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How Do Teachers Challenge Neoliberalism Through Critical Pedagogy Within and Outside of the Classroom?

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Abstract

This thesis uses the qualitative case study approach to investigate current strategies and skills four Ontario public secondary school teachers apply both within and outside of the classroom to enhance students' critical consciousness. The focus is on teachers' pedagogical work in the era of neoliberal restructuring in order to provide a rich account of how neoliberalism challenges and affects their teaching. Existing literature shows a crisis of identity and political agency among youth in many Western societies, characterized by individuals' inability to think critically about social, political and economic issues, which is rooted in neoliberal education reforms. Adopting a critical pedagogical lens, this research highlights the power of neoliberal trends that are embedded in the Ontario education system in ways that are often invisible to teachers. The study also demonstrates the lack of critical consciousness among some teachers, and the dire need for enhancing critical consciousness among teachers in Ontario.

Keywords: Critical pedagogy, critical consciousness, democratic education, neoliberalism, neoliberal education reforms, global education, critical thinking, identity and political agency

Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to those who:

Stand up for human dignity under any circumstances.

Their religion is peace and love and work hard for the betterment of humanity.

Keep faith, not hope, for change.

Take risks for the sake of the collective good.

Finally, I dedicate this thesis to my creator who gave me a vision and mission to learn, and illuminated my way during dark times.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Statement of the Problem

At the heart of any healthy and democratic society is an education system that nurtures individuals who are civically engaged and who take constructive social actions. Evidence shows an emergence of what Giroux (2014) calls a kind of social amnesia in many Western societies that is characterized by individuals' inability to think critically about the link between individual interests and the public agenda at the core of democracy. By 'public agenda' I mean a broad public program that meets the needs of all citizens, not merely what is defined by governing elites or the powerful. Research suggests that this current social amnesia illustrates a broader crisis of identity and political agency amongst young people, which is a function of neoliberalism and rooted in the erosion of public spheres, most importantly public education (e.g., Apple, 2006; Giroux, 2014). Neoliberal educational reforms are defined by privatization, an education market (commodification of education), a market-driven pedagogy and curriculum, and a Darwinist mode of competition (e.g., Apple, 2006; Ball, 2012; Giroux, 2014).

A number of scholars have found that the implementation of neoliberal educational reforms in schools in Chile, which began in 1973 (e.g., Cabalin, 2012), led to an education crisis (Apple, 2006; Giroux, 2014). Later, those neoliberal trends influenced many advanced industrial nations such as Anglo-American countries (e.g., Lingard, Martino, & Rezai-Rashti, 2013). Evidence shows that schools all over the world appear to run in much the same way everywhere since they follow similar ideas and policies about education (Baker & LeTendre, 2005; Robertson, 2000; Verger & Altinyelken, 2013).

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Neoliberal educational reforms are justified by globalization, as it calls for educational restructuring to enable nations to compete in the capitalist system. Sahlberg (2011) calls neoliberal educational reforms the Global Educational Reform Movement (GERM) and argues that it has impacted pedagogy negatively.

American scholars argue that the neoliberal war on education is partially an ideological war that operates through a market-driven curriculum and pedagogy that have deprofessionalized and reprofessionalized teaching practices by limiting any mode of critical thinking that challenges neoliberal trends (e.g., Giroux, 2014; Apple, 2006). Not only has a market-driven pedagogy been applied as an ideological tool to suppress critical consciousness, but it has also strengthened neoliberal ideology through the rhetoric of school choice, self-interest, and the definition of an effective education based on market criteria. From this perspective, the current education system functions in a way that guarantees the continuation of neoliberal ideology by attempting to shape students whose identities and agencies are aligned with the market and are against any mode of collective good. Neoliberal education creates citizens who lack critical consciousness and the political agency to keep democracy alive.

Purpose of the Study and Positionality

As a former teacher in Iran, I have witnessed first-hand the detrimental effects of the educational culture of my country, which is based on memorization (rote-learning) at the expense of enhancing critical thinking skills and adheres to a narrow curriculum that strictly defines what knowledge matters. Concerned about the possibility of establishing a democratic and just society that depends on a civic education, I decided to learn more about the philosophy of education, especially in democratic Western countries. However,

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from the works of Giroux (2014), Apple (2006), Freire (1998) and Ball (1993, 2012), all major critics of current neoliberal educational reforms, I came to understand that the educational policies of so-called democratic Western countries also face challenges in terms of building democratic and equal societies.

Recognizing that democracy and equality were at stake in the new context was even more shocking to me due to its legitimized and justified nature. This led to my thinking about modes of resistance to neoliberalism in an educational context. A critical mode of pedagogy is advocated by a number of authors (e.g., Giroux, 2014; Freire, 1998; Apple, 2006) as a means of resistance. It is argued that although different economic and social relations are capable of producing different structures of knowledge and educational outcomes, there is space within education through critical pedagogy to challenge neoliberal economic, political and social relations (e.g., Au, 2009).

As a former teacher who sees emancipatory possibilities in applying critical pedagogy in my professional work, I advocate the same strategy against mainstream commonsense notions that are influenced by neoliberalism. However, I believe that to establish a strong democracy, we need to be realistic and pragmatic. What I mean by pragmatic is the realization of current challenges under the neoliberal regime and learning from real-life practical experiences of teachers who apply critical pedagogy to challenge neoliberalism rather than relying solely on our theoretical knowledge about critical pedagogy. It is important to look at specific contexts to understand the practical application of critical pedagogy in our current historical time.

Consequently, this research study is a qualitative case study of teachers in Ontario public schools who implement critical pedagogy to challenge neoliberalism. The study

adopts a critical pedagogical lens to investigate strategies and skills practiced by those teachers to provide a context for the enactment of a democratic education with a focus on the production of political agency.

Canadian Context: Ontario

Research suggests that Canada, similar to many Western countries, adopted neoliberal economic reforms in the late 1970s and early 1980s as an answer to the economic shocks rooted in the oil Crisis of the mid-1970s (MacLellan, 2009; Morton, 1985; Basu, 2004). Neoliberalism became dominant in Canada during the 1980s and 1990s, and influenced federal policy reducing aspects of the welfare state (see Bradford, 2000; Lemon, 1993). The province of Ontario in Canada, as one of the most industrialized provinces, was also not immune to the federal economic crisis (MacLellan, 2009). Unlike many other countries, Canada does not have a national standard or federal coordinating organization for education; instead, each province has its own specific education system (Davidson-Harden & Majhanovich, 2004). Although the shift to neoliberal policies began under the conservative government in Ontario, those policies were strengthened under the Liberal government throughout the 1980s and into the 1990s (Davidson-Harden & Majhanovich, 2004). In 1992, the Education Council of Canada, and in 1987, Radwanski, a public servant and policy adviser, harshly criticized the Ontario education system for "not preparing students for the global employment market" (MacLellan, 2009, p. 56).

In the mid and late 1990s, public education in Ontario underwent more structural neoliberal changes compared to other provinces through the 'Common Sense Revolution' (CSR) reforms adopted by Mike Harris (the 22nd Premier of Ontario). The CSR

ostensibly aimed to address what the education minister, John Snobelen, called a "broken education system" using the neoliberal model as the basis for developing an accountable and efficient education system (Basu, 2004; Brennan, 1995; Martino & Rezai-Rashti, 2012). Research suggests that schools and teachers, in particular, were blamed for not preparing students for the new global knowledge economy, as public education was considered the vehicle to boost the economy of the province and was expected to align with global economic knowledge through the production of human capital (Davies & Guppy, 1997; MacLellan, 2009; O'Sullivan, 1999). According to Martino and Rezai-Rashti (2012), discourses of efficiency, the market and accountability became dominant in the context of policy making in the Ontario education system.

I decided to focus on the province of Ontario to investigate the current practices of teachers who apply critical pedagogy that aims to enhance students' critical consciousness for two main reasons. First, there are similarities among neoliberal educational reforms in Canada and neoliberal policies that have already been adopted by major capitalist countries such as the United States and the United Kingdom (MacLellan, 2009; Rezai-Rashti, 2002). Second, there is a lack of research on the application of critical pedagogy in a Canadian context as a mode of resistance to and alternative for neoliberal reforms.

Importance of the Study

The results of the study have the potential to provide empirical examples of what it looks like for secondary school teachers to apply critical pedagogy principles both inside and outside of the classroom. Also, the study is significant because it highlights both the gaps as well as the practical spaces in pedagogical resistance in educational

settings. Furthermore, the challenges that teachers face in trying to implement critical methods are underlined. Finally, this study has the potential to contribute to theory building in terms of critical pedagogy based on the empirical data gathered to analyze the gap between theory and practice.

Research Questions

To serve my purpose, I have designated one general research question and four sub-questions as outlined below:

General question: How do teachers challenge neoliberalism through critical pedagogy within and outside of the classroom?

Sub-questions:

1. How do teachers make schools more democratic?

2. How do teachers enhance students' critical consciousness about the world around them?

3. How do teachers support the development of their students' political agency in order to contribute to political change?

4. What are the challenges teachers face in implementing critical approaches such as critical pedagogy?

Theoretical and Methodological Frameworks: A Brief Summary

By realizing pedagogy is a struggle to shape identities (Giroux, 2014; Freire, 1998), in this research a critical mode of pedagogy is employed as the theoretical framework to analyze data. According to Apple (2006), Freire (1998) and Giroux (2014), critical pedagogy emphasizes social justice issues and is seeing an emancipatory mission for knowledge. Through this mode of pedagogy, teachers apply varied skills, strategies

and techniques that raise individuals' consciousness (conscientization) of their status quo, increase self-realization and produce political agency. To serve this purpose, critical pedagogy offers a discourse of possibility against fundamentalist and authoritarian ideology, makes power visible and accountable, creates a culture of questioning and dialogue, and applies a language of hope (Apple, 2006; Freire, 1998; Giroux, 2014).

This study adopted a qualitative case study research methodology as a means of bridging research and life to better investigate Ontario public school teachers' strategies and skills aimed at enhancing students' critical consciousness within and outside of the classroom. Due to the qualitative nature of the study that sees human experience as the main source of data, this study is grounded in an interpretivist paradigm. A number of researchers have advocated interpretive categories for case studies (McDonough & McDonough, 1997). Through an interpretive case study, researchers focus both on the interpretations of their participants and the researchers' own interpretations of the data.

As the primary focus of this study was to investigate the skills and strategies applied by teachers in secondary public schools that aim to increase students' critical consciousness, this study qualifies as an instrumental study as conceptualized by Stake (1994). Stake (1994) describes an instrumental case study as "the case is of secondary interest; it plays a supportive role, facilitating our understanding of something else" (p. 237). In other words, an instrumental case study attempts to gain insight into a current phenomenon via a case(s). Therefore, although in this study the case or unit is composed of Canadian secondary teachers (individuals) who have resisted neoliberalism by employing critical pedagogy in their practices, the aim here is to investigate examples of current strategies and skills critical pedagogues use in democratic education, as well as

identify and attempt to learn from the unsuccessful and inadequate applications of those skills and strategies.

Research Methods

In order to recruit eligible participants for this study, I adopted a snowball sampling method. Snowball sampling is a nonprobability sampling technique through which existing participants recruit further participants who have inclusion criteria and the potential to contribute through their social networks and communities (Morgan, 2008). Participant inclusion criteria include being a teacher in a public school in the province of Ontario, having experience resisting neoliberalism in their professional careers, and a willingness to participate in an interview. Due to the qualitative nature of the study, in-depth face-to-face semi-structured interviews were conducted. After the semi-structured interviews, I conducted follow-up interviews to explore more in-depth information. The length of the semi-structured interviews was approximately 45 minutes, and due to requests from the participants the follow-up questions were asked via email.

I used a set of semi-structured interview questions that aimed to investigate how teachers enhance critical consciousness and develop students' agency to contribute to social change and the challenges that teachers have faced in applying critical approaches like critical pedagogy. To analyze the data, I applied a thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is carried out through the process of coding in a number of phases to achieve meaningful patterns (Guest, MacQueen & Namey 2012). Those phases were: understanding the data (familiarization with data), generating initial codes (categorization of key ideas to make sense of the data), finding themes among codes and defining and naming themes for final report. Since this study used a critical pedagogical lens, there

was a possibility of using prior codes along with the development of new codes.

Conclusion

This research study is a qualitative case study of teachers in Ontario public schools who apply critical pedagogy in their teaching. In the first chapter of this thesis, I provided the structure of the thesis, the research questions, context, rationale, purpose, and a summary of theoretical and methodological frameworks. The literature showed a crisis of identity and social responsibility rooted in neoliberal educational reforms in many Western countries, especially the United States. Here, the gap in the literature became evident, as the research suggests the influence of neoliberal reforms on Canada over two recent decades, specifically in the province of Ontario, while there is lack of research on the application of critical pedagogy in Canada.

The study adopted a critical pedagogical lens to investigate the strategies and skills practiced by those teachers who aim to provide a context for the enactment of a democratic education.

This thesis is comprised of 6 chapters. In the second chapter, I review the literature related to this study. In the third chapter, I present my methodological and theoretical frameworks. In the fourth chapter, I provide the findings based on the interviews. The fifth chapter is dedicated to data analysis and discussion. Finally, in the last chapter I present my conclusion and provide some suggestions for future research.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Introduction

      This chapter broadly examines literature in the field of neoliberal globalization and its impacts on education systems. The first part of the chapter focuses on eight major themes: neoliberal theory, the real essence of neoliberalism, the role of the neoliberal state, competitive individualism, the role of the market, and democracy and citizenship. In the second part of the chapter, I review the following topics related to neoliberalism and education: an education market, dimensions of the neoliberal war on teachers' pedagogical work, and teachers' resistance to the reforms. I conclude by noting the following gaps in the literature, which provides the justification for this study.

Neoliberal Theory: Historical Background

      According to Harvey (2005), neoliberal theory was developed in 1947 by the Mont Perelin society, which was made up of a number of philosophers and economists, including Friedrich August Hayek and Milton Freidman, who focused on individual rights of property under a free market without any kind of regulation. Harvey (2005) defines neoliberalism and states:

> Neoliberalism is in the first instance a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade. The role of the state is to create and preserve an institutional framework appropriate to such practices. (p. 2)

Accordingly, neoliberalism is suggested as a political economic theory that presumes human well-being is best served through individuals' right of property in a free market and by limiting the role of the state.

In essence, neoliberalism was developed to challenge the main ideas associated with Keynesian economics. In the late 1960s, Keynesian economics policies broke down leading to a crisis of capital accumulation that was identified by rising unemployment and inflation, and a subsequent fall in tax revenues across a wide variety of nation-states (Harvey, 2005; Saad-Filho & Johnston, 2005). To address this fiscal crisis, the United States tried to control and regulate the economy through corporatist strategies, including abandoning the Bretton Woods fixed system of exchange, and attempting to stop the support of the American dollar with gold (Harvey, 2005; Hammes & Willis, 2005). Research suggests that the fiscal crisis of the 1970s should be realized as an oil crisis (Butler, 2010; Harvey, 2005; Jones, 2012). Conflict between Arab countries increased the price of oil, caused an oil embargo for Western countries, slowed down oil production, and led to the 1970s fiscal crisis (Harvey, 2005). It was believed that neoliberalism was the only condition under which "the resumption of active capital accumulation [could] be restored" (Harvey, 2005, p. 22). Harvey (2005) argues that neoliberalism has "long been lurking in the wings of public policy" (p. 19). Neoliberal policies were subsequently taken up by a range of countries, including Chile, the United States and England.

The Role of the Neoliberal State

In the following sections, the core ideas of neoliberalism found during the literature review will be defined and critiques will be provided.

Deregulation

Research on neoliberalism focuses on the idea of deregulation. The idea of deregulation intends to limit the state's control of and intervention in the market, and the underlying assumption is that an individual's well-being is best served through freedom

of choice in a free market (individuals are entrepreneurial, competitive if they are given the chance) (Apple, 2006; Giroux, 2014; Harvey, 2005). State intervention in the market, from this perspective, is regarded as "crushing individualism" (Hayek, 1944, p. 2).

Major critics of neoliberalism (e.g., Harvey, 2005; Giroux, 2014; George, 1999) criticize deregulation by showing the gap between the theory of neoliberalism and its practices. It is argued that although within neoliberal theory the state's role is to protect and promote individuals' choice through guaranteeing a free market even with "state action if necessary" (Harvey, 2005, p. 70), in practice the neoliberal state favours the private sector (George, 1999; Giroux, 2014; Harvey, 2005). Research suggests that when a conflict arises, neoliberal states "typically favour the integrity of the financial system [that is under the control of the elite] over the well-being of the population" (Harvey, 2005, p. 71). Evidence shows that this paradoxical situation is at the expense of public interest and wellbeing. For example, Giroux (2014) argues that the defunding of public spheres and major cultural apparatuses, most importantly education, is justified under the name of budget shortfalls by a neoliberal state (austerity measures). Critics of neoliberal trends also argue that the role of the neoliberal state has transferred to a new mode of surveillance in favour of the elite group (Ball, 2012; Giroux, 2014; Harvey, 2005).

Privatization

Another core idea of neoliberalism is privatization. The underlying assumption is that the public sphere is unable to increase productivity and innovation in the market (Ball, Therupp & Forsey, 2010; George, 1999). Research suggests a number of rationales for the advocacy of privatization policies by neoliberals. In the context of the United Kingdom, Margaret Thatcher called for privatization as a means of breaking the power of

labour unions and decreasing their wage bargaining (George, 1999). Privatization was also promoted as a way to limit the power of states (e.g., the United States and England.) (George, 1999).

