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**UNDERSTANDING EQUITY AND OPPRESSION
FROM A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE:
STUDENTS EVALUATE THEIR EDUCATION**

BY

Kevin Black

BA (Hons.), Wilfrid Laurier University, 1996

THESIS

Submitted to the Department of Psychology
In partial fulfillment of the requirements
For the Master of Arts degree
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2000

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Abstract

In 1993, the Ontario Ministry of Education and Training (MET) created a draft document on the topic of antiracism and ethnocultural equity in school boards. This document contained guidelines for anti-oppression policy and practice within schools. Many stakeholders within the education system and society debate whether or not an education for equity is being provided in schools. I chose to respond to this debate by listening to the voices of an unheard stakeholder group: students. Two methods of data collection, questionnaires and focus groups, were utilized in my study. Seventy-one students participated in the questionnaire section, and six students further participated in a focus group. I assessed the depth and breadth of students' definitions of equity, racism, and sexism. I also asked students to evaluate the quality of their entire education based on the visionary anti-oppression guidelines collaboratively created by the MET. Results from the questionnaire indicated that most students were unaware of the social justice aspect of equity; and still many more were unable to provide a definition of equity. Student definitions of racism and sexism did not include any recognition of systemic oppression, and only two students acknowledged the Western historical patterns of these social problems. Only three of the ten equity guidelines had more than 50% of students agreeing that they occurred more often than 'sometimes.' Students gave the schools a C- (61%) grade for overall anti-racist/anti-sexist education and the focus groups corroborated these results. Overall, the student participants stated that: 1) they and their student peers did not consider themselves as active participants in the curriculum; 2) community members were rarely participants in the classroom curriculum; 3) women and multi-ethnocultural role models were rarely seen in their studies; and, 4) accurate

information on the diversity of ethnocultural values and traditions within Canada was not presented in schools. Altogether these findings reveal a need for critical pedagogy in schools and an increase in the amount of equity content within the curriculum. An education for equity report card for the MET and recommendations for action are included within. The statistical analysis of my use of the MET equity guidelines indicated good reliability and validity, thus providing evidence to support the utility of introducing this questionnaire into schools to annually evaluate the quality of students' education for equity.

Acknowledgements

It's been said innumerable times that no great work is created without standing on the shoulders of others. This begs the question at this point in my thesis: exactly whose shoulders am I standing on with my size 12 shoes? The answer is, of course, many people. My theoretical influences are stated quite clearly within my literature survey, but there's more than the incorporeal (but not immaterial!) authors whose work I have read and who have given me both inspiration and an education (a most fruitful combination): there are the real live people who have contributed to my education, my research, and my life throughout this thesis-writing experience.

. ~ .

I would like to begin by acknowledging my thesis advisors – Susan James and Isaac Prilleltensky – and my thesis committee, Carol Duncan and Joanna Ochocka. Thank you all for your commitment to me and my education in general, but especially your commitment that I have the most valuable thesis-writing experience possible. I know that you have always had my best interests at heart. I count myself lucky to have had the opportunity to interact and learn from you all during this process.

To every student who participated in my research: thank you for your gift of time and knowledge. I know that this thesis would have been about 40 pages thinner, and nowhere near as interesting, without your contribution (i.e., the research findings). To those of you who expressed to me that your awareness of inequity has been raised here at WLU, and also during the research process, I hope that you shall continue to find the education for equity that you are searching for.

Thank you very much to the teachers and guest educators who were so ready and willing to work with me in providing an integrated critical pedagogy experience to the students of two local classrooms. I didn't have anything else to offer you but an idea and an opportunity to provide a critical education within schools. Clearly, you were willing to give your time and energy because of your belief in students and the importance of an education for equity. Thank you also to the teachers and administrators within the school system who gave me several history lessons (and personal critiques) regarding the quality and quantity of anti-oppression education occurring within Ontario, and specifically the local schools of Waterloo Region.

~

In addition to all those just mentioned who were directly and obviously involved with my thesis, there were those individuals whose involvement was indirect, although in no way was it any less substantial or important. The people I acknowledged here were my teachers, as well as an outstanding community of people who have made my life better in so many ways: my family, my friends, and my partner.

Thank you to my teachers: I consider myself blessed to have had the opportunity to learn from and with many extraordinary educators throughout my formal education career. The contribution of those teachers and professors to my learning has had a tremendous influence in shaping me into the kind of critical student and life-long learner that I am now. The following people stand out in my memory as exceptional critical educators: Paul Davock, Carol Duncan, Ludi Habs, Vern Schaefer, Daryl Taylor, Don Morgenson, and Richard Walsh-Bowers. Thank you all for giving me a critical pedagogy and showing me the power that education has to change lives. Thanks also to two

educators from outside of the formal education system: Janos Bottschner, for kindling my growing interest in critical discourse analysis; and Ali Sammel, for encouraging my ideas from the very beginning as well as providing valuable examples of the critical pedagogy process that really does happen within classrooms.

My most super-huge thanks to those special people in my life who gave me inspirational antidotes to complete this project when my energy was flagging. They are: my mom and dad; Allison and Nathan (two people who know the excitement and the ordeal of writing for other people); Tammy (thanks for the 'Quick-Start' insight); Peter (thanks for encouraging me to move to Edmonton and be a waiter!) and Amber (for insightful conversations into the nature of sexism and racism in human relationships). My biggest thanks for continuous inspiration, love, and support is given to my best friend and fellow partner in the adventure of life: Deanna. Thanks for being there on the other end of the phone in January and showing me that it just might be possible for another project to spring forth like a phoenix from the ashes of the first. Thanks also for all your encouragement since that time to just get in there and write the d--- thing!

. ~ .

I believe that writing is an act of creation, and I have always found that it is a craft that requires a lot of thought and energy. When you add a multi-method research process onto the task of writing then you really have a lot of work! Just consider: drafting a proposal for community education within schools; passing the ethics review; a process of negotiating within the school system that ends unsuccessfully after five months; drafting a new thesis proposal; passing another ethics review; questionnaire distribution; curriculum analysis; facilitating focus groups; transcribing; data analysis; participant

feedback; then finally the actual writing and editing of the thesis. I write this summary partly to acknowledge myself because I am impressed that I made it this far, but equally I write it for the sake of posterity so that I will remember most of what happened during the thesis process and my appreciation for all those who helped me along the way. To be sure, this project truly has been a long journey for me. I most certainly couldn't have done it without the generosity of those mentioned above (which has shown itself in many ways). If you were acknowledged above, please know that this journey's final destination – that is, my thesis – would certainly not have looked the way it does without your contribution.

I'm proud of what I've made.

My warmest feelings of gratitude are extended towards you all.

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Notes on Writing Style and Format

The style of writing and presentation throughout my thesis has some features that may be both familiar and new to readers. I have added this section at the beginning of my thesis to either provide the source of my style choice or explain my rationale where I have developed a style of my own. I have provided brief notes regarding my referencing of authors and their work within the text of my thesis; overall format, aesthetics, and organizational sequence; presentation of quotations; and a unique, but familiar, information-presentation device I have used in my discussion section.

To begin, throughout my writing I have chosen to provide the full name of each referenced author, and not just their patronymic. The faculty of the Community Psychology program at Wilfrid Laurier University (WLU) offer this method of referencing as an option because they consider that it honours women's contribution to scientific research. Since readers commonly assume that an author is male when only their surname is provided, full name references can assist (and oftentimes challenge) the reader in correctly identifying the gender of each author and thereby avoid a sexist method of literature referencing for a large number of cases. However, this method of referencing does require the reader to recognize the given name in question, which may not be the case if it is from a culture unfamiliar to the reader. Moreover, this method also requires the given name to be solely male or female (whereas names such as Pat and Darcy are not). This is obviously not a perfect method, but I believe it is an improvement for another reason beyond that of seeking to avoid the re-production of sexism within scientific writing. My other reason is rooted in my belief that the provision of an author's full name humanizes that person by putting them on a first name basis with the reader.

This is different than the traditional means of producing authority and domination given to professionals in academia and society; that is, the conventional use of professional appellations or titles. In my own experience I have found this method of referencing valuable (e.g., the question has been raised for me and now I often make a guess before I discover the author's gender) and so I want to provide this educational opportunity for my readers.

For similar reasons I have chosen to identify characteristics of cited authors, such as nationality, ethnicity, and academic specialty if these factors are known to me. Again, I believe that this extra information can help to humanize the author, while honouring the contribution of various ethnocultural groups (and avoid the common racist stereotype that all academics are white Western males). I have observed this style of referencing being used by many writers of critical education texts and I believe that it is useful because it gives the reader a general (but not specific, everyone is an individual) ethnocultural and academic location for the cited author. I recognize that the utility of this manner of referencing is limited by my knowledge of the authors in question, yet I believe that even these scant pieces of extra demographic information can be valuable.

As the above discussion illustrates, there is a need for critical awareness among authors who seek ways to avoid falling into common pitfalls that re-produce oppression and exclusion within academic writing. My own level of consciousness in these matters has become more finely honed throughout the process of writing this thesis, but it is by no means complete because there are, as yet, no perfect solutions to many of the moral dilemmas involved in writing accurately and fairly regarding other people, their lived experience, and my social interrelationship with them. My endnotes often illustrate the

present-day conclusion of a process of awareness-raising that I have experienced, although these self-reflexive moments are also frequently noted directly within the text of my thesis. I have provided these notes to reflect my growing awareness of complicated, and in many cases, unresolved issues regarding the use and misuse of terminology and representations of groups of people that are oppressive (e.g., sexist, racist, classist) by intent or by incognizance.

Throughout this work I have sought to draw readers' attention to this terminological dilemma by underlining words that are relevant to the topic of anti-racism and anti-sexism that have also been critiqued because of problematic aspects of their social construction (e.g., white, black, Indian, First Nations, African, European, race, and gender to name but a few). The problem is that, while these labels can be used for benefit in human communication and identity formation, they are fully laden with multiple socio-cultural interpretations and inferences that can also be misused and cause harm (i.e., conscious or unconscious racism and sexism). Undoubtedly, we live in a world where socio-cultural group identifiers are prolific and often under processes of negotiation and appropriation in society. These discussions and debates, often referred to as 'identity politics,' will continue until such time as human beings are able to create group identity labels that are entirely satisfactory to everyone (or abolished altogether). Until that time we will continue to use these labels; and thus I have endeavored to: 1) provide a summary of the general issues and debate surrounding the labels in question, either in the text of my thesis or in an endnote; and, 2) cue the reader visually so that we are both aware (i.e., conscious) that I have used a common, yet imperfect, gender or racial/ethnocultural social construction. That being said, I do not expect that the concerns and critiques that

convinced me to underline a word are universally shared. Readers may think that I have highlighted a word unnecessarily or they may note that I have missed a word that they find problematic. This is, of course, my main reason for underlining words in the first place: it creates discussion; an important part of critical pedagogy.

In regards to overall style, format, and organization requirements, I have followed the WLU Master of Arts thesis format standards. Further to this, I have utilized the American Psychological Association (APA) style guidelines as set out in that organization's *Publication Manual* (4th Edition). In particular I have utilized the general APA style common to psychology papers (i.e., introduction, methodology, results, conclusion), but I have also adapted the style to suit my writing of this particular work. Specifically, I have utilized the APA recommendations regarding the level and format of headings, but I have also used chapters to guide the reader through my thesis. Furthermore, I have chosen to italicize, rather than underline, all headings. I have also used italics when writing the names of published works within the text of my thesis. The use of italics in these circumstances is simply an aesthetic preference of mine that mirrors the presentation style of journal articles from the field of psychology. Similar to APA style, I have blocked and indented all quotations longer than 40 words. I have chosen to single-space rather than double space these block quotations throughout my work because I believe it is easier to read. However, I have chosen to do something unique in my *Research Results* and *Discussion* chapters. I wanted to emphasize the words of the student participants in my research, and thus their quotations appear in bold throughout these two sections. The quotations of academics, institutions (e.g., school boards), and all other sources follow the traditional style of quotation (i.e., they appear in plain font).

Finally, I have utilized some creative license and written much of my discussion in the form of a school report card. I thought it fitting given the topic of my study: education for equity within the school system.

Preface

I have included a preface in my thesis in order to provide two benefits to readers. One benefit was to give readers a glimpse into the organizational structure of my thesis. However, the principal reason for this preface was to situate myself, as writer-researcher, within the subject of my inquiry. I have done so by providing a brief personal history, as well as two personal statements: one explicating the values that inform my study, and another explicating the motivations that drove it forward.

On a Personal Note

I believe that it is important to place the researcher within the context of his or her own research. Researchers and writers are responsible for virtually every aspect of their work, from the philosophical choices they have made in regards to their research design (e.g., their personal ontology and epistemology inform their research relationship and method of inquiry) to the choice of knowledge and criticism they do or do not cite. It is insightful and valuable to the critical reader to understand the naturally biased, or subjective, human being who made the decisions throughout the research and writing process. The readers of this study would benefit by understanding me as soon as possible, and that is my rationale for writing a brief personal note at the beginning of my thesis, rather than placing it somewhere in the middle (perhaps in the *Research Process* section as it has been argued that, just as the questionnaire or experimental apparatus are instruments of scientific study, so too the researcher is an instrument in her or his research), or as most scientific writers do: not bother to write one at all. Whenever I am a

reader I prefer to understand a little bit about the writer I am reading before I am bombarded with or immersed in that person's perspectives, attitudes, emotions, opinions, beliefs, biases, arguments, and observations. In other words, as a reader I appreciate the courtesy of a greeting before walking through the door into the writer's world.

So here is my greeting to you.

Who is the Researcher?

My name is Kevin Black. Currently, I am a 27 year-old Community Psychology student who also works in the Waterloo Region public school system as an educational assistant (EA). I was an undergraduate student in 1994 when I first began working in local schools. At that time I was serving in two different roles at two different schools: volunteer English as a Second Language (ESL) tutor in a elementary school and mentor/"big brother" to a senior public school student who wanted an older friend. In the Spring of 1999 I began work as an EA, and I have continued this job through the 1999-2000 school year. This job has provided me with opportunities to work in small groups and one-to-one with students of various ages, abilities, ethnicities, socioeconomic classes, and (not surprisingly) personal histories. I began this job working in secondary schools, but I am currently placed in an elementary school, although I have done a short stint at an alternative school for "at-risk"/"at-home" students.

As far as my formal education goes, I went to three public schools – Grenoble P.S., Greenbriar S.P.S., and Chinguacousy S.S. – each located within the same lower/middle-class suburb of Brampton, Ontario where I was raised. Upon graduating high school in 1992, I moved to Waterloo to enter my first year of the Honours Bachelor

of Business Administration (HBBA) program here at Wilfrid Laurier University (WLU). After two years, I decided it was time to change to a program that I could enjoy, and thus I switched from Business to Psychology and completed my Honours BA in 1996. Two years later I was somewhat startled to find myself back on the WLU campus (and in the Science Building of all places!), this time studying Community Psychology. Evidently I must have completed my MA and graduated if you are now reading my thesis. My career ambition is to be working within the field of education, but where, with whom, and in what capacity I cannot say with certainty. And I like it that way.

Now, assuming that you are familiar with European given names (and one of Celtic origins in my case), you will recognize that I am a man. What my surname may obscure is my racial/ethnocultural heritage. This is actually a common issue with surnames in the West¹ for a variety of reasons such as mixed marriages, Anglicization of a family name upon immigration to North America, or receiving the 'master's' Anglo-Saxon patronymic if you were an enslaved African in the Americas. Given the racist culture of North America and the subject of my study, the matter of my ethnocultural heritage is more than an ordinary piece of demographic information. Because my gender, race, and class are seen by most Canadians as important features of who I am, they are also crucial elements for contextualizing me within my research and the greater body of inquiry and social theory to which I am contributing some small part. Thus, I inform you that I am Canadian with an ethnic background that is European, specifically a diverse blend of Anglo-Saxon cultures. Further to this, my ancestors are not particularly recent immigrants to this country since both my mother and father's families have been Ontario citizens for many generations.

Knowing these two pieces of information, a question that could easily form in anyone's thoughts would be: 'So why does a white man choose to study anti-racist/anti-sexist education?' The obvious implication of that question would be that racism and sexism have nothing to do with me as a white man, other than making me the beneficiary of a genetic lottery whereby I have the accumulated historical advantage derived from being a privileged citizen within a covertly racist and sexist society.

I could write a whole paper in response to that question. Instead of doing so, I hope that the following two statements will suffice.

Statement of My Underlying Values

The values I espouse and practice are the same as those contained in the vision statement of WLU's Community Psychology program: empowerment, equality, education, community, social justice, and the celebration of diversity. These are the values which drew me to the program and thus it is not surprising that these values are at the foundational level of my thesis. As you read on, I think that it will become clear where these values inform the motivation, rationale, objectives, process, and social criticism that have been utilized in this research.

Statement of My Underlying Motivation

I had several important experiences early in my life which have fed my motivation for this research project. One was growing up in a single-parent family raised by my mother alongside my (somewhat) younger sister. Throughout my childhood years my mother made it an important piece of my early learning to show and tell me that there

was nothing a man could do that a woman could not, whether it be home renovation or working in the corporate world. I would say that my sister has taken her lead and also follows this path. I know some of the sexism that both have faced in their lives, and I recognize that their experiences are common to women.

I count myself fortunate to have gone to a very multicultural school where most of my best friends growing up had skin colours different than my own. Of course I know, and have heard, racial slurs against the ethnocultural groups to which they claim membership. I have since learned of the systemic racism that can work against people who look like my friends

When I think back to my own public school experiences, I can remember witnessing several gross examples of racist behaviour. Often, the targets were Indian (i.e., young children from India, not the Aboriginal peoples of Canada²), although I can recall events where Jewish and black people also faced discrimination. No school-wide intervention was made during that time; perhaps someone from within the system may have intervened on an individual level with the students concerned, but that remains unknown to myself. Moreover, when I search my memories of general life experiences, I do not have to look very far to find examples of racist and sexist behaviour. The results of these experiences were that, from a fairly young age, I recognized that discrimination existed and that it simply felt unjust.

I think that institutions are a facet of Canadian society that play a large part in perpetuating inequity, and that they could play a vital role in working towards ending oppression in society. Furthermore, I consider the most important institution in this endeavour is the one charged with educating the young people of the future; I am, of

course, speaking of the school system. Whenever I think of my education and how little I learned about sexism and racism in school, how little I learned about cultural diversity, how many human stories (i.e., history) were left untaught, and how few women and multicultural role models I was exposed to, I feel cheated. Thankfully I did not need to rely on the school because the lessons I learned outside of school from my friends, mother, sister, and other role-models have stuck. If anyone were to say there was a justification for sexism or racism, I know differently. But there is more than what people know, there is what people do. In short, to know that we live and participate in a world that both consciously and unconsciously accepts and supports inequity based on race and gender can make me sad, but more usefully it can also make me angry. I choose to direct that motivation towards actions I hope will begin to make a change in this world, such as anti-oppression education.

When I began this research project in February 1999, it was a social intervention aimed directly at providing an anti-sexist/anti-racist educational experience within schools and an evaluation of the same. One year later, and after five months of working on the research process within a local secondary school, this possibility was inalterably halted for the 1999/2000 school year. Undaunted, I changed the topic of my research to one I could accomplish at a university setting, but that would still add valuable information to the body of knowledge on critical pedagogy within the public school system. Thus I conducted the research contained within this document and wrote *Understanding Equity and Oppression from a Different Perspective: Students Evaluate Their Education*.

One of the prime motivations for this thesis was to provide a well-written and thoroughly documented piece of research that gave a critical response a point of view I heard expressed within the school system; namely, that students are unable to evaluate the school curriculum and make recommendations for change. I knew this to be untrue. Students are daily immersed within the curriculum because they are its primary consumers. Therefore I designed a research process that gave students an opportunity to use the equity guidelines created by the Ontario Ministry of Education and Training (MET) to evaluate their own education for equity. Thus, this thesis is a rebuttal to anyone who states that school boards have done all they can to ensure equity within the curriculum, as well as those that believe students cannot evaluate their own education. I hope this research provides more evidence exposing those point of views as mistaken and unjust because I want to see a true education for equity within Canadian schools during my lifetime.

Thesis Organization

I have organized my thesis into eight chapters. Each of the chapters that follow have been further sub-divided into sections based on information that would be useful to the reader. Each of these chapters are listed below, along with the questions I addressed therein in anticipation of readers' needs:

- *Chapter One: Introduction* – What is the topic and purpose of this study? What are the social problems with which my study is concerned? What is the interrelationship between education, democracy, and equity? What is critical pedagogy and anti-

oppression education? What are the aims of this form of pedagogy, and is it being practiced in schools?

- *Chapter Two: Discrimination in Society and the School System* - How do racism and sexism reveal themselves in the curriculum?
- *Chapter Three: Education for Equity* - What is anti-racist and multicultural education? What is anti-sexist, or feminist, education?
- *Chapter Four: Education for Equity in Ontario* - What is the history (policy and practice) of anti-oppression education in Ontario and what education for equity initiatives are students likely to have been exposed to prior to arriving at university?
- *Chapter Five: Outline of Evaluation* - What research problems were addressed by my study? What were the objectives and rationale of my study? What is its significance compared to other research in the same field?
- *Chapter Six: Research Process* – What was the research paradigm? What methods and analyses were used? Who were the participants and how were they selected? Was this research conducted in a credible and trustworthy manner? What were the ethical considerations of this research process?
- *Chapter Seven: Research Findings* – How did students define sexism, racism, and equity? What was their quantitative and qualitative evaluation of their education for equity? Is the questionnaire a reliable and valid test instrument?
- *Chapter Eight: Discussion* – What are my recommendations for action? What were the limitations of this study and directions for future research?

Chapter One: Education and Equity

In this chapter I will present a brief outline of my study, including its purpose and methodology, as well as surveying the problem of social inequity and its interrelation with democracy and education. I will conclude with a discussion of exclusionary history, because it is a specific instance of inequity in education and therefore a primary threat to democracy.

Introduction

‘Are Ontario students receiving an education for equity in school?’ This has been the central question of my research for the past year. By ‘education for equity’ I mean an education that provides students with a critical language to identify, understand, and challenge acts of oppression, such as racism and sexism, in society.

In 1993, a policy document entitled, *Antiracism and ethnocultural equity in school boards: Guidelines for policy development and implementation*, was created through a partnership between the Ontario Ministry of Education and Training (MET) and the Government of Ontario. This policy document was based on a report made in 1987 by the Provincial Advisory Committee on Race Relations that pertained to the development of race and ethnocultural equity policy within school boards³. The 1993 document contained eight guidelines for the creation of equity policy and practice (specifically anti-racist) within school curricula, such as “the causes and patterns of racism in Canada and the world are explored and challenged” and “all students see themselves as active participants in the curriculum” (MET, p. 23). Dave Cooke, the New

Democratic Party government's Minister of Education and Training, stated in the preface of the 1993 policy document that its purpose was to "assist schools and school boards in ensuring that the principles of antiracism and ethnocultural equity [were] observed everywhere in Ontario's school system" (p. 2). Furthermore, he stated that "these principles must apply to and have the full support of students, teachers, support staff, school board trustees, administrators, and the community" (p. 2). However, many stakeholders within the education system – teachers, administrators, and government officials alike – would currently say that the status quo is sufficient and that equity is indeed being taught in the schools; nonetheless, there are still others (namely teachers and academics who have an interest and knowledge regarding anti-oppression education) who would say that much more remains to be done. Who is correct? I believe that a fair and valid reply to this debate requires listening to the voices of an unheard stakeholder group: students.

Thus I sought to listen in two ways. To begin, I wanted to know how students understood inequity; therefore I asked for their definitions of two forms of oppression – sexism and racism – in addition to requesting their notions of equity. I assessed the depth and breadth of these definitions to observe what students included and excluded from their definitions; in other words, to explore the boundaries of their thinking regarding oppression. Secondly, I asked students to evaluate the quality of their entire education based on the visionary anti-oppression guidelines created, yet never enacted, by the MET. The overarching question here was 'How would students rate their own education in terms of promoting and achieving the study of oppression and the experience of equity in the classroom?'

Problem Analysis

My research began with a concern that students graduate from secondary school unprepared to address inequity in our society (e.g., the home, workplace, community, or social institutions, such as colleges and universities). I suspected that many students were uncertain of even how to define the problem; that they were unfamiliar with terms such as oppression, exploitation, status quo, and structural discrimination; that they were therefore unable to recognize and label an oppressive action as such; and thus they would be hindered in their ability to participate in the transformation of the status quo from injustice to equity.

Accepting the fact that systemic sexism and racism are two oppressive forces that exist in Canada both openly and covertly, then it logically follows that social institutions, the schools being but one, are involved in the production and re-production of these forms of oppression. My concerns with the Canadian education system are situated within a much larger, global problem of inequity and oppression, which I describe at length below.

Education and Democracy

I agree with John Ralston Saul, a Euro-Canadian historian and philosopher, that public education is "the single most important element in the maintenance of a democratic system" (1995, p. 115). Saul and many others have demonstrated that, as democracy has been systematically weakened in Canada and other Western nations over the past 20 years by the neo-colonial forces of transnational corporate capitalism, so too the education system has been concomitantly and globally undermined (Saul, 1996;

Heather-Jane Robertson, 1998; Noam Chomsky, 1997; Donald Macedo, 1994; Maude Barlow & Robertson, 1994).

Popular participation in the creation of social policy is a threat to the position of the élite according to the social critique of Noam Chomsky (1987), therefore making the manufacture of consent, or hegemony, a necessary process for those persons in the dominant socio-cultural classes (usually upper-middle class men of European heritage within the West) to influence and control the rest of society. The manufacture of consent occurs through the repetitive presentation of a dominant ideology to the populace via mainstream media sources (television, film, books, and newspapers) coupled with the routine omission or derision of voices critical of said ideology. The result is that we have widespread public ignorance of anything but the dominant ideology, thus assuring a “private democracy” (David Sehr, 1997), or oligarchy, for those standing in dominant positions within society. Sehr’s epithet is an ironic indictment of our society since a private democracy is, by definition, no democracy at all; the distinct feature of this form of governance is that it is “government by the people” (Frederick C. Mish et al., 1990, p. 338) – *all* people – and not just those who hold élite positions of influence. A democracy becomes government by the people when all citizens have equal access and a strong ability to participate in the decision-making that effects them on a daily basis.

A democracy must necessarily be built upon the principle of equity; that is to say: social justice. Equity is operationalized in society through the universal provision of high quality social services (e.g. health care), respect and social status, as well as the fair distribution of valued resources, such as employment income, housing, and access to public discourse (i.e., the media) and decision-making (i.e., the government). These last

abilities, to participate in public discourse and decision-making, are enabled through every citizen's receipt of a quality education wherein we are taught to understand, critique, and evaluate our social world. The inability or ignorance of the majority to do so is the natural outcome of mass media involvement in the manufacture of consent, combined with school systems that promote the status quo rather than providing the tools for critical analysis and engagement with the reality of our surroundings (i.e., the violence of colonialism and capitalism, whether it be racism, sexism, classism, or corporate globalization). The fact is that as long as social inequity endures and it is supported by the dominant structures and systems within a nation (i.e., school curricula, mainstream media sources, and government policy), democracy does not exist.

Critical Pedagogy and Democracy

Public education is fundamental to a thriving and healthy democracy. According to critical pedagogues, such as Donaldo Macedo, a democratic education is one where there is a recognition and integration of students' socio-cultural experience within the curriculum (1994). This allows for the creation of a meaningful learning experience for both student and teacher. Macedo, an American critical educator, refers to this ability as "reading the word to read the world." In *Literacies of Power* (1994), he envisioned a democratic education system that served to strengthen national democracy. Namely, he stated that there are two mutually occurring and mutually supportive places for democracy: the school and the nation. Democratic education is taught through a process of critical pedagogy, the kind of which was sparked around the English-speaking world

with the 1973 translation of Brazilian educator Paulo Freire's classic text, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.

Critical pedagogy is a dialogue between teachers and students where several important abilities are strengthened. Students are taught to recognize, critique, and challenge ideology, hegemony, and asymmetric relationships (i.e., relationships of overt or covert domination). Moreover, this process must occur in a context where the diverse voices of students from oppressed social groups are heard and appreciated. Explained in yet another way, critical pedagogy is the recognition that the personal is political and the political is personal; it is the identification and examination of the socio-cultural dynamics that exist in society and work to oppress or promote certain groups based on arbitrary distinctions created between people (e.g., skin colour, religion, gender, sexuality, class); it is an answer to the problem of an education system that is profoundly undemocratic

Challenges to Democracy

An overview of the issues of prime concern to critical pedagogues was listed most succinctly by Euro-Canadian critical education theorist, Peter McLaren:

In general, [they] maintain that the cultural politics of the schools historically and currently inculcate a meritocratic, professional ideology, rationalizing the knowledge industry into class-divided tiers; reproduce inequality, racism, and sexism; and fragment democratic social relations through an emphasis on competitiveness, androcentrism, logocentrism, and cultural ethnocentrism (1995, p. 30).

In other words, all dominant and dominating assumptions operating within society (i.e., ideology) are fodder for critical pedagogues.

Exclusionary History

Critical pedagogues are especially concerned that the rewards of education go to those who renounce critical thinking. Macedo has argued that the winner in the present education system is the person who uncritically accepts all information and misinformation fed to her or him (1994). He further observed that misinformation is not always necessary within the system as the so-called minority voice is rarely heard. This is because our education system is based on a colonial model of education that ignores the 'other' and tacitly supports oppression. A result of colonial education is the omission of various cultural facts, historical information, and post-colonial critical interpretation (George Sefa Dei, 1998; Nancy Hoo Kong, 1996; James A. Banks, 1991, Eric Wolf, 1982). The result can be referred to as exclusionary history. Here, Hoo Kong provided her lived experience of receiving a colonial education.

I left grade three feeling as if I were living in a society which rendered me, a Black person, as a non-contributing intruder. To make matters worse, I was not even aware that the experiences of African Canadians in Upper Canada [i.e., Ontario] were being excluded... Without knowledge of [this] history or critical, analytical skills, I was unable to challenge the messages I received... by asking questions, such as: Whose knowledge is being taught? Whose knowledge or voices are being silenced? What issues are not being addressed? (1996, p. 60-61).

