CULTURALLY RELEVANT PEDAGOGY IN PRACTICE: TEACHERS' CONCEPTIONS OF THEIR WORK AND ITS CHALLENGES

by

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ABSTRACT

The primary aim of this study is to examine how teachers who practice a pedagogy aligned with culturally relevant pedagogy describe their beliefs, practices, and the challenges they encounter in relation to their teaching.

This study adopts a qualitative interview methodology. It relies on semi-structured interviews with ten participants, all practising in Metro Vancouver, British Columbia.

Analysis revealed four key themes that participants discussed in relation to their practice to support culturally diverse students: 1) An inclusive classroom established by building meaningful student-teacher relationships, promoting camaraderie through collaboration, and creating a respectful and safe classroom climate; 2) Expanding conceptions of the curriculum which validate students' cultures, develop critical consciousness, and promote student agency; 3) Development of a community resource team which includes collaboration with students' families and school support workers; 4) Purposeful renewal of educational knowledge by staying connecting with the research community, seeking opportunities for professional development and continuous critical self-reflection. In addition, participants described institutional barriers common to their practice.

DEDICATION

To my mom, the strongest person I know. A genuine agent of change

whose perseverance never ceases to astound and inspire me.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

*The notion of equity as sameness only makes
sense when all students are exactly the same
(Ladson-Billings, 1994, p. 33)*

Educators are increasingly under pressure to practice in ways that value, recognize, and appreciate the cultural diversity of their students. Nonetheless, for some educators, this appreciation often manifests as a "good intentions" approach that is viewed as academically fair and non-discriminatory towards culturally diverse students. To avoid the perception of holding biases, these educators frequently profess "colour blindness" as evidence of their aversion to racism and discrimination. This results in the perpetuation of ideological standpoints such as "I do not see colour" and "I treat everyone equally" or "everyone is the same." While such standpoints are not in and of themselves solely responsible for any gaps in the achievement of culturally diverse students, there is evidence to suggest that harnessing the cultural differences of students can positively influence outcomes related to performance.

Gloria Ladson-Billings (1994) maintains that when claiming *not* to notice student differences, the teacher is unwittingly disregarding one of the most salient features of a student's identity. When teachers fail to account for students' differences in their curricular planning and instruction, it may result in student disinterest and alienation, ultimately manifesting in lower academic achievement

and barriers to social well-being. In light of this, critical questions persist: What, why and how can educators work with culturally diverse children in way that facilitates their success?

Educators concerned with equity study responses to the differences in students' cultural and racial backgrounds. These educators understand that the ways in which the culture of school either converges with or diverges from the culture of the student is a contributing factor to that student's academic and social achievement (Irvine, 1990; Ladson-Billings, 1992, 1995a; Gay, 2000). On the other hand, disregarding the culture and race of students breeds space for disconnection from the school, and ultimately to disengagement with what is being taught (Howard, 2001, 2001b; Irvine & Armento, 2001) resulting in lower academic and social achievement (Irvine, 1990; Ladson-Billings, 1992, 1995a; Gay, 2000). Good intentions alone, apart from accounting for students' cultural identities, can act as an impediment to student success by contributing to inequalities in the educational experience of culturally diverse students.

Decades ago, Pierre Bourdieu (1977) wrote specifically about the mediating role of culture in reproducing social inequalities in society through institutions such as school. He argued that the education system favours majority group children who possess what he termed "cultural capital" that is compatible with those demanded by schools. According to Bourdieu, cultural capital is a fund of knowledge, including patterns of language and overall ways of viewing the world, which individuals accumulate over their lifetime. The cultural capital that is valued in schools depends on who controls power and resources in wider

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society; in Canada, this is middle-class society of White European ancestry. Elaborating on the importance of cultural capital in school success, Bourdieu (1977) contends that the educational system:

> Offers information and training which can be received and acquired only by subjects endowed with the system of predispositions that is the condition for the success of the transmission and of the inculcation of the culture. This consists mainly of linguistic and cultural competence and that relationship of familiarity with culture which can only be produced by family upbringing when it transmits the dominant culture (p. 494).

Bourdieu's views are essential to understanding the importance of attending to culture in schools, and to explaining the power structure that is fortified when the cultural diversity of students is disregarded. It exposes how certain forms of knowledge are privileged and others devalued, depending on whether or not one's fund of knowledge matches with that of the dominant culture. Bourdieu's work suggests that within the classroom, children from dominant cultural backgrounds are more likely to be deemed intellectually capable, while culturally-different students are likely to be deemed *less* capable. This is in part because schools reinforce the cognitive skills which the former already possess leaving the latter at a disadvantage.

Unfortunately, decades later, issues similar to those raised by Bourdieu persist. Lisa Delpit and Herbert Kohl (2006) offer a critique of the "culture of power," that operates at the micro-level of the classroom. They explain that because the culture of power emanates from and reflects the perspectives of the dominant group, navigating that culture is easier for children who share that background. As well, they identify numerous spaces of power, both explicit and

implicit. The formal curriculum, which has a strong Eurocentric emphasis, as an explicit space. Implicit spaces, composed of the hidden curriculum of student and teacher behaviour, include: communicative codes, ways of self-presentation, the school calendar, social and religious celebrations, concerts and festivals, hallway displays, collections in school libraries, Eurocentric values, and tacit acceptance of racism and discrimination (see also, Henry & Tator, 2006).

In the Canadian context, though there is a historical, and ongoing body of research supporting the need to integrate students' cultural backgrounds in to schooling, Carol Schick and Verna St. Denis (2005) write, "Public education lately remains reflective of white, Western or Eurocentric interests" (p. 298). As a result, those students who "...easily fit within the dominant cultural practices of the classroom see the school reflected back to them" (p. 298). Undoubtedly, what is needed is approach to education, which reflects and values the experiences and perspectives of students from cultural minority groups.

When seeking explanations for student disengagement, many educators fail to look to the structural inequality of schooling that scholars such as Delpit, Kohl and Bourdieu speak to. Though there is little evidence to substantiate them, cultural deficit or depravation explanations for student disengagement still prevail staff-room chatter in schools across Canada. These theories maintain that factors originating from students' home environments or cultural backgrounds (such as poor child rearing practices), constrain students' engagement and achievement in school (Irvine, 1990, 2002; Gay 2000). While educators may not be aware of the immobilizing consequences of such theorizing, the damage to

culturally diverse students' self-esteems and perceptions of their identities from the experience resulting from such beliefs, may last a lifetime (Egbo, 2009).

The Situation in Canada

There is compelling evidence that culturally diverse students have a tenuous relationship with schools due to exclusionary educational practices and Eurocentric ideologies that negate their identities and devalue their cultural capital (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Dei, 1992, 1997; Howard, 2001, 2001b). Immigrant and culturally diverse students' experiences in school show that far from providing opportunities for upward mobility, schools routinely exclude children from non-dominant cultural backgrounds. Numerous Canadian studies attest to the failure of the school system in meeting the needs of culturally diverse students. The high drop-out rates among Black students in Ontario is one clear example where research has been helpful. According to George Sefa Dei, et al. (2000) these rates are a result of differential treatment students receive, especially those students who fail to fit the mould of what a student should be according to the standards of the dominant group. A study by Duffy (2003) furthermore paints a disappointing picture of how Canadian schools are failing immigrant and minority students. He found that the integration of English second language (ESL) students into regular classrooms fails to serve their complex language needs. At the same time funding for ESL, and similar programs, is being cut. Duffy additionally found that feelings of discrimination profoundly affect culturally diverse students' self esteem and academic performance resulting in high dropout rates among immigrant secondary school students. Research, as

well, highlights the disturbing plight of Aboriginal students who currently have higher drop-out rates in secondary school, when compared to the general population (Gorman, 1999; Egbo, 2009).

Alongside these sobering statistics, recent immigration patterns reinforce that ethnocultural diversity is a stable reality in Canada. Educators *must* understand, very thoroughly, the relationship among students' cultures and the culture of schools in order to avoid compromising their academic and social achievement. Statistics Canada (2003) reports that while immigrants of European descent continue to make up the largest single group of immigrants to Canada, they now account for less than half (43%) of the total immigrant population. Among immigrants who came to Canada between 1991 and 2001, the largest group came from the People's Republic of China, followed by India, the Philippines, Hong Kong, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, and Taiwan. With these changes in the composition of source countries for recent immigrants, Canada's visible minority population has grown. In 2006, this population accounted for 16.2% of Canada's total population, up from 13.4% in 2001. Notably, the Immigration and Refugee Act (2002) affirmed Canada's dependency on immigrants for its population growth. Presently immigrants constitute one-fifth of Canada's total population. Not surprisingly, there are currently over 200 ethnic groups in Canada.

In British Columbia alone, the 2006 census enumerated over 1 million people who reported as being a visible minority. The province's 1,008,900 visible minorities represented 24.8% of its population, the highest proportion of all

provinces and territories. The vast majority (86.8%) of visible minorities in British Columbia resided in just one census area: metropolitan Vancouver.

The metropolitan area of Vancouver was home to the second highest proportion of visible minorities among all census metropolitan areas. Of Vancouver's 2.1 million residents, 875,300 belonged to a visible minority group in 2006, up 20.6% from 725,700 in 2001. These people accounted for 41.7% of Vancouver's population in 2006, second only to the census metropolitan area of Toronto. Visible minorities made up 36.9% of Vancouver's population in 2001. Approximately seven in ten visible minorities in Vancouver were born outside Canada. In fact, nearly two thirds (62.7%) of all visible minorities who were foreign-born came to Vancouver within the last fifteen years (Statistics Canada, 2006).

Canadian school populations mirror the ethno-cultural diversity that exists in wider society, especially in large urban centres such as Vancouver. Of the 2.2 million immigrants who arrived in Canada from 1991 to 2000, 309 700, or 17%, were school children aged between five and sixteen. Nearly one in five (17%) school-age children living in Vancouver and Toronto had immigrated within the past ten years. In Vancouver, 61% of school-age children who came to Canada in the 1990's spoke a language other than English or French, compared with 50% in Toronto, and 43% in Montréal (Statistics Canada, 2006).

Conducted in the Metro Vancouver region, the 2006 Safe School and Social Responsibility Survey (Hymel, 2008) for secondary students revealed factors indicative of why many culturally diverse students may feel disengaged

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and alienated in the school system. The survey, which had 19,551 participants from eighteen secondary schools, found that students of colour feel more unsafe than their White counterparts. This was consistent across numerous contexts such as school events, travelling to and from school, and in the community. Those groups who felt the most unsafe were African/Caribbean, Aboriginal and Asian. Interpersonal difficulties among peers only accounted for about a third of students' feelings of safety at school. An additional finding concluded that White students feel a greater sense of belonging at school than their culturally diverse peers. Those groups who reported feeling the least welcome in school were African/Caribbean, Aboriginal and Middle Eastern. When asked if adults at their school are accepting of individuals, regardless of race, White students most frequently answered yes. Those groups who disagreed most with this notion were, again, African/Caribbean, Aboriginal, and Middle Eastern. Findings from this survey are indicative of Eurocentric interests within the school environment, as White students consistently reported positive feelings of school, as compared to their culturally diverse peers.

The underachievement of students from some cultural groups has been spotlighted repeatedly, though the situation continues to be prevalent. On the contrary, overachievement, especially among Asian students who are often viewed as "model minorities", has also been highlighted. Being positioned as such, research shows that Asian students who face academic challenges are reluctant to seek help from their teachers. These students forgo assistance as they feel pressured to fit into the model minority stereotype in which they are

deemed intellectually capable and in no need of academic assistance. This is directly related to the high expectations that are extended to Asian youth who are commonly channelled into science courses. Certainly, doing so disregards opportunities for these students to, for example, experience arts based courses which they may indeed excel or have interest in (Found, 1991; Maclear, 1994).

Consequently, it is true that some of the disparity in academic and social achievement across cultural groups is attributable to racism and cultural hegemony in the educational enterprise. Nonetheless, to proclaim this is not sufficient in bringing about the change required to prevent school wide inequalities. Although there are numerous variables that contribute to successful academic and social achievement, the teacher is one of the primary influences often mediating student success (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994). The question then arises: where may educators look to find answers to teaching children in ways that reflect the rich tapestry of their culturally diverse backgrounds? Culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings 1994, 1995; Gay, 2000, Pang 2001; Wlodkowski & Ginsberg, 1995) is a strand of scholarship that investigates this fundamental question.

Purpose of the Study

Culturally relevant pedagogy is one response to the gap between the increasing cultural diversity in schools and the stable homogeneity of teachers and the Eurocentric curriculum. This approach asserts the value of focusing classroom curricula and practice upon the students' cultural frames of reference. It is a pedagogy which recognizes students' differences, validates students'

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cultures, and asserts that upon cultural congruence of classroom practices, students will discover increasing success in school. Nonetheless, this field of research is not without critics.

In this study, I interviewed educators who are committed to meeting the needs of culturally diverse students. By interviewing teachers, I hoped to gain an understanding of how they speak about and describe their practice. In particular, I aimed to gain insights into their philosophical beliefs regarding education and how these viewpoints manifest themselves in their described roles as teachers and their expectations and attitudes towards their culturally diverse students. Importantly, I sought to explore how these teachers exercise agency in their practice, attempting to empower their students of colour by facilitating their success.

In the following chapter, I review the key scholarship and tenets pertaining to culturally relevant pedagogy. I examine its various claims by reviewing studies that present its effectiveness in facilitating the social and academic achievement of culturally diverse students. In chapter 3, I describe the methodological procedures employed in this study. In chapter 4, I present the findings of the research. In chapter 5, I detail my analysis and interpretation of the findings in relation to the scholarship regarding culturally relevant pedagogy. In the final chapter, I offer conclusions of this study, and highlight areas for further research.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A Culturally Relevant Pedagogical Approach

The gap between cultural minority students and the Eurocentric practices of mainstream schooling has prompted many scholars to argue for a more representative and empowering way of teaching. One of these arguments resides in a field of scholarship known as *culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP)*. Within the last three decades, scholars working in this field have developed a theoretical framework for culturally relevant pedagogy, a pedagogy sometimes also referred to as *culturally compatible* (Jordan, 1987), *cultural appropriateness* (Au & Jordan, 1981), *culturally congruent* (Au & Kawakami, 1985, 1994; Mohatt and Erickson, 1981), and *culturally responsive* (Erickson, 1987; Gay, 2000). The principles of culturally relevant pedagogy give both hope and concrete guidance to educators who seek to improve the academic and social achievement of culturally diverse students. It is a theory that postulates that if schools and teaching change to reflect and draw upon students' cultural backgrounds and heritages, student achievement will increase. Although it draws upon an assortment of terms, the literature describing culturally relevant pedagogy and the need to make classrooms more consistent with the cultural orientations of ethnically diverse students is consistent.

Geneva Gay (2000), a noted scholar in this field, defines culturally

relevant pedagogy as "using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of

reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning

encounters more relevant to and effective for them" (p. 29). She adds that this

pedagogy is one that "teaches *to* and *through*" (p. 29) the strengths of culturally

diverse students. Gloria Ladson-Billings, who popularized the term "culturally

relevant teaching" (1992, 1994, 1995a) adds that this pedagogical approach

"empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using

cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes" (p. 18). Valerie Ooka-

Pang refers to these cultural referents as "cultural content" (2001), which

includes elements such as experiences, knowledge, events, values, role models,

perspectives, and issues that arise from the community from which the student

comes. Gay (2000) details six characteristics of culturally responsive pedagogy:

it is validating, comprehensive, multidimensional, empowering, transformative,

and emancipatory, each quality manifesting differently in classroom practice. As I

review the major tenets of culturally relevant pedagogy, I will simultaneously

overview some of the key studies that inform scholarly understanding of its utility

for improving the achievement of cultural minority students via culturally relevant

practices.

CRP is: Validating

The underpinning characteristic of culturally relevant pedagogy is its

"culturally validating and affirming" nature (Gay, 2000, p. 29), which allows space

for teaching practices that consider all students – not just those from privileged backgrounds – as having resources that may be foundational to their learning (Nieto, 2003). These resources include their languages, cultures, and experiences. In a widely cited article, Fordham and Ogbu (1986) point to a phenomenon termed "acting White", where African-American students fear being ostracized by their peers for demonstrating interest in succeeding in mainstream academic and other school-related tasks. In this way, school is perceived as a venue wherein African-American students must conform to dominant Eurocentric school practices in order to be considered successful by their teachers. Nonetheless, academic success for these students does not translate into social acceptance by their peers.

A teacher who practices culturally relevant pedagogy "utilizes students' culture as a vehicle for learning" (Ladson-Billings, 1995a, p. 3), "acknowledg[ing] the legitimacy of the cultural heritages of different ethnic groups, both as legacies that affect students' dispositions, attitudes, and approaches to learning and worthy content to be taught in the formal curriculum" (Gay, 2000, p. 29). Pang (2001) explains that "cultural models in schools can make learning more meaningful because they tap into what children already know about the world and act as important scaffolding" (p. 32). Ultimately, learning becomes increasingly meaningful for students. As well, this approach supports students in developing affirmative attitude regarding their cultural backgrounds (Ladson-Billings, 1995a; Garcia, 1994; Montgomery, 2001).

Research suggests that students are more likely to master new learning when they build upon concepts and ideas with which they are familiar (Gay, 1993, 2000; Wlodkowski & Ginsberg, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1995a)). In Hawaii, Au and Jordan (1981) conducted what is considered to be a seminal study in culturally relevant pedagogy. In this study, teachers of a language arts development program incorporated aspects of students' cultural backgrounds into their reading instruction. By permitting students to use "talk-story", a language interaction style common among Native Hawaiian children, teachers were able to assist students in achieving higher scores on standardized reading tests. When teachers in this study, and in others, are *responsive* (understanding and acting on the cultural influences of their students), culturally diverse students demonstrate higher achievement (Bowers & Flinders, 1990; Moll, 1988; Hernandez, 1995). Au and Jordon found that this "culturally congruent" method of instruction proved effective as previous to its implementation, Hawaiian children did not "recognize ordinary reading lessons as situations which call for the application of a full range of cognitive and linguistic abilities" (p. 151). The use of "talk-story" allowed these students to view reading as social interaction, requiring the full use of skills developed outside the classroom, within their community.

CRP is: Comprehensive

A second fundamental theme emerging from scholarly work pertaining to culturally relevant pedagogy is that it is *comprehensive* (Gay, 2000), meaning it employs a holistic viewpoint addressing the *whole child*. This calls for educators

to attend to minority students' academic and cognitive development as well as to their social, emotional and moral growth (Howard, 2000, 2001; hooks, 1994; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1995a; Gay, 2000). Scholars have written about a link between academic success and social and emotional learning (Elias, Arnold & Hussey, 2003; hooks, 1994). Such educators are committed to helping culturally diverse students connect with their cultural communities, develop a sense of camaraderie and shared responsibility and acquire an ethic of success that permeates all curriculum content and interactions in the classroom (Gay, 2000). In this way, students are expected to internalize the notion that "learning is a communal, reciprocal, interdependent affair, and manifest it habitually in their expressive behaviours" (Gay, 2000, p. 30).

Teaching from a holistic approach by adopting a "we" and "our" philosophy is exemplified in Ladson-Billings' (1994) seminal study of teachers who practice culturally relevant teaching with African-American students in the United States. She found that when students were part of an increasingly collective effort designed to encourage academic and cultural excellence, expectations were clearly expressed, skills taught, and interpersonal relations were exhibited. Furthermore, students were held accountable as part of a larger group, and it was everyone's task to make certain that each individual member of the group was successful. By promoting this community of learners, teachers responded to the students' need for a sense of belonging, honoured their human dignity, and promoted their individual self-concepts. Research shows that the degree to which a school is able to foster community influences students' sense of belonging,

which has been shown to impact at-risk behaviour (dropping-out of school), academic motivation and other positive school related affect (Anderman, 2003, pp. 6-7).

CRP is: Multidimensional

Gay (2000) describes culturally relevant pedagogy as necessarily multidimensional, encompassing numerous factors such as "curriculum content, learning context, classroom climate, student-teacher relationships, instructional techniques, and performance assessments" (p. 31).

Teacher-Student Interaction

In particular, the quality of the relationships teachers establish with their students and the impact of these relationships on student achievement have been examined in detail by scholars in the field of culturally relevant pedagogy (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 1999; Ladson-Billings 1994, 1995a; Villegas & Lucas, 2002; Gay, 1993, 2000). Unfortunately, research suggests that often when teachers attempt to forge relationships with students, they unconsciously favour those students who are similar to them in terms of race, class and values. Subsequently, teachers have low or negative expectations of particular students' intellectual abilities, which can have deleterious effects on student achievement (Good & Brophy, 1994; Mercado, 1993). On the other hand, those teachers who are culturally sensitive, reflect upon their position of power and their own biases

and privileges. From this awareness, teachers consciously work to develop commonalities with all students (Jacobson, 2003).

The significance of student-teacher relationships is illustrated in a New Zealand study (Bishop et al., 2006) called the Te Kōtahitanga project. It focused on how to facilitate the success of Māori students. Teachers of Māori students were required to enrol a program based on what was termed *Culturally Responsive Pedagogy of Relations.* Through this program, many teachers underwent philosophical shifts in terms of their conceptions of learning and teaching. They moved from a cultural-deficit paradigm to one that aligned with the tenets of culturally relevant pedagogy. Interviews with Māori students later revealed teachers' newfound care for their students as culturally-located human beings to be a key factor in supporting the students' success. Findings conclude that incorporating Māori culture and perspectives in lessons, as well as having equitable, caring relationships with students, supported the achievement of both Māori students and their mainstream peers.

Culturally relevant pedagogues feel personally, not simply professionally, invested in their instructional beliefs and practices (Villegas, 1988; Ladson-Billings, 1995a, Sleeter & McLaren, 1995). They attempt to create a caring relationship with all their students. In contrast, often times a teacher who has an assimilationist agenda, positioning herself/himself as an all-knowing authoritarian entity, positions students as passive recipients of knowledge (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Irvine, 1990, 2002; Cummins 1989, 1996). A teacher who instead practices culturally relevant pedagogy shares a fluid and equitably humane relationship

with all students. Consequently, the students learn from the teacher while the teacher learns from the students. This is an attempt on the teacher's part to share power in the classroom, as students' knowledge and values are legitimated through the recognition of their voices in class.

Lee's (2002) ethnographic study of low achieving, culturally diverse, urban high school students identifies three specific structures and practices that contributed to their underachievement. African-American and Latino students contended that two of the three contributing factors to their failure in school were teacher-centered classrooms and a lack of personal teacher-student relationships. Their experiences demonstrated teacher apathy in creating caring relationships. This study further illuminates the importance students place upon the relationships they develop with their teachers.

High Expectations

Beyond having a fluid and caring relationship with students, teachers practicing culturally responsive pedagogy are supportive of and have high expectations for all their students (Ladson-Billings, 1995a; Villegas & Lucas, 2002; Gay, 2000). This is in contrast to those teachers who have an assimilationist agenda and are satisfied with the status quo (meaning those students from dominant backgrounds have privileged knowledge within the school). Basing their assumptions on culturally deficit theories which shift blame to students' cultural heritages, these teachers believe that failure is inevitable for some students, most often those students who are from a cultural communities

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unlike those of the dominant group (Ladson-Billings, 1995a; Wlodkowski & Ginsberg, 1995). Subscribing to categorizations such as race, gender, ethnicity, social class and home language, teachers often modify their expectations of students while disregarding their intellectual or other abilities (Gay, 1993, 2000; Tatum, 1997). Research suggests that in due course a teacher's low expectations may cultivate learned helplessness. This occurs when a student, who feels her or his knowledge and contributions are insignificant and therefore becomes increasingly disengaged in school (Holliday, 1985; Ogbu, 1990). Dei (1997) explains it is therefore not surprising to witness Aboriginal students and students from visible minority groups dropping out of school at higher rates than their White counterparts. He argues that there must be a recognition that "early school leaving is a process – not an event – typically a long process of gradual disengagement" (p. 3), which is greatly influenced by teachers' low expectations and other negative attitudes.

