to separate the normal from the self, i.e., to acknowledge and work against their own privilege" (p. 35). Teachers and students should be continuously learning more about themselves and others, never believing their knowledge to be final.

As the province implements a newly revised curriculum in high schools over the next few years, anti-oppressive education has begun to take a larger role in the curriculum with a focus on teaching language as power and agency. In the new curriculum, the practice of power and agency, which is meant to "explicitly define and build critical thinking into instruction at all levels by supporting students to recognize inequities and bias, to work with moral and ethical issues, and to consider actions and alternatives" (Boyd & Warkentin, 2015, p. 9) represents a

new and important focus. The practice of power and agency can also be described by learners "using various processes to examine how texts (including their own) might influence, define, and transmit cultural and societal values, ideologies, beliefs, and identities or be influenced by these (Manitoba Education, 2017, p. 14). Such a stance also fits well with the emphasis in the curriculum on creating authentic learning experiences for students that honour all learners, and also the anti-oppressive notion of "inclusive curricula" that honours the identities and experiences of all learners, which contributes to accepting social differences and affirming oneself (Kumashiro, 2002). This curriculum moves away from the previous outcome-based curriculum where the onus was largely on the teacher to decide how students showed their learning and to assess how well each student met those expectations. Instead, this revised curriculum "invites and challenges educators to think about education, schooling, and English Language Arts as they might be rather than the way educators currently know them to be" (Manitoba Education, 2017, p. 9). While the teacher is challenged to re-think some of their beliefs about teaching, this new curriculum also creates room for the student to make decisions about their learning.

It can feel very daunting for an educator to take on ideas like "social justice" and "anti-oppression." These ideas are both personal and political, and they are ever-changing- knowledge about various identities and groups, including our own, can never be final. In ELA, educators are also tasked with finding their own content that will effectively fulfill the language and literacy practices identified in the curriculum. To be clear, the ELA curriculum does not stipulate content, i.e., the texts or materials to be taught in ELA classes, but it does stipulate that "Learners should have opportunities to work with a variety of texts including print, non-print, human, electronic, and virtual resources" (Manitoba Education, 2017, p. 10). The curriculum documents

and this thesis use the word "text" to signify any document that can be read, viewed, or heard, for example books, articles, short stories, poems, movies, songs, documentaries, artwork, photographs, and podcasts. Additionally, texts should be "current, relevant, credible, and representative of many viewpoints and worldviews" (Manitoba Education, 2017, p. 10). Therefore, this study aims to learn from secondary ELA educators who indicate they are already teaching or have taught about power and agency, with particular interest in *how* they are doing so, and with *what.* The curriculum and the content are inextricably intertwined, and I believe that this study helps illuminate this relationship now that there is greater freedom in choosing texts. This curriculum's focus on power and agency makes the selection of materials even more significant than it was previously.

Articulating an anti-oppressive stance in the classroom represents a dramatic shift in thinking. In committing to an anti-oppressive stance, our goal as educators should not be for students to leave our classes feeling they have final knowledge or a complete understanding of any one topic, group of people, issue, etc., "but disruption, satisfaction and the desire for more change" (Kumashiro, 2000, p. 34). According to Kumashiro (2000), "The strength of this approach is that it calls on educators to bring visibility to enrich their students' understandings of different ways of being" (p. 33). Keeping this in mind, the main questions of this study are:

1. How can concepts from multicultural, gender, and queer theories inform anti-oppressive stances in teaching ELA at the secondary level?

2. What are self-identified anti-oppressive [ELA] educators trying to achieve? How? What successes and challenges do they experience?

3. How can I, as a secondary ELA teacher, embody anti-oppressive education? What

    guiding principles can I learn from this study that can then inform my pedagogical moves

    and content decisions?

Organization

This thesis is organized into five chapters: the introduction, the literature review, the

methodology, the findings and the implications. In chapter one, the introduction details the

experiences that led me to feeling passionate about taking an anti-oppressive stance as an English

Language Arts (ELA) teacher. Readers will also come to understand the purpose of this study

and learn why this is relevant for ELA education today, as well as how it relates to the ELA

curriculum in Manitoba more specifically.

Chapter two is the literature review. Here I explain my approach to the research and

develop a conceptual framework. The chapter is organized into three sections that inform the

orientation I take as a teacher and a researcher in this study: to curriculum and materials, to

students, and to pedagogy. I also clarify here that the scope and focus of my literature review

has been shaped by my research questions, which in turn reflect my desire as an English

Language Arts teacher to learn more about anti-oppressive education as an orientation to the

curriculum and materials I use and develop, to the students I teach, and to my pedagogy and

practice. The literature review starts with an overview of relevant research on anti-oppressive

education to help to define and understand the ideas that I use to frame the study. Then the

chapter moves on to address research on multicultural literature, and gender and queer theories

related to teaching literature in high school classrooms.

Chapter three focuses on the methods I used in my study. Aspects of the study such as the participants, the sampling methods, recruitment, and research instruments are detailed here. Limitations of the study are also discussed in this section.

Chapter four represents a summary of the main findings of my research study. Here, I have outlined the findings of my study by compiling the range of ideas provided by the participants of the study as they relate to their attempts to adopt an anti-oppressive stance in their high school ELA classrooms. Findings such as motivation for taking anti-oppressive stance, strategies used in the classroom, and successes and challenges are explored.

Finally, chapter five explores the possible implications of this study as they relate to English Language Arts education in high school. Implications for professional learning, and the approaches to students and teaching strategies are discussed.

History of Interest

I have been teaching since 2006. I am a white, heterosexual, cisgender, middle class, female; therefore I fall into the "mythical norm" of teachers described by Jones (2009) that make up the majority of teachers in North America. This identity has given me inherent advantages throughout my life, both socioeconomically, and because of the absence of oppression, prejudice, and discrimination I have been afforded through most of my life. This experience is quite different from many of the students I teach, making it especially important for me to be conscious not to generalize my life experiences as being the norm. I teach at an urban high school located in Winnipeg that I consider to have a fairly typical composition of students in terms of visible diversity. However, other aspects of diversity perhaps not as visible such as socio-economic status, gender, and sexuality have likely always been present, but not as easy to generate data on like visible markers are. The majority of the students at my school are white;

although, I have noticed increasing cultural and linguistic diversity each year that I have been teaching, and provincial statistics support my observations. In 2014, Manitoba produced a statistical report on immigration facts and found that 6.3% of immigrants to Canada come to live in Manitoba, with the Philippines, India, and China accounting for almost 60% of immigrants to the province, making the most common languages among immigrants Tagalog, Punjabi, and Chinese. In addition, our province receives the highest number of refugees per capita. This demographic creates very diverse classrooms, particularly in urban centres, in terms of race, language, and cultural practices. Students of all backgrounds and abilities should have the opportunity to have meaningful, authentic, safe, and empowering learning experiences that are suitable for their diverse needs. Therefore, having the opportunity to learn from teachers who identify with the anti-oppressive movement applies to my interest in making my own classroom a place where students' identities are honoured and their thinking is challenged.

My interest in researching how to meaningfully incorporate content and assessments that represent human diversity recognizes that humans live their lives in different societal groups and positions, and some of those groups have more privileges than others (Magnussen, 2011). Approximately eight years ago I began to notice that students seemed less interested in the old-fashioned content and practice of my ELA classroom. Each semester it seemed harder to motivate students to read Shakespeare or complete chapter questions about a "classic" novel.

Seven years ago I was assigned to teach the grade twelve Transactional Focus English Language Arts class. This course is guided by the same general outcomes as all other ELA courses, but with a focus on more pragmatic texts and writing, rather than a focus on literature. Fortunately for me, teachers I knew from various schools who had taught the Transactional Focus course generously provided me with materials, and suddenly I had units on topics like

journalism, globalization, and humour in front of me. It was in planning for this course that I

realized the flexibility that could exist in designing content (e.g., texts, activities, and

assessments) for ELA. As a beginning teacher, I taught texts in my ELA courses that other

teachers in my school used because they told me that it was important for students to study

canonical texts, and because those were the texts I studied in high school. The selection of books

in my school included texts such as: *Brave New World* (Huxley, 1932)*, Lord of the Flies*

(Golding, 1954)*, The Catcher in the Rye* (Salinger, 1951)*,* and many more novels by and about

the white, heterosexual, cisgender, male experience, which is a major criticism of many novels

that are considered canonical.

My experience in consulting with others about teaching the Transactional Focus course

helped me to recognize that ELA teachers did not have to adhere to a narrow or oppressive canon

of literature any longer. In fact, when I revisited the provincial curriculum documents it became

clearer to me that ELA teachers are responsible for interpreting the curriculum, and in some

ways co-constructing it with students. What I mean by co-constructing is that it is the job of each

ELA teacher in the province to interpret the meaning of each outcome or idea in the curriculum,

and then come up with ways to guide the students to an understanding of that idea or skill. The

new ELA curriculum suggests that "Considering significant and complex ideas that are rich

enough to engage students in the four ELA practices provides the "content" for English

Language Arts" (Manitoba Education, 2017, p. 17). The process of interpreting the curriculum

and choosing content to meet this criteria will look different in every teacher's classroom,

depending on how they have chosen to make meaning of the curriculum for themselves and

along with their students.

The first milestone I recall in terms of feeling like I was co-constructing the curriculum, and had the power to make decisions about it, was studying journalism with students in my Transactional Focus class. There, we put together a newspaper as a class that was distributed throughout the school. During this time I was able to fulfill many of the outcomes in the curriculum that pertained to thinking, writing, and building community, and we did not have to read a class novel to achieve that goal. For example, one of the general learning outcomes in the previous ELA curriculum was to "explore, thoughts, feelings, ideas and experiences" (Manitoba Education and Training, 2000, p.17). By creating opportunities for students to read, discuss, and speak about current events, as well as write about events and ideas that were important to them, I was able to assess the specific outcomes in this part of the curriculum such as: explaining opinions, considering others' ideas, expressing preferences, and many more (Manitoba Education and Training, 2000). This is just one example of how I came to realize the manner in which I, as well as my students, could become co-constructors of the curriculum.

As I continued teaching the Transactional Focus course, I saw that the students were much more involved in their learning compared to students in my other ELA courses, such as the grade nine and grade eleven Comprehensive Focus courses I was teaching at the time. My experiences in previous courses were discussions that replicated the Initiate-Respond-Evaluate pattern (Cazden, 1988), where I, as the teacher, directed and controlled the conversation, despite my efforts to facilitate open dialogue. In the Transactional Focus course, however, there were lively discussions and "multi-party talk" (Lee, 2013) about current issues and events. In other words, multiple students were engaged in discussions, sometimes speaking at the same time; discussions were lively and energetic, yet productive. So, students were either talking to me or writing to me about issues that were introduced in the texts that I was inviting them to read. They

were connecting to the ideas in ways that showed me that they were important to them, and they seemed to be taking more pride in the work they were producing. They were "investing" in the course and in their learning. The concept of "investment" was originally developed by Norton in 1995 in relation to second language learners, to describe students who were motivated and committed to the learning happening within the classroom community. Investment signifies a deeper commitment than simply being motivated, which can be fleeting or externally induced, and it applied to many of the students in my course. The investment of the students in the course and in their learning also made me feel more enthused about and invested in my own teaching and learning.

As I gained more confidence that evolving my ways of talking with students and developing meaningful activities and assessments was a more effective way to teach than what I had been doing, I started to incorporate more articles about current events into all of my ELA courses to supplement the traditional content, such as Shakespeare and other canonical texts. This started to make those texts more relevant to the students. I found this effective because of the investment I was seeing the students make in terms of their interest in talking, reading, and writing about more current issues and ideas. Although I still knew that more could be done to get a higher percentage of students invested both personally and critically in my ELA classes, I was also aware that it would require different strategies for different students, and that investment would look different for each student. In any case, I wanted to achieve a classroom community where students felt passionate about what they were learning and empowered to explore topics that were important to them.

During this time, I was also starting to become aware of the behaviour of some students that I found very upsetting. Some students were regularly using the word "gay" in a derogatory

manner, and also calling each other extremely racist, sexist, and homophobic names as if it were a joke. Language holds a lot of power and can be very oppressive; this is one of the key ideas that I am consistently trying to communicate to students, and also something I want to be conscious of myself because it is my responsibility to do so as both a teacher and a Canadian citizen. Firstly, the Canadian Human Rights Act prohibits hate speech of any kind because it is "not in keeping with the aspirations to freedom of expression or the values of equality and multiculturalism" (Walker, 2010, p. 1) that exist in Canada. Secondly, as a teacher in the province of Manitoba, I have a responsibility to uphold the policies and standards set by our government, notably, Bill 18, the Safe and Inclusive Schools Act (Legislative Assembly of Manitoba, 2013). This Act contains a Respect for Human Diversity Policy that is meant to:

> Promote and enhance: a safe and inclusive learning environment, the acceptance of and respect for others, and the creation of a positive school environment; and address training for teachers and other staff about bullying prevention, and strategies for promoting respect for human diversity and a positive school environment. (41 (1.6))

In light of this policy, and what I have seen in my own classroom and school as a secondary teacher, I feel that taking an anti-oppressive stance in my classroom, and developing this thesis in order to move the conversation forward are imperative at this time. The government has recognized that there is an issue, and it is up to us to do something about it. One approach is to be conscious of using what Kumashiro (2002) refers to as "inclusive curricula" (p. 70). According to Kumashiro (2002), "Students enter school with a range of identities and life experiences, only some of which may be represented favorably in the curriculum. Inclusive curricula, therefore, are important not only for learning to embrace various social differences, but also for affirming oneself" (p. 20). Bill 18 is an important step towards legislating respectful

treatment of everyone, but concrete and meaningful ways to implement it are still necessary. In addition to curriculum, all of the systems in play such as pedagogy, leadership, and policy all need to be committed to taking on a role in addressing the issues raised in Bill 18.

Additionally, I have also found that the personalities and interests of the students I teach have changed dramatically in the relatively short time since I began my career. A key factor in that change has been the growing role of social media and the internet in students' lives. Twenge (2013) has reviewed research on how new technologies have affected youth particularly in the areas of caring, community, social action, and mental health. She has suggested "that social media lead[s] to more connections, but shallower connections (sometimes known as "weak ties")" (p. 12). Twenge (2013) also cites several studies that have found that more time spent on social media leads to more time spent focused on oneself, which can lead to narcissism (p. 15), the antithesis of empathy.

I feel that students sharing their lives and experiences on social media does not build the deeper understanding of themselves and others that relating experiences to a text can help to foster through conversations, listening, sharing, and creating. A focus on anti-oppressive education in the ELA classroom may be able to help counteract some of the challenges that are being created by the internet and social media in terms of counteracting narcissism, group thinking, and bullying behaviours that can be common in online interactions. One way to approach this is to attempt to get students to see themselves in others who might be different from them or part of a group that is considered marginalized; in others words, by fostering empathy. According to Taylor (2002), "the goal of such lessons is for students to project themselves into the difficult social situations of others unlike themselves, recognize their common humanity, and move in the process from disrespect to solidarity" (p. 223). To relate this

to taking an anti-oppressive stance in the classroom, Taylor's (2002) belief is that empathy moves beyond tolerance and ideally is paired with a desire to be an ally and bring about social change for groups who have been oppressed by mainstream society. I believe this is what is needed in education today.

Because of all the changes I was noticing in my students, as well as the effect of some of the smaller changes I was making in my practice, I arrived at a place in my career where I wanted to make a significant shift in my teaching practice and affect the negative student behaviour I was experiencing by going well beyond just classroom management or discipline strategies. I wanted to shape students' attitudes and beliefs. However, this seemed like a lot to tackle and I was not sure how to go about it all at once. I continued to bring in current articles exploring a range of life experiences and social issues to at least open up some discussions, but I knew I needed to go further.

Then, during CBC's 2015 *Canada Reads,* one of the books chosen was Raziel Reid's *When Everything Feels Like the Movies.* It was the first time a young adult book had been featured. The novel describes the life of a fifteen-year-old boy who could be described as queer, and struggles with bullying and abuse both inside and outside of his home. Although I regularly read young adult literature so that I can recommend books to students, I had never read a book that portrayed the perspective of a person who identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or queer (LGBTQ) in such an honest and vulnerable way, which speaks to the point that there are not enough LGBTQ books being taught in schools, and that the experiences of this community are not adequately represented in educational systems. This book helped me to understand the feelings of alienation that those who are marginalized often experience, and the strength of character they must possess to cope with the bullying they may experience on a daily basis. For

these reasons, I felt that it would be an excellent book to read with students. A book like *When Everything Feels Like the Movies* would be both challenging and helpful to students. It could help some students to develop understanding about sexual and gender diversity, it could challenge the beliefs and stereotypes of others, and it could make some students feel that they were not alone. Unfortunately, I knew my administrators or school division would probably not allow me to teach this book as a class novel, as other books containing fewer curse words and less graphic content had been rejected previously. One of the arguments made by some of the *Canada Reads* panelists (published on the CBC website at the time) was that this book could never be taught in schools due to the graphic language and sexual content. However, I still felt that students in grades eleven and twelve would be able to handle the content, and that reading the book in the space of an ELA class could open up conversations that were desperately needed for many of my students. I felt so strongly about this issue that I wrote an article on this topic for my *Curricular Issues in English Language Arts* course (Honeyford, 2015). The article was later published in an issue of *The Manitoba Teacher* (Fewer, 2015, p. 10-11).

After thinking about *When Everything Feels Like the Movies,* I realized that while adopting that book as a class novel might not be approved, I could find other texts that could push the boundaries, but still be approved for classroom use. I wanted texts that were meaningful for students and provided a variety of perspectives to help combat the sexist, racist, and homophobic attitudes of some of my students. Addressing these issues could at least start to make a difference in students' attitudes and open their eyes to the idea that society still favours whiteness, masculinity, heteronormativity (the presumption that heterosexual is the "normal" or preferred sexual orientation), and cisnormativity (the presumption that everyone identifies with the gender to which they were born).

In my opinion, teachers can and should be at the forefront of change in societal attitudes and norms. Furthermore, protecting students' rights and working to change attitudes is mandated by our province. As stated previously, there is an expectation in Bill 18 that teachers in Manitoba take responsibility to create inclusive spaces for all individuals. Because the English Language Arts curriculum is open to a variety of texts and to different ways for students to demonstrate their learning, ELA teachers are able to choose texts and develop activities and assessments with the purpose of developing students' skills in critical literacy, a concept that falls under the umbrella of anti-oppressive education. As Glazier (2007) writes, "Critical literacy brings students' voices, and students' lives to the front and center, introducing students to multiple texts, multiple stories, and including their own and those of their peers" (p. 146). If critical literacy was consistently used and understood effectively in ELA classrooms, I feel and hope that many of the negative behaviours I have noticed among students could be eliminated. Perhaps students would feel strongly about working to change the oppressive behaviours and attitudes of others, and begin to notice and take action against the systemic oppression occurring within the school system itself.

Because of these experiences, as I began to think about writing a thesis, one of the first topics I thought of exploring was how LGBTQ literature was (or was not) being used in local classrooms. However, in thinking about this research interest and discussing this with my advisor, I realized that I did not really feel that I could separate LGBTQ literature from other genres I felt were equally important to include, for example, books that explore other identity-based social and human rights issues. In addition, there are many examples of intersectionality in these topics; for example, a text that explores a particular cultural perspective may do so from a feminist or queer perspective. For example, Malala Yousafzai's book *I am Malala* can be

examined through a feminist lens, but also through the lens of her Pakistani culture, as well as in terms of the human rights violations occurring to those in the geographic area she lives in and writes about. To understand Yousafzai's experiences and viewpoint, the social identities explored in this book cannot be separated, the overlap of these identities all contribute to the oppression she experienced.

By the time I began working on my Master's degree, my teaching had changed and evolved quite a bit. I had stopped teaching Shakespeare, and no longer used chapter questions. I had almost entirely moved away from the class novel study, and instead was using literature circles and independent book choices for students, while supplementing that reading with various shorter, shared texts that we read together as a class such as current articles, poems, short stories, movies and documentaries. I selected these texts to speak to the issues addressed in many of the books students were reading. In terms of assessing students' learning, I realized the value in giving students choice in what they wrote or presented about. I saw that students were becoming more interested and even passionate about their work when they had ownership in what they were creating.

In the process of making these changes to my teaching, I realized that I have always enjoyed exploring important, and sometimes controversial topics with students, and trying to help them to think critically about different issues. ELA teachers are fortunate in the sense that they are able to choose much of the content presented to students because the curriculum is not based on content, but rather on skills or practices. Every day teachers can create opportunities to speak to students about real issues that affect their lives and the lives of those around them. However, this must be done with careful thought and planning because there may be no curricular documents or teacher guides to lead us towards these meaningful and important

conversations with students. Without adequate mentorship, it can be difficult for new and even experienced teachers to learn how to facilitate these types of discussions and literacy events. This study provides insights from educators who are engaged in that work, and shares those insights with others, who, like me, wish to become stronger and more effective anti-oppressive educators.

Many ELA teachers have moved towards providing students with more choice in their reading, and away from teaching a canon of literature, but many teachers are still required to have any texts they would like to purchase approved by their administrator. Unfortunately, when administrators are presented with a text that deals with issues that may be viewed as controversial, they may not approve the purchase because they foresee the possibility of having to deal with complaints from parents, school boards, and the public. Administrators need to be willing to stand up for and support anti-oppressive education, but they may also need to feel supported their superiors, like superintendents, trustees, and so on. One of the benefits of this study is that it could provide some insight regarding particular texts that administrators are willing to support, and that teachers believe will open up an anti-oppressive dialogue in the classroom.

As I continued to change my practice, another layer of my thinking was around assessment. As teachers we need to assess, and coming up with engaging ways to assess students' thinking on these texts and topics was also a challenge. I could not keep using the same outdated assessments that only tested students' comprehension in narrow ways. I had to come up with more authentic assessments that invited students to explore their thoughts and feelings about issues that mattered to them, and to explore other texts and contesting perspectives related to those texts we were reading in class. Asking all students to write a literary essay on a prescriptive topic about a book was not going to effectively fuel their passions about important

issues and allow them to think critically. In keeping with an anti-oppressive model, I wanted to give students choice in their assessments. However, coming up with several different, yet meaningful options for students to choose from to display their thinking and learning would require much more creativity and time than simply assigning a one-size-fits-all assessment.

All of the reflection I had been doing on my practice led me to undertake some professional reading. Also, I talked to other teachers and professionals and experimented with different ideas in my classroom to see what would most engage the students in investing in critical issues on a consistent basis, not just a one-off project or discussion that they were enthused about on a given day. Early on in my journey, the material I seemed to have the most success with was current articles and editorials on controversial topics that many teenagers could relate to or understand, for example, bullying, dress codes, Gender-Sexuality Alliances in schools, censorship surrounding books, movies and TV shows, and many more. Suddenly students who had not participated in class discussions were putting their hands up and giving their opinions on a variety of topics. Students were getting excited, or angry, about ideas presented in these articles. To translate this into an assessment, I would have students write articles or editorials on topics of their choice. These texts would serve as a platform to provide ideas, and also as mentor texts for their writing. Taking this small leap from reading and discussing articles and editorials to having students write them showed me how invested students can become when they are choosing their own topic and are not limited to discussing themes, characters, or literary elements of a text, as they may have been in the past. This process helped me realize that it was not just the texts I was choosing, but what I asked students to do with those texts that was equally important.

Finally, I realized that every part of my teaching was affected by this way of thinking. After some professional reading, I realized that anti-oppressive education was the most appropriate term for what I was trying to achieve in my classroom; a way of teaching toward social justice (Kumashiro, Baber, Richardson, Ricker-Wilson, & Wong, 2004) that I was trying to emulate and become. However, teaching toward social justice needed to encompass multiple layers of classroom decisions such as the materials, the assessments, and the everyday dialogues with students, all of which are equally important and work together to create an anti-oppressive environment for students.

Relevance

I regularly use literature circles in my teaching practice now. Literature circles are similar to a book club, but are an organizational strategy used in the classroom to provide students choice in their reading, allow them to read a variety of books, and to have group discussions about their reading (Brownlie, 2005). By using this technique, students are provided with choice in their reading and an opportunity is afforded for me to include more contemporary books for students to choose from. At my school, these include books generally published no earlier than the turn of the twenty-first century, and represent a variety of fiction and non-fiction texts written at a range of reading levels. I started incorporating literature circles in my ELA classes with a short unit in grade nine that included books such as: *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* (Alexie, 2007)*, Monster* (Meyers, 1999)*, Boot Camp* (Strasser, 2007)*, Speak* (Halse Anderson, 1999)*, The Fault in Our Stars* (Green, 2012)*, Beyond Magenta* (Kulkin, 2014) and *I am Malala* (Yousafzai, 2013)*. In my initial experience using these books, I had students tell me that it was the first time in their lives they had actually finished a book that was assigned for school. That was very meaningful to me because that kind of interest from previously

disinterested readers was very motivating for me. Not all early attempts were complete

successes; just because students were reading and enjoying the books did not mean that they

were completing any assessments or doing much writing about what they were reading. It

seemed that finding meaningful and engaging texts for students to read was proving much easier

than creating meaningful and engaging assessments of what they were learning.

While I have changed many of my teaching methods, by no means do I currently think I

am engaging every student and perfectly practicing anti-oppressive education at every moment in

my classes. There are things outside of my control that can make it difficult to do all of the things

I would like to do in my classroom, for example, getting a budget to consistently buy current

texts or bring in guest speakers. Additionally, I have encountered reluctance on the part of some

administrators to allow the inclusion of certain texts or the discussion of certain topics. At the

secondary level, I find one of the biggest challenges is to get the students to open up about their

thoughts and feelings on a topic or issue in front of their peers because they fear being ostracized

in class or elsewhere. Resulting in discussions and activities that do not have the outcome I had

hoped for, but this does not discourage me from continuing with this radical shift in my teaching,

and I want to continue with these changes.

I have done away with teaching different "units" in some of my classes. I revamped one

particular ELA class a few years ago that I felt was the course I was still teaching in the most

conventional way, mainly because I had not taught it often. When the opportunity came to teach

it again, I decided to change everything. Now the whole course is focused on human diversity,

and the students are cycling through a variety of books that speak to that topic all semester while

I provide articles, short stories, poems, movies and documentaries that portray ideas about

human diversity for us to discuss as a group. Book choices include: *The Glass Castle* (Walls,

2005)*, A Long Way Gone* (Beah, 2007)*, The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time* (Haddon, 2003)*, Shine* (Myracle, 2011)*,* and many others.