As Hoo Kong's personal story has shown, our colonial model of education results in the inability to question and assess the history, and therefore the present, of the West. When students are not systematically taught methods of critically investigating and evaluating the everyday political events that occur in North America, then society incurs a growing number of citizens who will suffer from "historical amnesia" (Peter McLaren, p. 29). Most critical education theorists say that this is already happening.

The fragmentation of history. Both the school system and the mass media are potent sources of cultural hegemony that facilitate the “fragmentation of history” (Macedo, 1994), both as history is presently occurring around the globe and as it is re-presented in schools. The fragmentation of history refers to a phenomenon whereby the popular media and other dominant social institutions interpret and re-present current events through an exclusionary context such that they appear as fragmentary moments without any connection to history. The experience that Hoo Kong related is an example of the fragmentation of history. Namely, she was taught that, as an African Canadian, she belonged to a group of people who had made no contribution to Canadian society. Until the time when she recognized the falsity of that teaching, the part of her identity that she identified as African Canadian was without a history other than the present moment; thus, her ethnocultural history had been detached, or fragmented, from its roots.

This mis-education manifests itself within Canada in many ways, most notably that Canadian citizens are largely ignorant of the history of domination and exploitation (e.g., forced migration and immigration, slavery or indentured servitude, cultural assimilation) waged by European colonists against Aboriginal people and all other groups of non-European immigrants to this country. So too, many Canadians are ignorant of a concurrent history of domination and exploitation waged against specific groups of European immigrants (e.g., Irish Catholics; people of Slavic and Mediterranean heritages) by other groups of European immigrants (i.e., British Protestants). Thus, it is not surprising that many citizens are convinced, with the manipulative persuasion of the dominant mass media sources, that anyone concerned with social justice, such as Aboriginal land claims or Employment Equity, is a member of a ‘special interest’ group and a justifiable target for

marginalization through the use of the disdainful epithet, 'politically correct.' It commonly goes unexamined by the majority of mass media sources that neo-colonial transnational corporations are the most dominant and politically influential special interest group in existence at this time.

In summary of this chapter, I presented the social justice arguments for linking education, and specifically critical pedagogy, with the future achievement of democracy. Namely, if the school curriculum is not designed to enable students to be critical consumers of information, government policy, and global events, then students are not guaranteed the receipt of an education that enables them to be active participants in their own democratic governance. In the subsequent chapter I discuss two specific issues of inequity within Canada, that is sexism and racism, and situate them both within the problems of society and the school system.

Chapter Two: Discrimination in Society and the School System

The forms of discrimination that exist within the walls of Canadian schools are as varied as those that exist outside those same walls. Indeed, officials within the Ontario MET partially recognized this fact when they formally acknowledged the presence of racism within the educational system (1993). However, no form of discrimination acts in isolation; in reality they are complexly intertwined with each other. For example, Roxana Ng has shown that both racism and sexism intersect with discrimination based on social class, or classism (1989)⁴. So too, homophobia, ageism, and ableism are common forms of discrimination that occur within human relationships, social structures and systems. Inarguably, each of the forms of oppression mentioned above are important and require proper rectification, but I wish it understood that I did not rank racism and sexism as 'most important' when I limited the scope of my thesis to those two social problems. Moreover, I did not want to rank sexism or racism against each other, and thus I have regularly switched the order that these two terms are presented throughout my thesis. My concern was that maintaining a strict order throughout my writing (i.e., racism and then sexism, or sexism and then racism) would present a bias and possibly create an impression in the reader's mind of a preference or actual ordering in the social world that, in my mind, does not exist. I intend that my presentation and organization of those critical terms reflects their intersection within human relationships, structures, and systems.

With this understanding in mind, I will proceed to examine both these forms of oppression – together – as they occur within educational institutions.

Racism and Sexism in Society and the School System

Oppressive beliefs and practices, such as sexism and racism, remain important problems in our country. As I noted earlier, the structural racism and sexism within our schools simply mirrors the systemic inequities and injustices that exist in the wider Canadian society. This allegation was corroborated through my classroom experience and conversations with teachers during my work as an educational assistant at three schools within the Waterloo Region board of education. Further confirmation also exists from research that has shown that the school curricula in North America is both Eurocentric (George Sefa Dei, 1998; Althea Prince, 1996; Nancy Hoo Kong, 1996; James A. Banks, 1991) and patriarchal (Gaby Weiner, 1994; Jane Roland Martin, 1995; Jane Gaskell et al., 1989) where the consequence is historical bias and exclusion, factual inaccuracy, and systemic oppression. This situation is worsened when the curricula is then combined within the structurally discriminatory context of an education system that denies social construction and insists that the curriculum is value-free and completely objective (Peter McLaren, 1995). Just as the lack of critical pedagogy within schools maintains the status quo and benefits the élite, so too does the lack of an anti-sexist/anti-racist education.

The concept of race has been influenced by culture, religion, politics, economics, science, and social factors over time (Paul Gordon Lauren, 1996), and consequently racism has similarly been effected by these same social forces. Furthermore, the concept

of gender with its attendant expression of oppression, sexism, could not escape these shaping influences existent in society. In the section below I will briefly discuss the implication of the assertion that race and gender are social constructions. What this means is that, while they are both frequently used terms to which a common understanding is shared between many people within all areas of Western society and its institutions, they do not exist outside of human relations. In other words, race and gender only exist in language, and subsequently they have their own human history. I will discuss race and racism first, and then gender and sexism.

Uncritically Defining Racism and Sexism

Although there is disagreement, the history of race likely dates to the 16th century, although its present connotation was not created until the latter part of the 18th century (Paul Gordon Lauren, 1996, Patrick Brantlinger, 1986, Ashley Montagu, 1965). Briefly, race is the notion that physical traits (skin colour being the most obvious of these) determine behavioural traits. While discrimination between social groups has existed for most, if not all of recorded history, the justifications for prejudicial behaviour were based in cultural arguments, rather than a belief in biological differences; that is, until the latter part of the 18th century when a pseudoscientific doctrine of race was put forward to justify the slavery of African peoples in the Americas. That does not mean that the human history of discrimination has not clearly shown that lighter-skinned people have consistently been privileged over darker-skinned people across the globe; they have (Lauren, 1996). It simply means that the discrimination and oppression that have existed for thousands of years was only in the past 200 years cloaked in the scientist's lab-coat of

'objectivity.' Today, the result is that many people believe race is a biological, rather than a social, construct. Despite the divergent perceptions of the status quo and those that challenge it, race is still a social force to be reckoned with, as is racism.

The word 'racism' was first used in 1936. Webster's Dictionary provides the following contemporary definition: racism is "a belief that race is the primary determinant of human traits and capacities and that racial differences produce an inherent superiority of a particular race" (Frederick C. Mish et al., 1990, p. 969). In addition, this example of defining racism also included a reference to racial prejudice and discrimination. Dictionary definitions such as this perpetuate the ideology of race by neither verbally indicating nor visually emphasizing its social construction (e.g., with quotation marks). In fact, I think that the dictionary has traditionally served the status quo because it reproduces stale historical definitions of many critical terms (in particular, sexism and racism) in a presentation that serves to disempower them. The traditional dictionary certainly does not provide critical definitions that challenge the status quo (John Ralston Saul, 1995), which can be seen by even a cursory comparison with definitions provided for the same words by critical theorists.

Before moving onward to that debate, I first need to provide a discussion of the word 'sexism.' Sexism was first used in 1970, almost 35 years after the first recorded use of racism. Sexism was defined in Webster's Dictionary as "prejudice or discrimination based on sex, especially discrimination against women" (Mish et al., 1990, p. 1079). This definition of sexism further included "behaviour conditions or attitudes that foster stereotypes of social roles based on sex" (p. 1079).

It is worth noting that the dictionary definition of sexism specifically mentioned its history (i.e., discrimination directed mainly against women), whereas the definition for racism did not include any history. As I stated earlier, the common dictionary is not a radical document, and thus in terms of anti-oppression pedagogy it is an instrument of the status quo. For example, while dictionary writers and editors are active participants in social construction, their definitions do not mention the intricate interrelationship of sexism and racism with culture, religion, politics, economics, science, and other social factors over time. That is the difference between dictionary definitions of critical terms and the definitions provided by critical theorists for the same words.

Critically Defining Sexism and Racism

Critical theorists are cognizant that the social construction of oppressive terms, such as sexism and racism, can be used to “define, structure, and organize relations between dominant and subordinate groups” (Jean Leonard Elliott & Augie Fleras, 1992, p. 334), and thus they seek to create terms that do not replicate oppression, but challenge it instead. Consider two definitions written by social critics, one for sexism and the other for racism:

[Sexism] is a belief system based on the assumption that the physical differences between males and females are so significant that they should determine virtually all social and economic roles of men and women...Sexism is manifest in all forms of behaviour from subtle gestures and language to exploitation and oppression, and in all human institutions from the family to the multinational corporation (Betty A. Reardon, as cited in Paula S. Rothenberg, 1988).

[Racism is] a relatively complex and organized set of beliefs (ideology) that asserts the natural superiority of one racial group over another both at institutional and individual levels. As well as having an ideological component, racism involves discriminatory practices that protect, sustain, or promote the power and domination of the superordinate group (Elliott & Fleras, 1992, p. 335).

There are noteworthy similarities between these definitions, particularly in terms of their authors' recognition of the pervasiveness of these forms of oppression, in addition to the listing of the overt and covert means of producing and reproducing social inequity. They both specifically note the power of belief systems, or ideology, in human relations and its ability to influence discriminatory practices that result in the oppression and exploitation of those groups deemed as inferior (e.g., women in the case of sexism).

The second definition is worthy of further attention in that its authors' use of the word "natural" when describing the essence of oppressive belief systems is reminiscent of Roxana Ng's use of the term "commonsense sexism and racism" (1995). Ng used this term to describe "those unintentional and unconscious acts that result in the silencing, exclusion, subordination, and exploitation of minority group members" (p. 133). She is, of course, referring to sexist and racist attitudes that are so pervasive within ourselves and our culture that they appear to us as "normal ways of seeing, thinking, and acting" (p. 133). Her observations of commonsense sexism and racism have led her to believe that these forms of oppression are more than just structural, but systemic in nature. Given that understanding, the argument can be made that important social institutions, and the school system in particular, can play a large part in maintaining an oppressive status quo or they can be a site of social transformation through the systematic provision of an anti-oppression education.

Exclusionary History in the School System

One of the means of maintaining the oppressive forces that exist within the status quo is through the exclusion of women and people from non-European cultures

throughout the dominant presentation and social construction of history. Exclusionary history has been defined by Nancy Hoo Kong as:

the conscious and/or unconscious omission of historical perspectives that conflict with Anglo-Canadian males' interpretation and representation of past events and people, as well as the omission of ethnic and racial groups from history textbooks (1996, p. 59).

As evidence, consider my personal examination of the 'critical' content of 22 contemporary grade 10 Canadian history textbooks⁵. The texts I investigated were those included in Circular 14, the source of all learning materials (except English literature) that have been approved by the Ontario MET for use by primary and secondary school students. Circular 14 policy states that

the learning materials must be free from racial, ethno-cultural, religious, regional, gender-related, or aged-related bias; or bias based on disability, sexual orientation, socio-economic background, occupation, political affiliation, or membership in a specific group; or bias by omission (MET, 1999a)

Despite this statement of intention, critical education for equity is not served by these texts. Specifically, I discovered through the course of my literature search that there was no mention of racism or sexism as such in Canadian history. Events such as mandatory residential schools for Aboriginal children, Japanese-Canadian internment during World War Two, and the denial of personhood to all but white men until the 20th century were each mentioned; however, in every case their presentation was without a critical education interpretation. For instance, the term 'racism' never appeared in the various historical descriptions of the Indian Act in Canada, nor was a discussion of racism included in any text; so too, the word 'sexism' never appeared in the discussion of the Suffragette movement's struggle against 19th-20th century patriarchal domination. Furthermore, neither of those terms were included in either the glossaries or indices of 22 of the latest Canadian History textbooks.

That being said, it is necessary to note that history is taught in more ways than in a formal history class. Considering that so much of our lives and learning are grounded in our interpretation of past events, history is actually being taught throughout every academic discipline. Therefore, I insist that the exclusion of the terms 'racism' and 'sexism' from the formal curricula impedes students and teachers from engaging in an anti-racist or anti-sexist education. Students are thus unable to critically reflect on actual history through the class material they read. Specifically, while young people may be able to recognize an unjust situation when they read it or see it, the curricula does not support the students' development of an ability to label it as 'racist' or 'sexist.' This latter skill is important in strengthening the ability to read the world, which is the main purpose of a democratic education. Namely, reading the word (e.g., critical terms and theory) can give every one of us a language to describe and define the problems of the world, which is an important step towards transforming it (Macedo, 1994).

A lengthy analysis of the commonsense racism and sexism within the policy and practices of both the MET and Ontario schools will be presented in chapter five. In concluding this chapter, I reiterate that critical pedagogy is subverted when children and youth are denied the opportunity for authentic exposure to their history, culture, and lived experience – as well as the history, culture, and the narrated experience of all other peoples across the globe – throughout their education. Furthermore, I assert that any omission of cultural history is an instance of social injustice. Sexism and racism are but two legacies of colonialism still alive throughout Canadian society and our education system.

In synopsis, the four sections of this chapter presented a discussion of sexism and racism within society and the school system; a comparison of critical and uncritical definitions of the terms, racism and sexism; and an explanation of exclusionary history within the school system. In the following chapter I discuss three specific types of educational initiatives designed to challenge sexist and racist oppression in society: multicultural, anti-racist, and feminist educations.

Chapter Three: Education for Equity

Critical pedagogy is more than just a process of developing critical consciousness (or *conscientização* as Paulo Freire put it); it requires the provision of critical content. The critical content will depend on the interests of the educator in question, and may focus on gender, ethnicity, class, sexual orientation, or any other pattern of oppression existent in society; it may also focus on the intersection of some or all of these oppressive forms. In practice it has been most common to focus on one particular area of critical content, which has led to the creation of specific types of critical education interventions. I will discuss the different labels used to describe critical pedagogy, before providing a description of the actual critical education initiatives themselves.

Labeling Critical Education Initiatives

Two specific types of educational interventions exist that are intended to challenge racist discrimination: multicultural education and anti-racist education. Anti-sexist education is a word that is exceedingly rare in the critical pedagogy literature⁹, but I have chosen to use it throughout my writing because it creates a useful visual symmetry with 'anti-racist education' that mirrors my belief in their mutual importance within schools and society. References in critical pedagogy texts specifically regarding the theory and action directed against sexism often use the terms 'feminist education' and 'feminist pedagogy,' so perhaps this term is preferred amongst educators in that particular field. Of the three educational initiatives mentioned above, only anti-racist education and anti-sexist education are forms of critical pedagogy; multicultural

education is not because it does not critically challenge oppression and exploitation throughout society.

Anti-sexist education would theoretically be the same idea as anti-racist education, but with an obvious focus on sexism instead of racism. That being said, the proper teaching of one should result in the teaching of the other. Namely, they both focus on the prevention of discrimination through conscientization, or political education; they view ideology and hegemony as targets for deconstruction; they practice inclusivity and respect for student thought and life experience; and they empower students by teaching them how to recognize, critique, and challenge the various relationships of oppression that exist throughout society. A thorough anti-racist pedagogy should give students the critical tools to contest all other forms of discrimination including, but not limited to, sexism, classism, and heterosexism. However, its practice in Canada has been critiqued for not providing any more than what its name promises (Goli Rezai-Rashti, 1995a); that is, anti-racism focuses solely on racism, and intersections with other forms of oppression are ignored.

Recognizing this limitation, some educators (and even the MET) have chosen to use the umbrella term 'anti-discrimination' because its inclusiveness does not focus on one specific type of discrimination. I have chosen the label 'anti-oppression education' because I think it is a stronger articulation of exactly what social force is being challenged by these educational initiatives. However, each has its own purpose in distinct situations, and anti-racism would be an appropriate term to use when challenging racism, just as anti-sexism befits an educational initiative that directly challenges sexism.

In addition to anti-oppression education I have provided the inclusive label 'education for equity' to describe these types of critical pedagogical initiatives⁷. I prefer this term because it centres on the ideal and the motivation (i.e., equity for all) rather than focusing solely on the problem; and like 'anti-oppression' it also encompasses all types of discrimination and not just one form. I interchange these terms throughout because it is important to know and remain mindful of the problem (i.e., oppression such as sexism and racism) as well as the goal (i.e., equity).

Defining Equity

At this point in my literature review, it is worth briefly describing equity, especially since I will be providing student definitions of this construct shortly. Equity is a word derived from the Latin, *aequus*, meaning "equal" or "fair," whose use dates back to the 14th century (Frederick C. Mish et al., 1990, p. 421). One current definition is "justice according to natural law or right, specifically freedom from bias or favouritism" (p. 421). It can also refer to a system of law that originated in England, or to the ownership of property. In 1993, the Ontario Ministry of Education and Training defined equity as "equality of access and outcome" (p. 43), which led to the creation of equity programs that were "intended both to remedy the effects of past discrimination and to prevent inequities" (p. 43). Similarly, I equate equity with social justice, and thus its use is entirely appropriate in the context of challenging oppression through anti-racist/anti-sexist education.

Multicultural Education and Anti-racist Education

These two forms are often seen as two different constructs within the field of education. The MET has defined multicultural education as:

An approach to education, including administrative policies and procedures, curriculum, and learning activities, that recognizes the experiences and contributions of diverse cultural groups. One of the aims of multicultural education is to promote understanding of and respect for cultural and racial diversity (1993, p. 43).

The Ministry then described anti-racist education as

An approach to education that integrates the perspectives of Aboriginal and racial minority groups into an educational system and its practices. The aim of anti-racist education is the elimination of racism in all its forms. Anti-racist education seeks to identify and change educational practices, policies, and procedures that foster racism, as well as racist attitudes and behaviour that underlie and reinforce such policies and practices (1993, p. 42).

Anti-racist education is seen by many critical educators as the more vigorous and effectual of the two forms of pedagogy because it centres on the elimination of systemic racism and the challenging of racist ideology as the means for reaching equity, while multicultural education believes respect and understanding are achieved through sharing knowledge and practices from all cultures. Anti-racist pedagogy is designed to help students and educators identify, analyze, and challenge commonsense racism, internalized colonial attitudes, and relationships of domination (Roxana Ng, 1995). Multicultural education has no such intentions, and thus it has also been criticized for this and other shortcomings. For example, multicultural education has been criticized for not exploring the ways that racial/ethnocultural difference have been created through ideology over time. Further to this, it has been critiqued for not addressing the social, economic, and political effects of these perceived differences (Roxana Ng, Joyce Scanton, and Pat Staton, 1995). In addition, multicultural education has historically been

marginalized within schools to the sole presentation of a 'Multicultural Night' or other such time-limited event. This serves to exoticize the multicultural 'other' because of the event's marginal nature and its focus on such 'commonsense' and visible cultural details as food and dress, as opposed to regular discussions across the school curricula of various cultures' values and belief systems. No doubt because of these criticisms, many earnest practitioners of multicultural education also apply anti-racist education in tandem.

Feminist Education

The issues that concern the feminist educator are as multi-faceted and diverse as the various forms of feminism existent in society (e.g., lesbian, black, eco-, radical, spiritual, post-modern, humanist feminisms). Yet feminist education (or anti-sexist education as I have termed it throughout my work) is centred on three general dimensions of feminism as expressed by Gaby Weiner: political, critical, and praxis-oriented (1994). Specifically, feminism is intended to be political in that it creates a movement to improve the situation and opportunities of females; it is critical in that it maintains a critique of the dominant and dominating social attitudes, otherwise known as patriarchal ideology and hegemony; and praxis-oriented in that it is "concerned with the development of more ethical forms of professional and personal practice" (p. 8).

Similar to anti-racist theory, feminism is also concerned with the intersection of all forms of inequity. This was succinctly expressed by Jane Gaskell, Arlene McLaren, and Myra Novogrodsky in their work, *Claiming an Education: Feminism and Canadian Schools*:

[Feminism] is linked with redressing other inequalities, as a matter of theory, because the persistence of one kind of inequality affects all forms of inequality,

and as a matter of practice, because we need a coalition of all those who oppose that inequality (1989, p. 3).

They continue by stating that the varied manifestations of oppression are all gendered experiences, and that understanding the intersections of social inequities aids in the understanding of the issues individually. Namely, “examining the ways that differences among women are based in systemic inequalities of other kinds helps us understand the organization of women’s experiences” (p. 3)

Three contemporary concerns of feminist pedagogues have been described by Kathleen Weiler (1991, see also Roxana Ng, 1995). They are:

- analyzing and contesting hierarchical relationships in society, and particularly the role and authority of the teacher (often known as the ‘hidden curriculum’), specifically where these relate to misogyny;
- the intellectual challenge of the epistemology of experience, specifically a philosophical argument that personal experience and feelings should be included as valid forms of knowledge and truth (which contradicts patriarchal theories of knowledge production); and,
- research and discussion into the question of human difference, especially the social construction of concepts such as feminine, masculine, and sexuality.

Critical Educations

In summary, both anti-sexism (or feminist pedagogy) and anti-racism are matching forms of anti-oppression education with comparable objectives and rationales. Their purpose is to challenge asymmetrical relationships of domination – between individuals and within families, communities, institutions, and nations – through a

process of critical conscientization. The long-term goal of all forms of anti-oppression education is to achieve democracy outside the classroom by providing a democratic education within the classroom that encourages and empowers students to challenge and change the inequitable social structures and systems within society. As I mentioned earlier, their differences lie in their primary foci – sexism or racism – but both practices most certainly include a concern for all other forms of oppression beyond their stated *raison d'être*. Lastly, all forms of critical pedagogy are comparable to feminism in that they all revolve upon a political, critical, and a praxis-oriented axis. In other words that paraphrase the three authors of *Claiming an Education*:

[Critical pedagogy] means inserting the concerns of [people] from all walks of life into policy and practice, ultimately reshaping the whole so that it better reflects the experience of both men and women (Gaskell, McLaren & Novogrodsky, 1989, p. 3).

In summary of this chapter, I used three sections to discuss the terminology and details of three specific types of critical educational initiatives designed to challenge racist and sexist oppression in society. In the subsequent chapter I describe and critique the history – both policy and practice – of anti-oppression education in Ontario through a detailed examination of MET anti-discrimination policy, curricular documents, and a local history of education for equity.

Chapter Four: Education for Equity in Ontario

Multicultural education began a gradual process of institutionalization within Canadian schools after the creation of a national policy on multiculturalism in 1971⁸. Eight years later, in 1979, the Toronto Board of Education created its first equity policy in an area known since that time as ‘race relations.’ During the 1980s, numerous other Ontario school boards began the development of similar equity policies. By 1995 however, only half of all Ontario school boards had such a policy (Goli Rezai-Rashti, 1995b), despite a 1992 amendment to the Ontario Education Act which stated that all boards must develop and implement anti-racism and ethnocultural equity policies (MET, 1993), and notwithstanding that progress would supposedly be monitored by the MET to ensure rapid compliance.

Problems in the Practice of Equity

A proposed criterion of Ontario equity policies was that students should believe that their identities are properly represented and affirmed by the school curricula (MET, 1993). While this has been included in some ethnocultural equity policies (but not that of our local public school board), there have been some shortfalls in its implementation. For example, although teachers are encouraged to utilize newly developed multicultural books and educational material, one primary school teacher learned that the African Canadian children in his classroom still perceived the picture storybooks as stereotypical, unrealistic, and ultimately harmful to their self-image (Andrew Allen, 1996). However, one of the largest problems preventing the achievement of equity in schools today is that,

while a manifold of policies exist across Ontario, there is little in the way of implementation plans (Rezai-Rashti, 1995b). The 1993 MET policy on ethnocultural equity included directives and guidelines for the implementation of an anti-racist education system, but, as I have already mentioned several times, this draft policy was only envisioned, yet for lack of political will it has never been enacted.

The consequence of a lack of systemic implementation are many. For instance, most movements toward an equitable curriculum occur as supplementary rather than obligatory in the contemporary Canadian classroom (Althea Prince, 1996), thus ensuring that these initiatives are marginalized within the school curriculum. Consider, for example, Prince's (1996) notion of "Have-Black-History-Month-Kit-will-travel," as experienced by her during her regular educational stopovers as she criss-crossed Ontario during the month of February." She writes of Black History Month as "The Great Canadian Multicultural Myth" (p. 167) which does not adequately challenge cultural hegemony in our country. Enid Lee, an African Canadian critical educator, explains why this is so:

One can organize a unity and diversity club and deal with cultural holidays and host a Multicultural Week and yet not deal with racism...[since the school] may leave intact the Eurocentric curriculum which students consume daily (Lee, 1994, p. 24).

I would also add to Lee's explanation that the school does not deal with sexism or the patriarchal values and practices within the curriculum and pedagogy.

A reason for the distinct lack of systemic anti-oppression education practices in the classroom is that the experience and application of critical pedagogy is not taught to teachers during their training (Carol Tator and Frances Henry, 1991). When Canadian anti-racist or anti-sexist initiatives do occur, they are one-time professional development

seminars that last an average of one to two hours (Rezai-Rashti, 1995b). The supplementary nature of anti-oppression teacher training supports the notion that it is a pedagogical ‘add-on,’ and this serves to further marginalize these practices within the consciousness of school staff and administrators.

Similarly, the race relations position is almost universally contractual and often integrated with another position (Rezai-Rashti, 1995b), thus creating a perception of it as being yet another ‘politically correct’ ornament that can be dispensed with once the political fashion changes. So it should not be surprising to discover that this position is among the first to be eliminated when budget cuts occur¹⁰. Thus, education for equity interventions will continue to be perceived by school system decision-makers as an admirable, yet ultimately unnecessary, accessory to a proper ‘back-to-basics’ education for as long as the commonsense racism that pervades the system remains unchallenged.

Problems with Anti-discrimination Policy

Alongside racism, commonsense sexism is another pervasive form of oppression that is existent within the MET, school boards, and society. The 1993 MET anti-racist policy briefly mentioned gender (but not sexism) when noting that the impact of racism is greater when it intersects with other forms of discrimination. However, unlike anti-racism and ethnocultural equity, Ontario schools are not required to have policies and practices for gender relations or anti-sexism (Rezai-Rashti, 1995a). It could be argued that anti-sexist policies have been instituted tangentially, but with a focus on sex and sexuality, as conceived in school board policies against sexual harassment and abuse. Without situating these policies within a wider policy and plan to end systemic sexism in

schools, I view these initiatives as sexist in and of themselves because the sole presentation of women within school board discourse is (implicitly) as sex objects.

To allay potential concerns that readers could develop regarding whether my criticisms of the Ontario education system were fairly presented and researched, I resolved to support my arguments by directing my concerns and questions to the Ontario MET. Thus, I wrote a letter to the Ministry¹¹ inquiring whether they had a gender equity policy that matched their 1993 policy on race and ethnocultural equity, in addition to requesting information on all of their equity initiatives. I have paraphrased and re-printed excerpts from the letter I wrote, but not the letter I received; rather I have provided excerpts from the MET curricular documents that I was directed by their spokesperson to read. I have ensured anonymity for the MET spokesperson because this person currently holds a position of authority and responsibility within the Ministry and therefore the disclosure of our correspondence within my thesis had the potential to cause harm. My purpose in mentioning the letter was solely to reveal that the excerpts from the MET documents that I discuss below are the ones cited by the Ministry spokesperson in answer to my query regarding their equity policy and practices, and as such I have not manipulated the discussion by targeting weak areas of MET policy, but rather I have focused on the entirety of the policies to which I was directed.

I began my letter with the following introduction: "I am interested in the policy and implementation of anti-racism and anti-sexism initiatives within Ontario schools." I explained that my letter was a component of the research for my Master's thesis, and that I wished to accurately represent whatever equity policy and initiatives were occurring in Ontario schools. I then asked my question: "I am aware of the 1993 Race Relations and

Ethnocultural Equity policy. Does a similar policy exist with regards to gender equity and sexism, especially with a focus on the use of the school curriculum to challenge these social problems?" To summarize, I was requesting information on anti-sexist and gender equity policies *and* initiatives, particularly those relating to the school curriculum. The response I received answered my question in the affirmative, but was nevertheless quite inadequate in my opinion.

The MET letter stated that they had a gender equity policy and that it was given in the Ministry document entitled, *Ontario Secondary Schools, Grade 9-12: Program and Diploma Requirements, 1999* (OSS), which was provided with the MET's letter of reply.

The spokesperson cited the following excerpts from Ministry policy:

The education system must be free from discrimination and must provide all students with a safe and secure environment.

The implementation of anti-discrimination principles in education influences all aspects of school life...it provides a school climate that encourages all students to work to high standards, affirms the worth of all students, and helps them strengthen their sense of identity and develop a positive self-image; and

It requires schools to adopt measures to provide a safe environment for learning, free from harassment of all types, violence and expressions of hate.

(MET, 1999b, p. 58)

This all reads like good policy, and while it has some laudatory parts, it also has significant deficiencies. I will describe each in turn.

Beyond the praiseworthy ideals expressed above, the only other commendable piece of this policy is an imperative that administrators and teachers ensure school-community interactions are reflective of "the diversity in the local community and the wider society" (MET, 1999b, p. 58). This expectation is commendable because the MET recognized the necessity of community involvement in school education; however, the use of an unspecified (and therefore ambiguous) 'diversity' is somewhat problematic.

Although diversity is a catchphrase in anti-discrimination education, I perceive a problem with the use of an unidentified 'diversity' in that it leaves the perception of diversity to the beholder; is diversity referring to gender, ethnocultural heritage, class, or sexual orientation?; or is it perhaps referring to the diversity of vocations or academic specialties within a community? Likely it is more of the former than the latter, but its ambiguity opens a loophole for teachers and administrators who are unwilling or believe themselves unable to provide an anti-oppression education in their classroom. Another loophole was contained in a paragraph directed at explicating the implementation of antidiscrimination education within the curriculum, wherein it was stated that "teachers will base their [program planning] decisions on the needs and abilities of students, taking into consideration their students' abilities, backgrounds, interests, and learning styles" (MET, 1999b, p. 58). Yet another vaguely worded expectation: what level of ability, 'background,' interest, or learning style is required by students in a classroom before they are deemed ready to participate in an education for equity?