Research suggests that when students are aware that their teachers hold them to high expectations, they strive to meet those expectations. This results in increased academic and social achievement, as well as personal confidence in their abilities (Villegas & Lucas, 2002; Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994). In his study, Tyrone Howard (2000) observed a fourth-grade class, discovering that a teacher's care for students was displayed though numerous behaviours. Howard's observed behaviours include: encouraging students' best efforts, verbally expressing high expectations for performance and making direct statements about how the teacher felt about the students. Howard explains that

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the "students' love and respect for teachers come with teachers' high expectations and with teachers' setting achievable standards for diverse students" (p. 6). He found that students were able to identify teachers' desire for student success.

A Respectful, Safe Climate

Establishing a classroom climate that is respectful and safe and that values students' cultural heritages is often paid great heed (Villegas, 1988; Sleeter & McLaren, 1995; Garcia, 1992; Kleinfeld 1975) in the literature. For some students, the communities in which they are raised differ greatly from the school environment they are required to learn in. This may result in the marginalization of certain students, as the classroom becomes an area where they feel alienated, unsafe and unable to confidently share their opinions (Ladson-Billings, 1995a; Villegas, 1988).

Rachel Minkler (1955) explains that, "the general climate of the classroom is determined, at least in part, by the degree of mutuality of acceptance. Mutual understanding and respect may precede or may follow acceptance" (p. 15). She regards mutual confidence as a necessary part of the classroom. When combined, these aspects support a student's sense of belonging to the group as an essential ingredient for personal and social achievement. Studies have shown a relationship between the quality of school climate and achievement (Anderson, 1982; Haynes et al., 1997). This suggests that mutual respect is an aspect of a

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positive school climate that involves the quality of interactions between the student and the teacher.

Research done by Haynes, Emmons, and Ben-Avie (1997) shows that "according to many students, the climate of the schools they attend is characterized by high levels of distrust and disrespect among and between students and teachers and the sense that students do not care about one another" (Haynes et al., 1997, p. 325). Tatum (2003) describes the responses of her college students when she asked them to share emotions regarding their experiences during their initial years in school. The students articulated words such as anger, confusion, surprise, sadness and embarrassment. They emphasized how unsafe they felt, and their sense that there was little possibility of sharing their thoughts with others in school. The feelings presented by these students highlight why advocates of culturally relevant pedagogy contend that a respectful and safe classroom atmosphere is essential.

Pang (2001) acknowledges the difficulty in attempting to create one environment that is equally congruent to all students, especially when there can be as many as twenty different cultures represented. Nonetheless, advocates of culturally relevant pedagogy continue to see the possibility of creating affirming environments for all students. For instance, those who practice culturally relevant pedagogy pursue instructional strategies that parallel those of the community in which the students have been raised (Pang & B. Grant, 1995; Lipka, 1994). Other teachers use culturally relevant activities and resources to organize and implement instruction (Irvin 2000; Nieto, 2003).

Community Involvement

Culturally relevant teachers work to soften a disconnection many culturally different students feel between their home lives and school. Ladson-Billings (1994) argues that those teachers who practice in a culturally relevant manner have relationships with students that "extend to interactions beyond the classroom and into the community" (p. 55). These teachers help students build bridges between school learning and their communities, by drawing on the expertise of community members, namely the children's parents. Those who practice this pedagogy consciously find ways to facilitate out of school interaction, as they are recognize that parents are crucially important partners in their practice and the education of their child.

Nieto (1996) asserts that regular communication with parents is an important aspect of a child's educational progress. When families share their funds of knowledge with the school community, teachers learn of their students' background knowledge and abilities and how they learn best (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992). In this way, culturally relevant teachers strive to know, as much as possible, about the children they teach in order to facilitate their learning (Villegas & Lucas, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1994). Not only are the connections between home and school strengthened, but appreciating students' cultural knowledge conveys to students that their culture and families have knowledge and experiences that their teachers values and holds to high regard, ultimately influencing the way in which they view their culture.

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A significant body of research has identified parental involvement as an important component of teachers' practices. Primarily, the discussion has focused on the positive relationship between parental involvement and student achievement. When parents are involved in reinforcing what a students learns at school, children achieve higher grades, have better attendance rates, complete more homework, demonstrate positive attitudes and behaviours, graduate at higher rates and have greater involvement in higher education (Henderson & Berla, 1994; Epstein 2001). The research highlighting the benefits of parental involvement suggests that changes in the schools will only begin to take place when relationships of power transform; that is, when the voices of parents and the community are heard and the direction of the school reflects the values of all (Cummins, 1989, 1996).

CRP is: Empowering

Central to culturally relevant pedagogy is the belief that schools should be empowering (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1995a), transforming (Gay, 2000; Banks, 1991) and emancipating (Gay, 2000) culturally diverse students. Paulo Freire's (1970) notion of "conscientization", or the process which invites learners to critically engage with the world and others (as cited in McLauren, 1989, p. 195) is reflected in the tenets of culturally relevant pedagogy. Students in classrooms where educators enact this pedagogy are empowered, as they develop critical thinking skills that allow them to examine dominant social discourses. For instance, these discourses include the formal curriculum which remains

"reflective of white, Western or Eurocentric interests" (Schick & St. Denis, 2005 p. 3). As well, these discourses are present in the existence of the racism that surrounds students with distorted and overwhelmingly negative images of the cultures, histories and possibilities belonging to students of differing cultural communities (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 1999; Tatum 1997, 2000). Ladson-Billings (1995) explains that culturally relevant pedagogical practices aim to support students in "develop[ing] a critical consciousness through which they challenge the status quo of the current social order by critiquing the cultural norms, values and institutions that produce and maintain social inequities" (p. 162). In this way, "culturally relevant teachers view their classrooms as key sites of resistance" (Delpit, 1988, p. 43), as the status quo is critically scrutinize and contested.

Students learn that no single version of truth is total and permanent. One does not have to subscribe to mainstream ways of knowing. In particular, Gordy and Pritchard (1995) assert that textbook influence on students is significant. They maintain that most students believe the authority of textbooks is incontestable and the information they provide is always accurate. The problem with the presumed authority of textbooks is that most of them are written and published by the dominant group, confirming its status and contributions while often sidelining the contributions of cultural minority groups. Culturally relevant teachers work to ensure their students understand and question the often privileged positions of textbook authors and textual information presented as truth, rather than one of many perspectives. They additionally work to

supplement biased textbooks, bringing in the materials and resources that teach of the many contributions of differing cultures.

Rather than depending on information sources such as textbooks, a teacher who practices culturally relevant pedagogy encourages students to co-construct knowledge (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Gay, 2000; Sparks, 1989) and become agents of their own educational experiences. Freire (1970) details two approaches to learning: the banking system and the mining process. The banking system of learning is one wherein teachers dispense information, chiefly in lecture format, which students are expected to memorize. This approach is adamantly discouraged by advocates of culturally relevant teaching. Overwhelming rote memorization of facts or textbook information reinforces the predominance of a particular knowledge, simultaneously impressing upon students the notion that their prior knowledge or conceptions are inconsequential in the classroom. Instead, advocates promote a mining approach wherein teachers provide instructional scaffolding, permitting students to build upon their own experiences, knowledge and skills as a foundation for further inquiry among peers (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 1999; Montgomery, 2001). Teachers who practice culturally relevant pedagogy empower not only students by incorporating their interests and cultural backgrounds (Corson, 1998), but they also empower and transform themselves by lifting the burden of being the class expert. As a result, co-creation of knowledge occurs with students in a learning community where open dialogue and questioning are encouraged (Harding, London, & Safer, 2001).

Dei's (1992) study examined the schooling experiences of Black/African-Canadian students in Toronto high schools to investigate the problem of these students' high rates of disengagement and drop-out. He found that students of ethnic minority groups are generally critical and aware that not all world experiences are represented in classroom discourses. His findings revealed three primary concerns expressed by students: differential treatment according to skin colour, the absence of Black teachers, and the omission of Black culture in school texts and academic discourse. Students in his study made reference to being empowered by a learning process which exercises their cultural knowledge to question society. Student narratives thus moved beyond questions of culture to questions of power. From such studies detailing the reasons behind the disengagement of many Black/African-Canadian students, came the implementation of Afrocentric schools in Toronto. In these schools, an Afrocentric curriculum which offers alternative ways of knowing, informed by the histories and cultural experiences of people of African descent, is implemented in an effort to empower students academically as well as help construct affirmative personal and group cultural identities (Asante, 1992).

It is through critical analysis of the effects of inequalities on different individuals and groups that the transformative nature of culturally relevant pedagogy becomes apparent. Gay (2000) explains that this pedagogy aims for "students [to] become change agents committed to promoting greater equality, justice and power balances among ethnic groups" (p. 34). In this way, students develop the knowledge, skills and values they need to become actively

participatory in shaping their learning and becoming social critics who can make reflective decisions and implement their decisions through effective action. These students practice these values and skills in different community contexts such as the classroom, the school and their neighbourhoods. In this way, developing social consciousness and personal efficacy in students is paramount so that they may be capable to combat racism and other forms of oppression.

The Los Angeles-based Association of Raza Educators is an organization which advocates community change through education. The association rose "as a response to the continued stereotyping and violation of the civil and human rights of the Raza community" or those who "identify with the Chicano/a Latino/a cultural heritage or experience" (The Association of Raza Educators, 2006). With philosophical underpinnings in the work of Freire, these teachers "model for and teach our students to be scholar-activists who excel in the classroom and make a difference in our community" (2006). These educators explain how they work *with* their students to transform oppressive conditions in their community through critically conscious education. By organizing events, rallies and conferences, teachers, students and parents take part in a community effort to bring attention to the need for a culturally relevant K-12 curriculum, increased higher educational opportunities for minorities and the creation of a network of Raza educators strongly committed to an education that is responsive to students' social and economic needs.

The demographic changes in student populations have challenged schools and educators to find ways to facilitate the success of culturally diverse

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students in an attempt to ensure educational equity for all. Culturally relevant teaching is one such strand of scholarship which attempts to create an equitable schooling experience that enables students to pursue academic excellence without abandoning their prior knowledge and experiences. Thus, ways of communicating, conceptions of knowledge, methods of learning and the overall context of the educative process are situated within a framework that is consistent with students' cultural backgrounds.

Responses to Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

CRP: Multicultural "Fluff"

Although there is literature advocating culturally relevant pedagogy and championing its utility in classrooms, it is not without contestation and critique. Scholars such as Diane Ravitch (2000, 2006) and Chester Finn (1999) argue that notions of cultural pluralism have gone too far. While these scholars and their research are based in the United States, much of their work's implications cross borders. Underlying their assertions is a neoliberal, democratic paradigm whereby they claim that the mission of public schools should entail the forging of a national identity that all Americans share. Ravitch (2006) writes:

> This seems to me a great paradox in American public education today. Educators believe that children's self-esteem is firmly linked to a positive relationship to their ancestral culture but not to the culture of the country in which they live and are citizens of and in which they will once day raise a family, earn a living and participate in elections. How strange to teach a student born in this country to be proud of his parents' or grandparents' land of birth but not of his or her own (p. 1).

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Ravitch writes of a form of patriotism which forces people to make a choice between American culture and their cultural roots. The choice is clear to Ravitch who advocates an appreciation of a "common humanity" that "transcends skin color, religion, language, and other accidents of birth" (p. 3). What Ravitch fails to appreciate is that not all students relate to a common American or Canadian identity which derives largely from Eurocentric ideologies. Scholars in the field of culturally relevant pedagogy do not speak of hatred towards the country in which they live. They, in fact, work to empower students so that they may become thoughtful citizens who take action in their communities (Ladson-Billing, 1995; Nieto, 2003). What is significant is that advocates of this pedagogy recognize that characteristics such as culture and language are fundamental to one's identity and worldview. Therefore, "transcending" these "accidents" entails taking a colour-blind approach and negating an important aspect of students' lives which cannot be, essentially, "turned off" depending on their environment.

Ravitch and Finn (1996, 2007) argue that schools should remain true to their historic role by "teach[ing] democratic values and the civic ethics that promote respect for other human beings, without regard for their race or other social origins" (p. 11). By pushing democratic values such as freedom of expression and the right to vote, these scholars argue that all Americans have equal opportunities. They fail to give enough attention to oppressive forces in society, which historically and presently cause particular groups of people to "live a second-class type of citizenship because they are excluded from certain social opportunities and benefits", ensuring that they "do not receive fair institutional

treatment that mainstreams groups take for granted" (Mullaly, 2002, p. 6).

Advocates of culturally relevant pedagogy, rather than simply teach students

blind acceptance of certain values, encourage students to think critically about

the social inequalities embedded in an oversimplified ideology that promotes an

American dream wherein mere effort is the key to success (Nieto, 2003).

Within the literature that critiques theories such as culturally relevant

pedagogy, there is a perpetuation of a binary distinction between academic

achievement and social justice in education (Ravitch, 2000; Kanstoroom & Finn,

1999). These scholars argue that a school's essential purpose is to promote the

intellectual development of every child. Furthermore, they claim that

improvements in public schooling are possible if there is a focus on teaching

knowledge. In the context of teacher education programs, publications by

Chester Finn and his colleagues (e.g., Kanstoroom & Finn, 1999; Finn,

Kanstoroom, & Petrilli, 1999; Finn & Petrilli, 2000) advocate alternate routes into

teaching, with high stakes testing as the primary way to ensure teachers' subject

matter knowledge. In the schools, they place a heavy emphasis upon academic

achievement and order (Farkas & Johnson, 1997). They argue that reported poor

teacher preparation is due to its preoccupation with issues concerning

multiculturalism, equity and social justice, at the expense of academic content

and high standards (Kanstoroom & Finn, 1999). Nonetheless, there is also strong

critique of these scholars' own ideas.

Marilyn Cochran-Smith (2004) argues the case for a "strong focus on

social justice as the necessary complement to an ongoing concern with

academic excellence" (p. 1). She explains that scholars such as Finn fail to pay attention to how questions of equity are inherent in the education system. In her view, in many attacks on teacher education, the commentator presumes to speak for "the public" and for "all students" (Cochran-Smith, 2004). She further explain (2001a), explains that, as we construct outcomes in teacher education, we need to question what it means to teach "all students" well and what it means to adjust teaching practices according to the needs and interests of "all children", especially with a growing immigrant population.

Cochran-Smith (2001a) argues that the presumption that improving our schools is simply a return to an idealized time when American values were shared by all, when the "canon" of western European history and literary works was unchallenged and when academic standards for all students were thorough and culturally neutral (Ravitch, 2000), is exceedingly problematic. Culturally relevant theory critiques the notion of "culturally neutral" and deconstructs assumptions that knowledge is a static commodity, which should be transmitted directly from teachers to students (e.g., Apple, 2004; Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1995a). Proponents of culturally relevant pedagogy argue that some aspects of current teacher assessments, such as those Finn proposes, are not in keeping with what research has shown regarding the strategies, relationships and beliefs of teachers who teach children of colour most effectively (Irvine, 2002).

CRP: Essentialism

A second critique of culturally relevant pedagogy is that CRP *assumes* that members of ethnic groups share core cultural characteristics, ultimately essentializing students of similar cultural communities (Irizarry, 2007; Yon, 2000). An essentialist notion of culture, according to Hall (1990), is defined as "'one people' with stable, unchanging and continuous frames of reference and meaning [...] this 'oneness', underlying all the other, more superficial differences, is the truth, the essence" (p. 223). Hall, however, argues against this essentialized notion explaining that, "We cannot speak for very long, of an exactness, about 'one experience, one identity', without acknowledging its other side – the ruptures and discontinuities" (p. 225). In this way, Hall adds, identity is not based upon a "fixed origin to which we can make some final and absolute return" (p. 226). Assuming all students of one culture share the same perspectives and values is what some argue is a formulaic element of culturally relevant pedagogy. Scholars who are critical of an essentialist notion of culture maintain that individuals cannot be recognized by a laundry list of behaviours. Indeed, by assuming that particular lists reflect cultural groups, teachers may reinforce stereotypes, ultimately instigating more harm than good (Irizarry, 2007).

Barbara Rogoff (2003) advances this discussion by employing the concept of a "fixed social address", based upon categorizations such as race, which are problematically equated with culture (p. 77). Rogoff argues that identity categories often focus on one's ancestral nation, overlooking important

variations, overlaps and subgroups. One is most likely to discern these variations if they know a group personally:

> If one is "Asian American", one is very much aware of the numerous ways in which internal differences are profound and consequential. Thus, Japanese Americans know the important distinctions between the generations and their attitudes toward assimilation in America... Chinese Americans see important differences between Chinese from Taiwan and Hong Kong, Southeast Asia and the Mainland, San Francisco and Walnut Creek, first or second generation, and so on (p. 78).

The concept of "difference" is frequently used in cultural discourse as a way to grapple with the multiplicity within cultural groups (Bhabha 1990, 1994; Yon, 2000). Rutherford (1990) uses "cultural politics of difference" to criticize "subsum[ing] identities into an underlying totality that assumes their ultimately homogenous nature" (p. 10). Rutherford's cultural politics of difference is a critique of essentialism as it "recognizes both the interdependent and relational nature of identities" while disproving the "overdetermination" of identities in reference to cultures (p. 10). Yon (2000) adds that while identities may "invoke notions of sameness, asserting difference stresses discontinuity within the sameness" (p. 17). In this way, individuals within a particular cultural group may follow certain cultural attributes yet assert their independence by displacing those same attributes.

Differences among members of the same group are influenced by fundamental characteristics such as class, gender and sexual orientation. Recognition of the impact these characteristics have on one's identity is often disregarded in the literature concerning culturally relevant pedagogy. An example

of how the intersection of skin colour and social class can determine variation within a cultural group comes from Waters' (1999) research on second-generation Caribbean youth in the United States. Waters maintains that first-generation Caribbean immigrants see Black Americans through the same prejudiced lens as dominant White Americans. Because of this, Caribbean immigrants wish to emphasize a separate ethnic identity to shield themselves from being stigmatized as African-Americans. Second generation Caribbean youth, according to Waters, must make a decision in constructing their identities. Do they adopt the anti-Black identity encouraged by their parents, or do they identify with the Black American communal identity often emphasized in such theories as culturally relevant pedagogy? Social class plays an important role in the complex issue at hand. Waters found that youth from middle class Caribbean families who have more frequent contact with White Americans and perceive more opportunity for social advancement were more likely to self-identify as Caribbean. Those from lower-class backgrounds tended to identify more with Black Americans. These findings illustrate the complexity of identity formation which is based upon the intersection of numerous characteristics. This current study has implications for educators practicing culturally relevant pedagogy. They must understand the plethora of influences on the formation of cultural identity in order to capture its complexity and, therefore, speak to all students.

Homi Bhabha (1990) further elaborates on the convoluted nature of cultural identity and critiques essentialism explaining that every individual has multiple identities and that their identification is "never the affirmation of a pre-

given identity" (1994, p. 64). He contributes to our understanding of culture and identity by providing conceptualizations of *hybridity* and *third space*. For Bhabha, the process of hybridity emerges from the notion that any pureness of culture or identity is disputable. He asserts that, "all forms of cultures are continually in a process of hybridity" (as cited in Rutherford, 1990, p. 211), alluding to the dynamic and complex development of cultural identity. Bhabha (1990) contends that hybridity is a third space, which is intrinsically critical of essentialist perspectives of identity and culture. He argues that the "importance of hybridity is not to be able to trace two original moments from which the third emerges" (cited in Rutherford, 1990, p. 211). Instead, hybridity is the third space, which enables other positions to emerge" (cited in Rutherford, 1990, p. 211). Thus, the third space stimulates new possibility by expanding the potential influences on one's cultural identity. It is a space of new forms of cultural production, blurring the limitations of existing boundaries and calling into question established categorizations of culture. Bhabha's notions have implications for teachers practicing culturally relevant pedagogy. His view recognizes the need to explore the diversity among members of the same group in order to remain open to the ways that culture manifests in different individuals.

Norma Gonzalez (2005) builds on the concept of hybrid identity in her study of Latino youth. She disputes the notion that all members of a particular group share a common view of their own culture. Instead, she advances a view of culture and cultural practices as hybrid funds of knowledge. Increasingly students "draw from an intercultural and hybrid knowledge base, appropriating

multiple cultural systems, as youth culture permeates greater and greater spheres" (p. 38). She acknowledges that, while Latinos may indeed share some commonalities, they are also extremely diverse. Even within a particular Latino ethnic group, individuals have different histories and experiences that shape their perspectives and cultural identities. Consequently, like other groups, Latinos draw from varied, intercultural knowledge bases and create and enact unique hybrid identities. This heterogeneity among Latinos, and even more specifically within all the ethnic groups that fall under that umbrella term, is rarely acknowledged by theories such as culturally relevant pedagogy, yet is important to consider. Solely focusing on potentially oversimplified pan-ethnic connections may result in teachers overlooking other beliefs that are highly valued by students.

Yon (2000) critiques an essentialist view of culture by asserting that culture is instead "elusive" as it is "made from the fragments and mingling of representations" (p. 6). He views identity as a process which is "continuous and incomplete" as well as "constructed and open-ended" (p. 13), ultimately raising questions about "complex relationships that youth form in a context of multiplying lifestyle possibilities" (p. 13). Yon argues that globalization, among other factors, has shaped how culture is manifested and how students construct their identities. Hall (1990) discusses the 'new world' presence which serves as a juncture-point wherein numerous cultures meet. It is this "space where the creolisations and assimilations and syncretisms [are] negotiated" (p. 234). Through processes of

globalization, where traditionally named national identities are in decline, hybrid identities are taking their place (Yon, 2000).

The hybridization of identities at the juncture-point of the 'new world' Hall (1990) refers to is apparent in Yon's ethnographic study of youth negotiating their identities in Maple Heights High School in Toronto, Canada. Yon develops a complex view of identity and culture, attuned to the ambivalent and contradictory processes of everyday life. Marta, a Serbian student who self-identifies as Spanish, typifies the problem with assigning students a "social address" (Rogoff, 2003, p. 77) based on their parents' homeland or skin colour. Marta's identity is informed by her Spanish friends and by technology such as the Internet. She visits Spanish clubs, listens to Spanish music and dresses in a style similar to her Spanish friends. Yon argues that because identity is a dynamic and open-ended process, partial to copious influences, Marta is not limited to a particular identity. Indeed, her situation is further complicated as many of her Spanish peers do not accept her as Spanish and instead view her as a "wannabe". Marta exemplifies the complexity inherent in identity formation. This complexity must be acknowledged by culturally relevant pedagogues in order to prevent a perpetuation of formulaic prescriptions of cultural identity.

Numerous scholars present academic challenges to culturally relevant pedagogy. Some scholars argue it diverts attention from the actual purpose of schools, which should serve to establish a common national identity and promote the intellectual development of students (Ravitch 2006; Kanstoroom & Finn, 1999; Finn & Petrilli, 2000; Farkas & Johnson, 1997). The literature details,

however, that issues of social justice and equity cannot be negated as they complement (rather than conflict with) efforts for academic rigor (Cochran-Smith, 2004). Other challenges accumulate around the problems of an essentialist notion of culture and a simplified view of cultural identity (Hall, 1990; Rogoff, 2003; Bhabha, 1990; Gomez, 2005; Yon, 2000). These scholars argue that cultures are much more heterogeneous and minority students' identities more hybrid than advocates of culturally relevant pedagogy acknowledge. In reality, most minority students and many teachers participate in varying degrees of more than one set of cultural practices and values. The critiques of culturally relevant pedagogy illustrate the key challenges to this approach, which must be acknowledged by both scholars and practitioners so that it may support the achievement of all students.

Conclusion

The literature I reviewed gives the frame that is required to understand culturally relevant pedagogy. In this literature review, theories and studies that argue this pedagogy's effectiveness in theory and practice are explored. As well, the review illustrates the more contested nature of culturally relevant pedagogy, highlighting scholarship that offers critiques of it. The interplay between supporters and detractors can create questions for educators considering its place in their classroom practice.

