Critical multiculturalism: A transformative pedagogy for equity, inclusion and student empowerment

By

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Abstract

Despite the existence of anti-racist policies and multicultural programs, many ethno-racial groups continue to be marginalized and suffer inequitable treatment in the education system. While research in this field suggests that teachers adopt a critical multicultural framework in order to resist and disrupt unequal power relations, there is little Canadian literature illustrating successful classroom approaches. In order to bridge this gap, this researcher conducted semi-structured face-to-face interviews with three effective critical multicultural educators. Interview findings indicate that successful critical multicultural teachers 1) integrate diverse histories, perspectives, and voices across the curriculum, 2) facilitate collaborative classroom activities that foster inclusive attitudes, 3) empower students to recognize and challenge bias, stereotype, and discrimination, and 4) provide opportunities for student empowerment. This study is relevant and timely as it suggests practical critical multicultural classroom approaches that foster equity, inclusion, and student empowerment in the classroom.

Keywords: critical multiculturalism, diversity, equity pedagogy, critical thinking
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Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION

Introduction to the Research Study

As today’s urban Canadian student populations become increasingly ethnically and racially diverse, concerns regarding inclusion and equity in the classroom are at the forefront of educational deliberations (Pieters, 2011). Despite the existence of national and provincial anti-racist educational policies, many ethno-racial groups continue to be marginalized and suffer inequitable treatment in the system (Henry, 2002). Accordingly, the need for widespread critical multicultural education is relevant and timely.

While numerous Canadian reports outlining the need for empowering multicultural education have been published over the past 40 years, research reveals that these policies are not translating to practice in the classroom (Chan, 2007). The curriculum in many classrooms does not reflect the diversity of Canadian students, and a tolerance for racism and minority student streaming continue to exist (Chan, 2007; Kubota, 2010). Even in Toronto, a city that comprises over 200 ethnic origins of its residents and where nearly 50% of the population self-identify as visible minorities (City of Toronto, 2006), diversity education is still largely reductionist and Eurocentric.

As a consequence of this gap in educational equity, a Toronto school board recently debated the value of and need for an Africentric high school in Toronto, putting the need for critical multicultural education at the forefront of the discussion. Proponents of this school sought a place for students of African heritage “to interpret their experiences on their own terms rather than through a Eurocentric lens” (Anderson, 2009, para. 4). Those in favour of such heritage-based schools argue for
the necessity of culturally-significant educational sites in order to foster inclusion and equity for students who have been traditionally marginalized (Dei, 1995; Nwoye, 1999; Pieters, 2011; Wane, 2011).

Others maintain that such goals for inclusion in education can be achieved in non-segregated schools; however, in order to do so, teachers must adopt a critical multicultural framework that transforms the stories, representations, and structures that reinforce discrimination (Freire, 1970; Ghosh, 2002; Kumashiro, 2001). Such an ideology facilitates participation, engagement, critical thinking, and academic success in an equitable class culture (Dei, 1995; Howard, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995; McReady, Montemurro & Rivière, 2011; Wane, 2011).

Through this research I will investigate ways that teachers can develop and sustain a critical multicultural program that extends across and beyond the curriculum, fostering equity, inclusion and student empowerment in the classroom. In order to uncover the complex dimensions of this pedagogical approach, I will go straight to the source: critical multicultural teachers.

**Background of the Researcher**

I have always been interested in the interplay between education and social justice, a term that urges us to be agents of social change based on our answers to the following question: “How can we contribute to the creation of a more equitable, respectful, and just society for everyone?” (Zajda & Majhanovich, 2006, p.vii). Social justice initiatives work towards eliminating forms of oppression on a global level, including the improvement of gender equity, race relations, and environmental responsibility, and the elimination of homophobia, violence, and labor injustices.
Teacher’s Federation, 2012). While I wished to investigate issues of inequity and work towards positive change, my education in a rural town outside of Ottawa did not offer many diverse cultural experiences and perspectives or opportunities to address inequities. I was not exposed to the benefits of critical multicultural pedagogy until my university education, when I saw the opportunities for more diverse learning in my constructivist Sociology seminars. The “knowledge” I gained in these seminars was built through the reflection on acts of prejudice and injustice and the collaborative analysis of events and concepts through multiple lenses. The instructors encouraged us to bring our own experiences to the classroom, to question the construction of knowledge, and to seek out videos, readings, and local performances that challenged our worldviews. We tackled tough issues: racism, sexism, ageism, classism, and engaged in what Milner (2005) refers to as “relational understanding”- we were finally able to understand ourselves “in relation to others” (p. 420). I could not believe that after having been a student in Ontario’s education system for over 15 years, this seminar course was my first taste of critical multicultural education.

I am passionate about ensuring that all students in the classroom are given access to participate and to succeed in a validating, anti-racist environment. After reading a variety of literature on multicultural education, attending social justice conferences, and experiencing the affirmation of difference in the classroom firsthand during my practice teaching blocks, I argue that in order to build an equitable and inclusive learning environment for all students, educators must adopt a critical multicultural pedagogy. As Canadian classrooms become increasingly diverse, I feel the responsibility, as a new educator, to learn how to best improve my practice to
ensure that my concept of, approach to, and goals for critical multicultural education are transformative.

**Purpose of the Study**

As a teacher candidate who strives to foster inclusivity and equity in the classroom, I hope to gain insights as to what makes for an effective critical multicultural practice. Furthermore, critical multicultural pedagogy is still an under-researched area with few illustrations of actual practice (May & Sleeter, 2011). I aim to contribute to this field of research by uncovering strategies used by classroom teachers to transform the nature of multicultural teaching into one of inclusion and empowerment. One area I wish to investigate is the type of resources and approaches that teachers can use to engage students from diverse backgrounds. I believe that experienced teachers will know which resources and practices work best to teach all students to think critically about issues of diversity and inclusion and to achieve academic, emotional and social success. By conducting this research, I hope to gain new insights on pedagogical approaches that new teachers can use in their practice.

During the course of this study, I will learn how to build a foundation for multicultural education that promotes critical thinking and literacy skills around a theme of equity, human rights and social justice. Throughout this study, I aim to uncover pedagogical practices that uphold and affirm differences and incorporate multiple voices and histories in order to challenge oppressive structures that continue to brand certain groups as outsiders (Dei, 1995; Kumashiro, 2001). Subsequently, this study will investigate the theory and practice of successful critical multicultural educators whose approaches foster an equitable class culture. Through this research, I will explore the
goals, barriers and resulting benefits of critical multicultural education in the 21\textsuperscript{st} century.

\textbf{Research Questions/Topic}

In this research study, the primary question is: \textit{How can elementary school teachers effectively incorporate critical multicultural education into everyday teaching and learning experiences?}

I will also investigate the following sub-questions:

1. How do teachers believe critical multicultural education can relate to the learning of all students?
2. What resources are available to guide and support teachers in taking a culturally inclusive approach to instruction?
3. How can teachers promote critical thinking and literacy development by teaching with a critical multicultural approach?

Through this research study, I hope to understand better the pedagogy connected to critical multicultural education, to determine the benefits both structurally and individually of such an approach, and to uncover successful strategies of implementation from current teachers.
Chapter 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter examines literature outlining two distinct pedagogical approaches regarding diversity in the classroom: multicultural education and critical multicultural education. In order to ground the goals and the role of educators within these two theoretical frameworks, this chapter first outlines the history of multicultural education in Canada and the United States. Next, this chapter defines culture, race, and ethnicity, the components of diversity education at the centre of this study. This chapter then investigates the question: What exactly is critical multicultural education and how is it different from multicultural education? This section examines the goals and benefits of these two approaches to diversity education. Finally, this chapter outlines pedagogical strategies of effective critical multicultural educators.

History of Multicultural Education in Canada and the United States

The legacy of multicultural education in Canada began in the 1960’s alongside the Civil Rights movement in the United States. Canada’s initial experience with multicultural policy was quite different from that of the U.S., which began with Brown vs. Board of Education, the 1954 case that initiated the elimination of the discriminatory separate school system for Black students (Gay, 2004). In the U.S., the ensuing court ruling to racially desegregate schools shed new light on issues of inequality and continued to fuel the Civil Rights movement, which then led to a slow move towards multicultural policy in education.

While racism also initiated the birth of multicultural policies in Canada, many other factors including rising immigration rates and French nationalism changed the face of multiculturalism. Harper (1997) classified five historical approaches to diversity
CRITICAL MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION

in Canadian education: oppressing difference, insisting on difference, denying difference, inviting difference, and critiquing difference. Until the middle of the Twentieth century, Canadian policy favoured the first three approaches to diversity, which served to assimilate, segregate and deny the inequities of non-dominant groups. From the late Eighteenth century until as recently as 1965, education was “racialized for publicly expressed reasons of morality or safety” (Chan, 2007, p.136). Racism resulted in a segregated school system for Black students across Ontario and Nova Scotia that was not abolished until 1983 (Historica-Dominion Institute, 2012).

Furthermore, discriminatory attitudes towards the Native way of life led to the widespread residential schooling initiative, which ran from the late 1800s to the 1960s. In an attempt to assimilate First Nations children into the European-Canadian way of life, children were not only segregated in their schooling, but were also separated from their families and shamed by their Native way of life (Gérin-Lajoie, 1998). On the West coast, discrimination against Chinese and Japanese citizens from the early 1900s up until the end of the Second World War resulted in a failed attempt at segregated schooling. However, a year-long boycott on schools by the Chinese and a three-year internment of Japanese students resulted in “deleterious consequences” (Chan, 2007, p. 134) for most, as many fell behind in school or worse yet, dropped out of school permanently. Protest from these groups averted the permanent segregation of schooling.

Ultimately, a fast-growing immigrant population in the 1950s and 1960s, alongside an anti-assimilatory French nationalist movement led to the consideration of a Canadian national multicultural policy in the 1960’s (Gérin-Lajoie, 1998; Ghosh,
Rising immigrant rates in the 1950s and 1960s helped to give voice to the frustration of a perceived monocultural Canadian identity and concerns about the portrayal of other cultures in the “new Canadian social mapping” (Gérin-Lajoie, 2008, p. 16). Additionally, Canada’s French-speaking citizens, mainly situated in Quebec, grew increasingly vocal with concerns that English-based national policies served to suppress the French language and culture. As a response to these appeals, a policy termed Bilingualism within a Multicultural Framework was approved in 1971 under Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau. Intended to help Canada’s diverse cultural groups to grow and contribute to Canadian society, the policy promised to appease the “interest of national unity” (Gérin-Lajoie, p. 16). Instead of maintaining the distinctiveness of the many cultural groups reflected in Canadian society, the early multicultural policy focused mainly on assimilating immigrant cultures into the country’s two dominant groups: English and French.

Arguably, the first multicultural policy did not have a significant impact on improving equity in schools. Firstly, while the policy was a federal document, Canada’s education system is controlled provincially. Therefore, it was extremely difficult to monitor provincial implementation in schools (Chan, 2007, p. 139). Furthermore, the focus on welcoming all cultures followed by encouragement to assimilate into the norm posed a contradiction that undoubtedly devalued cultures outside of the English and French realm (Hare, 2007). Additionally, many students, teachers and administrators continued to view minority students through a lens blurred by prejudice and stereotypes (Ghosh, 2002; Nyowe, 1999). Not only did the presence of racism in
schools persist, but racist ideologies were also sustained and strengthened through the lack of culturally sensitive learning resources and approaches.