Research shows widespread evidence that privatization serves neither economic growth nor provides better services for the consumer, but rather transfers wealth from the public to the private sector (George, 1999; Giroux, 2014; Harvey, 2005; Ball, 2012). George (1999) suggests that instead of using the word privatization, a word that hides the real essence of this policy, it is better to talk about the "alienation and surrender of the product of decades of work by thousands of people to a tiny minority of large investors." (p.7). In other words, she argues that privatization has provided the context for more capital accumulation by the elite group.

Individualism and Competition/Competitive Individual

Individualism, or the competitive individual, is another central concept associated with neoliberalism. This notion of individualism was evident in Thatcher's 1987 speech when she declared "there is no such thing as society. There are individual men and women, and there are families" (e.g., Clarke, 2005, p. 2). In the era of neoliberalism, individualism means individuals should secure their own well-being by gaining economic power because the role of state is only to provide a good climate for business (Apple, 2006; Harvey, 2005). As Apple (2006) explains, neoliberals have defined individuality and citizenship based on economic values. The underlying assumption about the competitive individual is that competition among individuals benefits society. Indeed, it is assumed that those who compete and win will benefit the rest of society (Apple, 2006; Ball, 2012; Giroux, 2014; George, 1999; Monbiot, 2016). Critics of neoliberalism argue

that while the free market is supposed to be a neutral system that provides equal

conditions for competition, in practice this system (e.g., resources, information, and

monopoly rights) privileges the interests of the elite over the rest of the population

(Apple, 2006; Ball, 2012; Giroux, 2014; Harvey, 2005). More importantly, according to

George (1999), while it is claimed that wealth trickles down to benefit the poor, the

redistributed wealth among the elite will go to the international stock market and not be

distributed at the local or national economic level.

Moreover, according to Monbiot (2016), comparing individuals and assessing

their qualifications based on constructed standards shows that the governments'

bureaucratic system has been replaced by a new system of control.

Role of the Market (Private Enterprise)

Free markets and privatization are regarded as central themes in literature on

neoliberalism. According to Arestis and Malcolm (2005), neoliberalism privileges the

market over the state and private property over public property. Research suggests that

neoliberals claim that "the free market is a self-regulating order. It regulates itself better

than the government or any other outside force" (Olssen & Peters, 2005, pp. 314-315),

and its neutrality is a moral mechanism that ensures everybody receives what he or she

deserves through the virtue of competition (e.g., Giroux, 2014; Monbiot, 2016). A

number of critics argue that the idea of a free market is only related to neoliberalism

because, in practice, the neoliberal government provides and regulates the market through

a new mode of surveillance that privileges the dominant group (Campbell, 2005; Ball,

2012; Giroux, 2014; Monbiot, 2016).

Research by critics of neoliberalism shows widespread evidence of the emergence of a large number of crises caused by the idea of the marketization of social life by the neoliberals (Apple, 2006; Giroux, 2014; Massy, 2013; Monbiot, 2016).

Democracy and Citizenship: Hijacked Words

Some of the literature on the critiques of neoliberalism shows how the terms 'democracy' and 'citizenship' have been hijacked. Research suggests that the depoliticized economic vocabulary in the era of neoliberalism has become the source of defining the everyday words that shape our practices, expectations, relations and worldview (Massy, 2013). For example, Massy (2013) discusses how the neoliberal notions of "consumer", "growth" and "investment" influence and shape our everyday practices and thoughts, suggesting a need "to scrutinize the everyday language that shapes how we think about economy" (p. 1).

Evidence also shows that the idea of the marketization of social life shows faith to the justice of the market (e.g., Apple, 2006; Giroux, 2014). It is argued that citizens are regarded as consumers, and that democratic choice is practiced through buying and selling (Monbiot, 2016) while the unequal condition of competition is ignored (Harvey, 2005).

Neoliberalism and Education

Here I review the body of research on the negative impacts of neoliberalism on education. Although the literature covers different layers of neoliberalism's influence on educational systems, this review focuses on the dimensions of the neoliberal war on teachers' pedagogical practices in the classroom. In this section, I focus on three specific critiques of the effect of neoliberalism on the pedagogical practices of teachers: a

prescribed narrow curriculum, the deprofessionalization of teachers' practices, and the reprofessionalization of teachers and pedagogy as a struggle over shaping identities. By adopting a critical lens, this paper will primarily focus on the relationship of these critiques with the intensification of top-down test-based modes of neoliberal accountability. Throughout this review, I will make reference to specific literature on the impact of these reforms on the Ontario education system.

Based on the research, the neoliberal war on education can be understood from two perspectives: ideological and economic. Evidence shows that the economic war is undertaken to maintain complete control by the dominant class, both economically and politically (Apple, 2006; Ball, 1993, 2012; Giroux, 2014). More importantly, the ideological war aims to shape commonsense notions aligned with neoliberalism (Apple, 2006; Ball, 1993, 2012; Freire, 1970a; Giroux, 2014; Harvey, 2005). At the political level, both dimensions of the war are served through the reform of the public education system, which is part of the larger neoliberal project to dismantle the public sphere (Apple, 2006; Giroux, 2014). Research suggests that the erosion of public schools is achieved by placing schools into the market and the defunding of public schools (e.g., Apple, 2006, p. 33; Ball, 1993; Giroux, 2014).

As varied neoliberal polices are interrelated and each policy is the cause or effect of one or the other, before reviewing the literature on the impacts of neoliberal trends on the pedagogical work of classroom teachers, I will provide a brief overview of the policies examined previously in the Privatization section (the education market and cutbacks to education).

The Education Market

Research on neoliberalism and education focuses on the idea of marketization. One of the main themes in neoliberal education reform is school choice (Chubb & Moe, 2011). To provide individuals free choice, varied modes of schools and programs under the guise of school choice have been implemented by neoliberals as public education alternatives, including educational vouchers, charters and private schools.

Research suggests that in advocating for privatization, market advocates assert competition among schools leads to high quality education which satisfies parents and students as consumers (Apple, 2006; Ball, 1993; Giroux, 2014). School choice and self-interest has been criticized from different perspectives in the literature. Some critics of the education market argue that although competition among schools might lead to school effectiveness through increasing school performance, in practice the application of the theory of market into education shows a partial and inadequate representation of the process (Apple, 2006; Ball, 1993). While it is expected that educational values will remain unblemished by being responsive in market-driven education, the changes by the market are not actually education led but financially driven and rest upon the self-interest of institutional employees to guarantee their position in the market (e.g. Apple, 2006; Ball, 1993). This educational reform is a shift from what schools do for their students to what students do for the schools (Apple, 2006; Giroux, 2014).

Based on the literature, not only has this market strategy made education subject to competition in the market (Apple, 2006; Brigham, da Costa, & Peters, 2003; Walberg & Bast, 2003), but also it has turned schools and students into salable commodities that fulfill the market's needs (e.g., Apple, 2006; Giroux, 2014). It is argued that an overemphasis on school choice and competition between schools might hinder schools

functioning as political sites intent to solve wider social problems and erode the values of collective action (Apple, 2006).

Research suggests that the defunding of public schools under the justification of budget deficits erodes public schools and makes them subject to market-driven policies, which in turn is part of the larger project of neoliberals to dismantle any public sites that can challenge neoliberal reforms (Apple, 2006; Giroux, 2014).

In Ontario, the Ministry of Education has eroded local school boards' power by reducing the number of school boards under the justification of budget deficits in order to suppress any dissent to neoliberal policies (Basu, 2004; Martino & Rezai-Rashti, 2012). Research suggests that the adoption of a centralized funding system has limited the autonomy of schools and boards of education to raise their own revenues, making them subject to an education market (Basu, 2004; Sattler, 2012). For example, dramatic cutbacks to Ontario's K-12 education was a shift in the funding mechanism in Ontario's education system under the Conservative Government in the 1990s (Mackenzie & Rosenfeld, 2002).

Dimensions of the Neoliberal War on Teachers' Pedagogical Work

Literature on neoliberalism and teachers' pedagogical work focuses on standardization. The main theme in the literature is the impacts of the neoliberal policy that calls for a top-down test-based accountability for pedagogy (e.g., Apple, 2006; Ball, 2001; Connell, 2009; Compton & Weiner, 2008; Hursh, 2008; Lingard & Lewis, 2016; MacLellan, 2009; Nichols & Berliner, 2007; Robertson, 2008; Stobart, 2008; Seddon, 1997b; Weiner, 2008). It is argued that in the era of neoliberalism, when there is a great emphasis on standardized testing and the use of accountability testing in education

systems, we need to ask how teachers' pedagogical practices are informed and how class content changes (Ravitch, 2011).

Evidence shows that in many parts of the world, including North America and the United Kingdom, high-stakes testing has corrupted teachers' pedagogical practices in the classroom because a centralized curriculum (Hursh, 2008; MacLellan, 2009; Nichols & Berliner, 2007;) undermines teaching practices as a professional task (deprofessionalization and reprofessionalization of teachers) (Furlong, 2013; MacLellan, 2009; Seddon, 1997a) and establishes colleges of teachers (Connell, 2009; MacLellan, 2009). In the following section, the literature associated with each policy will be comprehensively explored.

Top-Down Curriculum Design: A Narrow Curriculum

Neoliberal reforms also include curriculum standardization and a focus on math and science. Neoliberals justify the curriculum focus on science and math under the guise of practicality and their low cost compare to other subjects from humanities and art (e.g., Apple, 2006; Giroux, 2014).

A number of authors argue that those in power define what knowledge counts and that knowledge is not neutral (e.g., Apple, 2006; Ball, 1993, 2012). It is argued that while it is expected that neoliberal educational reforms give schools more autonomy, curriculum responsiveness and diversification, in practice, subject schools to a very centralized curriculum and performance criteria based on neoliberal values, learnings and methods (e.g., Apple, 2006; Ball, 1993, 2012). Research shows that knowledge based on a market driven curriculum emphasizes entrepreneurial subjects and the learning and teaching of basic skills rather than critical thinking and civic education (Apple, 2006;

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Basu, 2004; Crocco & Costigan, 2007; Giroux, 2014; Nichols & Berliner, 2007). To meet neoliberal accountability standards (e.g., the tests), national curriculum was narrowed in a reductive way (e.g., Hursh, 2008; MacLellan, 2009; Nichols & Berliner, 2007). A number of critics argue that the focus of curriculum on mathematics and science was at the expense of other subjects including art, music, the social sciences, history and geography (e.g., Hursh, 2008; Nichols & Berliner, 2007; Ravitch, 2013).

The neoliberal narrowed curriculum has been imposed on public schools by governments in many parts of the world. For example, during the Bush presidency (George W. Bush) the American public schools that received federal funding were subject to a curriculum that was designated to serve neoliberal standardized tests by the Department of Education while other subjects (e.g., art, the social sciences, music) were neglected (Hursh, 2008). These types of reforms have been taken up in Ontario too. Evidence shows that the standardization of curriculum in the Ontario education system put a great emphasis on mathematics and science, privileging those subjects over others (Basu, 2004). Furthermore, research suggests that these circumstances have led to public schools having little motivation to pay attention to other subjects (Ravitch, 2011). Teachers have not had any choice except to concentrate only on tested subjects at the expense of non-tested subjects (Robertson, 2008; Stobart, 2008).

According to Nichols and Berliner (2007), a report from the Education Policy Analysis Archives (2004) found that a Colorado teacher who had experienced applying a market-driven curriculum explained, "We only teach to the test even at second grade, and have stopped teaching science and social studies. We don't have assemblies, take field trips, or have musical productions at grade levels. …" (p. 4). Another research study

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about teachers in New York found that since the schools "are partially evaluated on test scores" teachers are expected to focus only on mathematics and reading (Ravitch, 2011, p. 256). According to the same study, some teachers explained that they were forced to eliminate topics in art and concentrate only on tested topics (Ravitch, 2011).

Deprofessionalization of Teachers' Pedagogical Work: Test Intensification

One of the important themes in the literature on neoliberalism and education is the new mode of surveillance that holds individuals accountable. It is argued that in the context of education regulation through surveillance is achieved by accountability criteria driven by educational testing regimes (Apple, 2006; Ball, 2012; Giroux, 2014). The focus on the role of the individual is key. Research suggests that in the era of neoliberalism individuals need to both "make an enterprise of...[themselves]" and provide evidence of performance that shows they are "making an enterprise of [themselves]" (Apple, 2006, p. 63). This mode of accountability marginalizes those students and schools that are not able to compete in the education market once the results of students' performance on standardized testing (Apple, 2006a; Giroux, 2014) have been put through the regime that involves "practices of sorting, naming, numbering, comparing, listing and calculating" students' performance (Lury et al., 2012, p. 4). Critics consider these tests a new mode of governing by numbers, a regulatory technology that promotes an education market by providing information for comparison (Apple, 2006; Ball, 2012).

Ontario has not been immune to global pressures to bring in standardized curricula and testing regimes. Widespread evidence shows that Ontario's Ministry of Education regards standardized testing and students' achievement on such tests (outcome-based education) a decisive factor in educational policy-making (Ben Jafaar &

Anderson, 2007; Basu, 2004; Chan, Fisher, & Rubenson, 2007; Lessard & Brassard, 2009; Martino & Rezai-Rashti, 2012; Sattler, 2012; Ungerleider & Levin, 2007). In 1998, the Education Quality and Accountability Office of Ontario (EQAO) imposed a mandatory testing regime for schools, which served as the first step towards public accountability (MET, November 1995).

More importantly, a number of critics argue that the pressure of performativity has forced schools to show better performance on the tests by reducing education to test scores at the expense of a civic education (e.g., Apple, 2006; Giroux, 2014). Research suggests that in Ontario the primary purpose of public schools as a political site and a battleground that has the potential to make change through civic education has been neglected (Basu, 2004; Mitchell, 2003). It is argued that performativity has aimed to eliminate the cultural and moral side of education and replaces the public agenda (public needs and interests) with the interests of the market (Martino & Rezai-Rashti, 2012).

Evidence shows that focusing on high-stakes testing regimes has deprofessionalized teaching practices and has made teachers subject to performance data (e.g., Apple, 2006; Connell, 2009; Furlong, 2013; Giroux, 2014; Lewis & Hardy, 2014; MacLellan, 2009; Seddon, 1997a). Apple (2006) argues that neoliberal reforms have turned schools into factories that are responsible for providing human capital to fulfill the needs of the market. Furthermore, research suggests that through these reforms, teachers are perceived as "technicians" ("knowledge workers") whose responsibilities are only to deliver pre-defined knowledge, "a situation for which skill, but not intelligence, is required" (Connell, 2009, p. 224). Based on a number of studies, the only responsibility of teachers is to provide students with the generic skills (e.g., reading, writing and

calculating) needed for students to excel on the tests and to track the students'

performance on such tests; this is now the criterion of an efficient and excellent education

(Apple, 2006; Basu, 2004; Furlong, 2012; Lewis & Hardy, 2016; Ravitch, 2011).

Overall, evidence shows that "the results-based logic of neoliberalism

instrumentalize[s] teachers, dehumanize[s] students, and make[s] the classroom into a

space of performance and efficiency, thereby denying…any genuine engagement with

social problems, political issues, or cultural critiques" (Portelli & Konecny, 2009, p. 92).

Under neoliberalism, teaching as a professional task associated with interpreting the

world for and with the pupils has been neglected (Connell, 2009) and teachers' skills and

knowledge and their capacity for independent thought have been undermined (Hursh,

2008).

Reprofessionalization of Teachers: Neoliberal Professionals

A number of studies suggest that in the era of neoliberal capitalism not only the

intellectual work of teachers has been controlled but also the concept of a good teacher

has been redefined and the nature of what it means to be an intellectual has been

reconfigured (Seddon, 1997a). It is argued that reshaping teachers' pedagogical work

("what to teach and what it means to be a teacher") is a crucial part of neoliberal, market-

based education reforms (Ball, 2003, p. 218). According to Connell (2009), in the era of

neoliberalism, teacher professionalism is based on individual competitiveness. Research

highlights the role of teacher education and the establishment of teacher registration

institutions in defining and dictating teachers' professional behaviour in a way that is

aligned with the neoliberal agenda that seeks to standardize outcomes rather than

determining excellence and efficiency based on learning (Compton & Weiner, 2008).

Evidence shows that the establishment of teachers' college in many parts of the world (e.g., Canada, the United State, England) is a mechanism by neoliberals to bind, regulate and control teachers' practices in alignment with the neoliberal agenda of productivity (Compton & Weiner, 2008; MacLellan, 2009).

A number of authors argue that under the neoliberal regime education systems are truly "payment by results" (Stobart, 2008, p. 27); test scores influence teachers' salaries and whether or not they will receive job bonuses (Nichols & Berliner, 2007; Stobart, 2008). Also, "standardized tests [partly] are being used not only to justify regressive funding but also to attack teacher job security and collective bargaining rights" (Lissovoy, Means, & Saltman, 2014, p. 103). Moreover, the neoliberal top-down test-based mode of accountability is used to enable principals to promptly remove those teachers who do not contribute to and focus on raising students' test results and replace them with those teachers who are regarded as effective based on neoliberal standards (e.g., Lingard et al., 2016; Ravitch, 2011). Similarly, research suggests that the very centralized curriculum implemented by the provincial government of Ontario was aimed at decreasing the power of boards of education, schools and teachers, making them subject to neoliberal policies (Basu, 2004).

Pedagogy: A Struggle Over Shaping Identities

Evidence shows that the power of neoliberalism is not only in the economic realm but also in the realm of the ideas and culture that have shaped what is considered 'common-sense' (e.g., Apple, 2006; Giroux, 2014). Accordingly, here I focus on the problematic nature of a market-driven pedagogy associated with identities and democracy in society.