Is culturally relevant pedagogy effective in supporting student success? The overwhelming evidence supporting the effectiveness of culturally relevant

pedagogy in improving the academic and social achievement of students from minority communities cannot be ignored. In addition to studies which have proven its effectiveness in aiding the success of students from culturally diverse backgrounds, there are studies that show it has bolstered the achievement of students from dominant backgrounds as well. The New Zealand Te Kōtahitanga project is one such study.

Aimed at investigating how to improve the achievement of Māori students, the Te Kōtahitanga project found success in improving the achievement of *all* students. Based upon standardized test scores, findings revealed that in both numeracy and literacy there was significant improvement in achievement scores for both Māori and non-Māori students in the Te Kōtahitanga project. Further analysis of the results revealed that students classified as having the lowest standings made the most significant gains. For both Māori and non-Māori students, the degree of improvement was above the threshold of what is expected from natural maturation during the course of a school year. Findings conclude that incorporating Māori culture and the perspectives of Māori students in lessons not only supported the achievement of the non-dominant group, but also of mainstream students.

Allen and Boykin (1992), Cummins (1989, 1996), Ladson-Billings (1994, 1995a) and others argue that students can benefit from the incorporation of their home cultures into schooling, although they acknowledge it will not eliminate all the disadvantages they face. Contemporary advocates do not claim that theories such as culturally relevant pedagogy will by themselves eliminate all the major

factors that produce exclusion and disadvantage in our educational system. Nonetheless, they claim that they can help in many cases. By speaking to educators committed to facilitating the success of culturally different students, I aimed to explore which aspects of this pedagogy are most aligned to teachers' practices and where this pedagogy fails to place at the forefront key issues in relation to practice and the challenges teachers face.

While there is a movement within teacher education programs to include more critical multicultural education and culturally relevant pedagogy (Villegas & Lucas, 2002), there remains a large segment of the practicing teaching population that is unaware of the philosophy behind the theory. This current study introduces educators to this pedagogy in relation to teachers' descriptions of how they practice. Currently, much of the literature on equitable education practices, and in particular, on culturally relevant pedagogy focuses on the experiences of African-American students (see Ladson-Billings, 1990, 1994; Tate, 1995; Howard, 2000, 2001, 2001b). Given that this study was conducted in a Canadian context, it contributes to the literature by adding the perspectives of educators who are committed to meeting the needs of students from a plethora of cultural heritages. This study is an attempt to capture the dynamic relationship between culturally relevant theories and the innovative classroom practices of experienced teachers, with implications for all classroom teachers who work with students of diverse cultural backgrounds.

My questions were designed to give voice to participants. When interviewing participants, I sought to gain an understanding of how they speak of

their work. In particular, how their described practices mirror tenets of culturally relevant teaching, and how their practices go beyond the literature of this field and the challenges they face in supporting their diverse students. For these reasons, the key research question of this study is:

- How do teachers who practice a pedagogy aligned to culturally relevant pedagogy describe their beliefs, practice and the challenges they encounter in relation to their teaching?

In chapter three, I will detail information on the methodological aspects employed by this study. In particular, I will give information on the process of selection and recruitment of participants, the method used in data collection, the approach used when analyzing data and the attention given to promote the validity of data analysis in seeking to answer the research question.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The primary focus of this study is to examine how educators who are committed to facilitating the success of culturally diverse students describe their practice and the challenges they encounter in relation to their teaching. Ten teachers whose practices align with culturally relevant pedagogy were interviewed. In this chapter, I will begin with a discussion on why a qualitative approach to research was most suitable. Then, I will outline ethical considerations taken to ensure the welfare of participants. I will highlight the procedures and benefits gained from conducting a pilot study. Subsequently, I will describe details of the data collection process and data analysis techniques employed in this study. Finally, I will specify the steps taken to help ensure this research attends to issues of validity.

A Qualitative Approach

Many scholars have written about a qualitative approach to research, yet the literature reveals some difficulty in achieving consensus on its definition. Despite variances, there are some generally agreed upon principles for conducting qualitative research. Creswell (2003) explains that qualitative research is a process of inquiry based on distinct methodological traditions that explore a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, and reports detailed views of informants. Similarly, Denzin and Lincoln (1995) state that qualitative research "consists of a set of

interpretive practices that make the world visible…[through] field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self" (p. 3). A qualitative approach is one that examines and describes the social world. In order to do this, Creswell (2003) explains that the human actor is best understood through capturing social life as people live it, through their experiences and their interpretation of those experiences.

The descriptive nature of my research question (*how do educators who are committed to culturally diverse students describe their practices and its challenges*) led me to utilize a qualitative approach. I was interested in descriptively capturing how the participants, or human actors, understood their experiences and interpreted their practice (Cresswell, 1998). I sought a description of participants' beliefs and experiences in order to understand how they understand their practice, their role as educators, and their expectations and attitudes towards students of cultural minorities. By conducting in-depth interviews, I described the world of each individual participant teacher, her or his beliefs, and how these beliefs influence her/his practice.

Maxwell (2005) further identifies numerous intellectual and practical goals for which qualitative studies are especially suited. According to Maxwell, qualitative studies are especially important when the researcher seeks to understand the meanings participants assign to situations, experiences and actions in which they are engaged. I sought to explore the meanings behind participants' described practices and teaching philosophies. Maxwell adds that a qualitative design is most useful when the researcher wants to understand "the

particular context within which the participants act, and the influence this context has on their actions" (p. 22). An appreciation of context, for this study, is vital as the school community and the classroom in which a teacher works, indubitably influences a teacher's agency in regard to her/his practice. Finally, this study fits a qualitative approach because of its "inherent openness and flexibility" (Maxwell, 2005, p. 22). By way of this study's flexibility, I was able to, for instance, modify my interview protocol to best address my research question and allow through discussion of what participants deemed important issues.

Ethical Considerations

Neuman (1994) and Rubin (1983) state that ethical research is concerned with the acquisition and dissemination of "trustworthy information in ways that cause no harm to those being studied" (as cited in Rubin and Rubin, 1994, p. 93). Because this study delves into the social lives of human beings, I was required to ensure the rights, privacy, and welfare of the people that form the focus of the study (Berg, 2004). In order to commence the study, the Simon Fraser University (SFU) Board of Ethics reviewed the procedures of this research. This study was deemed "minimal risk", as defined by the university as that which occurs when "potential subjects can reasonably be expected to regard the probability and magnitude of possible harms incurred by participating in the research to be no greater than those encountered by the subject in those aspects of his or her everyday life" (SFU, 2008, Policy 6.1a). In addition to SFU's ethical authorization to conduct the study, I employed a number of measures to ensure the safety, comfort and privacy of all participants.

Informed consent

Denzin and Lincoln (2000) explain that informed consent permits the participants to have the right to be informed that they are being researched as well as the right to be informed of the nature of the research. Rubin and Rubin (1994) define informed consent as a statement that describes the purposes of the research, provides background on the researcher, specifies the degree of confidentiality of the findings, details the voluntary nature of the study, and indicates that the findings of the research will be shared only if the participant so wishes. All participants in this study were required to sign an informed consent form which outlines the above stipulations as presented by Rubin and Rubin (see Appendix B). In this study, the informed consent given to participants additionally detailed how they may withdraw from the study at any point, and may refuse to answer any questions. As well, the consent form confirmed that participants in no way represent the school or school district in which they are employed. Rather, their opinions are representative of their personal teaching philosophies. At the onset of each interview, I read aloud key statements in the consent form while the participant followed along. Subsequently, each participant was asked if she or he had pertinent questions or concerns. If there was no apprehension, each participant and I signed a copy of the consent form, one allotted to the participant and one for myself.

Confidentiality

According to Denzin and Lincoln (1995) "Conventional practice and ethical codes espouse the view that various safeguards should protect the privacy and

identity of research subjects" (p. 92). They further suggest that "The major safeguard against the invasion of privacy is the assurance of confidentially" an issue which was addressed in this study (p. 92). In order to ensure the identities of participants were confidential, actual names do not appear during the process of collecting, analyzing, and writing of the data and final report – this thesis. Instead, pseudonyms were used to identify all participants, both in the transcriptions of interviews and the final report. As well, all information pertaining to the schools, school districts or other organizations in which participants were employed was kept undisclosed. What is more, safeguards were taken to ensure all collected data, including recoded tapes of interviews and signed consent forms, were secured in a locked location to prevent tampering.

Pilot Study

During the fall of 2007, I conducted a pilot study with two teachers from the lower mainland of British Columbia. Both teachers self-identified as educators who practice culturally sensitive pedagogy. The first participant, S'ekoia, was referred by a professor who teaches in the area of equitable education. She was identified as a resource within the educational community who possesses extensive knowledge in the area of critical multicultural and anti-racist education. At the time of the study, S'ekoia worked as a multiculturalism and anti-racism consultant for a school board in Metro Vancouver. Prior to working as a consultant, S'ekoia taught in elementary schools for a seven year period. Tania, the second participant in the pilot, was also an elementary school teacher with ten years of teaching experience. I interviewed both teachers for approximately

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60 minutes each. S'ekoia's interview was conducted in person and was tape recorded. The interview was later transcribed. Tania's interview was conducted via telephone. During this interview, notes were taken on key ideas which emerged throughout the conversation.

According to Janesick (1994) "the time invested in a pilot study can be valuable and enriching for later phases in the study" (p. 213). This held true for the current study. Conducting pilot research prepared me to focus on areas which I discovered and were previously ambiguous. From the results of these interviews, I was able to identify several topics which assisted me in articulating questions for my subsequent research (see Appendix C). In particular, I established that issues concerning the curriculum, teacher-student relationships and student empowerment were fundamental to both teachers' pedagogical practices, ultimately shaping the questions I asked during subsequent interviews. Additionally, from these preliminary interviews, I learned that capturing a description of teaching practices is a great deal more effective through in-person interviews, rather than over the telephone. As well, I discovered that audio recording an interview results in greater accuracy of participants' descriptions than solely presuming note taking during an interview. When writing the final report of the pilot study, I was able to refer to exact quotes from S'eiko's interview. For Tania's interview, I was forced to piece together fragmented phrases, amplifying the degree to which I misinterpreted her perspectives. In light of both these issues, all subsequent interviews were done in-person, and were audio recorded.

Because the two participants in this pilot study were re-interviewed for this current study, it "Allowed me to develop and solidify rapport...as well as establish effective communication patterns" (Janesick, 1994, p. 213). Not only did I become comfortable interviewing these two teachers, as a novice researcher, conducting these two preliminary interviews gave me a "feel" for interview etiquette desired for subsequent interviews.

Data Collection

Recruitment and Selection of Participants

The sampling method I employed for this study is referred to as non-probability sampling (Maxwell, 2005). Non-probability sampling can be useful when the aim of the study is primarily explorative, qualitative and descriptive. The most common non-probability sampling strategy is purposive in which the sampling problem is usually approached with a specific plan in mind. That is, purposive sampling is "based on the assumption that one wants to discover, understand, gain insight; therefore, one needs to select a sample from which one can learn the most" (Merriam, 1988, p. 48). Creswell (2002) adds that in qualitative research, the selection of research subjects requires selecting those individuals who provide information in understanding and examining a phenomenon, as these are the participants who are "information rich" (Patton, 1990, p. 169) and may provide insights which others cannot. As it was my purpose to understand how teachers committed to supporting culturally diverse students speak of their beliefs and practices, only those teachers who were

nominated by their colleagues as such, as well as those who self-identified with this form of commitment, were selected for participation.

Among the varied approaches comprising purposive sampling, this study used snowball sampling to identify participants who met the study's criteria. Spreen (1992) explains that snowball sampling seeks to benefit from social networks of identified respondents to provide a researcher with an ever-expanding set of potential contacts. I initially established contact with professors who teach in intersecting areas of equity and education (including sociological, anti-racist, feminist, and other anti-oppressive approaches to education). These professors nominated teachers from the lower mainland who they deem practice in a manner aligned with critical multicultural, anti-racist education as well as culturally relevant pedagogy. Three teachers' names emerged. I emailed these teachers an introductory letter entailing a description of the study, its purposes and rationale, as well as participation requirements (see Appendix A). All three teachers agreed to participate, and were subsequently interviewed for the study. One of these three teachers further nominated numerous teachers whom she worked with and whom she believed practice in a culturally sensitive manner. These teachers were emailed the same introductory letter given to the original three teachers, outlining the nature of the study and participation requirements. Of these teachers, five responded and all five were interviewed for the study. From these five teachers, one further nominated three teachers who she thought were suitable candidates for the study. I emailed the introductory letter to these three teachers. From these three, one teacher replied and was subsequently

interviewed. From that teacher came the nomination for the final participant in the study. That teacher was emailed the introductory letter, and upon agreement, was interviewed.

In order to qualify to participate in the study there was a set criterion which each participant met. Each nominated teacher was emailed a list of tenets associated with culturally relevant pedagogy. These tenets were generated from the literature written by key scholars in the field of culturally relevant pedagogy, Gloria Ladson Billings (1994) and Geneva Gay (2000). The following were the tenets included in the emails to teachers:

Teachers who practice culturally responsive teaching
(adapted from Ladson-Billings, 1994; Gay, 2000):

1. *Teach subjects from diverse perspectives, not just one that is Eurocentric.*
2. *Build bridges between academic learning and student's prior understanding, knowledge, native language and values.*
3. *Learn from and about their students' culture, language, and learning styles to make instruction more meaningful and relevant to their student's lives.*
4. *Have an "inclusive curriculum" meaning the voices and perspectives of students are included.*
5. *Hold students to high standards and have high expectations for all students.*
6. *Ensure classroom practices are challenging, cooperative, and hands-on, with less emphasis on rote memorization and lecture formats.*
7. *Encourage a "community of learners" or encourage students to learn collaboratively.*
8. *Motivate students to become active participants in their learning.*
9. *Attempt to create a climate of caring, respect, and the valuing of student's cultures in the classroom.*

10. *Validate students' cultural identity in classroom practices and instructional materials.*

11. *Encourage students to think critically about knowledge, social issues, the media etc.*

12. *Encourage students to be aware of discriminatory structures in society and struggle against them.*

13. *Have a relationship with students that is fluid or humanely equitable rather than fixed and hierarchical.*

14. *Demonstrate a connectedness with all students.*

15. *Educate students about the diversity of the world around them.*

In order to qualify to participate in the study, participants had to agree that they follow a *majority* of the above tenets. The term majority was purposefully kept flexible in interpretation. It was under participant discretion as to what a majority entails and whether or not participants see themselves as educators whose practices reflect these tenets. For this study, then, all participants agreed that their practices align with a majority of the tenets. The tenets were ordered numerically for organizational purposes only.

Participants' Profile

When planning, I sought as much variety as possible in terms of participants' experiences within the field of education. The participants represent five elementary and five secondary school teachers from the lower mainland. By ensuring that I did not denote the extent of teaching experience participants required to qualify, this study includes educators with varying degrees of experience, though primarily from mid to late careers. Moreover, though all

participants had at some point worked as classroom teachers, three participants in the study had stepped into other noteworthy education positions, namely working with pre-service and in-service teachers in universities, school districts and distinguished provincial organizations. The wide-ranging work experience participants brought to the study is valuable as it provided varied experiences and insights into teaching practices that serve culturally diverse students.

In addition to various teaching experiences, I aimed to recruit participants from differing cultural communities. This was not achieved to the degree I anticipated, as a majority of the participants identified as White of Anglo-Saxon heritage. As well, though I hoped for a relatively equal gender balance among participants, merely one of the participants was male, and nine others female. Both of these factors indeed mirror that research which states that the majority of the teaching population in North America remains White, middle class and female (Davis, 2005). Details of demographic data on the ten participants are presented in Table 1.

Table 1:   Participant Demographic Data (10 participants)

Participant pseudonym:	Currently teaching/ has taught:	Years of experience in education:	Self-description of cultural heritage:
Anne	Secondary ESL: primarily refugees	20 yrs. as a classroom teacher	Prairie Canadian
Anya	Grades 2-4; resource; ESL	25 yrs. as a classroom teacher	Hungarian
Clark	Secondary social studies and English	34 yrs: 10 yrs. as a classroom teacher; 24 yrs. in a provincial organization; teacher education	White, North-American privilege; Irish background
Joanna	Social studies 8, 10, 11; comparative civilizations 12; English	21 yrs. as a classroom teacher	Irish, English; raised in rural Cree community
Lauren	Kindergarten	12 yrs. as a classroom teacher	Canadian "mutt"
Mariah	Grades 4-7	11 yrs. as a classroom teacher	German-Dutch
Nina	Spanish; French; psychology 8-12	10 yrs. as a classroom teacher	East Indian: Punjabi
S'ekoia	Grades 4-7	7 yrs. as a classroom teacher; 3 yrs. as an anti-racism consultant	Ethnicity Chinese, Nationality Canadian
Tania	Grades 3-6	10 yrs. as a classroom teacher	Mixed race: South African Black and South African White
Zoya	Grades K-5, 7, 8	22 yrs: 15 yrs. as a classroom teacher; an anti-racism consultant; positions in provincial organizations	Chinese: third generation

Interviewing

As the primary method of data collection, I conducted interviews with ten

teachers from various public school districts across the lower mainland. Berg

(2004) contends, "Interviewing may be defined simply as a conversation with a

purpose. Specifically, the purpose is to gather information" (p. 75). I assumed a semi-structured approach with open-ended questions for all interviews. Such an interviewing approach is guided by key questions or issues, but allows the researcher freedom to change wording and order of questions during the interview (Maxwell, 2005). Additionally, this interview format allows for the flexibility to pursue particular issues in greater depth. This was often the case with participants who delved into detailed discussions of topics that were of utmost interest to them. Though I had predetermined questions and issues to explore, participants were keen to speak about their perspectives and experiences. Participants' willingness to share simultaneously allowed me to gather information, increase understanding and establish rapport. The flexibility permitted of this approach to interviewing fulfilled the emergent quality of this research.

Each participant selected a time, date and location that worked best for them to complete an individual interview. All of the interviews were conducted between April and May 2008. Before commencing interviews, I reviewed the informed consent form (see Appendix B) with each participant so that she or he had a clear understanding of the nature of her/his participation in the study. Participants were asked to select a pseudonym which would be used in the final report of the research. All participants were formally interviewed once, for between forty-five minutes to an hour (see Appendix C for interview guide). All interviews were audio-recorded with permission from the participants as "recording enables increased accuracy in data collection, permits the researcher

to be more attentive and allows for a more interactive experience" (Patton, 1987,

p. 137). All audio-recordings were later transcribed verbatim by myself.

Subsequently, participants were emailed a copy of their interview transcript and

were asked to respond back with additions, deletions and/or other clarifications.

An Interpretive, Feminist Approach

My approach to interviewing followed one that is aligned with Rubin &

Rubin's (1994) model of qualitative interviewing which they describe as

borrowing generously from an interpretive philosophy and feminist interviewing

techniques. Interpretive social researchers prefer to let ideas emerge from the

interviews, rather than categorize answers before the interview, according to

academic literature. During each one of my interviews, I supplied teachers with a

copy of the list of culturally response teaching tenets (see Appendix D). From the

list, I invited teachers to select three tenets which they consider most

representative of their teaching, and one tenet they consider to be most

challenging to implement in their practice. Though these tenets were chosen and

adapted beforehand from the academic literature, during interviews, they

essentially served as prompts for further discussion. As discussion instigators,

the prompts allowed participants to address issues pertinent to their teaching

practices, illustrating the emergent nature of this study. Four key themes

emerged from the interviews. These themes both were consistent to and straying

from what is at the forefront of scholarship regarding culturally relevant

pedagogy.

In addition to aligning myself with the interpretive philosophical underpinnings of Rubin & Rubin's interviewing model, my interviewing techniques borrow from feminist scholars. As taken from feminist theorists, Rubin & Rubin (1994) explicate that it is of the utmost importance "the interviewer should not dominate the interview relationship" (p. 38). I assumed each interviewee is a "partner rather than an object of research" (p. 10) in an attempt to ensure an equitable relationship between myself and the participant. By doing do so, the interview became a "congenial and cooperative experience" (p. 11) wherein both myself and the interviewee decided upon particular issues to explore and further elaborate upon. During several interviews, it was, in fact, an interviewee who questioned me about my teaching experiences, practice and beliefs, making for an equitable exchange of ideas. This is in contrast to a traditional view of interviewing wherein the researcher is assumed to have the greatest authority and knowledge, and therefore, questions the subject, not vice versa.

Another key element which drew me to the feminist nature of Rubin and Rubin's (1994) qualitative interview model is their assertion that "interviewers cannot be completely neutral" and researchers must "consider their own beliefs, needs and interests as they work out questions and try to understand answers" (p. 38). Indeed, I am aware of my biases and the ways in which they intersect with the research I conduct. For instance, this intersection is undoubtedly apparent in the fifteen culturally relevant teaching tenets I adapted from the literature (see Appendix D). These tenets were given much importance as potential participants referred to them in order to ascertain their eligibility for the

study. As well, during the interviews, participants were again required to refer to the tenets to prompt discussion on their educational beliefs and practices. When compiling the list of tenets, I was conscious of being drawn to those concepts I deemed most significant and central to culturally relevant pedagogy. My opinions do not necessarily reflect the views of all, including the participants. This substantiates the emergent quality of this research. Participants discussed topics that went beyond the tenets which I had identified as most significant by including on them the list.

Fieldnotes

In addition to audio-recording conversations with participants, I took field notes during each interview. A data analysis log was used to record all field notes (see Appendix C). Field notes are a hybrid of research ideas, research observations and general thoughts (Maxwell, 2005). My field notes assisted me for the duration of and subsequent to each interview. During each interview, I recorded key phrases which participants emphasized and those which aroused my interest or I required further clarification on. I addressed the phrases I recorded during later parts of the interviews for further elaboration. As well, my fieldnotes were utilized after the interviews, chiefly during data analysis, when they served to provide mental stimulation to help recall peripheral aspects of what was said during the interviews. The data analysis log was based upon issues I intended to explore, on the relevant literature, and on themes that emerged from my pilot study. The log listed probing questions, a majority of

which were either re-worded or simply not utilized as interviewees focused their discussions upon topics that were most prevalent to their practice.

Data Analysis

According to Denzin and Lincoln (1994) "Qualitative research is endlessly creative and interpretive. The researcher does not just leave the field with mountains of empirical materials and then easily write up his or her findings" (p. 15). During the process of and subsequent to collecting data, the researcher must make sense of what has been gathered. This "making sense" of collected data is what is referred to as the process of data analysis. As was the case in this study, Creswell (2002) explains that analyzing qualitative research is continual, emergent, and often conducted simultaneously with data collection. Embracing this notion, I frequently reflected upon the data whilst collecting it. By way of continual and consistent reflection, I was able to decide when a sufficient amount data was collected and analyzed to make valid claims about findings and identify avenues for further research (Druchman, 2005). To continuously immerse myself in the data, I personally transcribed all interviews becoming exceedingly familiar with the material. I was thus able to begin initial analysis almost immediately.

As Emerson et al., (1995) suggest, the initial phase I took when analyzing the data was reading and re-reading the interview transcripts and field notes (as cited in Maxwell, 2005). Listening to the audio recordings of each interview before transcribing, as well as the actual process of transcribing interviews and rearranging my field notes additionally acted as opportunities for analysis. As recommended by Maxwell (2005), during the process of reading transcriptions

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and listening to audio recordings, I wrote memos on details I saw and heard

develop in the data. Miles and Huberman (1994) explain that memos are an

essential technique for data analysis (as cited in Maxwell, 2005) as they not only

capture one's analytic thinking, but also "facilitate such thinking, stimulating

analytic insights" (Maxwell, 2005, p. 96). Writing memos assisted my efforts in

formulating initial categorizations which I considered in further depth during later

phases of the data analysis process.