Seventeen years later, Canada released a new policy on diversity, *The Multiculturalism Act of 1988*. While the focus of this policy was on equality measures for all Canadians and the preservation of all heritages, little changed in terms of teaching philosophy in the face of culturally diverse learners; many people assumed that the European experience and teaching methods were “universally applicable” (Kinchenoe & Steinberg, 1997, p. 231) and therefore all students, regardless of culture, race and ethnicity, were receiving equal opportunities for success in the classroom. While student protest brought public awareness to initial demands for heightened cultural sensitivity in schools, the process of change was lengthy and was delayed by Eurocentric backlash. Not until scholars studying the falling academic achievement levels and the rising dropout rates of African-American students (particularly males) did theorists in the field of education acknowledge a “call for culturally relevant curricula” (Nwoye, 1999, p. 10). This novel idea was met by three distinct standpoints with regards to change in the education system.

First, the suggestion to infuse multicultural curricula in schools was opposed by those wanting to maintain power in the social structure. Such Eurocentric thinkers uphold that schools and teachers should not change their subject content or their pedagogical approaches, as such acts would inevitably fragment social values, validate a series of reforms and threaten the rights of the dominant groups in society-white males in particular (Banks, 1994; Nwoye, 1999). Opposition from those who view
social equity as a threat to the status quo continues to halt the infusion of multiculturalism in schools.

On the other hand, the outcry for a reformist curriculum led to an educational ideal that placed the history and perspectives of marginalized groups at the center of learning (Anderson 2009; Dei, 1996; Nwoye, 1999; Pieters, 2011; Wane, 2011). While some claimed this focus would merely re-segregate students, advocates of Africentric, First Nations and other distinct heritage-based schools feel that such school programs breed “engaged learners” (Wane, p. 91). By providing positive role models, culturally affirmative materials, and culturally-relevant approaches to learning, these schools have the capacity to greatly enhance student achievement.

In between Eurocentric and Africentric ideals, advocates for the development of critical multicultural curriculum in all schools view the benefits that can result from such approaches as valid and nourishing for all students (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997; Kubota, 2010; Scott, 2001). Not only do such supporters recognize that empowering diversity education helps to forge respectful relationships between students, but they also realize that inequities in society need to be uncovered and addressed in order for any real changes to occur in terms of perspective-taking and social action (Gorski, 2008; Milner, 2005). Educational theorists supporting critical multicultural education became increasingly visible around the same time that the Lewis Report was unveiled, in 1992. This report, which called for Canadian school boards to develop anti-racism policies and to make the curriculum more reflective of the country’s diverse population, marked the beginning of a more thorough approach to multicultural education in schools (Lewis, 1992).
However, since the *Lewis Report* consisted of broad goals and mere recommendations for multicultural education, resulting program adjustments ranged greatly from what Harper (1997) historically defined as inviting difference to critiquing difference. Most schools chose to invite difference, undertaking what Banks (2002) refers to as the contributions approach, introducing selected elements of multicultural histories periodically and often from the perspective of majority groups. Few educators worked towards Banks’ (2002) transformation and social action approaches, where educators affirm differences, air traditionally marginalized voices and work towards the elimination of barriers resulting from power relations.

More than 15 years later, the state of multicultural education in Canada has evolved, with the implementation of policies including the *Policy on Race and Ethnocultural Equity* (1987), *Antiracism and Ethnocultural Equity in School Boards* (1993), and *Equity and Inclusive Education in Ontario Schools* (2009). However, despite the development of such documents, “existence of policy does not guarantee any action or particular practice” (Chan, 2007, p. 138). Chan (2007) asserts that current policies are largely overlooked as a result of deficient resources, divergent school priorities, and the lack of staff development around cultural diversity and equity issues. Furthermore, in order to develop culturally inclusive programs, many theorists assert that there is no one-size-fits-all list of strategies that teachers can insert into the curricula (Banks, 1995; Dei, 1996; Kubota, 2010; Elliston, 1996; Solomon, 1996). Instead, teachers in the 21st century should reinvent their practice as a constantly transformative process with the main goals of critical multicultural teaching in mind (Elliston, 1996).
Defining Culture

Before defining multicultural and critical multicultural education, it is imperative to explain what is meant by the term *culture*. Ghosh (2002) defines culture as the ways by which certain social groups respond to their surroundings and experiences cognitively, emotionally, and behaviorally. While traditional conceptions of the term culture referred mainly to a person’s ethnic background and ways of living, most current interpretations of culture broadly encompass all self-concepts that define different individuals and groups, including “race, ethnicity, gender, class, religion, lifestyles” – all of which “are socially created and serve to separate groups of people and form boundaries” (Ghosh, 2002, p. 4). Although I understand culture as a product of an individual’s experience of all of the aforementioned factors, for the purpose of this study, the term culture will focus only on race and ethnicity.

Defining Race and Ethnicity

While *race* refers to the social classification of individuals into various distinct groups based on visible physical dissimilarities including skin colour, facial features, and hair texture, there is no scientific validity to such groupings. Scientific knowledge denies the rigidity of race classification, instead arguing that not only are all human beings “members of one species: homosapiens”, but also that most “physical variation [of human beings] lies within so-called racial groups” (Ghosh, 2008, p. 27). Subsequently, race is a social construction - a concept created by humans to classify people into groups characterized by physical attributes.

*Ethnicity*, another socially constructed term used to categorize individuals, is based on “cultural criteria” including language, traditions, religion, heritage and
ancestry (Ghosh, 2008, p. 27). While some argue that ethnicity can be objectively established, that is the case “if and only if [individuals] are descended from common ancestors—that is, have a common genealogy” (Abizadeh, 2002, para. 6). As the term ethnicity is rarely used to denote such a literal definition, it is thus largely a social construction. However despite the socially constructed nature of these terms, Ghosh (2008) asserts that race and ethnicity are “very real concept[s] in our social consciousness” (p.27) and that we must not undermine their ability to influence lived experience. Defining culture, race, and ethnicity is necessary in order to examine the various ways they intersect with multicultural pedagogical theory and practice.

Distinguishing Multicultural Education from Critical Multicultural Education

With regards to culturally diverse education, pedagogical approaches can range from “studying minorities to a social reconstructionist approach” (Nwoye, 1999, p. 17). While the former exemplifies “multicultural education” and the latter reflects “critical multicultural education”, the two terms are often used interchangeably in pedagogical discourse. In order to distinguish between the two teaching approaches, I will outline the goals and the strategies for implementation for these approaches by grounding each approach in the literature.

Defining Multicultural Education

In many cases, multicultural teaching is limited to the celebration of ethnic holidays, certain historical figures’ birthdays, and days of independence. Howard (2010) and Knight (2008) argue that selective multicultural teaching perpetuates the centrality of Eurocentric knowledge and merely reinforces the normativity of whiteness. Accordingly, under such approaches, multicultural education symbolizes “others”, and
“racialized peoples’ histories as they relate to Canada are positioned as being outside of it” (Knight, 2008, p. 88). Furthermore, surface multiculturalism often denies that culture and identity are “multilayered, fluid, complex, and encompassing multiple social categories” (May & Sleeter, 2010, p. 10). Despite the limitations of such teaching methods, many teachers continue to take a minimalist approach to multiculturalism, such as one that merely celebrates the ‘Four F’s’ - food, festivals, folklore and fashion (Montgomery, 2011).

**Goals of Multicultural Education**

The main goals of multicultural education include one or more of the following: enhancing students’ knowledge about multiple cultures, eliminating discrimination, fostering a sense of dignity in all students and maintaining unique cultural identities (Scott, 2001). With such goals in mind, teachers celebrate selected holidays such as Cinco de Mayo, Martin Luther King’s birthday, Black History Month, and Aboriginal Awareness Week with class parties, stories and limited activities. While such programs may also include the occasional insertion of selected resources that reflect diversity, the overall course content is not affected substantially.

Many teachers prefer this approach to cultural education as it presents an easy and fast method to discuss diversity in the classroom; however, Solomon (1996) warns that such practices tokenize, trivialize and “trap and maintain minorities in a marginal state of ‘otherness’” (p. 72). Educators who adopt what many theorists term a celebrations (Banks, 2002) approach to multiculturalism may improve perceptions of minorities and diminish discrimination; however, without working to “alter
majority/minority group power relations” (Solomon, 1996, p. 72), these teachers will never foster true inclusion and equity in the classroom.

Instead, teachers should strive to implement diverse course content on a regular basis, and provide opportunities for students to examine the struggles faced by many ethnic and racial minority groups as a direct result of oppressive social structures (Banks, 2002). Therefore, in this research study, a critical multicultural framework is emphasized as the most relevant and effective approach to fostering equity in today’s schools.

**Defining Critical Multicultural Education**

Critical multicultural education is a transformative pedagogical framework that brings diverse experiences and voices to the centre of student discourse and empowers students to critique and challenge the social norms that continue to benefit some groups at the expense of others (Banks, 2006; Gérin-Lajoie, 2008; Ghosh, 2002; Kincheloe and Steinberg, 1997; May and Sleeter, 2010; Solomon, 1996; Turner, 1994). In order to best define the complex and evolving concept of critical multicultural education, this study grounds the goals of this ideology in the range of fields that inform this approach, including culturally-relevant, anti-racist, anti-oppressive, feminist, and critical pedagogies.

Drawing from culturally-relevant pedagogy, critical multicultural education necessitates that teachers provide opportunities for students to succeed by teaching to their unique backgrounds and strengths. In order to make learning experiences more culturally significant for students, culturally-relevant teaching requires educators to learn about and invite students’ home and community experiences into the classroom.
“to help them create meaning and understand the world” (Ladson-Billings, 1994, p. 110). Culturally relevant pedagogy naturally overlaps with critical multicultural education, as both approaches empower students to challenge Eurocentric school experiences, to see their own histories represented in a positive light, and to use “cultural referents” when constructing knowledge, skills and attitudes and demonstrating learning (Ladson-Billings, p. 17-18).

Critical multiculturalism also stems from anti-racist and anti-oppressive theories, which highlight structural inequities and discrimination that serve to “marginalize, exclude and alienate some groups” (Dei, 1996, p.85) while benefiting others. Building on the work of anti-discriminatory theorists such as Dei (1995) and Kumashiro (2001), critical multicultural approaches aim to transform the education system to one rooted in equity and social justice by de-emphasizing “majority” voices and redistributing visibility to diverse and traditionally marginalized voices.

Grounded in feminist pedagogy, critical multicultural education also aims to examine and study diverse representations in a fashion that challenges patriarchy and denies the objectification of certain voices (hooks, 2000). Critical multiculturalism is further influenced by feminist theory as it reflects a learning environment that engages students, local communities, and grassroots organizations all advocating for social change to work side by side (Shrewsbury, 1987, p. 6).

Finally, critical multicultural practices are shaped by critical pedagogy, which urges educators to ask questions about how, why and whose knowledge is created and sustained in the classroom. Giroux and McLaren (1989) argue that in order to develop “critical risk-taking citizens” (p. xxxii), educators must be aware of the politics
inherent in school systems, where knowledge and power are developed and sustained in order to advance the interests of those who hold power in society. Subsequently, under the framework of critical multicultural education, both educators and students are encouraged to expose and challenge unilateral knowledge sources.

As a result of these four influential theoretical approaches, a redefined multicultural education- critical multicultural education- was formed.

**Critical Multicultural Framework**

In order to investigate and define critical multicultural education, this study introduces a critical multicultural framework for teaching that was formed by analyzing the literature in this field. This framework outlines the goals and pedagogical strategies of this approach.

**Goals of Critical Multicultural Education**

Critical multicultural education can be further defined through its unique educational goals: to provide opportunities for all students to succeed academically, to learn about and from diverse cultures affirmatively, and to develop critical thinking practices to question structural inequities.