To highlight the importance of pedagogy, a number of authors drawing upon the works of Bernstein (1971, 2004) argue that pedagogy is a "cultural relay ensuring social and cultural production and reproduction" (e.g., Lingard, Martino, & Rezai-Rashti, 2013, p. 196). Research suggests that the future of democracy depends on the educational and ethical standards of society and that pedagogy is a political tool; by its virtue pedagogy has the power to shape identities, desires, values and social relations (e.g., Apple, 2006; Freire, 1970a). According to Giroux (2014), pedagogy should not be about training. Instead, it should be about educating individuals who are self-reflective and self-conscious about their relation with others and the broader world (Giroux, 2014).

A number of scholars argue that a market-driven pedagogy has led to depoliticized education (e.g., Apple, 2006), which in turn has promoted a social amnesia that is identified by the inability of youth to think critically, connect individual issues to broader political, economic and social structure of the society and take constructive social actions (Giroux, 2014). According to critics, neoliberal educational reforms shape subjectivities in such a way that they are aligned with the market values noted above (e.g., Apple, 2006; Ball, 2012; Giroux, 2014). Political illiteracy is more than a depoliticizing of the public as it has the power of suppressing any dissent that might threaten the market, thus making the wielding of power crueler and easier (Apple, 2006; Giroux, 2014).

The notion of performativity, reviewed above, is relevant to this discussion about teacher subjectivities. According to Ball (2012), neoliberals apply the mechanism or tactic of performativity "on the subjectivities of practitioners" by convincing individuals that they can become better through improving their performance in a competitive

climate (p. 31). In the context of education, we have seen performativity is about students' achievement on the testing regimes that define an effective education based on the neoliberal agenda. Ball (2012) asserts that performativity is "a technology of oppression" (p. 31). He argues that performativity influences one's practices, speaking, decisions and other aspects of life through defining one's worthiness based on his/her performance in delivering the organizational outcomes (Ball, 2012). Through the processes of "tracking data" and 'keeping data on track," teachers are simultaneously "tracked" and disciplined as their subjectivities are reshaped (Lewis & Hardy, 2016, p. 13).

Teachers' Resistance to Neoliberal Educational Reform

Research on teachers and neoliberalism suggests that teachers have a crucial role in resisting neoliberal trends. According to Compton and Weiner (2008), "teachers are in a war being fought over the future of education" and are at the forefront of the battle against neoliberal educational reforms (p. 5). One of the main themes in the literature is the role of teacher unions in resisting neoliberal educational reforms. For instance, evidence shows that teacher unions function as a social capital in many parts of the world to stall the march of neoliberalism by using collective power (Robertson, 2008; Jones, 2005). Compton and Weiner (2008) argue that teacher unions are grappling with the application of "business" and "quality control measures" in education that are provided by the private sector to public education, and the production of a low-skill workforce that corporations need to fulfill their needs and maximize their profits (p. 5). Furthermore, a number of authors argue that the boycott of neoliberal testing regimes in Seattle by

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teachers and students was a resistance against standardization that aimed to deprofessionalize teachers (Hagopian, 2013; Slater, 2015).

Also, research in the Canadian context shows that teacher unions in Ontario have resisted institutional neoliberal controls like the Ontario College of Teachers (OCT) by organizing a slate of candidates comprised of teachers for the elected seats on the College's Governing Council Teachers (MacLellan, 2009). Through their union, these dissenting teachers explained they "viewed it vital…to have a direct role in writing the bylaws governing College operations and to combat the influence of government-appointed council members [and] all the teacher-union candidates won their seats" (MacLellan, 2009, p. 61).

Moreover, a number of authors highlight the role of teachers as public intellectuals in implementing a critical mode of pedagogy both as an alternative to and mode of resistance against a market-driven pedagogy (Giroux, 2014; Apple, 2006; Freire, 1970a). In this respect, critical pedagogy is considered a theoretical tool to shape students' identities and provide them with the ability to recognize and criticize their status quo and to take actions that create social change (Giroux, 2014).

An Education Reform or an Education Crisis?

Critics argue that neoliberal educational reform is not a reform at all but rather an education crisis (e.g., Monbiot, 2016; Apple, 2006, Giroux, 2014, Freire, 1970a). In the era of neoliberalism, the question about knowledge has shifted from "Is it true?" and "Is it just?" to "Is it useful, saleable, efficient?"; this new approach to knowledge ignores the social purpose of education (Ball, 2012, p. 33). For example, Ravitch (2011) argues that the ineffectiveness of neoliberal educational reforms is not the only issue that threatens

the existence of public schools. In *The Death and Life of the Great American School System: How Testing and Choice Are Undermining Education*, Ravitch (2011) asks, "If the present reforms hold the potential for death of public schooling, wherein lies the potential for life?" (as cited in Burris, 2011, p. 2).

Evidence shows that neoliberal educational reforms that reorganize societies and social relations are a class project of capitalism that aims to shape neoliberal identities to fulfill the workforce needed in the market and turn public education into a private monopoly to open up strategic investment for corporations (Compton & Weiner, 2008). According to Compton and Weiner (2008):

> Under neoliberalism … there [is no] opportunity to develop education systems so that they can fulfill their true purpose—to enable people to live a full and creative life, or as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights puts it, to ensure that education is directed 'toward the full development of the human personality'. (p. 5)

Indeed, focusing on the tests in the era of neoliberalism has been at the expense of other subjects in the humanities, critical thinking skills and enhancing self-realization, and it is not associated with learning at all. Learning basic skills and neglecting civic education are real threats for the future of democracy.

To conclude, critics of neoliberalism have clearly shown that young people today are experiencing a crisis of identity and political agency identified by lack of critical consciousness. This is a real threat for the future of democracy in many Western countries, especially the United States and the United Kingdom, and Canada. As we have seen from the literature review above, Ontario has not been immune to neoliberal global trends. To resist neoliberal education reforms, critics have advocated infusing critical pedagogy into schools. However, although there is a large body of literature on the

crucial role critical pedagogy plays in establishing a healthy and democratic society, there is lack of adequate research on the application of such practices in varied contexts, including Canada. Accordingly, this research has the potential to enrich the current literature by: 1) investigating current issues teachers face in Ontario public schools in the era of neoliberalism; and 2) examining examples of applying critical pedagogy along with analyzing those practices in the province of Ontario, filling the current knowledge gaps in the application of critical pedagogy.

Chapter 3

Methodological and Theoretical Frameworks

Methodology: Qualitative Inquiry

Qualitative methodology is a scholarly effort as opposed to a scientific measurement because its focus is on life in its natural context rather than in laboratory conditions. According to Hesse-Bieber and Leavy (2006), qualitative research "differs in terms of [its] assumptions regarding the extent to which knowledge can be 'objective'. Most qualitative paradigms agree on the importance of subjective meanings individuals bring to the research process and acknowledge the importance of the social construction of reality" (p. 75). In other words, this tradition attempts to bridge life and research by seeing human experience (holistic accounts of subject) as the main source of data and explore how experiences shape human life (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). Since this methodology focuses on the meanings that participants bring to research, it is the best choice for addressing dilemmas in the field of education and educators' real needs (Creswell, 2007). Given that the research question motivating this study is positioned in the field of education, a qualitative methodology is therefore the most appropriate framework to use.

Research Design: Interpretive Case Study

Among the different qualitative approaches for research, this study has opted to follow a case study design to better investigate Ontario public school teachers' strategies and skills aimed at enhancing students' critical consciousness within and outside of the classroom. According to Baxter and Jack (2008), a qualitative case study is an approach

in education research that examines an experience (case or cases) within its natural context from multiple perspectives to gain a deep understanding of the issue at hand.

By adopting an interpretivist position in the current case study design (McDonough & McDonough, 1997), this study focuses on both the participants' and the researcher's interpretation of the data. Furthermore, a variety of approaches for interpretive case study research ensure that the case(s) under study has been thoroughly investigated. As the primary focus of this study is to investigate the skills and strategies applied by teachers in secondary public schools that aim to increase students' critical consciousness, this study qualifies as an instrumental study as conceptualized by Stake (1994).

Stake (1994) describes an instrumental case study as one in which "the case is of secondary interest; it plays a supportive role, facilitating our understanding of something else" (p. 237). In other words, an instrumental case study attempts to gain insight into a current phenomenon via a case. Therefore, although in this study the case or unit is composed of Canadian secondary teachers (individuals) who have resisted neoliberalism by employing critical pedagogy in their practices, the aim here is to investigate examples of current strategies and skills critical pedagogues engage in democratic education, as well as identify and attempt to learn from problematic applications of those skills and strategies.

Overall, a case study design enables a deeper analysis of teachers' critical practices through providing meaningful and accurate accounts of teachers' experiences in the province of Ontario (Patton, 2002).

Participant Recruitment

Making decisions about which individuals to include in the research and where to collect data is pivotal in research methodology. Based on the case study design of this research and the objectives of the investigation, a qualitative purposeful sampling was selected to provide detailed accounts of participants' experiences. Purposeful sampling, or "criterion-based selection" (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993, p. 67), is a technique used to identify information-rich case(s) that enable the researcher to gain deep insights into the issues that are the main focus of the question under study (Patton, 2002). Accordingly, for this study participant inclusion criteria included being a teacher in a public school in the province of Ontario, having the experience of resisting neoliberalism through applying critical pedagogy in teaching practices, and the willingness to participate in an interview. I focused on secondary schools in Ontario with the belief I might find more evidence of critical pedagogy practices at that level compared to the elementary school level. More importantly, based on my teaching experience at the secondary level, students at this level are very curious to know and learn and become ready to make decisions about their future. Thus, teachers can play a decisive role in a student's life by enhancing her or his critical consciousness.

In order to recruit eligible participants for this study, a snowball sampling method was adopted as a type of purposeful sampling. Based on this sampling method, the principle investigator (PI) knew one individual who met the participant inclusion criteria. That individual was asked to recommend several other people who met the participant inclusion criteria. Using the snowball sampling method, I continued to recruit participants until I reached four teachers for this study.

Participant Profiles

The following table summarizes pertinent information related to each participant, including the participants' gender/sexual identification, the number of years they have been teaching, and the subjects they have been teaching up to the time of the study.

Table 1: Summary of Participants

Participant Name	Sex	Years of Teaching	Teaching Subjects
Ewan	Male	23-24	History, Law, World issues, languages like Spanish, French, and German
Fredrick	Male	16	Physics
Adira	Female	19	English
Conrad	Male	29	Drama, Media, World religions and Philosophy

Participant 1: Ewan

Ewan is a male teacher at a public secondary school in southern Ontario with 24 years of teaching experience. For about half of those years, he taught mostly social sciences, including subjects in History, Law, and World Issues. In the last ten years he has more often taught languages like Spanish, French, and German. At the current time, he teaches history in French.

Participant 2: Fredrick

Fredrick is a male Science teacher at a public secondary school in southwest Ontario who has exclusively taught Physics for almost 16 years.

Participant 3: Adira

Adira is a female teacher in southwestern Ontario. She has taught English but also was a guidance counsellor as well. She has been a teacher for almost 19 years.

Participant 4: Conrad

Conrad is a male teacher in a public school in southwestern Ontario. He started his journey as a teacher with the subjects English and History. Then, he taught Drama, Media, and World Religions. Currently, he teaches Philosophy. He has 29 years of teaching experience.

Data Collection

Due to the qualitative nature of the study, the interview method was selected as a mean of collecting data. Regarding the importance of the qualitative interview, Patton (2002) explains that a qualitative interview is able "to capture how those being interviewed view their world, to learn their terminology and judgments, and to capture the complexities of their individual perceptions and experiences" (p. 348). Accordingly, to investigate the skills and strategies teachers applied both within and outside the

classroom to raise students' critical consciousness, a semi-structured

interview, what Patton (2002) calls a standardized open-ended interview, was conducted.

Conceptualized by Patton (2002), a semi-structured interview makes it possible

for the researcher to design the interview questions prior to the interview, while keep it

open for the participant to answer the questions using his or her voice. This interview

approach best enabled me to gather in-depth data for my research by providing the

context for asking new questions and allowing me to use my limited amount of time

wisely.

The interview consisted of 5 parts. First, the participants were asked about their

understanding of critical pedagogy. Then, they were asked about the strategies that they

have applied in their pedagogical practices to enhance critical consciousness of students

both within and outside of the classroom. Afterward, the teachers were asked about the

challenges they have faced to make the school and society more democratic. Finally, I

provided them with the definition of neoliberal educational reforms to investigate their

understanding about the reforms and how those reforms have impacted the Ontario

education system (See Appendix C).

The interview took place based on the participants' choice of location. The

duration of each interview was approximately 45-60 minutes. During the interview the

data was recorded by a voice recorder to ensure the accuracy. Notes were also taken to

help generate further questions. After the first interview, when the participants were

asked for a follow-up interview, they preferred the questions to be sent to them via email.

Therefore, along with sending the transcribed interviews to each participant so that they

could check the accuracy, a number of questions associated to the first interview were

included in the follow-up email. To further explore some of the information provided by two of the participants (Ewan and Conrad), I exchanged a number of emails with those participants. Conrad and Ewan agreed to use the exchanged email conversations in the research to enrich the data. The number of emails exchanged with Conrad and Ewan was around 10 and 5, respectively.

Data Analysis

Once the interviews were completed, the data analysis started through a lens of critical pedagogy advocated by Paulo Freire, Henry Giroux and others as a means of resisting neoliberal reforms. While I am aware of Patton's (2002) caution on qualitative data analysis as he explains there is not a fixed, formulated recipe for this kind of analysis, the best approach to investigate the question under study was determined to be transcribing each interview and then separating the rich data from incidental experiences by breaking down the original transcripts and highlighting the same patterns in the data. Following transcribing the original data, a thematic analysis was carried out through the process of coding in several phases to achieve meaningful patterns. To code the data, the transcribed work was read several times to. The first read through was undertaken to understand the data, the second to highlight, circle and underline the key ideas to make sense of the data (initial coding), and, finally, the last reading helped identify themes among the codes and to name them for the final report. Also, in each reading, I left comments, questions and thoughts that occurred to me at that moment. According to Patton (2002), "no way exists of perfectly replicating the researcher's analytical thought process. No straight forward tests can be applied for reliability and validity" (p. 433) in qualitative research.

Finally, since I adopted critical pedagogy as my theoretical framework to make sense of the data, it was possible to use prior codes along with the newly developed codes.

Limitations and Strengths of the Research

The case study method is criticized for its limitations regarding generalization, and that critique can be applied in this case as well. However, although case study research is criticized for its inability regarding generalization (Yin, 2003), it is regarded as a valid important scientific method in education due to its ability to investigate the complexities of the field by focusing on the depth and particularity of a case. According to Stake (1995), the point of using case study research is to choose a specific case to understand and to explore it deeply and conscientiously, not to compare its similarities or differences to other cases. Although the data provided by the four participants might be regarded as a limitation for this study given the issue of generalization, the semi-structures interviews, in addition to the large number of emails exchanged to elicit information, allowed for a deeper understanding of the implementation of critical pedagogy in the province of Ontario.

Furthermore, the freedom to use multiple kinds of information in case study research make it possible for the researcher to explore ideas and construct new theories about the subject under study. Indeed, the strength of the case study is that the case under study is unique. Finally, as Yin (2003) suggests, case study research is the preferred approach for answering question about 'how' and 'why about a contemporary phenomenon. Therefore, this research approach best serves to investigate the research

question this study asks: how critical pedagogy is practiced in the era of neoliberalism in Ontario public schools.

Theoretical/Conceptual Framework

I draw upon theory of critical pedagogy as advanced by Paulo Freire, Henry Giroux, Michael Apple and Peter McLaren to explore current examples of applying critical pedagogy in the era of neoliberalism, which in turn aimed at investigating probable spaces and gaps in the application of such practices in secondary schools in the province of Ontario.

Contemporary critical pedagogy is part of the tradition of progressive education that sees social and political change directly associated with education. Freire (1998, 2014) and others discuss a philosophy of education for the broader project of democratization. As Giroux (2004) explains, the project of fighting for democracy is served "by linking education to modes of political agency that promote critical citizenship" (p. 118). Freire (1998) argues that although education has been employed historically as a political tool to control and shape individuals, once transformed, it becomes a means of liberation. A transformed education enables an individual to resist and change any mode of oppression that has threatened their rights and human dignity.

Freire addressed the challenges education has faced under neoliberal reforms by considering "ethics, aesthetics, politics, and research" (as cited in Roberts, 2003, p. 455). Offering a discourse of possibility, Freire (1998, 1970a) challenges neoliberalism as the dominant ideology that has been claimed as an inevitable agenda for life applied by the elite groups who support the free-market logic and how it is used to justify social and economic inequities as necessary factors for economic growth. Further, the Freirean

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school of thought establishes a new critical imaginary, which is achieved by realizing

one's capacity to investigate, analyze and criticize the power relations of neoliberalism

(Roberts, 2003).

Although advocators of critical pedagogy do not imagine education as a cure for

unjust neoliberal social, political and economic issues, it is envisioned as a means that

provides the context for social transformation through dialogue, self-consciousness (one's

relation to others and the broader world), critical reflectiveness, and two-sided learning

and teaching (Robert, 2003). Indeed, the ability to think critically and to imagine a better

world are regarded as the most dangerous things for any authoritarian and oppressive

regime or situation (Giroux, 2014).