The central categorization strategy for qualitative research is referred to as

coding. As Janesick (2000) explains, coding occurs when the "qualitative

researcher uses inductive analysis, which means that categories, themes and

patterns come from the data." (p. 215). Each interview transcript was analyzed

separately and then comparatively to identify common themes and unique

experiences. Specifically, the data analysis process was based on the three

types of coding suggested by Neuman (1997): open coding, where the initial data

is reduced and major themes are identified; axial coding, where the focus is on

identifying connections between themes; and selective coding, where specific

examples are drawn out of the data and elaborations on the central themes

already identified are completed. The codes or themes that have been identified

in this current study are a result of a line-by-line analysis, with each sentence

given careful consideration. In this way, a comprehensive interpretation of the

data emerged. Once I concluded this process, I compared central themes with

those in the literature pertaining to culturally relevant pedagogy, as suggested by

Berg (2004).

Attending to Validity

Researchers argue that some qualitative research studies are superior than others; they frequently use the term validity to refer to this difference. Validity is typically used when referring to research that is plausible, credible, trustworthy, and, therefore, defensible (Maxwell, 2005). Scholars argue for the need of generalizability in a study to ensure some measure of validity. Stake (2005) uses the term "naturalistic generalization" to refer to the process of generalizing based on similarity. That is, the study may be generalized to other people, settings, and times to the degree that they are similar to the people, settings, and times in the original study. In order to assist readers of a research report to generalize, qualitative researchers must certainly provide information such as details on participants, how participants were recruited and qualified for the study, the methods of data collection, and data analysis techniques (Johnson, 1997) all of which are outlined in this thesis. Maxwell (2005) views validity in terms of threats, or ways in which the researcher may be incorrect, leaving room for alternative explanations. Keeping this in mind, to ensure a degree of validity I have highlighted the strategies used to identify and minimilise threats in this study.

Respondent Variation

Janesick (2003) explains that "The researcher needs to find a way to allow for the participants to review that material in one way or another" (p. 69). Often referred to as "member checks" (Maxwell, 2005) respondent variation is "systematically soliciting feedback about your data and conclusions from the

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people you are studying" (p. 111). Maxwell (2005) maintains that respondent variation is the foremost approach to prevent a misinterpretation of the meanings behind participants' comments. As well, it is a vital method through which the researcher can identify her or his biases and misunderstandings of participants' responses. I employed formal member checking in this study by emailing each participant a verbatim transcription of our interview. In the email, I asked each participant to add, delete or clarify what was written within the transcription to ensure I fairly represented participants' articulations. All ten participants responded by emailing me a transcription of their particular interview with changes including comments and further insights into what they described during the interviews. In addition to responding to me via email, three participants phoned me in order to elaborate upon issues or detail classroom examples which they felt they did not do justice to during the formal interview. Importantly, employing respondent variation in this study supplemented its feminist orientations and collaborative nature. It brought to the research an additional means of valuing the voices and concerns of participants.

Peer Debriefing

Peer debriefing refers to the "process of exposing oneself to a disinterested peer in a manner paralleling analytical sessions and for the purpose of exploring aspects of the inquiry that might otherwise remain only implicit within the inquirer's mind" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 308). In this study, I debriefed with a graduate student in a faculty of education who has taken coursework in the

area of culturally relevant pedagogy. Over the course of the study, our dialogue centred upon the research design, data collection, and data analysis procedures.

There is some contention in the literature regarding the effectiveness of utilizing peer debriefing as a strategy for ascertaining validity. In particular, intra-rater validity, an approach in which a researcher uses a second investigator to read and code a transcript, is critiqued. Morse (1994) claims that "...expecting another investigator to have the same insight from a limited data base is unrealistic (p. 231)." I recognize that it is unlikely a second party would have as much insight into the research as myself as I solely worked to collect, analyze and reflect upon the data. Nevertheless, having analytical, probing debriefings were valuable as they helped me realize how my biases and assumptions were informing the research I conducted. As well, debriefing the research provided me an opportunity to test and defend emergent themes by examining their reasonability with a second party not as immersed in the research as myself, though knowledgeable of the literature on culturally relevant pedagogy.

Reflexivity

Making a decision to work qualitatively means the researcher places herself or himself within the research. This closeness is value-laden as it is not possible to separate the values and biases of the researcher from the research. It thus requires the researcher to develop a self awareness or what Cresswell (1998) terms reflexivity. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) describe this process as "Conscious experimenting of the self as both inquirer and respondent, as teacher and learner, as the coming to know the self through the process of research

itself" (p. 183). Throughout the process of this study, from participant recruitment to data analysis, I have attempted to remain neutral and let the perspectives of the participants speak for themselves. However, I realize the impossibility of remaining outside of one's subject matter while conducting research. Reflexivity has urged me to explore the ways in which my involvement with this study, my own values, experiences, interests, beliefs, and wider aims in life, have shaped the research. Though I have greatly influenced the results of this research, it is imperative to note that the process of conducting this study has had a profound personal impact. This process has given me the opportunity to reflect on the social groundings of my beliefs and how they bear upon my own pedagogical practices as an educator.

Summary

This chapter explains the rationale for using qualitative interview methodology, describes the participants, the details of data collection and analysis, and the standpoint taken in the methodological approach I chose. In the following two chapters, I will present the major themes to emerge as findings from the interviews, and describe how they relate to the literature pertaining to culturally relevant pedagogy.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

In this chapter, I present information regarding the participants and discuss the four themes that emerged from the interviews conducted with them. The four themes highlight how participants described meeting the needs of culturally diverse students. Within these four broad themes, specific *dimensions* are identified and described:

- The first theme is *creating an inclusive classroom.* Three dimensions of inclusiveness surfaced: building meaningful teacher and student relationships, implementing a form of structured collaborative learning and creating a safe and respectful classroom atmosphere.

- The second theme is the notion of *expanding conceptions of curriculum.* The four dimensions regarding this theme are: the curriculum and assessment practices as either flexible or constraining, validating students' cultures through the curriculum, developing students' critical awareness and empowering students to be active in their communities.

- The third theme is working to *develop a community resource network.* Two dimensions were emphasized: interaction with students' families and collaboration with support workers.

- The final theme is an *active renewal of educational knowledge on the part of the participants.* This theme has two dimensions: a pursuit of educational scholarship through involvement with the research community and attending professional development opportunities.

Theme 1: An Inclusive Classroom

Participants emphasized the importance of creating an inclusive classroom in which all students feel appreciated and welcome. Three dimensions of this theme emerged. The first dimension, which all ten of the participants emphasized, is building meaningful teacher and student interactions which participants ensued as a means to learn about their students and foster in them a sense of belonging in the class. The second emergent dimension, which eight of the ten participants valued, is putting into practice collaborative learning as a means to advance a "team" sentiment as well as to promote academic and social success. All eight participants agreed that implementing collaborative learning is challenging, necessitating a structured approach. The final dimension, identified by six of the ten participants, is the importance of having a safe and respectful classroom atmosphere wherein students feel esteemed, permitting them to learn and interact in meaningful ways.

Dimension 1: Building Meaningful Teacher-Student Interaction

All ten participants described the substance they place upon building connections with their students. Participants offered examples which exemplify how they connect with their students. For instance, Mariah described how she connects with students by learning about them. At the onset of the school year, she does this by asking students to complete a questionnaire detailing their hobbies, educational goals and learning styles. Mariah also highlighted a lesson in which students create a piece of art, lending insight into their identities. Anya highlighted connections she forged with students by informally speaking to them

on manners regarding their out of class interests and activities. She described an example of attending a student's out of school Sri Lankan dance concert. Anya explained, how her students "are excited to come tell me things every morning, and I love to listen" (personal communication, April 11, 2008).

Other participants specifically described connections they forged with students through culture. Tania's example is one that typifies the importance participants placed upon connecting with students based on their cultural background. She stated that school should address the whole child, which encompasses the emotional, physical and intellectual, among others aspects. To this end, she explained, "Caring, respect and value, those are key words and those are what I strive for in my relationships with all my students" (personal communication, April 17, 2008), in an attempt to ensure her students develop a "positive sense of belonging and positive sense of identity" which, for Tania, entails "valuing their experiences, what they bring to the classroom." Tania added that the whole child must be addressed "first before other learning can happen". She gave an example of an Aboriginal student with whom she connected through recognizing his culture:

> He rarely said anything the first two months of school and I
> would try to engage him, not having much success. He didn't
> write much in his journal either. He had difficulty writing so it
> was hard to get any information from him, but he had written a
> sentence that he was going up north to his home town for about
> a week. When he came back I asked him about it.

Tania explained that the interest she placed in his culture positively impacted her relationship with him:

> As soon as I asked him about it his eyes lit up. He was so happy that I remembered that he had gone, that I cared enough to ask him. Because I valued the time he spent with his family, he made a really big deal about it. He could tell I was interested about the time he spends with his family and what he did there... [For the remainder of the year], he wasn't afraid to tell me about himself and his culture. He was a different kid just from that simple conversation. I was able to get him to write about it and have conversations about the time he was away with his family.

Tania further described how through "developing that relationship, other learning was able to take place" lending her student a sense of confidence in other aspects of his learning. She concluded by describing her role as one that is "more of a facilitator, I'm not standing at the front of the room telling them what I know". In this way, she stated how she consciously works to interact with her students, rather than acting as a non-approachable entity, dispensing meaningless information.

Lauren also discussed the need to appreciate the "social, emotional, physical and all the rest of the human being" (personal communication, April 10, 2008), as the "school system is so focused on the intellectual development, overvaluing academics". She added, "You cannot ignore that when you get a report card, language and math takes up three quarters of the paper and then one quarter of the paper is for the rest". For Lauren, establishing relationships

with students *is* valuing the social and emotional. Lauren's example illustrates a mode of connection which is more relevant to a student's family culture rather than her or his country of origin. She emphasized the importance in forgoing a mistake many teachers make when generalizing the experiences of all students with similar cultural heritages. She said:

> You have to be so careful because you can't generalize all experiences. Just because someone is from the same culture doesn't mean that their family culture is the same. Family cultures can be quite different within a cultural group.

Lauren explained how a teacher must work learn about each student individually, rather than make judgments based upon the student's cultural community:

> You have to have an open book. When there is difficulty you cannot make quick judgments. You have to take that as a sign that you need to get to know them better, you need to listen, watch and observe more, rather than quickly decide pretty much anything. You can really cause harm, as teachers have a powerful role in students' lives and misunderstanding can be hurtful.

S'ekoia discussed how she places great importance on the social development of children. She provided an example of how she developed a relationship with a mixed ancestry female student who had a difficult time bonding with girls in the class:

> When you are making relationships it goes back to finding out what their passions are and knowing how to connect to that

child. I think the biggest impact I've had was with a student who was of mixed ancestry, part Chinese, she was a consistent bully in our class. She basically pushed people away, ostracized herself. She dealt with thing by hanging out with boys, so she didn't have many female friends (personal communication, April 29, 2008).

S'ekoia explained how she connected with the student through her gender, rather than her culture, as she realized the impact it was having on her identity:

I started up a girls group where I had asked her to be involved. I know that she didn't want to. That spoke volumes to the relationship we were developing. The girls group was a venue to discuss qualities of a good friend because she wasn't demonstrating those qualities. Doing a lot of group activities like dialoguing.

S'ekoia described how her student's behaviour changed. She made numerous friends from her time in the girls club, giving her a sense of belonging in the class.

Clearly, for the teachers who participated in this study, building relationships with students is of the utmost importance. Zoya's comment sums up this principle as she explained, "If you don't have a good relationship with kids, it doesn't matter how good you know your curriculum, it doesn't matter how good you are with those strategies. If you don't have a connection with the kids, nothing else matters" (personal communication, May 7, 2008).

Dimension 2: The Value and Challenge of Cooperative Learning

Eight of the ten participants spoke of the value of collaborative learning both as a means to support student interaction as well as to promote academic and social success. An advantage participants highlighted is that collaborative learning allows students to develop social skills as they learn to support one another. Nina stated, "Two heads are always better than one. You can pick up on other strengths. You can help on areas in which you are not strong" (personal communication, April 11, 2008). Anya also discussed how collaborative learning is a vital way in which students learn to assist one another. She provided an example of her primary students: "By talking with each other" collaborative work allows "the more advanced kids [to] provide modelling of good language and sentence structure to the others" (personal communication, April 11, 2008).

The value of cooperative learning in forming social skills resurfaced in conversation with Anne who teaches English language learners often arriving from rural communities with small populations. She explained that collaborative learning is an exceptional forum in which her students may practice collaborative vocabulary required in their relations outside of school. She explicated the value of "learning the language of appreciation, learning the language of disagreement and actually teaching them expressions and rehearsing in non-emotional situations with their peers, so that when a situation occurs they can do something constructive with it" (personal communication, April 30, 2008).

Furthermore, participants described collaborative learning as an foremost approach used to teach students to strive for excellence as a team, rather than

individually in a competitive manner. Nonetheless, this hope for promoting a team effort is realistically rather challenging, as described by participants. Because of this, participants described the implementation of a structured approach to collaborative learning. Structure is established to guide students in their effort to work together, support one another and learn collectively. Participants described how they must consistently remind students of the *team* aspect of collaborative learning. In order to ensure students work collectively for the benefit of one another and themselves, participants provided examples of ways in which they structure collaborative learning activities to ensure all students are responsible for learning. Clark explained:

> Where there is clearly mutual responsibly, you stand together or you fall together, it's a learning environment that has a structure within so that one student can't do all the work and have all the others copy and get credit for it. They have to do something together or it won't work. Mutual responsibility is the biggest factor (personal communication, April 23, 2008).

The necessity of structure for meaningful collaboration reappeared in S'ekoia's comments. Structure, for S'ekoia, involves giving each student within a group a specific role so that all students are accountable for an aspect of learning. She used the example of literature circles:

> There is the vocabulary enricher looking for definitions in that chapter that you read together. There are passage pickers so picking a passage that spoke to them and describing why. The artful artistic sketches an image of something that spoke to them. So, each student comes to the table with a task that they

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were working on individually, but they bring it together to discuss and hash it out with members of their group (personal communication, April 29, 2008).

S'ekoia explained that the learning which ensues though her literature circles is a reflection of students taking ownership of their learning as she merely becomes "a fly on the wall". Taking ownership of one's learning is an aspect of collaborative learning which reappeared in interviews with other participants. S'ekoia explained that by the end of the year, collaborative learning becomes a "platform to take issues and talk about what is important in your life, or what is on the news right now. So, what started as short, contrived discussions become long courageous conversations". In this way, learning befalls a process in which students are actively engaged, relating the literature they read with personal experiences most pertinent to them.

Nonetheless, S'ekoia concluded that though dialogue is incredible to observe, "it takes a lot of work to get students to that place". This work is an issue participants were not hesitant to discuss. For instance, Zoya maintained that teachers must set a foundation for students, teaching them how to work in a cooperative situation. She explained that teachers "have to do things leading up to it. You really have to have a foundation with kids, you have to teach them how to listen, teach them about roles within a group" (personal communication, May 7, 2008).

Other challenges that participants detailed went beyond instilling in students the benefits of working as a team. Though Clark described himself as a

"champion" (personal communication, April 23, 2008) for collaborative learning,

he stated it is "difficult to do" as "the school system isn't all that accommodating

for collaborative learning". Tania also commented on the difficulty of

implementing collaborative learning. She explained that "It's a challenge with a

big class of thirty or thirty-two kids in class. It's hard to have the physical space"

(personal communication, April 17, 2008).

Interviews with participants certainly reveal the importance they place

upon collaborative learning. Through this form of learning, students develop

social skills and learn to support one another while working as a team, all the

while taking ownership of their learning. However, participants described the

ways in which this learning strategy is challenging to implement.

Dimension 3: A Respectful, Safe Classroom Climate

For six of the ten participants, creating a classroom environment which is

safe and respectful for all students arose as foundational to building relationships

and participating in meaningful learning opportunities. For four of the ten

participants, establishing conventions early in the year is a key way in which this

classroom atmosphere is cemented.

As Joanna clarified her perspectives on the purpose of school; she added

that it is of the utmost importance for the teacher to "create an environment that

is safe" (personal communication, April 30, 2008) so that students may seize the

opportunity to raise questions and not feel degraded by their peers or teacher.

Mariah also highlighted the importance of making school an enjoyable

experience, which for her entails a safe and stimulating classroom for students. She detailed the significance of "trying to make school experiences as rich as possible so that students have a good feeling of school, not that it is some dreaded horrible institution that they despise" (personal communication, May 9, 2008).

Anya additionally discussed the significance of a respectful classroom, explaining that establishing this atmosphere is vital as it demonstrates "that you value everybody's thoughts and ideas" (personal communication, April 11, 2008). In particular, Anya focused on ensuring students do not feel disrespected based on academic challenges they encounter. She explained that students must gain an understanding "that you are not superior because you are more intellectual or more academically ahead. You are all valuable people". She detailed how this class atmosphere is one which "you try really hard to create in September" as it is imperative for students to "know your routines" and what is expected of them in terms of considerate behaviour. This is required, Anya explained, to achieve a "cohesive class feeling" so that students may "like coming to class, they feel like it is their little class and they get excited about stuff".

The importance of establishing a safe and respectful classroom environment reappeared in S'ekoia's comments. Like other participants, S'ekoia detailed the value of maintaining a particular classroom climate in order for meaningful learning to take place. She presented an example of class dialoguing about students' personal experiences, which, she stated, there must be a "strong foundation for", this being a "safe and caring classroom climate" (personal

communication, April 29, 2008). This, she added, "takes a lot of work starting

from the beginning of the school year". S'ekoia explained that in her class, an

atmosphere of respect is established during class meetings which take place at

the onset of the school year. These meetings are a forum through which students

are informed about the expectations of behaviour in class. S'ekoia explicated

how she uses the concept of *community* to address why and how respect is

integral to all relationships. She said:

> At class meetings at the beginning of the year, we talk about
> what is community. So, who is part of our wider community?
> We narrow it down to the class, what does class community
> look like? Who is involved? Out of that come expectations of
> behaviour. Establishing norms and expectations around how
> we should behave in the classroom.

A safe classroom atmosphere re-emerged in conversation with Tania, who

also stated the importance of establishing this at the start of the school year.

Tania described this classroom environment as a tone. She said:

> A climate of respect and valuing I think is important because
> there is definitely a tone that is set right at the beginning of the
> year. It's that tone that is part of everything we do in the
> classroom and as a teacher in your relationship with the kids.
> You can feel it as soon as you walk into a classroom or school,
> the kids and parents can pick up on it. It sets a foundation, that
> feeling (personal communication, April 17, 2008).

Collaborative class discussion, similar to that which S'ekoia described, appeared in Tania's account of how the tone of her class is determined. She explained:

> I think, in September, collaboratively, you talk about a code of conduct. Every school has one and most of the kids are familiar with it. I use that as a base and then together come up with a code of conduct for the classroom. You talk about it with the kids and decide on a code of conduct together.

Tania clarified her zero tolerance policy for disrespect:

> Really nipping things in the bud, if you see things that are not a part of what you want in the climate of the classroom, you nip it in the bud right away so all the kids know there is zero tolerance for it, that this is a classroom of respect.

It is apparent that for participants in this study, establishing a safe classroom climate in which all students feel comfortable and secure is of the utmost importance. This atmosphere is so essential that participants detailed how they establish it at the beginning of the school, and work to ensure its ideals are held up for the continuation of the year.

In sum: An emergent theme from interviews with participants is the creation of an inclusive classroom in which students feel valued, safe and welcome. Three dimensions of this theme surfaced: building meaningful teacher and student interactions, implementing collaborative learning to advance students' social skills and establishing a safe and respectful classroom atmosphere. Additionally, an inclusive classroom, by way of the curriculum, was

indeed also a great source of conservation with participants, as illustrated in the second theme.

Theme 2: Expanding Conceptions of Curriculum

Participants described ways in which they move beyond the governmentally mandated curriculum. This movement beyond manifested itself in four dimensions. The first is a view of the curriculum and assessment practices as either flexible or constraining. Six of the ten participants referred to the curriculum as flexible while four described the curriculum and assessment practices as constraining. A second dimension, arising in dialogue with all ten participants, is utilizing the curriculum as a means to validate students' cultures. In particular, participants spoke of integrating students' cultural heritages in authentic ways, forgoing a "touristy" approach. A third dimension, which seven of the ten interviewees referred to, is the importance of instilling, in students, a sense of critical awareness. Regarding this dimension, three of the seven participants addressed critically analyzing textbooks. Three others spoke of employing literature as a "jump-off" to discussion of social issues. A final dimension identified by five of the ten participants is the challenge of encouraging students to move beyond the classroom and curriculum to become active in their communities.

Dimension 1: The Curriculum and Assessment as Flexible or Constraining

Participants were not hesitant to express their opinions regarding the curriculum. Their views of the curriculum and its learning objectives and

assessment practices may be summarized as either flexible or constraining to their teaching practices. Six of the ten participants, all elementary school teachers, described the curriculum as easily adaptable to student interests, if the teacher is so willing to take initiative.

S'ekoia's comments illustrate the flexibility six of the participants expressed regarding the curriculum. She explained that the onus is on teachers as "learning outcomes are quite vague and for people to say it's too difficult, or it's too structured, are not giving it enough of a chance to be able to weave in what they want to do" (personal communication, April 29, 2008). The concept of teacher initiative reappeared in Anya's comments when addressing Eurocentricity in the curriculum. Anya explained, "Different languages and literature and parents' expectations are all a part of our school. The curriculum allows for bringing these in. It's up to us" (personal communication, April 11, 2008).

Mariah, as well, addressed the flexibly of learning outcomes and the role of teacher initiative. She explained that one may "take a learning objective and design a lesson around it, or you could take a lesson and go find the learning objective that matches it" (personal communication, May 9, 2008), the latter being "far more my style". Mariah further described developing relevant lesson plans for her students as her "creative outlet". She explained, "If I have to teach something different, I look at the curriculum, but I don't base all my lessons on it". Mariah clarified how she refuses to follow the governmentally mandated

curriculum "because it takes my job away from me. It doesn't let me come up with ideas for how I would like to have the learning done".

Though there was discussion among participants regarding teacher initiative through which the formal curriculum may be accommodating, four participants, who teach or have taught at the secondary level, discussed how teacher agency does little in the way of influencing an ultimately constraining curriculum and assessment practices.

For instance, when Clark discussed the purpose of school, he spoke at length about the emphasis placed upon literacy and numeracy, which is "very much to the exclusion of social aspects of learning" (personal communication, April 23, 2008), namely "social consciousness, social justice, and social responsibility". He added that within the school curriculum and assessment practices, "There remains an emphasis on content that traps a lot of teachers. The effect of more emphasis on measurable objectives has an impact on the degree to which content is churned out". As a result, Clark explained, "aspects of learning which are more difficult to measure, in the classic sense, tend to get left by the roadside, such as critical thinking".

Aggravation pertaining to assessment practices, in particular, reappeared in Joanna's interview. She detailed how courses with governmentally regulated exams leave little opportunity for class dialogue, instead they confine her to lecture format, mirroring questions on an exam:

> The provincial exams, you just have to get through. I don't like it
> when I have to stand up there and do the talking head thing. It's

gone from the richness of dialogue and sharing. Now I'm talking about format of an exam. You answer the question, you have to memorize (personal communication, April 30, 2008).

Joanna explained that conducting large scale research projects is simply not possible in a class with a provincial exam component. She said:

> The spontaneity…something comes out of a dialogue…some of my class projects would not have happened if I had a provincial exam. I just couldn't risk not covering everything that was on the exam.

Zoya also addressed the content-heavy nature of the curriculum, adding that she finds it difficult to make lessons relevant to student interests. She explained:

> There is angst over how much curriculum there is. I try to balance the outcomes of the ministry to what students are interested in. I try to put them together so they can take ownership over the curriculum (personal communication, May 7, 2008).