I felt so rewarded at the end of my first semester teaching this class in the revised format. I had some of the best and most dynamic large and small group discussions I have ever had in any class. By this I mean that a much higher percentage of students were contributing meaningful and in-depth answers, and more students appeared passionate, excited or simply interested in the discussion topics. At the end of the semester I asked students to choose an issue related to social justice that we had or had not touched on in class, and create a Pecha Kucha presentation about that issue. A Pecha Kucha is a PowerPoint presentation that only contains visuals. Each image is displayed for only twenty seconds while the presenter speaks about it. A few of the presentations were the best, and also bravest, presentations I have seen in my career. For example, one student spoke about the issues faced by transgender teenagers. She shared about someone very close to her who is transgender, and described personal anecdotes about some of the discrimination they have both faced because of this. Her anecdotes were also supported by research such as statistics and quotes from reputable sources on this issue. Similarly, another student did his presentation on the stigma that exists towards those who suffer from mental illnesses. He shared his own struggles with mental health, and how difficult it was for him to be speaking in front of the class, but that he had recently been trying to push himself out of his comfort zone. About two weeks before, he had a severe panic attack in another class, and he shared that many students gossiped afterwards that he did it for "pity" or "attention." He talked about how hard he has worked to overcome these issues, and supported his statements with research from the DSM (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders) and other reputable sources. I was aware of his experiences and the topic of his presentation, so I have to

admit that I was not really expecting him to get up and do the presentation in class that day. It was extremely moving.

The experiences I had with the students in that class made me realize how meaningful talking about their own experiences and hearing about the experiences of others can be for teenagers. It can give them a sense of purpose to understand how they are disrupting normative and discriminatory narratives that they may have accepted previously. Also, it can help to foster empathy, and help some students feel understood. It has fueled me to believe that this is the direction I would like to take with all of my ELA classes. However, making it meaningful at each of the grade levels and for different groups of students takes a lot of planning and content knowledge. In talking to many other teachers, I do not think I am alone in my lack of a deep background in this area. Shulman (2013) describes this as "the missing paradigm" (p. 5), the result of the shift that has occurred in recent decades emphasising elements of the teaching process and de-emphasizing content area knowledge for teachers. That is an area where I have struggled, because most of the professional development I have attended throughout my career has been focused on teaching practice, not on content area knowledge. Because the content in ELA is endless, many teachers, including myself, are hungry for new ideas and ways to empower their students through content that is critical and meaningful. We are eager to hear what texts and assessment practices other teachers are using in their classrooms, and this study is a way to contribute to that conversation.

Curricular Relevance

Through 2021, the province of Manitoba is piloting a new ELA curriculum at the secondary school level. Many changes have been made in terms of the language used in this new curriculum. The old curriculum is outcomes-based, meaning that it is focused on the teacher

measuring the students' skills. The new curriculum aims for "deep learning in meaningful

contexts" (Boyd & Warkentin, 2015, p. 8). It is based on the idea of students and teachers

working together to develop competence in four main practices: sense making, system,

exploration and design, and power and agency (Boyd & Warkentin, 2015, p. 9). This new

curriculum recognizes that the abilities developed in ELA can and should be transferred to other

areas of learning and life. It "aims for learners [to] become flexible, reflective and critical

thinkers who are able to interact with complex ideas about themselves, the world, and society"

(Boyd & Warkentin, 2015, p. 8). The new curriculum aims to be anti-oppressive, an important

part of that is the practice of power and agency, which speaks directly to anti-oppressive

education because it is asking the students (and teachers) not only to recognize injustice, but to

take action against it.

Since the new curriculum has four practices that are all meant to be working

simultaneously, an exploration of power and agency could very well permeate all aspects of what

we do in our classes. I think that it is more important than ever to be choosing content and

including students in designing assessments that are relevant and important to them. Content

where students can see themselves, but also learn about and develop empathy towards others is

what is needed in our current society. While this new curriculum is a positive step towards anti-

oppressive education, it is only as good as the manner in which it is enacted. It can only make a

difference if teachers are supported in choosing a variety of texts, and having deep, meaningful,

and sometimes controversial conversations with students.

Significance of the study

Studying the work of educators who articulate an anti-oppressive stance in their

secondary ELA classes in terms of their approach to curriculum and materials, students, and

pedagogy is important because it has the potential to inform the work of other educators who wish to make anti-oppressive education a focus in their own work, and to critically consider the challenges in bridging pedagogical beliefs with practices. This study is also significant because ELA educators can be at the forefront of a movement towards anti-oppressive education due to the flexibility that exists within the curriculum. Because anti-oppressive education is a multi-faceted endeavour, this study explores the various facets that need to be considered by a secondary school ELA educator interested in taking an anti-oppressive stance. I am an ELA teacher who is seeking to uphold the curriculum while making human diversity and social justice a focus. My goals include improving students' skills in Language Arts, but also helping students to develop critical literacy skills, empathy, and an understanding of themselves as individuals and as members of a diverse community that respects and appreciates difference. How do I make all of these goals work together? By interviewing teachers who are working to achieve these goals, I was able to develop ideas to further my efforts to embody anti-oppressive education in my ELA classroom, these ideas also have the potential to contribute to professional conversations in the province about anti-oppressive education.

Growing the conversation is a major impetus for doing this study, and if we examine some of the news in our province, this is something that is needed. There have been specific cases in the news of students in our province experiencing discrimination and being marginalized in their schools, particularly with regards to gender and sexuality. For example, in 2013, a student at the Steinbach Regional Secondary School had to fight to start a Gay-Straight Alliance at his school, despite Bill 18, the province's anti-bullying bill which requires schools to accommodate students who want to start such clubs or groups ("Steinbach teen determined to start gay-straight alliance", 2013). More recently, a teenager in Brandon who felt his school

division was not aware or doing enough to assist LGBTQ youth through concrete practices and

policies did a formal presentation to his school board about making the division's schools more

supportive and inclusive for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer youth ("Brandon

School Division looking at student's recommendations to make schools more LGBT inclusive",

2017). Because LGBTQ students and families continue to feel a lack of support in schools,

perhaps we should consider that Bill 18 may not go far enough, or may require some supporting

documents that outline strategies schools can use to create more supportive and inclusive

environments. In Manitoba, schools are required to have respect for diversity policies, but there

is a disconnect between that legislation and the policies of certain school divisions in the

province that forbids teachers from discussing sexual orientation and gender identity in

elementary and middle years classrooms (Sanders, 2017). In my personal experience and in

speaking to other educators, I feel that many schools are struggling to be inclusive, perhaps

because they may not know how, but also because of systemic discrimination that exists. The

populations of most schools are diversifying at a rate that is much faster than policies and

societal attitudes are changing for the most part. The insights from this study could be shared

through professional publications and presentations, contributing to local knowledge, providing

concrete and achievable ideas, and expanding opportunities for critical change in schools for

those who are already part of the movement as well as those who wish to join it.

Contributions to the field

       The main purpose of this study is to learn more about anti-oppressive teaching in high

school ELA from educators who identify as engaging with this work, and also to learn about the

various aspects of the work they do that they consider to be a part of this stance, for example

their classroom practices, their interactions with students, and the extra-curricular activities they

may engage in. I wished to learn about their journeys as educators who express an interest in and

a commitment to anti-oppressive education. Specifically, I was interested in the decisions they

made in terms of trying to create an anti-oppressive culture in their classrooms with regards to

the values and expectations that have been established, and how they- within the broad and open

ELA curriculum- make decisions about what to teach, how and why, including the texts they use

and the assignments they give. I also wished to learn about how self-identified anti-oppressive

educators tackle difficult dialogue when it arises, including differences of opinion,

discrimination, and even hate speech.

The results of this study are meant to be shared with other high school ELA educators

who are interested in creating or continuing to create an anti-oppressive climate in their

classroom through dialogue, texts, assessments, and classroom community. I am hoping that

interested educators will be provided with research, theory, and practice that will support their

desire to take an anti-oppressive stance. By interacting with information or individuals who

participated in this research, either by reading this thesis or by attending a professional

development session that could come from this, educators will find some concrete ideas to use in

their classrooms if they are looking for an entry-point into anti-oppressive education, or if they

are looking to enhance or add to what they are already doing. Because the participants of the

study identify as having experience in anti-oppressive education in ELA they may already be

writing and presenting about this topic. Therefore, this thesis could foster a larger audience for

their expertise, and possibly allow some or all of the participants to come together to present

their ideas in a professional development setting.

This study looks at the practices of those educators who identify as making content

choices and employing teaching practices that are anti-oppressive in their nature. I am hopeful

that the findings from this study will help to develop an understanding of how every decision

educators make in the classroom, from what they choose to hang on the walls to their assessment

practices, can and should be permeated by anti-oppressive pedagogy. Discussions about these

topics in the classroom will ideally encourage students to think critically about issues related to

social justice, have a greater awareness of these, and more understanding and concern for

inequities that exist in society.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Conceptual Framework: Anti-oppressive education as a stance for teaching ELA

My research questions focus on how and why ELA educators can and should make anti-oppressive education a priority in their practice, as well as how certain theories, such as multi-cultural, gender, and queer theories, inform this practice; considering components of research, theory, and practice that can be described as taking an anti-oppressive stance in the classroom. Stance is defined by Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999) as the "position that teachers take towards knowledge" (p. 288). Because teaching is a complex and reflexive activity, stance provides "a grounding within the changing cultures of school reform and competing political agendas" (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999, p. 289). Therefore, in thinking about taking an anti-oppressive stance in the classroom, I first focus on peer reviewed research related to anti-oppressive education to clearly define this concept and understand the grounding of its key ideas. Starting with a basis for defining anti-oppressive education provided me with a conceptual framework for this study as an orientation to students, curriculum and materials, and pedagogy.

An orientation to students. I looked for research to orient anti-oppressive education to *students* in terms of honouring their race, gender, and/or sexual identities in the ELA classroom. These theories include: gender and queer theories, multicultural theory, including multiracial theory, and culturally responsive teaching.

An appropriate lens for this study and literature review is intersectionality. This was a term originally coined by Crenshaw in 1989 to describe the variety of ways in which race and gender interact to shape Black women's lives. Over time, Crenshaw (2015) has come to describe it as a term that is used as a way of shedding light on the invisibility that many people feel from groups that claim them as members. She argues that all social movements should be

intersectional; otherwise they privilege certain identities over others. This concept can be widely applied to take into account characteristics including, but not exclusive to: gender, sexual orientation, language, geography, immigration status, and (dis) ability. To frame this literature review and the thesis as a whole, when research regarding multiculturalism, gender or queer theory is being discussed, it is by no means meant to be viewed as exclusive to that group, but should be viewed as something that intersects with various identities and characteristics.

An orientation to curriculum and materials. I wanted to explore anti-oppressive education as an orientation to curriculum and classroom materials. The ELA curriculum does not specify the materials that a teacher should use in the classroom. Contrary to what many believe and to the practice of many schools, the provincial curriculum documents do not specify the literary (novels, short stories, plays, poetry) or expository texts (essays, articles, reports, documentaries) for high school ELA classes. Therefore, it was important to me that this study be framed conceptually by anti-oppressive education as an orientation to selecting and teaching curriculum and materials, including multicultural, gender, and LGBTQ literature in the ELA classroom. It is important to emphasize that these ideas and theories are not mutually exclusive; as theories and lenses of human experience, they provide overlap because individuals rarely fit neatly into one category of race, gender, or sexuality, nor should they be expected to. To view these theories as separate "categories" would be oppressive in itself. It is also important to note that these theories by no means represent an exhaustive list of theories that inform anti-oppressive education. It is simply not possible to have a large enough scope in this thesis to include every theory and important scholar that could inform anti-oppressive education. However, I have chosen to focus my research on curriculum and materials through the lenses of multicultural theory, multiracial theory, culturally responsive pedagogy, gender, and queer

theories because in thinking about this topic and my experience teaching, issues and concerns related to race, gender, sexual orientation and sexual practice, are, in my view, among the most pressing issues in today's classrooms.

An orientation to pedagogy. My initial inspiration for a model of anti-oppressive education was Paolo Freire (1970). His book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed,* was published over forty-five years ago, and is considered a pivotal work on anti-oppressive education. Reading this book gave me an understanding of how to define anti-oppressive education, and a foundation for understanding anti-oppressive education. It is a complex process that involves the materials that are chosen for use in the classroom, the important pedagogical decisions made about those materials, the discourse that exists in a classroom, and how that can affect the dialogue about texts and issues in a classroom. However, all of these aspects can also be affected by outside forces such as government and education policies, as well as current educational trends at a given time. To understand critical pedagogy is to be conscious of the ways the curriculum and materials, interaction with students, as well as the attitude and practices of the teacher, all need to be anti-oppressive in their nature. Freire (1970) emphasizes that anti-oppressive teaching is a choice to be intentional not only about engaging in dialogue with our students, but also what that dialogue is about:

> The dialogical character of education as the practice of freedom does not begin when the teacher-student meets with the students-teachers in a pedagogical situation, but rather when the former first asks herself or himself *what* she or he will dialogue with the latter *about*" [emphasis in original]. (p. 93)

 Consequently, when making decisions related to materials, classroom activities, and assessments, the teacher needs to be open to dialoging with students and view learning as a

reciprocal process. I feel this is still a radical idea in many of today's classrooms, making

Freire's (1970) book relevant to anti-oppressive education and research over forty-five years

after it was published.

There are many reasons why there is still push back from educators regarding anti-

oppressive education. Kumashiro (2001) states that one of the most common complaints from

educators is that the "research and theory on anti-oppressive education (or, education that works

against oppression) are difficult to translate into practice" (p. 3). Kumashiro (2001) also

articulates that many teachers believe that their priority is to teach their subjects, and that the task

of fighting oppression is not their job. Anti-oppressive theorists would argue that teachers

should be considered "activists, agents of social change, and allies in anti-oppressive education"

(Mitton-Kukner, Kearns, & Tompkins, 2016, p. 22). For teachers to view themselves this way,

many changes would need to be made to teacher education programs and the school system

itself. One such change might be for teacher education programs and teachers to recognize both

the official and unofficial curriculums that exist in schools (Mitton-Kukner, et al., 2016).

Teaching should no only be focused on course content, but also on building relationships with

students, and creating safe spaces for them. Perhaps the reason that the shift towards anti-

oppressive education is moving so sluggishly is that it will "disrupt the frameworks we

traditionally use to make sense of the world and ourselves" (Kumashiro, 2001, p. 5). The work of

the scholars discussed in this literature review renews hope for a shift in thinking about the role

of teachers, and how anti-oppressive education should be the responsibility of all educators.

In exploring anti-oppressive education as an orientation to the students, curriculum and

materials, as well as pedagogy in ELA, I focus on how anti-oppressive education can be

incorporated into the post-modern high school classroom. Chisnell (1993) describes the

postmodern ELA classroom as a place where we are "consciously balancing the teacher's roles

as promoter of expression and of "master" of authority" (p. 56). Chisnell (1993) explains that the

teacher's role in the postmodern classroom is to help students to perceive the unwritten rules that

society and culture have placed upon them, to come to understand how these unwritten rules

have or have not affected them as individuals, and to help them to become more thoughtful and

critical thinkers in that process.

While I prioritized more recent research in my search, I also decided to include older

articles, such as Pace and Townsend (1999), Lafrance (1991) and Greenbaum (1999), as their

research is considered to be foundational in this line of inquiry. A contemporary analysis of these

older articles suggests that efforts to affect critical change in education may be happening at a

glacial pace. In the context of calls for education to teach about residential schools and

colonialism, LGBTQ rights, and the human rights violations occurring in the "third world",

among others. These calls to action mean that ELA teachers taking an anti-oppressive orientation

to curriculum and materials, relationships and dialogue with students, and in pedagogy, is more

important than ever.

Anti-oppressive education: Developing a conceptual framework for teaching ELA

  The legacy of Paulo Freire. It is impossible to discuss anti-oppressive education,

particularly in the field of literacy and language arts, without discussing the influential work of

Freire. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970), Freire outlines one of the most important aspects

of anti-oppressive education, which is awakening the "conscientização", in other words, an

individual's critical consciousness. This means that an individual is "learning to perceive social,

political and economic contradictions, and to take action against oppressive elements of reality"

(Freire, 1970, p. 35). In his work, Freire (1970) also compares what he refers to as the "banking model" of education to "oppressive society as a whole" (p. 73). In this model, the students are viewed as empty vessels where teachers deposit information (Freire, 1970, p. 72). The following is a list of Freire's (1970) reasons why this traditional banking model so closely emulates oppressive society in general:

      (a) the teacher teaches and the students are taught;

      (b) the teacher knows everything and the students know nothing;

      (c) the teacher thinks and the students are thought about;

      (d) the teacher talks and the students listen- meekly;

      (e) the teacher disciplines and the students are disciplined;

      (f) the teacher chooses and enforces his choice, and the students comply;

      (g) the teacher acts and the students have the illusion of acting through the action of the

        teacher;

      (h) the teacher chooses the program content, and the students (who were not consulted)

        adapt to it;

      (i) the teacher confuses the authority of knowledge with his or her own professional

        authority, which she and he sets in opposition to the freedom of the students;

      (j) the teacher is the Subject of the learning process, while the pupils are mere objects.

       (p. 73)

Unfortunately, the banking model of education is still alive and well in our system, deeply embedded in teachers' practices, in curriculum documents, and in policies. In ELA, teachers who use the banking model are generally focused on the content of (often canonical) literature, and on

teaching students to write highly structured forms such as the five paragraph essay; therefore

failing to awaken students' critical consciousness.

In Canada, First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples continue to suffer systemic oppression

due to historical and ongoing government policies and practices. Sefa Dei (in press) describes the

main issues by explaining that, "For Indigenous peoples whose lands have been dispossessed, the

legacies of cultural genocide, residential schooling, and colonial settlerhood are yet to be fully

addressed" (p. 33). In addition, minority groups in Canada, for example refugees, face racism

and discrimination in many areas of society such as education, employment, and access to

housing. The challenges faced that are caused by systemic oppression should be acknowledged,

and with changes, the school system could be a forum for addressing some of these issues.

Unfortunately, there are many practices commonly used in classrooms today that oppress

students by stifling their ability to think critically and creatively about their place in the world.

Battiste (2010) states that "Indigenous people around the world continue to feel the tensions

created by a Eurocentric educational system that has taught them not to trust Indigenous

knowledge, but to rely on science and technology for tools for their future" (p. 16). Battiste

(2010) goes on to explain how the privileging of scientific knowledge systems over Indigenous

knowledge systems marginalizes not only Indigenous learners, but all learners because of the

lack of value placed on a knowledge system that focuses more on the collective than on the

individual.

According to Sefa Dei (2019), "The structural and systemic challenges that confront

contemporary learners (e.g. racism, navigating culture, language, power, and the politics of

social exclusion) call for developing and implementing practical strategies for achieving

educational inclusion" (p. 30). In order to implement strategies for inclusion, educators must first examine some of the standards that oppress certain groups within our educational system today. For example, the expectation that knowledge is displayed, almost exclusively in most spaces, in English. Therefore, "those who are literate enough are allowed to enter spaces of knowledge production, while those who are not, become knowledge consumers" (Sefa Dei, in press, p. 34). Besides the language conventions that inform the educational system in Canada, there are also social conventions at play that exclude certain groups such as Indigenous people. For example, "Indigenous-community literacy is beyond knowing how to read and write. In fact, Indigenous peoples do not look at peoples from this Eurocentric lens, but rather, they look at learning as a process of sharing, respecting, collaborating, healing, and creating relationships" (Sefa Dei, in press, p. 36). Changing the system to a more cooperative, community-minded way of being would lead to a less oppressive system for many of the most vulnerable learners.

The oppressive nature of the educational system persists throughout North America. For instance, Giroux (2013) points out that teachers and students, particularly in the United States, are working under some of the most difficult and oppressive conditions in history. Giroux (2013) describes recent reforms in education as "ignor[ing] the role teachers play in preparing learners to be active and critical citizens" (p. 460). According to Giroux (2013), neoliberalism in education has reached a critical point where students are not considered, and "teachers are also stripped of their dignity and capacities when it comes to critically examining the nature and process of educational reform" (p. 461). Unfortunately, while North American society today may appear different than the Latin American context Freire (1970) described, in reality there are

similarities in terms of the stifling impact of the government and corporations on teachers and students.

While thinking about anti-oppressive education in ELA, it is important to view it not as simply using materials and having discussions about marginalized groups and power dynamics in society, but to consider the oppressive nature of current educational practices themselves, particularly as they exist within classrooms. A practice that is achievable in individual teachers' classrooms is to move away from the "banking model of education" towards the "problem-posing model of education" proposed by Freire (1970, p. 79). In this model there is open dialogue between teachers and students; teachers and students are both "simultaneously teachers *and* [emphasis in original] students" (p. 72). In this model of education, Freire (1970) discusses the importance of "authentic thinking" (p. 77). He states: "Only through communication can human life hold meaning. The teacher's thinking is authenticated only by the authenticity of the students' thinking" (Freire, 1970, p. 77). Freire advocates allowing students to think for themselves rather than a teacher imposing their thinking on the students. Freire (1970) states that "problem-posing education regards dialogue as indispensable to the act of cognition which unveils reality" (p. 83), and that this model takes "people's historicity as their starting point" (p. 84). Valuing students' experience in this way makes the work in the classroom so much more authentic and meaningful to both the students and the teachers. Freire (1970) also takes it one step further by proposing the idea that "thought has meaning only when generated by action upon the world" (p. 77). Freire's (1970) ideas highlight the power that education can have in our society if teachers are willing to facilitate students' goals and desires to create change.

Postmodern anti-oppressive education in ELA. Many researchers have studied anti-oppressive education in terms of "understanding the dynamics of the oppression and articulating ways to work against it" (Kumashiro, 2000, p. 25). However, it is necessary to understand how oppression is defined in order to better understand its role in terms of pedagogy and practice. According to Kumashiro (2000), "Oppression is a situation or dynamic in which certain ways of being are privileged in society while others are marginalized" (p. 25). Kumashiro's (2000) definition informs my understanding of oppression, and its discussion throughout this proposed research study.

There are multiple perspectives of anti-oppressive education to consider in a research project. Butin (2002) argues that, "Anti-oppressive education is presumed to work through a rational discourse of overcoming and the myth of the autonomous individual as an agent of self-transformation remains central" (p. 14). In Butin's (2002) definition, the focus is on individual change and growth, which represents the type of influence many teachers hope to have on their students. Kumashiro (2002) echoes this idea by explaining that teaching an inclusive curricula represents an important part of anti-oppressive education, and is significant "not only for learning to embrace various social differences, but also for affirming oneself" (p. 70). However, there is no clear "roadmap" for learning how to do this. The practices of educators who focus on anti-oppressive education may not look similar from classroom to classroom because practices will change depending on the students, and societal values and issues at any given time. Anti-oppressive education is a process, and one that can often be difficult, as it involves examining privilege, the ways teachers are implicated in systems of oppression, and the complex ways discrimination and oppression have differential impact within and across groups. This can make anti-oppressive teaching, and teaching in general, very challenging. Kumashiro (2002) argues

that, "teaching does not consist solely of a rational, predictable, controllable process. In many ways teaching is unknowable and uncontrollable" (p. 78). Thus, flexibility is an important quality for anti-oppressive educators, and teachers in general, to possess in order to be able to work with their students to create successful and meaningful learning experiences.

Another consideration in terms of anti-oppressive approaches to teaching is that sometimes this approach can be oppressive in itself and can "operate in ways that challenge some forms of oppression while complying with others" (Kumashiro, 2002, p. 68). To support this idea, Butin (2002) makes the point that "anti-oppressive education imposes itself upon students, from the texts to be read to the intellectual positions defended and attacked" (p. 14). It is important for educators to understand their own biases and to be critical about the texts they choose to include in their classrooms, and also to be dialoguing with the students regarding these decisions. It is this dialogue, as well as co-teaching and co-learning with students that creates an anti-oppressive environment within a classroom.

When taking an anti-oppressive approach to education students become agents of their own learning; it is not for the teacher to be imparting "correct" ways of thinking. This again signifies a shift in pedagogy from the banking model of education to the problem posing model proposed by Freire (1970). For example, students can participate in choosing materials to be studied, creating meaningful assessments, and generating criteria. Butin (2002) suggests that it is possible to "construct as many situations as possible within which…students can begin to grasp the problematics of … any issue deem[ed] fit for inclusion in [the] curriculum" (p. 16). His goal is to create situations in the classroom where students feel comfortable coming to their own understanding about an issue, even if it differs from that of the teacher. Kumashiro (2003) argues that creating any set of standards for what is to be learned automatically becomes partial. He

shares that, "Even perspectives that critique social inequities cannot help but be partial, offering only certain ways of thinking about oppression and social change that can themselves be critiqued" (Kumashiro, 2003, p. 365). The partiality described by Kumashiro (2003) presents another argument for allowing students to have more input into their learning rather than being presented with only certain perspectives, even if they are considered anti-oppressive. Kumashiro (2003) sums up this point by stating that, "As teachers and learners, we need to examine how all approaches to teaching and learning are partial, including those approaches that center on social justice" (p. 367). Most importantly, there is not one "correct" way to be an anti-oppressive educator, and that part of the process is a willingness to learn, evolve, and even take risks by breaking with the status quo. When the awareness of how systems like the education system disenfranchise people comes to light, the outcomes can be radical- one reason why not everyone is on board with anti-oppressive education. Educators must be brave to do the work of challenging the materials taught, and the ways that schools themselves are run.

   Critical literacy and teaching for social justice. Freire's (1970) pedagogy has informed the practice of critical literacy in the ELA classroom. McLaren (1992) believes that "Freire has revealed to us that literacy practices are practices of power" (p. 10). McLaren (1992) classifies critical literacy as a practice that contests the "power arrangements that structure the politics of the everyday" (p.12), in other words, the texts and the work that is produced by students are examined in relation to power dynamics that exist within society and culture (McLaren, 1992). To understand power dynamics from a linguistic perspective, teachers and students must employ interpretive strategies to understand the way that "we" understand the social and cultural practices of "they"" (McLaren, 1992, p. 13). Also, critical literacy invites students to examine their individual relationships to power and privilege in society. By developing the ability to see

inequities in society that can be hidden in veiled language and accepted norms, students can be inspired to take action and to affect change in their culture, as was Freire's hope in writing *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970).

More recently, Riley (2015) has described critical literacy as an approach to "increas[ing] students' opportunities to learn by enabling them to see and respond to instances of injustice, expand the identities that they might take up, and participate in communities in service of social change" (p. 417). Luke (2012) describes the evolution of critical literacy from its beginnings with Freire to what it has become today as an American approach to critical literacy, which has "a strong focus on the *politics of voice* [emphasis in original], on engaging with the histories, identities, and struggles faced by groups marginalized on the basis of difference of gender, language, culture and race, and sexual orientation" (p. 8). Critical literacy can be difficult to define because it changes and evolves along with society and education. Luke (2012) suggests that, "Critical literacy entails a process of naming and renaming the world, seeing its patterns, designs and complexities, and developing the capacity to redesign and reshape it" (p. 9). Luke (2012) follows up this point by arguing that critical literacy is a process that is contingent on the individual teachers and students and their lived experiences. Although, Riley (2015) does suggest that there is a set of common practices that encompass critical literacy; they include: supplementing literature with other texts, advocating for social change, viewing the students as individuals with knowledge to offer, and questioning language and power throughout society and the school system itself. The flexible and changing nature of critical literacy, as well as its emphasis on social justice, serves to highlight its anti-oppressive nature.