The key to understanding Freirean philosophy is knowledge, and especially

realizing that knowledge is socially constructed and contextually important (Freire,

1970a). Empowerment happens when students re-construct knowledge based on their

own background and experiences (Freire, 1970a). In other words, critical pedagogy

emphasizes social justice issues and undertakes an emancipatory mission for knowledge

(Freire, 1998; Giroux, 2014; Apple, 2006).

To deconstruct traditional relations between teachers, students and knowledge,

Freire (1970a) offers the notion of *conscientização* as a crucial step to changing the

world. Conscientization happens with the application of skills and strategies by teachers

to raise students' consciousness of their political, economic and social structures,

increasing self-realization and producing political modes of agency (Freire, 1998). To

serve this purpose, critical pedagogy offers a discourse of possibility against any

authoritarian ideology. Critical pedagogy tries to make power visible and accountable by

enabling teachers to ask about power relations (questioning about 'whose power and knowledge' is valuable), create a culture of questioning and dialogue that foster critical attirude, raise awareness of social issues, and apply a language of hope (Freire, 1998; Giroux, 2014; Apple, 2006). To serve this purpose, critical pedagogy aims to raise questions about the broader power relations in society that have led to oppressive situations (Giroux, 2014; Freire, 1998). More importantly, critical consciousness is not about understanding power relations and criticizing them to maintain a hegemonic understanding of an issue, but instead this awareness aims at constructing a more just world (Giroux, 2014; Freire, 1998; McLaren & Leonard, 1993). In other words, as Giroux (2014) argues, the mission of critical pedagogy is not only to create the potential of having political agency but also to take action actively and purposefully for change. Indeed, for Giroux (2014) learning (knowledge) should lead to social/political change.

As Freire (1970a) argues, critical pedagogy is about working together with the belief that meaningful and real social change only can be achieved through the efforts of others. He explains that the first step is a realization of 'the self' as having potential to make change (self-actualization) (Freire, 1970a). Indeed, it is individuals who have the potential to make change possible; reality does not change itself. The recognition of this potential directs one's course of life. In this way, we should not underestimate the individual's role in shaping history. Freire (1970a) emphasizes that individuals must first be able to see how social structures are oppressive and then realize that they are capable of making change. This shifts students from being objects who receive knowledge to being subjects who are engaged in the production of knowledge.

Another key concept in the theory of critical pedagogy is the notion of praxis. According to Freire (1998), praxis is the relationship or connection between theory and practice. In Freirean terminology, praxis is a 'word-action'. This term holds hope and includes values, responsibilities, will, and the potential of becoming a real human. Within critical pedagogy, to make change possible, reflection (critical thinking, criticizing) must go along with action (praxis) (1970a, 2000). A new social construction becomes possible only through a commitment to transform the world through praxis.

While Freirean philosophy has built upon Marx's philosophy of dialectic materialism, Sartre's existentialism and Hegelian philosophy of dialectic (Dale, 2003), there are new viewpoints expanded by Freire (1970a) that have made Freirean philosophy distinct from those schools of thought and important in the context of education. While through a Marxist lens, it is history that shapes and determines individuals' existence, Freire (1970a) believes that "this distortion occurs within history; but it is not an historical vocation" (p. 44). What associates Freirean philosophy with Marxism is the emphasis of both philosophies on the ability of human beings to be creative, self-conscious and to make changes versus other creatures (Blackburn, 2000). The potential of individuals for transformation is stressed in Freire's (1970a) writings, as he suggests that reality does not transform by itself but requires individuals to make change possible. Freire (1970a) argues that individuals in society can possess the power of transforming their own oppression by engaging in critical thinking and collective action. Indeed, from Freire's (1970a) point of view the first step to make social change possible is to see how social structures are oppressive, and then the realization of 'the self' (self-actualization)

that has the potential to shape history has to occur, rather than seeing reality as being changed by itself.

Dialectic is a Hegelian concept borrowed by Marx and Freire. Dialectic (dialogue) is different from debate; while it is supposed that one wins a debate, dialectic is about mutual learning. In dialogue, contradictory opinions and discourses arise between two or more people, and the aim is to inquire and establish reality based on reasoning. Hegel's dialectic is based on the principle of contradictions; it means that contradictions within a society enable us to understand the world (Ritzer, 2008). Dialectic aims to find contradictions that are posited as finite since they do not give a comprehensive understanding of the world; thus, they are partially untrue (Ritzer, 2008). Hegel believed that contradictions are the creation of our mind, thus they should be resolved by the reasoning of mind itself (Ritzer, 2008).

However, as mentioned above, Freire develops the notion of praxis (practice versus theory) as a main factor to understand the world (Freire, 1970a; Ritzer, 2008). In other words, critical consciousness is achieved through both dialogue (interpretation of the world; critical thinking; reflection) and taking action (praxis). 'Learning' is central to Freire's dialogic pedagogy. According to Rule (2009):

> It [learning] arises from the critical engagement of teacher/learners and learner/teachers with each other and their worlds, and can take the form of dialectical resolutions of the contradictions between self and other: teacher and learner, limit and freedom, learners and their world, and so on. (p. 121)

As McLaren (1995) argues, the hierarchical relationship of teacher-student has led to an anaesthetised society in which the status quo is represented by centralized power; this is challenged within critical pedagogy. This is a shift from seeing students as objects who receive knowledge to subjects who are engaged in producing a new knowledge

through both dialogue and praxis. As Freire (1970b) explains, "a pedagogy [of freedom] must be forged with, not for, the oppressed (whether individuals or peoples) in the incessant struggle to regain their humanity" (p. 48).

In addition, Freire's humanist perspective advocates the liberation of all people, and there is an emphasis on collective good in this liberation (1970a, 2000). Indeed, in his point of view, one's liberation is associated with social liberation. Critical pedagogy is about working together by holding the belief that meaningful social changes only happen through a collective action and the effort of others.

As this research intends to investigate the application of critical pedagogy by teachers both within and outside the classroom, a broader view of critical pedagogy, as advanced by Giroux (2014), is adopted. Giroux (2014) does not see pedagogy as a practice that is restricted to the classroom practices of teachers, which are based on dialogue. Instead, Giroux (2014) argues critical pedagogy is the application of any skills and strategies by teachers that will lead to the production of political agency, both inside and outside the classroom, and through different sites from education to the alternative media (against the mainstream media).

In summary, to understand critical pedagogy it is first crucial to recognize that critical consciousness (conscientization) happens both through the ability of recognizing the connection between reflection (individual issues and the broader society that has created them) and the process of taking action (praxis). Second, there must be a strong focus on social justice issues and a collective vision and mission both in dialogue and action. Accordingly, from my understanding of critical pedagogy in the Freirean school of thought, as one's emancipation is associated with the emancipation of the broader

society she or he lives in, even self-realization aims at a collective vision and mission. Finally, as mentioned above, this research hopes to investigate teachers' pedagogical practices associated to critical pedagogy to highlight the strategies and skills teachers apply to enhance critical consciousness as it relates to both reflection and action.

Chapter 4

Findings

In this chapter, I present the findings based on the interviews I conducted with the four teachers in my study. Since the literature on neoliberal educational reforms shows the existence of a crisis of critical consciousness amongst young people, I intended to investigate strategies and skills teachers currently apply to enhance critical consciousness and produce civically engaged individuals. Given that education systems across Canada have been influenced by neoliberal trends over the last 20 years or so, and that critical pedagogy can be viewed as a response to the negative impact of neoliberal reforms in education, I have conducted a case study of critical pedagogy strategies amongst a group of teachers in Ontario, a province of Canada.

Understanding Neoliberalism: The First Challenge

Lack of Initial Understanding

Using the purposeful snowball sampling method, I tried to recruit participants who met the inclusion criteria. As mentioned previously, the inclusion criteria for the study were being a teacher in a public school in the province of Ontario, having the experience of resisting neoliberalism through applying critical pedagogy, and the willingness to participate in an interview.

Recruiting participants who met my inclusion criteria proved difficult, which illustrates the complexities of trying to study how critical pedagogy is used as a mode of resistance to neoliberalism. Thus, the initial findings of my study challenged some of my assumptions regarding the criteria I had initially developed. Although all of the four participants claimed that they had experience implementing critical pedagogy as a mode

of resistance against neoliberal reforms, when they were asked if they were familiar with the term 'neoliberalism' and what the term meant to them, only two participants were familiar with the language of neoliberalism and were able to define the term by referring to articles they had read on the topic. This is clear in the following excerpt from Conrad:

> Having been in the Faculty of Education for [my] MA and PhD, I heard about the term neoliberalism, but truth be told when I arrived there I really didn't know the term. It is a way of conceptualizing the situation but it is not the way teachers talk about it and think about it. So I think it is more associated with educational research. (personal communication, February 22, 2017)

Overall, the four participants seemed to have limited (or non-existent) and sometimes conflicting ideas about neoliberalism and its impact on education system. When they were asked about neoliberalism, one participant had no knowledge about neoliberalism. While the other two participants referred to neoliberalism as a sort of economic belief, one of them regarded it as "a Leftist fiction, a convenient bogeyman, not a reality" (Conrad, personal communication, March 28, 2017).

In realizing that my participants had a limited understanding of neoliberalism, I decided to introduce a few phrases into my interviews to provide my participants with some examples of educational reforms that they might be familiar with, but not necessarily attribute to neoliberalism. Thus, I used phrases like "focus on standardized tests", "competition and ranking of the schools", "neglecting the teaching of critical thinking about democracy and citizenship", "students as customers and products" and "underfunding of public schools".

I then asked them if they understand neoliberalism in the same way that I did. If not, I asked them if they thought what I had described characterized schools today and if there are problems for the Ontario education system today. The answers provided by the

participants showed that there was no consensus among the teachers regarding the

dimensions of the reforms and the issue(s) schools face in Ontario. Three themes

emerged from their responses: standardized tests, cutbacks to education, and practical

considerations. I used the same phrase "practical consideration" as it was employed by

Conrad when he described the issue(s) in the Ontario education system.

The Problem of Standardized Tests

Two of the participants referred to the problems associated with standardized

tests. Adira believed that although Canada is not quite influenced by neoliberalism, it

exists as a problem in the education system of Ontario. She referred to the standardized

tests as her concrete experience with the reforms. Adira explained:

> I definitely understand neoliberalism in the way you explained it. For example, our board is struggling with math scores, and so there are a lot of money thrown at math teaching, curriculum and strategies, and try to improve those math scores. Personally, I don't usually teach to the tests. However, more recently, I noticed that the students in grade 10 are struggling to prepare for the literacy tests. There is a certain amount of teaching to the test. I know that on a bigger scale, people do choose schools based on the reports and ranking and also based on those literacy tests result and the math test result, the numeracy ones, that are published in the paper. (personal communication, March 2, 2017)

Similarly, although Frederick did not see neoliberalism as the main issue in the

Ontario education system, he admitted that the description I provided is a model for some

schools in Ontario. However, he noted that this was not the case for all schools, including

his own. He implicated some schools in Ontario and criticized them for focusing on tests

and student achievement. Frederick said:

> I know a couple of schools in this region that focus only on the ranking in the tests and reputation. Sometimes when the students from those schools come here they tell us that everything is very competitive there. Everything is achievement driven, that is you should get higher marks in the tests. I use the term learning disabled for that mode of education. In the school I teach at, we focus on the learning. I believe that learning is an achievement. The problem of standardized

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testing is that at some point you should stop teaching and start teaching the tests. (personal communication, March 9, 2017)

What is interesting here is that Frederick saw that there was some choice amongst schools in how they responded to standardized testing pressures. For him, schools differed in terms of their responses to these pressures. Moreover, although Fredrick attributed what he explained as the main issue in the Ontario education system to the incompetency of politicians and their selfishness, later, when he asked about the challenges he has faced in applying critical approaches, he mentioned a top-down curriculum that emphasizes the tests rather than learning (for Fredrick learning was associated with critical thinking skills).

Cutbacks to Education

Ewan stands out from the other three participants as he adopted a revolutionary position, viewing the issues the Ontario education system faces through a broader lens. He believed that the capitalist system is the main problem in the education system and that neoliberalism is a symptom of that problem not the cause. He referred to the cutbacks to the education system as the fundamental impact of neoliberal reforms in Ontario, which he saw as part of the bigger project of neoliberalism to dismantle public education. This is clear in the following statement from Ewan:

> I see neoliberalism only as a symptom [in the education system of Ontario], not the cause of the problem. The main issue the education system faces is a systemic problem; class conflict is always present, and that will cause constant tension; the capitalist system allows the class tensions to be played out, and guess who is winning? The side that is allied with the system: neoliberalism. …Back to the role of the government in education, it traditionally has been quite strong in public schools, so in Canada the vast majority of schools are publicly funded and the way neoliberalism has impacted is going away from that model [government funded public education]. So it is the idea that government shouldn't be involved in the business of a society economically, so mainly to do with funding. I think maybe the big and fundamental impact is the underfunding of the school system.

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But, more broadly, there is also the ideological or the sort of political campaign of neoliberalism to delegitimize the public schools. (personal communication, February 13, 2017)

We can see here that Ewan had a sophisticated understanding of neoliberalism, its relationship with capitalism and its overall impact on schools. This is in comparison to the other three participants. For example, although Fredrick and Conrad did not directly discuss how the Ontario education system faces challenges due to neoliberalism, they referred to shrinking budgets as one of the obstacles they faced as teachers.

"Practical Considerations"

In contrast to the others, Conrad and Frederick noted that there was a gap between education research, policy making at the level of the Ministry of Education, and what is going on in the classroom. They considered these gaps as the main problem in the Ontario education system over the last 15-20 years. This is evident in the following statement by Conrad:

> The most important realization regarding the issues schools face is that there are three polarities in education. They are all heavily invested in education, but each one has a very different agenda, very different perspective and very different needs. They do not cooperate with one another and they make a huge problem for one another. These three polarities are the administrative level including the Ministry in the boards. They have the control of money and curriculum that goes into the education. Another polarity is the researcher. The researcher has no access to the money on his/her own, and needs to beg from the government and if the government believes in one's kind of research will be supported financially to do the research. So, [the researchers] really don't know what is going on in the classroom. (personal communication, February 22, 2017)

What is significant about this quotation is that Conrad described a problematic situation for schools, the lack of communication between what he called the three 'polarities' in the education system, but did not attribute this to neoliberalism.

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To dig more deeply into the issue explained above, Conrad and Fredrick were asked to what extent they saw the influence of neoliberal ideology and its agenda, if any, on the gap between classroom practices and policy making at the level of the Ministry and board. If they did not see that there was a relationship between neoliberalism and gaps in communication between researchers, the Ministry of Education and classroom teaching, I asked them to explain the reason(s) for the gaps. Both Conrad and Fredrick attributed the gaps to practical considerations such as the incompetency and short-sighted goals of elected officials rather than the influence of any ideology. Conrad mentioned both a systemic problem and the selfish behaviour of the politicians on both ends of the political spectrum (i.e., Liberal and Conservative) and believed that they want to be seen as doing something good and important, and they need that for the practical goal of being re-elected. Conrad said:

> We've got much bigger things to worry about. It was a combination of a system that is structured so as to make it a tool to serve the egocentric interests of those in the upper offices. The system invites self-interested politicians to make use of it and the self-interested and unethical behaviour of those same politicians in taking advantage of the opportunity created by that system. Those are real education problems. The "reforms" really all serve those pragmatic political interests, not some ideological invention. (personal communication, April 24, 2017)

Conrad believed that there were practical, not ideological, considerations that influenced educational reforms:

> The new Ontario government has at the top of its budget two items that cost much more money than anything else: number one health care and number two: EDUCATION! To be an effective government means to be dispensing money to various causes and be able to say I produce improvement. For many reason people are very sensitive about healthcare. [Thus], the Ministry has very little incentive to mess with that. The wonderful thing about education is that you can do anything to it and the effects of what you do will not be measured or known. For example, the program of moral education that was brought by the liberals started in 2005 and then issued in 2008 and then it was allowed to die; it was one of the worst ideas. The government knew that the political cost of measuring moral

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education would be disastrous for the chances of being re-elected and keeping their jobs so that is not going to happen. Here, the Ministry is driven by absolutely nothing else like the neoliberal agenda. The Ministry knows that *it must be seen* improving education (not must *improve* education) [emphasis added]. So, the appearance of improvement is absolutely everything to them and the real facts of the innovations they make are not a matter of great concern for them. (personal communication, February 22, 2017)

What is interesting here is that Conrad attributed the idea of "to be seen improving education" (personal communication, February 22, 2017) to the selfishness of individual politicians and rejected the influence neoliberal ideology. The idea of "being seen" (personal communication, February 22, 2017) to be improving education will be discussed in the next chapter as it is related to the idea of performance under neoliberalism.

And Fredrick mentioned in his interview that the incompetency of policy makers and administrators, both at the board level and at schools, who have little, if any, knowledge about practices of teaching at classrooms and lack of teaching experience were to blame for developing ideas about what the education system should be in the 21st century.

Critical Pedagogy: An Initial Finding

In the next section, before providing examples of strategies teachers applied to enhance their students' critical consciousness, it is crucial to report an initial finding associated to the four teachers' understanding and application of 'critical pedagogy', which was revealed once the interviewed were finished.