Zoya detailed a specific example of why she feels teachers in elementary and secondary schools often feel obliged to teach according to the curriculum and standardized exams. She said:

> Grade 10 math is a gatekeeper. If we don't teach kids according to the curriculum in elementary school, by the time they get to high school they're going to sink. We have not done those students any favours. There is pressure to have them learn certain things because I know that if they don't get grade 10 math, it closes the doors for their dreams and for jobs.

Curriculum was a topic of pronounced discussion among all participants. They felt the curriculum and assessment practices to be both flexible, if the teacher so takes initiative, or constraining, oftentimes no matter the degree of teacher agency.

Dimension 2: Validating Students' Cultures through Curriculum

A dimension which surfaced in interviews with all ten participants is the integration of students' cultural perspectives in the curriculum. This is done as a way to validate culturally diverse students, helping instil in them a positive sense of cultural identity. Five participants expressed their dismay concerning the "touristy" approach to multiculturalism. They acknowledged this approach may be valuable simply as an entry point to further cultural integration into mainstream curriculum.

Beyond a "Touristy" Approach

Joanna explored an observation she made of teachers who "have often trained through a very colonial, imperialistic curriculum presentation" (personal communication, April 30, 2008) and as a result, often teach in a manner that "has the potential to become very canned. Here are the handouts, here's the colouring, without the richness". Discussion of moving beyond a "touristy" approach appeared in comments made by Clark. He explained that as a teacher he "always wondered about that jump" (personal communication, April 23, 2008) from a "dining and dance" approach to one that authentically integrates students' cultures.

An example provided by Zoya further highlights the importance participants placed upon integrating diverse perspectives, beyond a superficial approach. When teaching about religions, she explained, "I have students research about the significance of Diwali or Ramadan, so not just the fun, food and frolic parts of multiculturalism, but also the other aspects that you can integrate so that students see themselves, their ethnicity as well as who they are, everyday in the curriculum" (personal communication, May 7, 2008). Participants' comments illustrate the importance they place upon ensuring students see themselves in the curriculum in a substantive way, rather than as tokens of their cultural communities.

A Positive Sense of Cultural Identity

For participants, validating students' cultural backgrounds by integrating their perspectives and voices is a key aspect of their practice. Participants spoke of instilling a positive cultural identity in students. Lauren explained, "If there is only one child from a culture, then it is even more important to bring in that culture. If there are three or four of them from the same culture, at least they see their own reflections around them" (personal communication, April 10, 2008). All ten participants highlighted lesson plans and activities through which they hope to accomplish this end.

For instance, Tania explained that her role is one that assists in "Develop[ing] a positive sense of belonging and positive sense of identity" (personal communication, April 17, 2008). For Tania, "valuing students'

experiences, and what they bring to the classroom" entails the use of classroom materials through which "students see themselves reflected". Tania elaborated:

> Crayola now sells crayons that have all the colours of skin. Remember how they used to have that one peachy colour? So, I go out of my way to buy those crayons. I also have a package of skin tone paper. So, if they are cutting out people there are shades of brown and beige. I think it's great to have those in the class, it validates and you don't always have that peach colour person.

The topic of cultural validation and positive identity reappeared in Anne's comments. In her class of English language learners, Anne described her attempts to validate her students' home languages while simultaneously encouraging them to speak English. She explained, "It's really hard with beginner students, to have them understand that you are just getting them to speak more English, that you are not disparaging their own language" (personal communication, April 30, 2008). She offered an example of some of her colleagues, also English language teachers, who belittle their students' mother tongues:

> Fining students in any way if they are to use their own language in their classroom. I know classrooms where that is happening and that just makes the hair on my neck stand up, so retrograde.

Anne explained how teachers who fall short of substantively reflecting on their practice and insult students' languages in such a manner, fail to understand "how what you teach impacts students".

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Another example of cultural validation through the curriculum is Clark's inquiry-based lesson he entitled "How Good Were the Good Old Days?" He explained: .

> They were to interview the oldest person they knew. The kids had to come up with some questions that would allow them to determine how good these times were. Things like, for example, what kind of health care did you have? (personal communication, April 23, 2008).

He detailed that many of his students of Chinese background, had parents who had emigrated from China at the onset of the Cultural Revolution. He discovered that most of his students knew little about their parents' childhoods. The lesson, then, gave them insight into their culture and their parents' lives in China. Clark explained:

> What the kids were able to do was find some verification and value in a cultural background that they didn't actually know anything about. That inquiry gave value to their personal experiences and their cultural experiences.

Clearly, all participants pay particular attention to instilling in students a sense of cultural validation by extending the mandated curriculum. Ensuring that students' cultural heritages are authentically integrated in everyday lesson plans is central to participants' beliefs and practices.

Dimension 3: Developing Critical Consciousness

A dimension that consistently reappeared in interviews with seven of the participants is the precedence placed upon teaching students to be critically

conscious. Four participants explained that integrating critical thinking skills in the curriculum may be challenging, though they continue to persevere. In terms of particular strategies employed to teach students to think critically, four participants described critically analyzing classroom textbooks. Three participants addressed an effective strategy of using literature as a "jump off" to critically viewing social issues.

S'ekoia explained that school is a "venue for engaging students to be critical thinkers" (personal communication, April 29, 2008), because "if students are not able to view knowledge and practices in a critical way, they are not able to make informed decisions and make change in the future".

Clark's comments are also reflective of participants' affirmation of critical understanding. He stated:

> Getting kids to be critically reflective and analyze their own attitudes and the reasons for their own attitudes, is a gateway to social consciousness and social justice. My thinking is that this is where teaching has to start. You have to find ways of getting students to be critical reflectors, to dispassionately analyze their beliefs and their reasons for it (personal communication, April 23, 2008).

Clark highlighted a lesson plan in which students gain a critical understanding of Canada's point system immigration policy:

> Students created an immigration policy to Canada that would be fair. You had to attach two criteria to it: how would you feel if you had to go through the process? And how would this work if every country did the same? That's how they had to decide

whether their immigration policy was fair. They had to come up with ten criteria for immigrating to Canada.

Clark highlighted examples of famous Canadian immigrants who, according to the current Canadian immigration policy, likely would not have been permitted to immigrate. He said:

> Wayne Gretzky's family and John A. McDonald's father would not get into Canada because they didn't have high enough levels of education or they didn't bring an income base. Those are the two driving forces of Canadian immigration that keep a whole lot of people from immigrating.

He outlined what he hoped students gained through the lesson explaining, "Canada's immigration policy is not serving the country well because these people who, in the past were, for example, stone masons, would not get into the country now because of the point system". Clark explained how this lesson was "as a teaching experience, one that I was fairly satisfied with because students came out of it having a more enlightened experience of what immigration should be about".

Questioning Textbooks

Four participants spoke specifically about critical awareness in reference to classroom textbooks. Emphasis on the importance of critical thinking skills and an understanding of multiple perspectives reappeared when Joanna illuminated her philosophy of school which is "to plant seeds of inquiry. To give them a lens, make them aware that they are looking through only one lens, that every person has a different lens" (personal communication, April 30, 2008). Joanna provided

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a particular example of a grade ten social studies lesson plan in which she highlighted the significance of considering multiple perspectives by comparing and contrasting differing accounts of history in social studies textbooks. Regarding the gold rush in Western Canada and the prospectors who came to stake claims, Joanna asked her students, "How do you think these people ate?" She gave her students textbooks edited by Keith Carlson and written by the Sto:lo people of British Columbia. Joanna explained what she did next:

> We read the textbook and started dialogue. The reality is that the Sto:lo people feed them. I wrote Xwelitem on the board, and asked them if they knew what it means. I told them it means hungry people, and we are still called that today because we are still taking. So, I asked them where is this history in our textbook?

Joanna's lesson illuminated, for students, differing perspectives on the same historical event.

Tania's comments are, indeed, also reflective of the weight participants placed upon critical awareness and the challenges of bringing about this awareness in class. In particular, Tania addressed the difficulty of viewing perspectives which are often contrary to conceptions deep-seated in students' minds. She explained, "You really have to work at deconstructing all those ingrained layers" (personal communication, April 17, 2008). Nonetheless, Tania stated that critical understanding is essential as it empowers students to question literature and authority figures who are frequently presented and perceived as unquestionable:

Critical thinking empowers them because they can question the media and their teacher. I think a light goes on because they don't have to believe what's in the textbooks or the teacher, they can think on their own.

She provided an example of bringing about critical awareness with her elementary students by way of questioning textbooks and dialoguing with students:

If we are looking at a textbook that is an older edition, I'll say to the kids, open the first page and find the date that this first book was printed. Who wrote this book? What do you think their background is? The authors of this book were all men and White, are they going to tell other parts of the story?

Indubitably, participants feel that critical thinking skills are of the utmost importance. They make space in their curriculum to ensure these skills are given high priority. Questioning sources of authority, such as textbooks, is clearly one way in which participants teach students about multiple perspectives.

Literature as a Jump Off

Three participants addressed the use of literature as an effective means to bring about critical discussion of social issues. For instance, Zoya described how she addresses issues concerning oppression by incorporating literature in her lessons with elementary school students. She provided an example of a particular children's book called "The Boy Who Wouldn't Speak". She explained the book is about a "boy whose neighbours are giants and want to get rid of his family. He doesn't say anything but eventually he speaks up. So, it's a book

about anti-discrimination and how to speak up" (personal communication, May 7, 2008). Zoya highlighted how rich discussion regarding discriminatory incidents came about:

> I would read the book out loud and we would talk about the character and about issues regarding how to speak out for somebody who doesn't have a voice. Also, who are some people who don't have a voice, when might that happen?

Zoya added that literature is a meaningful and straightforward method to address social issues:

> I try to bring in different types of literature, it speaks to kids. I think it's easy for most teachers just to jump. It's meaningful, no matter what, kids like story books. They are good for older kids, too. If you teach the message you are asking them to infer, find main ideas, use specific details.

Mariah also provided a specific example of using literature as a means to encourage critical thought. She explained that she "chooses novels that deal with issues in equity and oppression and issues the students might want to learn more about" (personal communication, May 9, 2008), such as "Underground to Canada" and "The Breadwinner", both of which she extended into class research projects. As a specific example, Mariah spoke of a poem called "Like Lilly Like Wilson" by Taylor Mali. Focusing on homophobia and human rights, she explained how through critical dialogue, her students gained an appreciation of the poems message:

They loved it immediately. Some of them didn't understand it on the first read. After we started talking, some of the students said that it was about the prejudices that we carry, and that when we can't find a defence for them they become solidified (personal communication, April 17, 2008).

Participants' descriptions of using literature to "jump off" to discussions and lessons pertaining to social issues are illustrative of a highly favoured and successful strategy. On the whole, participants' comments reflect how they extend the existing curriculum to incorporate lessons based on critical thinking.

Dimension 4: Empowerment Outside "the Box"

Reappearing in five interviews is the challenge participants reiterated they face in encouraging students to befall activism in their communities. These participants addressed the difficulty they encounter in moving beyond instilling a sense of critical awareness in their students, to a point at which students utilize their knowledge to contest injustices around them.

S'ekoia, for instance, explained that school should empower students to make change in their communities. School is an arena for students to discover "how they can contribute in society. Looking critically at aspects of society and how they can make change so they are represented fairly" (personal communication, April 29, 2008). S'ekoia, however, addressed a reality which makes it difficult for students to take action. She provided an example, speaking particularly about the school community and dejection by teachers, and by the larger institution of school, making any plausible attempt at change difficult. She

spoke specifically about students challenging a Eurocentric curriculum or other domineering traditions:

> You could have them be aware of discriminatory structures, but along with awareness comes responsibility for action and this is where I think it becomes debilitating for students. They might be aware it's happening in the school system, but how many teachers are culturally sensitive? How can they approach those teachers and tell them their voice isn't being heard? It's a difficult conversation to have with a teacher.

Discussion regarding the challenge of encouraging students to empower themselves by taking action reappeared in comments made by Clark, who advocates a community that is "inclusive and literate to social change driven by notions of social justice" (personal communication, April 23, 2008). During his time as a teacher, he explained that he had little opportunity to empower students by giving rise to student activism as it is "difficult getting kids out of the classroom". Though there are teachers who attempt to do so, principally at an international plane, he described how the quality of these experiences vary greatly:

> International concerns related to global education vary in terms of their quality. They range from being vaguely disguised tourism to a genuine involvement in community development. I'm careful not to criticize teachers who take students to the Philippines to build playgrounds, but at the same time I try to find ways of asking questions of: What else could you be doing there? What would have a longer term lasting effect in a positive way on the people living there?

In Joanna's discussion, the importance placed upon student empowerment via community activism resurfaced. As the community relations representative of her school, she elaborated upon the significance she places in attempting to move her student beyond the confines of the classroom. She explained, "I like to take them outside the textbook and outside of this box. To allow them to experience learning in real life situations, give them an opportunity to see how what they learn at school applies" (personal communication, April 30, 2008). She detailed her presumed approach when searching for opportunities to push students to the forefront so they may instigate change:

> As community relations representative for the school, what I like
> to do is see opportunities for the students in the community and
> make it happen for them. I'm always at meetings somewhere in
> the community, and I'll see something and tell the students
> about it, encourage them, so they can join.

Though Joanna presses for student activism, she addressed the bona fide constraints she faces in attempting to do so. In terms of assessment practices, she simply stated, "You can't do it with provincial exams". Joanna spoke of student activism via the school as being greatly dependant upon the administration and school district as it "really depends on their definition of progressiveness". Under her current administration, her position as community relations representative was discontinued, therefore, limiting her role whereby she connects students with the community. Nonetheless, through the diligence of students and parents alike, her position was reinstated and she was rehired.

A central theme appearing in interviews is expanding conceptions of the governmentally mandated curriculum. Participants discussed the curriculum in terms of both its flexibility as well as its constraining nature. Ultimately, they detailed how it may indeed be flexible if the teacher takes initiative, while other times initiative is simply not sufficient. Participants described expanding notions of the curriculum by speaking of integrating students' cultural heritages and instilling a sense of critical consciousness. Finally, participants identified the challenge of encouraging students to be active in their communities, in substantive ways.

Theme 3: Development of a Community Resource Network

A third theme to emerge in interviews is the purposeful interaction and collaboration with community members to assist participants in facilitating student success. Two dimensions of this theme emerged: interaction with students' families and collaboration with support or resource workers. Six participants described communication with students' families as a central method employed to gain understanding of a student's dispositions and cultural background. Four participants described the importance they place upon collaborating with support workers as a means to reach both students and parents, especially those who are English language learners.

Dimension 1: Collaboration with Families

The purposeful interaction and involvement of students' family members in school was a key topic of discussion among participants. Six participants

explained that cooperation with family members is a vital approach to informing

their practices. The notion of interacting with family members was not prompted

in the provided tenets (see Appendix D), perhaps alluding to its significance in

participants' practice. Nonetheless, all six participants spoke of collaboration with

family members as a challenge.

Lauren explained, "There is the individual, the family and the community

and it takes a village to raise a child, and the school is the village" (personal

communication, April 10, 2008). In this way, the school is necessarily associated

to a child and her or his family. Anne's comments also highlight the centrality of

involving family members in a child's education. She explained that for students

who are from a culture that has a strong group identity, familial connections are

essential as students "get their cues from the group" (personal communication,

April 30, 2008). Therefore, meaningful interaction among the teacher and family

members, rather than a stark disconnection between school and family, may

allow the student to feel increasingly comfortable and welcome at school.

Anya's comments, as well, reflect participants' beliefs as she stated, "the

family needs to feel part of the school community as much as the kids do"

(personal communication, April 11, 2008). Anya elaborated on the involvement of

extended family members in her school. She explained, "In some Chinese

cultures the grandparents are very involved. They come to school when the

parents are at work, bringing a hot lunch everyday". She described how fortunate

she is to work in a school where family members are given the physical space to

join the school community. She described, "We have these nice chairs in the

hallway, so, now they have this nice community time. When they give their food to their grandchild they can sit in the hallway and have a nice chat".

A key rationale behind the purposeful collaboration with family members is that it is an avenue in which teachers can gain further understanding of students' behaviours and dispositions. Participants detailed how the family may be used as a resource to inform the teacher. Lauren stated, "The family knows the child, and the apple never falls that far from the tree" (personal communication, April 10, 2008). She explained, "How they function in their family, the relationships they have with their family, all come into the classroom and are acted out amongst all the students and with the teacher". Lauren stated that failing to take the time to understand the source of a child's behaviour often results in negative attitudes toward the child. She said:

> If you don't have that understanding, if you take a student's
> behaviour personally, you get nowhere. If there is an issue with
> a child, as soon as you meet the family, you understand how
> certain issues come about. Without that understanding you
> can't address the issue in a respectful way.

Conversely, Lauren added, by familiarizing oneself with a student's family, "you get to troubleshoot if there is an issue, or you get to learn things that support the kid. They can give you information that is helpful to you". Tania's comments mirror Lauren's as she finds it exceedingly helpful to collaborate with family members when a child is experiencing difficulty. She explained:

> Whenever there had been concerns about students, or you
> want them to do better, sit down and have a meeting with the

parents and the child. You get a lot of insight into what is

happening with the family. It had always been helpful for me to

bring the parents in (personal communication, April 17, 2008).

Challenges of Interacting with Family

Limited opportunity for interaction with parents is a fundamental challenge

six participants identified. Nina explained how there is little room given to include

parents in their child's education. Like Nina, participants highlighted how parent-

teacher meetings, which typically take place no more than twice a year, is the

only time they are allotted and encouraged to speak with parents. Nonetheless,

participants spoke of the importance of connecting with parents and why they

continue to find space to do so. For instance, Zoya explained, "It's harder work,

but it's always much more rewarding once you have broken through. Let's work

together to help your child have more success at school" (personal

communication, May 7, 2008).

Anya highlighted the way in which she purposefully makes room to

interact with parents, though there is often little time and language barriers. She

said:

> They're in a rush often, picking up their kids. What I enjoy is
> being out on playground duty because that gives me a chance
> to say hello and a few words when they [family members] come
> by at lunch or after school. Some of the family is going to
> school to learn English, and it's fun to have chats with them and
> encourage them (personal communication, April 11, 2008).

Lauren additionally elaborated upon the approach she assumes to create space which allows for communication with family: "inviting them every single morning from nine o'clock until nine twenty in our community meeting time" (personal communication, April 10, 2008). As the case with other participants, she appreciates that "often the parents are working" therefore "the grandparents that are looking after them or their aunties usually come".

Another challenge, one that is perhaps most proliferate in a cultural pluralistic milieu, was detailed by Nina. She revealed the challenge faced by her colleagues in attempting to position themselves and parents in a way that allows them to work together on equal ground. She detailed a power dynamic between teachers and parents, wherein teachers habitually overpower conversations and final decisions. Nina stated that in order to ensure interaction is constructive, teachers must genuinely take into account parent's views and opinions regarding the education of their children. Nonetheless, Nina explained that there is yet much resistance to the notion:

> The challenge is to bring the parents into it in a way that is good
> for them and for us. What I hear from my colleagues is that we
> are always looking for the parents to think the way that we want
> them to think. I think we have to think more globally. We need
> to broaden our views, and I don't see that happening yet
> (personal communication, April 11, 2008).

An additional challenge, also reflective of Vancouver's ethnically diverse population, is what participants described as the difficulty of collaborating with parents who have dissimilar educational philosophies. Nina explained, "Often

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they are most interested in getting 95% and going to Harvard. They don't see the day to day lesson planning". Rather than circumventing parents, Nina explained how in situations such as these, teachers must purposefully create opportunities for dialogue with parents in order to better understand what may be a result from differing cultural expectations. She said:

> So that it's not just the teachers making judgments about the culture of the parents, and the parents being frustrated about how the school doesn't meet their cultural expectations. Trying to create something new, so they can share their thoughts and we can share our practice. Being able to dialogue, why it is they may have certain expectations and what we can do.

Anya's comments, like Nina's, also highlight the significance of connecting with parents in order to develop a relationship of support, rather than animosity. She explained that bringing family into the school is a "good welcome to Canada for new immigrants, and a place to begin to feel at home. Family members who feel welcomed at the school are likely to be supportive of their children's education and supportive of the teachers" (personal communication, April 11, 2008).

Clearly, participants place importance upon interacting with their students' families. Though they highlighted numerous benefits, participants also discussed the challenges of collaborating with family members. It is evident, however, that participants work to resolve challenges as they hinge great importance upon this interaction.

Dimension 2: Collaboration with Support Workers

Five participants described collaboration with support or resource workers as essential to facilitating the achievement of culturally diverse students. Support workers were described as language interpreters, multicultural workers, Aboriginal workers and school counsellors. In particular, participants spoke of these workers as fundamental resources through which they are able to communicate with students' families and students themselves, especially if there are language barriers.

Like other participants, Tania explained her approach of pursuing a team with which she can work to facilitate student success:

> If a child isn't responding you have to work with the parents, the administrator, and the support staff at the school, whether it's learning resources or counsellors. You use the team around you to meet the needs of kids (personal communication, April 17, 2008).

Lauren detailed the difficulty inherent in attempting to educate oneself on a culture and language that is not common in greater Vancouver. She explained, "it's harder to get information and support, and get it right, and it's easier to make mistakes and misinterpret things" (personal communication, April 10, 2008). In these situations, communication with those people who best know a culture is fundamental. Lauren explicated, "You would be on a wild goose chase if you didn't have somebody who gives you the right information. Even if you get the right country, there are sometimes fifty different dialects in the country". She provided an example of a new student from Indonesia with whom a language

barrier prevented effective communication. She explained, "He kept saying 'Acehnese'. He was ESL, and I kept telling him he's not Chinese, he's Indonesian". Through the aid of an interpreter, she gained clarification and spoke to him and his mother:

> I told his mom, who didn't speak English either, but through the multicultural interpreter we hired from outside of our school board, I learned that "Acehnese" is a dialect in Indonesia. So, the child was telling me that's what he speaks. Here I was telling him that he's not Chinese!" With the interpreter translating I was able to apologize to the student and tell him that he was right.

Nonetheless, Lauren addressed the difficulty entailed in hiring an interpreter, adding that much of the final decision is based upon school administration:

> The school board doesn't have translators for a lot languages. If the family doesn't have money it's basically what the administrator can do. You have to convince them to spend school money on a translator for one child. That's eighty bucks out of field trip money, and I argue that it is really important. We need to be able to communicate with the family. Some administers go for it, and some don't.

In Anne's class of primarily refugee students who are English language learning, the majority of communication with parents is done via multicultural-home stay workers. She cited an example of a time she collaborated with a multicultural-home stay worker to meet the father of a student who surpassed her initial academic expectations. She explained, "Usually the parents won't come

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unless they know for sure there are going to be multicultural workers present"
(personal communication, April 30, 2008). In this case, Anne described how the
multicultural-home stay worker had to encourage the father to attend teacher-
parent meeting night; the father, being a refugee, did not comprehend how his
son did well in school. She said, "In the country they're from, they're so
discriminated against that the idea that they could be acknowledged for doing
well was totally foreign to him". The multicultural-home stay worker, who spoke
the same language as the father, assisted him in understanding that increased
educational opportunities are afforded to his son in Canada.

Purposeful collaboration with support workers resurfaced in Anya's
interview. She explained that because a school counsellor has the necessary
skills, family members often volunteer more information to the counsellor than to
the classroom teacher. She said:

> The person who has made the biggest difference for me this
> year is our school counsellor. The families will open up to a
> counsellor more than to the teacher because they sometimes
> want you to give their kid good marks. She has the skills to
> speak to them (personal communication, April 11, 2008).

Anya highlighted an example of the ways in which her school counsellor
assisted her in working with a student who displayed harmful behaviours and
was not academically achieving to the level he was capable of. The counsellor
worked with the family of the student to develop a strategy which resonated with
Anya. She explained, "Every critical thing you say to a child, you have to say five
nice things to make up for it. She [the counsellor] told me that is what she

suggested to the dad and the grandma". Anya described the positive impact the counsellor had on the student's behaviour and academic achievement, stating "Now he's friendly, he likes doing his work, a very bright kid, and grandma is always smiling on the playground". Anya explained "the counsellor is the one with the real skills" and that she "wouldn't have known what to say to the dad or grandma".