The goal of fostering academic success, which refers to the development of various academic (for example literacy and numeracy) and social (for example turn-taking and active listening) skills, stems from advocates of culturally-relevant teaching practices, such as Gay (2004) and Ladson-Billings (1994). Accordingly, critical multicultural educators recognize that all students come to school with unique “funds of knowledge” (Howard, 2010, p.82) that are often underestimated in the classroom. For example, In *Other People’s Children*, Delpit (1996) explores problematic outcomes of
pedagogies that overlook the cultural capital that some children are armed with from day one. She finds that as a direct result of not having learned mainstream academic content at home, many children from ethnic minority and lower social-class backgrounds are immediately “labeled as needing ‘remedial’ instruction” (p. 30). Thus, such students are denied access to academic success and are subjected to long-term negative effects that result from being labeled as academically incompetent. Furthermore, while Banks (1993) acknowledges that all students will have specific strengths and weaknesses that may or may not be culturally-influenced, he argues that students’ home experiences should not result in barriers to academic success. He reminds us that a lack of knowledge not only in content but also in social skills might put some students at a disadvantage. For example, those students who have never been explicitly taught how to work with others and learn collaboratively should not be denied academic success that can result from such beneficial group learning experiences.

Another long-term goal of critical multicultural education is the development of cultural competence, whereby all students gain a working knowledge of and respect for a variety of global cultures. Ladson-Billings (1995) asserts that inclusive teachers build “cultural integrity” (p. 160) and knowledge about other cultures by using students’ culture “as a vehicle for learning” (p. 161). Howard (2010) and Wane (2011) also argue for the integration of first-hand student and community experiences to enhance and root learning in meaningful contexts that reflect students’ interests and experiences. McReady et al. (2011) remind us that oftentimes a contradiction emerges between students’ home and school cultures, which results in false assumptions that students
are unable to learn. In such cases where students choose to “not-learn” (Delpit, 1996, p. 163) for fear of devaluing their home discourses, students would benefit from educational goals that aim to merge both home and school experiences. For example, instead of constructing rap songs and poetry as mutually exclusive, why not validate both ways of knowing and utilize them side-by-side to encourage in and out of school literacy fluidity? Such an argument supports Banks’ (1993) idea that effective multicultural education promotes rather than avoids difference in order to enhance student learning.

Finally, critical multicultural education inspires a critical consciousness in today’s students. Freire (1970) warns of the danger of an alternative outcome, which he terms the “‘banking’ concept of education” (p. 72). Such an approach, which understands students as passive, unquestioning “depositories” (Freire, 1970, p.73) of knowledge, robs students of transforming the world’s injustices. Ladson-Billings (1995) also argues that teachers must foster a critical consciousness in order to allow students to “critique the cultural norms, values, mores, and institutions that produce and maintain social inequities” (p. 162). Ultimately, inclusive classrooms should aim to shape well-rounded students who are able to learn not in spite of, but because of an awareness of societal injustice. For example, Ladson-Billings recounts a story of student critical consciousness that led to social action. When students were using outdated, Eurocentric textbooks because of a lack of funding in the public sector, students not only examined underlying issues of inequality that deprived them of resources available to students in privately-funded school boards, but they also wrote to the editor of a local newspaper to voice their concerns. Banks and Banks (1995) agree that
by ensuring that students are aware of and able to critically examine the dominant canon, education can help students evolve into “reflective and active citizens of a democratic society” (p. 152).

With these clear pedagogical goals in mind, critical multicultural educators foster an equitable class culture.

**Critical Multicultural Pedagogical Strategies**

In order to teach for equity and inclusion in the classroom, the role of teachers is to embed their pedagogy in a critical multicultural framework. Banks (2006) highlights the five key strategies of this framework for teaching: integrating diverse content, challenging the knowledge construction process, working to reduce prejudice, implementing an equity pedagogy, and empowering students with opportunities to critique inequitable school and social structures and enact change.

According to many theorists, an essential element of critical multicultural education is content integration (Banks, 1995; Dei, 1996; Ghosh, 2002; McReady et al. 2011; Milner, 2005; Villegas & Lucas, 2002; Wane, 2011). In order to move past celebratory approaches to teaching about diverse cultures, educators must consistently integrate material from a variety of voices across the curriculum (Banks, 1993). Delpit (1996) asserts that in order to integrate content with a high degree of efficiency, teachers must go above and beyond what the Ministry of Education requires in theory; critical multicultural teachers must study on their own time to find alternative points of view for both their students’ and their own learning. By bringing in content from various cultural perspectives, teachers not only challenge “the dominant definition of the classics” (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997, p. 30), but they also facilitate student
learning by providing a natural connection between learning and their students’ personal experiences. (McReady et al., 2011). In her study of socially inclusive teaching practices, Cleovoulou (2008) also found that educators enhance student achievement by integrating materials that reflect student experiences. Her Toronto-based study analyzed student participation and success in a novel study of Naomi’s Road, a story about the experience of a Japanese-Canadian family forced into internment camps during World War II. By choosing a resource that encouraged students to examine issues relating to their own lives, including nationality, immigration, racism and family units, this educator provided a “way-in” for students who are often marginalized in the classroom. Furthermore, Gay (2004) argues that inclusive multicultural education cannot be limited to the fields of language and social sciences- instead, “diversity must be ingrained across disciplines” (p. 204). The lasting effects of comprehensive content integration can be seen not only through the gaining of multiple perspectives, but also through improved self image and subsequent academic success: “the higher the level of minority presence in the curriculum, the higher is the level of positive self-identification and self-esteem” (Ghosh, 2002, p.57).

Banks (1995) also urges teachers to facilitate a learning site where students are actively involved in the construction of knowledge and therefore able to critique content that is non-inclusive. In critical multicultural classrooms, students should be encouraged to make use of diverse sources to examine “how implicit cultural assumptions, frames of reference, perspectives and biases within a discipline influence the ways that knowledge is constructed within it” (Banks, p. 157). Furthermore, Kumashiro (2001) asserts that learning about traditionally marginalized groups should
not occur to “fill a gap in knowledge”, but instead “to disrupt the knowledge that is already there” (p. 34). This approach to learning teaches students that interpretations of non-dominant discourses often differ significantly from the mainstream perspectives offered in most texts. Nwoye (1999) also asserts that such an approach to knowledge construction is invaluable as it allows all students, regardless of background, to form different views of historical events and standpoints. Furthermore, teachers must acknowledge the importance of validating students’ own ancestral stories and encourage students to “learn of their rich legacy” (Delpit, 1996, p. 165), to “acknowledge their own ‘expertness’” (p. 46) and to “serve as guides to their own cultural backgrounds and identities” (McReady et al., 2011, p. 98). Knowledge construction should not be devoid of personal experience and inclusive classrooms should teach students to be critical of content that assumes “that the voices of the majority speak for all” (Delpit, 1996, p. 20). Finally, Botelho & Rudman (2009) caution that while it is essential that teachers provide students with diverse content, classroom resources do not automatically inspire critical thinking skills. Ultimately, teachers must actively model the process of analyzing content critically in order to inspire an inclusive knowledge construction process.

Critical multicultural pedagogy is also characterized by an active call for prejudice reduction. Teachers can combat prejudice first by cultivating a class culture in which ‘difference’ is a positive concept (Ghosh, 2002). Dei (1995), Ghosh (2002), and Kumashiro (2001) argue that teachers must instead reconstruct difference in a positive light that allows for students to deconstruct their vision of the ‘norm’. 

*Rethinking Schools* magazine emphasizes this call to unmask and challenge
stereotypes and biases that perpetuate discrimination with articles and activity suggestions in very edition. Additionally, the same publishers also released *Open Minds: A Sourcebook of Learning Activities to Affirm Diversity and Promote Equity*, a collection of sequenced lessons to aid educators in fostering inclusion and critical thinking in the classroom.

Furthermore, educators should strive to achieve cultural synergy, whereby students learn that cultural histories are interdependent as opposed to oppositional or individualistic: “the total effect of several cultures working together is greater than the sum of their effects when individual cultures act independently” (Ghosh, 2002, p. 56). Lee (2002) also asserts that educators must critically examine all resources for discriminatory depictions; otherwise, they impede the development of a truly inclusive multicultural classroom. Banks (1995) asserts that in addition to eliminating negative concepts of race and ethnicity in the classroom, educators must also strive to display positive attitudes towards all races, ethnicities and genders, religions, and lifestyles. Cooper and White (2006) also uphold that teachers must first evaluate their own perceptions of diverse cultures in order to eliminate negative attitudes in their classroom with regards to learning materials as well as the class composition. While many teachers may perceive of themselves as culturally inclusive in terms of course content, these teachers must ensure that they are not “creating stereotypical profiles of students” (Howard, 2010, p. 127) and subsequently ‘writing off’ certain students as incapable.

In order to effectively implement critical multicultural education, teachers must also work towards instilling an equity pedagogy in the classroom (Banks, 1995). While
all students should be offered equal access to success, Banks cautions that equity and equality are not interchangeable terms. Villegas & Lucas (2002) agree that different students require different, perhaps “unequal” teaching approaches, which is in fact what renders this an equitable practice. Accordingly, Kumashiro (2001) asserts the need for critical multicultural teachers to continuously ask the question: “Who does this space harm or exclude?” (p. 31). While McReady et al. (2011) warn teachers not to stereotype children’s learning needs based on culture, Delpit (1996) urges educators to ask important questions about children’s culturally-rooted behaviour and to design subsequent accommodations for success in the classroom. Her extensive experiences with students from diverse backgrounds led her to develop various approaches to culturally inclusive education. For example, research findings which revealed that Latina girls often have trouble speaking out in gender-mixed settings led Delpit to accommodate for the input of her female Latina students by pairing them with other females during group work periods. In order to build equitable, culturally-relevant experiences such as this, Delpit (1996) urges today’s teachers to get to know students in and out of school in order to effectively “locate and teach to strengths” (p. 172) of students, rather than assuming and focusing on deficits.

Furthermore, an equity pedagogy must address white privilege, “the advantages that whites obtain solely on the basis of their skin color” (Harpalani, 2002, para. 4). Educational scholars argue that only by encouraging whites to “examine, acknowledge, and unlearn their own privilege” (Giroux & McLaren, 1989, p. 108) can we effect “social change” (Harpalani, 2002, para. 15). Since oftentimes, “whites are not even aware of these advantages” (Harpalani, 2002, para. 5), they may also be unaware of the
inherent disadvantages stemming from racism and discrimination experienced by individuals of minority groups. Subsequently, calling attention to both structural privileges and denials that accompany race is necessary to reveal “how these systems [of oppression] are sustained and reproduced” (Knight, 2008, p.82). Additionally, as whites are often missing in discussions of race, students must be trained to examine white, Eurocentric accounts as only one of many diverse cultural expressions, therefore taking an approach to diversity that truly values all groups equally.

Finally, a well-rounded approach to critical multicultural education calls for the empowerment of school culture and social structure. Banks (1993) points out that cultural validation is not fully effective unless accompanied by a complete restructuring of school culture in a way that empowers students to make local and global changes to oppressive social structures. Dei (1995) also explains that in addition to providing a broad curriculum and multiple teaching strategies, inclusive schools aiming to empower students must also develop systems within schools that support and improve the experiences of all students. In addition to support systems that provide students with services, such as cultural clubs and breakfast programs, Cleovoulou (2008) outlined the importance of student support in the form of personal empowerment and encouragement to enact change. After a novel study that sparked discussions of the injustices in their own communities, students were encouraged to put their emotions on paper in the form of letters to the Mayor of Toronto, with suggestions for changes that would make their communities safer and more equitable. This activity gave volume and empowerment to students’ voices and was further enhanced by the Mayor’s visit and vow to take the students’ advice to heart. This example supports Banks’ (1993)
argument that educators must not only encourage students to challenge injustices, but they must also provide opportunities for students to take steps to remedy these injustices. Banks (2002) asserts that through such actions, effective critical multicultural educators offer students a sense of empowerment and “political efficacy” (p. 3). Kumashiro (2001) agrees, asserting that in order to empower students, we must help them to find ways in which they can work to transform oppressive structures in education and society as a whole. Ultimately, teaching for inclusivity and equity means that teachers must provide students with the tools to take action and make changes at both school and community-wide levels.