Lack of Common Critical Consciousness Among the Four Teachers

'Critical consciousness' assumes that teachers have a critical attitude or worldview about the political and economic agendas of the boards of education and the Ministry of

education. However, when the teachers were asked how they have enhanced the "critical consciousness" of their students, 'being critical' had different meanings for them. This showed there was no common "critical consciousness" among the four teachers (both consciously and unconsciously). To put it simply, there was a lack of critical consciousness among the four teachers. For example, in teaching critical thinking skills as a strategy, while Ewan emphasized raising systemic questions about inequalities in the society, Conrad said:

> Critical pedagogy misleadingly holds that the big conflict out here in the real world is economic, and along liberationist vs "neoliberal" lines. In this way of thinking, teachers are liberators and their enemies are large scale economic interests and conservatives. All that is nonsense. We actually struggle much more with other issues. I don't buy into [the] critical theory approach or the critical pedagogy approach as an ideology. What I think is authentically pedagogical and authentically critical about what you are doing when you are doing pedagogy means responding more to that natural organic process of students' curiosity and interest in applying critical approaches and that it is the students who need to decide what is pressing and important because inquisitiveness has an organic structure. (personal communication, February 22, 2017)

Conrad's belief that critical pedagogy is "nonsense" is significant, as he believed that the education system struggled with other issues that are not associated with economic considerations at all. Furthermore, his understanding of critical pedagogy in describing teachers as "liberators" is problematic and shows a lack of understanding of this tradition.

Furthermore, due to the lack of common critical consciousness among the four teachers, Conrad and Fredrick saw their pedagogical practices as a resistance against the wrong decisions/policies made at the Ministry level. For example, Conrad said:

> I don't hold a whole oppositional world view, but rather that on the occasions when my wisdom, as a teacher, deems it necessary, and when something comes down from above that stands to hurt kids, me, as the teacher, tend to react like a good parent. The phrase in the Education Act is, "in loco parentis" Latin for "in the place of a (firm and judicious) parent," and thus to protect "my" kids, the students from the bad effects of bad Board and Ministry policies. This is a little

rally cry among teachers, that is close the door and do the right thing. It is a strategy to resist against the insanity that goes in the name of politics above us. (personal communication, February 22, 2017).

What is interesting here is that while Conrad referred to bad top-down policies at the Ministry level as the subject of his pedagogical resistance, he saw that resistance against bad decisions made by selfish and incompetent individual politicians, not the influence of neoliberalism. Regardless of how each teacher framed the issue(s) within the education system and the pedagogical philosophy and intention of each teacher, they provided me with a number of skills and strategies when they were asked about how they enhance the critical consciousness of students within and outside the classroom. I review those strategies in the following section.

The Strategies Applied by the Four Teachers

In this section, I review the strategies and skills implemented by the four teachers when they were asked how they raised consciousness and civically engaged their students. I have organized the themes under two categories: the skills and the content knowledge students are taught. Following a review of those themes, I review the constraints and challenges the teachers faced in applying critical approaches.

Skills

Four themes emerged under the category of the skills the students are taught. Those themes are: critical thinking skills, media literacy, dialogue, social action and civic engagement. Here, I present the data associated with each theme respectively. Although media literacy may be considered an example of critical thinking skills, I put it under its own subtitle to provide more detail.

Critical Thinking Skills. When the participants were asked how they have enhanced the critical consciousness of students, the examples provided showed an emphasis on critical thinking skills. Each participant described what he/she meant by being 'critical'. For example, Fredrick noted that his intention was to create more independent students who are able to solve problems and challenges they will encounter in their life by creatively applying critical thinking skills.

Similarly, Adira emphasized her commitment to developing independent thinking in her pedagogical practices. She referred to social justice issues and the Marxist school of thought in applying critical approaches. She described being 'critical' as the ability to move from being told what information to asking new questions and having political agency.

Also, Conrad believed that critical thinking skills ought to be recognized as basic to every subject, but saw the idea of critical thinking as a fuzzy concept that nobody really can define. He noted that if teachers have any idea of it, it is radically different one teacher from the next. In his viewpoint, critical thinking was "the ability to detect how an argument is structured" (personal communication, February 22, 2017). And Conrad believed that that is an ability that once learned through any context makes one enable to be critical at any context. Conrad explained, "Critical thinking can be taught through many different kinds of content. It is an *attitude or approach to* content, not merely a content of its own. It's like when you learn to swim: once you know the skill, you can swim anywhere – in the ocean [emphasis added]." (personal communication, February 22, 2017)

To teach critical thinking skills a number of strategies and skills were explained

by the teachers. First of all, the four teachers referred to the crucial role of dialogue as a

method for fostering critical thinking skills. The data associated to dialogue is presented

in detail below. Here I discuss other ways that my participants taught their students

critical thinking skills. First, some of the participants asked their students to write

reflective pieces in order to enhance their critical thinking skills. Here is an example from

Ewan:

> In 'Canadian History' we also look at World War II. We would have dialogue and
> discussion about racism in the army and bringing that to racism today like
> discrimination past and present and how it has continued. So that seems to me
> would be a very good way to introduce critical pedagogy on that topic. Then I'll
> get them to write in the class a reflective piece about discrimination; have they
> had experiences with discrimination, do they know anybody else even if they
> haven't, what was it like, how do they know that it was discrimination. (personal
> communication, February 13, 2017).

Also, Ewan mentioned taking students to an art show, gallery or museum

associated with a discussed topic in the class as a way to think more deeply on that topic.

Adira noted sending her students to different conferences and organizations such as a

conference about newcomers' experiences of Canada to provide them with an

opportunity to think more deeply about refugees.

To show the importance of critical thinking skills, Conrad discussed the new

approach he applied in teaching poetry rather than the traditional approach. He said:

> I divided the students up to 6 groups and gave them a copy of the poem and told
> them that they had a limited amount of time to report back to me in the class
> 'what it is you learned by reading this poem? show me what is there'. Then, I
> listen to their discussions and watch what they are doing in each group, but I don't
> need to interfere at all in that time, for perhaps 30 minutes. After that time, I say
> group 1, 'what you have found in the poem' and then ask group 2 'tell us what
> you found in the poem that group 1 didn't say', and continue to ask it from each
> group. Well, by now, everybody is expected to add value, and what that value
> would be is up to them but each one of them is going to add value. And you

would be amazed to see what kids get upon all by themselves without any teacher or structure, just by experiencing an encounter with the poem and with their friends and with the conversation that is generated out of that. (Conrad, personal communication, February 22, 2017)

Media literacy. Another important theme was media literacy. For example, Conrad explained that to show the artificial and manipulative nature of the media and the necessity of deciding independently whether one wants to be part of that particular agenda or not. He took his students to see a television show in order to experience it directly. Here, he explains how the field trip enabled students to think more critically about the manipulative nature of the media:

> Being in a studio and seeing how they were manipulated as the audience and seeing how they were being used for commercial and political purposes, I don't think the students will ever look at the television same again after that because they actually had the experience of being there and seeing how constructed and official the whole situation really is. It is put together by someone; you need to decide for yourself whether you want to be part of that particular agenda or that particular cause that the advertiser want or whatever. We have conversation about it and process of it afterwards like 'how did you feel when this happened? What did you think of this? What did you learn from that experience?' (Conrad, personal communication, February 22, 2017)

Furthermore, Conrad mentioned using magazine articles as real life examples to teach students that being critical is the recognition of how an argument has been shaped. He said:

> I take a magazine article, it is written by somebody that has a particular personal or particular view or whatever like that, give it to the kids and say now, take it and see what you find in there; if it is a good argument should we believe it? or if it is a bad argument is the fault in the argument itself in that is the conclusion bad or is it a fault that this is person who is trying to argue for a good conclusion but cannot get the argument across very well? What we are looking at here and we have those kinds of conversations. (Conrad, personal communication, February 22, 2017)

Similarly, Fredrick used the laws of physics to show how the claim made by many

Hollywood movies that they are real is false. This is clear in Fredrick's following

explanation:

> I teach a unit of study called 'momentum of energy' [that is about] all motions
> have energy behind them. We take in the entire class to critically examine
> Hollywood movies in which people get shot. I look at those Hollywood movies
> that try to represent a story as a reality. For example, here is a situation that they
> are trying to tell you is a way that people in a certain part of the world live and
> certain things that have happened in interactions between those people. What I am
> trying to present to my students is that in opposed to the past—about 60-70 years
> ago—most of those Hollywood movies are not based on real stories anymore, and
> I show that by referring to the physics behind it, which couldn't even possibly be
> true. They just provide a promise to entertain you for 2-3 hours. (personal
> communication, March 9, 2017)

Also, Adira noted having discussion about news articles associated to the current

social issues as a way of raising awareness. In addition, she exemplified watching online

videos about the Syrian refugee crisis that occurred in the last year to think critically

about the biases and challenges refugees face when they have to move from country to

country and how students can help them in Canada.

Dialogue. The examples provided by the four teachers show the application of

dialogue as an integral part of their pedagogical practices. The terms dialogue,

communication and discussion were used interchangeable by the four participants. For

example, Ewan said: "In the grade 12 law class, I do a whole unit on Aboriginal law. So,

first, we look at the Canadian constitution and the aboriginal rights, then we look at the

history and we have a lot of discussions and conversation around it" (personal

communication, February 13, 2017).

The teachers referred to some strategies to encourage dialogue. Those strategies used the language of inclusion and focused on making students comfortable to ask questions. This is evident in the following details provided by Conrad:

> So at the beginning, I say to my student that I want you to know in our room here, there are no questions you are not allowed to voice, we will play around all the ideas; and either you want to raise we will treat with seriousness. I believe that the teacher has to be a good and patient listener, and the student has to feel free to speak. Then they need to negotiate their action—and their learning—out of that process of communication. (personal communication, February 22, 2017)

Furthermore, regarding the implementation of dialogue in the classroom, Conrad criticized critical pedagogy as being manipulative, at least in practice, in the sense that it tries to influence others based on the agenda of the post-Frankfurt School and postmodern ideology. Indeed, from his point of view, dialogue should provide the context for self-realization, not societal change. What he meant by self-realization had a great focus on individuals' interests and respecting their natural curiosity to direct the conversation and conclusion to any end they want. He explained this in detail below:

> I just have to quote that great educational philosopher who goes by the name of Sting who said "There is no political solution, to our troubled evolution, have no faith in constitution, there is no bloody revolution, we are spirits in the material world." That is the truth. That does not mean that we have no common projects absolutely, but the notions of community, nationality, globe; all those notions have to be negotiated against the question 'who is the individual?' Helping an individual finding his/her place in the world and helping him/her to achieve the person who is valuable for him/her. That is students who should decide what is valuable, important or is a pressing issue, neither what is defined by me or the curriculum. (personal communication, February 22, 2017)

Conrad said that he tried not to have any influence on how the students shape their thinking, but rather wanted to encourage students to engage in dialogue in order to better understand themselves as individuals. He stated:

> I don't try to control any discussion in the sense that I do not ask them to respond to me, rather I try to step back and be more like a music conductor helping

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students to systemize their thoughts, I stay receptive to what they give me as they feedback answers to me rather than trying to control their answers; for example, I say "Thomas you answer Ravinder: what do you think of that…" and as they volunteer, I direct them to each other rather than to me for feedback. I sit at the end of the classroom and let them be engaged with one another in such a focused way. The critique that is needed to be generated is coming out of the conversation with one another rather than out of some manipulative strategy I am using to pull them in a particular direction. So I can structure things for them. Although in that there is some element of my own character and personality, I try not to impose that, so much as to draw it out after the fact: that is much more important as a strategy. (Conrad, personal communication, February 22, 2017)

Social Action/ Civic Engagement. The teacher's pedagogical practices also showed different ways that they engaged their students in civic affairs and society. For example, Adira referred to the voluntary hours each student needed to complete outside of school. She said:

One of the things I do is to connect the students to different organizations, agencies, and different thing within the city they can volunteer in. Like sometimes hospitals, the human society which are community-based. And as volunteer hours are outside the schools, students have the chance of being engaged to civic affairs and connect to communities beyond schools and in the bigger society. Although it is a mandated thing, it gives student the chance of being involved in society. (Adira, personal communication, March 2, 2017)

Furthermore, Adira mentioned fundraising for refugees in Canada as part of the awareness about refugee crisis. She explained:

Last year when we had the Syrian refugee crisis we watched many online videos around that. Then we thought and discussed in the classroom that what we can do to help them and what are the biases they face and what are some of the challenges that they face as they have to move from country to country in order to escape. And I think that part of the awareness was looking at what are we doing in Canada to help. So, we have fundraiser out of the school; we raise funds for Syrian refugees. (Adira, personal communication, March 2, 2017)

Moreover, Ewan mentioned different projects the students had to do outside of the school to raise consciousness about social issues. Below, he details an example of one such project:

The easiest thing that we do is that, in civics classes in French, the students have to do projects where they actually do something. So that's the big final project; they have to do campaign, or they have to get engaged in groups to do something, and they might make a twitter page on AIDS in Africa, or posters around schools, it depends. There is a bunch of things they can do to kind of raise awareness of this issue or problem in the world or local community. For example, food banks. So, they do that, and that's a very good way, I would say, for them to become aware. (Ewan, personal communication, February 13, 2017)

Also, Fredrick noted some projects he asked students to do as part of a unit in engineering design. He called those projects "make something better." He said:

When I teach engineering design, quite often, when the students are learning the strategies, structures, and techniques of engineering design, they will create a couple of projects that look outside the classroom. For instance, they do many projects that are called 'make something better.' In the past, we would parallel a course at the first-year engineering design course in the engineering course at a university and their projects for engineering design would involve things from creating devices and technologies for handicapped people, to assist them, or the other one was engineering solutions for developing marginalized nations' clean drinking water. We would use the course engineering design as project material to apply engineering design techniques. (Fredrick, personal communication, March 9, 2017)

We can see that there were a number of different social and civic actions that the four participants in my study used with their teaching. These included volunteer work, fund raising for refugees, and doing projects outside the classroom to enhance awareness about an issue or improve society.

Content Knowledge

When the teachers were asked about the strategies and methods they have implemented to enhance critical consciousness and political agency (not just about big "P" politics such as government and political parties, but all the ways they are encouraged to participate in society or within their school to create change in favour of public good at any extent), there was an emphasis amongst them on the value of specific content knowledge and topics they taught. Ewan referred to teaching about social justice

issues and inequalities in society like discrimination and racism, authoritarian modes of

government and war. This is evident in the examples of classroom discussion that he

provided:

> Last week in this one course civics I gave out a summary of a report that was
> done four years ago about the working poor in Toronto and the GTA, and it
> actually showed that traditionally it used to be the case if one worked full time
> he/she could provide enough for the family, but there is actually tens and tens of
> thousands, the number's like 115000 people, who work full time and they are
> below the poverty line. (Ewan, personal communication, February 13, 2017)

He then had students discuss in class why that was the case.

The second example Ewan detailed was used in his Canadian history class. He

had students examine World War II, the Holocaust, the rise of Hitler, fascism and

discrimination. Also, Ewan mentioned having political party debates in the classroom as

part of his conscious practices in applying critical pedagogy. Similar to Ewan, Adira

emphasized social justice issues and discrimination like the refugee crisis and

newcomers' experiences in a new context.

In contrast to Ewan and Adira, Conrad mentioned that he tried to "present the

facts for the students" (personal communication, February 22, 2017), such as how the

media is manipulative. He emphasized that the students should determine which content

is important. In other words, he was not interested in shaping their opinions but in

encouraging them to think for themselves. Conrad stated:

> Students need to be able to drive the agenda and I try very consciously to do that
> in my philosophy class, they need to decide what is pressing and important
> because inquisitiveness has an organic structure. Teaching is an interpersonal
> negotiation, not a prefabricated curriculum handed down from above. That's not
> real teaching, whether the "above" means teacher, administrator or Ministry.
> Teaching starts with the rapport between student and teacher, and content only
> becomes relevant once that has been established. Before you can exchange ideas,
> you have to have the confidence of the students, and they have to know that their
> interests are going to be valued. How do we detect a "pressing" issue? Do we

mean pressing to the curriculum designers? Pressing to the teacher? Pressing to some conception we have of social good? Or pressing to the student? I say that what's pressing is what the student wants to know. Doing pedagogy means responding more to that natural organic process of students' curiosity and interest. For example, I would bring up war in general if war is an issue and I would see where they want to go with it. (personal communication, March 28, 2017)

The Teachers' Challenges and Constraints

When the teachers were asked what challenges they have faced in trying to implement critical approaches such as critical pedagogy in their teaching, they referred to a number of constraints and challenges. The most important challenges noted by the four teachers were: 1) a top-down curriculum that emphasizes tests and standardization, which has led to limiting critical thinking practices; 2) workload and high expectations from the teachers; and 3) doing more for less along with shrinking budget deficits. Here, I provide a number of quotations from my participants, which illustrate these challenges.

Ewan said:

Teaching is a demanding job; there is a pressure on teachers to focus on the curriculum and separate that from politics and wider society… I have this challenge in my mind to teach the student the body of knowledge they should have or covering the demands of curriculum. It is very hard maybe that goes back to the challenge to actually do that consciously. It is a tremendous amount of work to sort of plan and do all these things. On the top of this very demanding job, I think that there is a kind of neoliberalism that has its advantage because it is so pervasive in the society [he meant that common-sense notions are influenced by neoliberalism and impact the Ontario education system negatively]. Teachers had to work hard to overcome that and that is not always easy and in fact it needs a tremendous amount of effort. And 90% of my time is taken up with the little daily day-to-day stuff and this can be exhausting and so I completely understand why teachers don't introduce these ideas more. (personal communication, February 13, 2017)

Similarly, Adira explained:

I think it is difficult to both prepare students for the tests to cover the curriculum and at the same time enhance critical thinking or a higher level of thinking. There is enough curriculum you need to cover. When I am teaching, I generally try to make sure that I am covering the expectations, I don't usually teach to the tests.