In a classroom setting, there can be a strong dichotomy between those who are privileged and those who are considered the "other"; furthermore, there are certain groups of individuals

who are generally viewed as marginalized by mainstream society and in schools, and therefore

part of the "other." Those groups include, but are not exclusive to: females, the poor, those who

have physical or mental disabilities, those who identify as LGBTQ, and those who are non-

white. Education has a special obligation to these students. Unfortunately, those marginalized

students are often not receiving the benefits they deserve from their education. Blackwell (2010)

argues that many educators are "concerned with bringing white students into a consciousness

about racism and white privilege" (p. 473), which she argues can have the effect of making

students of colour invisible because their experiences are often used as ways to teach white

students about racism. Blackwell (2010) points out that when the success of teaching about

social justice is measured, it is often measured by white students' level of concern about racism,

and there is little to no data about how the education of students of colour has been impacted.

This lack of data, and perhaps concern, for students of colour demonstrates the importance of

employing the tools and strategies of critical literacy in a way that does not continue to reify

white privilege.

In relation to power dynamics, Kumashiro (2000) argues: "Educators have a

responsibility to make schools into places that are for, and that attempt to teach to *all* [emphasis

in original] their students. To fail to work against the various forms of oppression is to be

complicit with them" (p. 29). However, it is also important to acknowledge that many of the

power dynamics that teachers discuss with students can actually be occurring within the walls of

the classroom itself. According to Shim (2012), "understanding what we are working against is a

prerequisite for understanding what we are working toward" (p. 216). The practices teachers

choose to use or actualize in their approach to anti-oppressive education are of critical

importance. Anwaruddin (2015) argues that some approaches to anti-oppressive education in the

classroom are oppressive in themselves. Anwaruddin (2015) states that, "In the hope to be

emancipated, the oppressed submit to the intelligence of their emancipators who explicate

various methods of empowerment" (p. 735). Approaches to anti-oppressive education that are

structured in a manner where the host (the mainstream or norm), invites the guest (the Other) to

have their voices and their stories heard are clearly problematic because one group still has the

power to decide which voices are heard and which are not (Anwaruddin, 2015). Critical literacy

is a concept that could help to clarify in more practical terms what it looks like to equitably teach

towards social justice.

        Power and positioning in classrooms. In approaching anti-oppressive education, it is

important to consider the positions of both the teachers and the students in the classroom. Firstly,

teachers should think about their positing in the classroom, particularly during discussions and

activities about topics that can be viewed as political in nature such as race, culture, gender, and

sexuality. Lewison and Heffernan (2008) state that, "Too often, the dynamics of student-to-

student and student-to-teacher power relationships are not taken into account during

interrogation-and-critique sessions" (p. 438). Lewison and Heffernan (2008) also describe the

significance of disrupting power dynamics by creating safe spaces for students, but that these

spaces cannot be exclusive to the classroom and should extend to the whole school culture if real

changes are going to be made to students' lives beyond the classroom, as is the hope of exploring

important social issues with students. Unfortunately, many studies have shown the prevalence of

bullying in today's school related to issues such as race and gender, and the fact that it happens

most frequently in places outside of the classroom, creating tensions between that safe space

created inside the classroom and the realities students face outside of that space (Lewison &

Heffernan, 2008).

Another issue that can arise with regard to power and positioning in the classroom is that those members of the classroom who are in a position of privilege may not be able to entirely recognize or admit how this affects their views of certain issues. This can create challenges within a classroom because both the privileged and marginalized individuals may employ what are commonly referred to as defensive strategies. Walgenbach and Reher (2016) describe that privileged individuals tend to think in terms of a "we collective" (p. 201), causing "instances of discrimination to be trivialized as individual experiences" (p. 201). On the other hand, "these defensive strategies are also supported by disprivileged individuals, who do not refer to a (united) "we", but to the way they are personally affected" (Walgenbach & Reher, 2016, p. 201). In her study of feminist education in Sweden, Yang (2014) concluded that teachers and students should work together to understand the complex nature of racism, doing so through conversation and re-examination of themselves in order to develop a "critical consciousness" (p. 851), which is similar to Freire's (1970) thinking. Ways to develop this critical consciousness are complex and layered, but one of the most important elements may be to eliminate the patriarchal or authoritarian nature of the teacher-student relationship. Repositioning the way that students view themselves will help them to feel that they have a responsibility to seek out knowledge and to share their knowledge with others.

Second, the way in which both the privileged and marginalized groups are approached in classroom materials is an important consideration, and an area of focus for much of the research on anti-oppressive education, particularly as it relates to critical literacy. According to Kumashiro (2000), "Some researchers have attempted to work against oppression by focusing on what all students- privileged and marginalized - know and should know about the Other" (p. 31). While this may be a starting point, it is important that in keeping with the anti-oppressive model,

students are encouraged to discover information on their own, or express what they may already know or have experienced, rather than be informed by a teacher positioning themselves as an expert. Jones (2009) makes the important point that "the agency of the teacher lies in her power to construct social, cultural and linguistic practices with her students" (p. 237). From a critical literacy approach, one way of doing this is described by Borsheim-Black, Macaluso, and Petrone (2014) as reading both with and against a text. Reading with a text could mean looking at aspects of what an author is saying in a text in terms of characterization, setting, or theme. While reading against a text means to develop the ability to examine the aspects of the text that are taken for granted; for example, who is in a position of power? Who is victimized? How is the historical period portrayed? Whose perspectives are left out? (Borsheim-Black, et al., 2014). Therefore, finding out how teachers can choose materials that are going to challenge norms and help students to critically analyze the text and society, is of paramount importance in learning more about practicing anti-oppressive education in the ELA classroom.

Shim (2012) focuses specifically on anti-oppressive intercultural education. Similar to Butin (2002), she feels that "educators must recognize that we are all a part of the system that we are trying to work against and our unreflective thinking about ourselves, students, and curriculum will only reproduce the current inequality" (p. 216). Shim (2012) makes an important point about understanding our predispositions, and also what we take for granted when it comes to intercultural education. Shim (2012) points out:

> Individual members' relationship to and affinity for the dominant culture, race, language, linguistic styles, and particular dispositions toward knowledge do matter and must be unpacked in intercultural education if we set ourselves out to debunk what is taken for granted and challenge continuing inequality in the present time. (p. 215)

Students' prior knowledges and experiences should be a consideration for discussing attitudes and beliefs in any lesson that challenges norms and values. One of the hardest things to do in the classroom is to get students to realize and acknowledge some of their own biases. Such reflexive dialogue is an important part of anti-oppressive education, and on the occasions that it is achieved, can meaningfully engage students in considering what kinds of privilege they have, recognizing forms and implications of systemic oppression that exist, and the extent to which they experience oppression in their own lives. An analogous phenomenon is described by Freire (1970) as "co-intentional education" (p. 69). He states that when teachers and students "attain this knowledge of reality through common reflection and action, they discover themselves as its permanent re-creators" (Freire, 1970, p. 69). A meaningful way for teachers to help students to understand how privilege and oppression have impacted their lives is to model this reflexive thinking.

While the scope of this thesis only looks at what teachers articulate they do in their classrooms in terms of anti-oppressive education, it is still important to consider the education system as a whole and how individual teachers' actions might perpetuate the oppressive nature of the system. Only in reflecting on roles within this system can necessary changes occur in classrooms that are guided by the principles of anti-oppressive education. This study seeks to assist interested educators in this reflection by providing information regarding teachers' perceptions of anti-oppressive practices in their ELA classrooms.

Multiculturalism and education: Developing a conceptual framework for teaching ELA

       Taking a multicultural stance in the ELA classroom. As I mentioned previously, over the past several years, I have noticed in my own classes that the student population is becoming

increasingly diverse culturally, an observation consistent with immigration statistics in this province. Having a diverse population of students in the classroom has the benefit of bringing in a wide variety of viewpoints and experiences, and taking that diversity into account as I reflect on my pedagogy is critical. Therefore, incorporating multicultural pedagogy into the ELA classroom as another layer of anti-oppressive education represents an important part of taking an anti-oppressive stance in teaching, provided that it is done in a deep and meaningful way that moves beyond tolerance and towards affirmation of all identities. To ensure true affirmation of students' identities, critical multiculturalism as a response to the gaps perceived in multicultural theory is useful. According to Awad (2011), critical multiculturalism is a term used to take back some of the important concepts of multiculturalism that have been watered down and rendered multiculturalism more an act of tokenism in the eyes of many scholars, rather than a true desire to celebrate a multiplicity of cultures and identities. Awad (2011) describes critical multiculturalism as a democratic approach to multiculturalism where the ideals of certain cultures are not privileged over others. Throughout this thesis, the term multiculturalism is used with the intent of representing all cultures equitably, both of an invisible and visible nature.

In the ELA classroom, taking a multicultural stance may mean focusing on developing multicultural literacy in students. Taylor and Hoeschsmann (2011) define multicultural literacy as "developing a means of measuring openness to contestatory knowledges, intercultural awareness, and respect as lived relations and processes" (p. 221). They describe multicultural literacy as "a balanced learning regime (family, community, media, and school), and an apparent willingness or respectful desire to learn more" (Taylor & Hoeschsmann, 2011, p. 221). Characteristics such as respect, the desire to learn more, and the ability to think critically are qualities that schools are consistently trying to instill in students; if taking a multicultural stance

can help with that, it is yet another reason to make it a priority. Taylor and Hoeschsmann (2011) also point out the danger of not focusing on multicultural literacy; they argue that, "In the absence of educational leadership, media step in to inform or misinform youth with limited experience dealing with cultural difference or interactions with people of different ethnoracial and linguistic backgrounds than their own" (p. 231). Young peoples' engagement with media is often limited to their social media networks, presenting them with fairly like-minded views and perspectives. Thus, there is a need to make the most of the time that students are in school in order to help them to reconcile some of the Eurocentric and heteronormative stereotypes they are often exposed to in the media, and to gain the ability to think critically about what they see, hear, and read.

Sometimes, taking a multicultural stance in the classroom is simply viewed as including literature that is written by and/or about diverse cultures (Cook & Amatucci, 2009). However, it is much more complex and nuanced than just providing a variety of books. The guidelines created by the NCATE (National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education) in 2001 were intended to prepare teaching professionals to work in diverse, global communities. As cited by Cook and Amatucci (2009), those guidelines suggest teachers should be:

I.   Examining and understanding [their] own cultural assumptions and how they affect teaching and learning;

II.   Recognizing that language diversity is enriching and not something requiring remediation;

III.   Learning to recognize stereotypes and other manifestations of discrimination and prejudice in curriculum materials and school practices;

IV.   Identifying and understanding the impact of differential access based on ethnicity,

age, class, gender and ability;

V.   Developing cross cultural understanding and practice that embody and reflect that

understanding;

VI.   Promoting the development of curricula and classroom practices that promote

social justice for all students. (p. 224)

 While this is a good start, it is important to delve further into these ideas. For example, item I

(related to teachers examining their cultural assumptions) could go further by addressing

privilege and power and how they affect teaching and learning. Item II (regarding language

diversity not needing remediation) is significant because language is often viewed as a barrier,

and much needs to be done to change negative attitudes that can exist among both educators and

students towards those who may not speak the dominant language (or may speak it, but not well

enough to "pass" as native speakers of the language, which is an inappropriate standard to hold

second language learners to). Also, in item IV (regarding the disparity of people's access to

services), there is no mention of sexuality. I did not find that this had been changed in more

recent documents from NCATE, which led me to question the pervasiveness of

heteronormativity. To bridge this gap, scholars such as Mizzi (2008) have examined

transnational sexuality, suggesting that in international development discourses, identity has been

largely defined by "Western" standards (p. 118), which can perpetuate heteronormative ways of

thinking. Instead, Mizzi (2008) argues that while "communities, schools and families nurture

their youth differently; it is through these differences that one could shed light on differentiated

and non-normative ways of thinking" (p. 123). Finally, in item VI (regarding the development of

classroom materials and practices that support social justice), the term social justice is used as a

bit of a catch-all term and needs to be more specifically defined. Therefore, these guidelines can provide a start for tackling some issues surrounding oppression, but could also be viewed as superficial in some ways.

Provided that the needs and concerns of *all* students are considered, and a critical lens is employed when looking at multicultural pedagogy, there are some concrete ways of taking up a multicultural stance in ELA classroom practice. This could include methods such as using inquiry-based learning, "culturally relevant teaching, and multi-genre instruction" (Cook & Amatucci, 2009, p. 235). While Cook and Amatucci (2009) do not explicitly define these terms in their research, it is important to define them here as they are significant ideas that are mentioned elsewhere in this thesis. First, inquiry-based learning is the practice of "learners constructing knowledge through active investigation" (Jennings & Mills, 2010, p. 468). In other words, having students come up with relevant questions they are curious about, research, and share their findings on their chosen topic with their teacher and classmates, and perhaps even a wider and more authentic audience. Multi-genre instruction relates to inquiry-based learning because it addresses the idea that students be allowed more than one way of showing their learning; Davis and Shadle (2000) describe it as "incorporat[ing] multi-genres, disciplines, cultures and media" (p. 417) into classroom practice. Davis and Shadle (2000) go on to argue that multi-genre instruction represents a "shift in academic values that values toward a more exploratory inquiry that honors mystery" (p. 417). Both inquiry-based learning and multi-genre instruction value the students' ability and power to learn and express their learning in ways that honour their identities and learning styles, making these important concepts that relate to anti-oppressive teaching in ELA.

In reading Cook and Amatucci's (2009) work, they describe culturally relevant teaching as teaching that celebrates and incorporates the cultures of the students in a given classroom though text, conversation and assessment practices. However, it goes much deeper than this. Taking a multicultural stance in one's classroom is a layered endeavour that requires a lot of thought and planning around texts, assessments, classroom discussions and discourses, and classroom routines and expectations, to name a few. To plan with this multicultural stance in mind, Medina and del Rocío Costa (2010) argue the importance of valuing students' out-of-school-literacies. Teachers can do this by considering how "the design of academic literacy experiences connects with the content that students know outside of school through family, community, and, most important, youth culture" (p. 266). The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) supports and values diversity through their position statement on the Academic Success for Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students (2018). The NCTE website (2018) outlines core values in the area including:

- Incorporate the sociopolitical interests and rich backgrounds of linguistically and culturally diverse students in the curriculum and materials.

- Develop lessons that incorporate student voice and choice about topics of study, as well as the use of multiple linguistic dialects and registers to communicate with a broad audience.

- Position students as producers of digital texts that support communicative competence as well as flexibility to move among preferred linguistics practices.

- Recognize that emergent bilingual students have home language knowledge and practice literacies in their home languages.

- Incorporate the backgrounds of linguistically and culturally diverse students through reading materials as well as discussion about how culture, race, ethnicity, and language are taken up in the reading materials.

These examples of core values as they relate to diversity and teaching the ELA curriculum from an influential organization like the NCTE highlight the importance of valuing and honouring student identities, and the way that it should permeate every aspect of teachers' planning in their ELA classroom.

Incorporating multiracial literature in ELA. It is a misnomer to think that being racially inclusive in an educational setting means simply discussing and including texts by and about various monoracial groups. It can be common for educators to feel that including all monoracial populations is comparable to being inclusive to all races, visible minorities in particular (Chang, 2016). Unfortunately, multiracial students often do not feel represented in the classroom in terms of either the literature or the discussion because while the text or classroom discussion may include one of the races that a student identifies with, it usually does not encompass multiple races or ethnicities. Multiracial students may feel unable to relate to classroom materials and discussions, or feel that they are receiving a silent message that in order to relate they must ignore a part of who they are.

When taking a multicultural approach to education, this approach should include multiracial theory (Harris, 2016). This means moving away from the traditional "monoracial paradigm of race" (Harris, 2016, p. 804) that has been the norm. This paradigm particularly affects multi-race students because it may be difficult for them to feel heard or understood because they may feel pressured to identify with one race or another rather than having the entirety of their race recognized and valued. Harris (2016) argues that "there is a dearth of

vocabulary and knowledge [that] disallow[s] educators the ability to talk about and understand

race outside of a monoracial paradigm" (p. 804). For example, using the term multiracial in itself

is of significance because historically, when multiracial groups were acknowledged at all, they

were referred to as "mixed-race" which implies an "impurification of whiteness ('mixing

blood'), privileging white superiority as a reference point to racial categorization" (Chang, 2016,

p. 710). Changing vocabulary and attitudes towards race could be considered one aspect of

taking an anti-oppressive stance in the classroom.

     For educators, in addition to changing vocabulary and thinking around race, it is

important to validate multiracial experiences in meaningful ways. According to Chang (2016),

some of the things educators might consider are:

> Remembering that there are students who may not identify as monoracial and may feel
>
> unacknowledged when the classroom discussion/activity is limited to monoracial
>
> discourses; creating classroom discussion/activity which is increasingly inclusive;
>
> articulating that race is a social construction and a complex notion which is fluid,
>
> dynamic and ever-changing; acknowledging our own limitations as educators insofar as
>
> our knowledge about race and its nuances; soliciting insights from students in the
>
> classroom; and doing everything within our power to remain lifelong learners by reading,
>
> attending professional development sessions and actively listening to those that are better
>
> informed about these issues. (p. 726)

My understanding of the idea Chang (2016) presents here is that teachers need to be aware of the

identities of the students in their classroom at a given time; therefore, they must be as dynamic as

the students in their classrooms in terms of their practices if they hope to honour the identities of

each student. This applies to all teaching contexts, regardless of whether there are multiracial

students in the classroom or not. In addition, while some scholars might object to the neoliberal

nature of the Chang's (2016) term "life-long learners", I feel it is being used to mean that

teachers need to continue to be willing to explore ways of shifting and adapting their practice in

order to meet the ever-changing needs of the students. It could also signify what Dutro, Kazemi

and Balf (2005) describe as the "emotional work" that teachers must continue to do in terms of

examining their own thinking around race and guiding their students through some of the

feelings they may be experiencing around the topic of race. The "emotional work" of teaching

should be ongoing, and relates to the idea of stance as a way of teaching that is flexible,

adaptable, and responds to the environment.

        In the context of the ELA classroom, Chang's (2016) ideas have many implications. For

example, teachers and students could choose fiction and non-fiction texts both by and about

multiracial individuals. The approach could also include bringing in guest speakers to speak

about their experiences as multiracial individuals as it relates to the curriculum. However, Dutro,

Kazemi and Balf (2005) point out that multiracial literacy in the classroom should not use

students of colour to "teach" white students and teachers about race, but that each member of a

classroom, including the teacher, should be engaged in acknowledging and examining racial

positioning. Nevertheless, students should be given opportunities to speak and write about their

own experiences, ideally in a reflective manner, which can help all students to feel valued, no

matter their race.

        An important goal for anti-oppressive educators is for the classroom to be a safe space for

open and honest discourse. Ford and Malaney (2012) examined the effects of inter and intra

group dialogue on minority groups in historically white institutions. Ford and Malaney (2012)

define intergroup dialogue as "a facilitated, face-to-face encounter that aims to cultivate

meaningful engagement between members of two or more social identity groups that have a history of conflict" (p. 16); while the intragroup dialogue brings together students from a similar racial background. The goal of the intergroup dialogues is to provide a safe space for discussing both differences and similarities as a way of working towards equality (Ford & Malaney, 2012), while the intragroup dialogue attempts to discover and analyze common experiences. In their study, Ford and Malaney (2012) concluded that intergroup dialogues had positive results for students of colour and multiracial students in the sense that the majority of them felt greater pride in their race or culture, felt more positive about their futures, and felt that they had a greater understanding of their own biases. If done correctly, and with a lot of planning and reflection, a technique such as an intergroup dialogue can have an impact on students' lives outside of the classroom and on how they view themselves as individuals.

      Culturally responsive pedagogy. Another aspect to consider when taking a multicultural stance in the classroom is culturally responsive pedagogy. According to Gay (2002), culturally responsive pedagogy is "using the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more effectively" (p. 106). Cultural characteristics can include ideas such as "communication, learning styles, and relationship norms" (Gay, 2002, p. 107). Maasum, Maarof and Ali (2014) provide a definition of culture that is also helpful to understanding these ideas; they say that it encompasses "ethnic groups' cultural values, traditions, communication, learning styles, contributions and relational patterns" (p. 103). However, it is important to note that while culturally responsive pedagogy differs from multicultural education, the two can and should work hand in hand. Rychly and Graves (2012) explain the difference between the two by stating that:

Education that is multicultural can be delivered to a classroom containing students from

the same culture; the content presented is representative of various cultural perspectives.

Culturally responsive pedagogy, on the other hand, must respond to the cultures actually

present in the classroom. It connects new information to students' background

knowledge, and presents the information in ways that respond to students' natural ways

of learning. (p. 45)

When examining this concept through a lens of intersectionality, all aspects of students'

subjectivities, including invisible identity markers should be recognized. Teachers need to be

responsive to LGBTQ identities, as well as religious and cultural identities, and be conscious of

not perpetuating heterodominant, cisnormative, and Christian-centric discourses, to name a few.

Culturally relevant pedagogy is another term that is useful in multicultural theory and is a

term coined by Ladson-Billings in the 1990s as a way of explaining the pedagogy of educators

who experienced success teaching African-American students, rather than blaming their culture

for a lack of success in the classroom (Ladson-Billings, 2014). Ladson-Billings (2014) identifies

three major domains of culturally relevant teaching: academic success (helping students achieve

intellectual growth that results from classroom learning experiences), cultural competence

(helping students learn about and appreciate their own culture while also gaining knowledge of

other cultures), and sociopolitical consciousness (helping students to take learning beyond the

classroom to solve real world problems). While these three domains help to clarify what

culturally relevant pedagogy is, Ladson-Billings (2014) states that, "The idea that adding some

books about people of color, having a classroom Kwanzaa celebration, or posting 'diverse'

images makes one 'culturally relevant'" (p. 82), is superficial and does not represent culturally

relevant pedagogy.

Multicultural education, culturally responsive pedagogy, and culturally relevant pedagogy can all be considered important approaches to anti-oppressive education, as they all address teacher practices and decision making around classroom materials. Rychly and Graves (2012) propose four practices that they deem to be critical for a teacher to be able to implement a culturally responsive type pedagogy. They are:

> (1) That teachers are empathetic and caring, (2) that they are reflective about their beliefs about people from other cultures, (3) that they are reflective about their own cultural fames of reference, and (4) that they are knowledgeable about other cultures. (p. 45)

These four practices exemplify the importance of an educator's personal beliefs and their ability to be flexible and reflect on those beliefs. Rychly and Graves (2012) point out that teaching educators how to reflect and building structured reflection into practice is significant to making culturally responsive pedagogy work. This is particularly significant because of the dynamic nature of people and cultures, making learning a continuous endeavour that requires life-long scholarship. However, one dimension that may be lacking in Rychly and Graves (2012) practices is critical thinking. There is no mention of teachers questioning and criticizing the systemic oppression that permeates the educational system and working to change it. Regardless, this work cannot be done in isolation by individual teachers; educational, social, and political structures need to change and to be widely (and loudly) critiqued in order to be more equitable and inclusive.

Culturally responsive teachers need to be aware of how all of their actions and choices are contributing to either the oppression or the empowerment of certain groups. Gay (2002) talks

about the "symbolic curriculum" which she says includes "images, symbols, icons, mottoes, awards, celebrations, and other artifacts that are used to teach students knowledge, skills, morals and values" (p. 108). The most common forms of symbolic curricula are displayed on bulletin boards within schools. Gay (2002) states that, "Culturally responsive teachers are critically conscious of the power of the symbolic curriculum as an instrument of teaching and use it to help convey important information, values, and actions about ethnic and cultural diversity" (p. 108). Considering seemingly minor things such as the posters put up in the classroom, to larger matters such as celebrating student accomplishments (including what accomplishments are worthy of celebration, and how they are celebrated), can send a very clear message of caring (or not) to students. Gay (2002) declares that, "Caring is a moral imperative, a social responsibility, and a pedagogical necessity" (p. 109). Nieto (2017) echoes the importance of care and compassion in teachers, by correlating it to students' happiness. Nieto (2017) argues that feeling cared about increases students' happiness, which leads to characteristics such as: curiosity, enthusiasm, and acceptance and respect for others. Caring is at the root of all aspects of anti-oppressive education if it is to succeed, provided educators display their care through mitigating power and actively working to change oppressive practices within schools and classrooms.

The teachers' attitude, personality and pedagogical approach are arguably the most important factors to successfully incorporating culturally responsive pedagogy. One way of effectively practicing culturally responsive pedagogy is through the concept of cultural connectedness described by Irizarry (2007), which is "a framework for understanding the fluid nature of culture and the variety of ways that members of a cultural group express their cultural identities" (p. 27). Irizarry (2007) argues that:

The development of a culturally connected identity is active and constant. It requires

teachers to go into various cultural communities as opposed to just waiting for the

students to "bring their cultures" to class. Being culturally connected is an ongoing

endeavor that can accommodate for the ever-changing nature of culture. Re-examining

culturally responsive teaching by looking at culture from different perspectives can help

frame the approach in a way that informs teaching practices so that they are more closely

aligned with cultural identities as they are expressed by students. (p. 27)

The flexibility and adaptability necessary to effectively practice culturally responsive pedagogy

is also necessary to successfully take an anti-oppressive stance in the classroom, as it emphasizes

the teachers' willingness to learn and grow alongside students.

      Lack of diversity in the field. A final issue to think about when it comes to the effects of

race on educators and education itself is the lack of diversity that often exists in the teaching

profession in Canada. Recently, educators and teacher education programs have begun to not

only notice, but to take action towards creating more diversity within the teaching population.

According to Schmidt (2015), "Part of the impetus for diversifying the Canadian teaching force

stems from the mismatch between student and teacher populations in multilingual, multicultural

school systems" (p. 586). This lack of diversity can be problematic in the ELA classroom in

particular because human diversity has become an important criterion for selecting materials so

that students can see themselves reflected in the materials, or develop empathy and appreciate

diversity amongst groups and individuals. If diversity is valued in our selection of texts,

shouldn't it be valued in our selection of teachers?