Before further highlighting specific problems I have found with this policy, I need to clear up a misconception that was made by the spokesperson in the letter. Namely, it was stated that the MET had an official gender equity policy, but the OSS document contained only a policy entitled, *Antidiscrimination Education*, and thus no formal policy exists at this time that is specifically directed at the social problem of sexism and gender equity (nor is there a specific policy directed at anti-racism or any other form of oppression); nor, I must add, does the aforementioned policy mention or imply the existence of any social problems or even include the words sexism, racism, classism, or heterosexism. The result is that the reader is left feeling confident that the MET is

working “to ensure that all students have an equal opportunity to achieve their full potential” (MET, 1999b, p. 58)¹², yet there is ample reason to believe that this is not occurring in practice.

As I noted above, this section of the OSS document does not mention nor describe any of the forms in which oppression is expressed within society (e.g., sexism or racism). Furthermore, it only lists the Ministry’s zero-tolerance policy for overt forms of discrimination (i.e., “violence and expressions of hate”, MET, 1999b, p. 58), thereby neglecting to inform the reader about any prevalent forms of covert and subtle discrimination, such as exclusionary history. The MET does declare that “the implementation of *antidiscrimination principles* in education influences all aspects of school life” (emphasis added; p. 58), but what exactly these principles may be is yet another omission. Furthermore, the practices, principles, and promises in this section are more reminiscent of multicultural education than anti-racist education, as the following excerpt attests:

schools should work to create an inclusive learning environment in which the school’s physical appearance and the schedule of activities of the school acknowledges and reflect the diversity within the school system and the wider society...for example, through pictures, posters, and decorations for cultural events (p. 58).

This is a case of multicultural education posing as anti-racist education (I should actually say, ‘antidiscrimination education’: the word racism never appears in this section; one might think from reading this document that racism does not exist, at least not in our province). It is also impossible to see what these passages, especially the one cited above, have to do with gender equity since gender-related words (e.g., girl, boy, male, female, women, and men) never actually appear. Neither do ‘sexism,’ ‘feminism,’ ‘patriarchy,’ ‘oppression’ or even ‘equity,’ and that is the crux of my primary criticism:

the MET has not acknowledged the presence of the social problems that create a need for antidiscrimination education; Canada's history of oppression is erased as Ministry officials paint with words a portrait of equal opportunity, fairness, affirmation, and "positive self-image" (p.58). Thus, the OSS document is problematic because it provides the school system with a flawless image by excluding from discussion such problems as sexism and racism. The exorcism of the above issues from national and local discourse inhibits individuals and the nation from owning the 'negative' history – and present-day reality – of colonial oppression, assimilation, and exploitation upon which much of Canada was built and continues to function. I believe that we will consequently continue to be haunted by our past because of our refusal to come to (critical) terms with it¹³

The consequence of the accumulated omissions and misinformation contained within both the MET letter and the *Antidiscrimination Education* policy is mis-education and misdirection for lay reader and educator alike. In conclusion, I state that there is no unequivocal evidence to suggest that anti-sexist and anti-racist education is a priority for the MET, not only because critical education initiatives were not named or included in any way within the OSS document, but more tellingly because the placement of *Antidiscrimination Education* reveals its overall lack of importance within the Ministry: page 58, section 7.13: the 13th section out of 16 in the second last section of this 63-page document, placed between *Special Education* and *Technology in Education*.

A Critical Curriculum?

Having thus described and critiqued the latest MET anti-discrimination policy that was included with the Ministry letter replying to my equity policy and practice queries, I

will move on to discuss and critique the MET's stated anti-discrimination expectations expressed within the most recent (i.e., 1999) curriculum documents. The MET has stated that anti-discrimination learning expectations were included in the curriculum documents 'where most appropriate.' Judging from the examples cited in the letter, the only appropriate places for critical pedagogy within the school curriculum are located in the tenth grade. I say this because the three courses listed in the letter (i.e., Canadian History, Civics, and Media Arts; each mandatory for graduation except for the last) were within two academic areas of study within this grade: Canadian and World Studies and the Arts. The MET does not mention any anti-discrimination educational expectations in subjects such as math or science precisely because at present there are none.

Due to the elimination of the fifth year of secondary school in Ontario after the 2002-03 school year, new grade 9 and 10 curricula have been created. The new curricula for all grade 10 courses, including the three cited in the MET letter, will be introduced into the classroom by September 2000. Thus, having never been taught in their new form, there is nothing to evaluate these courses by other than the discourse contained in the *Ontario Curriculum: Grades 9 and 10* documents (MET, 1999b, 1999c, 1999d, 1999e, 1999f). Moreover, at the time of my writing this document, the new curricula for grades 11 and 12 were not published, and therefore I could not evaluate them. Until 2001-02, the old curricula (Ministry of Education¹⁴ (MOE), 1987, 1986) are in effect for the two senior grades.

The MET provided two instances of anti-discrimination education included in grade 10 Canadian History. The excerpts provided in the letter – and which I have cited below – were taken verbatim from the Academic¹⁵ stream of the Canadian and world

studies document (MET, 1999c). They were “an evaluation of the contributions to Canadian society by its regional, linguistic, ethnocultural, and religious communities (e.g., Aboriginal nations, Franco-Ontarians, Métis, Doukhobors, Black Canadians)” (p. 28) and an expectation to “assess the contributions of the women’s movement (e.g., suffrage, access to employment, equal pay for work of equal value)...to Canadian history” (p. 32). The only difference between the Academic and Applied streams for this course would be that students in the Applied course “describe” (p. 38) rather than evaluate in the former example, and “summarize” (p. 42) rather than assess in the latter. Whereas the previous curriculum was lengthier and included more detail regarding each history topic, time allotment per topic, sample teaching strategies and formative evaluations (MOE, 1987, 1986), the new curriculum omitted these. Consequently, I cannot ascertain with greater specificity what the actual differences between the Academic and Applied streams may prove to be beyond the variance in educational expectations noted above.

The second subject where anti-discrimination education is expected to occur is in the grade 10 Media Arts course. Specifically, the MET spokesperson directed me to note that, during a curriculum strand entitled *Function of Media Art*, “students are expected to identify and explain...how media artworks affect perceptions of identity (e.g., ethnic group, regional/provincial/national identity, religious affiliation, philosophical identity)” (MET, 1999f, p. 35). A related topic, media studies, may offer some insight into the curriculum as well. Media studies is one of four strands within the English curriculum, and the only strand to explicitly state the importance of students developing critical thinking skills to assist them in understanding and interpreting the “pervasive influence”

of the media (MET, 1999d, p. 7). Nevertheless, the paragraph describing media studies ends with the declaration that “students should be encouraged to appreciate the media as sources of personal information and pleasure” (p. 7), and this is somewhat contradictory to the previous promise to assist in the development of critical thinking abilities.

The final example of anti-discrimination education within the curriculum is the Civics course, which has never been taught before in Ontario prior to September 2000. Again, I was directed to the text of the new Canadian and World Studies curriculum, wherein it is stated that, during a unit on active citizenship, students will be expected to “research and describe how family, gender, ethnicity, class, nationality, and/or institutional affiliation may affect one’s ability to participate [in our society]” (MET, 1999c, p. 52). The MET spokesperson then told me that students in this mandatory course will also be expected to “identify similarities and differences in the ways power is distributed in groups, societies, and cultures to meet human needs and resolve conflicts” (p. 48), although the letter neglected to inform me that the examples cited in the curriculum include only family, classrooms, and municipalities, without mentioning the way ‘power’ is shared at the provincial, national, or global level. Moreover, this curriculum expectation neglected to mention the ways power distribution can cause conflict and fail to meet human need. This is a case of presenting only a positive spin on the study of ‘power’ distribution throughout society; and this is a universal criticism that I have with the Ontario curriculum.

Having said that, there are indeed many positive features of the new curriculum, particularly in Canadian and World Studies, that were not noted by the MET in the letter. I will present several excerpts from the *Ontario Curriculum: Grades 9 and 10: Canadian*

and World Studies (MET, 1999c) to give a context for the discussion to follow. I begin with an excerpt from the introduction to this document, which the MET used to locate this subject within the entire curriculum; I then provide excerpts related to educational outcomes and teaching approaches; and finally conclude with two quotations regarding specific strands of the Canadian History course. The excerpts are as follows:

An important goal of the Canadian and world studies program is to help students develop the knowledge, skills, and values they need to become responsible citizens and informed participants in the twenty-first century (p. 2);

The study of economics, geography, history, law, and politics is not a matter of memorizing a series of facts. Rather it teaches students to assess how events, ideas, and values affect society (p. 3);

Students learn best when they are engaged in a variety of ways of learning. Geography and history lend themselves to a wide range of approaches in that they encourage students to research, think critically, work cooperatively, discuss relevant issues, and make decisions about significant human concerns (p. 4);

History consists of stories. Through the narrative of history we hear and see the people, events, emotions, struggles, and challenges that produced the present and that will shape the future. Such knowledge teaches us that our particular accomplishments are not unique – an important lesson in a world in which the forces of globalization are drawing people of different cultures closer together (p. 25), and,

The study of... social structures considers the relationships among ordinary people in society, gender roles, forms of work, leisure activities, and the interaction between majorities and minorities...the study of political structures looks at the distribution of power [and] political participation (p. 26).

Viewing these MET statements in a holistic manner as I have placed them, it seems that, more than ever before, the curriculum is open to critical pedagogy, and specifically anti-racist/anti-sexist education. The MET has briefly described a relationship between education and such critical concepts and skills as values, democracy, and the ability to think critically and work cooperatively. The MET has also acknowledged, albeit implicitly, the nature of social construction in history via narrative story-making. Furthermore, the curriculum specifications for Canadian History provide a multicultural

wealth of events, people, and contributions that is reflective of the diverse social groups in our society. The English curriculum provides the same appreciation of the multicultural wealth of our nation, but they are given in the form of suggested readings rather than expectations. This is so because the head of each English department is responsible for choosing the literature for their school. The MET only provides guidelines for decision-making; they do not mandate any particular readings or texts for any course in any subject area.

Having lauded the MET for their multicultural education expectations and potential openness to critical pedagogy, I have some pointed criticisms as well. Although I was genuinely pleased with the bulk of the curricular material I evaluated, I must remark that these praiseful statements were only relevant to two courses of study within the so-called Humanities: English and Canadian and World Studies. Having reviewed the grade 9 and 10 curricular materials newly available this year, I feel confident that my commendations could not be directed anywhere else within the entire secondary school curriculum¹⁶

Once more, there is no mention of any critical terms within any of new curriculum material; the words racism, sexism, feminism, colonialism, patriarchy, or oppression never once appear. The previous curricula materials mentioned racism once and colonialism twice (MOE, 1987), but both these references were for courses other than Canadian history (MOE, 1986). Specifically, these critical terms were used in the Twentieth Century World History and American History (which mentioned colonialism, but not racism). Discrimination only appears once in the new material, and that is in the form of a definition for “antidiscriminatory language” (MET, 1999d, p. 50) located

within the glossary of the English curriculum. The terms racism and colonialism do not even appear in the curricular material for the multidisciplinary Native Studies program (MET, 1999e) which, given the destructive assimilationist history of this country, would seem an obvious place for an anti-racist discussion. It did not make a difference that in 1993 the MET acknowledged and described the following critical terms for use in the curricula: Eurocentrism, exclusionary history, bias, systemic discrimination, and social justice (1993, p. 42-44); six years later and the MET appears to have suffered its own version of historical fragmentation as the new curricular materials are weaker than those that had come before (e.g., compare the glossaries of MET, 1993 with METa-f, 1999)

The lack of critical terms within the new curricular materials is evidence that the school system is not strongly focused on providing an anti-sexist/anti-racist education for students and society. Although I mentioned earlier that critical thinking was emphasized by the MET as a purpose of Canadian and world studies, and furthermore that the description of the curricular materials lends itself to critical pedagogy, I explicitly state: the new materials are not directed at providing an education that is critical of oppression. It is precisely this unwillingness by the MET to provide the critical educational tools for students and teachers to actively engage with the inequity and oppression of the Canadian status quo that is the single greatest flaw of the new curricular material. While there is the space for critical pedagogy to occur, there is no expectation that it should. Thus, the story remains the same: only teachers that are already interested and knowledgeable about critical pedagogy will shape the curricula to provide opportunities for students to participate in an education for equity within the classroom; teachers who are uneducated

about critical pedagogy, unsure or unwilling to teach anti-sexism/anti-racism will not do so.

Nothing substantial has changed with the advent of the new curricular expectations. Anti-oppression education was not systemically provided before the new materials were created; it has always been the work of interested and knowledgeable teachers. The previous curricula had sufficient loopholes (e.g., teach 3 out of 5 units, see MOE, 1986, 1987) that teachers who were unsure or unwilling to teach anti-sexist/anti-racist education, much less multicultural education, did not have to. Whether or not this is a relevant concern today remains to be seen. Nevertheless, the contemporary classroom texts do not support an anti-oppression education, and even if texts did exist in Ontario that were supportive of a critical education, budgetary restrictions are currently hindering the purchase of any new curricular materials. This is an additional difficulty for the teacher intent on providing an education for equity.

Given the current lack of structural support combined with systemic incognizance and mis-education among teachers and administrators (as it is among most Canadians), is there much reason to believe that the present educational outcomes will improve and that the Ministry's most basic 'anti-discrimination' (i.e., multicultural) education expectations will systematically be achieved?

Education for Equity in Waterloo Region

Below is a description and critique of the actions being taken by the local public school board to fulfill their promise of equity in education. I have included this section to provide the reader with a contextualizing example of the school setting and educational

environment that students commonly experience. It is important to remember that this is only one southern Ontario school board, and that others may differ somewhat across the province. However, there is a saying that is appropriate when comparing the history of school boards with that of the MET: 'the fruit doesn't fall very far from the tree.' As I shall show you, the criticisms directed at the MET are much the same as those directed at local schools within this particular board of education.

Policy

Waterloo Region was one of the localities where its school boards followed the lead of the Toronto Board of Education and began drafting equity policy during the 1980s. The Race Relations Committee of Education for Waterloo Region was formed in 1985 in response to the growing ethnocultural diversity within the Region. As the name suggests, the purpose of this committee was to develop board-wide policies for race and ethnocultural relations. This resulted in a policy statement on anti-discrimination and anti-harassment (Waterloo Region District School Board (WRDSB), 1997, p. 1005) that was firmly grounded in the legal responsibilities stated within the 1990 Ontario Human Rights Code. This policy statement on anti-discrimination and anti-harassment served as the foundation for references to racial and sexual harassment or discrimination contained in three other areas of board policy: "expectations regarding learning and student behaviour" (p. 6000), "statement of non-tolerance," and "student bullying and/or harassment" (p. 5035). In essence, the school board's pledge for anti-discrimination and anti-harassment within the education system is expressed in the following commitments:

- To provide everyone with a respectful learning and working environment free from discrimination and harassment;
- To take actions that will ensure “an educational system free from discrimination and harassment” (p. 1005); and,
- A refusal to tolerate discrimination or harassment from anyone.

These commitments are virtually identical to those expressed in MET policy (see the OSS document, 1999b, p. 58). The preamble to the board policy on student bullying and harassment recognized that harassment is rarely “easily observed, recognized and labeled” (p. 5035) because it may be covert, subtle, sub-conscious, or appear normal. However, while the policy illustrated 11 instances of racist behaviour and 13 examples of sexual discrimination or harassment, each of these cases characterized overt behaviours. This severely cripples its utility in serving to increase the ease of observing, recognizing, and labeling subtle forms of discrimination. For instance, Nancy Hoo Kong’s definition of exclusionary history (1996) conceptually fits within this policy statement in several places, but recognition of exclusionary history or hegemony within the curriculum is not explicitly included in the board’s policy. Moreover, a pamphlet entitled *Let’s understand racial, religious and ethnocultural harassment* stated that the WRDSB would utilize the curriculum to “promote racial and ethnocultural harmony ...through a process of review, development, and implementation” (Waterloo County Board of Education¹⁷ (WCBE), 1993), but the actual word ‘curriculum’ is only mentioned once in WRDSB policy, and its active role in the prevention or acceptance of inequity is neither described nor contextualized. This solitary reference to the curriculum is merely mentioned within a

list of areas wherein the board expressed its commitment to the principles of anti-discrimination (p. 5045); thus it has never received the attention it deserves.

Another drawback to board policy related to equity is that sexism is not recognized to the same degree as racism and ethnocultural discrimination. Furthermore, the focus is not upon sexism or gender inequity, but rather harassment of a sexual nature. As noted in the previous section, this is an ironic instance of sexism in itself, in that the policy reflects society's sexual objectification of women: the emphasis is entirely upon overt sexual harassment while remaining silent with regards to sexism in all its subtle forms.

Practice

Although a regional implementation plan was never created to achieve the equity goals stated in its board policy, each school was given the task of creating a multicultural or anti-racist education plan. While some local schools have a teacher with a strong interest in equity who is empowered within the system to lead equity-based projects, many schools do not. The goal of equity within schools was further crippled in 1996 when the school board eliminated the position of Human Resources Officer involved with race and ethnocultural relations, arguing that the issue of inequity had been effectively addressed.

Nonetheless, the work does continue, albeit slowly and unsystematically. A group of local secondary school teachers, each committed to the principles of anti-oppression education, created a resource document in 1996 entitled *Shared Human Experience* (WCBE). This work was designed for English and Drama departments

wishing to expand their curriculum content in terms of diverse human experience (e.g., gender, race, culture, faith, age, ability, and sexual orientation). It served this purpose through the provision of sample curriculum units, annotated resource lists of diverse print and video materials, and anti-oppression teaching strategies. This was supported by a strong rationale for anti-racist education, in addition to a description of potential outcomes and sample performance indicators for this form of critical pedagogy. While this thoroughly researched and well-written document is a potentially valuable resource for this community, its power for inequity prevention was diminished because its utilization was only ever optional in Waterloo Region (in fact, most copies still reside in a cardboard box in the English department of a local secondary school).

WRDSB has provided race and ethnocultural training for interested teachers aimed at promoting awareness of existing bias within the educational system, providing teaching methods for addressing this bias, and exposing teachers to new multicultural educational material. Although the main vehicle for equity in schools is through multicultural education, anti-racism is taught to students (e.g., in the form of assemblies or teaching the school board's anti-discrimination policy), but this is only a board-wide response to overt examples of discriminatory behaviour (e.g., what to do in the event of name-calling or racially motivated violence). Subtle yet commonly seen examples of this form of education within the secondary school environment are posters and stickers with slogans, such as "Hate Hurts" and "Say No to Racism." In addition, the catalogue of books and videos dealing with overt racism is quite lengthy (i.e., over 100 items) in this Region, although much is directed at primary school-age children. The same magnitude of anti-oppression materials within schools does not exist for sexism. In fact, the only

initiative directed solely at challenging sexism is PROWIS (Promoting Women in Science), which is an initiative for select female students that rightly promotes science and mathematics as viable career opportunities.

Finally, there are three local student-teacher equity initiatives that occur in local secondary schools: the annual teacher-student seminar on the Holocaust provided by the Waterloo County Holocaust Education Committee; various *Unity and Diversity* groups; and the *Student Race Relations Equity Leadership Camp*. To begin, some secondary schools have a *Unity and Diversity* club (or an *Equity Group*) which is composed of a small group of interested students and one or more teachers. The actions of groups such as these are unique to the school where the group is situated, but they may include leading an annual multicultural show; hosting a race relations conference for younger students; drama workshops on topics such as racism, equity, and bullying; in addition to ad hoc involvement in race relations during the school year. The *Student Race Relations Equity Leadership Camp* is an event that occurs in partnership between the public and separate school boards. The camp has been a voluntary project occurring every October for the past ten years with six to eight students per school in attendance for a total of 60-80 students overall.

Whenever students participate in an equity initiative within their school, whether it is a club or a camp, the primary drawback to this method of conscientization is the small level of enrolment (i.e., usually less than 12 students). This is because the student participants are both teacher-selected and self-selected based on their level of commitment and interest in the issue of equity. Thus, the problem of inequity is never fully and systematically contested since neither sexism nor racism are systematically

addressed as they occur in the curricula and society at large. Any work that is done in these areas is entirely based on the efforts of individual teachers and not on a region-wide, province-wide, or nation-wide initiative.

In brief, the two main sections of this chapter contained both a description and a critique of the history (in terms of equity policy and practice) of anti-oppression education in Ontario. The next chapter outlines the objectives, rationale, and significance of my study.

Chapter Five: Outline of Evaluation

In this brief chapter I begin by providing a summary of my perceived limitations of existing literature on the subject of critical pedagogy. This discussion creates a discursive framework for the remainder of this chapter, wherein I sketch an outline of my evaluation by stating the objectives and rationale, as well as describing its relevance to community psychology and its relation to other research in the field of critical pedagogy.

Limitations of the Literature

Critical education theorists and practitioners of critical pedagogy have noted that there are as yet no universally accepted definitions for critical pedagogy or anti-racist and feminist educations, neither are there uniform guidelines for the practice of the same (Roxana Ng, Pat Staton & Joyce Scayne, 1995, Goli Rezai-Rashti, 1995). Five years ago, the essential problems of the theory and practice of critical education were clearly, concisely, and humbly articulated by Yvonna S. Lincoln:

There is still no critical pedagogy in place, and we have only an unclear and inadequate idea of how to educate democratically...we still do not know how to educate teachers for resistance and voice...we have only begun to uncover the forms and structures of oppression and violence that characterize [North] American life, especially schooling. We have only imagined "communities of difference"; we don't yet know how to make them real identities, nor do we have much practice at living them productively and with grace (1995, p. viii-ix).

Although critical pedagogy is approaching 30 years of age in the English-speaking world¹⁸, Lincoln's honest assessment revealed it as an academic discipline still in its youth. In academic-speak, critical pedagogy is without a paradigm; nonetheless, growth and progress continue all the time. In fact, the greatest amount of sophisticated theoretical activity regarding critical pedagogy has arguably occurred during the past

decade. For instance, it was in 1995 that the first writings were published that examined the intersections of racism, sexism, and critical pedagogy (compiled and edited by Ng et al.); certainly, analyses of the intricate interrelationships between multiple forms of oppression only began during the 1990s. This being the case, there are several limitations within the field of critical pedagogy that were reflected in my literature review. I have noted these below.

My primary concern in regard to my research was that there were no contemporary critical analyses for the following three areas of education in Ontario: the new 'common curriculum', school board and MET equity policy; and current textbooks available on Circular 14. The lone Canadian articles within the latter area were in the form of textbook critiques, but the few that did exist were long-since outdated (e.g., James Walker, 1983). The result has been a noticeable lack of Ontario (or Canadian) systemic evaluations of the implementation of anti-oppression (e.g., anti-racist and ethnocultural equity) educational initiatives for me to cite in my literature review. This revealed a need for documented critical evaluations regarding the implementation of anti-oppression principles, practices, and content in Ontario textbooks, school board policy, and curriculum expectations. However, I certainly accede that the current wave of educational reform in Ontario has likely delayed the feasibility of critical evaluations for several years. Nonetheless, the result was that, without documentation in these three fundamental areas of education, I needed to provide my own critical analyses on these topics.

A related concern was that much of the information and interpretation presented within my thesis as the history and critique of Ontario education for equity was offered as

personal communications (i.e., letters, e-mail, and conversation) between myself, teachers, board staff, and administrators – all of whom remained anonymous in my work. It is indeed unfortunate for my work that the private conversations held within schools regarding anti-oppression education cannot be evaluated and compared alongside the public discourse of school boards and the MET. The reason for anonymity and confidentiality is that most of these conversations occurred, either explicitly or implicitly, ‘off the record.’ For instance, one individual directly asked to forgo any form of acknowledgment within my thesis because providing criticism created a personal concern for potential occupational repercussions. Indeed, anti-racist/anti-sexist practitioner, Goli Rezai-Rashti, disclosed a similar problem that commonly faces anti-oppression educators working within the school system:

The overwhelming weight of institutionalized bureaucratic practices restrained [critical educators, e.g., those who sat on the 1987 Provincial Advisory Committee on Race Relations¹⁹] from openly criticizing their own organizations [i.e., the MET and school boards] for the slow progress attained so far. These practices also restricted them from pushing for more radical changes of the current multicultural policies, which they could only afford to criticize in a lukewarm manner (1995b, p. 9).

Thus, any un-referenced evidence or conclusions (often beginning with my writing the words, “I believe”) are based on personal conversations, and are consequently without the weight of a published academic article to support their authenticity. This has left the reader with the problem of personally assessing the verity of some of my evidence and conclusions.

However, this is not only a problem faced by myself, but by most educators searching for ways to enact critical pedagogy within the classroom setting. My experience with reading various works in the field of critical pedagogy was that they were more often excessively theoretical and rarely empirical or practical. For example,

critical theorists, such as Henry Giroux and Peter McLaren, have carved academic niches for themselves wherein they are positioned as the leaders of the discourse on critical pedagogy. When acting in the role of cultural critics, they have created a position where they are free to write without burden of proof that, "as twentieth century capitalism gave rise to mass advertising and its attendant gospel of unending consumerism, all spheres of social existence were now informed. by the newly charged rationality of advanced industrial capitalism" (Giroux, 1988, p. 77), or "there is a yearning for a daily apocalypse where salvation is unnecessary because chaos is always sublime, morality is frictionless and heaven can always be had MTV style" (McLaren, 1995, p. 5). Much of their writing, while personally engaging and interesting to read, is based on untested philosophical premises and their own critical standpoints of 'what ought to be' in contemporary North American culture, it does not meet the needs of their now-enlightened reader-educator wishing to create a democratic classroom (e.g., Elizabeth Ellsworth, 1992). In the defence of Giroux, McLaren, and others within their field, they describe themselves as critical theorists, as opposed to critical pedagogues, and this is an accurate act of identification; one should not expect them to be intellectually occupied with illuminating the intricacies involved in the everyday practice of equitable education, but rather be content that they are serving a useful purpose by promoting a particular ideal for transformative education. Thus, Yvonna Lincoln's incisive articulation of the paucity of critical pedagogical research, with which I began this section, also reflected my experience with this literature. It is clear that there is an expressed need for continual critical evaluations of school curricula and pedagogical practices occurring within real schools.

The next sections explicate the objectives and rationale of my study, several of which address the limitations of the current research in critical pedagogy.

Objectives

I had two groups of objectives, or goals, that I wanted to achieve with this research study. The first I have described as the action research objectives of this study; the second are the evaluation objectives, also known as the research questions.

Action Research Objectives

I have labeled the following three goals as action research objectives because their achievement would enable others to take action in society that would support anti-oppression education. These objectives were:

- To evaluate the extent that an anti-racist/anti-sexist education was received by students during their school careers.
- To involve recent secondary school graduates in curricular evaluation; and,
- To test the reliability and validity of the questionnaire as an evaluative instrument available for use in schools.

The accomplishment of these three objectives would provide evidence that would: 1) support ongoing arguments for or against the provision of critical pedagogy in schools; 2) reveal that students are a stakeholder group capable of participating in curricular evaluation and development processes; and, 3) show that the MET's anti-racist guidelines form an effective test instrument for evaluating the quality and extent of anti-oppression education in schools.

Evaluation Objectives

The action research objectives gave rise to the evaluation objectives, which were to answer the following research questions:

- How do students understand and give meaning to the concept of inequity, specifically racism and sexism?; and,
- How would students rate their own education in terms of promoting and achieving the study of oppression and the experience of equity in the classroom?

My evaluation was divided into two components that separately addressed each of the objectives stated above. My rationale for each component is given below.

Rationale

If you accept the point of view (currently being purveyed by elites within our capitalist economy) that education is a commodity, then it follows that students are the consumers of this product. However, due to the nature of the pedagogical process, students are not solely consumers, but also participants (to varying extents) in its production. Furthermore, in addition to being consumers, many adults from oppressed social groups, such as Métis and Aboriginal people, also perceive themselves as survivors²⁰ of the educational process (Howard Adams, 1995; Patricia Monture-Angus, 1995).

Continuing the market-driven metaphor illustrated above, I began thinking of terms such as production, consumption, and quality assurance, which in turn led me to think of customer service. I determined that as tax-payers, students' parents and society-

at-large must be the customers for education, while it is children and youth who are the consumers. However, students can be considered both consumers of education in the present and future customers for education. As a previous consumer of public school education I was curious: 'What is the quality of the end product that students receive, in terms of inclusivity and equity?' Since students are key stakeholders in education that are continually ignored during curricular development (Maryann Semons, 1991), I was most interested in the answers they would provide to that question.

Thus, an evaluation seemed in order. I have done so using both a definitional analysis of three key terms, as well as an evaluation of students' anti-oppressive educational experiences. The rationale for both components of the evaluation is provided below.

Definitions

I will present two quotations for your consideration because I think they aid in the explication of my rationale for requesting student definitions of sexism, racism, and equity. The first quotation states that "the notion of giving something a name is the vastest generative idea that was ever conceived" (Suzanne K. Langer, as cited by Gloria Steinem, 1993). Langer's quote implicitly recognizes the importance of language to humanity, and specifically highlights the power of labeling. The labels of interest for me in this study are, of course, sexism, racism, and equity; the first two are words applied to oppressive beliefs and behaviours, and the last relates to a form of social justice. These labels, as do all others, generate an understanding of the world. The fairy tale, *Rumpelstiltskin*, illustrated a peculiar ability of language: naming something grants a

person the ability to control it. The control I am referring to in the context of my study does not mean the ability to command; rather control begins when we can recognize something in the world and name it for what it is. In the case of oppression, using a word to name it is a critical action because the power of labeling provides us with a place from which to describe, analyze, and critique our social world. Finally, naming oppression as such creates the opportunity to challenge it and transform it as it exists in the world.