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However, more recently, because I am teaching a grade 10 applied class, and noticed that the students are going to be struggling with the literacy tests, I spent a few weeks just giving the students particular strategies for things that I know were going to be on the test. So, there is a certain amount of teaching to the test. We need to make sure as a school we have covered anything we need to. This is my concrete experience with neoliberalism. (personal communication, March 2, 2017)

Fredrick noted:

Many times, since I started teaching, the school day is the same; the number of classes we teach things should have changed over the past 10 to 15 years; there is so much you should do in a day along with the shrinking budgets. For example, we have the finals and to lessen the students' anxiety and stress is a real issue, I need to provide students with techniques and strategies during the term to attack the workload, how to study and cope with the tests. We don't really have the mechanism in the school to criticize the ministry, we are told by the administration. It used to be more inclusive years ago. At one time, our opinions mattered and shaped policy. But now we are simply dictated to. All we get now is policy from the top and the Ministry is not interested anymore what we think. (personal communication, February 13, 2017)

Conrad said:

One of the big constraints is curriculum limits teachers' ability to move the students in the direction the students themselves want to go. I think that is the problem of rationalization and is the idea of a factory system and a modern public school is really a factory; it has got specialization and segmented activities and repeated procedures and a product flowing in: they are uneducated students and the product flowing out: the educated students with certificate. We need to get beyond a factory model if we want to change anything I think. The factory model school I think may not have a run longer than 20 years. Teachers are afraid if they don't deliver the curriculum they might get into some kind of trouble because the Ministry demands them to deliver that curriculum. So there is such kind of straitjackets and limitations on actual classroom practices. Concerns like what about university entrance and the marks are going to be parallel and we have these standardized exams and so on. (personal communication, February 22, 2017)

In summary, the data shows that all four teachers faced similar constraints and

challenges in applying critical approaches like critical pedagogy. Those challenges were a

top-down curriculum, intensification of tests, budget deficit and workload. They argued

that those constraints have limited their teaching practices and identified enhancing

critical thinking skills as the main factor of learning. In the next chapter, I analyze these findings through the lens of critical pedagogy and discuss the gaps in the application of critical pedagogy by the four Ontario secondary school teachers.

<center>**Chapter 5**</center>

<center>**Discussion**</center>

Introduction

In this chapter, I provide an analysis of the data described in the previous chapter. This chapter has been divided into four sections to reflect the themes that emerged for analysis from the findings: Denying Neoliberalism, Critical Pedagogy and Critical Thinking, Media Literacy or Critical Media Literacy?, and Dialogue. I conclude with a call for critical consciousness amongst teachers in the province of Ontario.

Denying Neoliberalism

When the four teachers were asked about major issues in the Ontario education system, only Adira and Ewan acknowledged neoliberalism as an issue. Based on the data, while they referred to the intensification of standardized tests and cutbacks to the education respectively, Conrad and Fredrick believed that the real problems are not influenced by neoliberal agendas. For them, the main issues facing the education system are the selfishness and the incompetency of politicians on the both sides of political spectrum, which has led to a gap between policy making at the level of the Ministry and the classroom. However, I would argue that even though Conrad and Fredrick denied that neoliberalism is an issue, the problems they described in the education system in Ontario are, in fact, reflections of neoliberal ideology.

First, when Conrad discussed policy making at the Ministry level, his response showed that decision-making at higher levels serves the self-interest of individual politicians; politicians make decisions that allow them to keep their power (personal communication, April 24, 2017) To deny the influence of neoliberalism on policy making

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at the Ministry level, Conrad referred to a Marxist definition of class as a group who were defined primarily in economic terms to argue that since those individual politicians "have no particular class consciousness" they are not associated with neoliberals or promote neoliberal ideology (personal communication, April 24, 2017). Moreover, according to Conrad, politicians' intentions to be seen as improving the education system are motivated by a desire to be re-elected to office. However, I would argue that he has missed the point that the idea associated with neoliberalism is not restricted to a specific class or group anymore since it now shapes a wide range of common-sense notions that go beyond political parties or partisan politics. The literature reviewed on neoliberalism presented in Chapter 2 demonstrates that neoliberal agendas are associated with elite groups who value conservative neoliberal strategies to shape public discourses for more profit (Harvey, 2005; Giroux, 2014; Apple, 2006). However, as Massy (2013), Monbiot (2016) and Hall (2011) argue, neoliberalism has influenced all aspects and levels of social life and shapes our everyday thoughts and practices. Although neoliberal capitalism privileges a specific class more, it is not class specific anymore once it turned into a social imaginary. Rizvi and Lingard (2010) discuss how we come to internalize an ideology and turn it into a social imaginary as the source of our everyday decision-making and practices. Thus what we see in this study is how the social imaginary of neoliberalism has been internalized by the teacher participants who are not, for the most part, even aware of its impact on their lives.

From another perspective, regardless of the intention of policy makers, no one can deny the fact that individuals, including pragmatists, are influenced by an ideology or a theoretical framework, whether consciously or unconsciously, and that this shapes their

everyday practices. It is evident in the phrases "the idea of an excellent education in the 21 century" and "an education that must be seen as an improving education in 21st century" made by Conrad and Fredrick that they described the intention of policy making at the Ministry level (personal communication, February 22, 2017). Whatever the policy intention is, these phrases showed how the discourses applied by the politicians are influenced by neoliberal discourses of excellence, competition and standardization in 21st century.

Second, the four teachers described challenges and constraints they have faced in their pedagogical practices in terms of a top-down curriculum that limits teaching critical thinking skills and pressures teachers to prepare students for standardized tests. They also talked about cutbacks to education along with workload intensification. Although they did not associate these pressures and constraints with neoliberalism, there is significant research that demonstrates that these pressures on the education system stem directly from neoliberal policies (e.g., Apple, 2006; Ball, 2001; Connell, 2009; Compton & Weiner, 2008; Hursh, 2008; Lingard & Lewis, 2016; MacLellan, 2009). What they actually described reflects how neoliberalism works; it is a mode of a centralized education system in which the real power stays at the top, there is an emphasis on accountability and standardization as modes of measurement and control, and cutbacks to public schools are part of the neoliberal agenda to make the schools do more with less (e.g., Apple, 2006; Giroux, 2014). Accordingly, framing the issue as the gap between policy making at the level of Ministry and real classroom practices mirrors practices of neoliberalism—a top-down policy making and creation of a hierarchy of power that silences other voices, especially teachers' roles in designing curriculum. For example,

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Fredrick, who did not see neoliberalism as an issue in the Ontario education system, felt

he has no voice as a teacher anymore. He said, "it used to be more inclusive years ago. At

one time, our opinions mattered and shaped policy. But now we are simply dictated to.

All we get now is policy from the top and the Ministry is not interested anymore what we

think" (personal communication, March 9, 2017). Literature on neoliberalism and

education suggests that, in the era of neoliberalism, schools are subject to a very

centralized curriculum and performance criteria that focus on standardized tests (Apple,

2006; Ball, 2001, 2012; Connell, 2009; Compton & Weiner, 2008; Giroux, 2014; Hursh,

2008; Lingard & Lewis, 2016; MacLellan, 2009; Robertson, 2008; Nichols & Berliner,

2007; Stobart, 2008; Seddon, 1997b; Weiner, 2008). It is argued that while it is supposed

that neoliberal educational reforms give schools more autonomy, curriculum

responsiveness and diversification, in practice, it creates a top-down hierarchy of power

that both defines what knowledge counts and dictates how it should be taught by teachers

(Apple, 2006; Basu, 2004; Crocco & Costigan, 2007; Giroux, 2014; Nichols & Berliner,

2007).

Interestingly, research on neoliberal reforms in the province of Ontario suggests

that the provincial government designed a very centralized curriculum while at the same

time decreasing the power of the boards of education, schools and teachers, forcing them

to be committed to neoliberal policies and supressing any dissent (Basu, 2004). This is

evident when Fredrick shared his experience, as noted above. Evidence shows that the

erosion of the power of local school boards is one of the manifestations of neoliberalism

in Ontario (Basu, 2004).

Furthermore, the issue of cutbacks to education explained by the four participants reflects one of the key aspects of neoliberalism: cutbacks to the public sector and a reduction in the role of government. Critics argue that the defunding of public schools under the justification of budget deficit is part of the larger neoliberalism project to erode public schools (e.g., Giroux, 2014; Apple, 2006). Research suggests that the adoption of a centralized funding system by the Ontario education system limited schools and boards' autonomy to raise their own revenues, making them subject to an education market (Basu, 2004; Sattler, 2012). For example, dramatic cutbacks to Ontario's K-12 education during the 1990s was a shift in the mechanism of funding in the education system of Ontario (Mackenzie, 2002).

Similarly, when Conrad described the Ministry of education as the most powerful organization in the Ontario education system because it controls the money and the curriculum to show that gap between the researcher and the Ministry partially due to lack of funding by the government, Conrad is reflecting on a centralized system of funding in the era of neoliberalism and a decrease in spending in the public sector.

Consequently, the data revealed that neoliberal ideology has indeed influenced and impacted the Ontario education system over the last two decades, which is evident in both discourses and practices within the education system. As Martino and Rezai-Rashti's (2012) research suggests, discourses of efficiency, the market and accountability became dominant in the context of policy-making in the Ontario education system.

To clarify the influence and impacts of neoliberal ideology on the practices and discourses within the Ontario education system, and discuss about why some of the teachers were unable to make a connection between what is happening in the education

system and neoliberalism, I would like to refer to what is called by major critics of neoliberalism as performativity, or a performative culture. Below, I discuss how neoliberalism occurs in the context of the Ontario education system through performativity both anonymously and invisibly.

 Performativity: Technology of Neoliberalism. Ball (2012) discusses varied technologies and practices applied by neoliberals to make educational institutions subject to the neoliberal agenda. Those technologies influence our everyday life, as neoliberals use technology to influence our practices, speaking, decisions and other aspects of our life while "reforming" us (Ball, 2012, p. 29).

 One of the main technologies of neoliberalism is performativity. What is performativity? Ball (2003) explains that performativity is a "technology, a culture, and a mode of regulation that employs judgments, comparisons and displays as a means of control; attrition and change (p. 216). He emphasizes that performativity is increasingly used in policy analysis and writing not only to perpetuate performance management systems but also to change the subjectivities of practitioners (Ball, 2012). In the performative culture, effectiveness is equal with gaining maximum desired output through performance. As Martino and Rezai-Rashti (2012) explain, performativity aims to eliminate the cultural and moral side of education and replace the public agenda (public needs and interests) with the interests of the market.

 Given that whatever the intention of policy is, the idea of "being seen" to be improving education in the Ontario education system reveals the pressure of performativity and its power in shaping discourses at the level of Ministry. Thus, the language employed by individual politicians in the Ontario education system, or those

people Conrad called pragmatists, shows influence of neoliberal agendas that promote effectiveness and improvement.

In my view, what is ignored or missed in the understanding of any social, political and economic issue is the recognition of a dominant ideology associated to that specific historical time that shapes all aspects of people's life. This is evident in Conrad's inability to make a connection between neoliberalism and policy-making in the education system.

To show the pervasiveness of the neoliberal imaginary, Doreen Massey (2013) argues that neoliberalism has influenced all aspects of life, including the language we use on a daily basis. In her article "Neoliberalism Has Hijacked Our Vocabulary," she discusses how neoliberalism has "become part of our common-sense understanding of life" (p. 1) and has hijacked our words, referring to a depoliticized vocabulary under neoliberalism and how it shapes our understanding of life, growth and success. This being said, there is no wonder that Conrad and Fredrick could not notice the influence of neoliberalism on the issues the Ontario education system faces and even on the language employed by them when they described the intention of policy-making at the ministry level, issues of standardization, etc.

Furthermore, as mentioned above, performativity reforms and reregulates teachers and turns them into performative subjects who take action aligned with the neoliberal agenda, which focuses on students' performance on standardized tests. Thus, Ball (2012) calls the performative culture a form of "hand-off management" (p. 13). In this regard, it is very interesting to recognize that although Conrad did not see neoliberalism as a reality, part of his pedagogical practices was dedicated to teaching to standardized tests,

which highlights how this form of "hand-off management" works. Similarly, Adira, Fredrick and Ewan were forced to spend time and energy preparing students for the tests and covering the curriculum included in the tests.

From another perspective, the performative culture is evident when Adira, Fredrick and Ewan used the sentences and phrases such as, "I generally try to make sure that I am covering the expectations," "the expectation of things we do have changed," and "the demanding nature of teaching," respectively, to show the necessity of dedicating time to preparing students for the tests (personal communication, March 2 & 9, February 13, 2017 respectively). Indeed, those phrases and sentences show the pressure of "tracking data" and "keeping data on track"; moreover, the teachers are being "tracked" and disciplined by "these very same data" that work to alter and shape their subjectivities (teachers' subjectivities) as the teachers are "thoroughly responsive and reactive to data" (Lewis & Hardy, 2016, p. 13). This also shows how high stake testing regimes have corrupted teachers' pedagogical practices and deprofessionalized them by making them subject to performance data (Apple, 2006; Connell, 2009; Furlong, 2013; Lewis & Hardy, 2014; Giroux, 2014; Hursh, 2008; MacLellan, 2009; Nichols & Berliner, 2007; Seddon, 1997a).

Moreover, Ball (2003) examines the psychological and personal impact of performative culture on teachers and uses the term "schizophrenic" to describe the inner conflict teachers experience when they are torn between authentic professionalism and external demands. This is evident in Ewan's experience of teaching when he said he felt he had to choose between covering the curriculum and teaching for the tests or spending time on a body of knowledge that students need to learn. Indeed, it is hard for teachers to

avoid the forces of performance culture that try to subject individuals to what is seen and accountable (Ball, 2012).

In addition, the issue of a gap between the educational research and the Ministry that was explained by Conrad can also be framed as performativity. Conrad described how the Ministry, the most powerful organ in the education system, only funds research that is profitable (personal communication, February 22, 2017). He referred to the field of educational theory as a pure example of such defunding. Indeed, under the performative regime, the question that is asked about knowledge is no longer 'Is it true?' but rather "Is it efficient?" (Lyotard, 1997, p. 51). In other words, by asking 'what kind of research is valued in our society today?', the example provided by Conrad shows that performative culture values a kind of research that has an input/output equation.

As a consequence, the taken-for-granted nature of neoliberalism has influenced all aspects of life (both practice and discourse) in a way some of the teachers were not able to recognize in either the education system or their own language. What is clear in the four teachers' experiences is the invisible prevalence of neoliberalism through the neoliberal governmentality argued by Foucault (Gorur, 2011) and how it has influenced the subjectivities of all four of the teachers' consciously and unconsciously. Gorur (2011) refers to Foucault and argues,

> Governmentality pays particular attention to normative subjectifications and objectifications that are discursively inscribed through policy articulations. It alerts us to the technologies of power and surveillance that create discursive regimes and impose their particular sets of affordances and constraints. The imposition of order through technologies of regulation and control becomes a continual quest in this way of understanding government. (p. 617)

Finally, Conrad's description of current schools as factory models, even though he declined to acknowledge the impact of neoliberalism, is indeed the description of

schools in the era of neoliberalism. Based on the literature, neoliberal reform has turned schools to factories in order to provide human capital to fulfill the needs of the market (Apple, 2006).

Accordingly, although some of the teachers believed that the pressures the education system faces are not associated with neoliberalism (e.g., Conrad), their practices and discourses showed the existence of neoliberalism as a reality in the Ontario education system. The question that arises here is, 'Does it really matters what they call it?' In my view, it does matter. As Monbiot (2016) argues, neoliberalism's "anonymity is both a symptom and cause of its power" (p. 1). It is therefore important to recognize neoliberalism as a dominant ideology that has influenced all aspects of life, especially for teachers who care about real learning and needs of students.

Critical Pedagogy & Critical Thinking

As presented in Chapter 4, being "critical" was seen differently by each teacher, and there was no common understanding amongst them about what "critical" meant. Although the four teachers all emphasized critical thinking skills when they were asked how they enhance their students' critical consciousness, not all of their practices in applying critical approaches were associated with critical pedagogy.

Indeed, although there are similarities between critical thinking and critical pedagogy, it is important to make a serious distinction between these two approaches. First, I will compare the two traditions and then provide examples for each tradition based on the data.

Regarding the similarity, both critical pedagogues and critical thinkers hold the concern that there is a general group in the society who are not able to recognize

falsehoods and inaccuracies that limit their human possibility (Burbules & Berk, 1999).

Thus, they both argue that teaching students critical thinking skills can help them see the

way things are which leads to freedom.

However, by asking about the focus of each tradition (critical thinking and critical

pedagogy), the primary concern of critical thinkers like Richard Paul (1990) is the

irrational and unexamined living. Paul (1990) believes that one should be able to

recognize the logic of arguments that underpin our everyday activities. The emphasis is

on teaching students the skills of formal and informal logic. Furthermore, the purpose of

critical thinking, as Harvey Siegel (1988) posits, is self-sufficiency. For Siegel (1988), "a

self-sufficient person is a liberated person...free from the unwarranted and undesirable

control of unjustified beliefs" (p. 58). Here, to avoid any misunderstanding, it is crucial to

realize the difference between a self-sufficient person as defined by Siegel (1988) and the

purpose of self-reflectiveness in critical pedagogy. I clarify the difference in the

following sections.