Comprehensively, the literature reveals that in an effort to heighten equity, inclusion and student empowerment, effective critical multicultural educators integrate diverse materials across the curriculum, advocate for a critical reconstruction of knowledge, unmask and work towards eliminating prejudice, foster an equitable class culture, and empower students through support systems and opportunities to affect social structures.

**Challenges of implementation**

Various works of literature in the field of education present a number of challenges regarding the implementation of inclusive multicultural education. First of all, in order to build a curriculum and a classroom environment that is culturally relevant, teachers must face the challenge of surrendering control of the knowledge construction process and acknowledging their own biases and privileges (Dei, 1995). Villegas & Lucas (2002) acknowledge the challenges facing teachers who tend to favor teacher-directed approaches in implementing more constructivist teaching approaches
that allow students to bring their knowledge and perspectives to the classroom. Cooper & White (2006) echo this sentiment and urge teachers to confront this challenge by stepping outside of themselves in order to “allow multiple identities in” (p. 7).

Another challenge teachers face is that of developing a multicultural curriculum in classrooms where students are predominantly white and middle-class. Solomon (1996) and Nwoye (1999) recognize the barriers that many educators face in focusing on different cultures amidst administrators and parents that perceive no need for diversity education. Milner (2005) reminds us that we must continue to work to change public attitudes since even students in relatively homogeneous school settings “do not live in a vacuum” (p. 395) and they must learn to embrace difference at an early age so that they can challenge societal conditions that reinforce inequities under the “democratic rhetoric of social justice” (Ghosh, 2002, p. 2).

Finally, perhaps the biggest challenge facing teachers in developing a critical multicultural pedagogy is the deficiency of personal knowledge. Banks (1995) asserts that a lack of “multicultural, pedagogical, and subject area knowledge” (p. 156) is the biggest barrier that today’s teachers face; many teachers just do not have the background knowledge to offer multiple perspectives and foster critical dialogue in the classroom. Furthermore, even when teachers are educated on cultural issues, they must avoid “essentializing students” (McReady et al., 2011, p. 98), keeping in mind that “there is as much variation within groups as between them” (Ghosh, 2002, p. 2). Thus, teachers face a daily challenge to learn all that they can about available resources for classroom use, about the content itself, and about learning and relearning specific cultural ways of knowing among diverse students.
Chapter Three: METHODOLOGY

This research study on critical multicultural practices in the classroom was conducted through interviews of self-identified critical multicultural teachers and the collecting and analyzing of their classroom materials and accompanying activities. The qualitative data collected reflected both current and past practices of three Ontario teachers who have collectively taught in a variety of primary, junior, and intermediate classrooms. The data were collected by conducting one face-to-face interview with each participant and by reviewing their resources and lesson plans. The data were then analyzed and coded according to common themes reflected in the literature review and the main research study questions. In addition to the research design and procedure, this chapter also focuses on the participant selection process and a description of the participants, as well as the limitations of this study.

Research Design

This study is grounded in a qualitative approach to research that emphasizes the “interpretive, naturalistic” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 4) character of inquiry. A qualitative design was ultimately chosen for this research study as the study’s main purpose reflects that of qualitative research: “to seek answers to questions that stress how social experience is created and given meaning” (Denzin & Lincoln, p. 10). Instead of quantitatively measuring “causal relationships between variables” (Denzin & Lincoln, p. 10), qualitative investigation allows researchers to hone in on the perspective of interviewees through “detailed interviewing and observation” (p. 12). While qualitative research consists of multiple methods including but not limited to case study analysis, personal experience, interviews, artifact analysis, and observation, this
study relied on interviews and artifact analysis of resources and lesson plans to gather information on critical multicultural teaching.

While both qualitative and quantitative researchers face obstacles in conducting interviews regarding accuracy and bias, semi-structured interviews aid in eliminating possible respondent inconsistencies and errors due to unclear and loaded questions. As Converse and Shulman (1974) assert that "there is no single interview style that fits every occasion or all respondents" (as cited in Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 25), semi-structured interviews allow interviewers to make necessary adjustments in the face of "unanticipated developments" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 125). Such an approach to interviewing subsequently allows for a greater degree of elaboration and clarification. Ultimately, in order to "secure an in-depth understanding of the phenomena in question" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 5), I determined that undertaking a qualitative approach to research using semi-structured interviews as promoted by Denzin and Lincoln (2005) would best suit the goals of this study.

After an initial review and summation of the literature on multicultural education, I continued to collect emergent literature throughout the course of this study. Since this is an increasingly important field of education, I had anticipated that new information would surface during the course of my research.

**Participant Criteria**

In an attempt to investigate critical multicultural educational strategies, it was necessary to select interview participants who are currently using a critical approach to multicultural issues, and who can answer questions on how they came to effectively implement these strategies into their classroom practices. By interviewing participants,
I was able to retrieve data illustrating current teacher practices and attitudes and various responses to critical multicultural education. The criteria for participant selection was based on the following:

a) They must be currently practicing and experienced (5 or more years teaching) elementary teachers in Ontario

b) They must take a critical multicultural approach to teaching in their classrooms

c) They must be willing to provide examples of resources and lessons that reflect the critical multicultural approach as defined in criteria b)

In order to ensure that participants adhere to a common understanding of critical multiculturalism, they were provided with this brief definition upon first contact: Critical multicultural education is a transformative approach under which teachers ensure the presence of diverse representations of race and ethnicity across the curriculum in an effort to affirm differences and honour multiple voices, histories, and sources of knowledge and to challenge structural inequities faced by marginalized ethno-racial groups. In effect, such an approach consists of culturally diverse curriculum content, a redefined knowledge construction process that includes the perspectives of traditionally marginalized peoples, a move towards eliminating prejudice and cultural stereotypes, and an equitable class culture that works towards student success and empowerment (Banks, 2006; Rivière, 2012).

**Selection of Interview Participants**

I first approached teachers for recruitment with whom I had either worked or had known through other contexts. Three possible participants were invited to speak with
me to learn more about the study. These one-on-one meetings occurred at a time and location that was mutually convenient for both parties. At this time, I used the Initial Recruitment Questions (see Appendix B) to confirm that all participants adhere to the interviewee criteria for this study. All three participants are Ontario elementary teachers with at least 5 years of experience who self-identified with the definition of critical multiculturalism stated above. Furthermore, they were willing to participate in face-to-face interviews and to provide me with two to three resources and lessons to analyze under a critical multicultural framework.

In order to protect the participants’ privacy, I have not included any school, student or teacher identifiers and requested that the participants choose preferred pseudonyms that reflect their identities. Carla, who teaches grade 4/5 at an urban Toronto school situated in the middle of community housing, has a classroom population that is extremely diverse in terms of race, ethnicity, economic means and ability. Susan, a substitute teacher in both Ottawa and Quebec has recently been teaching regularly at a school in a rural Quebec neighborhood. This school population is predominantly made up of students from European-Canadian descent, although the socio-economic range of the students at her school is extremely diverse. Susan also regularly facilitates community and school-based workshops that fuse First Nations art and cultural education for students of all ages. Nikki is a teacher-librarian who teaches grades 6, 7 and 8 in an urban centre North-West of Toronto. The student population at her school is quite racially, ethnically and socio-economically diverse. For the purpose of this study, I think it is important to highlight critical multicultural practices in both ethno-racially diverse and homogenous school environments.
Data Collection

The primary source of data for this study was one-on-one qualitative interviews (see Appendix C for interview questions). I conducted and tape-recorded a one hour-long face-to-face interview with each participant at a location of her choice. The interview schedule consisted of 16 semi-structured interview questions. Through these questions, I strove to collect information about teacher practices, outlooks, and experiences regarding the use of a critical multicultural approach to education. The goal of the interviews was to gain an understanding of the benefits inherent in critical multicultural pedagogy, and also to gain a perspective regarding the potential obstacles that teachers may face when taking such an approach to education. Questions were developed with the support of my faculty advisor.

In addition to the data gathered from the qualitative interviews, a resource analysis of materials used in the classroom was conducted. Interview participants provided me with two to three resources (for example, books, videos, or games) each as well as accompanying lesson plans and activities used in the classroom to initiate and carry out critical multicultural teaching. The purpose of data collection of resources and lesson plans is to determine common themes of the activities, whether or not the lessons are teacher or student-centred, whether they are cooperative or individual-based, and how the lessons encourage critical thinking and an analysis of ethnocultural power relations.

Data Analysis

After conducting and transcribing the interviews, I analyzed the interview participants' responses using a critical multicultural framework outlined in Chapter 2.
As this study aims to uncover critical multicultural classroom practices, I looked for themes and patterns that reflected Banks' (2006) five key pedagogical strategies of critical multicultural educators: the integration of diverse course content, the implementation of non-Eurocentric knowledge construction processes, the attempt to eliminate racist and sexist attitudes, the establishment of an equitable class culture, and the provision of opportunities for student empowerment. The interview findings were organized and coded according to the five main themes stated above. In Chapters 4 and 5, the data were analyzed using theme subheadings and compared and contrasted to the findings from the existing literature as cited in Chapter 2.

I used the “Checklist for Analyzing Bias in Children’s Books” (See Appendix E) and the “Likert Scale for Analyzing Critical Multicultural Lessons” (see Appendix F) to critique the resources and accompanying lessons used in the classroom and their potential to incite critical multicultural thinking. I examined and compared the interview participants’ approaches to such a pedagogy against each other and against the literature in order to find common themes and ideas. I also noted examples of lessons that provided students with tools to take social justice action outside of the classroom and to feel empowered in the classroom, in their homes and in the community. From this structured analysis, I was able to identify critical multicultural practice and observed the benefits of adopting such an approach to education.

Limitations

Limitations to this study included a shortage of Canadian research highlighting critical multicultural classroom practices and the sample size of only three teachers practicing under a critical multicultural framework. While the findings of this study are
relevant and useful for educators, a larger sample size is called for in order to generalize the findings.
Chapter Four: FINDINGS

After interviewing three teachers who claim to use a critical multicultural pedagogy, I found many similarities in their ideologies, concerns, methods of direction, and response from school communities. While all three participants expressed long-standing interest in examining issues of injustice in their own lives and in their classrooms, it took them each years to gain comfort and confidence in teaching with a critical approach to multiculturalism. Furthermore, each of the participants reassured me that their methods are constantly “transforming”, echoing Elliston’s (1996) assertion that critical multicultural work is “a process rather than a program” (p.6).