My argument regarding the power of naming relates to Donaldo Macedo's adage, "you must read the word to read the world" (1994), which is at the foundation of my understanding of critical pedagogy. As I mentioned earlier, this saying refers to a belief that we need to recognize oppression *before* we can participate in its transformation. As evidence for my position, I offer my imagined vision of what society would have been like prior to the conception of the word sexism. To start with, behaviours and beliefs that today are regarded as sexist would not have been labeled as such; likely they were considered normal, or perhaps unfair by some in certain circumstances, but they would not have been considered oppressive. The creation of the word sexism must have begun a widespread transformation in our thinking regarding female-male relations and thus began to transform those actual relationships as they are lived in the world.

But even with the word in common use, sexism still exists in the world, as do all other forms of oppression. Thus it would appear that having a word in our collective English vocabulary is not sufficient to transform the world. What may be missing is a shared understanding of the word in question. This brings me to my second quotation: "It is the theory which decides what can be observed" (Albert Einstein, as cited by Gloria Steinem, 1993). Just as Einstein knew that theories place limits on observation, the

definitions we hold for social interactions, such as oppression, limit what we can see. Quite literally, to define means “to limit” or set boundaries (Frederick C. Mish et al., 1990, p. 333). These limits can be observed through an analysis of word definitions, such as sexism and racism. These definitions circumscribe the boundaries for thoughts and behaviour considered oppressive; what occurs as a discriminatory and oppressive action to one student may not occur the same way to another. Consider the following questions for instance: is oppression only overt actions such as name-calling and physical aggression, or does it also include subtle and covert discrimination such as exclusionary history? Is racism a concern for all people, or just minorities²¹? Does equity only mean a state of equality, or does it include social justice and redress for past wrongs?

People’s use of the terms equity, racism, and sexism is strictly limited by their understanding of them. For this reason I believe it is crucial to understand what people mean when they use these words. In my study I wanted to know what students included and excluded from their definitions; in other words, where did they establish their definitional boundaries?

As I have discussed above, people mediate the world through language use, or discourse. Discourse analysis is a recently created body of academic study that specifically addresses the language problems and implications that I have briefly illustrated above. Although I did not perform a formal discourse analysis within my thesis (I do not have the necessary training), I continue to find the analysis of discourse to be both fascinating and illuminating, and thus I present the following assertions of discourse analysis (Jonathan Potter, 1996) as they directly relate to my research rationale:

- Language is a tool utilized by people to do things;

- Discourse occurs inside a particular context; and,
- The social construction of the world occurs through our use of language.

Further to the three attributes of language listed above, several others are examined through the branch of study known as critical discourse analysis. Critical discourse analysis recognizes discourse as a dialectical “social practice,” wherein it both shapes and is shaped by social structures, institutions, and situations (Norman Fairclough & Ruth Wodak, 1997, p. 258). Thus, discourse may contribute to the transformation of the status quo, yet so too this feature of language use has the consequence that discourse may be employed to “produce and reproduce unequal power relationships” (p. 258).

The aforementioned negative consequence of discourse occurs when it is used as a tool to propagate and promote oppressive ideologies and the mass acceptance of asymmetric relationships of domination, together known as hegemony (Teun A. van Dijk, 1997, Norman Fairclough, 1989). Discourse has been utilized to socially construct and maintain an ideology of gender (Candace West et al., 1997) and of race (Teun A. van Dijk et al., 1997). In fact, discourse is the principal means through which prejudice and discrimination are produced and reproduced in society (e.g., Robert B. Moore, 1988, Robert Baker, 1988). Therefore, the mass media have a large responsibility for facilitating hegemonic discourse through their virtually complete domination of public discourse occurring in politics, economics, social policy, science, and art.

I think it is evident, given the discussion provided above and the literature review given throughout the previous sections of my thesis, that each of the assertions of (critical) discourse analysis supports my inclusion of a definitional analysis within my study.

Equity Guidelines

The *Anti-racism and Ethnocultural Equity* policy document was based primarily on a 1987 report from the Provincial Advisory Committee on Race Relations, but it also included information gathered at an anti-racism forum that occurred in 1993. The Advisory Committee included many school board personnel, but no student representation; the anti-racism forum had 29 participants, two of which were students. The exclusion of students from the committee is directly related to a fundamental limitation of both traditional education and the curriculum development process. Although James Banks and others in the field of critical pedagogy recognize that “when students are empowered, they have the ability to influence their personal, social, political, and economic worlds” (1991, p. 125), the student perspective is largely disregarded:

A significant voice has been missing from the books and articles that have been written about educating [female and] ethnically diverse populations, namely the voice of students. Usually research has been presented from the perspective of teachers, administrators, and experts in the field, virtually ignoring that of students (Maryann Semons, 1991, p. 139).

Students are considered to be the recipients of the curriculum, possibly respondents to curriculum documents (via their school and school board), but rarely, if ever, as full participants in the process. Given this environment of exclusion, it is not surprising that the outcomes noticed among many students from oppressed social groups and classes are high drop-out rates, negative self-image, alienation, and academic achievement that is below proven ability (George Sefa Dei, 1998; Gloria Roberts-Fiati, 1996). Moreover, given the educational environment described throughout the past four chapters, it is not surprising to discover that most students are ill-prepared to critically enter a society where discrimination, such as sexism and racism, exist.

Most assuredly there is a need to listen to student voices regarding their perspectives on education. Therefore, I made it the main purpose of my study to ask students – as the most important stakeholder in education – ‘How would you rate your education in terms of promoting and achieving the study of oppression and the experience of equity in the classroom?’ I utilized the 1993 MET guidelines for equity in the curriculum because they had a level of validity and respect within the educational community that I could not achieve by creating a new questionnaire of my own. In addition, as Government of Ontario documents, they were directly and indisputably relevant to education in this province.

Relevance to Community Psychology

I have previously noted the linkage between the values of the WLU Community Psychology (CP) program and the underlying values of my research project. However, my study is also related to CP through the topic of my study: education. Community psychology, as I understand it, is concerned with the primary (i.e., long-term) prevention of social problems, such as oppression and exploitation. One of the means through which primary prevention is accomplished is education. Thus, my research on the topic of education for equity is a natural fit with both the values and social action framework of the CP program.

Significance of This Study

This study addressed a glaring and widespread omission that occurs regularly in contemporary curriculum evaluation. As I noted earlier in my introduction, student

voices are rarely heard in any critical discussion of education (Maryann Semons, 1991) because they are rarely requested. In two separate literature searches using ERIC (the CD-ROM devoted to education research), as well as an e-mail request to education evaluators, I could find no references to research involving students in either defining critical terms or public school curriculum evaluation. This was further established through the complete lack of student contribution in the production or evaluation of the new Ontario Curriculum material (METa-f, 1999). I can say with certainty that at no time during their school careers do Ontario students participate in a system-wide evaluation of the education they have received.

Thus, this study is a valuable contribution to the body of research in critical pedagogy because it provides an exemplar of student involvement in curriculum evaluation, as well as furthering an understanding of the depth and breadth of students' thinking in regards to racism, sexism, and equity.

In summary, the three main sections of this chapter outlined the following characteristics of my study: its objectives, rationale, relevance to community psychology, and significance in comparison to other research in the field of critical pedagogy. In the subsequent chapter I will provide an in-depth discussion of the research process and the context within which that process was situated.

Chapter Six: Research Process

In this chapter I describe the research environment; that is, everything that is within the research process: the tangible and intangible, the physical and the philosophical, the human and the hypothetical. In short, I will present a holistic, ecological view of the research landscape. I have created seven main sections within this chapter to describe and discuss the following: my research paradigm orientation, the qualitative and quantitative methods, data-gathering tools, and analytical methods utilized in this study; the study participants and my sampling strategy; the settings where my research occurred; and finally, the ethical considerations related to this research project. In various sections throughout this chapter I also comment on the following items as they relate to the above topics: dilemmas I faced while conducting this research, limitations of my sample; the relationship between myself, as the researcher, and participants; issues related to the credibility of scientific research; and the departure from my original research design. All of the items discussed within this chapter are pertinent to my research in various ways that will be described below; however, their commonality is that they are each – subtly or obviously – a part of the context within which my research was situated.

Research Paradigm Orientation

The term ‘paradigm’ has been defined by critical research theorists, Egon Guba and Yvonna Lincoln, as the “basic belief system or worldview” (1994, p. 105) that guides researchers in their work. Every research paradigm, again according to these two

theorists, is a human construction accepted on faith that contains the investigator's ontology, epistemology, and methodology. Thus, the acceptance of this point of view (which I share) necessitates a brief discussion of my research paradigm and the concomitant philosophical foundations of my work.

To be honest, the research process that I created for this study was not designed from any conscious *a priori* philosophical position. Hence, it is not a purely phenomenological study, nor is it purely a hermeneutic inquiry; rather it is a unique combination of the perspectives and methodologies derived from those and other theories of naturalistic inquiry. However, the paradigm that I currently use to make sense of the world was certainly held *a priori*. I do not have a label for this paradigm, but will rather utilize two constructions created by Guba and Lincoln (1994) to explicate the philosophical assumptions that shaped this study: critical theory and constructivism.

Although critical theory and constructivism are distinct worldviews, they are commensurable according to Guba and Lincoln (1994). For instance, both share an ontology and epistemology that are similarly fused together; namely, they each hold that what can be known is interactively created between the investigator and the 'investigated.' In the case of critical theory, findings are value-mediated, while in constructivism the findings are literally 'constructed' during the research process. Moreover, both paradigms share a dialogical and dialectical methodology; however, for critical theory the aim is to create a transformational or emancipatory experience for participants, while the aim of constructivist methodologies is to use hermeneutics to create a "consensus construction that is more informed and sophisticated than any predecessor construction" (p. 111). The prime discerning feature between the two

alternative paradigms rests within their ontological differences: critical theory is described as 'historical realism' whereas constructivism is described as 'relativist.' Specifically, historical realism describes the belief that reality was once fluid, but that it has been formed over time by "social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic, and gender factors, and then crystallized (reified) into a series of structures that are now (inappropriately) taken as 'real'" (1994, p. 110); constructivism acknowledges that reality is constructed by the above factors (among many others, such as location and unique experiences), but its proponents emphasize the mutability, relativity, and individuality of ontological constructions, which critical theorists do not.

My personal ontology is a blend of these two worldviews, and my research paradigm is no less a reflection of this synthesis. I have combined the advocacy and action aim of both paradigms, added the socio-cultural critique and transformative vision of critical theory (e.g., my analysis of findings) with the constructivist belief in unique individual reconstructions and the importance of consensus in education (e.g., the focus group discussions); and included their shared emphasis on values (e.g., preface) and the multiple voices of participants and the researcher (e.g., presentation of findings). While a purist from the critical theory paradigm could argue that synthesizing their chosen worldview with constructivism exchanges ideological rigour for an increased recognition of individuality and socio-cultural specificity (or vice versa from a pure constructivist point of view), I think that I have balanced the best of both worldviews and that nothing of value has been lost within the context of this particular study.

I do acknowledge that the use of statistical analyses to determine the questionnaire's reliability and validity is based on yet another paradigm: postpositivism.

As Guba and Lincoln accurately state, postpositivism is currently the dominant paradigm in the sciences, and the people that hold this view gained hegemony as the “‘natural’ heirs of positivism” (1994, p. 116). Therefore I used postpositivist methodologies out of necessity (viz., if I want to communicate with ‘postpositivists’ then I must speak their language), but definitely not from an ontological or epistemological adherence to that paradigm.

As the description of my research process in the following sections of this chapter will show, I emphasized qualitative methods in this study, but I also utilized quantitative methods in the form of basic descriptive statistics. The use of mixed methodologies strengthens the confidence readers may place in the research findings (Michael Patton, 1990), yet it also creates some messiness from mixed philosophies. To be sure, the philosophical assumptions (ontological, epistemological, and methodological) that underpinned this study were varied, yet they were also complementary. Specifically, I acknowledge the influence within my study of three related theoretical traditions: phenomenology, hermeneutics, and orientational qualitative inquiry (1990). I will concisely explain my intellectual debt to each in turn.

To phenomenology I owe the ‘assumption of essence,’ wherein I believe that “there is an essence or essences to shared experience” (Patton, 1990, p. 70). This study is certainly not phenomenological in the strict tradition of its creator, German philosopher Edmund Husserl, but I do hold a phenomenological perspective that informs all of my psychological research; that is, a firm belief in the importance of understanding individuals’ unique experience of the world. Specifically, I was interested to understand

each participant's experience of anti-oppression education as well as their interpretations of racism, sexism, and equity.

The second theoretical tradition embedded in this study is hermeneutics, primarily with regards to my focus on context (e.g., personal, historical, temporal, and socio-cultural). Emphasis is made upon context within hermeneutics (as utilized within naturalistic inquiry) in order to help elucidate the meanings that people give to life experiences. Specifically, the researcher's perspective, as well as any tradition or perspective utilized by him or her to interpret meaning from the research findings must be made explicit. In the case of this study, I was interested in the meanings that students provided for three critical terms, in addition to their evaluation or 'interpretation' of their schooling in terms of education for equity. Thus, I endeavoured to explicate my biases and the dominant biases of my culture because I agreed that "one must know about the researcher as well as the researched to place any qualitative study in a proper, hermeneutic context" (Patton, p. 85). Furthermore, I constructed a detailed analysis of the educational context experienced by Ontario students because of the school system's dominant influence in socially constructing students' worldviews (e.g., see Henry Giroux, 1981, 1988; Donaldo Macedo, 1994; and Jane Roland Martin, 1995).

Lastly, my study could also be described as an orientational qualitative inquiry. This type of study is similar to both phenomenology and hermeneutics in that all three theoretical traditions acknowledge the interactive subjectivity of both the researcher and the researched (cf. with constructivism in Guba & Lincoln, 1994). However, orientational qualitative inquiry differs from the two theories mentioned above in that it overlaps with the paradigm of critical theory; namely, it

does not even attempt any pretense of open-mindedness in the search for grounded or emergent theory, nor does it present multiple perspectives....[it] begins with an explicit theoretical or ideological perspective [e.g., feminism, Marxism, post-colonialism] that determines what variables and concepts are most important and how the findings will be interpreted (Patton, 1990, p. 86).

In other words, the researcher's theoretical framework or ideological perspective necessarily 'orients' the study in a particular direction. This is simply a bold re-phrasing of the critical theory paradigm in terms of actual research practice. Once an investigator believes in the role of ideology in the construction of human reality, any study they undertake will likely examine and explicate the politics of ideology and oppression as they relate to the topic of inquiry. As Michael Patton explained, orientational qualitative inquiry "aims to describe and explain *specific* manifestations of already presumed general patterns" (1990, p. 86, emphasis in original). In my study, the 'already presumed general patterns' of interest to my research are (of course) racism and sexism. If I was to place a descriptive label on the orientation I have given this study, I would say I had a humanist perspective or a critical pedagogical orientation.

In summary, my research was a naturalistic inquiry founded upon my belief in two alternative paradigms: critical theory and constructivism; and a synthesis of three complementary theoretical traditions: phenomenology, hermeneutics, and orientational qualitative inquiry.

Methods

During this research I utilized both quantitative and qualitative methods to avoid the methodological weakness of relying upon a single data source or method. The two approaches I utilized to gather information were questionnaires and focus groups. The questionnaire consisted of both a qualitative and quantitative portion: the definition

section and the equity evaluation, respectively. I designed the latter section of the questionnaire to be quantitative in order to easily gather and describe the breadth of student assessments of their education for equity. The former section, as well as the focus groups, were qualitative in order to add context and depth to the breadth provided by the education evaluation.

The two qualitative approaches were forms of naturalistic inquiry, and as such they have benefits applicable to my research topic beyond those limited to quantitative (particularly experimental) inquiry. Specifically, naturalistic inquiry has the qualities of "openness to whatever emerges [and the] lack of predetermined constraints on outcomes" (Michael Patton, 1990, p. 40). This 'openness' allowed for an inductive analysis whereby I could explore students' experiences and evaluation of anti-oppression education through open-ended questions rather than theoretically derived deductions and hypotheses. This was befitting of the situation because I was truly uncertain of the degree of critical pedagogy occurring within schools, and hence I had no hypotheses from which to constrain or test this topic.

Another benefit of qualitative inquiry, available through my use of focus groups to gather knowledge, was personal contact with participants and insight into the phenomenon in question (Patton, 1990). Hence, I was able to have direct contact with those people who were closest to the phenomenon under study; in this case, anti-discrimination education. This direct contact allowed me to gain greater insight and understanding than I could have otherwise. In addition, the focus group provides participants with the opportunity to reflect and reply to other members' comments; it is also a highly efficient method of interviewing; it ensures some quality control of the data

through the act of reflection and reply; and it tends to be pleasant experience for participants (Patton, 1990).

Upon reflection, it was very appropriate that qualitative methods were the primary method chosen to explore this topic, since “qualitative inquiry cultivates the most useful of all human capacities – the capacity to learn from others” (Patton, 1990, p 7); after all, learning from others is what education – and critical pedagogy – is all about.

Data Gathering

Herein I describe the structure and format for both of the instruments I used to gather data as well as the process I followed during their use. I conclude this section with a discussion of an ethical dilemma that I faced as a critical researcher throughout the process of writing this thesis: how to use non-oppressive labels to describe participants’ race and gender demographics for use in my study

Questionnaire

This instrument began with a personal information form (Appendix A) that requested relevant demographic information from students to contextualize the data gathered from the questionnaire, such as gender, racial/ethnocultural heritage (see *Dilemmas* discussion below), as well as questions designed to locate students within the Canadian education system. The actual questionnaire (Appendix B) commenced with a request to define equity, racism, and sexism to the best of each participant’s ability.

The questionnaire further contained ten statements regarding the students’ pre-university formal education, such as “the causes and patterns of racism in Canada and the

world were explored and challenged” and “all students saw themselves as active participants in the curriculum.” All of these statements were adapted from the 1993 anti-racism curriculum guidelines provided by the Ontario MET in their draft document, *Antiracism and ethnocultural equity in school boards: Guidelines for policy development and implementation*. Most of the MET guidelines only required minimal grammatical changes to adapt them to the questionnaire format. However, in order to address anti-sexist education within the questionnaire, I innovated two statements (no. 3 and no. 9) from two MET anti-racism guidelines (no. 2 and no. 8, respectively; see Appendix C for a comparison of each questionnaire statement and the actual MET guideline from whence it was adapted). The question “How accurately do each of these statements reflect the whole of my elementary and secondary school education?” was used by students to rate each MET equity statement on a five-point scale (“never”=0 to “always”=4). The questionnaire concluded with an invitation to participate in a focus group designed to answer the same questions in greater depth.

The following were the procedures I followed during the distribution of questionnaires:

- 1) Introduce myself, giving my name and identifying myself as the researcher;
- 2.) Provide Letter of Informed Consent (Appendix D) for participants to read prior to completing questionnaire. Summarize letter and ask if anyone has any questions or concerns. Ask each student to sign the letter to acknowledge that I have their consent to participate in this research;

- 3.) Wait for students to complete questionnaire, then ask them to separate the last page (i.e., the request to participate in the focus group) from the rest of the package and place separately in two predetermined stacks;
- 4.) Upon completion, ask participants for feedback on the questionnaire and research process;
- 5.) Thank students for participating.

These procedures were modified somewhat for mass distribution in a large classroom to Religion and Culture students. Specifically, I did not wait for these students to complete the questionnaire immediately (i.e., procedures no 3 and 4), but rather picked them up several days after distribution.

Focus Group

I designed the focus groups to provide student participants with an opportunity to discuss their responses to the equity evaluation, thus giving me a deeper understanding of their education to complement the breadth of information I had already received from the questionnaire. During the focus groups I utilized a combination of the standardized open-ended interview and an interview guide approach (Michael Patton, 1990; see Appendix E). I chose this approach because it allows interviewers the opportunity to further explore and elucidate each topic in greater detail after the participant has provided his or her answer. A combination of these two methods ameliorates the weaknesses of both while maintaining their strengths. Specifically, the process was “conversational and situational” (Patton, p. 288); data was complete and all important topics were explored; and outside evaluators of this study are able to review the interview guide. It was

important not to narrow the participants' responses too soon into the focus group and for this reason the questions were very general and open-ended; any specific questions occurred as part of 'probing' to explicate and clarify a particular response.

The focus group began with a question designed to 'prime' the participant's memories of the questionnaire. Specifically, I asked the six focus group participants to recall and write the rating they gave each statement. Thereafter, I read the first education for equity guideline ("We were taught to recognize minority values as well as the dominant values in our society") and asked each student: 1) what they were thinking when they gave their rating during the questionnaire, and, 2) if they would provide specific examples of the actions their schools took with regard to achieving each equity guideline. They were then free to discuss their responses and school experiences with each other. This process continued until each of the equity guidelines from the evaluation section of the questionnaire had been discussed in turn. The conclusion of the focus groups was reserved for dialogue between the participants and myself on the topic of their recommendations for educational change.

It is my belief that the focus groups acted as educational opportunities for the more socially conscious students to engage in stimulating discussion with peers whose prior awareness of oppression in our society was limited. In particular, I recall several occasions where the critique by one participant would lead another student to re-evaluate the quality of her or his education in terms of its anti-oppression content. This was an unexpected benefit, and for that reason, facilitating these group discussions was a much more rewarding experience than I had anticipated.

Since timeliness is always a concern for the focus group facilitator (no less when the group is composed of first year university students at the end of their school year), the number of equity statements was shortened from ten to eight by collapsing together statements two and three, as well as eight and nine. Incidentally, the first and second focus groups were approximately 60 and 90 minutes, respectively

Upon completing a draft of my results section, I invited feedback from all the focus group participants. I did so by mailing them each a transcript, a copy of my *Research Findings* section, a research participant feedback sheet (see Appendix F), along with a letter encouraging their comments regarding my analysis of the research findings (see Appendix G).

The following were the procedures I followed during the focus group:

- 1) Introduce myself, giving my name and identifying myself as the researcher.
- 2) Provide Letter of Informed Consent (Appendix H) for participants to read prior to beginning focus group. Ask if anyone has any questions or concerns. Ask each student to sign the letter to acknowledge that I have their consent to participate in this research.
- 3) Thank the students for agreeing to participate.
- 4.) Request participants provide their address on a separate page so that I may send a copy of the focus group transcript and research results;
- 5.) Give each participant a pencil for any possible note-taking and a bottle of spring water to relieve any thirst they may develop during our discussion.
- 6.) Check with participants that the room is acceptable in terms of light, temperature, and fresh air.

- 7.) Explain that I will be taping the discussion to aid in transcription (this is reiterated from the letter of informed consent) and to free myself to engage in the facilitation of the focus group. Furthermore, explain to participants that, so as not to interrupt the students' discussion, I will write any questions that I develop while listening to the students and then ask these questions at an appropriate break in the conversation. Inform the participants that they need not have any concerns that these are personal notes about them.
- 8.) Explain that the purpose of the focus group is for me to develop an understanding of what they were thinking when they completed the equity statement section of the questionnaire. Specifically, I wish to know what happened in their school careers that made them give the rating that they did.
- 9.) Ask everyone to take a moment to write down the ratings they gave to each item on the questionnaire. Explain that this will be used as the starting point for the upcoming discussion.
- 10.) Begin discussion and taping. After each participant has had an opportunity to discuss their ratings for items one to eight of the focus group questions, complete discussion and end taping; and.
- 11.) Thank all students for participating; ask for feedback; and thank them again.

Dilemmas Created When Labeling People

As an ethical researcher I believe that respect for my study participants is a requisite, especially when I am utilizing research methods wherein study participants have given me license to present *their* knowledge, opinions, and experience as *my*

research findings. Hence, personal conscientization is a necessary element of that aforementioned respect whenever I present the diverse subjectivities of social groups to whom I cannot claim membership (i.e., females or any ethnocultural group that is not European, and specifically Anglo-Saxon), simply because I am presenting the group identity of people for whom I have no direct lived experience. Through my review of discourse analysis I became aware that what we call ourselves and others (e.g., male and female, black and white, Indian and Asian, research subject or participant) is a critical part of reproducing oppressive ideologies (Teun A. van Dijk, 1997). Thus a socially conscious researcher needs to be aware and give care in these situations.

The first issue for me as researcher was to ask myself whether it might prove relevant to present the participants' racial/ethnocultural heritage alongside their responses to my questions on racism and anti-racism. I quickly decided that this information (should participants choose to give it) could potentially provide useful information to the reader. I imagined that students from non-European racial/ethnocultural heritages might define racism differently, and that their experience in schools would be mediated by this perceived racial difference, and thus these students might also have different views on anti-discrimination education.

Once I had chosen to ask the question: 'How would you describe your racial or ethnocultural heritage?', I then had to decide whether to provide close-ended categories or let participants describe their racial identity in an open-ended manner. I decided to combine both by providing several broad categories and a space for participants to identify their own racial/ethnocultural heritage, should they choose to do so. This would encourage participants to utilize the categories I provided (which would aid in the

descriptive summary), but also give them the freedom to express the ethnocultural aspect of their identity in any manner they wished.

My final and most critical decision was which racial/ethnocultural categories would I provide? Categories of race are considered extremely important features of identity creation because they have so much meaning attached to them in our society. But how does one use race if one does not accept it? I have learned through my literature review that Adolf Hitler personally accepted race as a social construct (Lewis R. Gordon, 1995), yet he chose to ignore this fact because the abuse of race suited his violent political vision. Now, I am quite clear that the consequences of using race in my study were nowhere near equivalent to the overwhelming violence and devastation of 1930s/40s Nazi anti-Semitism, but I did think it arguable that there was something intrinsically racist about using racial categories in any context. To be sure, I was about to indirectly define people's identity for them based on the categories I chose to use, and that certainly bore consideration. Therefore, my concern was to somehow avoid reproducing (however well-intentioned) the same racist problems that occurred for social researchers (undoubtedly some ill-intentioned) who had preceded me.

The terms I initially considered were those that first leapt to mind (or should I say eye?): black and white. However, I was uncomfortable with both these terms, not least because they are the most polarized social constructs used to label race²². Moreover, if I did use those two terms, the issue arose of what description to provide in place of Asian and Aboriginal? Historically, yellow and red have been used to describe these people, but I viewed the cultural associations with these terms (e.g., 'the yellow menace,' 'red savages') as generally, but not universally, pejorative in nature. Africans and Europeans

in North America may use the terms black and white, respectively, to describe themselves and each other; however, I have never heard an Asian person describe themselves as yellow, and I believe that most Aboriginal people object to the term red as it is applied to them in both language (e.g., the *Washington Redskins*) and stereotypical imagery (e.g., *Cleveland Indians* and *Atlanta Braves* sports teams in the USA). As I reflect in the moment of writing this discussion, I think that the derisiveness I associate with the terms yellow and red are likely because the people they apply to did not choose these labels; rather they are applied to those people by ethnocultural groups other than their own, beginning with white Europeans. Finally, using a limited palette of four basic colours to describe the entire diversity of humanity occurred to me as too reductionistic and experientially untrue (whose skin is truly one of those four colours?), and therefore I chose not to utilize those terms for my study. Certainly, these terms have the potential to be a source of group esteem (e.g., 'Black Power' or 'Red Power'), but they also have the potential for harm through mis-use, as I have indicated above.

The solution I settled on was to provide the broadest possible ethnocultural categories for participants to use when describing themselves. This would enable me to keep the benefit of locating participants' ethnocultural identity without utilizing terms that could possibly be perceived as pejorative or derisive; after all, I must endeavour to do no harm as an ethical researcher. I deliberately made the categories broad, not to essentialize race or ethnic heritage, but to make it inclusive and thus avoid the possibility of ever-increasing ethnocultural specificity that can also become racist. Namely, I was aware of the existence of historical discrimination between ethnocultural groups that belonged to the same race (e.g., the discrimination between the Nordic and Slavic peoples

of Europe). Therefore, it did not seem worthwhile to potentially reproduce these problems by providing a list of nations, ethnicities, or cultures to which allegiance could be ascribed (not to mention the difficulty this would pose when organizing and interpreting this data). The five of the six imperfect categories I chose were based on the five major populated land masses of the world (in alphabetical order): Aboriginal North America, Aboriginal South America, Africa, Asia, and Europe (these are, of course, social constructs; see Eric Wolf, 1982), my last category was simply "Other" with space provided for participants to label themselves if they chose. Participants were free to choose more than one category, and some did; this reflects the multicultural aspect of human relations. I anticipated that the racial/ethnocultural heritage question would be answered by participants referring to their ethnocultural heritage prior to recent historical periods of migration (i.e., within the past 500 years). This also resolved the problem of the colour classification of race because pre-migration peoples are frequently known by their attributed skin colour (i.e., Africans and Europeans are considered black and white, respectively).

Finally, I recognize that, just as race is socially constructed, so too is gender. Humans would most commonly describe themselves and each other as either male or female, and unlike race, there are numerous observable biological differences between the two. However, the majority of differences are due to the socializing process of various cultures, wherein both females and males are indoctrinated from birth to accept the dominant social constructs for femininity and masculinity.

I have provided this discussion regarding the social construction of identity through the language of race and gender²³ in recognition that discrimination exists within

our society based on these arbitrary distinctions, and because I did not want to blindly reproduce these oppressive ideologies in my work. It should be apparent through my presentation of this discussion that the use of social identity categories is both personal and political; and that it is certainly never neat or easy.

Research Settings

Altogether there were three physical settings where my research occurred, each located within Wilfrid Laurier University (a small-sized Canadian business administration/liberal arts institution). Two research settings were for the questionnaire distribution and collection, and one was for the focus groups; however, one of the questionnaire settings was virtually identical to the focus group site. I will describe the settings in the order they were utilized during my research: questionnaire first, and focus group second.

Briefly, the research setting for student participants recruited from Religion and Culture was a large theatre auditorium; the setting for all other questionnaire respondents was a small, multi-windowed (but otherwise nondescript) room with a long rectangular table and several chairs. The setting where I conducted the focus groups was identical for both sessions: it was a fairly small (3m x 4m approx.) characterless room with a window open for a breeze and sunshine passing through the window. In each case, I sat at the head of a rectangular table with the student participants seated on both of the long sides of the table. I had arranged the furniture in the room so that the participants were at an angle where they faced me, yet were able to engage in dialogue with each other at the same time. Both the microphone and tape recorder were placed on the table; the former

in the centre and the latter in front and to the right of me. A pencil, as well as a copy of the focus group questions and informed consent letter, were placed on the table in front of each participant's chair.