In contrast, critical pedagogy has a very different starting point. According to this

tradition, as it has been advanced by Paulo Freire, Henry Giroux and others, the primary

purpose of being critical is not assessing arguments and specific claims for their truth

content, but instead asking about the systems of beliefs and power relations in the society

in which such arguments and claims have been framed. Thus, critical pedagogy is more

than critical thinking. For Freire (1970a) and Giroux (2014), freedom begins by realizing

the broader systematic inequalities and one's situation in that system. In other words, "for

critical pedagogy [..], self-emancipation is contingent upon social emancipation"

(Burbules & Berk, 1999, p. 8). Giroux (1988) clarifies, "the conditions for social, and

hence, self-emancipation" (p. 110) depend on the emancipation of the rest of the society. This contingency between self and society is the most important point that distinguishes between the nature of self-realization within critical pedagogy and critical thinking. In other words, critical pedagogy emphasizes a collective mission with its aim being self-realization for the betterment of society as a whole.

Another important key point to distinguish between practices of critical thinking and critical pedagogy is that the latter focuses on social justice issues and how change is possible, whereas the former only intends to foster skills needed for recognizing injustice. For Freire (1970a, 1998), being critical requires praxis that focuses both on reflection (thinking critically and interpretation) and action (making change). Conscientization, or "critical consciences" in the Freirean school of thought, is more than learning critical thinking skills; it involves creating social change. According to Freire (1970a), "Critical consciousness is brought about not through intellectual effort alone but through praxis through the authentic union of action and reflection" (p. 48). Also, as self-emancipation is associated with social emancipation, critical pedagogy emphasizes collective action to make change possible. Although in both traditions one needs to move to seek something; in critical thinking the seeking and reasoning are the purpose, whereas in critical pedagogy the purpose of seeking is social justice (Burbules & Berk, 1999).

Furthermore, Burbules and Berk (1999) argue that one important way that Giroux (1988) develops critical pedagogy and makes it completely distinct from critical thinking is by emphasizing a "language of possibility" instead of a "language of critique" (p. 5). Thus, developing a language of possibility to make change becomes an integral part of making a person critical in the tradition of critical pedagogy.

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Based on the data and the explanation above, the practices undertaken by Conrad and Fredrick are more examples of critical thinking than critical pedagogy. Conrad referred to being critical as "the ability to detect how an argument is structured," and emphasized topics and subjects that students might consider a pressing issue, and called directing students toward a specific point totally manipulative (personal communication, February 22, 2017). Conrad's definition of being critical is aligned with Paul's (1990) definition of criticality explained above.

Similarly, Fredrick's focus on critical thinking skills aimed at helping individual students to overcome the challenges they will face in their life and the ability to solve them creatively also focused on individuals. Although creating technologies for people with disabilities looked like an example of taking action (praxis) in favour of people in need, it is hard to regard it as critical pedagogy as advanced by Freire (1970a, 1998) and others. Indeed, Fredrick's primary goal in doing such projects was not to help people within disabilities themselves, who may have faced exclusion, but rather to apply the skills the students have learned in class in a creative way. Again, Fredrick's primary purpose to show how some Hollywood movies are not based on reality was to give the students a critical attitude when watching movies, not necessarily to provide them with broader questions about how the media is controlled by those in the power and how they shape the public's ideas of truth. Similarly, Conrad's example of media literacy only intended to help students see the manipulative nature of the media; it was not necessarily a call to take action against the mainstream media or to offer alternative media as a means of resistance. For him, it was enough to help students realize how manipulative the media was and it is "students who should decide whether they want to be part of those agendas

or not" (Conrad, personal communication, February 22, 2017). Indeed, taking action (praxis) with the intention of creating social change was a personal decision made only by students if they found it pressing and important.

In contrast, the pedagogical practices of Ewan and Adira do provide examples of what the research literature would consider critical pedagogy. In applying critical approaches, Ewan emphasized asking systemic questions (e.g., Freire, 1970a; Giroux, 2014) by referring to history and showing how, for example, discrimination has continued from the past to today. Here, the importance of content knowledge became highlighted, as it is associated to social justice issues. More importantly, as critical consciousness is associated with having political agency (both big "P" politics and small "p" politics that is the everyday politics of society), sending the students to the food bank showed how Ewan engaged his students to be civically active. Similarly, Adira's focus on social justice issues engaged students in social activities to enhance their political agency. For example, having discussions about the refugee crisis and newcomers' experiences (content knowledge) in the class (thinking critically), and then raising funds for refugees (taking action) and thinking of ways the students can help, showed a language of possibility, collective action, and creating change.

As a consequence, the lack of common critical consciousness among the four teachers showed a varied application of critical thinking skills, which in turn shapes different identities and mode of agency. Critical pedagogy, I would argue (in opposition to some of my participants) is more than critical thinking, and critical thinking will not lead to real consciousness or real change.

Media Literacy or Critical Media Literacy?

Critical pedagogy is part of the critical theory that emerged in neo-Marxian literature (Stanley, 1992). Burbules and Berk (1999) argue that the Marxist school of thought has been criticized by early critical theorists for underemphasizing the crucial role of media in empowering capitalism through providing conditions for ideological hegemony. The data from my study showed the importance of media for the four teachers to enhance critical thinking skills and improve students' awareness about the manipulative role of the media.

However, by remembering the distinction between critical pedagogy and critical thinking, a question arises here, 'Is there any difference between teaching media literacy in each of the traditions? If, yes, what is the difference (s)?' To answer these questions, I again refer to the intention and approach of each teacher in using the media to enhance critical thinking. My findings revealed that not all four the teachers had the same intention when they employed the media and not all of their pedagogical practices in applying critical thinking skills were associated with critical pedagogy.

While media literacy is a skill or ability that develops critical thinking skills to analyze, evaluate and create media and the complex messages we receive from it, understanding how media shapes identities, culture and society, identifying the intentions of media makers, understanding media biases and the relationship between power and information requires more than just achieving skills and abilities. The interconnection of media literacy and critical pedagogy suggests a critical media literacy that is employed by critical pedagogues.

In regards to the theoretical underpinnings of critical media literacy, Keller and Share (2007) argue that critical media literacy aims at establishing a radical democracy

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through developing skills lead to civically engaged individuals. They argue:

> When educators teach students critical media literacy, they often begin with media arts activities or simple decoding of media texts in the mode of the established media literacy movement with discussion of how audiences receive media messages. But critical media literacy also engages students in exploring the depths of the iceberg with critical questions to challenge ''common-sense'' assumptions and redesign alternative media arts production with negotiated and oppositional interpretations. (Keller & Share, 2007, p. 3)

Indeed, what Keller and Share (2007) define as critical media literacy shows the emphasis on the notion of praxis, which makes critical medial literacy more than just a tool to enhance critical thinking skills. This is the approach of critical pedagogy advanced by Freire (1970a) in that it aims at enhancing critical consciousness by necessitating dialogical communication between students and teachers with taking action (praxis) against oppression.

Accordingly, I argue that media literacy for Conrad and Fredrick was the employment of enhancing only critical thinking skills and creating the realization that media is manipulative. In contrast, for Adira and Ewan, media literacy aimed at taking action to make change. For example, Adira referred to dialogical communication on news articles about current social issues like the recent refugee crisis to enable students to understand the biases and obstacles refugees face (personal communication, March 2, 2017). What distinguishes the application of the media by Adira from Conrad's practices is that Adira saw taking action to change the situation of refugees as an integral part of the process of awareness, not just assessing and criticizing the situation as critical thinking would call for. Her call to take action when she asked the students how they can help the refugees or how they can answer to that crisis was answered through fundraising for refugees outside the school.

Similarly, Ewan designated final projects associated to class discussions to engage students in society by using media critically. For example, he asked students to create a Twitter page or make posters about an issue like AIDS in Africa to raise others' awareness of the issue. This is a clear example of praxis through critical media literacy. Indeed, discussion and analysis in the classroom should aim to deepen students' critical exploration of an issue at hand and influence students to enact change in the broader society.

When Keller and Share (2007) speak about praxis within critical media literacy, they suggest taking action to create change is only possible through applying alternative media against mainstream media. However, Adira's reaction to the refugee crisis was to engage the class to raise funds for the refugees while the role of alternative media as a mode of resistance and to take action was neglected in her action. In this regard, by considering the importance of critical media literacy in 21st century as a necessity tool to establish democracy under the circumstances that a market-based media shapes homogenized identities, cultures and values in the world, the question arises, 'When we speak about critical media literacy, to what extent it is crucial to take action through alternative media (the media itself)?'

The application of the media to enhance critical thinking and critical consciousness was applied by the four teachers in varied subjects or units of study (e.g., English, History, Media). Although as Conrad mentioned, in Ontario media literacy is mandated to be studied in all English courses, the data revealed that some teachers lacked the intention or real training to teach media literacy that fully aimed to enhance critical consciousness (critical media literacy). One of the issues highlighted here for further

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consideration and investigation is that critical media literacy, or even media literacy, is not really a part of the teacher preparation program in Ontario.

In short, critical consciousness will not be achieved by only enhancing critical thinking skills or even media literacy skills; rather, it requires critical pedagogy. This study has shown how teachers' understandings of critical consciousness are not necessarily associated with reflection (e.g., how those in power control the media to shape specific identities) and action/praxis (e.g., how media can be employed in favour of critical pedagogy to make social change in favor of public good).

Dialogue

The four teachers referred to dialogue as the main approach in teaching critical thinking skills. However, the data revealed that there is not the same initial intention among the four teachers in employing dialogue as a strategy in the classroom, which again highlights the distinction between applying critical thinking and critical pedagogy. For example, Conrad saw dialogue as a way for self-realization, and he believed self-realization aimed to help an individual find their place in the world (personal communication, February 22, 2017). In other words, self-realization, as defined by Conrad, is not necessarily in favour of collective good due to the fact that it can also include one's liberal interests. That is why Conrad is positioned in the tradition of critical thinking (discussed in the previous section); he applied dialogue to enhance students' critical thinking and self-realization in a sense that focused on individual interests and not necessarily on the collective good. However, Adira's intention in applying dialogue aimed at promoting a collective vision about the refugees' challenges and a call for action. The most important realization is that, similar to what I argued in the critical

thinking section, within critical pedagogy, communication or intercommunication (dialogue) is employed to build a collective vision toward working together for social change (Freire, 1970a). The key in applying dialogue in critical pedagogy approach is to take action (praxis) not simply create a greater understanding of the issue at hand.

Indeed, in comparison to critical thinking, within critical pedagogy there is more emphasis on the social nature of dialogue, a dialogue that "occurs between people, not purely as a form of dialogical thought" (p. 6), and does not focus only on individuals themselves (Burbules & Berk, 1999). Dialogue is the pedagogical method to foster critical thinking skills. Freire explains, "cultural action for freedom is characterized by dialogue, and its preeminent purpose is to conscientize the people" (1970a, p. 47).

The holistic concept of dialogue that is articulated by Freire (1970a, 1998) is a multi-dimensional and contextual process of creating meaning. It provides the context for each student to bring his/her background, concern and experience to the context. According to Freire (1970a), "A pedagogy [of freedom] must be forged with, not for, the oppressed (whether individuals or peoples) in the incessant struggle to regain their humanity" (p. 48). Within critical pedagogy, dialogue creates a critical attitude and enhances critical consciousness, otherwise known as conscientization.

Furthermore, the findings highlighted the crucial role of curiosity as an integral part of shaping any dialogue or conversation. Freire (1998) refers to curiosity as a fundamental factor in interaction and dialogism. He argues that curiosity is "some sort of openness to comprehending what is in the obit of the challenged being's sensibility" (Freire, 1998, p. 94). Arousing one's curiosity is a prerequisite to raising new questions and promotes a dialogue about any topic/subject/issue. More importantly, to encourage

students to be engaged in dialogue, applying a language of inclusion was highlighted by the teachers. In critical pedagogy, there is a great emphasis on the radicalness of inclusion, which makes education associated with being human (Freire, 1998).

Indeed, according to the Freirean school of thought, "learning arises from the critical engagement of teacher/learners and learner/teachers with each other and their worlds, and can take the form of dialectical resolutions of the contradictions between self and other: teacher and learner, limit and freedom, learners and their world, and so on" (Rule, 2009, p. 121).

Critical Consciousness

As the findings revealed, there is lack of critical consciousness among the four teachers. In this section, I discuss the necessity of implementing critical pedagogy in the Ontario education system in response to some of Conrad's comments regarding critical pedagogy. The discussion highlights why a common critical consciousness among teachers is vital at the current time, one in which democracy and citizenship is under threat, and raises questions about the role the teacher program in Ontario plays in enhancing teachers' critical consciousness.

The idea of critical pedagogy as part of Critical Theory emerged in the literature in the neo-Marxist school of thought (Stanley, 1992). Critical pedagogy was established against any authoritarian regime or systems of oppression. Accordingly, due to the domination of neoliberal authoritarian ideology at the current time, critical pedagogy as advanced by Freire (1970a, 1998) has become seen as an alternative for, and as a mode of resistance against, neoliberalism.

Based on the interviews with the four teachers in the province of Ontario, critical pedagogy is not really taught, encouraged, or influential among public school teachers for two reasons. The first is the demanding nature of teaching that emphasizes the schools' performance on standardized tests (mentioned by the four teachers). The second related reason is the focus on enhancing critical thinking not critical pedagogy, both consciously or unconsciously, by the teachers (e.g., Conrad and Fredrick's practices). Although some of Adira and Ewan's pedagogical practices can be regarded as examples of applying critical pedagogy, Ewan acknowledged that his pedagogical practices associated with critical pedagogy are more integral when questions and issues are raised by students; he had no plan for encouraging it in the classroom (Ewan, personal communication, February 13, 2017).

However, the fact that critical pedagogy is not influential among teachers at secondary schools does not diminish the importance of critical pedagogy; *it only shows that neoliberal ideology has a stronghold in current education circles*. Marxism is not taught, encouraged, or influential either, but that does not mean it has no validity. Critical pedagogy precisely has "value in the real world" because it starts from the 'real world': it is based on human beings' everyday, real world experiences. Conrad believed that "it [critical pedagogy] misleadingly holds that the big conflict out here in the real world is economic, and along liberationist vs 'neoliberal' lines" (personal communication, February 22, 2017).

However, the question arises, 'Why is there not a struggle that is based in economics?' Of course it is based on economics—even mainstream liberal political

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education theory is based on economics: all ideologies are based on economics because it is the basis of all political/social/educational relations.

Furthermore, the critique of critical pedagogy provided by Conrad as being manipulative, Fredrick's unfamiliarity with the terms under discussion, and many of the teachers' practices showed a lack of understanding about critical pedagogy and neoliberalism. This reflects how the performative culture, or what Foucault (1991) calls art of governmentality, operates powerfully in the era of neoliberal globalization. Conrad's understanding of critical pedagogy—he described teachers as perceived "liberators"—is not a correct definition of critical pedagogy. Freire (1998) does not state that teachers are liberators. In fact, Freire (1998) emphasizes the dialectical process of all learning, including questions of social conflict. Teachers and students work together. On the other hand, in contrast to Conrad and Fredrick's pedagogical practices that are positioned in the critical thinking tradition, Ewan applied critical pedagogy when it was brought up by the students, and he mentioned that after looking back he planned to apply it purposefully.

Thus, the most important realization is the need to go one step back and ask about the extent of teachers' critical consciousness and the necessity of a common critical consciousness among teachers in the Ontario education system. The issue is both the anonymity of neoliberalism, which Monbiot (2016) explains "is both a symptom and cause of its power" (p. 1), and the misunderstanding of critical pedagogy and its necessity in the current historical time. At the very least, teachers should be critically conscious about their work as teachers.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

The propagation of neoliberal ideology, followed by neoliberal educational reforms in many parts of the world, especially in major Western societies, has led to what Giroux (2014) calls a social amnesia identified by the inability of youth to think critically about social, political and economic issues, and their failure to take part in constructive social activities that make change. This social amnesia, as Giroux (2014) explains, demonstrates a crisis of identity and agency among youth in the broader society.

In response to neoliberal educational reforms that have been identified, at least partially, as an ideological war to shape individuals' agency so that it is aligned with the market and against any mode of collective good (market illiteracy), an application of critical pedagogy (both as an alternative and as a theoretical mode of resistance to such trends) has been advocated for by major critics of neoliberal policies like Paulo Freire, Henry Giroux and Michael Apple.

Due to the influence of neoliberal trends for over 20 years in Canada, and the subsequent threats to democracy and citizenship, and the lack of research on the application of critical pedagogy in the context of education in Canada, this research intended to investigate current strategies and skills teachers apply to enhance the critical consciousness of students as a necessary factor for social transformation.

Since the potential of a case study is to answer 'why' and 'how' questions, and this fits with an interpretivist paradigm, I adopted an interpretative case study methodology to answer my research question: "How do teachers challenge neoliberalism through a critical pedagogy within and outside of the classroom?" The qualitative nature

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of the study sees human experience as the main source of data.

To collect data for the purpose of this study, I used semi-structured interviews and asked participants some follow-up questions via email to gather further information. The inclusion criteria were: being a secondary teacher in a public school in the province of Ontario, having had experience applying critical pedagogy in teaching practices and a willingness to participate in the study. To recruit the participants, a snowball sampling method was employed to ensure that the participants met the inclusion criteria. This study qualifies as an instrumental case study, which means that although units or cases are teachers, the main intention is to investigate the skills and strategies applied by them to enhance critical consciousness.

I performed a thematic analysis through the process of coding in several phases to achieve meaningful patterns. Furthermore, I adopted a critical pedagogical lens, as it has been advanced by Freire, Giroux and others to analyze the data. The core ideas of critical pedagogy include: a focus on social justice issues, asking systematic questions about power relations, a culture of dialogue and questioning, and an emphasis on collective action and self-realization, in the sense that an individual's emancipation is contingent with social emancipation. More importantly, critical pedagogy (critical consciousness) can only be achieved through both the process of reflection (thinking critically) and action or praxis.