Collaborating with those who can best assist them in meeting the needs of culturally diverse students is a focus that emerged as having great significance with participants. Clearly, purposeful interaction with families and collaboration with support workers are two key means through which participants inform their practice and facilitate the success of their students.

Theme 4: Renewal of Knowledge

All ten participants made reference to the continual learning process embedded in teaching. Five participants discussed the unfortunate reality that many of their colleagues are hesitant to experience discomfort, a feeling participants described as necessary when one critically self-reflects on their attitudes and how they are implicated in their practice. In particular, seven of the ten participants directly cited scholars, theorists or researchers in the field of education when considering the ways in which their educational beliefs and practices are informed. Five participants directly referred to the opportunities they seek for involvement in professional development opportunities, namely teacher workshops.

Dimension 1: Experiencing Discomfort

Five participants addressed their belief that many of their colleagues are hesitant to experience discomfort. Participants explained that feelings of discomfort are often the first step in ongoing critical self-reflection, therefore, those colleagues who fail to do so, concurrently fail to genuinely reflect upon their teaching and seize opportunities to better their practice by way of renewing their knowledge. Participants described renewing one's knowledge as a choice that requires initiative, and if not pursued, may result in insular teaching practices.

As an anti-racism advisor for a school district in the lower mainland, S'ekoia organizes and implements workshops regarding culturally sensitive teaching. She spoke at length about the importance of self-reflection and experiencing discomfort. From her experience in implementing workshops, she addressed the resistance she faces from numerous educators. She explained:

> They need to go through that self-reflection and what's difficult
> is that it is attitudinal. It's challenging to have those discussions
> with teachers because it is based on their prejudices and their
> upbringings, their experiences with various groups. So, it's
> been challenging with some teachers, they don't respond very
> well, they shut down (personal communication, April 29, 2008).

Discomfort is a feeling S'ekoia finds so widespread among teachers who attend her workshops that she designates time at the onset of each session to assure teachers that feelings of uneasiness are common and indispensable to the process of critical self-reflection. As a preamble to her workshops, she explained:

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I ask participants to be willing to agree to four agreements
which come out of a book called "Courageous Conversations
about Race" by Glen Singleton. They are: to stay engaged, to
speak your truth, to experience discomfort and to expect and
accept nondisclosure. They are powerful because you are
asking teachers to experience discomfort. To be open to and
not worried about how what you are saying is being perceived
by others, but in a respectful way.

Tania's comments are additionally representative of participants'
sentiments. She also acknowledged the difficulty and perseverance required to
move beyond one's comfort zone:

It takes a lot of work for teachers, and they have to want to do
it. It's a choice, it's really easy for teachers to stay in their
bubble, in their comfort zone and just do the same thing that
they have always done and maintain the status quo. They have
to really want to do it (personal communication, April 17, 2008).

Nina explained that within her work environment, hesitancy in
experiencing discomfort is very common. She added that support from other
teachers to be reflective of one's practice is rare. She said:

I think there has to be a group of teachers who are really
committed to the topic, but at this school I don't think that is the
case. I'm pro-d chair and we had multicultural workers come in
and talk about the importance of students' cultures, but there
seems to be an element of the staff that is not interested. Until
that interest is there amongst a larger group and until people
are more comfortable exploring these things without feeling put

down, it's not going to happen (personal communication, April 11, 2008).

Anya also addressed the issue of teacher hesitancy. She added that there are various opportunities for teachers to advance their practice and become active in their learning:

> You read a book, you go to a workshop, you meet a teacher who tells you something they tried, and then you go and try it! You can always renew yourself if you want to, and if you are open to things. If you're not open to it, unfortunately, you continue to do the same thing all the time (personal communication, April 11, 2008).

Unquestionably, participants felt that teachers must move beyond feelings of hesitancy to critically self-reflect upon their biases and prejudices and how they are implicated in their practice. Participants described emotions relating to discomfort as necessary to becoming reflective and increasingly successful teachers of culturally diverse students. Doing so requires teachers to move outside of their comfort zones and become active in searching for opportunities to renew their knowledge.

Dimension 2: Information and Support from Scholarship

Seven participants referred to the importance of drawing upon work by educational scholars, theorists and researchers when elucidating their educational beliefs and describing their classroom practices. Participants cited key scholarship which informs and supports their described teaching practices and educational philosophies.

Zoya, for instance, was eager to explain the role of educational

scholarship in her teaching. She described how literature informs the approach

she takes to structure cooperative learning during her literature circles. She

added that she modifies the instructional ideas and concepts discussed in

numerous articles, according to the students she is working with. She explained:

> There is a lot of literature which has outlined how you can
> structure literature circles. I sort of mixed and matched the
> literature, what works for me. Really depending on the students,
> you have to know what your students are interested in
> (personal communication, May 7, 2008).

Tania referred to scholarship when detailing her belief that teachers need

to experience discomfort and critically self-reflect. She explained it is necessary

for teachers to be aware of why and how White skin entails unearned privileges.

She referred to work by scholar Peggy McIntosh, explaining that "teachers need

to push themselves out of their comfort zones. In the article 'Unpacking the

Backpack of White Privilege', there are many people who don't consider the

things in the article" (personal communication, April 17, 2008).

In addition to citing scholars to support their educational philosophies,

participants referred to educational literature when describing concrete teaching

strategies impacted by the research community. As she clarified her goals

regarding collaborative learning with her students who are learning English, Anne

described the work of the Johnson brothers. She explained how, she, in the past,

had minimilized collaborative work, and how some of her colleagues continue to

do so. She said:

David and Robert Johnson listed, articulated and expected that in every lesson a social skill would be taught. That is the most important part of it, but for me, what their work has been minimilized to is the kinds of assignments you give. So, just to have kids work together, which is what I did before I read their work, isn't necessarily cooperative learning. A social skill aspect, so, like learning the language of appreciation and the language of disagreement (personal communication, April 30, 2008).

Mariah additionally highlighted a specific example of turning to educational scholars to assist in informing a unit plan she did with students. By reading current research, she realized her learning objectives were far from being met. She discussed the article "The Risks of Empathy" by Megan Boler and the way in which it facilitated her realization she was not doing justice to a unit on slavery. She explained:

The risks of empathy are, for example, if you read a book on the Holocaust and afterwards you say that you completely understand what it must have been like. I realized it's very dangerous to say this. You're voyeuristic, you haven't actually lived through it (personal communication, May 9, 2008).

After reading the article, Mariah described how she reflected upon what she considered to be a most insightful unit on slavery and ultimately changed the way she taught the subject:

I used to have kids compile a slave dairy where they pretend to be a slave leaving from the south making their way to Canada. I realized it was probably the worst thing I could do. I wanted

them to empathize with what it would feel like to be a slave. I realized it's more valuable to get them to research documentation of slaves, to look at those words. Then, if they want to, create a poem or art piece based on that.

Mariah explained that as a teacher she is immersed "in a learning process", continually determining approaches she may take to best reach her students, certainly through staying connected with the research community.

Nina, like the other participants, described the value of reading the work of researchers; however, she voiced a concern when describing how numerous colleagues view theoretical work as an "ideological world removed from the reality of actual teaching" (personal communication, April 11, 2008). Nina explained that a reason for this line of thinking may be that teachers find it difficult to access research. Indeed, because of this, Nina described her attempts to find "ways to bridge the gap" in hopes to encourage teachers to apprehend the practicality of theory. As a solution to the perceived disconnection between researchers and practicing teachers, she expressed interest in "having an outreach" between, for instance, the Center for Intercultural Studies in Asia at the University of British Columbia and schools in the lower mainland. Nina described how an outreach may in fact persuade teachers to approach theory with an open mind, utilizing it, and becoming conscious of the many ways in which it is central to their everyday practice.

In addition to referring to the work of others, participants described their work as educational researchers as well as teachers. For instance, previous and subsequent to retiring as an educator, Clark described his active participation in

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the research community at Simon Fraser University and the University of British Columbia. Moreover, he worked for a notable provincial teaching association for whom he published widespread articles on social justice and education. Another participant, Joanna, is actively involved in research at Simon Fraser University. She works with professors conducting action research on social issues, most pertaining to environmental sustainability. In addition to Clark and Joanna, four other participants carried their passion for life long learning to graduate school, after receiving their professional teaching certificates. Their graduate level work was a purposeful endeavour to reconnect themselves to research and renew their knowledge.

It is apparent that participants in this study work with the research community to both inform and support their beliefs and practices. Participants purposefully seek opportunities to connect with research and in doing so hope that their colleagues do the same.

Dimension 3: Information and Support through Professional Development
As well as staying connected with the research community, five participants expressed the significance professional development plays in their processes of life long learning. Most predominantly, participants described that teacher workshops, administered by their respective school districts and regarding issues such as anti-racist and culturally sensitive teaching practices, are an essential means of professional development. Three of the five participants in particular, referred to S'ekoia's workshops on culturally sensitive teaching. Participants who identified workshops as key to their practice explained

how they have encouraged them in moving along in their lines of thinking by informing and supporting their instructional beliefs and practices.

Tania's comments regarding the benefits of attending workshops are reflective of other participants' thoughts. An attendee of S'ekoia's workshop, she explicated how attending workshops is necessary if teachers are to gain insight into the needs of their culturally diverse students. She acknowledged that "Through workshops that S'ekoia does, yes, people may feel uncomfortable, and, yes, the conversations might not be resolved" (personal communication, April 17, 2008). However, she explained that through partaking in reflective activities and rich dialogue, this discomfort will set in motion conceptual growth. Through S'ekoia's workshop and "a few other workshops that do role playing and other activities, teachers are taken out of their comfort zone and are moved along in their thinking." Following workshops, Tania maintains, teachers "bring back their experiences to the classroom" to inform their teaching practices. In this way, Tania, like other participants, attests to S'ekoia's assertion that "all teachers need to be put through a cultural diversity awareness program because it encourages self-reflection of our own biases" (personal communication, April 29, 2008), which will allow teachers to achieve awareness and understanding of what their biases "might look like in the classroom, because their racial perceptions are always being implicated in their teaching".

Anya emphasized the ways in which attending professional development occasions replenished her educational beliefs and instructional strategies. For Anya, taking note of the ideas and concepts presented in workshop forums, as

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well as subsequently reflecting on what she hears, motivates and supports her educational philosophy. She said:

> Workshops have given me so much. I went to a BCTF social
> justice conference and the guy speaking was so inspiring about
> social justice in every classroom. I came away thinking that I
> feel right carrying on with the way I teach. I'm not going to let
> the curriculum flood me by telling kids to sit and write and make
> it neat. That's not what it's all about (personal communication,
> April 11, 2008).

Beyond supporting educational philosophies, participants highlighted the ways in which workshops provide them with new instructional techniques and resources. For instance, Lauren explained that she "learn[s] so much from going to workshops, seeing what new technology, like computer games, are out there" (personal communication, April 10, 2008). She added after learning about a new resource, "I take it back to class and adapt it according to my kids. I know what they are interested in and how they like to learn."

Zoya provided an example of a specific instructional strategy she learned while attending a workshop centered on literature circles. She said:

> Faye Brownlie, she has done a lot of writing with Susan Close
> with Smart Reading. I went to a workshop a couple years ago
> on how she does literature circles and I really, really liked the
> way she did them (personal communication, May 7, 2008).

She explained the particular aspect of her newfound approach to literature circles she was most fond of learning about:

When she [Faye Brownlie] does novel studies she has four or
five books that are the same and the kids choose. The kids
read them on an ongoing basis, they do activities, they have
literature circles where they discuss, and then as they finish
they can go onto another novel. It's not flogging a novel to
death with questions, like the good old book report I had to do
when I was in school.

Zoya reiterated that if she teaches language arts again, "I would choose
the kind of approach she [Faye Brownlie] has chosen" demonstrating how
attending this workshop informed her practice.

It is evident participants place great importance upon remaining active,
lifelong learners. Participants spoke of the need to experience discomfort and
reflect on their practices by continuously renewing their knowledge. Two key
avenues through which reflection is instigated and practices are informed and
supported include: staying connected with educational scholarship and attending
professional workshops.

Summary

This chapter offered a thematic organization of the themes that emerged
in the data. It outlined the four key themes to emerge in interviews with
participants. These themes are: creating an inclusive classroom, expanding
conceptions of curriculum, developing a community resource network and
renewing one's knowledge. Within these themes, key dimensions were outlined,
highlighting how participants spoke of each broader theme. In the next chapter, I
will analyze and interpret the meaning behind the data presented by linking it to

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scholarship in the field of culturally relevant pedagogy. In the final chapter, I will

lend my concluding thoughts on this study, highlight its limitations and propose

further areas of research.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

The participants in this study were not selected because of their

knowledge of culturally relevant pedagogy. Rather, participants were selected

based upon their commitment to meeting the needs of culturally diverse students.

It was intriguing, then, to see patterns emerge from interviews that were in direct

relation to the literature. Remarkably, many of the practices and beliefs described

by participants support the literature regarding culturally relevant pedagogy,

demonstrating the practical value of this theory. Additionally, it was interesting to

explore those practices that participants highlighted as being central to their

pedagogies, but that are not discussed, in a substantive manner, in the literature.

It was also interesting to explore the numerous challenges participants

encountered when attempting to facilitate the success of their culturally different

students. These challenges are often absent in the scholarship regarding

culturally relevant literature, perhaps reflecting the somewhat narrow conception

of this theory.

The question that began my inquiry was: how do teachers who teach in a

manner that is aligned to culturally relevant pedagogy describe their beliefs,

practices and the challenges they encounter in relation to their teaching?

Chapter five presents a discussion of participants' preferred practices and the

obstacles faced by them, in light of the current literature on culturally relevant pedagogy.

Multidimensionality of Participants' Practice

The multidimensional quality of participant's practices became apparent very early during the course of interviews. Participants identified difficulties in what they found to be an exercise in limiting themselves to selecting three tenets (see Appendix A) that were most representative of their teaching practice. They additionally found it problematic to rank these three tenets. When attempting to identify tenets, Joanna's comments (in particular), were illustrative of the dilemma that many of the participants alluded to:

> 13 and 14 you can't have 13 without 14, demonstrate connectedness and if you don't have that you can't do number 13. Number 11, and number 9…it's a little bit of a repeat of number 3…I mean they are very close. And the same with this connectedness, you can't have this climate without connectedness (personal communication, April 30, 200).

S'ekoia's comment mirrors Joanna's, as she also had difficulty choosing. S'ekoia explained: "I'm thinking of more holistic tenets…but it's so hard because some of these connect with others" (personal communication, April 20, 2008). The struggle participants faced is indicate of a teaching practice in which several characteristics or aspects are so intertwined that they occur simultaneously in the classroom. In this way, participants had difficulty regarding each tenet as a separate entity. Rather, they are necessarily connected in the shaping of

participants' practices. In part because of this complexity, the tenets quickly became prompts for further discussion.

The multidimensional nature of the participants' practices was also evident when attempts were made to organize the findings of this study. It was challenging to separate the ideas and concepts into specific categories when participants spoke of them in an interrelated way. Tania, for instance, spoke of connecting with an Aboriginal student in her class who was, at the onset of school year, unhappy, quiet and disengaged with academic exercises such as journal writing (see Chapter 4, p. 57). Tania served to validate her student by forming a meaningful relationship with him based on his cultural knowledge. She attempted to empower him by emphasising that his culture has place and is appreciated in the class, thus boosting his confidence in academic subject areas. Clearly, this example may fit into any one of numerous categories, as there is a substantial overlap. Therefore, although specific themes and dimensions have been delineated, one can argue that the interconnectedness of the participants' teaching philosophies could pose problems with the organizational scheme. This aligns with what Gay (2000) describes as the multidimensional nature of culturally relevant teaching, which encompasses numerous aspects such as interactions in the classroom, the classroom climate and the curriculum content. The teachers interviewed for this study also reflected, in their responses and approaches to the questions, how truly integrated and holistic their pedagogies are.

A Comprehensive and Validating Teaching Philosophy

Much of what participants described as central to their beliefs and practices is consistent with the body of literature on culturally relevant pedagogy. Gay defines comprehensiveness as the process of teaching the whole child, or teaching in a holistic manner which encompasses social-emotional and moral growth (Howard, 2000, 2003; hooks, 1994; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1995a; Gay, 1993, 2000). This process takes into account more than simply the intellectual development of students. For participants, the concept of social and emotional growth was linked to the notion of self-respect and the development of a positive sense of identity, both culturally and otherwise. These attributes are indicative of the validating nature of the participants' educational philosophies. As consistent with the literature (c.f. Gay, 1993, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Montgomery, 2001) the central concern of the participants was to ensure that their students feel validated, and are active contributors to the class community.

The holistic and validating nature of the participants' philosophies manifests itself in numerous forms: the curriculum, the relationship between teacher and student, and the interactions between students.

Cultural Validation though the Curriculum

As consistent with the literature regarding culturally relevant pedagogy, participants discussed the crucial need to acknowledge the cultural heritages of students, in order to make lessons more meaningful to them (Gay 1993, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Pang, 2000, 2001). This indicates that participants are

fully aware of the Eurocentricity of the curriculum and the impact it may have on those students who rarely see themselves represented in it. Additionally, it indicates an awareness of the feelings of validation regarding one's cultural identity that are established when students' perspectives and voices are integrated into everyday lessons. The emphasis placed upon affirming this sense of identity is further indicative of an understanding of the relationship between this validation and a sense of belonging to the school. This increases the likelihood of student engagement and improved academic achievement.

Moreover, participants stressed the need to move beyond a "touristy" approach of cultural integration, which is consistent with observations made within the body of related scholarship (c.f. Ladson-Billings, 1994; Gay, 2000, Villegas & Lucas, 2002). This emphasis highlights the participants' understandings that an affirmative sense of identity and cultural validation cannot be sustained through a superficial acknowledgment of cultures. Instead, an affirming sense of identity may only be achieved if students' perspectives and experiences are *continually* integrated into the curriculum. As consistent with the literature (c.f. Ladson-Billings, 1994; Villegas, 1988; Pang, 2000), participants appear to understand that touristy approaches may serve to harm an individual's sense of cultural identity by either spotlighting students, or by perpetuating damaging stereotypes. Therefore, participants exercise this approach with caution, at all times, supplementing it with authentic integration of diverse cultures into the curriculum (see Chapter 4, p. 69).

Purposeful Softening of Teacher-Student Hierarchies

An interesting finding of this research was the strong emphasis

participants placed upon building meaningful relationships with their students.

This emphasis is also consistent with literature on culturally relevant pedagogy,

which highlights the need for teachers to demonstrate a connectedness with all

students (c.f. Ladson-Billings, 1994; Gay, 2000; Howard, 2000). Meeting the

needs of their students is evidently the foremost concern for participants. The

effort they put forth into establishing connections with them indicates their

awareness of how their behaviour plays a significant role in students' feelings of

validation (or alienation) in school. The participants' emphasis on building

relationships is further indicative of their view that a sense of validation is utterly

fundamental, and that all other learning is built upon it. This idea of validation is

also essential to culturally relevant pedagogy (Gay, 1993, 2000; Ladson-Billings,

1994, 1995a; Wlodkowski & Ginsberg, 1995). Participants perceptibly recognize

that feelings of alienation and isolation are an impediment to academic success.

The emphasis on building relationships with students also illustrates a

sensitivity to traditional hierarchal power structures, and a desire to soften them.

This is consistent with the body of literature that encourages educators to have

fluid relationships with students, rather than remaining distant authority figures

(Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1995; Gay, 2000; Pang 2000). Although participants

described themselves as "not being friends" with students, their interviews

highlighted how they develop caring relationships so that they may be viewed as

approachable figures (see Chapter 4, p. 56). Therefore, relinquishing a distant,

authoritative position may be a pedagogical strategy that accommodates comfortable communications between teachers and students. Participants appear to be aware of the potentially negative consequences of acting as an intimidating authority figure, as this may prevent students from expressing difficulties and concerns, ultimately making it exceedingly difficult to access and address their individual needs.

The intentional softening of hierarchal relationships also indicates a desire, on the part of the educator, to foster a sense of validation and belonging in learners. Participants appear to understand that feelings of belonging are influenced by the degree to which their teacher is perceived as warm and welcoming. Belongingness is also linked to the degree to which students believe that their perspectives and experiences are welcome in class, as consistent with the literature on culturally responsive theory (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Villegas & Lucas, 2002; Pang, 2001). Participants described implementing practices that attempted to convey to students the significance of their voices within the learning process. The examples given by them illustrate their attempts to convey to students that the teacher is not the sole source of knowledge, and that students must provide input on the learning experience of their peers (see Chapter 4, p. 61).

Culturally Responsive Pedagogues do Recognize Student Variability

What is interesting about the abovementioned connections made between participants and their students is that they challenge the central criticisms

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levelled at culturally relevant pedagogy. For instance, participants comprehend the potential damage that can be wrought by essentialist pedagogies, and have an understanding of intra-group variability. Lauren expressed the danger of making rash judgments on students based upon culture, as there is always variability within the same cultural group, not to mention the variables of socio-economic status, gender, family, language (regional variations, language spoken within home e.g. English or Cantonese) and value systems. She emphasized the importance of gaining awareness of a student's *family* culture as a genuine (and often more relevant) way to connect with students. She explained that every family, even within the same culture, has differing experiences and values (see Chapter 4, p. 58). Anne's comments additionally demonstrate a sensitivity towards variation within cultural communities. She gave one example of a Vietnamese student:

> Many of the kids I teach, they come from Vietnam, and it's the Vietnamese nationals who discriminated against them. A lot of the mountain people in Vietnam feel that they are culturally and racially more similar to the Filipinos than to the Vietnamese, although their passport is Vietnamese (personal communication, April 29, 2008).

In this way, Anne understands that attempting to form a connection with her student based on Vietnamese culture writ-large may not be successful.

In addition to appreciating variability within cultural groups, participants appeared to have an understanding of how culture intersects with other fundamental characteristics of one's identity. This is in contrast to one critique of

culturally relevant pedagogy, which claims that it over emphasizes culture much to the negation of other characteristics. Participants, however, in contrast to this critique, recognize that the construction of identity is complex and multifaceted. From this understanding, participants work to forge meaningful connections with students according to their unique experiences and perspectives, rather than forming superficial connections based *solely* on their cultures (see Chapter 4, p. 59). Building relationships with students based upon individual variances is not a topic at the forefront of literature regarding culturally relevant pedagogy. Rather, this pedagogical approach is centred upon notions of collectiveness in relation to cultural heritage.

Participants also described discovering other points of connection with students that may be even more meaningful and relevant than culture. These points include learning styles, interests and out of school activities. These purposefully sought connections, again, demonstrate a recognition of student diversity. For instance, participants appreciate that not all students learn in the same way, and therefore work to make lessons that accommodate different learning styles (e.g. visual, aural, kinaesthetic). What was particularly emphasised was the philosophy of respecting and appreciating students' prior experiences. As a key tenet of culturally relevant pedagogy, (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Villegas & Lucas, 2002; Montgomery, 2001) participants appreciate the significance of recognising those funds of knowledge that arise from life experiences, previous learning experiences and personal interests. Certainly, the importance participants place upon recognizing student variance highlights their

efforts to forge meaningful connections, and their understanding of how these connections validate the presence of each individual.

The process of relationship building with students was highlighted as a significant aspect of all participants' practices. This is perhaps because there is little in the way of obstacles to prevent them from doing so. Aside from procedural and curricular restrictions, teachers enjoy relative autonomy within the classroom, permitting them to develop meaningful relationships (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Nevertheless, the issue of structural constraints became apparent when participants discussed their views on collaborative learning.

Classroom Camaraderie

Another feature of a comprehensive teaching philosophy emphasized by participants is the process of learning in a collaborative manner. When implementing collaborative learning, participants described how they hoped to garner a "team" effort, in which all students contributed to the learning process (see Chapter 4, p. 61). This is consistent with the literature on culturally relevant pedagogy, which highlights the importance of creating a *community of learners*, in which students work collectively toward a common goal (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Gay, 2002; Montgomery, 2001). Nonetheless, participant interviews suggest that there are a number of obstacles, which limit the implementation of collaborative learning. What is intriguing is that these challenges are not at the forefront of the literature on culturally relevant pedagogy.