Departure From Original Research Setting and Design

The original research design I proposed to complete for my Master's thesis is different from the one that I actually used within this study. The impetus for the departure from my original design was due to an event that necessitated my changing the intended research setting from a local secondary school to the university where I am currently enrolled. I will briefly describe my original research design and the event that lead to my current thesis because the shift in research setting certainly affected my data collection, and arguably affected my analysis and interpretation.

In February of 1999 I created a proposed social intervention and evaluation with the following objectives

1. Conscientization: this involves awareness-raising in addition to the development and practice of a critical language for understanding oppression in society. The focus of conscientization in this proposed research project was on sexism and racism.
2. Provision of a critical pedagogical process that would involve students in a way that was meaningful to them; and,
3. The student-lead creation of curriculum recommendations regarding the teaching of oppression that can be utilized by the key stakeholders in education (e.g., teachers, school boards, Ministry of Education and Training).

Briefly, I proposed to create an opportunity for critical pedagogy to occur during two grade 12 classes – English literature and World History – within a local school. This would occur in the classroom through the provision and facilitation of eight guest educators and their presentations regarding various aspects of systemic sexism and racism in society. A process, such as the one I have just described, would ensure that anti-racist/anti-sexist education was included within the curricula, rather than being marginalized – as is the norm in Canadian schools – as an educational ‘add-on’ to the traditional public school education. My study would then conclude with a request for students to evaluate their experience of this educational intervention. I proposed a Participatory Action Research model wherein all the stakeholders – students, teachers, school administrators, and myself – would be involved in the research process.

In February 2000, at the end of six months of collaboration and negotiation within a local high school, my proposed critical pedagogy intervention and evaluation was permanently quashed for the 1999/2000 school year. For that reason, I have included an outline of my original research design as the final appendix to the my thesis because I hope that someone else will collaborate with a school to fulfill my original Participatory Action Research plan (see Appendix I)²⁴.

One of my main motivations when writing this thesis was to create a thorough and well-written research study that would give a critical response to an argument that I heard expressed within the school system: that is, that students do not know the curriculum and are thus unable to evaluate it and make recommendations for change. I recognized that I needed to go outside the school system if students were going to participate in an evaluation of their education, yet I wanted to get as close as possible so that the results

would be valid and meaningful. Thus, I chose Wilfrid Laurier University as my research setting and first year students for my research participants. Consequently, my research project metamorphosed into another project within the same theme of critical pedagogy. Namely, while I was unable to provide a critical pedagogy intervention and evaluation *within* schools, I was able to give graduated students (i.e., students *outside* of schools) an opportunity to evaluate the entirety of their pre-university education for equity. In this way, my new study helps to fill a critical gap in the knowledge base of Canadian public education.

Study Participants and Sampling Strategy

In this section I describe my study population; discuss my sampling strategy; describe the participants recruited for my research sample; and analyze the limitations of said sample.

Study Population

My study population were university students who met the following two criteria:

- 1) They had received their education within Canada (and preferably Ontario); and,
- 2) They were *recent* secondary school graduates (i.e., within the past 1-2 years).

The rationale for these criteria were that, since I was asking first year university students to evaluate their public school education based on equity guidelines drafted by the Ontario MET.

- 1) all participants needed to have a wealth of Canadian, and preferably Ontario, school experiences before they could accurately complete an evaluation that I could then meaningfully analyze; and,
- 2) participants needed to remember their school experiences clearly and with as few confounding variables as possible (e.g., post-secondary educational experiences with critical pedagogy), hence the recency of secondary school experience was a necessary criterion.

Sampling Strategy

Since my study included both quantitative and qualitative methodologies, the sampling strategy of the former affected the latter, as I will explain. I utilized the Psychology Participant Pool²⁵ in my sampling strategy because it is the prime vehicle for recruiting undergraduate university student participants for psychological research. In addition, I also personally recruited student participants from an introductory Religion and Culture class because I was curious to determine whether there would be a difference between the two groups of students; after all, participants' post-secondary education, short though it had been at the time of my sampling, was nevertheless a potential confounding variable in my research. The Religion and Culture students received their questionnaires *en masse* while seated during class; those from the Psychology Participant Pool completed the questionnaire either while alone in the room or with small groups of other participants present. The response rate for students recruited through the Participant Pool and the Religion and Culture class were 95% and 45%, respectively.

Within my study sample I wanted to achieve a quality known as maximum variance (Patton, 1990). Maximum variation sampling is an asset to research, particularly for small samples, because “any common patterns that emerge from great variation are of particular interest and value in capturing the core experience and central, shared aspects or impacts of a program” (p. 172). The program in this case is the school system and the phenomenon in question is the process of gaining a formal education within said system. I did not conduct maximum variation sampling *per se* (I only sampled from two university classes), but I fully expected and desired maximum variance among participants (specifically with regards to gender, racial/ethnocultural heritage, and school system).

Given that I planned to distribute the questionnaires first, then use focus groups to interview students second, my sampling strategy for the latter was to include a ‘request for participation’ at the end of the questionnaire, and thus the focus groups were sampled from the same population as the questionnaire. Incidentally, I sought the same level of maximum variance in the focus groups as in the questionnaire (i.e., gender, racial/ethnocultural heritage, and school system). Sixteen questionnaire respondents (22.5%) indicated their interest regarding further participation in my study, but only six of those students (37.5%) were able to attend either of the two focus groups that I hosted.

Study Participants

Two groups of people participated in my study: those who completed the questionnaire, and a smaller subset of that group (8.5%) who participated in either of two focus groups. I will discuss each in turn.

Questionnaire respondents. These study participants were 71 first year Wilfrid Laurier University students who had recently graduated from secondary school (i.e., within the past 8-20 months²⁶). They were students from a range of academic disciplines and faculties (arts, science, business). The majority (53) signed up to participate through the Psychology Participant Pool although an additional 18 students were recruited from an introductory Religion and Culture class (*Evil and its Myths*). As these were both introductory courses, they had a broad range of student enrollment from across the academic spectrum, and thus there was considerable overlap among students from both classes

All participants provided basic demographic data regarding their education, in addition to giving their gender and a broad description of their racial/ethnocultural heritage, as shown in the table below

Table 1
Characteristics of Questionnaire Respondents

Demographic	No. of Students (%)
No. of years since secondary school graduation	
1	61 (85.9%)
2	10 (14.1%)
Province where received majority of education	
Ontario	67 (94.4%)
Other	4 (5.6%)
Secondary school system	
Public	56 (78.9%)
Separate	15 (21.1%)
Gender	
Female	50 (70.4%)
Male	21 (29.6%)
<u>Racial/Ethnocultural heritage</u>	
<u>Aboriginal North American</u>	5 (7.1%)
<u>African</u>	1 (1.4%)
<u>Asian</u>	6 (8.5%)
<u>European</u>	57 (81.7%)
multi-heritage	2 (2.8%)
no answer	2 (2.8%)

Note. N=71

As can be seen above, all the participants were recent secondary school graduates with the vast majority having received the entirety of their education in Ontario public schools. The preponderance of student participants were female, which is not unexpected given that most WLU psychology students are women. Finally, there was some ethnocultural diversity within the sample, yet the bulk of questionnaire respondents (82%) were women and men of European heritage.

Focus group participants. Four participants (female=2, male=2) attended the first focus group and two (female=1, male=1) attended the second. These were six students enrolled in a variety of academic disciplines here at WLU: two were English majors; there was one each in Business Administration, Psychology, and Biology, and the last was intent on majoring in several disciplines within the Humanities. All of these participants were Canadians with a European heritage, and almost all had attended Ontario public schools for the entirety of their education, except one who had graduated from an all-female private secondary school.

In terms of additional equity training that the focus group students may have participated in while attending school, only the aforementioned female student had any extra-curricular anti-oppression education; she had attended a two-day anti-racist leadership camp, and this occurred during the time that she was a senior public school student.

Limitations of the Sample

The ideal sampling strategy for this study would be to recruit a stratified random sample of graduating students from secondary schools across Ontario. Given that the ideal was not met, I must acknowledge – in the interests of unbiased research – that several limitations were incurred, as they are with all samples.

The primary limitation of this study was that there was a disproportionately large number of students who were female, of European heritage, and public school educated. Thus, my participant sample would have been balanced – and thus improved – with the

inclusion of more racial/ethnocultural diversity, males, and students from separate schools.

The above limitation was more evident in the focus groups, which were especially homogenous in terms of ethnocultural diversity (in fact, they could almost be labeled monocultural rather than multicultural). This is an ironic limitation given that, by their very nature, focus groups utilize a strategy called homogenous sampling (Michael Patton, 1990). Of course, when I designed this research study, the only homogenous factor amongst the focus group participants was intended to be the same criterion for their inclusion in the study population (i.e., they were all university students who were recent Ontario secondary school graduates). Thus, while there was a gender balance and a variety of educational experiences within the focus group, there was not the maximum variance that would have been possible with male and female participants from a diversity of racial/ethnocultural groups

Another limitation to my sample was the occurrence of a potential confounding variable within my study due to my choice of recruiting first year university students as participants. Namely, some students may have taken introductory university courses that exposed them to critical pedagogy (e.g., English, Women's Studies, History, Religion and Culture), and thus they may have become more critically aware of oppression than they were during secondary school. If this was so, these students would use their newly acquired conscientization to evaluate their education differently than they would have eight months prior (i.e., at high school graduation), or even differently than their peers who have not received a critical education for equity at university.

This second possibility also raised a concern about possible differences between the equity evaluations of Psychology students and their Religion and Culture counterparts. However, this possibility may have been ameliorated because there was a great deal of cross-enrollment between the two classes with student participants taking university courses across the academic spectrum (e.g., Psychology, Religion and Culture, Biology, Anthropology, History, English, and Business Administration). Although independent sample t-tests indicated no differences between the mean ratings of respondents recruited from either class, the concern for potential confounding of results still remains a theoretical concern.

Analysis

Since both qualitative and quantitative methods were utilized in this study, several methods of analysis were necessary. This section contains a description of those methods and a rationale for their use, but before moving to that discussion I will briefly outline my overall analytical hypotheses.

Critical education theorists and researchers have shown that students' educational experiences within the school system differ significantly depending on their social identities because of many discriminatory factors, racism and sexism being but two of these. Given the topic of my thesis, it made sense that I examine whether students' definitions, equity evaluation ratings, and classroom recollections differed markedly between racial/ethnocultural groups as well as between the two genders. So too, it was also possible that students' anti-oppression experiences would be different between the

two main school systems in Canada – public and separate – and so I attended to this aspect of their education as well during my analyses.

Overall, I anticipated that students would have had a diversity of learning experiences depending on the school settings wherein they gained their education; that is, rural, urban or suburban schools in multicultural or monocultural communities in higher, middle, or lower class neighbourhoods. While I recognized these factors as important sources of diversity in educational experience, analysis of these additional types of diversity was outside of this study's focus; therefore I did not group students based on those factors prior to the analyses. Nonetheless, the experience of schooling in multicultural versus monocultural communities became a meaningful analytical concept during my analysis of the focus group discussions.

Thus, the three main sources of potential difference among student data that I was attentive to throughout my analyses were gender, racial/ethnocultural heritage, and school system. My underlying logic for utilizing these three analytical lenses of observation was based on my phenomenological perspective, and it was thus: it would be a very significant finding if students, despite their diversity of social identities and learning experiences, still provided an essential criticism of the anti-oppression education provided in schools.

Quantitative Data Analysis

Quantitative analyses of the questionnaire results involved my use of both descriptive and inferential statistics, as well as reliability and validity testing. Descriptive statistics were calculated to investigate the breadth of student evaluations of their anti-

oppression schooling. Specifically, the mean, standard deviation, mode, maximum, and minimum were calculated for the participants' ratings of each equity statement. Furthermore, the ratings of all ten statements were summed to calculate an overall rating for anti-racist/anti-sexist education. It was then necessary to use inferential statistics to determine if any differences in mean equity evaluation ratings existed between groups of students. Namely, independent sample t-tests on the mean ratings were conducted for the following groupings: public and separate school educated students; females and males; and students with European and non-European²⁷ racial/ethnocultural heritage. Finally, the trustworthiness of the quantitative data (i.e., the education evaluation) was verified through testing the reliability and validity of the questionnaire by using Cronbach's alpha and a factor analysis, respectively.

Qualitative Data Analysis

Qualitative data were gathered in both the questionnaire and the focus groups, hence the methods of analysis I utilized for each are described below in two separate sections.

Questionnaire. I began by conducting a content analysis on the three definitions (equity, sexism, and racism). I used both indigenous concepts and sensitizing concepts (Michael Patton, 1990) to define the patterns I observed in participants' data. Briefly, indigenous concepts are "the categories developed and articulated by the people studied" (p. 390) and sensitizing concepts are the concepts, categories, and patterns that the researcher brings to the analysis. The (so-called) indigenous concepts I used to present

the research findings were those ideas, themes, and trends that emerged during my review and analysis of participants' definitions. Overall, these were primarily given by students' word choice (e.g., discrimination, superiority, or bias). The sensitizing concepts I used were given by the literature of critical education theory, critical discourse analysis, and critical pedagogy (e.g., conscientization, hierarchic relationship dynamics, exclusionary history, hegemony, etc.), and I used these to analyze the critical depth and precision of student definitions.

Selected quotations were chosen that represented either the variety or similarity of students' responses. All quotations include the gender and racial/ethnocultural heritage of the participant in question. This information is provided in square brackets. For example, [F, E] indicates a female of European heritage, which is a basic description that fit the majority of this study's participants. Given the topic of my thesis research, these cultural identifiers could be useful contextual information for readers of this study.

Focus group. I conducted a content analysis to identify the major patterns and themes contained in the focus group discussions. Again I utilized both indigenous (i.e., inductive) and sensitizing concepts (Patton, 1990) to organize and describe the research findings. For instance, some indigenous concepts were participants' definitions and examples of dominant and minority values; some sensitizing concepts were passive participation, consciousness-raising, and monocultural versus multicultural communities. Selected quotations were chosen that highlighted the variability and consensus between students' assessments. As with the analysis of the three questionnaire definitions, every

excerpt from the focus group includes the gender and racial/ethnocultural heritage of the participant in question as well as an identifying number (e.g., [M1, E] or [F2, E]).

In order to best represent the conversational style of the participants I adopted the following transcription procedures:

- The end of an incomplete sentence or expressed thought is represented by three ellipsis points and one space between the third ellipsis and the new sentence or idea. I have also used this method to show a participant's contemplative pause during the discussion (e.g., "I recall that happened once . . . and maybe another time too. . . yes, I'm sure now."). According to APA style, three ellipsis points are reserved for indicating that material has been omitted within a sentence;
- When material has been omitted within a sentence, I have not typed a space after the third ellipsis (e.g., "I think that statement is inaccurate . . . and very likely misleading."). I have followed APA format and used four ellipsis points to indicate material omitted between two sentences;
- Parentheses have been inserted whenever a participant seemed to be making a conversational aside during the discussion; in other words, if I deemed they were speaking parenthetically (e.g., "I would say 'yes' to that (pardon me if I think aloud) because of the following reasons. . .");
- I have corrected any minor grammatical errors (e.g., improper conjugation of verbs), in addition to removing any "ums" and "uhs" from the transcript. My rationale was that a transcript would unduly highlight these mistakes and imperfections, perhaps reflecting poorly on the participants. Furthermore, my experience informs me that it

is uncommon to recall these common conversational imperfections (e.g., “ums”), and thus their removal still makes an authentic record of the focus group discussion.

Verifying the Trustworthiness of the Qualitative Data

The qualitative data were verified for validity and reliability through four methods of triangulation: multiple analysts (i.e., participants and myself), data, methodological, and theory (Michael Patton, 1990):

1. Analyst triangulation: Focus group participants verified the information generated during their discussion by frequently commenting on each other's responses. In addition, I briefly re-interviewed two members of the focus group to determine whether my presentation and interpretation of the research findings accurately reflected their experience (i.e., face validity; Patton, 1990);
2. Data source triangulation. I compared the research findings from both focus groups, thus corroborating their constructions regarding the education they received;
3. Methodological triangulation: I compared the qualitative findings from the focus group discussions and the quantitative and qualitative components of the questionnaire results (i.e., the curriculum evaluation and open-ended definition questions); and,
4. Theory triangulation: I compared the research findings to the writings of critical pedagogues (both anti-racist, multicultural, and anti-sexist), critical education theorists, and the primary source documents (e.g., secondary school curricula) of the Ontario MET.

A limitation to the triangulation methods mentioned above was that I did not have multiple focus group facilitators or multiple analysts of the research findings (beyond the verification provided by focus group participants).

Ethical Considerations

Before any participation in this study would occur, free and informed consent was assured through a letter of informed consent (see Appendices D and H) signed by each student participant. Participation in this research project was entirely voluntary; specifically, there was no penalty for non-participation and potential participants could decline to participate without penalty or loss of benefits to which they would otherwise have been entitled. Participants could also refuse to answer any questionnaire item or focus group question. If a participant withdrew from the study after data collection, but before completion of my thesis, her or his data would have been removed from the final document and then returned or destroyed.

The contribution of all students cited in this work are, and will always remain, confidential. Thus, the participants' equity statement ratings from the questionnaire have only been presented as research findings in their aggregate form – never as individuals. In addition, all excerpts from the focus group that I have cited in my research findings were only used after I received approval from the student in question. Only the gender and racial/ethnocultural heritage of the cited students have been attached to their quotations, and every student was notified prior to participation that this would occur. I included this demographic information because it relates to the topic of my research, hence it may prove useful contextual knowledge for readers of my work.

Research Relationship

The positive feedback I received in regards to the ethical approaches I took during my research speaks to the positive nature of the research relationship. Specifically, I am thinking of three ethical concerns regarding human participation in psychological research that needed to be addressed before my study could proceed. They were related to three possible participant experiences.

- Personal discomfort discussing the topics of racism and sexism;
- A desire to withdraw from the research process at any time; and,
- Satisfaction with my re-presentation of participants' data (e.g., the focus group discussions).

The first issue is unique to this study because of the topic, but the latter two concerns are common to all research involving human participants.

In regards to the issue of personal discomfort, the possibility existed that participants might feel uncomfortable discussing these issues, particularly if they have been directly affected by either or both forms of oppression. Thus, a social work professor from WLU was available to provide counseling support to participants if it was necessary at any time during the data-gathering process. However, the feedback I requested and received during data collection at no time indicated that this form of support was necessary. In regards to the latter two concerns, no participant withdrew from my study at any point during the research process and none of the focus group participants had a concern with my re-presentation of their discussions.

In summary, I did not perceive that the participants experienced any harm from the research process that would have effected the research relationship. I therefore

conclude that the university students who participated in my study found the experience to be quite benign.

In summarizing this chapter, I elucidated my research worldview or paradigm; described the research participants, settings, and research relationship; explained the sampling strategy, research methods, and analyses employed in this study; addressed issues and dilemmas relevant to establishing the credibility and scientific validity of my research, as well as those involved in labeling people; and finally, discussed the ethical considerations of this research project. In the following chapter I present and discuss the depth and breadth of student definitions of sexism, racism, and equity; in addition to providing the quantitative and qualitative results from students' evaluations of their education for equity.

Chapter Seven: Research Findings

This chapter contains three main sections that structure my presentation and discussion of the research findings. The first section contains the content analyses for students' definitions of three critical terms; the second section separately presents the descriptive statistics and focus group discussions for each of the ten equity statements; and finally, the reliability and validity of the questionnaire as an evaluative instrument is analyzed and discussed in the last section.

Definitions

The questionnaire began by soliciting students' definitions of the words sexism, racism, and equity. The content analyses of these definitions appears below. I begin by presenting students' indigenous concepts (i.e., the words and themes that participants use to define a particular phenomenon) for each of the three critical terms, and I conclude with an integrative synopsis and comparative analysis of both the indigenous and sensitizing concepts for sexism, racism, and equity.

Sexism

The student definitions were remarkably similar in what they contained and in what they did not contain. As with any sample of human thinking, there was some variability, but the amount here was small. Below is a table that presents the most recurrent key words that students used to define sexism. The frequency of these key

words is included in the table, expressed as both a number and a percentage of the total sample of respondents (N=71).

Table 2

Defining Sexism: Frequency of Key Words

Key word	Frequency (%)
discrimination	27 (38)
superiority	8 (11)
prejudice	7 (10)
bias	7 (10)
unfair	5 (7)
unequal	4 (6)
stereotypes	3 (4)
degrades/denigration	3 (4)

Note. N=71

Some critical terms occurred in student definitions only once and for this reason they were not included in the table. They are the following: "oppressed," "hierarchical," "gender roles," "dislike," "double standard," and "irrational belief."

Discrimination. As the table above shows, sexism was most commonly defined as discrimination. For example, three separate students stated that sexism is: "discrimination against...the opposite sex in the form of verbal or physical actions" [F. Aboriginal NA²⁸], "being discriminatory towards members of the opposite sex simply because they are of a different gender" [M. E], and the "*belief* that one's own sex is *better* than any other and *practicing prejudice* and *discrimination* towards the other sex" [F. E; emphasis added]. This last definition is unique among the student participants because it included many ideas, which I have emphasized in her text.

Specifically, she described sexism as a belief in gender superiority that leads to certain actions, namely prejudice and discrimination.

Action or attitude, behaviour and belief Twenty-four students (34%) defined sexism as some form of inter-gender mistreatment (e.g., **“treating a person differently because he/she is from the opposite sex”** [M, Asian]) The remainder of the respondents described the manifestation of sexism as occurring through thoughts or feelings, whether they were defined as judgments, beliefs, or viewpoints (e.g., **“thinking that your ‘sex’ is higher than the other”** [F, E]) Only 14% of student respondents specifically described sexism as occurring in both thoughts and actions; for example, sexism is an **“irrational belief that one sex dominates over the other; mistreatment of the opposite sex”** [M, E] and **“judging someone by their sex and treating them differently with regards to their sex”** [F, Asian/E]. Only two students included examples of sexist thoughts or behaviours with their definitions The examples provided were job discrimination and the belief that **“girls can’t play sports because they are girls”** [F, E].

In equality of oppression. The majority of students defined sexism as some form of discriminatory thoughts or behaviour that occurred equally between both genders. Only three respondents, all female, noted the historical context of sexism wherein males have traditionally maintained an oppressive asymmetric relationship with females. Two of those definitions are provided below: **“generally, [sexism] refers to the denigration of women throughout history by males”** [F, E] and **“usually treating men better than**

women, such as giving jobs to men over women because of an assumption that men are superior and more competent” [F, E].

Infrequently used critical terms. The presentation above contained illustrations of each of the key words utilized by students to define sexism, except for the following: bias, stereotypes, unfair, and unequal. Examples of the use of these key words (with emphasis added) are provided below. Three separate definitions of sexism are:

- **A personal or cultural *bias*, either good or bad, based on a person’s gender** [F, E];
- **When someone of one gender believes that they are better than the other gender. Also, if someone does not fit the *stereotypical* gender role they are discriminated against** [F, E]; and,
- **Treating the opposite sex *unequally* or *unfairly* solely based on the fact that they are of the opposite gender** [M, E].

In summary, discrimination was the term most frequently used by students to define sexism, although other similar terms, such as bias, prejudice, and stereotypes were utilized. The majority of students defined sexism as some form of discriminatory thoughts (as opposed to action) that occurred equally between both genders. As I move the discussion to student definitions of racism, it is worth noting that two participants specifically defined sexism as an oppressive experience similar to racism, in that they are both the “**unfair treatment of individuals**” [F, E].

Racism

Whereas all students identified sexism as a phenomenon occurring between the two genders, there was some variability in defining the targets of racism. Most participants described racism as a phenomenon occurring between individuals and groups that are of different ethnicity, heritage, culture, background, skin colour, race, or any combination thereof. However, some students further extended the basis for racism to include gender (female=1, male=2), age (N=2), "handicaps" or other "physical differences" (N=2), and religion (N=2). Certainly much disagreement exists among people as to the verity and utility of the construct race (and one student noted this in her definition), but the inclusion into race of such diverse factors as those listed above is, I believe, an interesting finding.

The following table presents the most recurrent key words that students used to define racism. The frequency of these key words is included in the table, expressed as both a number and a percentage of the total sample of student participants (N=71).

Table 3

Defining Racism: Frequency of Key Words.

Key word	Frequency (%)
discrimination	19 (27)
prejudice	15 (21)
bias	6 (8)
stereotype	4 (6)
superior	4 (6)
dislike	4 (6)
unfair	4 (6)
unequal	2 (3)
hatred	2 (3)
exclusion	2 (3)

Note. N=71

Some critical terms occurred in student definitions only once and for this reason they were not included in the table. They are the following: “segregating,” “violence,” “degrade,” “hierarchical,” “ethnocentrism,” and “irrational.”

Discrimination. Similar to the frequency of key words in students’ definitions of sexism, racism was also most commonly defined as discrimination. For example, racism was defined as: **“discrimination against an individual because of his/her ethnic background”** [F, Aboriginal NA] and **“treating a person differently because he/she is from another race. Therefore, you are discriminating on the basis of race”** [M, Asian].

Prejudice. Racism was also commonly described as prejudice. For example, racism is: **“when you prejudge a certain culture on what you believe them to be like”** [M, E] and **“a bias or prejudice towards another individual or group that isn’t or your race”** [M, E]. I also included the following definition as an example of prejudice: **“judging a person based on false assumptions about their ethnicity”** [F, E].

Action or attitude, behaviour and belief. Very few students (only 11%) defined racism as some form of inter-racial mistreatment or difference in treatment (e.g., **“objectionable treatment to different individuals dependent on their cultural/racial background”** [F, Aboriginal NA]). The definitions provided by the remainder of respondents described racism as occurring through thoughts or feelings, whether they were defined as beliefs, perceptions, or judgments (e.g., **“how we perceive other**

people's race consciously and unconsciously" [F, E] and "when someone does not like another person or group of persons due to their ethnic or cultural background" [F, E]). Only 17% of student respondents specifically described racism as manifesting itself through both thoughts and behaviour; for example, "treating or viewing another group unfavourably due to their race (skin colour)" [F, Asian].

In equality of oppression. The majority of students defined racism as some form of discriminatory thoughts or behaviour that occurred equally between races. Only one student observed that racism tends to occur against those people described as the "minority." Another student somewhat noted the Western historical context of racism; namely, that the majority of people from a European heritage have benefited from the systemic maintenance of an asymmetric relationship of oppression and exploitation with all other races of people at some point in time. This lone student defined racism as "treating someone differently based on race (skin colour, culture, etc). Generally in a bad way: if not white, then treat them poorly" [F, E].

Infrequently used critical terms. The above presentation has illustrated each of the key terms utilized by students to define racism, except for the following: stereotype, unfair, superiority, unequal, hatred, and exclusion. Examples of the use of these key terms (with emphasis added) are provided below. Five separate definitions of racism are:

- **Creating self-perceived *stereotypes* of a group of people based on their religion and cultural beliefs. Usually these stereotypes are negative and *unfair*** [F, Asian];
- **When people are treated differently (positively or negatively) based on the fact that they are a certain race; or when people have certain conceptions that they feel apply to a whole race; or that a certain race is *superior* to another** [F, E];

- **Discrimination of a particular group based solely on race (culture); looking at a group as *unequal* because of race [F. E].**
- **Being biased or feel *hatred* towards a specific group or race [M. Aboriginal NA];**
and.
- **The act of preferring one race to another; to dislike/*exclude* a person because of their race [F, Asian].**

Two definitions of racism were extremely unique and therefore resisted categorization, thus, they are included below: “**people who have spent little time in investigating other cultures**” [F. E] and “**the extent to which an individual judges/associates oneself with others of another culture or group**” [F. E].

Only one participant described racism in a manner indicative of commonsense racist beliefs. As an ethical researcher, I cannot present this student’s definition without a concern for potential harm to this person. However, it is worthwhile to note the basic content of the definition given its relevance to my thesis topic. Suffice to say, this student’s definition included a brief rationalization for the apparent necessity and logic of discrimination in certain circumstances. It is also worth noting that the same student made a similar argument for the necessity of sexism. Fortunately, this was only one individual out of 71 participants, and I hope that this is an indicator that the disconcerting severity of this person’s incognizance is just as rare among the wider population.

In synopsis, racism and sexism were similarly defined in that discrimination was the critical term most frequently employed by students. Synonymous terms, such as prejudice, bias, and stereotypes, were used, although the latter two were utilized much

less often. The majority of students defined racism as some form of discriminatory beliefs (rather than behaviour) that occurred equally among all races of people.

Equity

As with the previous two subsections, I have provided below a table of the most recurrent words used by students in their definitions. However, this table includes both key words and key themes. The frequencies of words and themes are included in the table, expressed as both a number and a percentage of the total sample of student participants (N=71).

Table 4

Defining Equity: Frequency of Key Words.

Key word or theme	Frequency (%)
equality	46 (65)
Employment Equity	10 (14)
opportunity	9 (13)
rights	5 (7)
level playing field	3 (4)
owner's equity	3 (4)
unable or unsure how to define term	15 (21)

Note. N=71

Unlike my request to define sexism and racism in the questionnaire, approximately one-fifth of all participants were unable to define equity, or, if they did, their responses belied a high degree of uncertainty (e.g., “???” and “I don’t know”). The students who were able to define equity have had their definitions classified into seven groups below based upon my content analysis of the indigenous concepts that emerged from their responses.