      Because of the lack of diversity in the teaching field, the teacher is generally in a position

of privilege; some students may be in privileged positions while some may not. The most recent

data available indicates that in 2006, 6.9% of teachers in Canada were visible minorities (Ryan,

Pollock, & Antonelli, 2009). I was not able to find any data regarding the percentage of teachers who may be part of other minority groups. However, recent changes being made to many teacher education programs to recruit more diverse applicants and include diversity categories in admissions policies, indicates that this lack of diversity is still a major issue in the field. Cross (2003) argues that in most teacher education programs, students are not asked to question their "Whiteness" and how that has affected their position in society and their position in relation to minority groups. The lack of diversity in the teaching profession is problematic because students who feel they are part of a marginalized group may not feel that they can be understood by their teachers who are in more privileged positions. Cross' (2003) solution to this problem includes the idea that preparing teachers to teach in culturally diverse classrooms should not stop at simply exposing teachers to ideas about diversity, but that teachers need to learn how to be advocates for students from diverse backgrounds.

Unfortunately, some of the efforts to diversify the teaching field in Canada have not been successful or sustained. For example, according to Schmidt and Gagné (2015), programs aimed at supporting internationally educated teachers in accessing the Canadian teaching force have been largely discontinued. Unfortunately, "With the surplus of teachers in many (though not all) urban centres nationwide, these programs have been in increasingly short supply and typically discontinued after a pilot period due to a lack of sustainable, financial, political and institutional support" (Schmidt & Gagné, 2015, p. 297). These internationally educated teachers have a lot to contribute in terms of diversifying the teaching force in Canada both culturally and linguistically, and the lack of support for these programs, and the teachers themselves, is one example of the failure to recognize systemic discrimination as an issue.

Jones' (2009) scholarship emphasizes the importance of the relationships that teachers build with students, and the impact they can have on a teacher's ability to reach a student. Jones (2009) describes the idea that "a teacher who 'matches' a student along race, class, gender, ability, and religious lines would better educate the student" (p. 234) as a "faulty argument" (p. 234). She goes on to point out that this faulty argument presupposes the idea that a Caucasian, female and middle-class teacher will surely fail at teaching a student from a different background than her own (Jones, 2009), which most educators would agree is simply not the case. However, this does not mitigate the need for diversifying the teaching force. Schmidt (2015) explains that attempting to "match" teachers to cultural or linguistic characteristics of the student population can in fact marginalize everyone and put teachers in a position where they are viewed as being responsible for creating equity within the school; Schmidt (2015) supports a more global approach to diversifying the teaching force.

Why there is such a lack of diversity in the teaching field, is however, still worthy of examination. Efforts need to focus both on diversifying the teaching force through initial teacher education, as well as to help current teachers to succeed at implementing anti-oppressive pedagogies such as multicultural and/or culturally responsive pedagogy. Because ideas about race, gender, and class are socially constructed, Jones (2009) believes that teachers are either "conforming to or disrupting what is perceived as normal" (p. 234). As more and more teachers disrupt those norms, that can send a very powerful message to students. Jones (2009) states that, "the power of the teacher is in her *being* [emphasis in original] with students in and across defining moments of who the classroom participants are and who they might become" (p. 237). So, while race, class, and gender are important dynamics that can affect classroom culture, it is important to remember that building meaningful relationships, as well as respect and

understanding between the teacher and students, as well as between students (particularly those in minority groups) and their peers can be the most powerful tool for taking an anti-oppressive stance in the classroom.

Gender and queer theory in education: Developing a conceptual framework for teaching ELA

  Definitions. Gender and sexuality are important issues in education, particularly in the ELA classroom because most teachers (depending on the policies to which they must adhere) have many opportunities to discuss diverse perspectives and to allow students to share their experiences. Whether or not this happens is also dependent on the individual educator's beliefs and comfort level in discussing certain issues. However, the way that these terms are defined can be problematic and varies depending on the context. For example, gender can sometimes be used as a noun to identify an individual as male or female. In the ELA classroom as well as in this thesis, it is used largely to describe gender identity (i.e. there are more than two genders) and gender expression, as well as the ways in which gender is socially constructed.

  Sexuality is also a complex term to define, but is generally used to refer to a person's sexual orientation and sexual practice. The complexity underlying sexuality is that there are many ways that individuals might define their sexuality; unfortunately, the heteronormative nature of our society does not lead us to believe that there are many possibilities. Narrow ideas of sexuality and gender oppress many people. However, scholars like Mizzi (2015) bring awareness to the Westernized nature of these terms and how they are defined:

    The term sexual orientation functions not only to *describe* (give an account of a group, in

    a specific context, location, time) but also to *inscribe* (relegate the subject to a set of

    predetermined and dominant judgements, behaviours, and characteristics that define and

limit agency) Western understandings around sexual difference [emphasis in original]. (p.

86)

Consequently, it is important to be cognizant of the sometimes problematic definitions associated

with these terms, and work to draw attention to them.

Queer theory contributes many useful ideas to anti-oppressive education. First, it is

important to understand the use of the word queer in this sense in that it is not pejorative, but that

it is used as opposed to the term LGBTQ as a way of recognizing that sexual and gender

identities exist outside of these categories and that they are "multiple, variable, shifting, and

fluid" (Blackburn & Buckley, 2005, p. 202). The term queer theory was first coined by de

Lauretis in 1990 and was "aimed at resisting the cultural and sexual homogenization in academic

"gay and lesbian studies"," (de Lauretis, 2011, p. 257). Rather than viewing gay and lesbian as a

single field of study, de Lauretis was inviting scholars to examine the intersectionality and

deconstruct the silence around sexuality, gender, and race and to think about these terms in new

ways (de Lauretis, 2011). Instead of performing a heteronormative status quo, queer theory

argues that there can be insights into human sexuality and resilience through going against the

grain and embracing sexual and gender fluidity. Another way of thinking about queer theory is

that it takes on both gender and sexuality (de Lauretis, 2011). Furthermore, Britzman (2012)

defines queer theory as thinking of "identities in terms that place as a problem the production of

normalcy and in terms that confound the intelligibility of the apparatuses that produce identity as

repetition" (p. 294). Britzman (2012) writes that queer theory attempts to go "beyond the need to

render difference through the lens of the same" (p. 304). The idea that a hetero/homo or

male/female binary exists is called into question by scholars like Britzman. Queer theorists also

highlight the need to challenge the social construction of gender and sexuality and the overall

apparatuses that sustain these binary social systems. This description is significant because it

highlights the way that queer theory attempts to get away from the us versus them ideas that can

underlie much pedagogy and identity (Britzman, 2012). Luhmann (1998) describes one of the

significant tasks of queer pedagogy as "transgress[ing] the boundaries between queer and

straight, partly by deciphering queer content and subtexts in ostensibly straight narratives, partly

by pointing to the overlap between heterosexual and homosexual practices" (p. 125). Queer

theory and queer pedagogy share many similar values with anti-oppressive education. For

example, that a person's identity may not fit into a pre-existing box or category, nor should it be

expected to. Rather, diversity among people should be studied, celebrated, and appreciated. Also,

queer pedagogy and anti-oppressive education are both critical and political stances that can be

taken by educators.

Looking at these issues in relation to teaching practice, there are several important

considerations: first, gender and/or sexuality can have an impact on the educational experience

and the success of each student, because the way a person expresses their gender and/or sexuality

may affect the way they are treated. For example, students may experience bullying from their

peers related to their expression of gender, sexuality or sexual practice; this would likely have a

negative impact on their education. Second, some students may feel silenced by the

heteronormative nature of schools (and society as a whole), which would affect their ability to

fully participate in the educational system because they may not feel welcomed. If students

perceive their sexuality or gender as "not normal", they are likely to remain silent, believe in

their 'abnormality', and subsequently cause damage to themselves and to others.

Gender inequities in schools. Regardless of the messages that are prevalent in society

about how much "progress" has been made in terms of gender equality, there is much research

that shows that "gender inequality in the classroom continues and is manifest in and maintained by a variety of overlearned, non-conscious and non-verbal messages initiated in interactions between teachers and students" (LaFrance, 1991, p. 3). These kinds of interactions could include communication related to written work, class participation, or discipline, to name a few. Although LaFrance's research was published in 1991, I would argue that in my experience as an educator, in my conversations with other educators, and in my experiences in professional development sessions, LaFrance's point that, "the prevailing wisdom has it that boys have a tougher time in school than do girls" (p. 4) might still be the case if we are looking at only a two-gender, heteronormative paradigm. However, students who do not identify as cisgender and/or heterosexual likely have the most difficult time in school. According to the 2017 study titled "Being safe: Being me in the prairie provinces", half of school aged trans youth in Saskatchewan and Manitoba attempted suicide in the past year. This statistic speaks to the need to move the conversation away from the two-gender paradigm that is the norm in most schools and in much of society.

According to La France (1991), a common belief among educators is that gender discrimination in schools has virtually disappeared. However, LaFrance (1991) argues that this is not the case and that there is still gender bias in terms of how teachers treat students. For example, LaFrance (1991) contends that a challenge faced by cisgender girls in the classroom is that the academic expectations for them are significantly lower than those of boys. However, LaFrance (1991) also points out that boys are reprimanded far more than girls, but "Embedded within the imputation of immaturity is the assumption of eventful maturity" (p. 7). This creates an issue for females because "males are expected to fully develop their abilities and to eventually achieve their maximum potential; females, even in primary school, may be assumed to have

already reached theirs" (LaFrance, 1991, p. 7). A combination of factors can affect students'

academic performance; this is just one way of looking at how gender discrimination can have an

impact on student performance and motivation.

Since LaFrance's (1991) research, the inequitable treatment of (and expectations for)

boys and girls may still be similar in some places, but there has been a shift in the academic

achievements of boys and girls in Canada at least. Gambell and Hunter (2010) summarized and

analyzed research done by each of the provinces related to gender and achievement and have

found that "whether one looks at urban or rural marks, female students have outperformed their

male counterparts in every grade 12 subject except mathematics" (Gambell & Hunter, 2010, p.

691). The gaps between boys and girls are especially wide when it comes to literacy

achievement. And, these gaps continue to exist. In Canada's 2015 participation in the

Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) study, girls outperformed boys in

reading in every province by a statistically significant twenty-six points on average across

Canada (O'Grady, Deussing, Scerbina, Fung, & Muhe, 2015). I did not find any scholarly

articles interpreting the results of the 2015 PISA study in Canada, and believe that the reasons

that Gambell and Hunter (2010) suggest for this gap could still be the same. They propose that in

most children's lives, their role models for literacy are usually females, mainly mothers and

female teachers, and that the types of texts (non-fiction in particular) that engage more boys in

reading are not taken seriously by teachers.

There are aspects of the educational system that are doing great disservices to the

development of both males and females in different ways; however, the ways that individual

teachers approach their students can make a lasting difference in how those students see

themselves not only as readers, but as people. Engels, Colpin, Van Leeuwen, Bijttebier, Van Den

Noortgate, Claes, and Verschueren (2016) characterize positive teacher-student relationships as being warm, sensitive and receptive. In their study on the effects of positive teacher-student and peer-student interactions on adolescents, Engels et al. (2016) found that students with positive teacher-student relationships were more emotionally secure, felt a greater sense of belonging, were more motivated in their learning, had a more positive self-perception and a greater capacity for self-regulation, than students who had negative teacher-student relationships. The aforementioned list of effects that developing positive relationships with students can have on the student outside of their learning and behaving in the classroom, provides a great deal of support for emphasizing the importance of caring and connectedness as a teacher, which plays a major role in taking an anti-oppressive stance in the classroom.

Examining gender through literature. In ELA in particular, gender and sexuality may play a significant role in many of the texts that are studied. The gender and/or sexuality of the author or the gender and/or sexuality of the characters can play a significant role in how a student might view a text, and subsequently themselves. Pace and Townsend (1999) make the point that "Attending to stereotyping based on gender identity means questioning the simplistic roles often assigned to women and men and examining- as resistant readers and listeners- the texts we read and the voices we hear" (p. 48). The conversations we have in the classroom about texts related to gender and/or sexuality can shape students' thinking and actions outside the classroom. An example of this could be discussing and modelling the use of gender-inclusive pronouns (Airton, 2017). This modelling could be done by using texts that include non-binary characters, but even more simply by the teacher using inclusive language and talking openly about preferred pronouns and why this should be important to everyone. This type of action

could make some students feel heard and included, and others enlightened as to the role that they play and the impact they can have on others outside of the classroom if they are willing to try.

While it should be considered the work of all teachers to implement anti-oppressive education, it is understandable that some teachers may feel powerless to help students to overcome the gender discrimination and obstacles to equitable gender recognition and affirmation they face in the education system. However, in many ways, ELA teachers potentially have the ability to help students to understand and overcome some of the stereotypes they may have faced both in and out of the classroom because "language is the primary vehicle through which stereotyping is perpetuated" (McClure, 1999, p. 78). According to McClure (1999), ELA teachers have the chance to help students "understand how pervasive and effective sexist language and sex-role stereotyping are" (p. 80). McClure (1999) goes on to suggest some concrete ways of doing this, the most effective way being inquiry-based research projects because these allow students to collect and interpret their own data, instead of being asked to believe something they are being told by an adult, which they are often reluctant to do. Rather than viewing one gender as particularly disadvantaged over others in a classroom setting, this type of approach values all genders and gives students the opportunity to better understand how gender may have impacted (and is impacting) their lives, as well as the lives of those who identify with a gender that differs from their own. This approach taken by McClure (1999) follows Freire's (1970) idea of "problem-posing education" as being the most effective way to humanize and liberate students.

In the ELA classroom, written texts such as books, poems, articles, and short stories, present opportunities to analyze and discuss gender with students. Gender and gender roles are often viewed and discussed through the lens of characters and how they are presented in

literature, as well as other genres of text. Therefore, it is important to present students with characters of all genders who do not fit into the stereotypes of male or female, or if the characters do fit into those stereotypes, it is important to address that as well.

Gender stereotypes are often perpetuated in texts that are read in schools, and some of these stereotypes can translate to student behaviour and choice in reading materials. According to Earles (2016), "While women/girls are (tenuously) welcomed into masculine spaces, notions of nurturing and love remain relegated to characters and spaces categorised as feminine" (p. 16). Benjamin and Irwin-DeVitis (1998) found similar results when they studied gender bias in 1000 grade six, seven and eight students in both rural and suburban New York and Louisiana. In this study, when students were asked to discuss their favourite characters, in discussing male characters, both male and female students liked them for characteristics such as "bravery, independence, and strength", while female characters were chosen because "they were nurturing and self-sacrificing" (p. 65). The results of Benjamin and Irwin-DeVitis' study in 1998 and Earles' research from 2016 demonstrate that gender stereotyping continues to be an issue that needs to be addressed in the classroom.

Exploring ideas surrounding gender diversity in high school ELA is yet another important consideration in terms of honouring students' identities in the classroom. Approaching ideas about gender diversity through literature is one way of getting the conversation started. As noted earlier, many teachers still use a significant number of canonical texts, which are typically male dominated in terms of the authors and the protagonists. Coryat and Clemens (2017) argue that teaching from the canon does not provide students with images of strong and fearless women, particularly women from diverse racial or ethnic backgrounds. Male and female students should be exposed to female writers and characters, and engaged in conversations about the power of

these women, in order to subvert the idea that women are somehow considered "less than" in society (Coryat & Clemens, 2017, p. 42). Classroom discussions about females in powerful positions, or about why females are not often represented with characteristics like power and bravery can help students to read and think more critically about the texts they encounter.

Displaying a balance of characters and discussing the characteristics of those characters is only part of what ELA teachers should consider when choosing and discussing texts in their classrooms. Greenbaum (1999) suggests that stopping and simply discussing the characters may be polarizing; instead, she suggests creating juxtaposition by seeing a text through "lenses, perhaps our own and an author's, or character's, [which] allows us to experience juxtaposition, to be influenced by another point of view" (p. 97). Greenbaum (1999) explains that in her work she has found that using this approach has helped students to "find fewer polarities and more similarities between genders … [often because] they examine the intersection of gendered norms within one person" (p. 98). ELA teachers can be responsible for either perpetuating or breaking down expectations of gender that are continuously being presented as the norm because "by providing [students] with better literary examples of collective interactions, cooperation, and love, authors and educators could help further deconstruct hegemonic notions of gender at school for the benefit of all students" (Earles, 2016, p. 16). This is a reminder that the work of an ELA teacher can foster understanding and build relationships between students of all genders in a classroom.

Teachers must think deeply about the methods they will use to convey important messages related to stereotyping and hegemony. The most common way to approach this task is through discussions about texts. However, before teachers choose texts, and before students read

texts in school, Gilmore (2017) argues that teachers and students should be aware of their own

implicit biases to be able to identify those biases as they exist in texts. Gilmore (2017) states that:

It does not necessarily lie within a teacher's power to expose each individual's implicit

biases, nor would we want that power, but it is within our power and responsibility to

offer every student an opportunity to recognize implicit bias, both in his or her own

reading life and in the literature we bring to school, and thus to make the implicit explicit.

(p. 24).

Understanding biases with regards to identity markers such as gender allows for more

meaningful interpretations of texts and can translate into greater understanding of self and

society. This is significant because, "literature and the ways that we talk about it have the power

to define what we perceive as acceptable in our culture" (Pace & Townsend, 1999, p. 43). Pace

and Townsend (1999) suggest that, "The methods we use are as important as the texts that we

teach. Building sensitivity to gender-role stereotypes is more complex than policing sexist

language" (p. 48). This points again to the importance of the teacher modelling language that

does not perpetuate hetero and cis-normativity in everyday discourse in the classroom, and

taking opportunities to use texts to show how these assumptions can have very real and negative

impacts on a person's life. Discussing literature and characters with students is complex and

sensitive and requires continuous practice on both the part of the students and the teacher; it can

require a lot more planning and thinking ahead of time on the part of the teacher than might be

expected, another reason why taking an anti-oppressive stance can feel daunting for some. Pace

and Townsend (1999) suggest these strategies for successful and meaningful discussion:

Work to deepen students' thinking by increasing class participation though various

methods of grouping, by talking explicitly about stereotypes, by seeking surprising or

unusual ways of looking at people (What if Hamlet were a girl?), by lacing our speech

with uncertainty markers to open spaces for new ideas, and by assuming the posture of

resistant readers to examine with our students the transcripts of our own classroom

conversations. (p. 49)

As students make their way through adolescence, they may be experiencing a crisis of identity by

struggling to meet societal expectations, and consequently being ostracized because they do not

meet those expectations. These conversations can help students to break their silence on these

issues and realize that they are not alone.

Queer inclusive classrooms and curriculums. While discussions about inclusion have

embraced linguistic, cognitive, cultural, and even gender diversity, they have been slower to

address sexual identity. Rottmann (2006) points to the fact that many sexually minoritized

teachers and administrators feel pressured to keep their sexual identity private to maintain job

security as an important barometer of the climate in our education system with regards to sexual

identity. Because while "teachers and students have been exploring issues of social justice by

explicitly questioning how gender, race, and culture are embedded within characters for years…

many struggle to include sexual identity in these analyses" (Crisp & Knezek, 2010, p. 77). In

schools, heterosexuality is presented as the norm, making queer students (and staff) feel unsafe,

or at the very least not represented in the curriculum.

Schools and classrooms should be safe spaces for students; however, for transgender

youth they have historically, and currently, not been that way. Johnson, Singh, and Gonzalez

(2014) argue that there have been many studies documenting the experiences of LGBTQ youth,

and how school and classroom experiences can be changed in order to be more inclusive.

However, Johnson et al. (2014) point out that these studies generally use LGBTQ as a blanket

term when the research actually refers mainly to sexual orientation and not gender identity,

leaving a major gap in research surrounding the experiences of transgender and queer youth,

including strategies to improve inclusion and build understanding. Scholars like Mizzi and

Walton (2014) point to the term "sexual minority" as another term that can be used in the

discourse of sexual identity. However, as with all language used in discussing sexual identity

(and identity in general), it should be used with caution and as a way of extending what the terms

"queer" or LGBTQ do not offer (Mizzi & Walton, 2014, p. 87).

Transgender, queer, and questioning youth who participated in the study conducted by

Johnson et al. (2014) identified several factors that would improve their experiences in school

such as: eliminating, or at least addressing languages and spaces that represent gender binaries,

creating space for cisgender people to reflect on their own assumptions about gender expression,

raising awareness that sexual orientation and gender identity are different, raising awareness of

the "gender-power system and integrate discussions of this power system into the curriculum and

to design a variety of class activities that did not use gender to determine involvement" (p. 428),

and finally to feel supported in developing and using language that conveys gender identity.

Kedley and Spiering (2017) suggest that texts that are already part of the curriculum and not

necessarily labeled LGBTQ-themed can also be used for what they refer to as "queer readings"

(p. 54) where teachers "actively recognize and discuss instances with students where authors or

characters challenge normative gender and sexual identities" (p. 54). Looking at texts that are

commonly used, as well as incorporating queer texts into the curriculum is a way that educators

can help transgender, queer and questioning youth feel validated, and ELA teachers have a

particular ability to do so because they can use literature and text as a tool to open up conversations, raise awareness, and build understanding and support in their classrooms.

The responsibility of including queer perspectives in ELA classrooms and curricula includes incorporating queer literature. According to de Lauretis (2011), a queer text can be considered one that works against narratives and the pressure for "closure and fulfillment" (p. 244), but also disrupts common symbols in society. Crisp and Knezek (2010) also discuss the effect that the inclusion of queer literature can have in a classroom. They state:

> Readers are generally expected to identify with a story's protagonist, so the use of a heterosexual leading character may work to *distance* readers from queer content, while the use of a gay protagonist may operate to position readers to identify with (and see through the eyes of) a gay character. For readers who self-identify as gay, it's a potential opportunity to see "someone like me," and for those who self-identify as heterosexual, it may disrupt heteronormativity by placing those generally *outside* in and those who are generally *inside* on the outside [emphasis in original]. (p. 78)

Helmer (2016) suggests that one way to help students to interact with queer texts is to encourage them to create "counter-narratives" (p. 43) where students are asked to examine anther point of view or another side of the story by reconsidering, reformulating, and/or renaming an aspect of a text (p. 43). To add to this point, Helmer (2016) has proposed the idea of "queer literacies" which includes the following six dimensions:

> Dimension 1: recognising as legitimate bodies of knowledge and making the focus of inquiry the stories, experiences, cultures, histories and politics of LGBTQI people.

Dimension 2: developing an understanding of the dynamics of oppression related to

normative systems of regulation of sexuality, gender and sex (i.e. homophobia,

heterosexism, heteronormativity, cissexism, genderism, transphobia).

Dimension 3: troubling commonsense, partial and distorted understandings of sexuality,

sex and gender.

Dimension 4: using the critical method of deconstruction for the literary and social

analysis of discourse and text.

Dimension 5: engaging with and producing counter-narratives that open spaces for new

imaginings about sexuality, gender and sex.

Dimension 6: creating spaces where students can enter and work through feelings of

discomfort and crisis. (p. 45)

These six dimensions proposed by Helmer (2016) are meant to work together. In teaching ELA,

the dimensions suggest that teachers should: legitimize ideas and texts by and about people who

have not been previously considered legitimate; work to understand how oppression is created by

the "norms" that exist in society; address problematic viewpoints or understandings; critically

analyze and deconstruct texts; provide a space for including alternative ways of thinking and

being than may have been presented in a given text; and guide students through their feelings

about these topics. I feel that these are all points that are addressed by the ELA curriculum in

Manitoba through the practice of power and agency, but Helmer's (2016) dimensions of queer

literacy provide another way of presenting these ideas that may be helpful for those seeking to

participate in anti-oppressive or queer inclusive education.

   If ELA curriculums are not or do not become queer inclusive, we will continue to

perpetuate the notion that the "institutional framework of high school ELA consciously and

publicly silences certain sexualities" (Blackburn & Buckley, 2005, p. 203). When queer inclusive

curriculums are used in ELA, then, "At the very least, homophobic students are forced to

intellectually engage with mores and values and people they feel unable to accept socially"

(Blackburn & Buckley, 2005, p. 203). However, this is a minimal expectation of the results of

including queer texts in the ELA classroom. Having students understand what it means to be in

allyship and wanting to be a part of creating social change are really the ultimate goals (Burke &

Greenfield, 2016).

  While it is important to choose texts that present diverse images of queerness, this must

be done carefully and critically. Britzman (2012) argues:

  The normal view is that one should attempt to 'recover' authentic images of gays and

  lesbians and stick them into the curriculum with the hope that representations- in the form

  of tidy role models- can serve as a double remedy for hostility towards social difference

  for those who cannot imagine difference and for the lack of self-esteem for those who are

  imagined as having no self. (p. 297-298)

Including queer texts in the classroom should not be an act of tokenism, which is why what a

teacher does with those texts is so imperative. For example, supplementing texts with contextual

information and relevant discussions to guide students in their understanding is a very important

part of the job of the ELA teacher (Blackburn & Buckley, 2005). This is especially true for queer

curricula because it is relatively "new" territory in many classrooms. This way of teaching is

summed up by Helmer (2016) as an "intertextual approach" (p. 41). Helmer (2016) suggests:

  Reading a literary text alongside media texts through a deconstructive lens as well as

  taking a historical approach that showed students similarities and shifts in LGBTQ

  representations in texts, allowed students to develop more critical and queerly informed

reading practices. However, engaging students with such alternative reading practices

might also produce moments of emotional discomfort and/or cognitive dissonance, but

these moments can become important catalysts of learning. (p. 41)

In other words, Helmer (2016) addresses the strategy of using media texts in conjunction with

literary texts in the ELA classroom, and describes the feelings of discomfort that could or should

be evoked in the students and teacher. Feelings of discomfort are a key catalyst that can lead to

learning, as well as changes in behaviour and attitudes. However, this approach requires

vulnerability, self-reflection, and emotional work on the part of the students and the teacher.

The strategies that teachers use to open up the dialogue regarding queer perspectives are

particularly important because of the personal and sensitive nature of this topic for many

students. According to Schneider Kavanagh (2016), the reason for this is "one of the paradoxes

in the history of the civil rights struggle for LGBTQ people: the simultaneous need for both

visibility and privacy" (p. 25). Some of the most powerful moments in the classroom can be

when students and teachers are sharing personal information and experiences. This can be

especially difficult when discussing LGBTQ issues because "when students make text-to-self

connections, they are making themselves vulnerable" (Schneider Kavanagh, 2016, p. 15). To

help to manage this issue, Schneider Kavanagh (2016) proposes two possible approaches a

teacher may take: The "parallel approach" is one that "attends to the demands of both visibility

and privacy, but within different, parallel, instructional spheres" (p. 18). In more practical terms,

this gives students the option to have their voices heard in a classroom discussion should they so

choose, but they also have the opportunity to write about their ideas and beliefs, which remains

anonymous (Schneider Kavanagh, 2016). Another option is for teachers to use a "simultaneous"

approach to deal with the "visibility-privacy tension" (Schneider Kavanagh, 2016, p. 19). This

approach means using strategies such as allowing students to anonymously write questions and comments to be read by the teacher, which makes "student voices public while at the same time maintaining individuals' privacy" (Schneider Kavanagh, 2016, p. 19). While there is not a singular approach that works in all contexts, it is another example of how thoughtful anti-oppressive educators must be in making their pedagogical decisions. Furthermore, these decisions may not be the same from year to year or class to class.