For participants, there appears to be two central reasons for their focus on implementing this learning strategy in the classroom: developing necessary social skills, and creating a sense of validation amongst learners. In terms of developing social skills, participants revealed their belief that, as teachers, it is their responsibility to provide a space where students can obtain the necessary tools for social participation and cooperation. This sense of responsibility may stem from a recognition of the highly individualistic and competitive Western ideology of mainstream Canadian society. Thus, participants may feel the need to somehow balance the effects of this predominant ideology through a pedagogy that emphasises that collectiveness and support. Indeed, participants recognize that an individualistic ideology is pervasive in school culture. For example, it is apparent in assessment practices such as provincial exams, which are completed individually and are compared with the results of others. Regarding exams, Joanna explained, "the provincial exams are a problem. It's gone from the richness of dialogue and sharing. Now I'm talking about format on an exam" (personal communication, April 30, 2008). Dialoguing and sharing are representative traits of collaborative learning; therefore, Joanne has attempted to give space to collaboration and camaraderie in her classroom, perhaps because these values are typically marginalized elsewhere.

The emphasis on collaborative learning also indicates a recognition of cultural philosophies in which there is a strong communal component. This is consistent with literature on culturally relevant pedagogy which insists that teachers must have an understanding of culturally mediated ways of learning

(Ladson-Billing, 1994, 1995a; Sleeter & McLaren, 1995; Tatum, 1997). This line

of thinking was highlighted by Anne, who explained: "in this culture we teach

children to be responsible for themselves, but in a culture that has a stronger

group identity you get your cues from the group" (personal communication, April

30, 2008).

Because of this recognition, much of the learning in Anne's class is done

collaboratively. In implementing this learning strategy, participants provide space

for students to develop social skills, while simultaneously permitting them to use

an approach that is similar to many cultural modes of interaction within the home.

Indeed, participants are aware of the significance of establishing learning

opportunities which reflect students' prior knowledge as a means to validate and

engage learners.

Challenges of Implementing Collaborative Learning

Starting from Scratch

Although participants discussed the benefits of collaborative learning, they

continuously voiced the challenges they faced when putting this strategy into

practice in a meaningful way. Interestingly, the literature on culturally relevant

pedagogy does not attend substantively to the challenges of a collaborative

approach, though it steadfastly advocates its use. Notably, participants

addressed the need to have a clear structure in place for collaborative work.

Participants explained that structure is necessary for genuine camaraderie as it

ensures that all students are equal contributors (see Chapter 4, p. 61). That

participants described the necessity of structure as a precursor to an authentic team effort, is indicative of many issues. For instance, it could imply that previous teachers have not valued a collaborative philosophy. Or, perhaps, that previous teachers appreciated the aims of collaborative learning, but did a poor job implementing it. This may result from a lack of reflection on their practice, and a failure to evaluate what students were gaining, or not gaining, from collaborative exercises. As well, this emphasis on establishing structure is perhaps a further indication of the failure of teacher preparation programs to train pre-service teachers about the purposes of these various and integrated learning strategies. Indeed, this is the case for Clark, who recalled:

> I know I didn't, coming out of teacher education. I didn't even know what it [collaborative learning] was. There was certainly no distinction made then, and even now, between collaborative or cooperative learning and group work. I didn't understand it myself until well into my career (personal communication, April 23, 2008).

For this reason, participants may find themselves starting from scratch, so to speak. Though it is likely that students have experienced working with their peers in previous classes, they may have failed to learn how to cooperate in a manner that encourages *collective* accomplishment and accountability for one another's work. It should be noted that participants in this study differentiate collaborative learning from group work. In contrast to what commonly occurs in group work situations, teachers who implement collaborative exercises actively scaffold learning, and model to students how they may contribute to their teams.

(see Chapter 4, p. 61). These characteristics are consistent with literature pertaining to culturally relevant theory.

Classroom Logistics

The participants made additional comments that indicated the constraints they faced when attempting to employ collaboration. They detailed the numerous ways in which collaborative learning is especially challenging when there are high numbers of students in each class. This results in a greater amount of noise and disruption, with students attempting dialogue with each other. Though collaborative learning actively involves a teacher who scaffolds and models to students, having too many students limits the time a teacher can spend with each group. The consequence of this is a less valuable learning experience. The issue of large class sizes is coupled with the constraining physical layout of classrooms, as classrooms typically have inadequate space and seating to allow for comfortable collaboration. Tania explained, "It's a challenge with a big class of thirty or thirty-two kids. It's hard to have the physical space" (personal communication, April 17, 2008).

Increased class sizes, in conjunction with the arrangement of classrooms, illustrate how schools are designed for a mode of individual learning that complements the independent, individualistic ideology of mainstream western society. Though students often sit at tables at the primary level, intermediate and secondary level classrooms typically have desks, which are not easily portable. There is an underlying assumption that the older one gets, the more independent and competitive they should be in terms of their learning. Undeniably, the

abovementioned structural restrictions are indicative of a learning environment that encourages a lecture format or banking approach to education, in which the teacher is the sole authoritative source of valuable knowledge (Freire, 1970).

Curriculum and Assessment

Additionally, participants discussed the constraints of the formal curriculum and assessment practices. These constraints form an aspect of Clark's conviction that school: "isn't all that accommodating for collaborative learning" (personal communication, April 23, 2008). The curriculum, which, in particular, secondary school teachers described as content heavy, leaves little space for developing social skills and dialoguing with peers.

The individual and competitive nature ideology inherent in mainstream Canadian society is evident when viewing assessment practices, as they often disregard the social aspects of learning. This is in contrast to the educational philosophies held by the participants. This, ideology, then, may act as a deterrent to teachers, discouraging them from using collaborative learning strategies. For instance, provincial examinations are designed to assess the knowledge of individual students. Thus, the space given by participants to their students to build social skills, support one another, and actively construct knowledge is negated by exams, which do not reward the attainment of such skills. Lauren's frustration with this reality was apparent when she spoke of report cards. She exclaimed:

> You cannot pretend not to notice that when you get a report
> card language and math take up three quarters of the paper

and then one quarter of the paper is for social, emotion, physical and all the rest of the human being (personal communication, April 10, 2008).

The pressures of the curriculum, exams and report cards (all of which typically discount the benefits of collaborative learning) tend to result in teachers resorting to lecture format and becoming "talking heads" (Joanna, personal communication, April 30, 2008).

What became apparent throughout the course of interviewing was the way in which participants' educational philosophies mirror the comprehensive and validating nature of culturally relevant pedagogy (Gay, 2000; Villegas, 1988; Wlodkowski & Ginsberg, 1995). Their philosophies, which appreciate the whole child, manifest themselves through their innovative use of the curriculum, the relationships they form with their students, and the camaraderie they encourage between learners. Interestingly, much of what participants emphasized is in contrast to common critiques of this pedagogical approach. As well, much of what participants said also extends that which is currently at the forefront of culturally relevant theory, as participants focused much attention on structural barriers which hinder their agency.

Certainly, the emphasis participants place upon collaboration is indicative of their goal to empower their students. In discussions of collaborative learning, they described learning situations in which they placed themselves on the sidelines (see Chapter 4, p. 61). Their positioning is demonstrative of the roles these teachers position themselves in. They are facilitators of active students

learning, not the only sources of knowledge in a classroom. As facilitators, they work to support students and encourage them to take ownership of their learning. The role of the teacher as a facilitator or a coach, rather than an all-knowing authority figure, is consistent with the literature on culturally relevant theory (Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1995a; Villegas & Lucas, 2002; Cummins 1989, 1996). By acting as facilitators, participants may be attempting to instil in students a confidence that their knowledge and contributions are valuable within the school. In collaborative learning, students move away from a banking system of education to that of a mining approach, in which they are active learners dialoguing with one another and building upon their previous knowledge (Freire, 1970). This form of learning, then, is indicative of participants purposefully "lifting the veil of absolute authority" (Gay, 2000, p. 78), and giving students' voices primacy in the learning process.

Empowering Education

What emerged as central to the educational philosophies of participants is their commitment to develop in students a sense of critical consciousness. This is done primarily so that they are able to analyze authoritative discourses presented to them both in and out of school. It is consistent with the literature regarding culturally relevant pedagogy, which states that teachers must encourage students to "develop a broader socio-political consciousness" (Ladson-Billings, 1995a; Gay, 1993, 2000), allowing them to critically analyze dominant ideologies which produce and maintain social inequities. One authoritative discourse often

mentioned by participants is school textbooks. Participants explained how they encourage students to question the information and influence of textbooks, a strategy that is consistent with culturally relevant theory (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Irvine, 2002; Sparks, 1989). They recognized that in textbooks, a focus on Eurocentric history, accomplishments and perspectives often marginalizes the contributions of culturally diverse people (see Chapter 4, p. 74). This is again illustrative of the participants' aim to confirm to students that no source of information is unquestionable, complete or holds an absolute truth.

Another reason why participants may accentuate a critical component to their teaching, is because they recognize that there is a lack of emphasise on this by their colleagues. This is further indicative of the challenges teachers face in adopting a critical stance in their pedagogical practice. The curriculum and assessment practices are perhaps a key structural constraint, limiting teachers who see benefits in conducting critical inquires. The particular form of critical thinking projects carried out by participants in their classrooms, are typically not tested in common assessment instruments such as standardized exams. This may discourage teachers from bringing critical thinking to the forefront of their practice (see Chapter 4, p. 79). Indeed, the problem may lie in teacher education programs, which (in general), are not geared toward teaching pre-service teachers the importance of empowering students. As S'ekoia explained, teacher education programs seem to be most preoccupied with "the logistics around lesson planning" (personal communication, April 29, 2008).

Another barrier to instilling critical awareness in students is what participants perceived as the supremacy of dominant ideologies ingrained in students' minds. It is likely that teachers find it demanding to unearth innovative and influential approaches that will illustrate to students the oppressive nature of the status-quo. This is especially difficult in light of the fact that they often do not have teaching resources that allow them to do this. For this reason, teachers are forced to use their own time to compile resources, typically without any form of incentive to do so.

During the interview process, the frequency with which participants highlighted the use of literature as a "jump-off" to begin critical discussion of social issues was notable. It is a strategy which participants described as a rather straightforward method to initiate critical dialogue (see Chapter 4, p. 76). The search for an uncomplicated approach to begin these lessons is indicative of the challenge inherent in teaching critical awareness in an effective manner. As well, literature, in the form of children's stories which participants referred to, is typically accessible. Perhaps this indicates that this strategy of using literature is one that saves time for those teachers on a constant quest to locate meaningful resources. This again illustrates the lack of support teachers have in employing critical inquiry. Interestingly, participants highlighted how literature may be used at all levels to begin fruitful discussions on social issues. This illustrates their belief that critical thinking can and should occur in all grades, of course taking into consideration the age of the students and what they are able to comprehend.

Exercising Agency: Student Activism

What emerged as a key challenge is the process of empowering students to exercise agency in struggling against the oppressive nature of the status quo. Gay (2000) describes this as the transformative characteristic of culturally relevant pedagogy. Interestingly, while the literature recognizes the importance of students becoming active in their communities (Ladson-Billings, 1995a; Gay, 2000; Montgomery, 2001) it fails to detail the various obstacles present in promoting student activism. Participants described how attempts to create authentic opportunities for students to be active in their communities often result in forms of charity drives wherein students discover very little regarding genuine activism. This is perhaps indicative of teachers having little idea in terms of the potential of student activism. It may additionally be indicative of the constraints placed upon teachers, forcing them to limit activist opportunities for their students.

Though participants may strive to empower students, the challenges they face are illustrative of the structural restrictions placed upon them. Institutional barriers to change agentry seem to present themselves at every turn. The curriculum and provincial exams, for example, give little credit for learning that takes places through community involvement. Indeed, it is likely that funding would be a key issue, if a school wanted to become directly involved in linking students with their community. Additionally, the hierarchal nature of the educational system places those who are in control outside of the classroom, in roles of authority. In this way, administrators hold a great deal of power.

Participants' comments illustrate how their resistance often immobilizes a teacher's endeavours to encourage student activism. As Joanna explained, "it depends on their [administration and school district's] definition of progressiveness" (personal communication, April 30, 2008). Those teachers who struggle to create opportunities for their students to get involved in the community may be negatively labelled as radical or uncooperative. So, teachers who work to empower their students may, in fact, be silenced, for fear of being ostracised by administrators and colleagues. For instance, Joanna's position as a Community Relations Representative for her school was discontinued by her administration.

Consistent to the literature on culturally relevant theory is the participants' commitment to foster in students a sense of critical consciousness. The importance participants place upon this is indicative of the desire they have to empower their students. Nonetheless, they highlighted key barriers which, though not at the forefront of the literature, presented grave obstacles to students becoming active citizens in their communities.

From Isolation to Collaboration

The interviews provided an understanding of just how committed the participants are toward meeting the needs of their culturally diverse students. It was also clear that the participants have a humble attitude in their efforts to facilitate the success of their students. During interviews, they continually questioned whether they were doing enough to reach their culturally diverse

students. This modesty may a foundation of their persistent efforts to discover innovative educational conceptions, reinvent instructional strategies, and form connections with those who are like-minded. In this way, participants demonstrate how their practice stretches beyond the walls of the classroom and moves into the school community, the school district, and the home communities of the students.

What became apparent, then, is that participants do not work in isolation. They are the antithesis to an image presented in popular discourses of the educational "lone ranger". Rather, participants described situations, which indicated the degree to which they interact with community members, the research community, and educational professionals who support and inform their practice. It is interesting to note that although participants' descriptions of their beliefs and practices indicate a movement toward collaboration, the literature regarding culturally relevant pedagogy often fails to substantively address the importance of finding a like minded community network of collaborators.

Collaboration with the Family

The emphasis participants placed upon their collaboration with family members highlights their reluctance to teach in isolation. Literature on culturally relevant pedagogy encourages teachers to become active in the communities of their students and, in particular, stresses the importance of dialoguing with parents (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Neito, 1996). Consistent with this literature, participants discussed how parents are a necessary part of the school

community. This necessity is indicative of the participants' awareness of an interconnected relationship between the school, the student and the family. Participants understand that students' home lives, which entail their family values and perspectives, cannot be dis-attached or separated from students while they are in school (see Chapter 4, p. 80). Additionally, an awareness of this interlinked relationship demonstrates the participants' appreciation of those cultures with a strong sense of group identity, rather than individual. In this way, making space to interact with family members, such as through inviting them into the classroom, is a purposeful attempt to validate cultural differences, and instil a sense of belonging in those students who are especially comfortable with community oriented cultures (see Chapter 4, p. 80).

This desire to create space for interaction and collaboration with family members is illustrative of the lengths which participants take to meet the needs of culturally diverse students. Indeed, these participants often recognize that they may not single-handedly possess the pre-eminent techniques and strategies needed to facilitate the success of their students. As consistent with the literature, family members serve as valuable resources for gaining insight into a student's culture, interests, and behaviours (Neito, 1996; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Having this information assists teachers in understanding how they may structure lesson plans and activities in ways that best align to their student's interests, helping to minimalise any disconnection between home and school. Indeed, participants are aware of the value that parents bring to their practice.

Therefore, they do not shy away from parents, and discard popular discourses that view parents as intrusive and negatively critical of the teacher.

Challenges of Collaborating with the Family

Interestingly, though the literature regarding culturally relevant pedagogy advocates interaction with parents, it falls short of responding to the challenges participants were keen to discuss. A fundamental challenge, voiced by Nina in particular, is that of reconciling the often dissimilar expectations and educational philosophies of teachers and families. Nina described these differences as frequently resulting from a cultural disjuncture between teachers and parents. In this way, participants recognized that conflicting values reflect how educational expectations are culturally mediated. She explained that by observing her colleagues, this disjuncture often results in the perpetuation of a power dynamic wherein the teacher disregards parents' concerns and rather follow their own agendas (see Chapter 4, p. 83).

Though reconciling expectations may serve to be a considerable challenge, participants indicated that in our pluralistic society, teachers *must* address and accommodate differences. This should not done by measuring differences against a common standard, but by beginning to explore the possibilities for change based on different cultural ways of knowing. Therefore, participants' comments are indicative of the need to have ongoing dialogue with parents in order to understand their hopes and aspirations for their child, their sense of what the child needs, and suggestions of ways the teacher may assist.

In doing so, family members may begin to feel valued rather than disempowered, resulting in a greater understanding and support of the teacher's work.

Participants also shed light on structural obstacles that limit familial interaction with the teacher. Once again, these structural constraints appear to be muted in the scholarship on culturally relevant pedagogy. One may say that there is a long standing belief that the classroom is the arena of teachers and students. The physical layout of the classroom, which leaves room for solely the teacher and students (as well as short class periods in secondary school), and which requires students to move from one classroom to the next, are everyday examples of obstacles that may reinforce this belief. The fact that parents are normally called upon only once or twice in an entire school year for parent-teacher conferences, may also contribute to parents' feelings of disempowerment (see Chapter 4, p. 83). In this way, parents are given little opportunity to share their views, much less take part in the in the class. The little amount of time allotted to parents may also instil, in teachers, an inflated sense of authority towards a child's education, much to the exclusion of parents. An additional institutional constraint, particularly in secondary schools, is the pressure of abiding by the standardized curriculum, and preparing students for provincial examinations. Because participants described these issues as ones which take centre stage at the secondary level, cooperation with family members could be seen as irrelevant to the learning process, with its focus on mastering the curriculum.

Though there are numerous obstacles and constraints, participants make a clear effort to interact with their students' communities. For instance, participants revealed a great deal of cultural sensitivity in their attempts to establish lines of communication with even those family members who possess a limited grasp of English (see Chapter 4, p. 82). They also work to make physical space in their schools so that family members may feel welcome (see Chapter 4, p. 80). Participants have an understanding of the time limitations faced by parents in working families which may prevent an active involvement in their children's schooling. Because of this, participants wholeheartedly welcome extended family members into the school (see Chapter 4, p. 80). Though research shows that minority parents face increased difficulties when participating in their child's education (Corson, 1993; McCollum, 1996), participants' patterns of interaction with students' families, indeed, help decrease the difficulties for these parents. These examples are indicative of the lengths participants go to in order to work alongside family members, appreciate their cultural perspectives and reconcile discrepancies in expectations.

Collaboration with Support Workers

This study demonstrated that the participants prefer to avoid professional isolation, as shown in their purposeful collaboration with support workers. It was striking to note that, though participants emphasized the importance of partnering with support workers, this form of collaboration is not at the forefront of literature regarding culturally relevant pedagogy. A principle reason for the importance

placed upon this collaboration (especially with multicultural workers and translators), may be related to Vancouver's status as a highly diverse city. This is in contrast to the majority of studies on culturally relevant pedagogy which focus on a single cultural population, such as studies on African-American students (Ladson-Billings 1994; Howard, 2000) and Native Hawaiian students (Au & Jordan, 1981). Because of this cultural diversity, school districts in greater Vancouver are perhaps more inclined to recognize the importance of hiring professionals to support teachers in facilitating the success of their students of colour.

Participants provided numerous examples of ways in which support workers assist them in facilitating success with their students. This purposeful collaboration is indicative of the alliances they seek to create with like minded professionals, in order to put the needs of culturally diverse students at the forefront of their educational agenda. It is likely that one time assistance provided by a resource worker, may lead to a long-lasting partnership with the teacher. From this juncture, a degree of trust may be developed in which both parties are familiar with one another's pedagogical and philosophical underpinnings. This trust allows for the space needed to critically dialogue and reflect upon concerns and strategies to assist students, ultimately creating a partnership which best meets the needs of culturally diverse learners. Indeed, some participants stated that without the support workers, they would not reach particular students, as they do not have the necessary training or expertise (see Chapter 4, p. 86).

The necessity for this collaboration was especially apparent when participants discussed working with multicultural home stay workers and translators, both of whom work with students learning English. From the experiences described, it is apparent that linguistic support is fundamental in establishing lines of communication between participants and students (see Chapter 4, p. 86). This comes as no surprise, as building relationships with students serves as a key component of the participants' practice. Indeed, in order to build effective relationships and gain insight into the cultures, interests and passions of students, participants must be able to communicate with them. Moreover, collaboration with support workers is indicative of the holistic teaching philosophies held by the participants. The process of creating a space for learners to express themselves illustrates the attempts made to empower otherwise voiceless students (see Chapter 4, p. 86). Students who have an opportunity for self-expression through which they may engage in relationship building allowing increasingly feels of validation and enhanced feelings of self-efficacy and self-esteem.

Because participants emphasized the value of collaborating with parents, the importance they placed upon the role of support workers in establishing lines of communication with family members does not come as a surprise. For instance, Anne explains that during parent-teacher conferences, the parents of her refugee students "usually won't come unless they know for sure there are going to be multicultural workers" (personal communication, April 30, 2008). In this way, bridging the gap between home, school and community epitomizes the

role of support workers. It is important to note that, instead of discounting those parents who do not speak English, participants actively attempt to involve parents in their child's education. These efforts indicate that participants are aware of the often inconsequential positions some minority, and other, parents find themselves in.

For many students of diverse cultural groups where language is a barrier, communicating effectively with schools is a difficult process. The collaboration of participants with support workers helps to foster communication with parents, and indicates their awareness of the issue. In order for these parents to have their voices heard, they must have knowledge of the institutional language of schools, and present their concerns according to an established protocol. Confronted with pedagogy that is different from what they are accustomed to, many minority parents feel disempowered when they fail to affect change, or simply gain a better understanding of their child's educative process. Participants may see support workers as resources who facilitate parental empowerment , as they allow parents to effectively communicate with their child's school (see Chapter 4, p. 86). Additionally, support workers enhance cross cultural understanding by providing relevant information regarding the school, in the first language of the family. As well, participants described how support workers help to inform them of the cultural backgrounds and expectations of these families (see Chapter 4, p. 85). This can foster a sense of empowerment amongst families and students, as they become aware that their voices are being heard by educational professionals.

Challenges of Collaborating with Support Workers

Though participants described the necessity of working alongside support workers, their interviews revealed the structural limits that constrain this partnership. One constraint is having too few support workers in the school system (see Chapter 4, p. 85), as schools generally have a limited number of counsellors (perhaps only one assigned to several grades). Typically, each school district has a set number of Aboriginal workers or translators who are often not from the same cultural group, or do not speak the same language as the student in need of assistance. This assumed homogeneity speaks of a general lack of cultural awareness found in the schooling system.

Participants also described a lack of funding as a key constraint. Lauren explained that her school is often forced to make budget choices between field trips and providing fundamental assistance to students (see Chapter 4, p. 85). Moreover, administration has a significant role in the final decisions concerning hiring processes of support workers. Unfortunately, an overall lack of accessibility can discourage teachers from attaining assistance for their students. In particular, Lauren's comments have an air of powerlessness and vulnerability, as she is put into the position of fighting for a student's right to equal education. It is also possible that some teachers disregard the assistance needed by a student in order to avoid "ruffling feathers," as they are aware of funding restrictions and opposition from some administrators.

Though there are numerous constraints limiting the collaboration between participants and support workers, the emphasis participants placed upon this

partnership is indicative of repudiation to working in isolation. Instead, participants reach out to the school community, finding like minded professionals who have the expertise to assist them. This demonstrates the participants' belief that working in isolation cannot garner the same results as collaborating with others. Their search for establishing alliances, especially within the numerous structural constraints of schools, illustrates participants' level of commitment in facilitating the success of their culturally diverse learners.

Collaboration with the Reseach Community

A principal way in which participants exemplify a rebuff to practicing in isolation is through their continuing determination to renew their knowledge through research, educational literature and in-service workshops. The emphasis placed upon this was noteworthy, especially because it is not at the forefront on scholarship concerning culturally relevant pedagogy. The weight placed upon this is additionally striking, as it is in opposition to popular discourses that highlight teacher burnout or "set in their ways" attitudes. In fact, one participant was retired, while another was retiring in the subsequent school year.