Owner's equity and employment equity. Three individuals' familiarity with the word equity was within the context of accounting (i.e., owner's equity), as the following response indicates: **"the amount of ownership or capital that one has in a company"** [F. Asian]. A further ten respondents (14%) associated equity with their interpretation of employment equity. For example, equity was defined as: **"something to do with employment; equal rights and privileges in the workplace"** [M. E], **"equal pay for equal work"** [M. E], and,

People get what they deserve, based on needs/criteria. That is, a job more valuable to a business gets paid more than one less valuable. For example, a male and female employee get paid the same for some job, but a secretary gets paid more than a gardener [F. E]

Equity equals equality. The majority of participants (65%) associated equity with the word equality. This is likely due to the fact that the two words have close resemblance because they are derived from the same Latin root, *aequus*. Consider the following examples where students defined equity as: **"the result of a society viewing every individual as equal"** [F. Asian/E], **"when everyone is treated equal"** [M. E], and **"ensuring that all people receive fair treatment and are considered equal in all they do"** [F. African], and **"equality for all mankind (*sic*)"** [M. E]. It is ironic that the last student cited herein used an exclusionary term (i.e., 'mankind') rather than an inclusive word (e.g., 'everyone') to describe equity

Equal rights. The notion of human rights as an assurance of equitable treatment was included with several definitions (7%) and it was described in several ways.

Consider for instance the clear and simple definition of equity as **“equal rights for all people”** [M, Aboriginal NA], or the humanistic definition shown here: **“the chance for people to achieve to their full potential and become what they feel they should be. The same constitutional rights as friends, family, neighbours, and fellow human beings”** [F, E]. Equity was also defined as the situation where **“everyone has the right to the same jobs, same education, benefits, etc.”** [F, E].

Equal opportunity. The previous definition hints at the idea of equal opportunity being an important manifestation of equity. Thirteen percent of students included the word opportunity in some manner; for example, equity is **“equal legal, political, and economic opportunity for all”** [M, E] and **“receiving the same opportunities as everyone else”** [F, E]. Equality of opportunity may be similar to the thinking of the three students who used the phrase “level playing field” to describe equity (e.g., **“allowing all individuals to operate on a level playing field in terms of any aspect of life”** [M, E]). As an aside, I believe that the phrase, “level playing field,” is commonly used by politicians and the popular media to describe the intended result of equity legislation, such as employment equity.

Action or attitude, behaviour and belief. A third of all students specifically defined equity as some form of fair treatment between people (e.g., **“to treat others as you would yourself without the consideration of race, sex or religious beliefs”** [F, Asian] and **“the process of being treated as an equal person”** [M, E]). The definitions provided by the remainder of respondents described equity as occurring through thoughts.

beliefs, or moral imperatives (e.g., “**thinking people of all race and cultures are equal**” [F. E]).

Social relevance A small number of students (8%) defined equity as a gender-specific concern, while a further 3% defined it as a distinctly race-based issue. The majority of students (42%) unequivocally identified equity as an issue relevant to all people, or at least multiple groupings of people (i.e., race, gender, colour, culture, age, religion, or any combination thereof).

Equity as social justice. Two students provided definitions for equity that resisted categorization, and for this reason they are presented below. Both definitions are similar in that they succinctly articulated the idea of social justice (which is central to equity, but not necessarily equality). These students defined equity as “**everyone deserves the same**” [F. E] and “**everyone is entitled to [their] fair share**” [F. E].

In conclusion, equity was a difficult term for students to describe since more than 20% of them were unable to do so, or at least they were very uncertain of their definition if they did provide one. Nonetheless, the majority of participants who provided definitions for equity equated this word with ‘equality,’ although some also associated this critical term with equal rights and equal opportunity. In addition, the majority of students defined equity as occurring in thought and belief (although it was also defined as occurring through action), and said that equity is a social issue relevant to all people.

Summary and Interpretation of Students' Definitions

Before providing a summary and interpretation of students' definitions, I will remind readers that Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary defined the three critical terms thus:

- Sexism: "prejudice or discrimination based on sex, especially discrimination against women; behaviour, conditions or attitudes that foster stereotypes of social roles based on sex" (Frederick C. Mish et al., 1990, p. 1079);
- Racism: "a belief that race is the primary determinant of human traits and capacities and that racial differences produce an inherent superiority of a particular race" (p. 969); and,
- Equity: "justice according to natural law or right, specifically freedom from bias or favouritism" (p. 421).

Furthermore, critical theorists have thought beyond these standard definitions to discuss the following: the pervasiveness of commonsense sexism and racism among all human relationships (e.g., institutions, structures, and systems; see Roxana Ng, 1991); the influence of oppressive ideologies (i.e., belief systems) and the establishment of hegemony, also known as the manufacture of consent (e.g., Donaldo Macedo, 1994 and Noam Chomsky, 1987); and the silencing and exclusion of oppressed social groups (e.g., Nancy Hoo Kong, 1996). In addition to those mentioned above, critical theorists have used a variety of critical terms to describe oppressive beliefs and practices, such as sexism and racism: the following is but a short list: dominant and subordinate groups;

hierarchical, asymmetric, or unequal relationships; power and influence; misogyny, patriarchy, colonialism, and exploitation.

The above summary of standard and critical definitions provides readers with the sensitizing concepts that will be compared with a summary of the indigenous concepts given in the students' definitions.

In summary, 65% of students defined equity as equality. Equity was far less frequently associated with human rights and equal opportunity, which is near to a definition of equity rooted in justice and fair treatment. In general, few students were aware of the standard (i.e., dictionary) definition of equity; it was almost universally misunderstood. Moreover, 21% of students were clearly unfamiliar with or uncertain of the term equity, and thus they were unable to define it at all. However, no uncertainty existed for students defining either racism or sexism, but there was little variability either. In fact, the students' interpretations of those two terms were closer to the uncritical definitions recorded within standard dictionaries than those conceptualized by critical theorists.

The most frequently used word to define both sexism and racism was discrimination (38% and 27%, respectively). Key words, such as prejudice, stereotype, and bias, also appeared, although much less frequently (approximately 10% each). Unlike critical theorists, the majority of students defined racism and sexism as some form of discriminatory thoughts or behaviour that occurred equally between both genders and all races of people. Therefore, it is not surprising that only two students acknowledged specific Western patterns of oppression, specifically that women and people of non-European heritages have been the targets of these forms of discrimination and

exploitation²⁹. It is certainly arguable that this is an instance of historical amnesia (Peter McLaren, 1995) resulting from the fragmentation of history (Macedo, 1994) within the public discourse occurring through mainstream media sources.

Although it was uncommon, some students' definitions implicitly observed the injustice or inequity of racism and sexism in society, but they did not have the words to describe it thus. My final critical observation is that, in general, students do not have the use of critical terms such as those provided by critical theorists. The closest any students were to critically defining either racism or sexism were those who mentioned the idea of superiority (approximately 10%), which is related to the notion of hierarchical or asymmetric relationships. There was no mention within student definitions of anything similar to commonsense racism and sexism (Ng, 1991) that indicated an understanding that oppression is manifested throughout all forms human relationship (e.g., family, institutions, and systems: see Jean Leonard Elliott & Augie Fleras, 1992).

Overall, student definitions of sexism and racism were very limited and circumscribed, indicating a perceptual near-sightedness for observing these forms of oppression in society. Moreover, the notion of equity was widely misunderstood by those that recognized the word, thus its potential for healing oppressive relationships is circumvented. The preponderance of evidence indicates that first year university students (and therefore secondary school students) are as yet uneducated regarding the consciousness-raising concepts and critical terms of colonialism and oppression. I assert that this limitation of students' education requires critical attention. In conclusion, the content of the student definitions is not indicative that these young men and women received a critical education for equity in school.

Education for Equity Evaluation

This portion of the chapter contains the results from both the equity evaluation section of the questionnaire and the focus group discussions. The text from each of the equity guidelines is provided below within eight separate tables that also contain several descriptive statistics. The mean and standard deviation are supplied alongside the minimum, maximum, and modal ratings, and the percentage of students who chose those responses. Excerpts from the focus group discussions follow each of these tables. These student quotations are given to provide depth and explanation to the descriptive statistical data presented in each table. All excerpts are from the two focus groups I facilitated wherein participants were requested to provide examples of the information from their previous school career that they were recalling during the time they were completing the questionnaire. I have structured the presentation of focus group findings into various subsections that represent the major themes, ideas, and topics that emerged from the discussions. The research findings for each of the evaluation's equity guidelines are described and interpreted in turn. I conclude this section with the overall grade students gave to education for equity alongside a summary and interpretation of the findings thus far

Societal Values

Table 5
Descriptive Statistics for Equity Statement 1

Statement	mean	sd	min (%)	mode (%)	max (%)
1 We were taught to recognize minority values as well as the dominant values in our society.	2.42	.87	1 (14.1)	2 (40.8)	4 (11.3)

Note. N=71

Slightly more than 40% of first year students stated that they were “sometimes” taught to recognize the dominant and minority values of Canadian society. The mean ranking for the focus group participants was 1.7, which is lower than the group mean for all students (2.42). One of the participants explained her low ranking in the following excerpt: “I put 1 because I live in a community where there’s no other ethnic groups....[The school] never mentioned anything else about anyone else’s values” [F1, E].

Defining dominant and minority values. All four students shared a common understanding that dominant values were the values of the majority of people in Canada (i.e., “Western values.... European-type values” [F3, E]) and that minority values were the values held by people within minority groups.

The dominant values of the school would be the values that are not necessarily right or wrong, but they are the values most impressed on the students. And the minority values would be like...values of minority groups. [M1, E]

The two participants in the second focus group worked together to define dominant values, concluding that Jewish and Christian beliefs, such as monotheism and

heterosexuality, were dominant values in Canada. Two students in the first focus group provided the following three examples of dominant values:

Punctuality....coming to class on time. Learning, stressing practical education like reading and writing skills and stuff like that, whereas some other cultures would probably stress more community-based stuff rather than individual learning. [M1, E]

When people go in for job interviews you are expected to make eye contact, be engaging, speak loud... I don't think every culture has those... In some cultures it's rude to make eye contact and some cultures are quieter than others. There's a lot of very European, Eurocentric ideals of how to act...and I think that's a very dominant force in our society. I think that can work against people that may not come from that background. [F2, E]

I think there's also an assumption that everyone's parents are together [i.e., married]... I think that's a dominant value that's pressed into a lot of kids in elementary and high school; 'that's what family should be': this idea of mom and dad and possibly some relatives. [M1, E]

All the students had difficulty giving exemplars of dominant and minority values when queried during the focus group. One participant explained his difficulty this way:

I can think of Western values that were, whether purposefully or unconsciously, put out there [by teachers] for us to look at. I can't think of any examples of other cultures' values. I can recall that other cultures existed in Canada. We learned that we are not a melting pot and that there is supposed to be a diverse culture....They covered that there were other cultures, but they didn't [specifically] cover other cultures. I know no knowledge of other cultures from school at all. [M3, E]

Regardless of the difficulty, the students sought to provide examples of minority values.

The following is their list:

- **Languages: "Not everyone speaks English in Canada and that's what's assumed. Especially with Aboriginals and the French [this assumption is wrong]" [M2, E];**
- **Interpersonal customs: eye contact, loudness of speech, Indian Mendi art; and.**
- **Faith: "Religion is a big minority value" [F1, E]; e.g., marriage and divorce, fasting during religious observance, Muslim women covering their faces with clothing, and**

young Sikh men wearing kirpans (small ceremonial knives with religious significance) in school.

Dominant versus minority values in schools. The example of kirpan-wearing in schools included the following elaboration from the same participant cited above:

That's an example of a minority value upsetting a dominant value. And for the minority value to be accepted, it really has to go through a lot of rigmarole, so-to-speak; they really have to take it into the court system. That really speaks to...how our laws are all founded on Christian and Jewish ideals. [F1, E]

So too the removal of *O Canada*, *God Save the Queen*, and the *Lord's Prayer* from schools were each cited by focus group members as examples of minority values 'upsetting' dominant values

Who can hold minority values? The following brief conversation began during the first focus group in response to the question, "Can a person from the majority hold minority values?"

- I think it would be rare to see someone who has a few minority values and then is still a member of the dominant... [M1, E]

- ...that's really strong to those minority values... [M2, E]

- Yeah. [F2, E]

- ...that goes along with them all the time. [M2, E]

Interpretation

Overall, the students in the focus groups had difficulty discussing this equity guideline. Specifically, they found it difficult to define and provide examples of dominant and minority values, which indicates a lack of formal education on the topic of societal values. In the end, students defined dominant values with a fair degree of accuracy as those values that belong to the majority of people in society, but they mistakenly defined minority values as those belonging to people from minority (i.e., non-white) groups. The phrase, “minority values,” was intended to refer to those values that are non-dominant, or alternative (e.g., socialism), to the dominant values in society (e.g., capitalism). These values are likely held by a minority of people, but they are not necessarily, and by definition, the values of minority group members. However, this was a misinterpretation made by all the focus group participants. Thus, it was often the case that the examples provided by these students revealed that they were confusing diverse cultures and customs with the elusive construct, minority values. Clearly, this was a gap in the students’ education, and they readily acknowledged this fact.

Role Models and Inclusive Education

Table 6
Descriptive Statistics for Equity Statements 2 and 3

Statement	mean	sd	min (%)	mode (%)	max (%)
2 The school curriculum included a diversity of role models and information about Aboriginal people and diverse racial and ethnocultural groups.	2.22	.99	0 (5.6)	2 (40.8)	4 (8.5)
3 The school curriculum included female role models and information about women.	2.63	.93	0 (1.4)	3 (38)	4 (18.3)

Note. N=71

Both the mean and modal ranking were rated higher for the inclusion of female role models and information about women in the curriculum than the same for Aboriginal people and a diversity of other racial and ethnocultural groups. One focus group participant stated it this way: **“For me in school, there was a lot more emphasis placed on women being equal than there was on different cultures being equal”** [M3, E]. These findings corroborate the results of the equity evaluation wherein slightly more than 40% of first year students stated that “sometimes” role models and information were provided in the curriculum for a diversity of racial and ethnocultural groups, whereas 88% of participants found that women were included in the curriculum with a frequency between “sometimes” and “always.” The focus group participants ranked these statements lower than did the student participants as a whole. Two participants explained their rankings below:

I gave it a 1 because I can’t bring to mind any instances where we singled out women. In the context of Canadian history I think we only learned about Laura Secord, and that was it.... We really never learned about [a diversity of role models]; for instance, Martin Luther King and the black movements of the 50s and 60s and Malcolm X and all that stuff. We never learned about Buddhism or Judaism or anything like that....There was a very British/European connotation on everything. [M1, E]

I gave it a 3 because [there are] Aboriginal people in my community so we do have pow-wows and presentations and art....I had some really good teachers who really taught about the position of women in history. The one thing that was weak was the 'other,' like the racial and ethnocultural groups....I took American History. That's how I learned a lot about black history and that was my choice because I felt that I should learn about that, but....you never really get to understand the culture of the people you're learning about. I agree with [M1] in that sense. You get a taste of it, but you never really get the full disclosure on it. [F2, E]

I can think for sure that we were given women role models, and that women were definitely focussed on, and that's the only reason I gave it a 2....I can't say in my schooling in Ontario that I can really remember learning about one racial or ethnocultural role model. I can't think of one person who was not European. I can't think of one Asian person; I can't think of one black person. [M3, E]

Two other participants recognized that they did not learn of cultural diversity within their education: **"We never really had any diversity of role models. It was all... We never had a black teacher or Chinese teacher or anything like that, so it was always our own culture"** [F1, E].

Community monoculture and the lack of educational diversity. The two students mentioned directly above gave mid-range ratings to the two equity statements because they thought that the lack of diversity in the curriculum reflected the uniform culture (i.e., European) of their small town Ontario communities.

There were just no Aboriginal people in our community, so it was diverse for our community....I think in our community they made it as diverse as they could for what was offered. If people came in, they would have had to come in from an hour away or so, if we were going to get in any black teachers or Aboriginal people. That was just how it was around my town. [M2, E]

They postulated that educational opportunities to better understand race-based oppression were likely available at their respective schools, but that these would occur in the optional American history class, not in the requisite Canadian history class. Both they and another student believed that their lack of exposure to anti-racist information and

role-models was primarily due to their chosen enrolment during secondary school in science and business classes, rather than history and English courses.

Female role models. During the focus group I asked the three women participants whether they were satisfied with the amount and quality of the female role models presented in their education. One said that there were none in her experience; another student declared that she found plenty of women role models in English literature, but that she achieved this largely through her own reading (although she was also supported in this endeavour by several quality English teachers); the last said that she was presented with plenty of female role models during her private school education, but there was a limitation: **“We had absolutely no role models from any other groups aside from Catholic women”** [F3, E]. The implication within this student’s statement is that these women role models all shared a similar ethnocultural heritage (i.e., white European), in addition to a common religion. This implication was made because she had previously elaborated that a third of the students at her school were Asian Canadian, yet no mention was made within her education of the historical contribution made to our country by this segment of society.

Comparing anti-sexism and multicultural education within schools. Further into the focus group discussion, this same participant compared the amount of information on women with the amount of information on world cultures. At that time she stated unequivocally that

there was actually no information about cultures. In terms of women, we had tons in high school. In English classes there was always a portion, if not

the majority, on female authors....I was reading *The Female Eunuch* in grade 10... [Gender equality] was really enforced, but it was not anything that was always said; it was just implied in everything we did, and I think that was really good. That could just be because it was an all-girls school; it probably was....[but] in terms of other cultures there was nothing whatsoever.

Her comparative evaluation of anti-sexism and anti-racism is comparable to that of other participants who also said that information on women and female role models outweighed the amount of multicultural information and role models provided to them in school. These observations also match the results of the equity evaluation (see table 6 above).

Interpretation

It is clear from the equity evaluation and focus group discussions that the amount and quality of information on women and female role models has higher than the same for Aboriginal people and all other racial and ethnocultural groups. However, the inclusion of anti-sexist education in schools needs to be criticized because it is random (i.e., unsystematic), and therefore entirely dependent on the interests of the particular teacher students receive. In other words, only teachers interested and sufficiently knowledgeable to provide a rich diversity of female role models, women's experience, and anti-sexist critical analysis will do so. Hence, while all students will receive the majority of their schooling from a patriarchal education model (Jane Gaskell et al., 1989), some students may never receive a feminist teacher and thus they may not experience within school the pedagogical difference of an anti-sexist education for equity.

In regards to anti-racist education, it would appear from the focus group discussions and equity evaluation that exclusionary history is still the status quo within

Ontario schools. In fact, the comments from students indicate that even multicultural education, the least revolutionary form of the two education models, is not widely practiced either. Specifically, students have unequivocally stated that they experienced an almost complete lack of multicultural role models and information. Some students from monocultural communities rationalized that the lack of diversity within their education is expected given the lack of diversity within their communities, as well as their academic focus on science or business. This viewpoint is a disconcerting revelation of a common perception within the school system that multicultural and anti-racist education is an educational “add-on” that is dependent on a student’s educational interests (e.g., history) and home community (i.e., is it ethnoculturally diverse?). In conclusion, the most students were able to say was that they were taught that Canada is a multicultural nation, but they were never systematically given knowledge of what exactly the multiplicity of cultures may be.

Cultural Diversity

Table 7

Descriptive Statistics for Equity Statement 4

Statement	mean	sd	min (%)	mode (%)	max (%)
4 Accurate information was conveyed about a broad range of cultural values, life experiences, and the diversity within cultures.	2.44	.77	1 (8.6)	2 (47.1)	4 (8.6)

Note. N=71

Forty-seven percent of students indicated that accurate information about a range of cultures and life experiences was “sometimes” provided through the school curriculum. This assessment was congruent with the ratings given by the members of the

focus group. The following excerpts from the focus groups illustrate the students' reasons for the rankings they gave:

I wouldn't know how to place [what we were taught] as accurate because I wouldn't have anything to compare it to because no one was talking about cultural practices that I was a part of, so I couldn't say "Yeah, that's right or wrong." [M1, E]

In my situation, I have traveled a lot and so I have seen a lot of different cultures. But, if I were to come home to the classroom and ask a question about it (if I didn't understand something that I saw), they wouldn't be able to explain to me why or for what reasons; I would only have what I saw. [F1, E]

I feel that we were given an adequate, maybe not sufficient, but we were given a substantial amount of 'women are equal' information [in school] and I feel like I grew up believing that....But as far as it goes for other cultures or life experiences, I can't think of anything. [M3, E]

There were cultural values that were addressed, but it wasn't a broad range. I didn't learn about all different types of cultures. I learned about cultures that directly affected me; therefore, it was very limited. The people that were teaching me were the same way. They came from the same sort of background: White Anglo-Saxon Protestant. That's the way it is around where I lived, other than the Aboriginal people, and I don't think just teaching about Aboriginal people represents a broad range of cultural values....We know enough about European culture, that's for sure. I would have liked to learn more about [people from] different parts of the world. [F2, E]

In my community there aren't many different ethnic groups... or cultures... I don't really know what is out there, so it is hard to say if it is accurate or not. They didn't go out on a limb to try and teach us and give us examples through videos and things like that about other cultures....I was taught only about Canada, like the French or Inuit... It might have been addressed a little bit, but it didn't go outside of the Canadian culture. [M2, E]

Limited pedagogical methods. One student was particularly critical of the limited methods used by his teachers to educate students regarding global cultural diversity, specifically "maps but not videos...maybe the odd film strip from the 60's..." [M2, E]. The other students agreed that video was the primary medium for cultural communication and that culture, when it was taught, was done so solely through the

assigned reading of history textbooks and not through classroom discussion, hence the lack of critical pedagogy.

Diversity within culture. The students further stated that while cultural education “sometimes” occurred, there was never any mention of the diversity that occurs within cultures. To wit, the following conversation from the second focus group:

- **I definitely remember it being enforced that we are a multicultural society.** [M3, E]
- **Yet at the same time no accurate information was conveyed.** [F3, E]
- **Yeah...about other cultures.** [M3, E]

This same criticism was echoed by the two participants in the second focus group as well.

Eurocentrism. A student from the first focus group provided an example of the oppressive Eurocentric pedagogy that she received in school, wherein cultural diversity was not explored and stereotypes were not challenged:

Say we’re looking at African Americans... From the way I was taught, the way you address the subject is you’re looking at them as a thing, a function of history, and they’re ‘otherized.’ In other words, they’re made other: there not a part of you; they’re separate from you. You look at them, but you don’t look into them to see the differences. I mean, how can you see the differences and individuality when you are grouping things together and seeing them as something separate and apart. That’s the way I think my school system addressed minority values and different cultures and I don’t think they meant to do it; it’s just built into the Eurocentric perspective that I think most of us have. [F2, E]

It is important to note that this participant’s reference to the concept of the “other” and being “otherized” was part of her university education, and that her secondary school teachers did not provide these terms of critical post-colonial analysis. The two other students who were familiar with these terms from their first year Anthropology and

English courses verified that they had never heard that terminology discussed during their secondary school careers.

Religious diversity. Another topic that lacked discussion was the reason some students of diverse faiths left the classroom during the playing of () *Canada* and the recitation of the *Lord's Prayer*. This was a mystery for most children at the time – including the first four focus group participants – as shown through the following conversation:

- **It was never addressed in our school.** [F1, E].
- **The teacher may have said something like “those students will step outside...”** [M2, E]
- **“...It’s their religion...”** [F2, E]
- **“...so that’s what they’re going to do, so don’t make a big deal out of it.”** [M2, E]

According to these students, when the *Lord's Prayer* was eventually removed from schools altogether, this action was also left unexplained.

What is the culture of Canada? The final excerpt of this section reveals an ironic gap in the cultural education many students receive: **I’m not sure I learned what Canadian culture is....What is it to be Canadian? I guess we did learn that to be Canadian is to be in a diverse culture....But what is the diversity in Canadian culture?** [M3, E]

Interpretation

The focus group discussions gave striking evidence that students were not exposed to a wealth of information regarding a diversity of cultures and religions. Moreover, students were not even confident that any information that they did receive was accurate. Viewed in this light, it is not surprising that they were also uneducated regarding the diversity that exists within cultures. One student (see the final quotation above) was humourously critical that, notwithstanding the diversity of cultures that exist around the globe, he never learned the culture of his own country; his education neither included a discussion of the essences of being Canadian, nor lessons regarding the diversity within our own culture. The question of who can be considered Canadian was shared by another student participant, but in a separate focus group. Specifically, that student had a very limited perception of who can actually be included in Canadian culture, implying through the conversation that this cultural category was restricted to the English, French, and Inuit. A clue to his incognizance lies in his description of the limited methods utilized by teachers to inform his classmates regarding global diversity, specifically an over-reliance on videos and textbooks as opposed to classroom discussion. So too, Eurocentrism was identified by another participant as another likely cause of exclusionary education. In conclusion, the results indicate that a Eurocentric curriculum combined with limited teaching methods and a lack of critical pedagogy has created a student body that is largely uneducated concerning the diversity of cultures and religions, both worldwide and here in Canada.

Integration of Student Perspectives

Table 8

Descriptive Statistics for Equity Statement 5

Statement	mean	sd	min (%)	mode (%)	max (%)
5 The school supported and integrated the perspectives of all students to assist us with living in a diverse society (e.g., diversity reflected in the contents of school library, displays, celebrations, school events, calendars, and food services).	2.74	.95	0 (2.8)	3 (43.7)	4 (21.1)

Note. N=71

The mean ranking for this statement was one of the highest ranked (2.74 out of four) from the entire group of equity statements. The modal rating was three, with almost 44% of students agreeing that, more often than “sometimes,” yet less than “always,” all student perspectives were integrated into school life with a view towards assisting them with living in a diverse society. The ratings provided by the focus group students were lower, but generally in agreement with these fairly high ratings. I have structured the focus group findings into four sections based on the students’ discussion: they are: the experience of both monocultural and multicultural communities with integration of student perspectives; presence without integration, or what happens when multicultural education exists without anti-racism; and the perceived experience of English as a Second Language (ESL) Students.

Monocultural communities and integration The comments below were given by two students who stated that their childhood communities lacked racial and ethnocultural diversity.

I have a high number for that [statement] because [the integration of student perspectives] reflected the students in my school because it was mainly a white school. That's what it reflected... that's how it was. So all the stuff... the libraries, displays, celebrations, events... it fit to our school. It fit our school, but it didn't show us what else was out there. [M2, E]

We only had one culture, so everyone was always integrated. [F1, E]

Thus, these students argue that since their schools lacked cultural diversity, the integration of all student perspectives was not a problematic consideration, and that logically it must have occurred.

Multicultural communities and integration The students who lived in more multicultural communities than the students quoted above had different viewpoints, if not different scholastic experiences:

I gave it a 1 because even though there are 10...15...20 people that aren't of the dominant culture, I still think there should be things for them. There was never any acknowledgment of Ramadan [in my school] or... there was Black History Month...we didn't even know about it and there were students who were black and who were Muslim. They were just never represented. It's like they spent most of their time trying to fit in. [F2, E]

I think [the integration of student perspectives] was stronger in extra-curricular activities. There were a lot of clubs for minority groups and there was a Black History Month assembly in high school. There were things like that that weren't necessarily parts of the curriculum, but did address the needs of students who were in minority groups. [M1, E]

While the student quoted directly above believed that some school clubs and an annual assembly were sufficient to meet the needs of all students, he also stated quite distinctly that Canada's multicultural diversity was not celebrated within the events, displays, calendars, or food services that occurred within his secondary school.

Presence without integration. Another participant noted that her school administrators involved Aboriginal people and culture in the schools, but that this level of engagement was not sufficient in her analysis.

At my school we lived near [an Aboriginal reservation] so we had a lot of the Native kids so we had some awareness of Aboriginal ideas....We saw that they had art displays sometimes, and they had a pow-wow come into our school once... It was present but there was never any real awareness. [F2. E]

She explained that prejudice and stereotypes against Aboriginal people still existed within her school community despite the actions described above.

English as a Second Language (ESL) Students A student from another school recalled “posters being up in the halls and maybe some [cultural] displays (at times) at [the school] where I went....If it was another culture’s special holiday (whichever that may be) there was some mention of it” [M3. E]. However, he also reflected that “English as Second Language students were carted off and stuck in another room,” adding his opinion that

The whole history of Canada is people having to adapt to a foreign culture; one that is (basically) being created still. It seems to me that [new immigrants] should be an important representation in the Canadian identity, and there would be lots of ways to do that....A family friend teaches ESL students, and he says that they don’t try to fit in because [these students] don’t see an appropriate doorway for them to fit into the rest of the curriculum. [M3. E]

Moreover, both participants from the second focus group noted that at their respective schools, ESL students were frequently the targets of harassment (e.g., teasing and fighting). In addition, one of the student participants observed that the ESL students were segregated from the other students within the school, thereby denying any possibility for

the integration of their perspectives and experiences within the larger school curriculum that exists outside of the ESL classroom.

Interpretation

There were several important points brought out during the discussion surrounding this equity statement. Similar to the discussion from previous equity guidelines, a recurrent theme from the students of monocultural communities was their belief that the lack of cultural diversity within their schools logically dictated that all student perspectives were necessarily integrated within the curriculum. However, I argue that they have not considered the accuracy of their statement that there was only one culture in their schools. Notwithstanding the fact that there were likely a small number of students within their schools from non-white, non-European ethnocultural heritages that escaped their recollection, their statements imply that all of (so-called) white Canada is a monoculture as opposed to a multicultural, which is arguably not the case. Thus, despite the high rankings they gave this equity guideline (see above), their stated reasons did not indicate that a high level of integration actually existed within their schools. Moreover, the objective of this particular equity guideline was missed since these students admitted that their exclusive education did not prepare and them for “living within a diverse society” (MET, 1993).

Students from multicultural communities had somewhat different educational experiences than their counterparts from monocultural communities. Namely, they were more aware of the degree that the integration of all student perspectives and experiences was occurring within their respective schools. While both these students stated

unambiguously that cultural diversity was lacking within their school's events and activities, one student made the uncritical assumption that several school clubs and an annual assembly were sufficient to meet the needs of all students. Again, comments of this nature reflect a commonly held (and marginalizing) viewpoint that multicultural education is an extra-curricular supplement to the conventional education.