　　　　To conclude, anti-oppressive educators have many decisions to make in terms of their orientation to selecting and teaching curriculum and materials, making decisions related to materials and classroom activities and assessments, their orientation to students, as well as their orientation to pedagogy. Thus, this study is designed to find out how secondary ELA educators in Manitoba who identify as anti-oppressive educators make decisions in terms of selecting texts, designing activities, and creating classroom climates that are anti-oppressive in nature. This study is also informed by research on anti-oppressive pedagogy, multicultural pedagogy, multiracial theory, culturally responsive pedagogy, and gender and queer theories. Ideally, this study will provide useful information for educators who are either starting out, or continuing their journeys as anti-oppressive educators in the ELA classroom.

Chapter Three: Methodology

Overview

To answer my research questions, I planned a qualitative research study. Qualitative research is an "approach to social science research that emphasizes collecting descriptive data in natural settings, uses inductive thinking, and emphasizes understanding the subjects' point of view" (Bogdan & Bilken, 2007, p. 274). Through this study I hoped to learn about anti-oppressive education in the secondary ELA classroom. The research questions I set out to answer are:

1. How can concepts from multicultural, gender and queer theories inform anti-oppressive stances in teaching ELA at the secondary level?

2. What are self-identified anti-oppressive [ELA] educators trying to achieve? How? What successes and challenges do they experience?

3. How can I, as a secondary ELA teacher, embody anti-oppressive education? What guiding principles can I learn from this study that can then inform my pedagogical moves and content decisions?

Specifically, I designed this inquiry to learn more about individual educators' perceptions about how they are approaching anti-oppressive education in their ELA classes and to describe and analyze their experiences in order to explore the possibilities and tensions in this work, as related to curriculum and materials, students, and pedagogy.

In keeping with the qualitative research model, interviews were the source of my data, and they are one method of fieldwork used in qualitative research. The participants in the study are educators who self-identify as practicing anti-oppressive education, and feel strongly about practicing anti-oppressive education in high school ELA. These educators shared their ideas on

anti-oppressive education, and how they attempt to weave those ideas into their orientation to curriculum and materials, students, and pedagogy. This is in keeping with the idea that the interview is used to "gather descriptive data in the subjects' own words so that the researcher can develop insights on how subjects interpret some piece of the world" (Bogden & Bilken, 2007, p. 103). By interviewing these educators, I was interested in learning about their perspectives and experiences in trying to take an anti-oppressive stance in their classrooms.

The goal of an interview is to gain an understanding into how the person thinks (Bogden & Bilken, 2007). Conducting the interviews face to face allowed me to create a connection, and create that connection more quickly with the participant so that they felt comfortable describing their thoughts and experiences to me, both positive and negative. Because I am an educator interested in anti-oppressive education and the participants were all educators engaged in that work, I found that we were able to relate easily to one another. I made every effort to create a welcoming and supportive climate during the interviews by making eye contact, smiling, making encouraging comments, and sharing some of my own related experiences. I interviewed each participant once using a semi-structured interview protocol that allowed me to ask follow-up questions in order to clarify or explore an idea in more depth when necessary. I felt that the semi-structured interview was appropriate for my study because it offered me "considerable latitude to pursue a range of topics and offer[ed] the subject a chance to shape the content of the interview" (Bogden & Bilken, 2007, p. 104). The participants' ideas and values represent the data in this study, so the semi-structured interview provided me the best opportunity to collect that data.

In addition to the interviews, I had thought there might be an element of document analysis in this study. Prior to the interviews, when I provided participants with the interview protocol, I also asked that they bring any supporting documents with them that they were

comfortable sharing. For example, this might include a rubric, a handout, a PowerPoint presentation, and so forth. However, only two participants provided me with any type of document, one of which was a very detailed unit plan one of the participants provided to me after the fact. I will not be sharing that document here as that participant provided that document as more of an educator to educator opportunity to share, and not a something to be analyzed for the purpose of this study. In return I also shared a unit plan with him. Another participant shared an article with me that she used to inform her literature circles, and that is referenced in the findings of this study.

I believe there are several reasons that most of the participants did not have a document to share. First, in my experience, teachers are often reluctant to share their work with peers for fear of it being judged. Most of the work created by teachers is not shared with peers, but with students, so sharing work with other teachers can feel risky. Secondly, most of the participants who participated in the study admit that their methods have changed a lot over time, and they have come to identify with an anti-oppressive stance in the latter part of their careers, making a lot of their materials still works in progress. Finally, the nature of anti-oppressive education is to be flexible and adapt methods based on our learners, and to let the learners guide the learning, which could reduce the number of static documents a teacher might have. In order to mitigate this issue in my study I tried to take advantage of the semi-structured interview protocol by asking more follow-up questions as participants shared specific strategies they use in the classroom. While I may not have a document to exemplify these strategies, I tried to get participants to paint a clear picture of the strategy.

The design of this study was informed by a pilot project I conducted in a graduate qualitative research course. In that project, I selectively recruited three teachers to interview. The

criteria I used to recruit those teachers was: they were high school ELA teachers from the

surrounding area, they each worked in a different high school, they were known to me through

my professional affiliations to have articulated an anti-oppressive stance in teaching high school

ELA, and they were willing to provide informed consent to share their ideas and talk about their

journeys in teaching towards social justice. From that study I learned that there is no singular

approach to taking an anti-oppressive stance in teaching ELA; each teacher had a very different

journey and approached their teaching in very diverse ways. As a beginning researcher, these

interviews provided me with valuable practice in interviewing, particularly in terms of asking

effective follow-up questions and note-taking.

For the purpose of this thesis, I conducted a secondary analysis of the data I collected

during the pilot project. In my initial examination of the data, both time and course constraints

limited my analysis. With the conceptual framework I outlined for this study, I revisited that

data, as well applied to amend the ethics protocol in order to extend the time allowed for the

study and to seek permission to contact those participants in order to provide them with an

amended consent form that would allow me to use their real names to give credit to the ideas

they shared here should they choose to do so. All three of those participants signed the amended

consent allowing me to use their names.

Participants

For this study I sought to interview seven to eight educators with experience in secondary

school ELA (including the three I already interviewed) in urban and surrounding areas who take

an anti-oppressive stance in their classrooms in terms of the materials and methods they use.

They were all from different high schools in order to get a wider variety of ideas and

experiences. Interviewing participants from the same school might have yielded data that was too

similar, as it is likely that teachers at the same school, teaching the same subject have collaborated with each other previously, and could share many contextual factors that would influence their work (e.g., the population of students they teach, the level of support from colleagues and administrators, school and department practices, divisional policies).

The number of participants for this study was determined through sampling techniques. First, I used purposeful sampling (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). In my pilot study I chose to interview teachers I was already aware of in terms of their commitment to work in anti-oppressive education. In continuing this study, I was aware of or made aware of approximately four other teachers, who I approached, only one turned down my request. From there I employed the snowball sampling technique and asked the participants to pass along my recruitment letter to other possible candidates for the study. My hope was that the use of these two sampling techniques would lead to "selecting information-rich cases for study in depth" (Glesne, 2016, p. 50). However, snowball sampling did not yield any additional participants, which supports an idea that was mentioned by several of the participants about doing this work in isolation. Therefore, I also used a more open-ended sampling technique, by placing ads to look for participants who self-identified as anti-oppressive educators in high school ELA. I was able to get an ad placed on the Manitoba Teachers Society Twitter account, and also on the website for the Manitoba Association of Teachers of English. One participant responded to the ad on Twitter. The recruitment poster I used for both of these ads can be found in Appendix E.

The seven participants of this study shared some common qualities, but also some important differences. Firstly, they have all been teaching for over ten years, experience ranged from approximately eleven years to thirty years. Secondly, all but one participant had pursued some post-secondary studies, four of the participants had completed a Master's degree, one had a

Master's degree in progress, and another had just finished a post-baccalaureate diploma.

Participants came from a wide variety of school divisions throughout the province including:

Pembina Trails, River East Transcona, St. James- Assinaboia, Seven Oaks, Mountain View and

Sunrise. Participants were also diverse in terms of gender. Two participants self-identified as

female, four as male, and one as non-binary. Racially, the participants were perhaps not as

diverse, although I did not ask them to identify their race, it came up in most of the interviews.

At least four of the participants self-identify as Caucasian, with European heritage, and one

participant self-identified as Indigenous. Perhaps unsurprisingly, this is representative of the lack

of racial diversity in the profession discussed in chapter two.

   Once they agreed to take part in the study, I set a date to interview each participant at a

time and place that was convenient for them. Participants were informed that these interviews

were to last approximately ninety minutes. By asking participants to plan to speak to me for

ninety minutes, I anticipated that would provide enough time to re-visit the consent form, have

some small talk in order to break the ice, and make them feel comfortable. After that, I expected

that the discussion of the interview protocol would last for about sixty minutes. This is

considered a suitable length of time that still allows for some flexibility; according to Glesne

(2016), "An hour of steady talk is generally a suitable length of steady talk before diminishing

returns set in for both parties" (p. 110). This proved to be true, and I found there was an adequate

amount of time for each interview.

   In the pilot study I already conducted, I interviewed three teachers from different high

schools in the metro area. The purpose of these interviews (and the interviews that followed) was

to gather information regarding the feelings and experiences of educators regarding their

journeys in taking an anti-oppressive stance in their ELA classes, including their motivation, the

successes they may have experienced, as well as the barriers and tensions in this work, and

specific ideas regarding texts, strategies and lesson plans, all of which informed the analysis and

contributed to better understanding educators' experiences in anti-oppressive education in high

school ELA classrooms. In turn, the findings from the study could be shared with education

personnel to help them to continue or attempt to begin their own journeys as anti-oppressive

educators in ELA. Hopefully, participants saw the benefit of participating in this study in order

to share their experiences, beliefs and insights with others, and most importantly to contribute to

a project that seeks equity for teachers and students in our education system; which, based on the

sampling methods of this study, likely aligns with their values as educators.

This being a qualitative research study, based on semi-structured interviews, required

participants to describe their perspectives and worldviews (Marshall & Rossman, 2016) on anti-

oppressive education in the secondary ELA class as they relate to curriculum and materials,

students, and pedagogy. From these participants, and in keeping with qualitative research, I

sought to understand their histories (Marshall & Rossman, 2016) surrounding their approaches to

anti-oppressive education in order to better understand their journeys as anti-oppressive

educators. Thus, because two people do not experience the same phenomenon in the same way,

the perspectives of seven educators regarding their experiences and insights about anti-

oppressive education in the ELA classroom was a reasonable number to provide diverse points

regarding the phenomenon of anti-oppressive education in secondary ELA. In addition, it was

appropriate based on the open recruitment methods used.

Recruitment

Selective recruitment was used in this study. In this study, some of the participants were

colleagues who were known to me through professional affiliations, and who I was aware or

was made aware articulate an anti-oppressive stance in their secondary school ELA classrooms.

The criteria that I used to recruit and select participants for this study included: incorporating

texts and materials into their classrooms that focus on social justice and human diversity,

showing an interest in exploring these topics outside of the classroom through professional

development, coursework, and extracurricular activities, and have been identified by colleagues

in the field (e.g. by education professors, ELA consultants and literacy coaches, professional

organizations, conference programs, fellow teachers, administrators) as individuals with this

focus. In addition, the snowball sampling method was also used to recruit participants. The

recruitment letter (Appendix A) sent to participants asks them to pass the letter on to others

who fit the criteria of the study. Also, I asked participants at the end of each interview if they

knew of, and were willing to pass along my recruitment letter to anyone else they felt would

have valuable insights to provide to this study. Although participants had an electronic copy of

the recruitment letter that they received when I recruited them via e-mail, I offered to send it to

them again if needed, and I also had paper copies on hand for participants to take if that was

more convenient for them. As stated earlier, open recruitment of participants was also done by

placing ads on the Manitoba Teachers' Society Twitter and on the website for the Manitoba

Association of Teachers of English (see Appendix E for recruitment poster).

      Participants for this study were first sent a recruitment letter via e-mail requesting their

participation (see Appendix A). These educators had reputations for doing this kind of work, or

self-identified as anti-oppressive educators because of their professional activities such as

presenting at conferences, continued course work, and professional development; they have

made their stance with regard to anti-oppressive education known. The e-mail addresses of all

teachers and education personnel in Manitoba are readily available on their school or divisional

websites, which allowed me to contact them. The recruitment letter (Appendix A) described the purpose of the study, the interest in the topic sought in the participants, as well as the commitment required by the participants in terms of time.

Informed Consent

This study attempted to adhere to the three most important ethical considerations in qualitative research: respect, beneficence, and justice (Glesne, 2016, p. 159). As Glesne (2016) explains, "The principle of respect emphasizes that people should participate in research through voluntary and informed consent" (p. 159). Beneficence requires that the researcher do no harm to participants, and that they actively seek to maximize the benefits of the study for participants, while justice requires that research does not "burden vulnerable populations" (Glesne, 2016, p. 59). I was mindful of each of these concepts throughout the study.

Once a participant expressed interest in participating in the study, I sent them a detailed informed consent letter (Appendix B). The letter also outlined for the participants that they had the right to refrain from answering any questions and/or to withdraw from the study at any time. The form also reminded participants that their consent was ongoing and could be discontinued at any point without judgement or penalty. The consent form also provided the participants with the option to provide me with an e-mail or mailing address, should they wish to be made aware of the results of the study.

The most important information that I tried to convey through my consent form, as well as through my attitude and demeanour during all interactions with participants, was an ethic of care and a feeling that they were and would continue to be respected as persons by respecting their privacy, their right to participate or not, and to convey to them that they were not viewed

as a means to an end for me, the researcher (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). I wanted the

participants to feel that their ideas were valued and the stories and experiences they shared with

me would be honoured. Another manner that I conveyed to participants that I valued and

honoured their input was through member checking. I shared with each participant the

transcript of their interview in order to provide them the opportunity to check for accuracy and

resonance. Participants had the chance to add, delete, or otherwise modify the transcripts before

they were included in analysis.

Confidentiality

The first three interviews I conducted used pseudonyms. However, upon further

reflection of these interviews, I realized that I would like to give participants the choice of

having their name included in the study because I felt that they should have the opportunity to be

recognized for their ideas if they were comfortable with the way that they were presented and

analyzed in this thesis. This option is reflected in the Amended Consent Form (Appendix C). See

Appendix D for the Renewal Approval form. I think that using pseudonyms at first, showing

participants the results, and then providing them with an amended consent form worked very

well for research purposes; the reason being that participants might be more likely to share

struggles or obstacles when they believe a pseudonym is being used. If they had given consent to

use their real name from the beginning, they may have been more concerned with presenting

themselves in a positive light. Therefore, as I did in my pilot study, I provided the amended

consent form once the participants reviewed the results of the study. In this document, Dan,

Cathy, Larry, Lindsay, and Wade are the participants who consented to using their real names,

the rest are pseudonyms.

I recorded interviews on an iPhone that is secured by a password, and kept all notes on paper in a locked filing cabinet in my home office. Once the interviews were ready to be transcribed, I transferred them from the iPhone to my home computer which is also secured by a password. The research assistant who transcribed the interviews also signed a confidentiality form guaranteeing not to discuss any of the data she transcribed. The reason for doing this was mainly in the interest of saving myself a little bit of time, and also because I was able to obtain a grant to cover the cost of this. The recordings of interviews were sent to her through a secure email server, and sent back to me in the same manner. I printed the transcripts and secured them in a locked filing cabinet in my home office.

Research Instruments

The main research instruments for this project were the questions asked during the semi-structured interviews (see Appendix E). I provided these questions to the participants ahead of time to provide them with the opportunity to think about what they might like to talk about. Although I made it clear to them that there was no expectation that anything be prepared ahead of time, I did not want them to feel put on the spot. Interviews were audio recorded using an iPhone and then were transcribed by a research assistant, in order to analyze the data. Audio recording the interviews helped to provide accurate transcripts of the interviews, and allowed me to pay better attention to participants throughout the interviews (Glesne, 2016).

Throughout the interviews, I also used paper and pens to record notes. In the notes I recorded any body language or facial expressions that provided additional context to particular remarks. I also stayed at the location of each interview immediately after in order to finish up any field notes. Staying in the same location made it easier for me to remember details and provide proper context in my notes.

Data Analysis

Transcripts of each interview were reviewed using thematic analysis to search for themes and patterns (Glesne, 2016). During the interviews, I made field notes about ideas that stood out as particularly important to the participant or to me, as well as notes on body language, tone, and so on. Through reading and re-reading the transcripts, I did what Saldaña (2009) refers to as initial coding, which is an open ended approach to looking for patterns or categories in the data through in-depth analysis. In this initial coding process, I made margin notes that provided me with some initial ideas about emerging themes. Once overall themes were recognized, they were further coded using coloured highlighters as well as annotations, to get a sense of the various themes apparent in each interview, their frequency, and possibly the order of their appearance. From here, I began to delve deeper into the data in order to begin creating even more detailed sub codes, and began the process of data analysis.

The inspiration for the codes came from Honeyford and Serebrin (2015), who in turn were inspired by Saldaña's (2013) use of dramaturgical codes. Because Honeyford and Serebrin's (2015) study was also focused on interviewing teachers about their practice, I felt that some similar codes applied in this study. According to Saldaña (2009), dramaturgical codes are useful for exploring inter and intra personal experiences of participants, and also for studies where communication plays an important role. This was applicable to my study because dialogue and communication are some of the most important elements of anti-oppressive education, and perhaps teaching in general. Saldaña (2009) suggests several "first-cycle" codes that are dramaturgical in nature, they are: objectives, obstacles, strategies, attitudes, emotions and subtexts (p. 102).

Based on the interviews I conducted, as well as ideas garnered from the literature review, emerging themes initially revolved around the strategies used by each participant, the materials they use, their feelings regarding the successes and obstacles they faced, as well as the feelings or reactions of the students. Therefore, many of the dramaturgical codes suggested by Saldaña (2009) applied to this data. However, as I delved deeper into the transcripts, I found that some of these emerging codes needed more detailed names, and even sub-topics within that code because of the broad range of data each participant provided. Initially, the codes I identified were: Motivation (for taking an anti-oppressive stance), Objectives (goals in taking an anti-oppressive stance), Strategies (materials, lesson ideas), Challenges (that arose from taking an anti-oppressive stance), Successes (that came from taking an anti-oppressive stance), and Important Issues (to address when taking an anti-oppressive stance).

After reading and re-reading the transcripts, my thoughts changed on some of these first-cycle codes. For example, I realized that including both lesson ideas and materials such as texts was too much to include under the Strategies code and that materials and the strategies for using those resources were really two different things. Therefore, I decided to leave lesson ideas as part of the Strategies code, and create a new code for Resources in order to be able to clearly identify the texts and resources participants identified as important to their practice. Also, I decided that I needed to add a code that could encompass how each participant defined being an anti-oppressive educator, which I labelled Definition. Additionally, I found that the initial code I had labelled as Important Issues was not necessary. Important Issues was not a useful code as I found that participants discussed the issues that were important to them, for example race, gender or multi-culturalism, either in the context of their motivation for taking an anti-oppressive stance

that was related to personal experiences, or these issues were reflected and discussed in the contexts of the texts chosen by each participant.

Limitations of the study

As much as this study may have to offer in terms of finding meaningful ways for high school teachers to make anti-oppressive education a priority in their ELA classes, the limitations stem from the size of the study, the nature of the use of interviews, and the researcher's personal biases.

While interviews with seven education personnel should yield a variety of experiences across contexts regarding classroom practices; this sample size was limited by the expert nature of the subjects I was seeking, and also the time constraints of completing my Master's program (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). While generalizability is not necessarily a goal in qualitative research, I was not able to find a large sample of people in this province who not only have knowledge and experience regarding anti-oppressive classroom practices in ELA, but who were also willing to discuss it. That being said, this qualitative study is not seeking to generalize to an entire group of educators, but rather to illuminate the complex phenomenon of self-identifying as an anti-oppressive educator and what that looks like with regards to approaching students, curriculum and materials, and pedagogy. Depending on the background and experience of each participant, some points of view may be left out while others may be over-represented.

Interviews were chosen as the main research tool in this study because I was seeking information about educators' thinking about their curriculum, assignments, assessments, and classroom community. However, in my initial planning of this study, I had thought there would be an element of document analysis included in this study. The fact that none of the participants provided me with any documents presents a further limitation to the data. Interviews allowed for

participants to explain their thinking and decision making process, but because these are complex issues, participants were provided with the interview protocol ahead of time in order to allow them to gather their thoughts on these issues. Semi-structured interviews allowed me to ask follow-up questions tailored to the participants' responses, which helped to clarify responses, gather more specific information, and provided information that was not prepared or planned. This also means that not every transcript included the same information, which can make coding and analysis of the data more challenging, as it may be more difficult to cluster or code information across transcripts because certain questions were asked to some participants and not others (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Interviews as the sole source of data presents its own limitation as the data only represents the interpretations of the participants of their own practice, and does not include any outside interpretation on the part of the students for example, or observation on the part of the researcher to corroborate any of the statements made by the participants.

In a qualitative study like this, I, the researcher, am one of the instruments (Marshall & Rossman, 2016), in terms of relating to the participants. Because of this, it may be difficult to view the data from a neutral point of view and was something I was aware of in my analysis, so I continuously attempted to focus on an important goal in qualitative research which is to add knowledge to a phenomenon rather than passing judgement (Bogden & Bilken, 2007). For example, at times a participant may have explained a strategy they used in the classroom similar to one I use, such as inquiry-based learning, and I may have viewed this information more favourably than I might otherwise have because someone else who identifies as an anti-oppressive educator is using a method similar to one I use, which validates my thinking. To mitigate this bias, I tried to be extremely conscious that one of the important research questions I

was attempting to answer relates to how I might learn and grow as an anti-oppressive educator, and simply agreeing with things I already do would not help me do this, while listening for approaches that differed from mine would. This study is situated in the postmodern genre, and the assumption in these studies is that "all knowledge is political and that researchers are not neutral, since their ultimate purposes include advocacy and action" (Marshall & Rossman, 2016, p. 118), which is true of this study.

Because my biases as the researcher need to be taken into account, it is important that the reader understand the context of the study, and the context that I am an educator who identifies as taking an anti-oppressive stance. My positioning needs to be recognized in terms of how I came to feel that these were important research questions. The term positioning is used here as a "broad term that encompasses things such as stances, ideologies, politics, identities, frameworks, and how one makes sense of the world" (D'Ambrosio, Bernard Martin, Frankenstein, Moschkovich, Gutiérrez, Taylor, Barnes, Katsberg, 2013, p. 11). I tried to clearly recognize my own opinions and assumptions as I analyzed and discussed the data; because I am also an ELA teacher attempting to take an anti-oppressive stance in my classroom. Acording to D'Ambrosio, et al. (2013) it is "important to know what political framework the researcher brings in terms of influencing what that person decides to research and why. Not to pretend there's neutrality" (p. 13).

As outlined in my "History of Interest" section, my experiences as an educator are largely what lead me to my research questions. I also chose to include that section in my introduction in order to be transparent about who I am and why I have chosen this topic for research. This is significant because it shows that I am aware that my role as an educator could influence my perspective on this study; because it should also be considered that "the absence of positioning is

also a form of positioning" (D'Ambrosio, et al., 2013, p. 19). While it could be viewed as a

limitation for a researcher's positioning to have a significant influence on their study, I would

argue that it is a benefit in educational research. In this study, like the participants, I also identify

as taking an anti-oppressive stance in my teaching, this cannot be ignored as I interview

participants and analyze the data in this study. On the contrary, I can be aware of and embrace

the multivocality. Mizzi (2010) states that multivocality represents the "plural and sometimes

contradictory *narrative voices* [emphasis in original] located within the researcher. To shed light

on these narrative voices means to provoke a deeper understanding of the often silent tensions

that lie underneath observable behaviours in the study" (p. 2). Multivocality can enhance my

research process by "giving voices to already fragmented and marginalized researcher

subjectivity" (Mizzi, 2010, p. 10). In the end, the main goal of this study is to bring awareness

and contribute to the conversation about the value of anti-oppressive education. D'Ambrosio, et

al (2013) state that "If we actually cared more about making changes in actual schools with

teachers in their settings as opposed to making [a] study to be generalizable to other people and

be disseminated, it just completely changes the way we do research" (p. 20). The potential for

making changes for teachers within their schools, myself included, is why I set out to conduct

this research.

Scope of the study

Because I interviewed educators attempting to practically take an anti-oppressive stance

in high school ELA classrooms, I only interviewed ELA educators who either self-identified or

were made known to me by my professional affiliations as educators actively engaged in anti-

oppressive education. Although teachers at all levels may practice anti-oppressive education, I

only interviewed educators with experience at the secondary level because of the uniqueness of

the materials, and the level of classroom conversation that exists at this level.

      In order to get detailed data, I provided participants with the interview questions ahead of

time, which provided a valuable opportunity to reflect on their pedagogical decisions, their

journeys as anti-oppressive educators, and what they have tried and learned along the way.

However, I did not ask participants to do much in the way of specific discussions of theory. To

compensate for this, the practices described by the participants were grounded in the theories

discussed in my literature review.

      The next chapter will outline the findings of this study. In this section I hope to provide a

clear picture of how these educators define taking an anti-oppressive stance, as well as a clear

understanding of what that looks like in relation to students, curriculum and materials, and

pedagogy.

Chapter Four: Findings

Introduction

I am extremely grateful that these seven educators took the time to speak with me about what taking an anti-oppressive stance in their ELA classroom looks like for each of them. All of the participants provided me with detailed and thoughtful answers about their practice. The discussion of the findings allows for the development of a clear understanding of the identities, motivations, and strategies of these educators that contribute to their perceptions of their anti-oppressive stance.

After reading through the transcripts multiple times, creating a variety of notes and webs, and adjusting my initial codes, I came up with seven codes that I used to categorize the data, they were: Motivation, Objectives, Strategies, Resources, Challenges, Successes and Definition. Once all of the transcripts were coded using a different coloured highlighter to represent each of these codes, I set out to identify thematic findings to represent the key ideas from the data regarding participants' perspectives on anti-oppressive stances in the high school ELA classroom. Using webs, I came up with some initial findings and sub-categories within those findings that would properly represent all of the highlighted ideas from each participant under each code. The seven findings of this study are:

These educators perceive their

1. Motivations to take an anti-oppressive stance are grounded in their experiences with students, their professional learning, and their own identities and experiences.