Limitations of the Study

Case study research is mainly criticized for its lack of generalization (Yin, 2003). Thus, this study might be critiqued for the low number of participants I reached to gather the data. However, including only four participants in the study gave me the opportunity

to conduct very deep interviews and elicit data through subsequent emails that I exchanged with the participants after the first interview. Indeed, I had the chance to thoroughly discuss each participant's viewpoint and the different dimensions of the issue at hand from their perspectives.

Moreover, before starting the interviews, I had a number of presumptions regarding the implementation of critical pedagogy, teachers' critical consciousness and recognizing neoliberalism as an issue in the education system of Ontario. Also, I did not fully realize that the teachers would have different ideas about critical thinking and what is occurring in the education system. That was a limitation for me and challenged me in terms of analyzing the data. However, disapproving my initial hypothesis opened new doors for me and enabled me to ask new questions regarding teachers' critical consciousness. To avoid any manipulation of the data based on my presumptions, I let the data lead my conclusion by letting the teachers share their pedagogical experiences and viewpoints in any language they preferred. I started to think on one hand, 'What do the critics of neoliberalism say about critical pedagogy?' and on the other hand, 'How do teachers understand the issues in the education system of Ontario and apply critical approaches as a response?"

Findings

The study revealed that not only is there a lack of critical consciousness among the four teachers in the province of Ontario, which has led to different pedagogical practices, but also there are conflicting understandings about the issue(s) the Ontario education system faces.

While two of the teachers (Adira and Ewan) applied critical pedagogy and saw

neoliberalism as an issue for the Ontario education system, the other two participants (Fredrick and Conrad) framed the issue(s) as political considerations, or, as Conrad explained, "practical considerations." The focus of the two latter teachers was on critical thinking approaches, which as we have seen has a different starting point from critical pedagogy.

The reason for this lack of critical consciousness among the four teachers can be understood from two perspectives. First, it is caused by the teachers holding different meanings for what it means to be 'critical' and then defining different pedagogical philosophies based on that definition of criticality. Second, it is caused by the power of neoliberal ideology that has shaped all aspects of life and the teachers' subjectivities in a visible and powerful way. Surprisingly, although all four teachers were very experienced (they had between 16 to 29 years of teaching experience), they were not able to recognize how neoliberalism has shaped both their discourses and practices. Foucault's (1991) idea of neoliberal governmentality and performativity as technologies of neoliberalism was adopted as another framework to show how neoliberalism is turned into a global phenomenon and that it has shaped common-sense notions.

Also, regarding the varied strategies and skills the teachers applied to enhance the critical consciousness of students, the data showed that critical pedagogy is more than critical thinking, as it facilitates taking action to achieve social change not merely recognizing unjust structures. Also, the role of critical media literacy was highlighted. However, the practices of the teachers in the study (e.g. Adira) who intended to implement critical media literacy showed inadequate training in how to teach such skills.

Areas for Future Research

One of the important findings about the application of critical pedagogy among the four teachers in the province of Ontario was that critical pedagogy is not really encouraged or influential among public school teachers. Accordingly, due to the limitations of the generalizability of the case study method and the vital nature of the study for the future of democracy and citizenship in Canada, it is important to repeat the study with a large number of teachers in different parts of Canada. As well, conducting an ethnographic study at the classroom level to observe and monitor how teachers apply critical pedagogy could be an effective way to collect rich data.

Implications and Suggestions

Limited influence and engagement with critical pedagogy, along with a lack of critical consciousness among the four teachers, forced me to step back and think about teacher education in Ontario. In doing so, I searched for research on teaching education in Ontario through the website of the Ontario College of Teachers ([http://www.oct.ca)](http://www.oct.ca) and spoke to some of my friends who hold a teaching certificate. By examining the program requirements, I realized that although critical pedagogy has infused into varied subjects in teacher education, it is not necessarily under the title of critical pedagogy or as a separate course in the Ontario education system. Here, although I am aware that critical pedagogy is a subject approach that can be applied in any subject, the question arises, 'Why is critical pedagogy, as a response to current threats to democracy and citizenship, not identified, valued and taught as a separate course under its own title in teacher preparation programs in Ontario?'

I believe that Monbiot's (2016) concern about the danger of the anonymity of neoliberalism is serious, and as Ball (2012) explains, "we need to understand ...

neoliberalism not as abstract ideas but as a discourse, in the full senses of the word—a set

of practices and subjectivities that are realized in actually existing and mundane forms in

different settings and locations" (p. 37). Finally, given Giroux's (2014) point that the

most important question in America today is not why students or young people do not

participate in protests but how those movements can lead to change, I would like to

mention that both enhancing critical consciousness among teachers and students, and

finding and organizing those same synergies that aim at keeping democracy alive are

important and crucial for Ontario schools as well as teachers and students.

Final Thoughts

After the second interview, while I was confused and surprised with some of the

unexpected data, Conrad stating, "See you later" was a relief to me. Conrad's willingness

to take time out of his busy life and answer all my questions with patience via email was

one of my best experiences of learning during my research. Indeed, the dialogue between

me and two of the participants via email had a critical pedagogical nature. *I learned about*

critical pedagogy through my own experiences as a researcher in this study.

Interestingly, Paulo Freire's (1970a) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* has been

translated into multiple languages and has sold over 1 million copies throughout the

world (Kampol, 1999).

Finally, in my viewpoint, current complex practices of critical pedagogy in teacher

education program in Ontario (mentioned in the previous section under a question) show

how neoliberalism has had such a strong impact on higher education (teacher education)

that many of the changes/reforms that we have seen in higher education that are related to

neoliberalism have become taken-for-granted such that it has almost become impossible

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to imagine critical pedagogy as a stand-alone course in teacher education programs any longer. However, although thinking about ways of valuing critical pedagogy as a stand-alone course in teacher preparation programs in Ontario has become more complex and its implementation has almost become impossible in the era of neoliberalism, realizing the discourse of possibility (advanced by Henry Giroux) is a key, which reminds us that change is possible.

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Appendix A

How Do Teachers Challenge Neoliberalism Through Critical Pedagogy Within and Outside of the Classroom?

LETTER OF INFORMATION

Principal Investigator:

Dr. Marianne Larsen, Associate Professor, Faculty of Education, Western University

My name is Rezvan Shahsavari and I am a MA student in the Faculty of Education at Western University (Canada). I am currently working on a research project entitled *"How Do Teachers Challenge Neoliberalism Through a Critical Mode of Pedagogy Within and Outside of the Classroom?"*. You are being invited to participate in this research study. The purpose of this letter is to give you the information you need to make an informed decision about whether or not you would like to participate. It is important that you understand what the research involves. Please take the time to read this carefully and ask questions if anything is unclear. You should feel free to ask the co-investigator, Rezvan Shahsavari, any questions you may have about the study at any time.

Why this study is being done?

At the heart of any healthy democratic society is an education system that nurtures individuals who are able to recognize authoritarian tendencies, are civically engaged, and take constructive social actions. There is much evidence to suggest that neoliberal educational reforms have had many detrimental effects on the democratic potential of education systems. As a result, some scholars have proposed the idea of critical pedagogy (or a critical mode of pedagogy) to challenge the influence of neoliberalism. The purpose of this study is to understand how teachers challenge neoliberalism both within and outside of their classrooms through critical pedagogy.

The study aims to understand how resistant teachers raise students' social consciousness and shape their political mode of agency, and the challenges that these teachers face in their pedagogical practices.

What are the study procedures?

If you choose to participate in this study, you will be expected to participate in an interview that will take no longer than 60 minutes. However, if the researcher, Rezvan Shahsavari, recognizes a need for further information to clarify your initial responses, you will be asked to participate in a follow-up interview that will take approximately 15 minutes.

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to determine the location (except inside your own school) of the interview that works for you. Also, the exact time and date of the interview (s) will be set by both me, as the researcher, and you to ensure that as timing works for you, there is no overlap with other participants' choice of time and date. Skype is another option for interview, *but the preference is a face-to-face interview*. You need to bring a copy of the signed Consent Form to the face-to-face interview or sign, scan and email it back to me before the interview by Skype. The interview (s) will be recorded by an audio recorder to ensure the accuracy of all information.

What are the risks and harms of participating in this study?

The questions of the interview try to investigate your experiences using critical pedagogy both inside and outside of your classroom/school to challenge neoliberalism. The questions will not be related to your school's policies.
There are no known or anticipated risks or discomforts associated with participating in this study. The activities can be stopped at any time if you experience any discomfort or fatigue. You may refuse to answer any questions or withdraw from the study at any time with no effect on your academic status. If you decide to withdraw from the study, any information collected prior will not be used. No new information will be collected without your permission.

What are the benefits?

This study sees the voices and experiences of resistant teachers, like you, as being valuable and very important for the future of democracy both inside and broader society. You may not directly benefit from participating in this study but information gathered may provide benefits to society as a whole which include the potential of the research to highlight both possible spaces and gaps in the practices of a critical mode of pedagogy that aim to produce civically engaged students as the core of democracy. Also, the empirical data has the potential to help us better understand resistance not only by relying on theoretical models, but real-world practical experiences of critical pedagogy in action.

The researchers will take every precaution to maintain confidentiality of the data. The audio-recordings will be transferred to the laptop as soon as possible and encrypted. Also, the laptop is encrypted as well as password protected. The information collected will be used for research purposes only, and information will not be used in any reports, publications or presentations of the study results. Assigned numbers for each participant will be used instead of participants' name.

How will participant's information be kept confidential?

Only representatives of The University of Western Ontario Non-Medical Research Ethics Board may require access to the study-related records to monitor the conduct of the research. Other people/groups/organizations outside the study team will not have access to information collected. Any personal information about you in a form of a hard copy will be kept for 5 years in a locked cabinet at the researcher's Rezvan Shahsavari's home.

A list linking your assigned number (instead of your name, each participant will be given a number) for the research study with your identifiable information will be encrypted and kept in a password-protected file, separate from all other files, in the hard-drive of the researcher's, Rezvan Shahsavari's laptop, which is encrypted and has personalized lock system. Only Rezvan Shahsavari has access to this laptop. All the data will be securely destroyed using industry-standard shredders and data-deletion software after the retention period of 5 years.

Are participants compensated to be in this study?

As a token of recognition for the participation in this study, each participant will receive a Tim Horton gift card and any parking fees will be paid by the researcher, Rezvan Shahsavari. If you do not complete the entire study, or withdraw after concentration, you will still receive a Tim Horton gift card and any probable parking fees will be paid by the researcher, Rezvan Shahsavari.

What are the Rights of Participants?

Participation in this research is voluntary and not mandatory in any way. You may decide not to be in this study. Even if you consent to participate, you have the right to not answer individual questions or to withdraw from the study at any time. If you choose not to participate or to leave the study at any time, this decision will have no effect on your academics. You do not waive any legal right by signing this consent form

If you have any questions about the rights of the participants or the conduct of this study, you may contact The Office of Human Research Ethics at xxx-xxx-xxxx or email: _____

If you know of any other individuals whom you think would like to participate in this study and meet the participant inclusion criteria as outlined in the LOI, please forward this email to them.

Principal investigator:	Research assistant:
Dr. Marianne Larsen	Rezvan Shahsavari
Associate Professor	MA Student
Faculty of Education	Faculty of Education
Western University	Western University
Email:_____	Email: _____
Phone: xxx-xxx-xxxx	Phone: xxx-xxx-xxxx

Western

Appendix B

How Do Teachers Challenge Neoliberalism Through a Critical Mode of Pedagogy Both Within and Outside of the Classroom?

CONSENT FORM

Principal Investigator:

Dr. Marianne Larsen, Associate Professor, Faculty of Education, Western University, Email: _____

I have read the Letter of Information, have had the nature of the study explained to me and I agree to participate. All questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

I consent to the use of unidentified quotes obtained during the study in the dissemination of this research

☐ YES ☐ NO

I agree to be contacted for a follow –up interview if clarification is needed about my initial interview responses

☐ YES ☐ NO

I choose:
A face-to-face interview ☐ a Skype interview ☐

Print Name_____   **Signature**

Date_____

My signature means that I have explained the study to the participant named above. I have answered all questions.

Name of Person Obtaining Consent_____

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent_____

Date_____

Please bring this form to the interview day. If you choose to interview via skype, please sign, scan and send back this from to me before the interview.

You will be given a copy of the Letter of Information and the Consent Form once the Form has been signed.

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Background Information:

1. How many years have you been teaching?
2. What subject(s) have you been teaching?

The Teachers' Understanding of Critical Pedagogy:

3. Are you familiar with the term 'critical pedagogy'? If so, can you tell me what that means to you?

Teachers Apply Critical Pedagogy Inside their Classrooms/Schools:

4. What have you done in your classroom/school that have helped to enhance your students' critical consciousness about pressing issues in the world today? Please provide 2 or 3 examples of strategies you have applied within your school/classroom.)

5. What have you done in your classroom/school to support the development of your students' political agency? In other words, what activities have you done with your students within the classroom that have helped them to become more engaged in civic affairs? Can you give me a few examples of specific strategies you used with students to encourage them to become more active in civic affairs? (I'm thinking of ways in which students may be encouraged to become more politically active, but not just about big "P" politics such as government and political parties, but all the ways they are encouraged to participate in society or within their school to create change in favor of public good at any extend.)

Teachers Apply Critical Pedagogy Outside their Classrooms/Schools:

6. What extra-curricular activities have you done with your students that have helped them to become more engaged in civic affairs? Now can you give me a few examples of specific strategies you used with students to encourage them to become more active in civic affairs.
   How do these strategies help to raise students' social consciousness about pressing issues in the world today?
   (I'm thinking of ways in which students may be encouraged to become more politically active, but not just about big "P" politics such as government and political parties, but all the ways they are encouraged to participate in society to create social change.)

7. Can you provide an example or two to show how your students have been engaged in civic affairs? This would be activities that are related to improving society in some way.

Teachers' Challenges in Applying Critical Pedagogy:

8. What challenges have you face in trying to implement critical approaches such as critical pedagogy in your teaching?

Concluding Question:

9. Is there anything else you would like to share with me regarding how you implement critical approaches, such as critical pedagogy, in your classroom teaching.

The Teachers' Understanding of Neoliberalism:

10. I've reading a lot about neoliberalism and education which is basically the idea that schools should run like business, parents and students are perceived as customers and should choose the schools they want. Under neoliberalism, there is a focus on competition and ranking of students and schools through standardized tests. Some critics say this neglects the teaching of critical thinking about democracy and citizenship. Have you ever heard of the term neoliberalism? If so, do you understand it in the same way that I do? If not, do you think what I've just descried characterizes schools today? So, do you think neoliberalism is a problem for education? If yes, please give me examples of its impacts on the education system of Ontario.

Appendix D

ETHICS APPROVAL

Western Research

Research Ethics

Western University Non-Medical Research Ethics Board
NMREB Delegated Initial Approval Notice

Principal Investigator: Dr. Marianne Larsen
Department & Institution: Education\Faculty of Education, Western University

NMREB File Number: 108763
Study Title: How Do Teachers Challenge Neoliberalism Through a Critical Mode of Pedagogy within and outside of the Classroom?

NMREB Initial Approval Date: January 12, 2017
NMREB Expiry Date: January 12, 2018

Documents Approved and/or Received for Information:

Document Name	Comments	Version Date
Western University Protocol	Received December 23, 2016	
Letter of Information & Consent		2016/12/22
Recruitment Items	Recruitment Email	2016/11/12
Instruments	The Interview Questions	2016/11/12

The Western University Non-Medical Research Ethics Board (NMREB) has reviewed and approved the above named study, as of the NMREB Initial Approval Date noted above.

NMREB approval for this study remains valid until the NMREB Expiry Date noted above, conditional to timely submission and acceptance of NMREB Continuing Ethics Review.

The Western University NMREB operates in compliance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS2), the Ontario Personal Health Information Protection Act (PHIPA, 2004), and the applicable laws and regulations of Ontario.

Members of the NMREB who are named as Investigators in research studies do not participate in discussions related to, nor vote on such studies when they are presented to the REB.

The NMREB is registered with the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services under the IRB registration number IRB 00000941.

Western University, Research, Support Services Bldg., Rm. 5150
London, ON, Canada N6G 1G9 t. 519.661.3036 f. 519.850.2466 www.uwo.ca/research/ethics

Curriculum Vitae

Name:	Rezvan Shahsavari-Googhari
Post-secondary Education and Degree:	Shahid-behehsti University, Tehran, Iran B.A., Philosophy, 2007-2011
	The University of Western Ontario, London, Ontario, Canada M.A., Education, 2015-Present
Honours and Awards:	Ranked 3rd in the 19th National Persian Literature Olympiad, Iran, 2007
	Best Instructor Award for Teaching Persian Literature Olympiads Preparation Classes, Iran, 2008-2009
Related Experience:	Persian Olympiad Instructor, Iran's National Elites Foundation 2007-2009
	"Populism, Post-truth and Politics of Divisions? Responses for Democracy from Higher Education" Panel Discussion: Researching International and Contemporary Talk, Faculty of Education, Western University, March 8th, 2017
	Western Education Research Symposium: Annual Robert MacMillan Graduate Research in Education Research Symposium, April 7th, 2017
	Congress of Humanities and Social Sciences: 45th Canadian Society for the Study of Education (CSSE) Conference, May 30th, 2017, Ryerson University