A similar problem, which I termed "presence without integration," was noted by a student who had lived in a community with a large population of Aboriginal citizens. She critically observed that while Aboriginal culture had a presence within her school (e.g., art), and Aboriginal women and men were occasionally involved in school events (e.g., pow-wows), the non-Aboriginal students lacked any real awareness of Aboriginal culture and experiences; hence, anti-Aboriginal racism continued to exist within her school and her community. This is likely the result of token multicultural education occurring in isolation from anti-racist education.

Another example of presence without integration was provided by a student participant who observed that ESL students were segregated and lacked an "appropriate doorway" into the curricula, events, and activities of the school. His criticism indicated that there were groups of students whose perspectives and experiences were definitely not integrated within the school curriculum. The result was that the ESL students and all other students at his school did not have an opportunity to interact in a positive environment and learn from each other, thus practicing important skills that would assist them with living in a diverse society.

Overall, these research findings indicate that even in multicultural communities, schools were not assisting students to live in a diverse society, in that they were not

ensuring that all student perspectives and experiences were being integrated. The integration of cultural perspectives and experiences was occurring for students of a white, European heritage, but the same could not be said for students who belong to racial and ethnocultural groups that have historically been silenced and oppressed by the dominant culture in Canada. In conclusion, the focus group discussions indicated that, despite fairly high equity evaluation ratings, only a low level of integration of student perspectives and experiences occurred within schools. Specifically, cultural diversity was not represented at all in monocultural communities, and only minimally represented in multicultural communities. Furthermore, any cultural diversity that was presented within these schools was done through the modality of multicultural education without a complementary anti-racist education to support and encourage an education for equity.

Active Participation in the Curriculum by Students

Table 9

Descriptive Statistics for Equity Statement 6

Statement	mean	sd	min (%)	mode (%)	max (%)
6 All students saw themselves as active participants in the curriculum.	2.5	1.03	0 (4.4)	2 (36.8)	4 (17.6)

Note. N=71

The modal rating for this equity statement was "sometimes," which almost 37% of the student respondents agreed was an accurate response when asked if they considered all students to be active participants in the curriculum. A further 32% gave this statement the next highest ranking (3).

Differing perspectives, different observations The discussion on this topic differed between the two focus groups: the first group tended to have ratings that were in the high range, while the participants in the second group stated succinctly and unequivocally that **“All students, regardless of race, were definitely not active participants in the curriculum”** [M3, E], and consequently they gave lower ratings. In regards to the students of the first focus group, their discussion on this statement is encapsulated in the following statements:

I didn’t get a sense that [all students] were encouraged, but I also didn’t get a sense that they were not encouraged. I think if there was anything that was stopping them from participating I think it would be something less observable... I don’t know what it would be, but... [M1, E]

We didn’t have any other cultures or whatever, but if people wanted to participate they would, and if they didn’t they weren’t told not to... That was their choice.
[F1, E]

There was nothing holding them back that I saw. [M2, E]

Defining “active participation in the curriculum” The discussion at this point seemed to beg the question “How do you define being an active participant in the curriculum?,” which elicited this response: **“Just being there and being encouraged to ask questions, to pose questions, and making an attempt”** [F2, E]. However, there was also this alternative perspective:

I found that the more popular people always participated in the curriculum, like extra-curricular activities, other than the not-so-popular people because they felt that they couldn’t be a part of that group. [F1, E]

This observation was echoed in the second focus group wherein the two participants added that being involved in school clubs, talking in class, and having friends were all indicators of active participation in the curriculum. While I did not ask these students

directly “How do you define ‘curriculum’?” the statements above are congruent with the 1993 MET equity policy document wherein the school was viewed as a holistic learning environment and thus the curriculum is “all learning experiences the student will have in school” (p. 13)³⁰, including the day-to-day interactions between students, teachers, administrators, and the community.

Integration of student interests in the curriculum. The final rejoinder to the discussion on active participation in the curriculum occurred when I sought to determine whether students were able to incorporate their personal academic interests into their classroom education, at which point it was stated that **“I’m sure [the teachers] would have a discussion, but they wouldn’t exactly make up a whole new course to teach something that you wanted to learn”** [F1, E]. All the focus group participants agreed that the school curriculum was inflexible and that students were not encouraged to follow their own intellectual interests; for example: **“I can’t think of any courses where I actually could have gone and done a project on another culture and their values. I don’t know where that would have fit in. It didn’t.”** [M3, E]

Passive participation. Although the first focus group firmly claimed at the beginning of their discussion that students were active participants in their education, a comment made somewhat earlier in the overall discussion deeply contrasted with the consensus that occurred for this particular statement, namely:

For me in my history courses, in my experience, it was really centred on media. If you could get a video to teach, that was good. I’m not saying I didn’t have really good teachers; I had teachers that were really good at explaining stuff, but at the same time they liked to use the multimedia. I

guess they thought it would help us remember, which is stupid, because I would rather sit and be a participant in the class than sit there and stare at a t.v. screen and be bored out of my mind. [F2, E]

Clearly, this student has stated that watching videos in class – which all student participants agreed occurred all too frequency during their education – is antithetical to active participation; rather, it is passive participation.

Interpretation

While the equity evaluation results clearly indicated that active participation within the curriculum was a random occurrence (i.e., it only happened sometimes), the two focus groups contained some differences of perception and opinion. The second focus group was both succinct and unequivocal in their assessment that all students were not active participants in the curriculum. The first focus group stated that students were active participants; however their discussion on this statement seemed to contradict the high ranking it received. Specifically, this group of participants stated that, while every student at their respective schools were not active participants, there was nothing observable that prevented the participation of these students. The problematic aspect of their statements is that they may stem from a lack of critical awareness and conscientization on their part. Specifically, subtle racism and sexism may have been present in the school environment that acted to hinder the participation of students directly affected by those forms of oppression; however, the focus group participants may not have had the critical awareness to observe this phenomenon. Consider an example of a similar situation given by one of the focus group members wherein it was stated that unobservable (i.e., subtle and covert) actions commonly impeded the participation of so-called unpopular students. It is just as likely that similar actions could have been

occurring that were racist or sexist, but that they were equally covert and unobservable (in other words, they were “commonsense”; see Roxana Ng, 1991). The argument I have made here is simply that, just because students were unable to see any overt discrimination at their school does not automatically mean that none was occurring; and in fact, there is plenty of anecdotal evidence and other research (e.g., George Sefa Dei, 1998; Nancy Hoo Kong, 1996) that has revealed that every student does not experience encouragement to become active participants in the curriculum. The focus group participants implied this criticism; I found it necessary to make it explicit.

I had another concern with the students’ ratings of active participation in the curriculum, and it was in regards to their definition of the term. The definition of active participation created by the focus group participants included: asking questions and giving answers in class; having friends in school; and doing extra-curricular activities, such as clubs and sports. While this definition is indicative of a holistic construction of ‘the curriculum,’ this interpretation of active participation and the student recollections that support it (see above) indicate a lack of critical pedagogy in the classroom. Namely, it was inconceivable to these students that they could be active participants or leaders in their own education; they clearly indicated that they were not given any opportunities to either collaboratively create an academic agenda with their teachers’ guidance and support or pursue their own academic interests within the classroom.

The final consideration on this topic was a critical observation made by one student regarding the increasing amount of passive participation in the classroom. This participant was, of course, referring to watching television and videos as a replacement for classroom instruction and discussion. She indicated an over-reliance on multimedia

to teach while unambiguously advocating that more time needs to be given by teachers to encourage meaningful student participation in classroom discussion.

In conclusion, while active participation within the curriculum was “sometimes” encouraged, and while popular students were the prime participants in school-life, it is entirely possible that covert racism and sexism was hindering the participation of some students. In fact, critical pedagogues report this as a common occurrence in classrooms across North America. I cannot say with assurance that this was the reality for students at the participants’ respective schools without appealing to the research of others (e.g., George Sefa Dei, 1998; Gloria Roberts-Fiati, 1996). However, I do see a need – based on the students’ expressed inability to perceive covert discrimination – to teach critical awareness as part of an anti-oppression education.

Regardless of whether or not active participation by all students was encouraged, it is indisputable that the form of active participation envisioned by critical education theorists, and that experienced by students on a day-to-day basis within schools, was quite different. Specifically, students were not encouraged to be leaders in their education, but were more often the passive recipients of education given by teachers (see Kathleen Weiler, 1991 and other feminist education theorists for a discussion on the problems of teacher authority and classroom hierarchies). Certainly, the increased reliance on television, video, and computers as the media through which learning is expected to occur is resulting in a concomitant increase in passive participation and decrease in active participation (i.e., critical thinking and discussion skills) within the curriculum. Overall, the evidence of the focus group discussions and equity evaluation suggest that the process of critical pedagogy is not systematically occurring in Ontario

classrooms, teachers and students are not actively engaged in creating a curriculum that meets their specific needs and interests, and that students are not even aware of all the educational possibilities that active participation can be.

Addressing Racism and Sexism in the Curriculum

Table 10

Descriptive Statistics for Equity Statement 7

Statement	mean	sd	min (%)	mode (%)	max (%)
7 Teachers addressed any racism or sexism contained in the school curriculum (e.g., content, language, and illustrations).	2.8	1.08	0 (4.3)	3 (42)	4 (27.5)

Note. N=71

This equity statement had the highest mean rating (2.8) of all the statements. Thus, the modal rating was also high, with more than 67% of student respondents stating that their teachers “always,” or at least more than “sometimes,” addressed any racism or sexism that existed within the school curriculum. The students in the focus groups had similarly high ratings for this statement.

Committed and quality teachers. The student participants from the focus group emphasized that the majority of their teachers (as opposed to their textbooks) were effective at addressing racism or sexism within the curriculum. The teachers cited by the students were primarily in English literature and secondarily in history; no teachers from any other subject were mentioned.

I felt that my teachers, in general, did a very good job at [addressing any racism or sexism in the curriculum]. The textbooks... I don't think they did as

well. They're terrible and very Eurocentric, but my teachers were fine. [F2, E]

If we were in English classes, whenever we were reading any novels, everything would always be picked at. I just think of my grade 11 teacher (she was amazing)...she was always trying to make us aware of the existence of the racism and sexism in everything....I think it was maybe just the teachers that I had, but it was there. [F3, E]

Five of the students were thinking only of overt racist behaviour when they made their ratings, as the following quote reveals: "I can't think of any examples, but I don't think [the teachers] would let it go. If there were racist remarks in a textbook or something, they would obviously address it" [M2, E].

Discussing discriminatory discourse The next excerpt provides an example of how some teachers handled discriminatory discourse in English literature.

When you're reading older literature, there's always stuff that's sexist and borderline racist. And I found that teachers always, always, said "You're going to notice something about this line. Now this could be that so-and-so was sexist (and he probably was), but we're studying it from a literary point of view, and if anyone has a problem with that we can discuss it now." [F2, E]

Consciousness-raising A serendipitous event occurred during the focus group that highlighted a benefit derived from this method of data-gathering. In this instance, as one student began explicating the subtleties of sexism and racism within the curriculum that had been revealed to him at university, this educational moment occurred:

- I gave [this equity statement] a 1 because... I think if you gave me this [questionnaire] a year ago and I hadn't come to Laurier, I would probably have given it a higher mark. But just seeing how whole courses are constructed around sexist and racist ideologies like... Western History... the book is filled with old white guys and that's pretty much it. It's a male white world in Western history and in Canadian history and in American history. And so I think that racism was really subtle and I don't think that racism was addressed at all in [my school] courses. [M1, E]

- I never thought of it like that... how it's all old white guys in the history books, and it's subtle... I never really thought of that, but it's true... that is a kind of racism thing that was subtle... [M2. E]

- Yeah. In English, who's the guy you learn about the most? William Shakespeare. Did anyone learn any black, women, Indian...any [other] kind of writers in English? I didn't at least. [M1. E]

Lacking diversity within required reading. When asked directly whether anyone could recall reading the works of a writer whose ethnocultural heritage was not European, their replies were unanimously in the negative. When asked who were the women writers on the reading list for English literature, two Canadian writers (Margaret Atwood and Margaret Lawrence) were noted. The only student who had a different educational experience was the young woman whose secondary schooling was received at an all-female private school. During that time the majority of writers that she had been exposed to in her French and English literature classes were women.

Passive participation revisited. As the discussion on this topic deepened, two students who were previously generous in the praise for their schooling began to critique the limitations of the teaching they received. The conversation excerpt provided below illustrates the weakness of relying almost solely on videotapes to teach culture without providing critical classroom discussion of the presented material.

- Teaching about different cultures using a tv... that's kind of a twisted mirror...that's not really teaching, but letting us absorb in whatever biases and misconceptions that are already in the piece of film. They don't even address what biases and misconceptions may be built into the piece of film that you're watching. [F2. E]

- ...because you don't get a chance to discuss if there are biases within it. [F1. E]

Interpretation

All of the students had faith in their teachers that, in accordance with Ontario's zero-tolerance policy on discrimination, overt racism would always be addressed. However, the students were united in their belief that any subtle racism and sexism inherent within their school curriculum would not be noticed by their teachers and therefore it would pass unacknowledged and unexamined. This indicates a need to train teachers in critical awareness, specifically anti-sexism and anti-racism.

This need also extends to the teachers' choice of textbooks for use in their classrooms. Specifically, several participants criticized the blatant Eurocentrism of their texts, in addition to the overall lack of women and racially/ethnocultural diverse authors in their required readings. It is also worth noting, within the school, the principal critics of racism and sexism in North American culture were teachers from two academic disciplines: English literature and history. Thus, while other areas of academia, such as mathematics and science, have exclusionary histories of racism and sexism, this is not taught to students (nor, for that matter, is it included in MET curricula documents).

Once more, students were critical of their teachers' over-reliance on video within the classroom, specifically in regards to teaching culture. As I noted before, the use of television and video as teaching tools results in passive – not active – participation. The students cited in the excerpt above also criticized the videos they watched in their respective classes as poor teachers of culture, in that the videos contained biased, inaccurate information. Those students' observations also contained an implicit wish to be educated by live persons capable of engaging them in critical dialogue, and not by

machines that can only reproduce a pre-programmed monologue. Indeed, the entire focus group was supportive of the criticisms made by the two students.

In conclusion, the students were certain that overt sexism and racism would always have been addressed by the majority of their respective English and history teachers, but that subtle forms of oppression within the curriculum would pass unnoticed and therefore remain unaddressed. Two specific concerns expressed by students in regards to this topic were the subtle Eurocentrism of school textbooks and the lack of women and culturally diverse authors. Indeed, both are clear examples of covert racism and sexism within the curriculum. Another related concern was the overabundant and uncritical use of television and video as the medium of choice to (mis)educate students regarding world cultures. Thus, it is clear that many teachers, especially those in English and history, wish to participate in anti-racist/anti-sexist education, but that they commonly do not have the knowledge and critical ability to recognize subtle forms of discrimination (e.g., their own Eurocentrism). This shortcoming could be overcome by a combination of two actions: educating potential teachers in the practice of critical pedagogy as part of their training, and the encouragement of community-member participation (e.g., guest educators) within the classroom to assist teachers on topics of which they are either unfamiliar or uncertain (e.g., the diversity world cultures). In this manner, schools would be closer to achieving this particular equity guideline, thereby ensuring the provision to both students and teachers of an education for equity.

Exploring and Challenging the Causes and Patterns of Oppression

Table 11

Descriptive Statistics for Equity Statements 8 and 9

Statement	mean	sd	min (%)	mode (%)	max (%)
8 The causes and patterns of racism in Canada and the world were explored and challenged.	2.19	1.02	0 (5.6)	3 (40.8)	4 (5.6)
9 The causes and patterns of sexism in Canada and the world were explored and challenged.	2.28	1.0	0 (2.9)	3 (39.1)	4 (8.7)

Note. N=71

These two statements were among the three lowest ranked equity guidelines. In total, 53.5% of students deemed that the causes and patterns of racism and sexism were discussed “sometimes” or even less often in the curriculum. The rankings of the focus group participants were lower still than the mean for students as a whole. The discussion of the students’ rankings was short within both focus groups. The extent of the first group’s conversation is provided below:

- In grade 12 English we did one thing that was...it didn’t have much to do with racism; it was more to do with sexism. We looked at ads in magazines, like *Vanity Fair* and *Cosmopolitan*, and we kind of had to do a gender reading on those and how they portrayed women and men. That was really close to something that was exploring and challenging those ideas. Other than that, there was nothing. [M1, E]

- I’d have to say that in my English class, there was a debate on something and one of the issues was racism. That was one chance. The other was in English Media class where we looked at advertisements and stuff...sexism and all that... [F1, E]

- I never did any exercises like that; there was nothing else that looked at racism or sexism. There was nothing in my curriculum at all. [M2, E]

- I do not recall ever discussing the causes and patterns of sexism or racism in Canada. [F2, E]

The second focus group had a similarly short discussion on this topic. The following is their brief conversation, wherein they agreed that their education dealt with sexism much better than racism.

- We had the idea that you weren't supposed to be racist, that racism was bad, that it was older thought, and that it was wrong. That was explored. But the specific patterns of racism, no. Sexism, yes. [M3, E]

- Totally the same thing [as the other participant said]. Nothing really with racism, but sexism, completely. There was a real thing for sexism. [F3, E]

Interpretation

The assessment provided by the students in the focus groups corroborates the results from the equity evaluation: very little work was ever done within schools to help these students and their peers explore and challenge the causes and patterns of racism and sexism in Canada and the world. During 13-14 years of formal education, only one or two opportunities were provided to discuss the issues of racism or sexism. Moreover, the recollections from the student participants suggest that, while discussion on both topics was rare, racism was addressed the least of the two. Thus, the research findings strikingly indicate a need to provide an education for equity that addresses the critical limitations explicitly stated by students above. The rationale is simply that students cannot effectively participate in the transformation of asymmetrical relationships of oppression to ones of equity if they are uneducated – and therefore unable – to recognize the causes and patterns (i.e., the manifold manifestations of racism and sexism) of oppression that exist within their social environment.

Active Participation in the Curriculum by Staff, Parents, and the Community

Table 12

Descriptive Statistics for Equity Statement 10

Statement	mean	sd	min (%)	mode (%)	max (%)
10 Active participation in school programs and learning was expected by staff, parents, students, and community members, including female and male representatives of Aboriginal and racial and ethnocultural minority groups.	2.54	1.11	0 (2.9)	2 (36.8)	4 (26.5)

Note. N=71

Close to 37% of first year students stated that “sometimes” a diverse group of people actively participated in school programs and learning. The mean ranking of the focus group participants was 1.8, which is lower than the group mean for all students (2.54).

Participation of Parents and Community Members. The students noted that, while staff and students were obvious participants in the school, parents were seldom very active and community members even less so. Nonetheless, some parents and other community members were involved.

We had police officers in our schools [and] we had a lot of Aboriginal people come in and do presentations. Parents? Not so much, but there were parents that volunteered in the music department and stuff like that. [F2, E]

I [rated the statement] a 2 because there were parents and students involved in the community. They had some group...[that] would meet every month or so and talk about things in the school and what could be changed. There would be heads of the committee that would talk to the school board several times a year. It was there, but there were no Aboriginal, racial, minority groups at all....They obviously could do more, but they at least had it there. [M2, E]

The following student changed his rating after listening to the discussion on this topic.

[My rating] would be more like a 1 because there wasn't a lot of representation by other cultures in our school. [M1. E]

Among the students, only two could recall a member of the community ever participating in the classroom to support the teaching of any topic. All the students agreed that the teacher was, with these rare exceptions, the only human educational resource provided within the classroom.

Interpretation

Participation by staff and students was expected within school; this is, after all, the way that schools work. However, the active participation by parents and community members was extremely rare. The problem with a lack of wider participation in the curriculum by members of the community was already stated above: the teacher becomes the only human educational resource provided in the classroom. Teachers, like everyone else, have limits to their knowledge and pedagogical methods. People from the wider community surrounding the school could have the ability to fill those gaps, but they are not encouraged to do so. The students in the focus group expressed a preference to learn from people who have direct experience rather than erudition. That is the prime reason for the inclusion of this equity guideline: parents and community members – both male and female – from diverse racial and ethnocultural backgrounds have learning to offer students. The equity evaluation results and the focus group discussions clearly indicate that more work needs to be done within schools to enact this guideline and create a high quality, collaborative anti-oppression education for equity.

Overall Grade of Education for Equity

Only three of the ten equity guidelines discussed in the previous section had more than 50% of students agreeing that they occurred more often than “sometimes.” This indicates a distinct lack of plan and design in the teaching of equity within Ontario, which explains how the total of all individual equity ratings could range from a low of three to a high of 35. Nonetheless, the mean total was 24.37 (N=71), which translates to a 61% or a grade of C-.

Summary and Interpretation of Education for Equity Evaluation

Two focus groups were facilitated to gain an understanding from students of their recollections of anti-sexist/anti-racist education. The following are a summary of the participants’ observations:

- At most, students received a lesson on racism or sexism once during their school career, and during these curriculum units, only acts of overt racism and sexism were taught. Moreover, covert and subtle forms of oppression, such as exclusionary history, were not explored and challenged. In fact, bias and inaccuracy were present within their education, and Eurocentrism was covertly (or blindly) promoted throughout the curriculum. Thus it is not surprising that students were not taught in schools how to recognize and critique the relationships of exploitation and domination that are common effects of oppression;
- Students did not consider themselves and their peers as active participants in the curriculum. Specifically, they were not participants in setting the direction of their own education or encouraged to incorporate their own life experiences into the

curriculum in meaningful ways. Furthermore, an over-reliance by teachers upon television and video trained students in passive participation within the curriculum, rather than the preferred modality of active participation:

- Similarly, community members were not active participants in the curriculum either. Namely, they were not invited to share relevant life experiences and learning and thereby participate in school-based learning experiences;
- Women role models were rare, but even so, they occurred more often than multi-ethnic role models;
- Students found it difficult to identify either dominant or minority values in society; and,
- Neither cultural diversity, diversity within cultures, nor stereotypes were sufficiently explored in class.

Overall, the findings from the focus group corroborated and increased the depth of understanding regarding the results of the equity evaluation. The research findings from both research methods indicated that any equity occurring in the curriculum was random; that is, the result of specific teachers, and not by institutional design.

In conclusion, these findings reveal a need for critical pedagogy in schools and an increase in the amount of equity content within the curriculum. Moreover, the results show that most teachers need to be thoroughly educated in anti-racist/anti-sexist education and that the MET guidelines utilized in my evaluation need to become formalized expectations for equity within schools.

Reliability and Validity of Questionnaire

Using the MET's eight curriculum equity guidelines as the basis for an anti-racist/anti-sexist evaluation was an original method of holding the school system accountable for the quality of its anti-discrimination education. Certainly those eight guidelines were never designed for use in a questionnaire; nevertheless that is what I have done and thus I needed to test the reliability and validity of said questionnaire as a meaningful test instrument. To begin, I calculated Cronbach's Alpha to be 0.81, which indicates that the internal consistency, or reliability, of the questionnaire was good. I then examined the intercorrelations between the ten equity statements used in my questionnaire.

I hypothesized that most, if not all, of the equity statements would be significantly correlated because I believe that they are highly interrelated in practice. Namely, the teaching of any one of these equity guidelines indicates a dedication to critical pedagogy, specifically anti-racist/anti-sexist education; and either most are taught or none are taught. For example, I hypothesized that statements 5 and 6 would be correlated because any teacher that integrated all student perspectives into their teaching would very likely be the kind of teacher who would also make students active participants in the curriculum; and this hypothesis was confirmed by my analysis ($r_{56}=.36, p<.001$). In addition, I hypothesized that statements 2 and 3 would be correlated because a teacher that recognizes the importance of presenting a diversity of role models to students would likely include both women and a variety multi-ethnicultural role models; this was confirmed ($r_{23}=.36, p<.001$). Similarly, I expected that a teacher who addressed sexism and racism within the curriculum would also explore and challenge the causes of those

same social problems; thus I expected statements 7, 8, and 9 to be correlated. Again, this hypothesis was supported by my analysis (see table 13 for results). A correlation table for the questionnaire items is presented below

Table 13

Intercorrelations Between Questionnaire Items for Students

Equity Statement	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Taught minority and dominant values	--	.40	.28	.30	.15	.46	.26	.43	.41	.16
2. Diverse racial role models		--	.36	.41	.42	.21	.17	.37	.19	.35
3. Female role models			--	.40	.21	.41	.20	.34	.36	.34
4. Taught diversity within culture				--	.23	.24	.16	.27	.27	.17
5. Integrated all student perspectives					--	.36	.15	.21	.13	.37
6. Students active participants in curriculum						--	.42	.39	.26	.39
7. Teachers addressed racism/sexism in curriculum							--	.32	.26	.39
8. Causes & patterns of racism explored & challenged								--	.66	.40
9. Causes & patterns of sexism explored & challenged									--	.25
10. Participation from community members expected										--

Note. N=71. * $p < 0.05$ (2-tailed). ** $p < 0.01$ (2-tailed).

The highest correlation between questionnaire items was for statements 8 and 9 ($r_{.40}=.656$, $p<.0001$), which indicates that if the causes and patterns of racism were explored and challenged in class, the same could be said for the causes and patterns of sexism, which also confirmed one of my original hypotheses.

I also conducted a factor analysis to examine the validity of the questionnaire as a test instrument (Barbara G. Tabchnick & Linda S. Fidell, 1989). Three factors had

eigenvalues greater than one; therefore one-three factor solutions were considered. Principal component analysis provided a one-factor solution that explained 37.1% of total variance. The two-factor and three-factor solutions explained a further 12.1% and 11.4% of total variability, respectively. The table below provides the total variance explained by each factor using rotation sums of squared loadings.

Table 14

Total Variance Explained using Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings

Component	Eigenvalues	% of Variance
1	2.168	21.685
2	1.998	19.980
3	1.889	18.890

Note: N=71

Factor loadings were calculated using principal component analysis as the extraction method. I considered an item to load on a factor if its value was .35 or greater. The ten equity statements loaded on a single factor with values that ranged from .459 to .711, as can be seen in the table below.

Table 15

Factor Loadings

Equity Statement	Loading Value
1. Taught minority and dominant values	.589
2. Diverse racial role models	.597
3. Female role models	.681
4. Taught diversity within culture	.555
5. Integrated all student perspectives	.555
6. Students active participants in curriculum	.684
7. Teachers addressed racism/sexism in curriculum	.459
8. Causes & patterns of racism explored & challenged	.711
9. Causes & patterns of sexism explored & challenged	.651
10. Participation from community members expected	.569

Note. N=71

While both the two-factor solution and the three-factor solution are possibilities, the scree plot and factor loadings were supportive of a single factor loading, and that solution makes intuitive sense based on the content of the ten equity guidelines. In addition to the statistical analysis of validity described above, participants' responses from the focus group revealed strong face validity for every questionnaire item.

Independent sample t-tests revealed no significant differences on the mean item ratings between the following groups: female (N=50) and male (N=21) participants; students whose racial/ethnocultural heritage was European (N=58) and non-European (N=12); and those who received public (N=56) and separate (N=15) school experiences.

The sample sizes were small for students who were male, non-European, or separate school educated. Nevertheless, Levene's test for equality of variances was met for all items on the gender comparison, and nine of ten items for both the racial/ethnocultural heritage and school system comparisons. In addition, I compared the questionnaire rankings for students who were recruited through the Psychology Participant Pool (N=53) and those who received the questionnaire in Religion and Culture class (N=18); I found no significant differences between the two groups.

Although more testing of this instrument is warranted, these results are a strong indication that the questionnaire could be given to all graduating students within both the public and separate school boards

In summary of this chapter, I discussed student definitions of sexism, racism, and equity; in addition to providing the quantitative and qualitative results from students' evaluations of their education for equity; and a statistical analysis of reliability and validity of the questionnaire as a test instrument. In the final chapter of this study, I discuss my research findings; provide recommendations for action using a report card format; elucidate the benefits and limitations of this study, as well as directions for future research; and conclude my thesis.

Chapter Eight: Discussion

This, the final chapter of my thesis, contains five main sections wherein I present a vision of hope available through critical education; relate the critical findings of this study to the literature of critical pedagogy; provide recommendations for action based on the research findings; discuss the benefits and limitations of this study alongside potential directions for future research in the critical education field; and conclude my thesis

Education for Equity: A Vision of Hope

In the previous sections I have been critical of the Ontario education system and many who work within it: teachers, administrators, board trustees, and government officials alike. I will continue to be critical in this section as well, but I will also take the opportunity to be hopeful as I present my vision for an education for equity. I offer my vision knowing full well that it is a perspective commonly shared by critical pedagogues, both inside and outside of the school system.

Hope is one of the ontologically imperative qualities Paulo Freire continually brought to the study of critical pedagogy. Namely, he believed that hope was a necessary quality for being human. He expressed it thus in an interview with fellow Brazilian educator and critical theorist, Moacir Gadotti:

I know that I cannot continue being human if I make hope disappear and the struggle for it. Hope is not a donation. It is part of me just as the air I breathe. Unless there is air, I die. Unless there is hope, there is no reason for history to continue. Hope is history....At the moment you definitely lose hope you fall into immobilism. Then you are as much a jaboticaba [a tropical shrub in Freire's backyard] as the jaboticaba itself (Freire and Moacir Gadotti, 1995, p. 259).

I believe that what Freire said holds true, and thus I conclude my study and critique with a vision of hope.

If the school system were to be transformed to an environment that entrenched the expectations and resources for a critical education (e.g., see Henry Giroux, 1988; Donaldo Macedo, 1994; Roxana Ng, 1996) within its walls, the following educational possibilities would become ordinary rather than extraordinary, as they are now:

- Students would learn that their lived experience is an invaluable source of knowledge that should be respected;
- Students would appreciate their own culture, that of others, and the multi-ethnicultural interrelationship of all world cultures;
- Students would be taught an informed and inclusive history that presented both the enlightenment and the oppression, the triumphs and the misdeeds of their society and others;
- Students would be active participants in their education (i.e., they would own it), thus giving them the skills and confidence to be lifelong learners wherever they may go in life;
- Students and their teachers would be meaningfully engaged with their social world (school, community, country) and the various social problems that exist within that world; and,
- Students would have a critical language (e.g., racism, sexism, classism) and framework (e.g., post-colonialism, patriarchy, hegemony, ideology) from which to understand, critique and challenge the asymmetric relationships of oppression and exploitation that occur throughout all levels of society. In other words, they would be

capable of “reading the word to read the world.” (Donaldo Macedo, 1994) and thus they would be able to collaborate in transformative social justice initiatives rather than ignorantly participating in the constant production and re-production of social inequity.