2. Definitions of taking an anti-oppressive stance are grounded in the idea that they are facilitators of learning.

3. Objectives in taking an anti-oppressive stance are set out for themselves and their students.

4. Selection of resources is grounded in the objectives for their students that connect to an anti-oppressive stance.

5. Classroom strategies to be grounded in using flexible teaching and assessment tools, experiential learning, and building positive relationships with students.

6. Challenges in taking an anti-oppressive stance stem from using strategies and resources that create discomfort in the classroom, misunderstandings between teachers and students, and a lack of support.

7. Successes in taking an anti-oppressive stance came from the authentic relationships and meaningful discussions being fostered in the classroom and the impact the students' work was having outside the classroom.

Finding 1: These educators perceive their motivations to take an anti-oppressive stance are grounded in their experiences with students, their professional learning, and their own identities and experiences.

Making the decision as a high school ELA teacher to take an anti-oppressive stance in the classroom was not taken lightly by any of the participants of this study. Each of them had identifiable experiences personally or professionally that led them to take such a stance. In general, participants' motivation for taking an anti-oppressive stance came from any of the following three areas: experiences with students, professional learning experiences such as graduate work, and their identities or experiences that helped to shape their identities.

Experiences with students as motivation. Several participants identified a lack of engagement from students as a motivator for changing their teaching philosophy. Cathy, Sam, and Char all discussed the lack of engagement they started to notice with the use of teaching

strategies and materials that were outdated and quite inflexible, in particular teaching whole class

novels from the canon. This feeling of apathy they noticed in their students started to lead each

of them to change their approach to resource selection and teaching strategies. For example,

using literature circles or book clubs where students have choice in the texts they study, as well

as providing students choices in how they show their learning. Each of these participants noticed

that when students' identities were considered, their investment in learning also increased. When

these educators began to change their approach, they may not have been calling it anti-

oppressive education, but they did notice how their students became engaged with materials

pertaining to social justice, and the increase in investment when students were given more choice

and voice in the classroom. Most of the participants who came to change their practice in this

gradual way that was responsive to the students did not come to identify with an anti-oppressive

stance until later on.

Sam brought up a very interesting phenomenon regarding the seemingly increasing

number of students suffering from mental health issues, anxiety and depression in particular. He

noticed that taking an anti-oppressive approach to students as well as teaching was allowing

these students to feel heard, and provided them with hope that success in school was possible for

them when they may not have previously believed that (Interview # 5, 2018, p. 3).

Facilitating extra-curricular activities for students also motivated several participants to

think about how those experiences might influence their stance as teachers. Since the beginning

of their careers, both Cathy and Larry have lead social justice clubs for students in their schools.

Larry has even organized humanitarian trips for students in his school to developing countries;

although some researchers critique these "edu-tourism" endeavours. According to Rahman,

Hassan, Osman-Gani, Abdel Fattah, and Anwar (2017), edu-tourism is defined as "any academic

programme offerings by the higher learning institutions where participants are travelling to a

destination with the primary purpose of engaging in education and learning experience" (p. 157).

Rahman et al. (2017) explain that many less developed nations are attempting to "transform

towards a knowledge economy" (p. 157), and that these nations are expressly creating programs

for international tourists, which could call into question the authenticity and humanitarian value

of some of these trips. Nevertheless, seeing the impact that learning about and participating in

social justice activities had on young people, prompted both of these teachers to integrate these

ideas into their classrooms in order to reach an even greater number of students. In addition,

Sam's extra-curricular experience helped create change in his teaching; he was a debate coach

for many years, and says that that helped him to see the educational benefit of students trying to

contend with controversy (Interview # 5, 2018, p. 1).

       Professional learning experiences as motivation. Graduate work was a major influence

for several of the participants' desire to take an anti-oppressive stance. In fact, six of the seven

participants identified it as a motivator for beginning to take an anti-oppressive stance in their

teaching practice. For example, both Cathy and Char talked about a summer writing institute

they took part in about writing for social justice as a turning point for them. It provided them

with professional reading on topics like inquiry-based learning that influenced their thinking, as

well as giving them the opportunity to plan meaningful activities for their students and think and

talk with others about how some of their ideas could be implemented.

       Lindsay identified reading Kevin Kumashiro's *Troubling Education*, while working on

their post-bac as an important motivator for taking an anti-oppressive stance (Interview # 4,

2017, p. 14). Sam also discussed his Master's work as an important factor in re-examining his

teaching philosophy. He says that he stumbled upon critical pedagogy, which he says led to

reading Freire and Dewey, which he states "really started spurning [his] interest in harnessing a style that would activate and engage more students, not just the elite students…but every student, into a level of discourse about their lives and what's going on around them" (Interview # 5, 2018, p. 1).

Dan talked about how his graduate courses in sustainability reinforced his belief in emphasizing that topic, and extensions of that topic in his classroom (Interview # 1, 2016, p. 2). Finally, Wade describes his Master's work as a "journey" (Interview # 6, 2018, p. 22), and cites the work of Alex Wilson and Sheelah McLean from the University of Saskatchewan as especially poignant in this journey in terms of developing deep understanding and wanting to take action against systemic racism that exists against Indigenous people in Canada.

Identities and experiences as motivation. An important aspect of taking an anti-oppressive stance in the classroom is recognizing the identities of the students. Often, an educator's own experiences that have shaped their identity can help with this. Larry's discussion was a particularly interesting interview for me because of his vast life experience. While Larry is Caucasian, he grew up with an adopted sister who is Indigenous; he later found out that she was part of the Sixties Scoop in Manitoba. Seeing the racism she regularly faced helped to develop a great deal of empathy and understanding in Larry's character. Larry began his teaching career in Thompson, Manitoba in 1985, and he describes the students in his classroom as coming from seemingly opposite upbringings. Many of his students were Indigenous and lived on nearby reserves, while others were the children of mining executives living in the town. Larry states that these two groups of students were not "mixing well" (Interview # 3, 2016, p. 2), and for him, this sparked a desire to make all of his students feel valued and recognized, as well as developing their capacity for understanding others.

Another participant whose identity plays a large role in taking an anti-oppressive stance is Lindsay. Lindsay identifies as non-binary and uses the pronoun they and the title Mx, and they feel that being a queer person has made LGBTQ rights and anti-homophobia education an important focus in their classroom. During the interview, I felt a strong admiration for Lindsay because they dedicate a lot of personal time to what they describe as "supporting, advocating for and listening" to different voices within their community (Interview # 4, 2017, p. 5). They attend meetings, discussion groups, lectures, and documentary screenings, and often involve their students in these events.

Wade's identity has also had a profound impact on his teaching. In each of the buildings where he has taught, he has usually been the only staff member who identifies as Indigenous. He says that his social justice "radar" is always on (Interview # 6, 2018, p. 2). He feels that he is sometimes a lone reference point for students about Indigenous issues. Wade was also the participant who touched the most on his identity as a teacher, and that he believes that taking an anti-oppressive stance in the classroom makes him a good role model and helps him to create change, which he feels is at the heart of being a teacher (Interview # 6, 2018, p. 25).

Dan and Char each have strong personal beliefs that influence how they teach. For example, Char echoed Wade's idea saying that she believes that it is a teacher's job to bring important and controversial issues "to light" for students (Interview # 7, 2018, p. 2). Similarly, Dan is a person who has always cared about the environment and sustainability. Once he started bringing that personal interest into his ELA classroom, those discussions lead to other important topics such as economic issues, and the circumstances that people all around the world live in.

Finding 2: These educators perceive their definitions of taking an anti-oppressive stance are grounded in the idea that they are facilitators of learning.

While defining what it means to take an anti-oppressive stance was different for each participant, there were two ideas that were each mentioned or implied by a majority of participants. The first was that you must be brave to do this work. Most of the participants felt that taking an anti-oppressive stance was equivalent to going out on a limb. Furthermore, it was described by some participants like Lindsay and Wade as being rebellious. Second, was that anti-oppressive educators view themselves as facilitators in the classroom rather than imparters of knowledge. Some participants like Lindsay, Char and Cathy went on to say that they too viewed themselves as learners in the classroom. Each participant defined their stance in a different way, but in the end, each participant was doing what they felt was the right thing to do in order to be the best educator possible, even though it might not have been in line with what they had done in the past or what their colleagues were doing.

For example, being a good educator and an anti-oppressive one was synonymous for some participants like Sam and Wade, who both discussed their view that making this choice was simply the right thing to do. Sam took this idea further than the other participants by describing how he believes that education is inherently anti-oppressive because according to him education is about "emancipating the individual" (Interview # 5, 2018, p. 11), making it naturally anti-oppressive. He feels that "in its truest form, education is a cure for many ills of society such as racism and sexism" (Interview # 5, 2018, p. 11). He was the only participant to take this particular stance.

Other participants like Lindsay and Wade took a different view towards the educational system itself. They felt that one of the most important things to do in taking an anti-oppressive

stance is to look critically at the educational system that we work in. Wade stated that, "We're teachers because we were successful in the system that is designed only for a certain group of people" (Interview # 6, 2018, p. 10). While Lindsay said that, "if we can't critique our own system, then how can we make any change because we are just perpetuating this very sort of industrialized, capitalist, colonial system…how can we expect kids to see the world differently if what we're doing is just replicating all those types of oppressions?" (Interview # 4, 2017, p. 14).

Participants like Lindsay and Larry believe the anti-oppressive stance to be something very personal that goes beyond the walls of the classroom, something that permeates one's whole being, and something to live in and outside the classroom. For both of them, it had a lot to do with educating themselves about different groups of people and helping to facilitate students in doing the same. Larry described his belief that it has to go beyond teaching "tolerance", a notion that he finds arrogant. For Larry it was about modelling (Interview # 3, 2016). Additionally, Lindsay described modelling vulnerability for students and being willing to have conversations about "our own subjectivity" (Interview # 4, 2017, p. 16).

Finding 3: These educators perceive their objectives in taking an anti-oppressive stance are set out for themselves and their students.

Participants in the study each described objectives or goals that they set out when taking an anti-oppressive stance in their classroom. For all of the participants, the objectives they set out applied either to themselves or to their students. Ultimately, all of the goals were set out with the idea of making what happens in the classroom effective for the greatest number of students possible.

Objectives for the teacher. The desire to be a role model, and the notion that it is a part of a teacher' job, was an objective for taking an anti-oppressive stance in some cases. Lindsay described it as "walking the talk" outside of the classroom, by letting students know that they are an activist and participate in volunteerism (Interview # 4, 2017, p. 7). Sam had another take on this idea, he felt that being non-judgemental and non-oppressive could build sensitivity in the classroom, and that modelling those behaviours was important because it "ultimately affects how students treat each other" (Interview # 5, 2018, p. 4).

Four participants explicitly discussed being inclusive in terms of choice of materials as a key way of being a role model to and connecting with students. Wade, Char, Cathy, and Lindsay all discussed how important it is for them to choose texts that represent a variety of viewpoints and experiences. They all talked about doing that by moving away from the canon and all of its "dead white guys" (Interview # 4, 2017, p. 6). Although, all of the participants who discussed the canon seemed to view it as representing longer texts such as novels and plays, so part of their move away from the canon was not only about choosing different books, but also including a broader definition of text by including a variety of fiction and non-fiction as well as visual and written text.

Several participants alluded to the idea that developing relationships with students was an objective for them. Those participants gave examples of extra-curricular activities they help with, or specific students who have been important to them, or who they feel they made a difference for. Therefore, for most of the participants those parts of the interviews were coded as successes. Sam was the only participant who specifically stated that building rapport with students was an objective for him, he stated that, "if you do actually leave when the bell goes every class you're going to miss out on those opportunities" (Interview # 5, 2018, p. 25). However, other

participants such as Larry, Lindsay, Cathy, and Char implied that relationship building was a

meaningful part of their practice when they discussed the impact specific students had had on

them, and vice versa. These participants should consider the importance of relational learning to

anti-oppressive education. While it does seem to be a part of their practice, it could be a more

explicit tenet of their approach.

      Objectives for the students. Some participants identified developing empathy and

similar ideas, like being open-minded, as a goal for their students in their commitment to taking

an anti-oppressive stance. In particular, helping students who are more privileged understand

their privilege as well as the obstacles that individuals who are oppressed are facing. Dan

referred to this for him as "building cultural sensitivity in students" (Interview # 1, 2016, p. 7).

Cathy talked about wanting her students to see that there are many different types of people in

the world who are struggling with many different issues, so learning about that can help students

think about how they might approach their own issues (Interview # 2, 2016, p. 2). Finally, Sam

described empathy as, "the antidote to racism, sexism, homophobia, and so on" (Interview # 5,

2018, p. 15). He also explained that he did not feel that empathy was only something one should

feel for others, but also for themselves. He said, "that it's very inspirational for kids if they get it

because they can appreciate who they are and grow to have empathy for their own follies and

mistakes, they're happier people" (Interview # 5, 2018, p. 15).

      Related to this idea, some participants like Wade, Dan, Sam, Larry, and Lindsay talked

about how opening students' eyes to important and sometimes controversial issues going on in

society, and helping students to think about those issues was a major goal for them. Wade

described this idea very eloquently explaining that a goal for him was to get students

"comfortable with being uncomfortable" (Interview # 6, 2018, p. 14). Sam described it as an

opportunity we have in the ELA classroom to "rest with a little bit of cognitive dissonance" (Interview # 5, 2018, p. 30). While Larry said that he "was not teaching [students] for their affection, [he] teach[es] them to try to stir up the hornets nests' in their brains a little bit" (Interview # 3, 2016, p. 20). Lindsay and Dan took this idea a step further by explaining that one of their objectives in discussing uncomfortable topics with students was to provide students the opportunity to figure out where they stand on these issues, and to guide students towards making reasonable conclusions on their own.

A few of the participants also identified making sure that students felt their voices were heard as an important objective. For example, Lindsay, Wade, and Char mentioned the significance of students being able to relate to characters, authors, and topics being read and discussed, and seeing themselves in the materials presented. Similarly, Sam talked about the importance of getting students' voices active (Interview # 5, 2018, p. 6). Sam elaborated on this by stating that doing things like choosing a variety of texts, and making sure students' voices are heard could actually help students work though some of their emotional issues (Interview # 5, 2018, p. 10), highlighting the significance of these objectives for some educators. He went on to explain that by doing this he believed that more kids would be "actualized", which he felt was an important objective of education in general (Interview # 5, 2018, p. 25).

Interestingly, Cathy was the only participant who made a specific objective related to her students' learning. For her, and the majority of the participants, offering students choice in the texts they read was a major part of taking an anti-oppressive stance. However, Cathy was the only participant that mentioned that by doing this, one of her goals was to improve her students' reading ability and stamina (Interview # 2, p. 8). I believe that her specific focus on this stems from her role as a literacy coach within her school.

Finding 4: These educators perceive their selection of resources is grounded in the objectives for their students that connect to an anti-oppressive stance.

One of the most valuable findings from this study for teachers may be the resources chosen by these thoughtful and experienced educators. New resources are something most teachers are continuously looking for. When each of the participants discussed the resources they use, the resources generally connected to one of that participant's objectives for their students such as building empathy or feeling that their voice was heard. The majority of participants including Cathy, Char, Larry, Lindsay, and Wade expressed that choosing texts that show diverse points of view was a high priority.

Interestingly, only one participant, Sam, talked about focusing on the canon in any way, because his belief is that any text can be taught in an anti-oppressive manner. However, this is not to say that he does not incorporate newer texts. Sam gave some examples of ways that he felt particular Shakespeare plays could be looked at. For example, the manner in which Macbeth's character defends his position with "force and conniving" could be looked at and compared to current issues in the world today. Sam also touched on how in studying *Macbeth* he also likes to touch on how gender is treated in terms of the way that women are portrayed as evil. He also discusses the "patriarchal nature of relationships" in *Romeo and Juliet* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Interview # 5, 2018, p. 13). Sam finds ways to bring these texts into the twenty-first century.

Each participant listed resources they have used with students and have found to be effective. Appendix G contains a comprehensive list of all of the classroom resources named, as well as what type of resource it is (e.g. novel, documentary). In addition, I sorted these resources

into seven categories based on what each participant described as the issue brought to light in each text. These categories could also be considered an expression of issues considered important for classroom discussion in high school ELA. However, there is overlap in the categories, and some texts could be placed under more than one category. Therefore, I sorted each text into the category that expressed its dominant topic. Resources were organized into the following categories: Women's'/Children's Rights, Gender and LGBTQ, Indigenous, Mental Illness/Wellness, Discrimination, Culture, and a Miscellaneous category for those resources that touched upon topics other than these. An explanation of why these issues are important and strategies used by participants for discussing these issues appears later on. It is also important to note that each participant expressed that these resources are not meant to stand alone, but to be supplemented by current articles, discussion, activities, and other texts. In addition, the choice of resources was contingent on the interests and identities of the students in a classroom at a given time. The comprehensive list can be found in Appendix G.

Finding 5: These educators perceive their classroom strategies to be grounded in using flexible teaching and assessment tools, experiential learning, and building positive relationships with students.

For most educators, every decision made in the classroom is purposeful. For the participants of this study, this was particularly true because of their knowledge, experience, and reflective natures. In discussing the strategies they use in the classroom that they perceive to encompass an anti-oppressive stance, participants discussed the main areas that they considered when making decisions about teaching: strategies used as part of day to day classroom routines that enhance and scaffold learning, assessments, and interpersonal relationships with students. It is also important to note that the participants all discussed how the strategies they chose were

flexible and dependent on the specific group of students they were teaching at a given time- a notion that in itself is anti-oppressive.

Anti-oppressive strategies and assessments. The most frequently used strategy mentioned by almost every participant was using literature circles or book clubs in their classes. Char, Cathy, Sam, Wade, and Lindsay all mentioned choosing texts with social justice or human rights as a focus to be something they valued. Participants each approached the literature circle or book club strategy in slightly different ways. Sam was the most flexible in his approach to literature circles. He allows students to read any book of their choosing, and then he places them into groups with others reading similar genres or about similar topics for their discussions. He says he has found this successful because students have some "pride of ownership" when discussing their book because they picked it completely on their own (Interview # 5, 2018, p. 18).

Char provided another example of literature circles; she provides students with a variety of fiction and non-fiction texts that are at various reading levels, and on different topics related to social justice. She then organizes those texts into bins by more specific topics, such as the ones found in Appendix G. Students are then encouraged to choose the texts they are most interested in. So, a student might read all the books in one bin, or move between bins, depending on their interest and ability. In order to help students read texts critically, Char brings in current news articles to deconstruct with the whole class, and help students to use those same skills with the texts they are reading. In addition, Char also provides students with what she refers to as a "theme question" to consider throughout their reading of the texts. An example of a theme question might be: "what social justice or human rights issue is important to you? Or, what are a persons' rights and responsibilities in society?" (Interview # 7, 2018, p. 12). To help answer

these theme questions, students keep a writer's notebook while they are reading these texts. In the notebook, students write down their thoughts about these theme questions, and are provided with prompts to help them to reflect on their text. The reading and writing students do related to social justice in Char's class lasts for about a six week period, which culminates in an inquiry project where students think about the information they have gathered throughout their reading, writing and discussion, and come up with an inquiry question to conduct further research.

Char and Lindsay both mentioned that teaching students to examine a text through a variety of lenses was strategy they each focused on. Lindsay teaches Advanced Placement and higher level academic courses, so they have a very academic focus in teaching about lenses. They use a series of texts by Routledge called *Critical Thinkers*. Students are asked to read one of those texts, and to understand as much of it as possible. Lindsay tells their students if they understand five percent of the text they are doing well. After that experience, Lindsay tries to break down the different lenses for the students in less complex terms. Lindsay has about ten pairs of oversized sunglasses; they put on a pair and say to the students something like, "Okay, now I am wearing my critical race lens." They try to get the students to see that someone could read one text and see ten different things based on which set of "glasses" they were wearing (Interview # 4, 2017, p. 15).

Char introduces the idea of lenses along with her literature circles. She uses an idea she found in an article by Thein, Guise, and Sloan (2011). This article addresses one of the issues that many teachers find with literature circles, which is that students are mainly making personal connections to the text rather than deeper and more critical connections. Thein, Guise, and Sloan (2011) propose that students in a literature circle group be given roles that will help each of them delve more deeply into a text. For example, a "stereotype tracker" who keeps track of the

stereotypes of groups of people presented in a text and discusses those stereotypes and whether

they are created intentionally or unintentionally by an author. Another role was a "critical lens

wearer" who considers the text through the lens of a critical theory, for example feminism

(Thein, Sloan, & Guise, 2011, p. 22). Char stated that these roles really helped to make her

literature circles more meaningful, she did pre-teaching and modelling of the various roles using

shorter texts related to social justice that she examined with the whole class.

Cathy also uses what she calls the book club approach with her students in an attempt to

think about and discuss social justice issues. However, before moving to the book club approach,

which requires more independence as readers and thinkers, she reads a whole-class novel or text

first. Recently, she has been using *Night* by Elie Weisel. While studying this book together,

Cathy has the students try out different strategies to develop their understanding. She divides the

book into five parts. In the first part she has the students focus on questioning, thinking about

how to develop important questions about what they are reading. For the second part she focuses

on quotations, finding important ones and being able to discuss what makes them meaningful. In

the third part of the book the focus is trying out different reading strategies to help make

meaning of challenging text. She states that some scholars she turns to for finding reading

strategies to try with students are Cris Tovani, Kennan Pearson and Kylene Beers (Interview # 2,

2016, p. 5). In the fourth part of the book study, Cathy has the students partake in fishbowl

discussions, and in the fifth part students conduct a book club type of discussion on their own

(Interview # 2, 2016, p. 4). After all of this scaffolding, students are able to choose books and

work through them in book clubs. The texts Cathy uses for this are included in Appendix G.

During the book clubs, Cathy and Wade take a similar approach. They both follow the

strategies in Faye Brownlee's *Grand Conversations* where students are writing double entry

journals, which essentially means that they are choosing a quote from their text and writing their thoughts and opinions about it. Wade and Cathy also try to establish routines during this time to encourage class discussion. In Cathy's class, every Friday she has the book club groups come together to talk about all of the double-entry journals they wrote that week. On these discussion days, Cathy sits and discusses with one or two groups, she often invites her school's teacher-librarian to come into her classroom to discuss with groups as well (Interview # 2, 2016, p. 15). Wade does not designate a specific day for discussion, but he also brings in another teacher to help him guide and monitor the discussions on those days, a resource teacher in his school. As a part of Wade's routine, he implemented what he calls Tune it in Tuesdays. Every Tuesday one or two students bring in a song to share with the class that they feel has lyrics that make a statement about human rights, they play the song, and discuss it with the class. Both participants had similarities in the strategies they used during the book clubs.

As far as assessment goes during the book clubs, Cathy has students choose a short assignment to complete as they finish each book; she says that within the choices provided, some are more visual, such as creating a sociogram of the characters, while others are written such as choosing three songs that relate to characters or themes in a text (Interview # 2, 2016, p. 10). Also during the time that students are in book clubs, Cathy uses a similar idea to Char's theme questions, she asks all of her students to think about what they each stand for (Interview # 2, 2016, p. 3). Their answer to this question at the end of their time with the book clubs is expressed in the form of a memoir, so Cathy brings in shorter memoir texts to analyze with the whole class to build up to each student writing their own memoir.

Larry was a participant who took a slightly different approach to using literature circles, but his goal was similar to other participants in terms of wanting to spark discussions and ideas

about social justice. Larry does a unit on World Literature with his students, and in this unit he says he brings in texts from "fairly unknown" authors from countries like Nigeria, South Africa, China, Chile, Botswana, Egypt, and Palestine (Interview # 3, 2016, p. 8). Larry was not able to name any specific texts he used here, and I think the reason for that is that Larry is so well read that every year he is bringing in new texts for this unit just as he is reading them. While we were speaking he told me that he was just finishing a few new books he was about to use with his class, and it sounded as though this was the norm for him every year. His goal in exploring these texts is two-fold, he uses the approach of having a big question for students to think about like Char and Cathy, and he asks students to consider how culture affects the way we see our reality. Also, he explores with students how linguistic patterns shape a story (Interview # 3, 2016, p. 8).

Lindsay was another participant who mentioned using the literature circles approach. The texts they recommended are included in Appendix G. However, in my interview with Lindsay, as well as Dan, when discussing strategies and materials, they concentrated much more on discussing different topics and issues they focused on with students, rather than larger texts. An example Lindsay gave of this was discussing the performance Beyoncé gave at the 2016 Super bowl (Interview # 4, 2017, p. 10). Lindsay took the controversy surrounding that performance and developed it into a short unit of study. During this time, students were researching and discussing topics such as racism, with regards to the Black Lives Matter movement, as this topic was featured in Beyoncé's performance. Lindsay also said that their class had a very interesting discussion about feminism, which was also featured prominently in the performance, and what "brand of feminism" Beyoncé was portraying (Interview #4, 2017, p. 10). This topic came about simply by Lindsay asking the students what they were interested in talking about, and that was the topic the class came up with. Dan uses similar strategies; he explained that he uses many

articles and editorials about current events and issues in an effort to get students more engaged

with the world around them (Interview # 1, 2016, p. 4). He provided an example of a news article

he used a few years ago about how Tagalog had recently become the second most spoken

language in Winnipeg, and supported it with videos of news clips interviewing some individuals

in the francophone community talking about how they felt about French being moved down to

the third most spoken language in the province. Dan said this launched a really interesting

conversation about culture in our city. Taking current events and issues going on in society that

resonate with students was a significant strategy for both of these participants.

   Experiential learning. In several of the interviews I conducted, participants focused a lot

of the value of experiential or hands on learning for their students. Two participants, Lindsay and

Wade, mentioned the Privilege Walk as an important learning experience for their students. They

have both tried conducting it in different ways, for example students using their own life

experiences or the experiences of a character or individual in a text they are reading. Both

participants talked about what a powerful experience this activity was for many students in terms

of thinking about privilege in ways they previously had not.

      Larry has created an enormous number of experiences for his students. Some

examples he provided were doing what he called an urban plunge with students where he would

spend two days in downtown Winnipeg with students working with Siloam Mission, the

Friendship Centre, Main Street Project, or Union Gospel, and sleeping in a church basement for

those two days. Another thing he did was to organize a school wide hunger banquet through

Oxfam, which he says shows students the diversity of income and power structures that exist

around the world. In addition, he organized a full day refugee camp scenario at his school. He

explained that the school became the world, different classrooms became different warzones, and

in the end the whole school ended up in the gym with some people having "made it to Canada", while others were "dead". The event culminated with a speaker from IRCOM (Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization of Manitoba) talking to the students about what life can be like for a refugee. During that time, Larry also ran an art contest in the school asking students to create art that was reflective of the diverse realities that refugees are going through, that art was posted around the school to raise awareness (Interview # 3, 2016, p. 14).

Lastly, Lindsay makes a concerted effort to seek out different events they can bring their students to. Book launches and movie screenings that expose students to identities that may be different than their own are examples of this. They also bring guest speakers into their classroom to raise awareness about different topics.