Critical Multicultural Framework

In order to examine each of the participants’ ideologies, lessons, resources, and goals, I have analyzed the data collected using a framework of critical multicultural education. I was able to code the participants’ responses according to the five categories that outline key pedagogical strategies of critical multicultural educators: integrating diverse course content, critiquing and disrupting hegemonic knowledge construction processes, unmasking and reducing prejudice, implementing an equitable class culture that fosters social inclusion, and empowering students to enact change. Furthermore, the findings also indicate that these critical multicultural educators set pedagogical goals in line with the goals stated in the literature on critical multicultural education: ensuring opportunities for all students to succeed academically and socially, to extend their cultural competence, and to develop a critical consciousness.
Content Integration

Incorporating Diverse Representations of Race and Ethnicity

As Canadian teachers in an age of widespread cultural diversity, all three participants in the study emphasized that in order to foster inclusive classrooms, teachers must ensure that diverse identities are reflected in classroom and school resources. Carla believes that the single most important factor in ensuring student success in literacy is that students “see themselves represented” in the books they read. She reflected upon the fact that given the choice, students tended to gravitate towards books with protagonists that looked like them and who faced similar challenges. Furthermore, thinking back to her own experiences as a child of colour, Nikki also remembers the desire to find books with which she could relate. Such experiences have grounded her hope as a teacher and librarian “that students will be able to identify themselves in their understanding of the world.” By giving students choice and by offering a variety of resources that reflect students’ own lives and experiences, these teachers have been able to increase student engagement and achievement in the classroom (McReady et al., 2011). Susan also spoke to the importance of incorporating diverse histories and perspectives across the curriculum “other than the mainstream, Eurocentric male-centric stories” that dominate Canadian classrooms. She believes it is up to educators to dispel stereotypes that “celebratory” teaching reinforces and in turn end up “othering” First Nations peoples.

Examining Multiple Voices Within Representations

All participants in this study also agreed that in addition to the representation of many experiences across the curriculum, critical multicultural teachers must also
provide space for multiple voices within these representations in order to avoid reducing experiences to one solitary account. Nikki reflected upon the words of a professor that she remembers from a discussion in an undergraduate English course: “Let’s think about who’s telling these stories- whose perspective?” Subsequently, Nikki is adamant about ensuring that her students hear a variety of authentic voices. She is “constantly thinking about whose voices to put in the library” not basing her choices on what has “traditionally” gone into a school library. Furthermore, Nikki often warns her students not to generalize experiences after hearing one unique story. Following this assertion, she spoke about the usefulness of Ted Talks, a series of free videos available online that deal with various subject areas including equity and social justice. She shared a video of author Chimamanda Adiche’s Ted Talk *The Danger of a Single Story*, which she cited as an educator resource that has supported her “drive in being a critical multicultural educator.”

Adiche speaks about coming to the U.S. and the idea that we read one story and we categorize. We read a story about a black child. Suddenly, all the kids look at that one black child in the class and think, okay, that’s your story. She talks about how everyone connects her with Africa, but Africa is a continent. They assumed she would have the African story, but she didn’t even think of herself as African until she came to the U.S. She makes a compelling argument that we need to break down the stereotype that everyone from Africa has the same story.

Nikki asserts that “we’ll never hear every story, but a challenge is to bring many stories to the forefront.” Carla is also highly aware of her role as a teacher in shaping her students’ perceptions of the Other: “I *pick* (her emphasis) things as a teacher. I program. I do constantly go through my materials and make sure that there are books that represent as many voices as possible.” Susan also has concerns with teaching that reduces cultural groups to one representation:
I observed a craft that a teacher did, where she had her class make headdresses in a unit on First Nations. Not only did she focus her teaching on celebrations, food and clothing, but she took an approach that left students believing that all Native groups are the same. Unfortunately, she was unknowingly incorporating really stereotypical activities to teach about First Nations people. This type of teaching doesn’t eliminate racism. Students end up thinking the same thing about all First Nations people- I know about you, you lived in teepees. We don’t all live in teepees and only the Native groups in the Plains wore headdresses. We’ve all been lumped into this one big group, so you really need to break it down.

All participants warned that although a plethora of multicultural resources have become increasingly available over the past few years, educators must be critical in their analysis of these resources for authenticity and accuracy in order to facilitate critical multicultural teaching.

Knowledge Construction Process

Developing Critical Thinking Skills

As critical multicultural educators, all three participants emphasized the development of critical thinking skills in their students as a top priority. In order to be aware of bias and cultural reductionism, Nikki tries to ensure that every student learns to “read between the lines” and “to always question things.” Carla agrees that at the heart of critical multicultural education lies the requirement that teachers give students the tools required “to see representations as negative and positive and get them to ask why they’re negative or positive.” Carla grounds much of her teaching in the understanding of the words stereotype and bias. She believes that by teaching students to recognize such representations in texts and media, “then everything opens up for them and they see things that they wouldn’t otherwise see.”

I think that kids like to challenge and making them feel empowered and view things with a critical eye appeals to their natural sense of rebelling against authority. They like to understand why things are unfair- that their
perceptions that things aren’t always fair are actually correct and that’s one way to lead them into critical multicultural teaching.

In this sense, critical thinking skills are a form of empowerment for students, giving them a way to examine how cultural assumptions shape perspectives and biases that are apparent even in educational learning sites (Banks, 1995).

Susan also highlights the need to develop critical thinking skills alongside students’ exposure to popular culture depictions:

I strive to find curriculum content and resources that are as authentic and accurate as possible. If inaccurate representations and ideas do find their way into the classroom, it’s important to address them to dispel stereotypes. Say you are watching a film like Pocahontas and students have not been guided through the misrepresentations and challenge the story’s accuracy, students can hold onto these misrepresented ideas without realizing that they are damaging to certain voices.

In order to shape these skills that allow students to question Eurocentric accounts, teachers must overtly model and scaffold their own critical line of thinking. Both Nikki and Carla create critical thinking anchor charts for their students, reminding them of important questions that critical thinkers ask while reading or viewing texts or media. Nikki’s grade 6, 7 and 8 students use these questions on their own once Nikki has modeled possible answers and once they have had practice answering the questions as a class in response to a text that has been read aloud:

• What does the author want us to believe?
• What assumptions does the author make about us as readers?
• Whose voices are we hearing? Whose voices are missing?
• How might this story have been different if it had been written by someone of a different gender, religious group, or ethnicity?
• What are the economic issues that underlie the text?
• What are some parts of this text that really bother you politically?
• How else might these parts of the text have been written?

Nikki has also created a chart with critical questions designed for younger students. She used this chart in her previous classrooms in conjunction with read-alouds and literature circles to discuss books such as *Bud, Not Buddy* and *Homeless Bird*. It consists of the following questions:

• Why is the main character a boy? Why not a girl?
• How are females represented in the text/pictures?
• What cultures are represented in the book?
• Are the representations accurate? How do you know?
• What role does class play in the book?
• How does race impact/not impact the characters?
• Why is the story set in a certain time period?

Carla asks her grade 4/5 class similar questions in response to read-alouds and independent book studies. She often models critical questioning through the analysis of illustrations in picture books, which she uses frequently for read-alouds. She asserts that by asking critical questions about illustrations, she is able to include all of her students, regardless of their vocabulary or oral comprehension level.

**Facilitating “Critical Conversations”**

In line with Botelho and Rudman’s (2009) reasoning that “texts do not necessarily foster critical thinking” (p.267), all participants asserted that providing students with good multicultural books and critical questions is not enough to ensure
effective critical multicultural programming. The participants emphasized the need for “critical conversations”, whereby teachers facilitate discussions surrounding controversial issues and personal experiences. Carla is often reminded by her students of their inherent interest in uncovering issues of injustice. She uses these teachable moments to talk about discrimination and inequity. For instance, for ongoing anti-discriminatory teaching she has created classroom charts that list definitions of stereotype, bias and discrimination (with subheadings racism and sexism). She introduced students to the terms stereotype, racism and sexism with read-alouds of *Amazing Grace* and *Ruby’s Wish*. Carla asked students probing questions regarding the challenges that both main characters faced regarding assumptions about them based on their race and gender. Following the discussion, students were able to cite examples of stereotype, racism and sexism from the stories to record on the chart. Under these definitions, Carla continuously urges students to bring issues that they encounter either personally or in books, videos or television shows to the class’s attention and subsequently writes these examples on the class chart.

Susan also brings critical conversations into her lessons with books such as *The Backyard Time Detectives*, a book that challenges Eurocentric and human-centric thinking by walking students through the history of a neighborhood page by page, inquiring about the pioneer way of life, the Native way of life and life before humans existed. The book then jumps forward to the future of urban development. Susan emphasizes the richness of this book in terms of discussions in the classroom. She states that books like this get students asking those important questions about power and what kinds of books big publishers want to sell to the next generation. She cites
many books like this as controversial because in terms of the economic superpowers, “it’s not to their advantage for kids to learn to think this way.” Great resources paired with critical questions provides many opportunities for students to learn about power relations regarding land claims, the economy of food and global hunger, development and the gap between rich and poor.

All participants agreed that while many teachers are reluctant to have these critical conversations with students, students are ready and eager to talk about issues of injustice at a very young age. Nikki remembers a specific incident that opened the door to having critical conversations with students in her grade 3 classroom:

When I taught grade 6 about first contact and how horrible the Europeans were to the First Nations people, I loved teaching. But when I went to grade 3, I felt that I couldn’t talk about the atrocities that went on because it’s not in the curriculum. So I was having this conflict within myself. I thought, I’m basically gonna be teaching my kids that the First Nations peoples and Europeans got along and worked side by side. I remember saying to my kids that you’re gonna learn in grade 6 that it’s not this pretty, but we’re not going to talk about that now. It was after the summer when Cathy Freeman, the Aboriginal Olympian from Australia, ran with no shoes after she won gold to show the world how poorly Aboriginals had been treated by that country. One of the boys put his hand up and said, “My mom’s from Australia and I’m aware of the horrible things that happened to Aboriginals in that country.” He gave me that key to realize that I could be critical with grade 3 students. Up until that point, I thought I had to be all neat and tidy. That was the beginning of starting to think about how to have critical conversations with students and start giving students the chance to ask these questions.

Sparked by the realization that students are inherently drawn to questions of injustice, Nikki found a way to both teach the curriculum and to have critical conversations with her students.

Valuing Collaboration

All participants in this study emphasized the importance of collaboration
between teachers, community members, and students in order to foster critical thinking and a well-rounded knowledge construction process. As Delpit (1995) warns teachers to be wary of creating programs where they assume the majority voices represent all voices, the teachers in this study have ensured many opportunities to broaden their own experiences and those of their students by incorporating many group activities that require critical thinking. Nikki reflects upon the importance of planning with other teachers: “By yourself, you’re not always asking the right questions. To be an effective programmer, you need to work with others and collaborate.” Susan also asserted the value of collaborating with community members and local artists to enhance her own knowledge and to plan inclusive, authentic activities.

Nikki, Carla and Susan also rely heavily upon collaborative classroom activities including think-pair-shares (where students first share with a partner before potentially sharing comments with the class, which increases the capacity for students to hear each others’ voices), K-W-L charts (where students brainstorm what they know about a topic, what they want to know and what they have learned), literature circles (where students self-select a book to study and meet weekly to discuss the literature book club-style with probing questions), research projects (where students research actual events that take place in the books they are reading), and take action projects (where students agree together on a social justice initiative they will undertake). Such an emphasis on group work increases students’ exposure to different experiences and points-of-view.

Nikki likes to use literature circles in conjunction with critical thinking charts: “We wanted to ask new questions, not just the same ones they’ve been asking for years like
making connections and predicting.” She argues that literature circles have profound benefits as they allow students to work in groups and hear each others’ viewpoints; however, she feels that in traditional literature circles (where each student has a role that alternates weekly, including a summarizer, a word definer, and an illustrator), “there were many questions that were missing from their meetings.” By facilitating collaboration with critical thinking, Nikki believes that “we’re teaching them to read between the lines.”