In contrast to these prevalent notions, participants' comments are indicative of the ways in which they actively seek opportunities to renew their knowledge, though is it not typically a requirement of schools or school districts. The participants' remarks are illustrative of how research is utilized to *substantiate* their philosophies. For instance, Anne spoke of the importance of developing students' social skills, explaining that she refers to the works of the

educational theorists, the Johnson brothers, to strengthen her knowledge on this subject (see Chapter 4, p. 90). As well, Anya defends and justifies her educational philosophies by referring to research that supports them. She explained that following workshop she attended, her views were reinforced: "I came away thinking that I feel right carrying on with the way I teach. I'm not going to let the curriculum flood me".

In addition, participants spoke of connecting with the research community to *inform* their practice. Foundational to this pursuit may be a commitment to a notion that has become rather cliché in educational practice: teaching necessitates life long learning. As participants recognize that student bodies are becoming increasingly diverse, they turn to scholarship and professional development opportunities to assist in informing instructional strategies that are responsive to students. For instance, Mariah spoke of altering the objectives of her unit plan on slavery subsequent to reading an article on the risks of empathy (see Chapter 4, p. 91). Participants' remarks are indicative of their appreciation of the often dissimilar perspectives and experiences tied with each generation of students, and each new wave of immigrants. In this way, participants recognize that if their pedagogical approaches are to be relevant to their current student body, they must pursue the goal of continuous professional development. This goal is a reflection of a belief that the teaching is, indeed, far from static. There is certainly no "best way" to attend to the needs of all students as, evidently, the participants are particularly sensitive to variability within cultural communities.

Though the participants described their active involvement with the research community, they stated that their colleagues do not take the same initiative. Nina spoke of a general perception amongst her colleagues that educational theory is removed from the more practical realm of teaching (see Chapter 4, p. 92). Her colleagues may feel this way because of a popular belief that research is not easily accessible. It is true that teachers have limited time available to go to libraries or conduct database searches, so unless there is support, encouragement, or other forms of incentive, many teachers may continue to employ their accustomed instructional methods, without taking any form of initiative to modify their practice. Another barrier may be a belief that research studies are indeed not be relevant to one's teaching context or location. As a result of this, participants spoke of a need to make research more accessible to teachers. In this way, a greater number of educators could consider how they might use this scholarship to renew their practice. (see Chapter 4, p. 92).

The Need for Reflection

For participants, the concept of lifelong learning and renewing knowledge is coupled with a continuous reflection upon one's teaching. Though participants indicated a great deal of personal reflection, they described their colleagues hesitant to do the same. According to the participants, this hesitation is the result of a reluctance to experience discomfort. This is perhaps indicative of teacher education programs that fail to encourage trainees to examine their own biases. For example, Anne discussed how professional development programs fail to

teach future educators the importance of critical self-reflection. She stated, "I've seen evaluation of student teachers there is not really a place where teachers are encouraged for their own reflection where the kind of behaviour and attitudes toward your own culture are discussed" (personal communication, April 30, 2008).

For in-service teachers, there are numerous ways in which the school system permits teachers to forgo critical self-reflection. As observed by Anne, "I don't think we have a place in ongoing professional development to really be reflective on how what you teach impacts the students". Administrators often have little expectations in the way of encouraging their staff to renew knowledge and critically self-reflect. Also, there are few opportunities for professional development forums where teachers can share knowledge and reflect in a collaborative manner. Research has shown that "one-stop workshops" are ineffective in terms of genuinely providing for teachers the space for dialogue and reflection upon their biases (Sleeter & McLaren, 1995). Workshops must to be continuous, and learning points need to be reiterated in order for them to take effect; however, for S'ekoia (who serves as the sole anti-racism advisor in her entire school district), finding opportunities to revisit the schools under her jurisdiction is a challenge, to say the least. Additionally, structural constraints such as the curriculum and provincial assessment, may act as a justification for professionals who argue that standardized exams do not test a teacher's reflective process.

Although the participants stressed the importance of critical self-reflection, it is not at the forefront of literature regarding culturally relevant pedagogy. Educational scholars studying the broader field of equity in education do, however, address the need for self-reflective practices. For instance, bell hooks (1994) argues that: "teachers must be actively committed to a process of self-actualization that promotes their own well-being if they are to teach in a manner that empowers students" (p. 15). During interviews, participants suggested that feelings of discomfit are a precursor to effective reflection. They appear to have an acute awareness of how reflection of one's own prejudices creates recognition of how pedagogical practices may be favouring some students' perspectives and knowledge over others.

The participant's interviews suggested that this reflection should take place both individually and in collaboration with other teachers. The recognition that reflection should, in part, be collaborative is indicative of an understanding that mutual evaluation of professional practice, if facilitated effectively, is an especially enriching experience. Facing discomfit and voicing concerns with a group of professionals who face similar challenges can often result in the acquisition of enlightened perspectives. This dialogue, which is typically not present in schools, may serve to open minds and support and inform professional practice.

An Absence of Collaboration with Teachers

Although pressed, participants failed to offer examples of collaboration with fellow teachers. Rather, they focused on interaction with parents and partnerships with support workers and connections with the research community. There are numerous factors which may explain this. For instance, due to time constraints, participants may have limited opportunities for collaboration with their peers. Although professional development sessions may serve as opportunities to interact with other teachers, there is a shortage of these sessions. Conversely, because support workers are hired to assist teachers, their presence may be more accessible, allowing for more frequent collaboration with them. Purposeful collaboration with family members, rather than with other teachers, may result from a belief that the family holds the greatest insight into a child.

Another reason why there could be a lack of peer-to-peer collaboration is because of a mismatch of philosophies between participants and their colleagues. Anne stated that collaboration with teachers "depends on the teachers." She made clear, "if someone's personal and pedagogical values are different than mine I am not as interested as I probably once was in trying to convert them or trying to have conversations". Anne's comments seem to indicate that at one point, perhaps at the beginning of her career, she had the passion and energy to spread her philosophy. Now, Anne's comments seem to present a disheartened view of her colleagues - perhaps she feels that too many of them have philosophies that disregard or disadvantage cultural diversity in schools. Perhaps after years of practice without support, she has lost the drive

she once had. Participants may feel that inequitable philosophies are far too ingrained in their colleague's minds, and that they do practice adequate self-reflective to change these perspectives. This indicates that participants have to make a decision: either put effort into spreading their educational philosophies, or work alongside like-minded professionals in assisting students. Participants most often chose the latter.

Summary

What is clear from the interviews is that participants' practices extend beyond the confines of the classroom. These teachers refuse to work in isolation and instead work in conjunction with families, like-minded professionals and the wider research community. Engagement with these groups of individuals and ideas act as recourses for participants who have a commitment to meeting the needs of culturally diverse students. Participants also discussed the many challenges they face in facilitating the needs of these students. The crux of these obstacles is a lack of space that would allow professionals to collaboratively reflect upon their educational practices.

The findings of this research illustrates that participants have a clear understanding of how a sense of belonging and validation are precursors to engagement and academic achievement. Participants work to ensure students feel validated by purposefully discovering approaches to integrate their cultures into the learning environment, while at the same time accounting for student variances. They work to empower their students by instilling a sense of critical consciousness, permitting them to take ownership of their learning and

encouraging them to be active in their communities. Participants also purposefully seek communication with a wide network of people who may best assist them in meeting the needs of their students. They exercise agency to renew their knowledge, connect to the research community, and continuously self-reflect upon their practices in an effort to remain dynamic and responsive to their students.

The final chapter will reflect upon the findings of the research, discussing implications for practice and future research.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

This study focused on the perspectives of classroom teachers who are dedicated to facilitating the success of culturally diverse students. It sought to answer the research question: how do teachers committed to meeting the needs of culturally diverse students describe their beliefs, practices and the challenges they encounter in relation to their teaching? What resulted from interviews with ten participants were some prominent similarities and noteworthy divergences between what participants described as central to their practice and what is at the forefront of existing literature on culturally relevant pedagogy.

When one conducts sound research she or he is expected to contribute to the body of presently existing scholarship, generally filling some gap. This study both adds to the current research and identifies a gap. In recent years, studies have given voice to educators teaching in culturally diverse environments. These studies lend insight into the lives and practices of teachers dedicated to meeting the needs of their culturally diverse students. Nonetheless, most of the research has been conducted in the United States, with African-American students (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Chapman, 1994; Irvine, 1990; Hollins, 1996). This present study, then, contributes to the scholarly discussion in the field of culturally relevant pedagogy by offering views of culturally sensitive teaching approaches in the Canadian (specifically, British Columbian) context. It incorporates perspectives of educators who teach students from a wide variety of

cultural backgrounds or heritages, not often found in the current, pre-eminent literature. Additionally, this study's focus extends beyond simply comparing teacher's practices with culturally relevant theory. The participants' interviews revealed several conceptions and practices, which are not at the forefront of current literature concerning culturally relevant pedagogy. This is where my research may have most value, informing practice, while also raising and providing implications for practice.

Implications for Practice

The participants in this study as well as the scholarship regarding culturally relevant pedagogy provide insight into how one may facilitate success among a ethnically diverse student population. This research project did not set out to explain how every classroom in Canada may attain success with their culturally diverse students. Neither the study, nor the researcher, claims to have all the answers to the difficulties that plague the education system (Egbo, 2009; Dei, 2000). This study does, however, give voice to experienced educators who are committed to finding consistent ways to achieve success with all students. The findings of this study suggest three implications for practice.

The first implication is the need for teachers to find space to continuously and critically reflect upon their own identity development. Teaching in a context of student diversity requires a particular mindset, which can be achieved only through critical and ongoing self-analysis. This often entails moving into a position of discomfort so that one may genuinely begin the process of reflecting upon their biases and prejudices, and how they are implicated in their practice

and ultimately the success of their students (Tatum, 1997, 2000; Howard, 2001, 2003). Self-refection, then, is crucial as our self-perceptions, including our beliefs, attitudes, and interactions with others, may change dramatically upon inspection. Indeed, teachers can only empower their students when they understand who they are and how their identities intersect with the pedagogical choices they make (hooks, 1994). It is clear that the participants in this study have a remarkable sense of awareness. Their comments illustrate a clear understanding of how their identities influence their practice and their students' sense of validation and academic success. They hope that their fellow colleagues take an opportunity to reflect and develop comparable understandings.

A second implication for practice is the need for teachers to actively search for opportunities for collaboration. Despite the norms of privacy that pervade teacher culture and the postulations concerning our behind-closed doors independence, we actually *need* to interact (Epstein, 1991). Collective work consists of more than just incidental interactions; it integrates work within a wider network or brings together agents to participate in the meeting of shared goals (Grangeat & Gray, 2008). Acknowledging this interdependence is especially urgent when we consider issues of equity. Participants in this study recognized the necessity of including multiple actors to support their students from cultural minority groups. They acknowledged that the assistance and support they receive, in particular, from student's parents and support workers, is invaluable to their commitment to meeting students' needs.

A third implication for practice is the call for educators to incorporate elements of an approach such as culturally relevant pedagogy in their practice. Subsequent to conducting this study and analyzing my experiences, both as an ethnically diverse student and teacher, I agree with what the literature has determined to be likely: culturally relevant pedagogy helps to increase the social and academic success of students, (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Gay, 2000; Villegas & Lucas, 2002) though only if implemented in a meaningful way. One must not sidestep the numerous critiques of culturally relevant pedagogy. Essentializing students by assuming those from a particular culture share the same experiences is exceedingly problematic. Indeed, students may disengage if a teacher attempts to integrate their culture in an irrelevant, perhaps offensive manner. In order for this pedagogy to be effective, teachers must recognize student variably, as the participants in this study described. There is no standardized approach to being culturally sensitive. Though participants described practices which utilize tenets of this pedagogy, they also strayed from the literature, depending on what "works" with their students. Appreciating the flexibility of the theoretical concept of culturally relevant teaching may make it a valuable approach for educators to take.

Implications for Future Reseach

Discussions with participants shed light on the value they place upon life-long learning. They are driven to realize innovative concepts and strategies that support them in facilitating the success of their students. Participants' remarks illustrate the high degree to which they are informed of theoretical notions and

educational research. Their initiative in seeking to work with the research community is clear, albeit little encouragement and support in doing so. Though participants exhibited a desire to renew their knowledge, they accepted that many of their colleagues are hesitant to do the same. There could be numerous factors influencing or perpetuating this hesitancy. Therefore, the first implication for future research that this study expresses is exploring how to facilitate teacher engagement with educational research. What are the factors that lend themselves to feelings of tentativeness or perhaps complacency? How may this concern be surmounted so that teachers appreciate the significance of connecting with scholarship to renew their philosophies and practice according to Canada's changing demographics?

Participants in this study demonstrate purposeful collaboration to best meet the needs of their diverse student populations. Their comments are illustrative of an understanding that no one of them alone constitutes their students' education. Nonetheless, it is intriguing to note that participants seldom mentioned collaboration with their colleagues. This leads to a second implication for further research. That is, searching how to facilitate greater opportunities for teacher-peer collaboration. It is no secret that typically teachers are given little in the way of encouragement and assistance in working with one another to develop a common vision or to discuss shared challenges. Indeed, given opportunities to work in partnership, discussion may move beyond a focus on instrumental goals such as teaching resources, curriculum mapping, or pedagogical coaching, all of which have an immediate impact on the classroom.

Collaboration, instead, may well become an avenue to tackle foundational questions that must be addressed for lasting school change. In this way, collaboration may be a site for open-ended, reflective dialogue amongst a professional community in which teachers have differing, but generally well-intentioned conceptions about what it means to educate students.

This study explored the described philosophies and practices of teachers. It focused on teacher agency: how teachers work to facilitate the success of their students. In focusing on teachers, however, the research was limited in that voices of students were not heard. The third implication for future research that this study conveys is the need to focus studies on the perspectives of students. Rather than solely viewing the success of students from a teacher standpoint, the perspectives of students must be highlighted to gain insight into the success and empowerment students feel from the implementation of theories such as culturally relevant teaching. Students may best answer questions concerning their teachers' attempts to form relationships with them and validate their cultural experiences. The perspectives of those people closest to the students, family members, may also take centre stage in subsequent research.

Our understanding of this study would be sharpened by future, replicate studies on similar topics; therefore, this work has additional implications for academics. Ladson-Billings (1994) contends there is need for studies which analyze the use of culturally relevant pedagogy so as to gain stronger insights into teacher's practices. Future research might continue exploring described practices of culturally sensitive teachers, though they may explore how the

cultural heritages of teachers influence their philosophies and practice. Studies

may also pay greater heed to the multifaceted nature of students' identities. For

example, studies may explore the impact of culturally relevant pedagogical

practices on differing generations of immigrants. Future research could also

explore the impact of this pedagogy when taking into consideration how culture

intersects with other characteristics fundamental to one's identity such as gender,

class and sexual orientation.

Limitations

Though this study has revealed several findings, it is not without its

limitations. The key limitations of this study are due to the scope of the project.

As demonstrated by the above-mentioned areas of future research, this study is

but a scratch on the surface of further related research, such as listening to the

voices of students, or accounting for the cultural backgrounds of participants. The

participants in this study, though knowledgeable and certainly passionate about

their practice, were unequally represented as there was merely one male

interviewee. As well, because the study focused solely on what participants

described, is provides little insight as to how effective participants actually are in

their efforts. Observation, as a complement to interviewing, then, may provide a

more complete, rich picture of theory into practice. Finally, resting in the

Vancouver context, this study fills a gap in the research on culturally relevant

pedagogy. Nonetheless, findings of the research are also limited in that they

represent the described practices of teachers in one location. Indeed, varying

data results may arise if conducted is differing regions of Canada.

Final Comments

This research study gives voice to teachers who have a commitment to supporting students who are from cultural minority communities. Their teaching philosophies permit them to see how a positive sense of cultural identity and self-worth are intertwined with academic achievement. Participants validate students by appreciating their prior knowledge, building meaningful relationships with them, and fostering a sense of community. Their comments illustrate how they work to empower their students by allowing them space to take ownership of their learning, providing them with a critical lens through which they may deconstruct notions of absolute truth, and attempting to make available opportunities where they may exercise activism in their communities. Participants' descriptions of their practice reflect the high degree to which they exercise agency. They disrupt the domineering Eurocentric interests of schools by placing the needs of their culturally diverse students first, connecting with the research community in order to understand how this may be accomplished, and working in collaboration with those who support their philosophies.

Though it is apparent that participants are empowered by way of exercising their agency, this study has revealed deep cracks that add a serious element of complexity to participant's agency. When addressing how they facilitate the success of their students, participants revealed the many challenges they face, most of which reflect structural or institutional constraints. The undeniable predominance of these constraints in participants' interviews made me question the degree to which a teacher is truly empowered or given space to

exercise agency. Though participants described their dedication to supporting culturally diverse students, I am left uncertain of the impact of their described teaching transgressions on students. Undoubtedly, participants hope to empower their students, but how much of a trickle effect is realistic when there is but a handful of teachers with a similar commitment, working in a system where they are outnumbered, where their philosophies are often negated and where they are provided with little support?

Participants did not address the challenges they face lightly. From their assertions, it is apparent that the institutional arrangements governing a school effectively establish the parameters within which teachers work. These arrangements include how schools are organized as well as how schools incorporate the rules and structures built into the wider environment. For this reason, attending exclusively to the heart of learning and teaching, or to pedagogical approaches, may be insufficient when looking to change teaching practice as the organizational structures that support or produce those practices are not considered and perhaps altered, as well. This has implications for numerous factions of our education system.

Participants' remarks signify how they often have different job priorities than their school administrators, putting them in conflict with the policy objectives of the school system. Participants' interviews indicated that while they attend to the particular concerns of their students, the school, as an organization, typically promotes system wide goals. This conflict has implications for those people who hold institutional control, such as administration and school district officials.

Administrators, for instance, have the authority to create time and space for teachers to collaborate and dialogue. Furthermore, they, along with school districts, have the ability to make research more accessible to teachers, encouraging some teachers while supporting and sustaining those who currently take initiative to work with the research community. Indeed, school districts may hire anti-racism and culturally informed consultants to provide increased professional development opportunities for teachers.

The results of this study indicate that we as educators must rethink the traditional role of teacher. It requires us to let go of hope for simplistic solutions for the educational problems we face. We must grapple with the complexities of institutional and personal change. The shifting demographics of this country make it imperative that our response to diversity be effectively thought out and guided by a dedication to learning for every child. Ultimately, authentic change best occurs when education professionals at every level embrace inclusive and anti-bias paradigms and demonstrate an unwavering commitment to equitable education.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Dear _____,

My name is Nisha Parhar and I am a graduate student in the Inclusion and Diversity Masters cohort in the Faculty of Education at Simon Fraser University. I am currently preparing to collect data to use in my graduate thesis as required for the Master of Arts. Dr. Özlem Sensoy is my thesis supervisor and she recommended you would be a great teacher with a wealth of knowledge and insight to contribute to my study. I am writing to tell you about the study, and ask if you would be interested in participating in an interview.

My research centers on critical multicultural education practices. Though Vancouver is becoming an increasingly diverse city, there has been little research done on educators who teach in a manner that facilitates the success of culturally diverse students. For this study I would like to interview teachers who feel they are dedicated to facilitating educational experiences in which all students actualize their fullest potentials as learners and as citizens of our diverse community.

To qualify to participate in this study, you must agree that you practice a majority of tenets associated with multicultural education and culturally relevant teaching. I have attached a list of the most significant tenets for your reference. If you agree that you do in fact practice a majority of the tenets described, we will schedule an interview. You will be interviewed once, by me. The interview will last approximately forty-five (and not more than sixty) minutes total. I would meet you at your convenience, wherever you feel most comfortable and at whatever time works best with your schedule. I anticipate that I will begin conducting interviews by mid-April.

The university and I subscribe to the ethical conduct of research and to the protection at all times of the interests, comfort and safety of participants. You can be assured that your identity will be protected as I will not use real names or any identifiers in the reports of the research.

If you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at nparhar@sfu.ca or via telephone at 604-XXX-XXXX. Contacting me for further information in no way obligates your participation.

II look forward to your response. Thank you very much for your time considering this invitation.

Sincerely,
Nisha Parhar

Appendix B

Informed Consent Form

You are invited to take part in a research study being conducted by me, Nisha Parhar, a graduate student at Simon Fraser University as a part of a Master of Arts program in education. Your participation is this study is voluntary and you may withdraw from the study at any time. If you have any questions about the study, or your participation in it, you may discuss them with me or my thesis supervisor, Dr. Özlem Sensoy.

You will be asked to participate in a one-on-one interview with me, Nisha Parhar. This interview will last approximately forty-five to sixty minutes and will be audio-taped. During the interview you can withdraw any statements you have made up to that point. The location of the interview will be a convenient and safe place, as mutually agreed upon by you and me.

You understand that the statements you make are in no way representative of the school or school district you work for. Your statements are a representation of yourself as an individual and your personal teaching beliefs and practices.

You will remain anonymous for both the transcribing of the interview as well as in the final report. A pseudonym will be used and all efforts will be made so that your views and opinions will not be presented in a way that might expose your identity. I will store data and transcripts in a locked cabinet and on a password-protected computer. The only person to have access to these will be me.

If you have any question now or at any point during the study, please direct them to me, Nisha Parhar. My phone number is 604-XXX-XXXX and my email address is nparhar@sfu.ca. If you choose to participate, you will be kept informed about any changes that may affect your decision to participate. If you are interested, you will also be provided with a copy of either the final report or a summary thereof.

Signature

This study has been explained to me. I have been given the opportunity to discuss it and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I hereby consent to take part in this study. However, I realize that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time.

Participant Name:
Participant Signature:

Researcher Signature:
Date:

Appendix C

Interview Guide/ Data Analysis Log

Subject Name:	Researcher Name: Nisha Parhar
Teaching background. Grade(s) teach, subjects, how long have you been teaching.	
How do you describe your cultural heritage?	
What is the purpose of school?	
Which tenet do you think is the most challenging for you to enact in the classroom? • Why? • Examples?	

Pick three tenets which you think most represent what you do. Rank them: 1 being the most representative of your teaching practice.

\#_____

\# _____

\# _____

Question Prompts:

- Define "curriculum"
- Most recent experience with curriculum?
- Best experience using curriculum?
- First time you developed curriculum?
- A frustrating experience with curriculum?
- How do you interact with curriculum on a daily basis?
- What is the relationship b/w teacher and student?
- How do you think students learn best?
- What opportunities do students have to see or act in a way that demonstrates they know they can be active citizens?
- How do you increase student' personal and academic confidence?

Appendix D

Tenets of Culturally Responsive Teaching (adapted from Ladson-Billings, 1994; Gay, 2000).

1. *Teach subjects from diverse perspectives, not just one that is Eurocentric.*

2. *Build bridges between academic learning and student's prior understanding, knowledge, native language and values.*

3. *Learn from and about their students' culture, language, and learning styles to make instruction more meaningful and relevant to their student's lives.*

4. *Have an "inclusive curriculum" meaning the voices and perspectives of students are included.*

5. *Hold students to high standards and have high expectations for all students.*

6. *Ensure classroom practices are challenging, cooperative, and hands-on, with less emphasis on rote memorization and lecture formats.*

7. *Encourage a "community of learners" or encourage students to learn collaboratively.*

8. *Motivate students to become active participants in their learning.*

9. *Attempt to create a climate of caring, respect, and the valuing of student's cultures in the classroom.*

10. *Validate students' cultural identity in classroom practices and instructional materials.*

11. *Encourage students to think critically about knowledge, social issues, the media etc.*

12. *Encourage students to be aware of discriminatory structures in society and struggle against them.*

13. *Have a relationship with students that is fluid or humanely equitable rather than fixed and hierarchical.*

14. *Demonstrate a connectedness with all students.*

15. *Educate students about the diversity of the world around them.*