An anti-oppressive approach to students. All of the participants of the study discussed the importance of developing relationships with students. This means honouring their identities, their experiences, and their ideas, even if they are different than that of the teacher. A concrete way that was mentioned of valuing students in this way while still adhering to the curriculum was to give students choice in their reading and in the assessments they complete, in terms of both the genre they create, and also the topic they cover. Some participants like Char and Sam mentioned how allowing for such a degree of choice necessitates having individual conferences with students about their work, but this also helps build relationships and respect.

Char, Lindsay, and Sam talked about using inquiry-based learning, they each talked about how it provides students the opportunity to have a lot of freedom in terms of choosing how they show their learning, and how they think this flexibility has helped some students be more successful. Char and Lindsay were both very open to students creating all different types of texts, not only written pieces, but visual and artistic texts as well, giving students more ownership over

their work and a greater opportunity to display their strengths. Lindsay described inquiry-based

learning as "a good fit for anti-oppressive education" because it helps students to start to

challenge "dominant narratives" (Interview # 4, 2017, p. 28). Char also had a good example of

how to implement inquiry-based learning at the end of her literature circles where students were

coming up with their own inquiry question to research. She said that students had to come up

with a proposal to discuss with her that listed one inquiry question, three sub questions and an

explanation of the genre they were going to create; for example a pamphlet, podcast or article

(Interview # 7, 2018, p. 13). This gives Char a chance to learn about what her students are

interested in thinking about and creating, and a chance to show them that she is there to help.

Lindsay, Cathy, and Wade were participants who felt strongly about the importance of

the teacher's willingness to share about their personal life and to be vulnerable as a meaningful

way of building relationships with students. For all of these participants, their ability to build

trust with students is one of the factors that contribute to students being open to having effective

class discussions and writing about personal issues and feelings. For Cathy, one of the really

important things that she does is to write with her students, she shows students her own writing

on a document camera. This not only shows students that she is willing to take risks and be

vulnerable, but also provides important opportunities to teach about writing. Cathy also

recognizes that building this trust takes time; therefore, writing a memoir is not the first thing she

asks students to do. Rather, it is the last piece of writing they do in her class.

For Lindsay, they take the time to share orally with their students about their personal life

and beliefs, including information about how they spend their free time and about their partners.

In addition, Lindsay told me that they do not stand for the national anthem at their school every

morning because they do not agree with "militarism or colonial history" and making this

statement has sparked many discussions with students about values and beliefs (Interview # 4, 2017, p. 16). Lindsay says that they believe that these conversations humanize teachers and break down walls of a system that is "predicated on power dynamics" (Interview # 4, 2017, p. 6). Lindsay and Wade also both mentioned that they each do feel some level of responsibility to speak for the communities that they each belong to, Lindsay being queer and Wade being Indigenous. Both are very open to answering questions from students about these communities, but are also both careful about letting students know that they are only one voice, and are not speaking for an entire community. However, while Lindsay is willing to answer questions from students, they make a really important point in letting students know that it is important to educate yourself about communities other than your own, and to not only rely on members of a particular community to teach you, otherwise that individual may feel tokenized. Lindsay is conscious about modelling this practice for their students by showing interest in many different communities and talking to their students about what they are reading or viewing for their own personal interest and knowledge acquisition (Interview # 4, 2017, p. 26).

For Larry, having students consider other points of view is extremely important to him, so in order to foster understanding, he works a lot at building relationships among the students themselves and trying to get them to see each other's point of view. He does this by creating flexible discussion groups for students throughout the year that are constructed purposefully based on his knowledge of his students' interests and beliefs. In doing this he hopes to give students the opportunity to learn from and about others who are different than themselves.

Both Sam and Dan foster their relationships with students by trying to get them to reflect meaningfully on their own lives and beliefs, and how this might influence how they see the world around them. However, both of these participants emphasized that asking students to write

or talk about their personal lives should only occur after some relationship building between the teacher and the students, and amongst the students themselves. Sam stated that it is important to build a foundation with students before you start ask them what he called "risky" questions. He feels that if you start with those questions you will "intensify" students right away, meaning that students could feel defensive or put on the spot about their beliefs and experiences, which could in turn create a scenario where some students do not feel safe (Interview # 5, 2018, p. 21).

When Dan asks students to reflect, he has students consider questions such as: Are we born with a sense of right and wrong? Who helps us form our values? Why do people end up being different and thinking differently from each other? After considering these questions, Dan has students generate a list of their own values. Then he listens to and discusses with students a few episodes of a radio show on NPR (National Public Radio) called "This I Believe". Finally, students must choose one of the values they identified and write an essay modeled after one of the episodes of the radio show they listened to. Dan says that throughout this process he also shares his values with students and he tries to foster an environment where they can share with each other in a non-judgemental way, and the focus is on the idea that everyone is going to have different values (Interview # 1, 2016, p. 10). Echoing this, Sam told me that more than ever before, many of his assessments ask students to "reflect honestly about what they are going through" (Interview # 5, 2018, p. 7).

While classroom discussion plays a key role for all of the participants, Sam was the only participant who talked about using it as a tool for assessment. During small and large group discussions, he does what he calls "clipboard marking" (Interview # 5, 2018, p. 4). Meaning that he usually has a clipboard in front of him with all of his students' names and he takes brief notes about their contributions to discussions as they relate to particular curricular outcomes. Sam

describes these activities as "culture communicative" and says that he thinks that talking and

sharing with others helps students to build confidence (Interview # 5, 2018, p. 8). Sam uses these

as very small, low-stakes assessments to scaffold students to be able to complete larger pieces of

work; he feels strongly that it builds a foundation for doing higher level assignments (Interview #

5, 2018, p. 33).

Finding 6: These educators perceive their challenges in taking an anti-oppressive stance stem from using strategies and resources that create discomfort in the classroom, misunderstandings between teachers and students, and a lack of support.

While all of the participants of this study believe strongly in the value of taking an anti-

oppressive stance, this approach is not without challenges. The challenges identified by

participants were related to: using teaching strategies and materials that students might not be

familiar or comfortable with, perceived misunderstandings between teachers and students, and a

lack of support.

Teaching strategies that create discomfort. Several participants like Sam, Dan,

Lindsay, and Char identified getting students to participate in discussions as a significant

challenge, particularly in light of some of the sensitive topics being discussed. Sam stated in his

interview that on a good day he is getting thirty to forty percent of students in the room putting

up their hands to participate, but even of those students, he feels that less than half of them are

willing to give an extended, in depth response, they are often sticking to safer and more

simplistic answers (Interview # 5, 2018, p. 6). Lindsay talked about the challenge of trying to

balance students' comfort level and building trust with them, but also challenging them to get out

of their comfort zone. Char talked about how she often feels that when she poses a question in

class that is perceived to be "risky" she finds that often only one person will answer and the rest

of the class is either afraid to speak up, or agrees through their silence (Interview # 7, 2018, p. 15). Building the type of environment in a classroom where students feel safe enough to talk about sensitive issues speaks to relational learning as an important part of anti-oppressive education.

Several participants also identified that departing from more old fashioned teaching strategies can be a challenge at times, although all the participants have made a concerted effort to move forward, change, and adapt their techniques. For example, being flexible and willing to slow down the pace of the class can be a challenge because it is a departure from the more established way of teaching by trying to move the class forward towards a goal such as an assessment or an exam by a certain date. Sam articulated this clearly by stating that, "It takes sensitivity and awareness, and a willingness to teach everyone and differentiate, to say "I'm slowing down the pace of the class"" (Interview # 5, 2018, p.8).

A departure that Dan identified from what he felt was an older model of teaching was not being the expert in the room anymore, and being conscious not to simply tell students how to think about certain issues. Even though teachers generally have the best intentions in terms of wanting their students to be inclusive or open-minded, it is not up to the teacher to tell students how to think about an issue. Dan made an important point when he said that, "If they're susceptible to just believing you, then someone else will come along and say something else, and they'll just believe that person" (Interview # 1, 2016, p. 7). Lindsay echoed this challenge, explaining that sometimes it can be hard to understand why others may not think the same way you do, so as educators we have to be aware of stepping out of our "silos" and listening to other points of view, even if we do not agree with them (Interview # 4, 2017, p. 27).

Getting students to accept some of the ideas they are being presented has also been a

challenge for many of the participants; some mentioned that it was difficult to get students to

"buy in". This could be because in the anti-oppressive classroom, students are often being

presented with ideas that they may not have thought about, or may be different from their current

values and beliefs. Participants like Dan and Wade also felt that smart phones had a lot to do

with this issue, because in the classroom students are being asked to think about ideas that are far

removed from most of the things that they see on social media. Dan stated that he feels that

students are not engaged in some of the topics presented in class because many of them are under

the impression that some of these problems and issues have been "fixed" and as a society we are

past certain issues, racism for example (Interview # 1, 2016, p. 6). Wade mentioned that he felt

that students did not have enough reference points in their lives for understanding diversity

issues. He felt that for most of his students, their friends and social media were almost the only

influences on their thinking, which he finds problematic (Interview # 6, 2018, p. 19).

Finding the right texts was identified as a challenge for Lindsay, Wade, and Char. For

Lindsay and Wade, they both talked about how most of the books that were available in their

schools until quite recently were largely written by white, male authors, and did not reflect the

diversity of the texts they want to teach. Lindsay talked briefly about the canon, and their

perception that some educators are still very wedded to all of those "dead, straight, white guys"

(Interview # 4, 2017, p. 6), and their desire to change that. Wade agreed with the idea that

teaching books by those authors went against his "grain" (Interview # 6, 2018, p. 11). Char

simply talked about trying to be really conscious of picking what she felt were the "right" kind of

texts to reflect diversity. An example that she provided where she said she struggled was finding

LGBTQ texts where the LGBTQ character is not victimized, or the "sidekick in someone else's story," and their story is not explored in an empowering way (Interview # 7, 2018, p. 11).

Perceived misunderstandings between teachers and students. Dan, Sam, Wade, Lindsay, Cathy, and Larry all talked about what they believed to be misunderstandings they had with students, where they thought they were communicating an idea about one thing, but some students took offense, perhaps because it was indeed offensive, or perhaps because they had misinterpreted what the teacher was saying or doing. All the participants of this study describe themselves to be anti-racist, anti-homophobic, and anti trans-phobic, so although they may have offended a student, I would presume that none of them ever meant to oppress an individual or group. Lindsay and Sam each gave general examples of saying something that inadvertently sounded racist in class, but they did not mean it to be, or their word choice was wrong or awkward, so they went back and had discussions with students clarifying what their beliefs really are.

Wade explained that he finds in his community conversations around LGBTQ issues are very difficult for young males, and he has had several instances of students completely disengaging and "huffing and puffing in the corner" because of this topic (Interview # 6, 2018, p. 15). Larry gave an example of bringing in an elder to speak in his class, and perhaps not preparing his students enough. In the end, he said that the message he was hoping resonated with his students about diversity actually reinforced some of their negative stereotypes, and he had to do a lot of what he called "fix up" afterwards (Interview # 3, 2016, p. 17). Larry did not elaborate very much on this, but the reason I think he did not is because it is difficult and maybe even uncomfortable to talk about our students being racist, especially towards a guest you have invited into the building. Larry invited this elder to bring awareness to his students, and to fight

against racism he was perceiving in his class. His body language in this part of the interview communicated to me that he was embarrassed by how this event turned out, and he did not really feel that his students were enlightened the way he hoped they would be.

Cathy's example of a misunderstanding occurred in the teaching of the novel *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time,* which focuses on a young boy with autism. Cathy's intent in using this book was for students to see another example of a diverse individual who is succeeding in life, despite any challenges. She also hoped the reading of this text could help some students to develop empathy. However, one student in her class who read the book came away thinking that autism was something that needed "fixing" and wondering how we make these people "normal" (Interview # 2, 2016, p. 13). Once she realized this was how this student had interpreted this issue she spent time discussing with him about how people are all different and how we should all be accepting of those differences, but she did not feel confident that he truly received or understood that message.

Dan gave an example of a lesson that did not go at all as he planned, and it was around the article mentioned previously about Tagalog becoming the second most spoken language in Winnipeg. He says that the students were challenging him on why they had to read and talk about the article, and what did this have to do with English class? Dan described that he was feeling an undertone of racism from some of the students, but also noticed that some students were indicating that he was racist for bringing the article in in the first place. In the end, after much discussion, he was able to figure out that some students thought the article was racist because it was referring to "Filipino" people, and they thought that naming people by their ethnicity was racist because they are "just people." Dan's students felt that as a society we had moved beyond that (Interview # 1, 2016, p. 12). In the end, Dan did a lot of debriefing with his

students about their points of view, and explaining why he did not feel the same, but he ended up feeling that his original intent had been lost. His take away from that experience was very interesting, he said that he, "got the sense that if we're talking about food and dress and stuff like that, that's all good, like the sort of Folklorama-ized feel of diversity. But if you get beyond that surface at all to any real differences that we might have to accept, then that's not acceptable to some students" (Interview # 1, 2016, p. 14).

Lack of support. A lack of support or perceived support from parents and administrators was also identified as a challenge by some participants. Data from The Every Teacher Project, which is a study that set out "to investigate the perspectives of Canadian educators on the safety and inclusion of LGBTQ students and topics in schools," (Taylor, Peter, Campbell, Meyer, Ristock, & Short, 2015, p. viii) supports this feeling. Results from that study found that overall the "participants were not strongly confident that school system leadership would support them in the event of complaints, and many participants were not confident at all" (Taylor, et al., 2015, p. 155). Lindsay put it well when they describe why that support or feeling of support might not be there, they said that "context is at the core of this" (Interview # 4, 2017, p. 23). They are referring to the context of where someone teaches and the values and attitudes of that community, and also the context in which educators present ideas to students. There is a lot of room for interpretation, and there is a feeling that some administrators might not want to risk dealing with the repercussions of a teacher discussing potentially sensitive topics with students, no matter how valuable a learning opportunity it might be. For example, Char talked about being worried about parents phoning the administration at her school to complain about some of the topics she was discussing in class because they were not necessarily the dominant conservative viewpoint in her community (Interview # 7, 2018, p. 17). Also, Lindsay and Wade talked about

this leading to feelings of isolation within a building or a division. Both of these participants

alluded to not wanting to be viewed as what Wade referred to as "that annoying social justice

crusader of the hallway" (Interview # 6, 2018, p. 21). He also felt that sometimes if a person did

feel alone in their building, it might make them "quieter not louder" (Interview # 6, 2018, p. 26).

Finding 7: These educators perceived successes in taking an anti-oppressive stance came from the authentic relationships and meaningful discussions being fostered in the classroom and the impact the students' work was having outside the classroom.

All of the participants of this study were able to identify successes they feel they have

had in their classroom as a result of taking an anti-oppressive stance. The majority of the

successes that participants identified were related to seeing students invested in their learning.

Another success that several participants acknowledged was seeing that students felt safe to

express themselves in a classroom, but this seemed to be more of an overall feeling that

participants perceived based on the successes they were describing. The majority of successes

that participants identified were related to seeing that work happening in the classroom was

having an impact for students or others beyond the classroom, having meaningful and important

discussions with students, and fostering authentic relationships. When each of the participants

discussed the successes they felt, it also seemed to reinforce for them why they felt so strongly

about taking an anti-oppressive stance in their classrooms.

Impact beyond the classroom. One way that participants viewed success was when they

saw students making a real-world difference because of what they had learned or experienced in

the classroom. For example, Char talked about an experience she had where students were doing

an inquiry project on an issue of their choosing, and one of her students decided to put together a

presentation about the importance of having designated genderless bathrooms in their school.

She said this raised awareness about the issue, and in the end a bathroom was reassigned for this purpose (Interview # 7, 2018, p. 13). Sam had two similar examples, one was of a student in his grade nine class who had a stutter, and that student did a presentation to the class about stuttering. Sam said that he could see how empowering it was for that student (Interview # 5, 2018, p. 9). Sam's other example was a student in grade twelve who put together a very detailed proposal about creating urban farming in downtown Winnipeg, an idea she was very passionate about (Interview # 5, 2018, p. 32).

Lindsay provided an example of a speaker they organized for Orange Shirt Day at their school, which is a day to bring awareness to the effects of residential schools. After the speaker, who was a survivor of a residential school spoke, Lindsay led a discussion in their classroom where several Indigenous students shared the inter-generational effects of residential schools on their families. Lindsay said that these were students who had not spoken in class before, and that it brought a "new level of understanding and respect" between many of the students in their class (Interview # 4, 2017, p. 20). Lindsay made an effort to make this day meaningful for their students by giving a voice to students who may have previously felt silenced. However, not all classrooms are making this day more than an act of tokenism. Looking at it through a lens of critical multi-culturalism, consideration needs to be given at the school level not only to raising awareness but using this day to create social change, and meaningful changes in societal attitudes and perceptions, which can start at the school level.

Another example that Lindsay provided was bringing their students to a screening of the movie *Do the Right Thing* which was followed by a discussion moderated by a member of Black Space Winnipeg. Lindsay said that many of their students were uncomfortable with the discussion because some students were being called out on their racist attitudes. However,

Lindsay makes an interesting point stating that they have "learned to realize that if a kid is upset by something we're talking about, then it means that I'm poking at something that probably needs to be examined a little bit more or that they would at least benefit from thinking about" (Interview # 4, 2017, p. 22).

Larry took real-world learning all the way to Bolivia. He planned nine different trips there where students were staying right in and helping to care for children in an orphanage there. He received a lot of positive feedback from students about those trips, and also shared that a few of his former students have gone on to do humanitarian work as a career at least in some part thanks to this experience (Interview # 3, 2016, p. 19). Larry considers that part of his career extremely significant.

Meaningful class discussions. The feeling that class discussions are more meaningful and empowering for students was another success that participants recognized. Dan, Char, Larry, Sam, and Cathy all felt this way. Sam expressed this clearly by saying that his belief is that in anti-oppressive classrooms, "the big benefit is that you get classrooms that are probably more engaged and more interesting to talk to…they actually want to be there" (Interview # 5, 2018, p. 31). Dan echoed this by saying that if students are "thinking about things in a way they haven't before, that in itself is a success" (Interview # 1, 2016, p. 16).

Larry gave an example of doing a poetry slam with his class where he wrote a poem to start them off. He shared a deeply personal poem that explored some of the feelings he had regarding growing up with his adopted sister. He said that this set a precedent for the poetry slam where most students were writing and sharing poems about meaningful issues and topics (Interview # 3, 2016, p. 16).

Many meaningful discussions that the participants identified came from talking about specific texts. An example that Char gave was reading the novel *Indian Horse* with her class, and a particularly honest and open discussion about race that came from that. She said that most of the class was participating, and that they seemed to feel that it was a safe space to express their feelings (Interview # 7, 2018, p. 14). Sam had a similar example of a class discussion he had about gender roles that was inspired by reading *A Midsummer Night's Dream.* He said the discussion gave a modern perspective to that text, and he felt really good about how it had gone (Interview # 5, 2018, p. 13). Dan had a similar example of a class discussion he felt impacted his students that was around an article about forced marriages. He said that he felt that many students were affected by the article because they were able to think about it in terms of a "freedom that they looked forward to having" that was taken away from others in the world (Interview # 1, 2016, p. 6), many of the students really empathized with those affected by this issue. Dan also said that since he started using articles about current issues in society as a jumping off point for class discussions, he has had much more direct feedback from students letting him know that they appreciate these articles (Interview # 1, 2016, p. 19). Also, Lindsay provided an example of discussing the book *Gender Failure* with students. They said that students were asking very open and honest questions about gender and what it meant to identify as non-binary, it was a meaningful discussion for Lindsay personally, and also many of the students in the room (Interview # 4, 2017, p. 20).

Finally, Cathy talked about the success she has felt in discussing the book *Night* with her students. She provided an example where students made connections between what it must have been like for Elie Weisel to pick up the pieces of his life and make something of himself after going through the concentration camp, to the experiences that Syrian refugees have coming to

Canada and starting their lives over after the horrors that they have also lived through. Cathy said that she could see how eye opening it was for many students (Interview # 2, 2016, p. 12). In talking about these successes, Cathy made an interesting observation, and she was really the only participant to directly speak to this, she said that she feels more satisfied with what she is teaching today than what she was doing even five years ago, she said that it just feels more "authentic" (Interview # 2, 2016, p. 18).

　　　　Fostering authentic relationships. Creating meaningful relationships with individual students was another success identified by several participants. Sam recalled a student he taught last year who had not previously had much success at school because he did not want to or did not like to write. Sam noticed that this student did seem to like reading, so he helped him to choose engaging books, and built a relationship with this student by talking to him about what he was reading. Eventually, Sam was able to assess him orally on some of the curricular outcomes, and even got this student to do some writing. Sam indicated that this might seem small, but this is an enormous leap for a student to make in one semester (Interview # 5, 2018, p, 24). Two years later, that student did graduate from high school.

　　　　Wade was the only participant who discussed their success as an anti-oppressive educator as something that was a group effort within his school. All of the successes identified by the other participants happened within their individual classrooms, while Wade talked about a shift in his building that he feels was brought on by the administration and leadership team, many of whom identify themselves as anti-oppressive educators. In addition, Wade said that including him, six teachers in his building are in the same Master's cohort, and he thinks that has had an impact on the rest of the staff moving towards an anti-oppressive stance (Interview # 6, 2018, p. 26).

Conclusion

The findings of this study do provide answers to my research questions. In particular, it has taught me a lot about the pedagogical moves and content decisions that I might make as a teacher who articulates an anti-oppressive stance. For example, using a variety of flexible teaching and assessment strategies and fostering relationships with students in order the build the trust that is needed to discuss many of the sensitive and personal topics that arise in an anti-oppressive classroom. Anti-oppressive educators are trying to expose students to a variety of topics and viewpoints, and to get students to think critically about these topics and their own values and beliefs. In order to do this, educators must be ready to be open and vulnerable, and ready to question some of their own values and beliefs, even about the oppressive nature of the school system itself. Chapter five will discuss these findings and consider the implications of the research for anti-oppressive educators, and our education system in general.

Chapter 5: Implications

This study builds on work that has already been done in the areas of anti-oppressive education, ELA curriculum and materials, and pedagogy, and has long been of interest to educators. More recently, with changes to the Manitoba ELA curriculum that includes a focus on power and agency and planning for rich and meaningful learning experiences, taking an anti-oppressive stance in the ELA classroom has become especially appropriate. Other factors also make this topic particularly timely, such as legislation that mandates the inclusion of all students, as well as an increased emphasis on reading and writing for social justice. Taking an anti-oppressive stance with regards to students, curriculum and materials, and pedagogy is embedded in the Manitoba ELA curriculum. However, the manner in which teachers go about taking such a stance is not clearly laid out in the framework of this new curriculum, and is therefore worth investigating in order to discover ways that a teacher could embody an anti-oppressive stance and what principles they could look to to guide their pedagogy and content decisions.

As a practitioner interested in anti-oppressive education in the classroom, this inquiry was in part motivated by my own experiences and questions, and by the dearth of relevant research and examples particular to teaching ELA in the Manitoba context. This research has been very personal for me, and has resulted in many changes to my practice. The manner in which I now look at curriculum, materials, and pedagogy has been forever changed by this process, which is a meaningful part of this inquiry that must be recognized. According to Brown, Carducci, and Kuby (2014) "It is now acknowledged (at least by researchers anchored in critical, feminist, and postmodern schools of thought) that the process of inquiry is not a neutral activity (Brown & Strega, 2005); it is a highly political endeavor with significant implications for the

researcher as well as the individuals and contexts that serve as the focus of study" (p. 1). The implications of this study for my practice will be discussed throughout this chapter.

In defining the practices of teachers who articulate taking an anti-oppressive stance in high school ELA, this study makes connections with the three most important considerations for a classroom teacher: students, curriculum and materials, and pedagogy, and provides awareness of practical considerations for the classroom. This investigation leads to three main implications that pertain to anti-oppressive education in the high school ELA classroom: self-identified anti-oppressive educators draw from a repertoire of flexible teaching and assessment strategies, self-identified anti-oppressive educators are influenced to take such a stance because of professional learning, and self-identified anti-oppressive educators prioritize honouring the identities of their students as well as their own identities to facilitate learning.

The practical implications of this study all connect to the goal of providing students with positive and authentic learning experiences, while focusing on the objectives set out by the curriculum. The theoretical implications of this study are that educators who read this might consider and act in using multicultural, gender, and queer theories to inform their practice. This study might also add to the conversation about how important ideas stemming from multicultural, gender, and queer theories, that have been around for many decades, have not been acted upon in our current educational system. Practically, or theoretically speaking, the main purpose of the study was to uncover ideas that may be useful to classroom teachers as they relate to their approach to students, curriculum and materials, and pedagogy.

Implication 1: Self-identified anti-oppressive educators draw from a repertoire of flexible teaching and assessment strategies.

Creating authentic learning experiences is important to most teachers, and was certainly discussed as a significant goal for the educators in this study. Being flexible in the materials used in the classroom as well as the way students can show their learning is a consideration in taking an anti-oppressive stance. Recently, many educators have been moving away from conventional methods for teaching ELA such as doing class novel studies of canonical texts, and the teaching and writing of the five-paragraph essay. Most of the participants of this study identified a lack of engagement from students as part of the reasoning for their shift away from these time-honoured strategies and towards what they see as an anti-oppressive stance to teaching and learning. Today, many educators are using teaching strategies such as literature circles, independent reading choices, and being open to conducting small and large group discussions on various topics. In addition, inquiry-based learning was mentioned frequently by participants of this study as both a learning and assessment tool that allows students to explore topics and create products that are meaningful to them individually.

Developing familiarity with some of the aforementioned tools can help teachers not only to take an anti-oppressive stance in their classrooms, but also to implement the new ELA curriculum in Manitoba. For example, Murdoch's (2015) work on inquiry based learning can help with this. Murdoch (2015) suggests that inquiry can be a way for a teacher to set up their whole process of teaching and learning in a classroom by considering aspects such as the materials chosen, classroom discourse, planning, documenting and assessing, and with each of these considerations, the learner is at the center (p. 15). That description of inquiry-based learning in itself aligns with many of the tenets of anti-oppressive education because the teacher

perceives and takes action against some of the oppressive elements that are found in many

conventional models of education. In addition, MacKenzie (2016) describes inquiry as "the

strongest method to create personalized learning pathways for all learners, a method that brings

the curriculum of life into the curriculum of school" (p. 9). For ELA teachers, this idea is

especially poignant because the curriculum is not based on any specific content; therefore

students and teachers are learning together about a variety of topics and the teacher's role

becomes one of facilitating learning rather than delivering knowledge. The majority of the

participants of this study discussed explicitly and/or provided examples from their experiences of

how inquiry-based learning helped many of their students to find solutions or raise awareness

about real-world problems that affect them personally and how valuable that is for students.