**Prejudice Reduction**

**Confronting Bias**

All participants commented on the responsibility of teachers to work towards the elimination of prejudice in their classrooms. Dei (1995) asserts that the first step in this process requires teachers to confront their own biases and prejudices, understand how these prejudices and biases might affect their teaching, and work towards changing them. As Ghosh (2002) argues, critical multicultural teachers must embody the belief that “difference” is a positive concept. Carla admits to feeling challenged by her limited knowledge of diverse cultures, an obstacle to critical multicultural education that she worked to resolve by starting a professional book club for teachers at her school. She credits long-term involvement in the book club with opening her eyes to some of her “own stereotypes and biases in teaching children who come from ethnically diverse backgrounds.” She believes that by looking at these issues alongside other educators, she has become much more honest and open-minded about the assumptions that she once held about some of her students and their parents. Now, more than ever, she is “highly aware of who comes into the classroom” and their personal experiences and
beliefs. Furthermore, Carla has made recent efforts to get to know the families in her school community as well, claiming that such relationships are essential in order to learn about student needs. Susan also credits personal reading to giving her the background knowledge needed to challenge bias in accounts that leave out or misrepresent Native histories. She recommends *A Fair Country: Telling Truths About Canada* by John Ralston Saul as a great source to learn about the often overlooked Native perspective and impact on the state of modern Canada. In order to teach children about marginalized stories, educators must first uncover these stories.

**Seeking Authentic Perspectives**

All participants spoke to the necessity and challenge of seeking out resources that are free of bias, stereotypes, tokenism, negative lifestyle judgments, and representative of authentic voices. In order to reduce prejudice in the classroom, all research participants spoke of the need to critically analyze their resources and to have critical conversations with students about resources that present potentially biased viewpoints. While the participants do not follow a specific chart to analyze books for bias, when I presented them with A Checklist for Analyzing Bias in Children’s Books (see Appendix E), they each asserted that they agreed with the points outlined in the checklist. After analyzing their resources according the checklist, one concern I have with authenticity is addressed by Susan during our interview:

Although I have used the resource *The Maple Syrup Book* in the past, I had to rework the content of the book to avoid marginalizing the Native perspective. While I like that this resource, unlike many others, at least acknowledges the contribution of First Nations people in the discovery of maple syrup, I would be happier if the story was told from an authentic First Nations voice and not solely in the past tense. For example, Linton writes: “The few weeks when maple syrup could be made were known as Maple Moon and were celebrated with special ceremonies.” (Susan’s emphasis in
This use of language makes it appear that First Nations no longer use this terminology, when in reality, acknowledging the various moons throughout the year are still part of the culture. This only perpetuates a racist assumption that our cultural practices are a thing of the past and that we have been completely assimilated.

Susan cited a lack of ready-made critical resources as a limitation in her teaching. To overcome this obstacle, she is often left with no choice but to rework resources. Optimistically, Susan has found that recent critical multicultural resources have emerged on government and ministry websites, including the Elementary Teachers Federation of Ontario (ETFO) website, www.etfo.ca, where she discovered The Learning Circle activities (developed by Indian Affairs and Northern Development) to empower First Nations education in the mainstream classroom. She asserted that sometimes “it’s not that there aren’t good resources available, but it’s about finding the time to locate them.”

Nikki also expressed frustration with author perspective and authenticity:

*Homeless Bird* by Gloria Whelan is a book I have used about Indian girl brides. Which brings up my conflict about author authenticity. For example, *Homeless Bird* is written by a white woman in Michigan. But it’s a great story and most of my Indian students love this story. But again, is it marginalizing Indian girls? Will students think that if a girl lives in India this is what happens to them? So no, my job is to find more stories about Indian girls, so that I can offer a variety and maybe bring in some more authentic voices.

Scholars in the field of Cultural Studies have raised similar concerns with regards to some of the resources used in the participants’ classrooms, namely Deborah Ellis’ trilogy (*The Breadwinner, Parvana’s Journey, Mud City*), which centres on one girl’s experience in Taliban-run Afghanistan. Sensoy and Marshall (2011) argue that these novels embody the “politics of storytelling”; the books falsely reinforce beliefs about the inherent oppression of Muslim women while denying the oppression of Western
women and the authors assert that these novels must be used with caution and analyzed alongside social context. Carla speaks to this concern by rooting her class’s study of *The Breadwinner* in an essential analysis of Afghan government and history.

While Sensoy and Marshall (2011) are not arguing for the “one ‘right’ Muslim girl story” (p. 127), they hope to bring attention to the reality that by using these books without critical conversations or accompanying resources (for example, Bigelow et al.’s curriculum package *Scarves of Many Colors: Muslim Women and the Veil*) teachers may in fact reinforce common Western stereotypes of Islamic cultures. Nikki supports this claim and has been working to acquire a variety of authentic Muslim stories for her library, although she cites financial limitations as a primary obstacle to this goal. Furthermore, she has recently introduced a new assignment to her students where they must conduct a research project inspired by true historical events or cultures from a book they have read. This research assignment requires that students verify facts from their novels and provide multiple authentic voices to support their research. By doing this, she hopes to foster skills that help her students to learn to ask questions about validity and to identify discriminatory depictions in their everyday reading.

**Equity Pedagogy**

**Knowing and Valuing Students’ Lived Experience**

The need to know one’s students is a theme that surfaced on multiple occasions during the participant interviews. All participants agreed that in order to create an inclusive, equitable class culture, teachers must validate students’ experiences outside of the classroom in order to provide opportunities for these students to succeed in the classroom, which can be achieved by differentiating instruction to reflect their learning
styles, interests, and experiences. Susan integrates a lesson on storytelling to validate oral traditions of language and story that are prevalent across many cultures. Using the a story and lesson from The Learning Circle, a resource produced by Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, Susan tells the story The Granddaughter Who Was Eaten by a Big Fish and then teaches the art of storytelling to students so that they can learn traditional tales and legends themselves to then share with their peers. Another resource she uses when teaching students to tell oral stories is *Nature’s Circle and Other Northwest Coast Children’s Stories*, which can be used alongside discussions that help students to pick out the key points and messages of the story as well as role play to pinpoint the emotions and element of suspense. Through storytelling, Susan is able to honour First Nations ways of knowing and teach valuable oral literacy skills to students.

Carla asserts that teachers must acknowledge that their role in planning for success is dependent on the knowledge they have of their students’ lived experiences:

> It’s so important to teach kids that sometimes we get stuck not because we don’t know the words but because we don’t know what it means- we’ve never experienced it. As a teacher, there are a lot of things I take for granted. I know that, I have that background information, that’s my culture, but these kids might not know this- what it feels like to paddle a canoe, or what a paddle is. And that’s why it’s so important to pick the right things for kids to read. And that’s why so many of our tests are biased because we’re expecting all kids to have that same background information and they don’t have it.

Nikki also makes conscious decisions to foster equity in the classroom. She recalls a team-teaching occasion where she had to choose an appropriate book for a read-aloud in a class with many English language learners who were new to Canada. Although Nikki’s co-teacher was keen on reading *The Hatchet*, a book about a boy
trying to survive in the bush in Northern Canada, both teachers were reluctant to read such a novel that many students living in urban centres would have trouble relating to. Instead Nikki decided upon *Bud, Not Buddy*, a novel about a young African-American boy searching for his father in an urban setting. By making this choice, Nikki was able to increase student success in literacy by engaging them with material that “reflected [her] specific group of students.” Such teaching practices illustrate Delpit’s (1995) assertion that equitable educators get to know their students personally in order to connect their practice to students’ lived experience.

**Valuing Different Kinds of Knowledge**

An equity pedagogy involves more than just teaching students background information to succeed under normative structures and providing students with material that they can relate to. The teachers in this study assert that an equity pedagogy also involves validating and honoring multiple forms of knowledge. For example, Susan spoke of a successful hands-on unit that she taught on First Nations traditions incorporating a trip to tap and sample maple syrup. She told oral stories of various First Nations discoveries of maple syrup, had students participate in role plays that reenacted this and other events, and taught them how to make mokuks, traditional Birchbark syrup containers used in Native communities. Susan emphasized that this unit allowed students to gain a different perspective on the origins of syrup, a Canadian product that is often associated in student learning with pioneer life. Furthermore, throughout this unit, students were given the opportunity to learn not only about Native culture, but from and through it as well.

In order to appreciate different forms of knowledge, Carla’s school provides
many opportunities for students, parents, teachers, and other community members to “showcase and teach skills like drumming, dance, and cooking” and other arts-based practices that are often undervalued in Ontario public schools. Carla sees the importance of drawing upon human resources not only to perform for students but also to pass on their skills and knowledge as well. Such experiences provide students with opportunities to build positive attitudes towards forms of knowledge that are not limited to reading, writing and mathematics.

**Challenging Normativity**

The participants asserted that challenging norms and social structures that serve to reinforce white privilege and power is an essential element of critical multicultural education. Susan cited white privilege as the reason why inclusive resources are often impossible to find and instead mass produced textbooks that serve only to maintain the privilege of those in power are shelved in mainstream stores and libraries. She spoke of this issue as a relevant entry point for students to investigate how white, male privilege permeates our education system. Susan also noted European-shaped education systems as an obstacle to taking holistic, critical multicultural approaches to teaching. She asserts that a rigid focus on “compartmentalized” teaching of subjects and on specific forms of assessment such as observing seatwork and writing standard tests limits the depth of diversity education that would flourish under collaborative, cross-curricular approaches to teaching.

In order to disrupt unequal power relations, Susan shared the unit “The Imaginary Indian” as a useful set of lessons to challenge norms and stereotypes that have been perpetuated through Eurocentric media sources for centuries. The lessons,
produced by The Learning Circle, include activities urging students to discuss the nature of culturally-demeaning and racist mascots such as the Washington Redskins, to analyze media depictions of Native peoples in films and news stories under a critical lens, and to debate the value of positive stereotypes such as those that pin all Native cultures as “caretakers of this planet” (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, 2008, p.43). Susan asserts that such activities reveal the “roots of prejudice, misunderstanding and stereotypes” and allow students to examine and discuss whose values are reinforced and diminished by these misrepresentations.

**Empowerment of School Culture and Social Structure**

**Fostering Empowerment in the Classroom**

All participants spoke of empowering their students in the classroom as a necessary component of critical multicultural teaching. Susan feels that giving students choice in their learning is a form of empowerment. She recalls wishing she had a chance to learn about Native values in school. Nikki also emphasizes that empowerment at this level includes giving students choice in their learning, relating the learning to their experiences, and listening to their concerns: “How can I transform my teaching to start with the kids’ voices first instead of with the text?” She asserts that good critical multicultural teachers create a “safe space to talk about issues and ask questions” and let the students’ questions “guide the lesson.” Carla adds that empowerment at the individual level in her classroom means viewing every student as a source of knowledge and encouraging other students to go them when they need help. Carla also empowers students by giving them tools for comprehension that other teachers might overlook:
There are many strategies that good readers use to understand, and [*The Breadwinner*] is a really good book to teach that good readers are always accessing background information to better understand. Because the girl in the book is Muslim, there are a lot of things in the book, the clothes they wear, the things they eat, that are not familiar to everyone in the class, but I ask the kids what some of those things are. For example, a *shalwar kamiz*, many of the kids did not know what that is, but some of the kids did. So they took on the role of the kids who could give you that background information. If you don’t know, it can be very hard to understand something if you don’t have the background. Where can I go to find out this information? Who are the resources, not just me? That’s the wonderful thing is that I could look at my classroom and say, can anyone tell me why they’re doing this, or can anyone tell us why it’s so important that the women cover their heads? They gave the information, not me. The kids felt empowered because they could give others the background information they needed.

By using a variety of culturally diverse resources that reflect the experiences of her students, Carla provides every student with opportunities to be the “class expert.”

**Fostering Empowerment at the Community Level**

In Carla’s teaching, empowerment is not limited to the classroom. Her teaching consistently encourages student-led learning and regularly integrates social action initiatives. She recalls a particularly powerful activity that required students to take action for change at the community and global levels:

Every group was given a different book and at the end of reading, they had to take action and organize something to give back to the community. Students decided on the action. One group had a food drive, another group cleaned up the yard, and the third group put on a fashion show to raise money to buy books for a girl’s school in Afghanistan (after reading *The Breadwinner*). They found parents and businesses to donate clothes for the show. They managed to raise $1600. They made a check out to the charity in Afghanistan that was highlighted by Deborah Ellis (author of *The Breadwinner*) on her website. Then they wrote to Deborah Ellis and called her to see if she would pick up the check in person and she did. For months afterwards, the kids could not believe they managed to do what they had done.

Providing students with opportunities to make a difference in the world is key to the success of critical multicultural education as it allows them to critique the world
without feeling completely discouraged about the inequities surrounding them (Banks, 2002).

**Critical Multicultural Resources**

After interviewing the participants, I collected their classroom resources and analyzed them using Rudman’s (1984) A Checklist for Analyzing Bias in Children’s Books (see Appendix E). I concluded that the following picturebooks, novels, and educator resources are free of stereotypes, tokenism, loaded words, negative lifestyle judgments, and were written with an authentic voice that provided positive role models for children of colour: *Amazing Grace* by Mary Hoffman, *Ruby’s Wish* by Shirin Yim Bridges, *The Watson’s Go to Birmingham – 1963* and *Bud, Not Buddy* by Christopher Paul Curtis, *The Backyard Time Detective* by David Suzuki, *Nature’s Circle and Other Northwest Coast Children’s Stories* by Robert James Challenger, *The Learning Circle: Classroom Activities on First Nations in Canada* by Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, *All My Relations: Sharing Native Values Through the Arts* by Canadian Allaince in Solidarity with Native Peoples.

While I questioned the authenticity and author’s perspective of the other books listed by teacher participants, including *Homeless Bird* by Gloria Whelan, *The Breadwinner* and *Parvana’s Journey* by Deborah Ellis and *The Maple Syrup Book* by Marilyn Linton, I must emphasize that these books were used alongside a line of critical questioning by which teachers encouraged students to research and evaluate the validity of these stories. Teachers noted the importance of using these books alongside a variety of different experiences in order to avoid cultural reductionism.
Critical Multicultural Approaches to Lessons

All of the participants regularly facilitate lessons and activities that reflect the goals of critical multicultural education. Each of the lessons analyzed focused on ensuring that diverse representations were reflected across the curriculum, traditionally marginalized voices were heard, differences were affirmed, the elimination of prejudice was targeted, normativity was challenged, students’ experienced were valued and oppression was analyzed from a structural standpoint, all of which contributed to fostering student inclusion, equity and empowerment in the classroom.

Carla discussed four types of lessons/activities that she facilitated in her classroom with a critical multicultural approach including a discussion and ongoing chart on stereotypes, bias and discrimination used after reading Amazing Grace and Ruby's Wish, a read-aloud with critical discussion and a compare/contrast activity regarding government and culture while reading The Breadwinner, literature circles using books such as The Watson’s Go to Birmingham-1963 and Parvana’s Journey, and a student-led take action activity as a follow-up to literature circles. Carla notes that she finds resources and inspiration for critical multicultural lessons from fellow teachers at her school, the Globe and Mail Kids section, and her book club participants.

Nikki outlined three critical multicultural lessons/activities that she incorporated into her teaching, including a critical thinking anchor chart used while discussing many books including Bud, Not Buddy, reworked “critical” literature circles to discuss books such as Homeless Bird, and research projects conducted alongside historical fiction. Nikki credits online educator and librarian blogs (including TinLids.com where she...
reviews graphic novels) and professional development sessions with enhancing her list of resources and lesson ideas.

Susan described one activity and four lessons that she has facilitated both in the classroom and at community workshops. She uses K-W-L charts to start many of her units to determine what students know already and to uncover misconceptions and stereotypes they may hold and encourages students to return to these charts often so that they are invested in their own learning and so that they can replace misconceptions with new perspectives. She also uses critical conversations in her lessons alongside books that challenge both Eurocentric and human-centric perspectives (such as *The Backyard Time Detectives*) examines First Nations stereotypes in popular culture with research projects, debates, and film viewings, tells and teaches the art of telling authentic Native stories alongside role plays, and takes students to experience hands-on culturally-rooted activities such as maple syrup tapping. She finds resources and gets ideas from public and university libraries, internet searches, other educators, government websites, community “experts”, art shows, travel and cultural events.

I analyzed these critical multicultural lessons using the Likert Scale for Analyzing Critical Multicultural Lessons (see Appendix F) and found that all lessons discussed with the participants met each of the criteria at either “always evident” or “strongly evident” categories. I was able to conclude that the lessons shared with me were commonly anti-discriminatory, student-centred, reflective, collaborative, empowering, and required critical thinking.
Conclusion

The participants’ responses were coded into themes that reflect critical multicultural pedagogical strategies outlined in Chapter 2 of this research study. All of the participants incorporated collaborative, student-centred lessons and activities with a focus on critical thinking into their teaching. These lessons reflected Banks’ (2002) transformative or social action approaches to critical multicultural education. Such activities include literature circles with culturally-diverse materials, read-alouds with critical conversations, research projects that focus on deconstructing Eurocentric understandings of culture and history, and take action fundraisers and presentations. These activities worked towards ensuring the goals of critical multicultural teaching—ensuring that all students develop and experience academic success, cultural competence, and critical consciousness. Furthermore, all participants embodied the role of critical multicultural educators by integrating diverse content across the curriculum, facilitating the construction of knowledge rooted in as many voices as possible, working towards reducing prejudice, creating a class culture that is equitable and inclusive, and empowering students within and outside of the classroom.

All participants cited the benefits of critical multicultural teaching for all students, not only students from racially and ethnically diverse backgrounds. The participants uphold that in order to create equitable, inclusive classrooms and communities, children from all walks of life must learn to unlearn societal norms that continue to oppress some students and benefit others.

In terms of resources, participants cited publically accessible materials as being most useful, including fellow teachers, parents and community members, blogs,
newspapers, and increasingly, anti-discriminatory Ontario government documents and school board professional development sessions.

The responses also reflect critical multicultural education’s potential to inherently increase literacy skills by offering students material that garners interest by reflecting their own lives and by teaching them how to obtain cultural background information to increase comprehension. Furthermore, critical multicultural teachers foster critical thinking on a daily basis by rooting their analysis and conversations with students in a critical line of questioning alongside the “traditional” comprehension questions such as predicting and making connections.
Chapter Five: DISCUSSION

Implications

Research and Teaching

I believe this study is relevant and timely, as it fills a gap in Canadian research on classroom practices reflecting critical multicultural education. The process of researching, conducting interviews, and analyzing findings has been extremely rewarding and insightful for me. I anticipate that this study will lead me to continue to research and investigate best practices in this field.

As a teacher, this study has been invaluable, as it has convinced me even more thoroughly that the need for critical multicultural education is essential for teachers who aim to foster equity and inclusion in the classroom. My teaching practice will reflect the pedagogical strategies and activities examined in this research study with an aim to build into my daily work the goals of critical multicultural education: academic success, cultural competence, and critical consciousness. After conducting this research study, I am more confident than ever that students have the ability and inherent desire to reveal, question, and work to change inequities, and I now feel prepared to undertake a pedagogical approach that allows and encourages students to do so.

Educational Community

Implications for the educational community include the realistic implementation of equitable and inclusive classrooms through the realization that many current multicultural practices may serve to reinforce stereotypes, as well as the ability to access practical critical multicultural methods. In many teacher education programs
and professional development sessions in schools, the benefits of anti-discriminatory teaching are highlighted, but not demonstrated. This study helps to do more than advocate for such an approach to teaching - it also provides practical strategies for implementation. By reading this study, I believe that teachers can begin to successfully integrate lessons and activities that will help teachers and students alike unlearn biases and learn to affirm differences.

Furthermore, this study confirms the importance of collaboration between teachers, community members, and students. Teachers in this study emphasize the value of planning together, sharing materials, and inviting community members to bring their expertise into local classrooms. As all teachers in the study cited economic factors as the largest limitation to teaching under this framework, such resource sharing practices allow for well-rounded, open-minded and financially plausible outcomes in the application of critical multicultural work. Teachers in the study also credited group work in their classrooms as stepping stones for students towards understanding the value of varied perspectives and multiple ways of knowing.

**Recommendations**

**Increased teacher Support**

The findings of this study support the need for increased teacher support in the form of professional development and sample questions and lessons. Although some schools currently offer professional development in the area of anti-discriminatory teaching, I believe that in order to broaden this practice, all schools and teacher education programs should hold mandatory sessions in this area. Furthermore, although there are current school board and government documents urging teacher
work in this field, I believe that many teachers will not undertake critical multicultural
practices until they are explicitly outlined in the curriculum documents and
accompanied by probing questions and sample activities. As per the findings of this
study, critical multicultural teaching should be integrated into the curriculum
expectations across all subjects of study.

Resource Sharing

As I pointed out earlier in this chapter, resource sharing among teachers is
essential in order to make the best use of limited funding. I also believe that sharing
great, highly sought out books for literature circles among school libraries would be
extremely beneficial for students. As literature circles require that classes obtain a set
of 5 or more copies of each book that is chosen, sharing these books between schools
would allow students a greater variety of diverse materials to choose from and the
opportunity to engage in multiple literature circles per year.

Furthermore, in addition to collaboration, I recommend that teachers consider
sharing their own experience with other teachers and classes. Especially in schools
with culturally diverse staff members, students could benefit from rotary-style lessons
led by teachers with specific background knowledge and expertise.

Accountability

Finally, I think that accountability in the field of critical multicultural education is
increasingly required in today’s schools. As mentioned earlier, there are multiple
school board and government-level documents stating that teachers must teach about
difference affirmatively, although I have seen many classrooms where this is not the
case. In order to ensure that teachers are in fact teaching about diversity responsibly, a system of accountability needs to be established.

**Limitations of the study**

While I believe that this study offers a wealth of information for Canadian teachers hoping to strengthen their practice in the field of critical multicultural pedagogy, this study is limited by two major factors. This study is confined by both a lack of previous Canadian research highlighting critical multicultural classroom practices and the sample size of only three teachers practicing under a critical multicultural framework. The small sample size of this study results in an inability to generalize the findings across the field, leading to a need for future research on critical multicultural teacher practices.

**Further Study**

**Questions to consider**

After researching critical multicultural education in Canada alongside the practice of three exemplary Ontario educators, a number of new questions have arisen. How can educators create a safe space in their classrooms in order to allow “critical conversations” and honest reflections regarding oppression and privilege? How can teachers expand their critical multicultural teaching to include all aspects of culture in addition to race and ethnicity, including but not limited to gender, class, sexual orientation, language, family composition, immigration, and ability? How can teachers foster a healthy balance between empowerment and empathy when teaching about “Othered” identities?
Subsequent research

While conducting this study, my biggest obstacle was the lack of current Canadian research in this field. To build on and complement this study, subsequent research should focus on student perceptions of critical multicultural teaching and student performance in critical multicultural settings. Such findings would undoubtedly inform and enhance teacher practices in this field.

A larger scale study of critical multicultural teacher practices across the country would also benefit this field of research. As this country is large and diverse in many ways, such an analysis would undoubtedly provide additional insight into effective strategies in this field.