Another method of providing students with further agency over their learning is by

providing choice in the texts they read. Brownlee's (2005) approach to literature circles has been

widely used throughout Manitoba. Brownlee's (2005) method emphasizes students having

authentic and meaningful conversations about books, rather than conversations that are contrived

and concern an assigned book, or even an assigned section of the book, with her method,

students are free to read at their own pace. However, students are choosing to read from a variety

of books pre-selected by the teacher. Students are also discussing their book with other students,

promoting a culture of collaboration, respect, and sharing in the classroom. Participants of this

study make it clear how vital text selection can be in engaging students, and they all choose texts

that they believe reflect important issues going on in society and even in their own classrooms.

Texts that deal with gender, sexuality, race, and culture, were of particular interest for these

educators, which can be seen in the topical organization of the resources selected by these

educators in Appendix G. The significance of resource selection was particularly highlighted for

the participants of this study with students who are reluctant readers who might need to see themselves reflected in a book in order to open the door to reading, and in some cases even to feeling valued and heard at school. The list of texts in Appendix G is a starting point that interested teachers could use as inspiration for choosing literature circle books.

Allowing students the opportunity to participate in literature circles can also be a springboard for inquiry. One important aspect of today's literature circles is that they have shifted classrooms away from prescribed activities such as chapter questions and book reports. Therefore, once students finish reading a book, a goal for them might be to think about what questions and topics came up for them during their reading that they are interested in exploring in an in-depth manner, because they now have some context and some knowledge to use as a jumping off point for inquiry (Harvey & Daniels, 2015). This process more closely mirrors what reading is like outside the classroom, making it more authentic for students and teachers.

Flexibility in teaching and assessment can be challenging because it is a departure from more old-fashioned approaches to teaching, but participants of this study emphasize how rewarding it can be to see students invested in their learning and motivated to continue. Participants also highlighted that making these changes to their teaching was scary at first, but once they were rewarded for that risk, they felt encouraged to continue to view themselves as facilitators of learning. One benefit of using flexible teaching and assessment strategies that was identified by participants of this study included increasing student confidence. Flexible strategies allowed some students to experience a feeling of competence and success that they may not have experienced with more conventional teaching. In addition, participants also identified that they were able to foster meaningful relationships and build trust with students because of the ownership that students were given over their learning. The key to making literature circles and

inquiry-based learning powerful for students "lies in offering kids real choices, responsibilities, and opportunities to make their thinking matter and take it public" (Harvey & Daniels, 2015, p. 272). To do this successfully, educators must be willing to be flexible in their plans and teaching strategies, and also view themselves as more of a facilitator than a teacher of the past who held all of the answers. Learning is happening together, for everyone in the room, not only the students, but the teacher as well.

In my own practice, over the last few years, I have moved almost exclusively to using literature circles and choice reading for students. I also take a lot of time choosing the texts that I use in class, because I want texts to be about meaningful topics that will allow students to either see themselves in the text, or develop a greater understanding of a person or group who is different from them. I also try to choose texts in a way that is responsive to the individual learners in my classroom at a given time, this means considering their identities, their interests, and their learning needs. Before I began this inquiry, I did not think so explicitly about all of these considerations for choosing texts to use in the classroom. This inquiry also changed the way I assess my students. Currently, every assessment I give to students has choice in the topic, and often the form in which the students can present their learning. I have seen these changes lead to greater investment from many students, but I have come to realize how important it is to make changes and be flexible depending on the learners in my classroom each year. Taking an anti-oppressive stance to curriculum and materials is never something that is finished, it is ongoing.

Implication 2: Self-identified anti-oppressive educators prioritize honouring the identities of their students as well as their own identities to facilitate learning.

Teachers and students all arrive in the classroom with invisible backpacks and briefcases of experiences that can shape their behaviours, beliefs, and interests. Consciously honouring and acknowledging the identities of both the teacher and the students contributes to an anti-oppressive classroom because identity can have such an influence on the teaching and learning process. This study found that experiences that teachers have had either in their personal or professional lives is a factor that led them to take an anti-oppressive stance with students. This study also found that teachers' identities and life experiences often influence their choice of materials for their classroom in terms of the topics and issues they cover such as gender, race, culture, and sexuality, as evidenced by the topics of the texts found in Appendix G.

Additionally, the findings support the idea that many students who may have been prone to oppression have benefitted from this approach because of the freedom they were given in their learning, and the respect with which they were treated by their teachers. Participants of this study were all conscious of their students' identities in their planning of activities and assessments in their classrooms, and felt that taking identity into consideration was an important way to honour and respect their students. Honouring identities also helped many participants to achieve important goals for the students in their classrooms, for example helping students to develop empathy and even work through some of their own emotional issues.

Students feel a certain level of respect when given choices in materials and assessments. Participants in this study noted that those feelings of respect can translate to improvements in others areas of a students' life at school such as improved attendance and increased participation in classroom and extra-curricular activities, and for some students, simply getting them through

the door is a meaningful first step. Consequently, participants of this study also cited many examples of field trips, extra-curricular events, groups, and clubs they helped to facilitate that brought awareness to topics and issues that were of interest to both students and teachers. These activities were especially valuable for honouring both student and teacher identities, and further building relationships, trust, and mutual respect to a level that went beyond the classroom walls.

However, discussing sensitive issues and having critical conversations is something that should be done in a thoughtful and reflective manner, and is another area where current and pre-service teachers may need more training. The findings of this study demonstrate that the times when teachers felt it most challenging to take an anti-oppressive stance was in having critical conversations with students about important issues. This occurred either because the teacher felt they were not properly communicating their point, which they were likely not properly trained to do, or because they were worried that the ideas they were discussing would not be supported by their administration or school division. Vetter, Schieble, and Meacham (2018) studied the "discursive strategies" or words spoken by pre-service teachers during classroom conversations on critical issues such as race and gender (p. 256); because they argue that there is a need to "develop stronger teacher education practices around critical and racial literacy instruction, which takes on heightened importance with current national political tensions about issues involving race, immigration, income inequality, sexual orientation, and gender identity" (p. 256).

A lack of support or a perceived lack of support from administrators was another common challenge faced by participants of this study. Only one participant felt he had the support of his administration, and that was because his principal also self-identifies as an anti-oppressive educator. At Wade's school, there were several teachers and administrators working

together in a Master's cohort, and that shared learning helped Wade, and surely others, to feel less isolated in their work and beliefs regarding anti-oppressive education.

The findings of this study show that participants perceived successes in their classrooms that resulted from their stance were: building authentic relationships, having meaningful discussions, and the impact the students' work was having outside the classroom. These relationships, discussions, and student work were largely built by bringing important ideas, for example, racism, sexism, and homophobia, to light and looking at them critically. However, the participants of this study are experienced, reflective teachers who have pursued professional learning, making them particularly skilled at approaching sensitive issues in the classroom. Participants in this study are likely to have an awareness of "how their language choices, and how the Discourses to which they subscribe and circulate, operate to privilege some students over others and play a major factor in students' opportunities and material experiences in school and beyond" (Vetter, et al., 2018, p. 258). Participants of this study demonstrate awareness of their own privilege and also of how their choice of words and discussion topics positions themselves and their students. Displaying awareness and understanding of privilege and position is an important way to honour identity in the classroom; however as Vetter, et al. (2018) point out, "Critical conversations are messy and complicated. There is no prescribed way to have them" (p. 276). This highlights how crucial experience and professional learning are to practice; these are not conversations to be taken lightly and engaged in without a lot of training, experience, and self-awareness.

This inquiry has made me much more conscious of the language that I have used or students use in the classroom that is oppressive to certain groups. I am much more aware of language that is heteronormative, cisnormative, racist, and sexist, than I was before, and I work

to bring this awareness to my students. I also have developed much more knowledge about these topics that allow me to have informed discussions with students and have made me more confident in my ability to conduct critical conversations. However, I have also realized the importance of continued learning about these topics. There have been important changes made to language choices even in the time I have been conducting this inquiry. For example, when I began this study, GSA stood for Gay-Straight Alliance, today it stands for Gender-Sexuality Alliance.

Through this inquiry, I have also come to realize that while I do feel more equipped to have critical conversations with students, it is the aspect of taking an anti-oppressive stance that is the most challenging for me. The reason that I find it challenging is because I am nervous about opening up the floor to students and having them say something offensive. I feel capable of addressing it, but worry about damaging the relationships between myself and certain students or between the students themselves. In the back of my mind, there is also a worry of not being supported by the administration. Because I articulate taking an anti-oppressive stance in my classroom, I recognize, as many of the participants of this study do also, that I must be brave and continue to practice having critical conversations in my classroom.

Implication 3: Self-identified anti-oppressive educators are influenced to take such a stance because of professional learning.

Six of the seven educators interviewed for this study have gone on to study at the graduate level. Having the opportunity to continue to learn about pedagogy after a teacher has had the chance to experience the realities of the classroom is very powerful. Once an individual realizes what challenges exist for them in the classroom, developing a greater understanding of

pedagogy and teaching philosophy can help to overcome some of the challenges that may have presented themselves. Many participants of the study discussed how graduate work has helped them to ground their beliefs about teaching and learning in theory. It also can give educators a space, and even the vocabulary to identify and critique some of the issues within the educational system itself.

I too feel that the graduate work I have done throughout my Master's program has had by far the most influence on my practice to date. I now have a much wider vocabulary to articulate the decisions I make in my classroom, and also a greater understanding of why I make certain decisions around curriculum and materials, students, and pedagogy. Prior to this program, I was making some choices that were anti-oppressive in nature, but I was making those decisions simply based on my feelings. Today, I can make decisions that can be supported by knowledge and research on anti-oppressive education, and also pedagogy. As I continue in my journey as a teacher, I plan to keep up with professional reading much more than I did prior to this inquiry, and to seek out opportunities for professional learning that align with my beliefs, and will allow me to spend enough time on a particular topic to be able to have the knowledge to implement it into my practice.

While not all teachers have the opportunity to pursue graduate work, most still wish to learn and grow professionally. Canadian statistics were difficult to find in terms of the actual percentage of teachers that do go on to do graduate work, but in the United States, 52% of public school teachers were found to have a Master's degree or higher (George Washington University, 2012). In Canada 54% of adults aged 25 to 64 in the general population have postsecondary qualifications (Statistics Canada, 2016). It is not clear how these statistics might translate to Canadian teachers, but based on the numbers in the United States for teachers, and the general

population in Canada, at least half of teachers might pursue some level of graduate work. Gini-Newman and Case (2018) discuss the importance of supporting teacher growth, but doing so in a way that is teacher-directed and a form a professional inquiry, rather than a mandate that is being forced upon them. The teachers in this study all found their graduate work very enriching because they could choose the focus for that work. However, because many teachers do not go on to graduate work, a goal for our current system should be to make professional development more meaningful. Gini-Newman and Case (2018) point out the short-comings of our current model of professional learning, mainly that professional development is something that happens *to* teachers in formats that are "short-lived and sporadic" (p. 255). Studies have shown that one-off seminars are the delivery model for over ninety percent of professional learning for educators, even though it has also been found that "professional learning sessions or programs of less than fourteen hours in length do not typically lead to increased student achievement or changed teaching practices" (Gini-Newman & Case, 2018, p. 254). Perhaps the entire model of delivery for professional learning needs to be re-considered to be more valuable and more empowering for teachers.

Conclusion

While I have gained so much personally from taking on this work, there is still a need for further research. The very nature of anti-oppressive education is that it is flexible and ever-changing, so it would be valuable to see how these same educators change and evolve in their practice and pedagogy as their careers progress. In addition, while this study provides insight into the views of educators and how they perceive the moves they are making in their classrooms, it does not take into account how students might perceive being in a classroom with

a teacher who self-identifies as anti-oppressive and what difference that may make for a student (or not).

Studying for my Masters' degree has helped me to define the type of educator I want to be and have been trying to become throughout my career. Completing these studies has given me theories and research, and a name for the stance I take as a teacher. In addition, gaining this knowledge has also given me the confidence to be able to take an anti-oppressive stance in my classroom, and not be afraid to call it that. I also feel that I got many valuable answers to my research questions, in particular how I as an anti-oppressive educator in high school ELA can embody such a stance in my classroom through my decisions about content and pedagogy. With regard to choosing content and having discussions with students especially, I have a greater understanding of the importance of looking to theories such as gender, queer, and multi-cultural theories to help with those choices and discussions. Gaining knowledge of these theories has helped me to think more critically about the language I use and the content that I choose for my classroom. I also see the need to set out clear objectives for myself as an educator and for my students and the importance of having students see value in what we are doing inside of the classroom, outside of the classroom. In addition, it has become clear that it is the responsibility of teachers to expose students to a variety of viewpoints and issues and to get students to think critically about their own biases.

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Appendix A: Recruitment letter

UNIVERSITY
OF MANITOBA

Faculty of Education

Dear Colleague,

I am a Master's student at the University of Manitoba in the Faculty of Education. I am interested in how issues related to social oppression and anti-oppressive education in general are made meaningful in the high school English Language Arts classroom. I am conducting a research study that seeks to find out what texts, strategies, and practices educators who focus on this are using to impact students in a profound way.

I am writing you at this time to request your participation in my study, as well as requesting your help in recruiting other high school English Language Arts educators who may be willing to participate, and who feel strongly about the importance of focusing on this topic through either their choice of materials, assessments and/or their dialogue with students. Please pass on this e-mail to anyone you feel fits these criteria.

Participation in the study will require participating in an interview of approximately ninety minutes, at a time and location that is convenient for you. Participation is completely voluntary and participants are free to discontinue participation at any time without consequences. Participants are free to decline to answer any questions, or withdraw their participation at any time, if this occurs, any data collected will be destroyed immediately. Written consent from all participants will be obtained.

This study has been approved by the Nursing/Education Research Ethics Board, and I am asking you to consider participating yourself or to pass along this letter to other colleagues who may be interested. Anyone interested in participating should contact me, Kelly Fewer, at umdruryk@myumanitoba.ca or

Sincerely,

Kelly Fewer

Appendix: B: Consent form

UNIVERSITY
OF MANITOBA

Faculty of Education   Consent Form

Research Project Title: Anti-Oppressive Education in the High School English Language Arts
Classroom
Principal Investigator and contact information: Kelly Fewer, umdruryk@myumanitoba.ca,

Research Supervisor: Dr. M. Honeyford (thesis advisor), Michelle.Honeyford@umanitoba.ca,

This consent form, a copy of which will be left with you for your records and reference, is only part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more detail about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask me. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

I am a Master's student at the University of Manitoba in the Faculty of Education. I am interested in how to meaningfully make anti-oppressive education an important focus in the high school English Language Arts classroom. I am conducting a research study that seeks to find out what texts, strategies, and practices educators who focus on this idea are using to impact students in a profound way.

This study will form the basis of my Master's thesis. Therefore, it will be published and searchable in databases, and I may wish to publish and present in professional venues such as conferences or professional journals at a later date.

I am writing you at this time to request your participation in my study. Participation in the study will require participating in an interview of approximately ninety minutes, at a time and location that is convenient for you. Participation is completely voluntary and you are free to discontinue participation at any time without consequences. You simply need to tell me if you wish to make this choice during the interview, or contact me any time using the contact information on this letter.

There are minimal risks to participants in this study, beyond the risks encountered on a typical day. However, some of the risks include: feelings of discomfort talking to another educator about your practice, feeling that you are putting yourself in a risky stance because people in your building or those with power over you may not know the full extent of your anti-oppressive pedagogy, or the feeling of being judged. However, you are not being evaluated on your teaching abilities. The purpose of the study is to gather ideas regarding texts, strategies, lessons and practices that participants believe effectively integrate anti-oppressive education in their classrooms. The results of the study may be helpful to you, as other educators who feel that it is important to make anti-oppressive education a focus in their classrooms will also be sharing their ideas.

Your name and any identifying information will remain confidential in this study. Pseudonyms will be used in all written and presented versions of this work. All notes, and iPhone recordings of interviews, will be kept strictly confidential, stored in a locked office and/or password protected computer files in my home office. Contact information and consent forms will be stored in a different drawer and/or computer file than notes and transcripts from interviews. All files will be destroyed and written notes will be shredded five years from the completion of my Master's program, which I estimate to be approximately in January of 2018. The reason for this length of time is that it allows me the opportunity to conduct additional analyses of the data should I need or wish to for the purpose of presenting it or for preparing publications.

There will be no compensation for participating in this study; however I will provide light refreshments for participating.

I will provide you with a transcript of our interview in order to provide you with the opportunity to add, edit or delete any information. Please provide me with your e-mail address on the line indicated below. If you would like a summary of the results of this study upon its completion, please provide me with your home street address or e-mail address as indicated below.

Your signature on this form indicates that you have understood to your satisfaction the information regarding participation in the research project and agree to participate as a subject. In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the researchers, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time, and /or refrain from answering any questions you prefer to omit, without prejudice or consequence. Should you choose to withdraw from the study; any data collected from you will be destroyed immediately. Your continued participation should be as informed as your initial consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation. The University of Manitoba may look at research records to see that the research is being done in a safe and proper way.

This research has been approved by the Nursing/Education Research Ethics Board at the University of Manitoba. If you have any concerns or complaints about this project you may contact me, Kelly Fewer, at umdruryk@myumanitoba.ca or   , any of the above named individuals, or the Human Ethics Coordinator at   or e-mail humanethics@umanitoba.ca. A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference.

_____

Participant Signature   Date
_____

E-mail address for receipt of transcript

If you would like a summary of the results of this study, please list your e-mail or mailing address below.

_____

(E-mail or mailing address)
_____

Researcher Signature   Date

Appendix C: Amended consent form

Amended Consent Form

<u>Research Project Title</u>: Anti-Oppressive Education in the High School English Language Arts Classroom

<u>Principal Investigator and contact information</u>: Kelly Fewer, umdruryk@myumanitoba.ca,

<u>Research Supervisor</u>: Dr. M. Honeyford (thesis advisor), Michelle.Honeyford@umanitoba.ca,

In the spring of 2016, you were a participant in my research study about creating a focus on human diversity and social justice in the high school English Language Arts classroom. At the time of that research, the consent form you signed stated that your name would remain confidential. At this time I am providing you with an amended consent form to provide you with the option of having your name used.

This amended consent form is completely voluntary. You are free to choose to keep your name confidential without penalty or judgement. Because you are sharing lessons, assessments and ideas you have created, I feel that it is important for you to have the choice of having your name included in the study, in order to give you credit for your ideas. However, this is up to your discretion.

The previous consent form you signed allowed me to use the findings in a paper for a Qualitative Research course, as well as for my Master's thesis. You were provided with a copy of the results of the study that I used in the course. Now, as I continue the study, it will form the basis of my Master's thesis. Therefore, I may publish or present my findings at a later date.

Should you choose for your name to remain anonymous, your name will not be used in any written information. All notes, and iPhone recordings of interviews, will be kept strictly confidential, stored in a locked office and/or password protected computer files in my home office. Contact information and consent forms will be stored in a different drawer and/or computer file than notes and transcripts from interviews. All files will be destroyed and written notes will be shredded approximately five years from the completion of my Master's program, which I estimate to be approximately in January of 2018.

Your signature on this form indicates that you have understood to your satisfaction the information regarding participation in the research project and agree to continue to participate as a subject. In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the researchers, sponsors,

or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time without prejudice or consequence. Should you choose to withdraw from the study; any data collected from you will be destroyed immediately. Your continued participation should be as informed as your initial consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification or new information if necessary. The University of Manitoba may look at research records to see that the research is being done in a safe and proper way.

This research has been approved by the Nursing/Education Research Ethics Board at the University of Manitoba. If you have any concerns or complaints about this project you may contact me, Kelly Fewer, at umdruryk@myumanitoba.ca or ⬛⬛⬛⬛⬛⬛, any of the above named individuals, or the Human Ethics Coordinator at ⬛⬛⬛⬛⬛ or e-mail humanethics@umanitoba.ca. A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference.

Choose **one** of the following participant signature lines:

_____

Participant Signature (Amended consent to use name)   Date

_____

Participant Signature (Name will continue to remain confidential)   Date

_____

Researcher Signature   Date

Appendix D: Ethics Approval

UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA   Research Ethics and Compliance

RENEWAL APPROVAL

Date: January 30, 2017   **New Expiry:** February 15, 2018

TO: **Kelly Fewer**   **(Advisor: Michelle Honeyford)**
         Principal Investigator

FROM: **Zana Lutfiyya, Chair**
         Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board (ENREB)

Re: **Protocol #E2016:019 (HS19523)**
         "Teaching about Human Diversity in the High School English Language Arts Classroom"

Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board (ENREB) has reviewed and renewed the above research. ENREB is constituted and operates in accordance with the current *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans.*

This approval is subject to the following conditions:

1. Any modification to the research must be submitted to ENREB for approval before implementation.

2. Any deviations to the research or adverse events must be submitted to ENREB as soon as possible.

3. This renewal is valid for one year only and a Renewal Request must be submitted and approved by the above expiry date.

4. A Study Closure form must be submitted to ENREB when the research is complete or terminated.

Funded Protocols:
- **Please mail/e-mail a copy of this Renewal Approval, identifying the related UM Project Number, to the Research Grants Officer in ORS.**

Research Ethics and Compliance is a part of the Office of the Vice-President (Research and International)
umanitoba.ca/research

Appendix E: Recruitment Poster

UNIVERSITY
OF MANITOBA

Faculty of Education

Are you an English Language Arts educator at the senior years level? Do you take an anti-oppressive stance in your classroom?

If so, you are invited to participate in a research study about anti-oppressive education in the high school ELA classroom. Participation would include an interview of approximately one hour that would take place at a mutually agreed upon location, date and time. If you are interested in participating, please contact the researcher, Kelly Fewer at umdruryk@myumanitoba.ca.

This research is in fulfillment of my Master of education degree at the University of Manitoba. All information will be kept confidential and participants' names and identifying information will not be used. Participation is strictly voluntary. Further information about the study will be provided and informed consent will be obtained prior to the interview. This study has been approved by the Nursing/Education Ethics Board at the University of Manitoba. If you have any concerns or complaints about this project you may contact the Human Ethics Coordinator at ▆▆▆▆▆▆▆▆ or email humanethics@umanitoba.ca.

Appendix F: Interview Questions

The questions I plan to ask the participants during the semi-structured interviews are as follows:

•   How long have you been teaching? What levels of ELA have you had experience teaching?

•   When did issues related to human diversity or social justice become a major focus for you in the classroom? Why?

•   What are some of the equity issues that are most important to you and/or your students? Why?

•   How do you incorporate these issues into your classroom? What are your goals for your students?

•   As an ELA educator how do you incorporate the language arts (reading, writing, speaking, listening, viewing and representing) in relationship to those goals?

•   Some people use the term anti-oppressive education. What does that term mean to you? Would you define yourself as an anti-oppressive educator? Why or why not?

•   A lot of the work we do in ELA is around texts. What texts (including books (fiction and non-fiction), articles, short stories, poetry, essays, movies and documentaries) do you use? If we understand "texts" most broadly, for example to include art, people, social media, news articles, student writing, advertisements, etc., what other kids of texts do you incorporate?

•   What do you look for when selecting those texts and why?

•   What activities have you used with students around these texts? What are your goals when planning activities? Have they been effective at getting students to think about and discuss social oppression and diversity in meaningful ways?

•   Can you provide an example of a specific class you implemented where you felt that the students walked away with an especially profound understanding of social oppression or diversity?

•   What elements do you think made the class you just described work so well?

•   Have you ever had an experience where something didn't go as you planned or how you thought it would? How did you respond? What did you take away from that experience?

•   What feedback, if any, have you received from students with regards to the focus on anti-oppressive education in your classroom?

- Have you ever felt uncomfortable or worried about any repercussions of taking an anti-oppressive stance in your classroom?

- What have you learned through being an anti-oppressive educator? What has been most difficult? What are you working on?

- What supports do anti-oppressive educators need? Do you feel you have the supports you need? If yes, where do you find such supports and what do they contribute to your work? If no, what supports would be helpful to you?

- Is there anything else you'd like to share?

Appendix G: Possible texts for use in the anti-oppressive classroom

Women's and Children's Rights	Gender and LGBTQ
Dreamland by Sarah Dessen (novel) *Hidden Figures* directed by Theodore Melfi (film) *A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier* by Ishmael Beah Memoir) *The Sun and Her Flowers* by Rupi Kaur (poetry collection) *Milk and Honey* by Rupi Kaur (poetry collection) *All the Rage* by Courtney Summers (novel) *I am Nujood, Age 10 and Divorced* by Nujood Ali (memoir) *I am Malala* by Malala Yousafzai (memoir)	*The Laramie Project* by Moisés Kaufman and Stephen Belber (play) *Shine* by Lauren Myracle (novel) *Gender Failure* by Ivan Coyote & Rae Spoon (autobiography) *Tomboy* by Liz Prince (graphic memoir) *Moon at Nine* by Deborah Ellis (non-fiction)
Discrimination	**Indigenous**
Passing by Nella Larson (novel) *Policing Black Lives: State Violence in Canada from Slavery to Present* by Robyn Maynard (non-fiction) *The hate U Give* by Angie Thomas (novel) *The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins (novel) *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee (novel) *Mause* by Art Spiegelman (graphic novel) *Othello* by William Shakespeare (play) *In Memory of Millions* directed by Brian Blake (documentary) *Night* by Elie Wiesel	*Righting Canada's Wrongs: Residential Schools* by Melanie Florence (non-fiction) *The Missing* by Melanie Florence (novel) *Missing Nimama* by Melanie Florence (picture book) *Rez Rebel* by Melanie Florence (novel) *Stolen Words* by Melanie Florence (picture book) *Children of the Broken Treaty* by Charlie Angus (non-fiction) *Looks Like Daylight: Voices of Indigenous Kids* by Deborah Ellis (non-fiction) *Indian Horse* by Richard Wagamese (novel)
Mental Illness/Wellness	**Culture**
The Glass Castle by Jeanette Walls (memoir) *The Unlikely Hero of Room 13B* by Teresa Toten (novel) *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* by Mark Haddon (novel)	*Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe (novel) *The Kite Runner* by Khaled Hosseini (novel) *Heart of Darkness* by Joseph Conrad (novella) *The Thing Around your Neck* by Chimamanda Ngozi (short story collection) *Duran Duran, Imelda Marcos, and Me* by Lorina Mapa (graphic memoir) *Ru* by Kim Thúy (autobiography) *Death and the Maiden* by Ariel Dorfman (play) *Budrus* directed by Julia Bacha (documentary)
Miscellaneous	
Tuesdays with Morrie by Mitch Albom (memoir) *The Martian* by Andy Weir (novel) *Life of Pi* by Yann Martel (novel) *Tell me Why: How Young People can Change the World* by Eric Walters (non-fiction) *This I Believe* created by Edward R. Morrow (NPR radio program)	