Finally, a comprehensive resource list of both children’s books and videos and educator resources that have been analyzed using Rudman’s Critical Framework for Analyzing Bias in Children’s Books (see Appendix E) would prove extremely useful for educators, parents, and students. Furthermore, involving students in the creation of such a resource would be invaluable, as it would allow them to further refine their critical thinking and literacy skills.
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Appendix A: Letter of Consent for Interview

Date: ___________________

Dear ______________,

I am a graduate student at OISE, University of Toronto, and am currently enrolled as a Master of Teaching candidate. I am studying Critical Multicultural Education for the purposes of investigating an educational topic as a major assignment for our program. I think that your knowledge and experience will provide insights into this topic.

I am writing a report on this study as a requirement of the Master of Teaching Program. My course instructor who is providing support for the process this year is Dr. Jackie Eldridge. My research supervisor is Mira Gambhir. The purpose of this requirement is to allow us to become familiar with a variety of ways to do research. My data collection consists of a 40-60 minute interview that will be tape-recorded. I would be grateful if you would allow me to interview you at a place and time convenient to you. I can conduct the interview at your office or workplace, in a public place, or anywhere else that you might prefer.

The contents of this interview will be used for my assignment, which will include a final paper, as well as informal presentations to my classmates and/or potentially at a conference or publication. I will not use your name or anything else that might identify you in my written work, oral presentations, or publications. This information remains confidential. The only people who will have access to my assignment work will be my research supervisor and my course instructor. You are free to change your mind at any time, and to withdraw even after you have consented to participate. You may decline to answer any specific questions. I will destroy the tape recording after the paper has been presented and/or published which may take up to five years after the data has been collected. There are no known risks or benefits to you for assisting in the project, and I will share with you a copy of my notes to ensure accuracy.

Please sign the attached form, if you agree to be interviewed. The second copy is for your records. Thank you very much for your help.

Yours sincerely,

Emily Theriault

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Instructor’s Name: Jackie Eldridge   email: jackie.eldridge@utoronto.ca

Research Supervisor’s Name: Mira Gambhir   email: mira.gambhir@utoronto.ca

Consent Form

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

I have read the letter provided to me by Emily Theriault and agree to participate in an interview for the purposes described.

Signature: ________________________________________

Name (printed): ______________________________________

Date: ____________________
Appendix B: Initial Recruitment Questions

1.a) What is your name?

b) Where are you currently teaching?

c) What grade(s) are you currently teaching?

d) How many years have you been teaching?

e) According to the definition below, do you consider yourself to be a critical multicultural educator?

Critical multicultural education is a transformative approach under which teachers ensure the presence of diverse representations of race and ethnicity across the curriculum and examine structural privilege, power and discrimination in an effort to affirm differences, to honour multiple voices, and to deconstruct Eurocentric histories and sources of knowledge. In effect, such an approach consists of culturally diverse curriculum content, a redefined knowledge construction process that includes the perspectives of traditionally marginalized peoples, a move towards eliminating prejudice and cultural stereotypes, and an equitable class culture that works towards fostering student success and empowerment.
Appendix C: Interview Questions

Section 1: Background Information

1. a) Can you tell me about your class/student population?
   b) How long have you been teaching at this school? Have you taught elsewhere?

Section 2: Beliefs/Values (WHY?)

2. How do you define critical multicultural education?

3. Do you see yourself as a critical multicultural educator? If yes, why? If no, why not?

4. What is your vision for an effective multicultural program? As a teacher, what lasting impression do you aspire to leave your students with?

5. What prompted you to take a critical multicultural approach in your teaching?

6. Do you believe all students can benefit from critical multicultural practices? If yes, how?

7. Was there a particular resource or author that had an impact on you personally, or one that you feel is important for students to experience? What makes this resource or author so noteworthy?

Section 2: Introduction to Provided Resources

8. Can you tell me about the critical multicultural resource/lessons (2 to 3) you are sharing with me today?
   a) How/when/where did you first come across each resource/lesson?
   b) What features related to critical multicultural teaching do you like most about this resource/lesson?
   c) What do you see are some of the challenges/limitations of each resource/lesson?

Section 3: Teacher Practices (WHAT/HOW?)

9. a) Can you give me an example of a lesson or a unit that you’ve taught with a critical multicultural lens that you found to be successful?
   b) Why do you think it was a success?
   c) What kind of follow-up did you do?

10. a) How do you select classroom resources?
    b) How do you find out about new multicultural resources?
c) What factors do you consider when choosing these resources?

11. What steps do you take to familiarize students with the skills required to think critically about multicultural issues?

Section 4: Influencing Factors (WHO?)

12. Can you tell me about any challenges or obstacles you have faced when taking a critical multicultural approach in your teaching?

13. What types of feedback have you been given from students, parents and colleagues regarding your critical approach to multicultural education in the classroom?

14. Is critical multicultural teaching commonly practiced in your school?

Section 5: Next Steps (WHAT NEXT?)

15. What would you still like to learn concerning multicultural education practices?

16. What are your future goals for teaching critical multiculturalism? How do you plan on achieving these goals?
## Appendix D: Critical Multicultural Framework

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Headings</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Theorists</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Goals of Critical Multicultural Education</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Academic Success</td>
<td>- Students are given opportunities to succeed by learning in ways that are personally and culturally meaningful</td>
<td>Banks, 1995; Dei, 1995; Delpit, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1995; McReady et al., 2011; Wane, 2011</td>
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<td>Cultural Competence</td>
<td>- Students learn to embrace various cultures and affirm differences, are aware of their own unique views of the world</td>
<td>Banks, 1995; Dei, 1995; Delpit, 1995; Howard, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995; McReady et al., 2011; Wane, 2011</td>
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<tr>
<td>Critical Consciousness</td>
<td>- Students reconstruct knowledge from multiple perspectives, are aware of and able to critique institutions that reproduce inequity</td>
<td>Banks &amp; Banks, 1995; Dei, 1995; Freire, 1970; Ghosh, 2002; Kincheloe &amp; Steinberg, 1997; Kumashiro, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Rivière, 2012; Solomon, 1996</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Critical Multicultural Pedagogical Strategies</strong></td>
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<td>Content Integration</td>
<td>- Resources and lessons continuously reflect diversity across the spectrum, teachers avoid essentializing certain groups (teach about diversity within groups as well)</td>
<td>Banks, 1995; Dei, 1996; Delpit, 1995; Gay, 2004; Ghosh, 2002; Kincheloe &amp; Steinberg, 1997; Ladson-Billings 1995; McReady, 2011; Milner, 2005; Solomon, 1996; Villegas &amp; Lucas, 2002; Wane, 2011</td>
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<tr>
<td>Knowledge Construction Process</td>
<td>- Histories are deconstructed and rebuilt from multiple perspectives, many perspectives and stories that are traditionally marginalized are validated and required in order to paint a more complete picture of history</td>
<td>Banks, 1995; Dei, 1996; Delpit, 1995; Gay, 2004; Ghosh, 2002; Kincheloe &amp; Steinberg, 1997; Kumashiro, 2001; Ladson-Billings 1995; McReady, 2011; Milner, 2005; Rivière, 2012; Solomon, 1996; Villegas &amp; Lucas, 2002; Wane, 2011</td>
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<td>Prejudice Reduction</td>
<td>Banks, 1995; Dei, 1996; Ghosh, 2002; Kincheloe &amp; Steinberg, 1997; McReady, 2011; Solomon, 1996; Rivière, 2012; Wane, 2011</td>
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<td>Difference is constructed as a positive concept, synergy of cultural histories is emphasized, stereotypes are challenged</td>
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<td>Equity Pedagogy</td>
<td>Banks, 1995; Dei, 1996; Delpit, 1995; Gay, 2004; Ghosh, 2002; Giroux &amp; McLaren, 1989; Harpalani, 2002; Howard, 2010; Kincheloe &amp; Steinberg, 1997; Knight, 2008; Lee et al., 1998; McReady, 2011; Nwoye, 1999; Solomon, 1996; Villegas &amp; Lucas, 2002; Wane, 2011</td>
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<td>Teachers know their students personally, cultural accommodations are provided with a focus on student strengths, emphasis on eliminating oppression and injustice</td>
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<td>Empowerment of School Culture and Social Structure</td>
<td>Banks, 1995; Dei, 1996; Delpit, 1995; Ghosh, 2002; Kincheloe &amp; Steinberg, 1997; Kumashiro, 2001; McReady, 2011; Solomon, 1996; Wane, 2011</td>
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<td>Moving away from an empathy-centred approach towards empowerment, all students are given opportunities to succeed &amp; access to extra support systems, encouraged to apply a critical lens to issues of inequity, empowered to take action against injustices</td>
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Appendix E: A Checklist for Analyzing Bias in Children’s Books (Rudman’s framework)

Check the illustrations
• Look for stereotypes. Some illustrations are blatantly stereotypical; others may be more subtle in ridiculing characters based on their race or sex.
• Look for tokenism. Check to be sure that the illustrator has not simply used white characters colored in and that all people of color do not look alike.
• Examine who is doing what. Are only white men active or in leadership roles? Are women or people of color in passive or subservient roles?

Check the story line for bias in the following areas:
• Standards for success: do people of color have to exhibit white behavior in order to succeed? Must people of color be extraordinary in order to succeed?
• Resolutions of problems: are problems solved by white people? Are societal problems explained or are they treated as inevitable? Are minority people considered to be the problem?
• Role of women: are achievements of women and girls based on their looks? Could the same story be told if the sex roles were reversed and the characters were men or boys?

Look at the lifestyles
• Are the contrasts between people of color and whites negative?
• Are people of color presented in settings other than the barrio or ghetto?
• Does the author sincerely present an alternative lifestyle without negative value judgments?
• Are women and those of diverse family styles fairly represented

Weigh the relationships between people
• Are the whites or males in the story in control?
• Are the family structures stereotypical?

Note the heroes
• If the heroes or heroines are persons of color or women, do they avoid all conflict with whites or with men?
• Are they admired for the same qualities as white and male heroes or heroines?

Consider the effects on a child’s self image
• Are standards established that limit the child’s aspirations and self-esteem?
• Are there positive and constructive role models for children of color and for females?

Consider the author’s or illustrator’s background, if possible
• If the book is about people of color or women, does the author or illustrator have the experience and knowledge necessary to create nonbiased descriptions or discussions?
Check the author’s perspective
• Is the author or illustrator’s personal perspective limited?
• Does this view distort the story in any way?

Watch for loaded words
• Some words carry insulting or derogatory connotations.
• Does the author avoid the use of such words as “savage,” “treacherous,” and “primitive” when describing people of given ethnic, cultural, or social groups?

Look at the copyright date
• The copyright date is no guarantee that a book is nonbiased, but more recent books generally present a more authentic view of people of color and women than those published in the 1960’s and before.

Information taken from:
“Ten quick ways to analyze books for racism and sexism”
### Appendix F: Likert Scale for Analyzing Critical Multicultural Lessons

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Elements of the lesson/activity</th>
<th>Not evident</th>
<th>Slightly evident</th>
<th>Mostly evident</th>
<th>Always Evident</th>
<th>Strongly evident</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Do the activities require critical thinking?</td>
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<td>2. Do the lesson themes expose racial and ethnic structural inequities?</td>
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<td>3. Do the activities deconstruct Eurocentric knowledge?</td>
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<td>4. Do the activities encourage students to consider multiple perspectives and challenge stereotypes and biases?</td>
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<td>5. Are the activities student-centred?</td>
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<td>6. Do the activities encourage student collaboration?</td>
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<td>7. Do the activities relate to students’ lives?</td>
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<td>8. Are the activities culturally relevant?</td>
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<td>9. Do the activities promote student empowerment?</td>
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<td>10. Do the activities invite student reflection?</td>
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<td>11. Do the activities support prejudice reduction?</td>
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<td>12. Do the activities inspire further social justice action?</td>
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