Within a critical pedagogy, each of these ideals would cease to be just a possibility and instead become a reality

Relating the Critical Findings to Critical Pedagogy

I have divided the following discussion into two sub-sections based on the two study objectives

Objective 1: To understand student definitions of sexism, racism, and equity

The student definitions of the critical terms – racism, sexism, and equity – closely mirrored the presentation of oppression in Canadian and world history throughout the MET curriculum. Readers will remember that this history, in addition to the contemporary relevance of sexism, racism, and all other forms of oppression, are neatly excluded from the formal curriculum and curricular resources (specifically textbooks) in Ontario schools. In other words, these issues have not been specifically addressed, nor even cursorily mentioned, so there is no reason to expect they would be taught system-wide. Thus, it is not surprising that students made virtually no mention of the Western history of racism or sexism within their definitions. The students’ commonly held beliefs that racism and sexism occur equally and identically between all cultures and both genders could be described as either fragmented history (Donaldo Macedo, 1994) or a

case of historical amnesia (Peter McLaren, 1995). Similar to the MET school board policy, student definitions of racism and sexism lacked any recognition of covert oppression and subtle discrimination, such as exclusionary history. Moreover, the term race was confused and socially misapplied by more than ten percent of participants, and certainly no one indicated that it was a social construct.

Finally, in regards to student definitions of equity, it was largely unheard of or improperly defined as equality (thus omitting its social justice essence). In conclusion, most schools produce students who are ignorant of the meaning of this critical value, in addition to the critical terms, racism and sexism.

Reading the work of Paulo Freire (1973) and others in the field of critical pedagogy has shown me the importance of the process of conscientization before citizens can actively engage with social problems. This is the idea of reading the word to read the world. In other words, if you cannot name the problem, you cannot participate in the transformation of it. The first question I asked in my study was, "Can students name the problem?" I believe that the answer is largely negative because the holistic examination of student definitions has clearly shown large gaps and omissions in their education. However, the focus group results also gave me hope because I saw conscientization at work as well as students who were genuinely interested in learning to challenge the social problems of sexism and racism. This, I believe, is the heart of critical pedagogy.

Objective 2: To gain a student assessment of their education for equity

This study has shown clearly and in great detail that anti-oppression education is not being taught throughout Ontario in a manner that is high quality and consistent across

all areas of the curriculum and across all grade levels. Rather, the research findings confirmed that any anti-oppression initiatives happening within the system are the result of individual teachers acting out of their personal commitment to social justice rather than a systemic plan to provide an education for equity within schools.

As it stands today, the Ontario school system has yet to implement anti-racist/anti-sexist education within its classrooms despite the MET's stated commitment to antidiscrimination education (1999b). This is very likely because Ontario's conservative government, while it has sought to reconstruct the education system within the province in many ways, has shown no interest in directing the MET to enact the visionary guidelines it offered the province in 1993. Until such time as the Ontario school system begins to show a motivation for providing an education for equity within the classroom, continuous public education is necessary regarding the shortcomings of the MET's anti-oppression education with accompanying public pressure to begin critical pedagogy within schools. Before transformation of the school system can occur, public support and advocacy for anti-oppression education needs to occur from stakeholders involved in all areas of education provision (MET officials, school trustees and administrators, teachers and support staff) and education consumption (students, parents, their community, and society). The reason is simple: the interests and responsibilities of these various stakeholders are interconnected and therefore the implementation of a quality education for equity demands their collaboration.

Since I believe that the need for equitable change in the curriculum has already been shown through the data given by students and presented in the previous chapter, I will not reiterate that evidence here. Instead, I have analyzed and condensed those

research findings into a report card that grades the MET's performance on providing an education for equity to its students.

Report Card and Recommendations for Action

The report card below is comprised of eight subjects in an anti-racist/anti-sexist curriculum (i.e., the 1993 curriculum equity guidelines). The grades received by the Ontario school system in each subject were provided by Ontario students. Similar to the typical Canadian report card, recommendations designed to improve the grade in each subject are included below. However, in the case of this report card, the recommendations I am speaking of would transform the school system.

Education for Equity Report Card

Name: Ontario School System

Circled: Graduated Ontario students (Class of 1998-99)

EDUCATION FOR EQUITY SUBJECT	GRADE
1. "Students are taught to recognize minority values as well as the dominant values in our society." (MET, 1993, p. 25)	C-
2. The school curriculum included a diversity of role models and information about women, Aboriginal people and diverse racial and ethnocultural groups.	C-/D
3. "Accurate information is conveyed about a broad range of cultural values, life experiences, and the diversity within cultures." (MET, 1993, p. 25)	C-
4. "The school supports and integrates the perspectives of all students to assist them in living in a diverse society (e.g., the contents of school library, displays, celebrations, school events, calendars, and food services reflect diversity)." (MET, 1993, p. 25)	C
5. "All students see themselves as active participants in the curriculum." (MET, 1993, p. 25)	C
6. "Guidelines are developed to deal with bias in content, language, and illustrations." (MET, 1993, p. 25)	B-
7. The causes and patterns of racism and sexism in Canada and the world are explored and challenged.	D
8. Active participation in school programs and learning is expected by staff, parents, students, and community members, including female and male representatives of Aboriginal and racial and ethnocultural minority groups.	C

Report Card Recommendations

1. Teach the Diversity of Societal Values: Educate students regarding values, both the dominant societal values and those that challenge, or are different, from the norm (i.e., minority values). Students and society-at-large often confuse the term minority values with so-called minority peoples. Likely, the term 'non-dominant,' 'alternative,' or 'oppositional' values should replace 'minority' values. I offer for discussion the following as examples of dominant values in our society: individualism, competition, athleticism, capitalism, retributive justice, and a preference for youth, strength, and a narrowly defined concept of physical beauty. So too, I offer the following as examples of minority values: community, interconnectedness, socialism, restorative justice, and a preference for peace, diversity, and equity. I recognize that I have constructed the list to contain only polar opposites, but I couple that with a recognition that most people would fall somewhere on a continuum for these values, and not at the extremes. Students will benefit from the ability to recognize diverse values in action within society (i.e., in the political decision-making of governments, institutions, corporations, non-governmental organizations, and individuals). Students also need to be able to critically reflect upon all social values and actively choose their own.

2. Provide Role Models and Inclusive Education: Include a wealth of information and role models for women and people of all cultures. This must occur in all areas of the school curriculum: not only in history and English literature, but science and math too. Show students that sexism and racism occurred in Canada, and that exclusionary history was but one unjust manifestation of these social problems (see Nancy Hoo

Kong, 1996). Be wary that the recitation of exclusionary history does not continue; promote and practice inclusive education (see George Sefà Dei, 1998) throughout the entire school curriculum.

3. Teach Cultural Diversity: Show and tell the manifold diversity that exists within Canadian culture, but also give students the opportunity to experience the diversity of Canadians. In so doing, it is of critical importance to teach the diversity between cultures, but also within cultures, because no nation or group of people is uniformly the same. It is also a valuable learning experience to compare and contrast the dominant and minority values from a diversity of cultures with those values that are dominant and non-dominant in Canadian culture. Actively state that diversity is the nature of Canadian culture. Specifically, students need and want to know how they can interact with diversity and how it affects their lives.
4. Integrate Students' Perspectives and Experiences into the Curriculum: Fully integrate multiculturalism and gender equity into all areas of the school curriculum. This means moving beyond simply recognizing culturally significant celebrations or observances, but bringing these issues into relevant classroom discussion for student-teacher edification. The full and equitable integration of students' cultural and gender identity into the curriculum shows students that they have value in education and therefore they have value in the community, province, and country.
5. Actively Involve All Students in the Curriculum: Meaningfully involve students in their own education. This is more than just showing and telling. This means teachers need to invite their students' opinions and experiences into the classroom; then listen and make the students' learning relevant to their lives (Donaldo Macedo, 1994); and

finally, offer students independent learning opportunities within the curriculum. This leads students towards becoming independent learners. Moreover, practice critical pedagogy in the classroom; this will lead students towards becoming critical consumers of information (an important skill in the age of the Internet). These are vital skills for the students of the future because, as the MET noted in 1993, the curriculum is everything that occurs in the school and people are always learning, both in and outside of the classroom. These actions will cultivate powerful learners.

6. Actively Teach Anti-sexism and Anti-racism in the Classroom: This means teachers and student share the opportunity to integrate critical equity work into the curriculum material at any and every opportunity. Show students how to recognize, define, and label inequity and oppression. In addition, teach students how they can act in oppressive situations by giving them real options. Teach teachers how to recognize covert racism and sexism (especially exclusion) in the curriculum and in society because only when they can recognize it themselves can they can teach it to their students (Roxana Ng, 1991, 1995). Furthermore, it is necessary that equity in textbooks and the curriculum accompanies the systemic pedagogical changes noted above. The participants in my study all agreed that the textbooks were very Eurocentric (cf. with Andrew Allen, 1996 and Nancy Hoo Kong, 1996). Therefore, schools need to choose curriculum materials that place a high value on equity and human diversity. Moreover, the MET and school boards need to replace biased resources and provide only current curricular material that supports the accurate teaching of cultural diversity in Canada.

7. Explore and Challenge the Causes and Patterns of Oppression: Discuss the occurrence of sexism and racism in Canada and around the world. That is one example of providing students with opportunities to become knowledgeable about oppression in human relationships. It is crucial to do so because students' perspectives can shift and widen when this occurs. A person should not need to attend university to participate in a critical education (and this is not even guaranteed at university). Furthermore, all students need to continuously receive an anti-oppression education within school so that they are enabled and empowered to become citizens actively working to promote equity and end oppression within themselves and their community.
8. Actively Involve Broad-based Community Participation in the Curriculum: Create an expectation that parents and community members (of both genders and a diversity of cultures) need to be involved in the school. Encourage teachers to open their classrooms to educational opportunities provided by community members. Utilize the anti-oppression educators that may be in the community and create opportunities to involve these people as guest educators within the classroom. Since all teachers have knowledge gaps, invite community members to educate in areas where the teachers are less knowledgeable and therefore uncertain.

Report Card Concluding Remarks: Teachers are, by and large, very resourceful and qualified people: they know pedagogy. For that reason, I did not recommend 'how' to teach, but rather I described the values, intentions, and possibilities that inform a transformative critical education. Many teachers and administrators just need to receive a critical education themselves because their own education was lacking. Additionally, all

teachers need appropriate resources (i.e., contemporary anti-oppression textbooks and multimedia) to effectively provide a critical education within their classrooms. Notwithstanding these facts, the marks received on this report were poor and reveal a drastic need for improvement. To avoid a failing grade in subsequent years, the following primary objectives of an education for equity must be implemented:

- A. The Ontario MET must enact the 1993 curriculum equity guidelines contained in their draft document, *Antiracism and ethnocultural equity in school boards: Guidelines for policy development and implementation*, along with additional guidelines devoted to challenging all forms of oppression (e.g., sexism and classism);
- B. Specific measurable goals need to be created by the MET that will ensure that the province, the school boards, and ultimately each individual school are systematically providing a quality education for equity to all students; and furthermore,
- C. These goals need to be regularly evaluated to ensure province-wide compliance and pedagogical quality.

Benefits of this Study

The benefits of this research are several. Participation in this research project has added to the body of knowledge in this area of study; specifically, it has provided a “snapshot” assessment from recent secondary school graduates as to the effectiveness of schools at delivering anti-racist/anti-sexist education to their students. This study also contains a detailed examination of students’ understanding of three critical terms: sexism, racism, and equity. I anticipate that this information will be useful to both the secondary and post-secondary education systems.

To begin, the data provided by my research are beneficial to the MET and schools when assessing their effectiveness at delivering anti-racist/anti-sexist education to their students. Particularly helpful in this regard are my analyses of the reliability and validity of the MET-based questionnaire as a test instrument. Specifically, I have shown the utility of this questionnaire as a tool for measuring the level and quality of critical pedagogy being delivered in schools. The statistical analysis of my use of the MET guidelines has shown good reliability and validity, thus providing evidence to support the utility of introducing the questionnaire into schools to annually evaluate the quality of students' education for equity.

This research also provides useful information for educators in a post-secondary context. Namely, my research findings could be useful to university professors wishing to gauge the sophistication of incoming students' understanding of the critical concepts of sexism, racism, and equity. My research provides a thorough baseline understanding of graduating secondary students' conceptualization of those key critical terms, in addition to an evaluation of their experience (or lack thereof) with critical pedagogy. I anticipate this data would be useful (perhaps to begin a discussion) in the classroom of any educator working in the subject area of anti-oppression education.

Finally, the most rewarding benefit of this study is that it clearly shows that students *can* evaluate the curriculum and the whole of their education. My research has shown that students have something to say about education, and that it is important that their voices are heard within the system.

Limitations of this Study and Directions for Future Research

My questionnaire sample was limited for several reasons because I used a method of self-selection rather than random assignment. All participants were first year university students who were enrolled in an introductory Psychology or a first year Religion and Culture class. Although both these classes contained students from across all academic disciplines, it is possible that my sample was limited to a certain subgroup of students within these classes. Moreover, if the professor for a certain class provided a critical pedagogy experience in the classroom whereas another did not, then this factor would influence student evaluations

Another limitation of my sample was that the participants were university students rather than graduating secondary students. Although most had graduated from secondary school within eight months of my evaluation, they were still required to recall events that may have become somewhat obscured since that their graduation. My response to that argument is to parallel my evaluation with the standardized school tests already given to students to evaluate their literacy, math, logic, comprehension, and problem-solving skills. If those tests have a sound basis for their implementation then the same can be said for an anti-oppression evaluation. Specifically, if students still in their first year of university do not remember receiving much equity in their education, then this is crucial information for educators and citizens concerned with social justice.

Finally, my study was limited because it had only one investigator. It is possible that a lone researcher could create an unwitting bias among participants during the data gathering phase that could subtly influence the research findings. Although my thesis

advisor and committee members have analyzed my presentation of the research findings and conclusions, I can never be completely certain that the results are not unfairly biased.

Ideally I would like to address these limitations by conducting a comprehensive study that utilized multiple evaluators and a stratified random sample of graduating secondary school students from across all Ontario school boards.

It is my wish that this study provide a starting point for further student evaluations of the critical education they received in school. I have already critiqued the MET and school board policy and curriculum regarding its level of anti-oppression education. But that was only an examination of the discourse of equity, and not its actual practice. Thus, in-depth evaluations of the application of curriculum content and teaching style are necessary steps in determining the actual degree of education for equity in which students participate in school. A potential next step would be to evaluate key critical terms and cultural-historical information that students should possess, asking the question, "How exclusive and uncritical is the current curriculum as it is applied in the classroom?" Another step would be to evaluate the degree to which students can critically assess their society, thus answering the question, "Are their teachers providing a critical pedagogy?" This work could be an important step towards revealing that student require a deeper grounding in critical pedagogy and education for equity.

Finally, it would be useful to provide an opportunity for students to receive exposure to a critical education for equity initiative *within schools* and ask for their evaluation of this initiative. In fact, that was my original research proposal. An action research initiative of that sort could potentially lend much-needed support to the argument for the provision of critical pedagogy in schools. For that reason I have

included my proposed intervention-evaluation as an appendix to this research (see Appendix I).

Conclusion

Critical pedagogy is an educational strategy that directly challenges the ideology, structures, and practices that maintain social inequity in society. It is a process that seeks to transform the education system so as to transform the governing values and actions of society to one of equity and justice. As noted earlier, critical pedagogy occurs in both process and content. The process is one of engaging students in a critical dialogue regarding racial, gender, and other social inequities maintained in our society through ideology and hegemony; it is a conversation that intentionally recognizes the diverse subjectivities and histories of oppressed groups of people. Moreover, the process of critical pedagogy requires a curriculum content that is rich in terms of representing the diverse realities of all persons

The findings of my research indicate that an anti-racist/anti-sexist critical pedagogy is not happening systematically throughout Ontario schools. Students' definitions of racism and sexism have marked their perceptual boundaries for these social problems; and they have clearly indicated that the MET equity guidelines were not being met in a comprehensive and quality manner during their primary and secondary school education.

Our democratically elected governments, both federal and provincial, have espoused equity and social justice values. In order to put these values into practice, we require a province-wide anti-oppression education for all students in all grades. In order

for this to occur, the MET must begin by enacting the visionary equity guidelines that were collaboratively created in 1993; expecting these guidelines to be implemented within all areas of the school curriculum; and providing critical educational support and learning resources for teachers. Only when this occurs will we be ensured of the Ontario school system's commitment to providing a critical education for equity within every Ontario classroom.

Endnotes

The West is a term commonly used to describe the nations of Europe and North America. However, a notion of the West also requires a notion of The East, which has been exoticized and otherized by scholars, writers, and artists for centuries, much to the detriment of Eastern peoples and cultures. This Western cultural phenomenon is analyzed and critiqued by Edward Said in *Orientalism* (1978).

I have used an endnote on this occasion to highlight a problem that will re-occur from time to time throughout my thesis: that is, the use of labels to categorize, define and describe ourselves, and perhaps more destructively, other people too.

² The term Indian, as it is used today to refer to the Indigenous peoples of Canada is a colonial artifact and historical misnomer within our culture. The Eurocentric designation of non-European people into groups known as East Indians (the only people truly from India), North American Indians, and West Indians seem very inappropriate to me, and thus I choose to avoid them. The term Indigenous or Aboriginal, while correct by definition, have been critiqued by those people to whom the name is directed: the reason: the name was popularized by the Canadian government and not by the Aboriginal people themselves, thus it was another case of Euro-Canadians labeling the 'other'. A popular name amongst younger Aboriginal people is First Nations, although this appellation has also met criticism from the Métis because of its exclusivity. Many choose to circumvent this problem by using band names, such as Cree and Ojibwa, or a combination of these as necessary. Nonetheless, Indian is still a commonly used name for Aboriginal women and men to refer to the entirety of First Nations people, although this term is most often used by those in older generations.

³ The title of the report was *The Development of a Policy on Race and Ethnocultural Equity*. For a discussion of the report, see the article by Goli Rezai-Rashti (1995b).

³ Ng has provided several examples of the intersection between race, gender, and class in her article. She stated that Canadian immigration policy – past and present – functions differently depending on gender and ethnocultural heritage; and that the differentiation in treatment determines new immigrants relationship to the means of production in Canada, consequently affecting class. An example from Canadian history is the indentured labour system which “imported” Chinese men to build railways while prohibiting the immigration of their wives and families. These inequitable policies were based on race and gender and intended to maintain these men within a low economic class.

⁴ This information that follows is based on an unpublished paper I wrote in 1999 describing my investigation into this area of exclusionary history.

⁵ In fact, I have seen the term ‘anti-sexist’ used only once. This was in an article by Goli Rezai-Rashti (1995a).

⁶ It is interesting to note that terms such as revolutionary pedagogy, engaged pedagogy, liberation pedagogy, and transformative pedagogy, have all been created to draw distinctions and make criticisms about critical pedagogy.

⁷ The federal government was critical of Canada’s colonial history of assimilation. Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau gave the following criticisms and promise of equity when introducing this legislation:

There cannot be one cultural policy for Canadians of British and French origins and one for aboriginal people and yet a third for all the others. For although there are two official languages, there is no official culture, nor does any ethnic group take precedence over any other. No citizen or group of citizens is other than Canadian, and all should be treated fairly (as cited in Rezai-Rashti, 1995b).

¹ Black History Month began as 'Negro History Week' in 1926 through the efforts of African American historian, Carter G. Woodson. Woodson established the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History in 1915 and used this group to apply public pressure for the inclusion of black Americans into history. The second week of February was chosen by Woodson for this recognition because it marked the birthdays of two US men who, in his opinion, had made the greatest impact on the lives of African Americans: black abolitionist, Frederick Douglass; and white president, Abraham Lincoln. In 1976, 50 years after its inception, this celebration of African American achievement was expanded to become Black History Month.

¹⁰ This occurred within the Waterloo Region District School Board in 1996.

¹¹ Despite my constant usage of the terms, MET or Ministry, it is important to recognize that the MET is not some monolithic entity or 'it', the MET is simply a human organization.

¹² I include this quotation because, as the first sentence in the first paragraph of section 7.1: *Antidiscrimination Education*, its primary discursive role is to set up the entire discussion on discrimination and equity

¹³ As I was re-reading this passage and reflecting on my choice of metaphors, I think it fair to say that my arguments in this paragraph have been influenced by Toni Morrison's book, *Beloved*. This novel, in the guise of a ghost story, addresses the historical consequences of slavery in the Americas.

¹⁴ The Ministry of Education (MOE) amalgamated with two other provincial Ministries and became the Ministry of Education and Training (MET) with the inception of the Mike Harris government in 1995.

¹⁵ Two streams, Academic and Applied, will replace the three streams (Advanced, General, and Basic) presently used in secondary schools. There are subtle differences in expectations between the two new streams, but these were not noted in the letter I received, although I have analyzed the source documents and noted them in the discussion that follows.

¹⁶ The same commendations and criticisms that I have made in this section regarding the Ontario secondary school curriculum can be applied to the primary school curriculum (MET, 1998), which I have also reviewed, but not included in the discussion herein.

¹⁷ The Waterloo County Board of Education (WCBE) became the Waterloo Region District School Board (WRDSB) in 1997, acquiring new geographical boundaries and a new acronym because of Ontario school board amalgamation.

¹⁸ It would be slightly older in places, such as Brazil, because Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* was not translated from Spanish to English for approximately six years.

¹⁹ This committee's 1987 report largely influenced the 1993 MET policy document that was the catalyst for my research methodology.

²⁰ This term is taken from the critical discourse surrounding the treatment of mental health/illness. 'Consumer/survivor' is a term of empowerment chosen by many recipients of institutional treatment to describe themselves. Its use connotes the sense of social, and in particular, institutional oppression and victimization experienced by many of these people.

²¹ This is yet another problematic term. In Canada, the concept of visible minorities was created in the early 1970s to avoid pejorative terms, such as 'coloured people' and 'non-whites,' which were common at the time (Anthony Synnott & David Howes, 1996). It was designed to signify the common problem of racial prejudice experienced by all people not of the white race. However, the ambiguity of both words in the term has raised the question: 'Who may be considered a visible minority?' For instance, homeless people have been considered to be part of this group because they are both visible and a minority, but this was never the intention. The idea of being a minority is related to population size, but also to intangibles such as economic, political, and social status. Thus, one can cease to be seen as a visible minority through an upward change in status, although one's ethnocultural heritage and skin colour remains unchanged. Despite detailed description within national legislation of exactly who *is* a visible minority, the usage of this term within public discourse is neither clear nor uncontested.

²² Perhaps the most important factor in my decision-making was the one that occurred at gut-level: I associate the capitalization of white with the term 'White Supremacy,' and I instinctively wish to distance myself from a word filled with so much hatred and ignorance.

²³ Unlike Roxana Ng (1991), I have not analyzed in depth the various intersections of race and gender (much less class) in my thesis. Since it was never the purpose of my study to either describe or analyze these potentially complex intersections, I have only provided the contextual information, and I leave their interpretation to the reader.

²⁴ Anyone adopting my original research design at some point in the future may benefit from a summary of the reasons my project was halted. Hence, the three primary problems and criticisms I faced are included within the appendix mentioned above because they may be potential concerns at other school settings that would need to be overcome before a similar intervention and evaluation could be accomplished.

²⁵ The Participant Pool is an option given to students enrolled in the introductory Psychology 100 course wherein they can gain a maximum of 5% added to their final grade through participation in psychological research occurring within the department. Students are recruited from a bulletin board where they read a summary of the available research studies and sign up to the ones of their choice.

²⁶ This range was calculated by subtracting the date of data-collection (the entire month of March) from a secondary school year that ends in the last week of June.

²⁷ All participants were collapsed into one of these two groups. The decision behind this particular statistical analysis could be criticized for one of the very things this research critiques, namely essentialization and ignorance of the diversity within ethnocultural groups. The rationalization for this analysis was simple: my sample did not include sufficient members of various racial/ethnocultural groups to provide any other meaningful statistical analysis. This particular statistic is not especially meaningful in itself, and was conducted only to support the inclusion of everyone within my analysis, rather than separating participants into groups. I do not wish to support, through the use of this particular analysis, a belief in the "commonsense racism" (Roxana Ng, 1995) that all non-Europeans are a homogenous group.

²⁸ NA is the acronym I chose to substitute for North American, just as I have used E to substitute for European. I distinguished between two general groups of Aboriginal people, those whose heritage is from what is now known as North America and those who would consider themselves as South American Aboriginals. No one who participated in this research described their racial/ethnocultural heritage using the latter category.

²⁹ Although racism and sexism undoubtedly occur in non-Western cultures, I have limited my discussion and conclusion to the West simply because I do not wish to speculate about cultures to which my knowledge and experience is limited or non-existent.

³⁰ However, curriculum has since been re-defined by the MET under the direction of the Progressive Conservative government. The curriculum has presently been confined and defined as "the plan for student learning outlined in MET curriculum policy documents and implemented in classroom programs through the use of a wide range of resources" (p. 79, MET, 1999a).

Appendix A
Personal Information Sheet

1. How many years since you left high school? _____

2. In which province did you receive the majority of your education? _____

3. In which school system did you receive the majority of your education?
Please circle one answer for each of the following groups of grades.

K-6	Public	Separate	Other
7-8	Public	Separate	Other
9-12/OAC	Public	Separate	Other

Please note: Since this research is on the topics of racism and sexism, the following two questions are included because they may help to contextualize my research findings.

4. Gender: Female Male

5. How would you describe your racial or ethnocultural heritage using the following broad categories:
 - Aboriginal North American
 - Aboriginal South American
 - African
 - Asian
 - European
 - Other _____
 - _____

How accurately do each of these statements¹ reflect the whole of my elementary and secondary school education?

Please use the following scale to give your responses in the spaces provided below:

Always 4	3	Sometimes 2	1	Never 0	My Answer
Print the letter D if you Don't Remember or Don't Know an answer to the statement.					
Statement					
1 We were taught to recognize minority values as well as the dominant values in our society.					_____
2 The school curriculum included a diversity of role models and information about Aboriginal people and diverse racial and ethnocultural groups.					_____
3 The school curriculum included female role models and information about women.					_____
4 Accurate information was conveyed about a broad range of cultural values, life experiences, and the diversity within cultures.					_____
5 The school supported and integrated the perspectives of all students to assist us with living in a diverse society (e.g., diversity reflected in the contents of school library, displays, celebrations, school events, calendars, and food services)					_____
6 All students saw themselves as active participants in the curriculum.					_____
7 Teachers addressed any racism or sexism contained in the school curriculum (e.g., content, language, and illustrations).					_____
8 The causes and patterns of racism in Canada and the world were explored and challenged.					_____
9 The causes and patterns of sexism in Canada and the world were explored and challenged.					_____
10 Active participation in school programs and learning was expected by staff, parents, students, and community members, including female and male representatives of Aboriginal and racial and ethnocultural minority groups.					_____

¹ Each of the above statements was adapted from the Ontario Ministry of Education and Training's (MET, 1993) *Antiracism and ethnocultural equity in school boards: Guidelines for policy development and implementation*. See Appendix A for a comparison of the verbatim MET guidelines and my questionnaire statements.

Dear Participant.

Thank you very much for giving your time to complete this questionnaire; without your participation I would have no research.

Would you be interested in participating in a focus group that would examine these questions in greater depth? If you would, please provide your name and a telephone number where you can be reached. I will then contact you promptly

Thanks again.

Respectfully,

Kevin Black

YES. I would be interested in participating in your focus group.

My name is _____

My phone number is _____

*Please detach this sheet from the rest of the questionnaire and hand in separately.
This will ensure the confidentiality of your responses.*

Appendix C

Comparison of MET Equity Guidelines and Questionnaire Statements

The eight Ontario Ministry of Education and Training (MET) equity guidelines are presented below – verbatim – in the same numerical order as they appeared in the 1993 draft document *Antiracism and ethnocultural equity in school boards: Guidelines for policy development and implementation*. The adaptations of these guidelines that comprised my questionnaire statements appear directly below each MET guideline for ease of comparison. Any modifications that I have made are noted with square brackets. Two questionnaire statements were adapted by myself from MET guideline to become statements on gender equity; these are both noted with an asterisk (*).

1. “Students are taught to recognize minority values as well as the dominant values in our society.” (p. 25)

[We were] taught to recognize minority values as well as the dominant values in our society
2. “Curriculum materials include information about Aboriginal people and diverse racial and ethnocultural groups.” (p. 25)

[The school curriculum included a diversity of role models and] information about Aboriginal people and diverse racial and ethnocultural groups.

[The school curriculum included female role models and information about women.]*
3. “Accurate information is conveyed about a broad range of cultural values, life experiences, and the diversity within cultures.” (p. 25)

Accurate information [was] conveyed about a broad range of cultural values, life experiences, and the diversity within cultures.
4. “The school supports and integrates the perspectives of all students to assist them in living in a diverse society (e.g., the contents of school library, displays, celebrations, school events, calendars, and food services reflect diversity).” (p. 25)

The school support[ed] and integrate[d] the perspectives of all students to assist [us with] living in a diverse society (e.g., [diversity reflected in] the contents of school library, displays, celebrations, school events, calendars, and food services)

- 5 "All students see themselves as active participants in the curriculum." (p. 25)

All students [saw] themselves as active participants in the curriculum.

- 6 "Guidelines are developed to deal with bias in content, language, and illustrations." (p. 25)

[Teachers addressed any racism or sexism contained in the school curriculum] (e.g., content, language, and illustrations)

- 7 "The causes and patterns of racism in Canada and the world are explored and challenged." (p. 25)

The causes and patterns of racism in Canada and the world [were] explored and challenged.

[The causes and patterns of sexism in Canada and the world were explored and challenged.]

- 8 "Active participation in school programs and learning by staff, parents, students, and community members, including representatives of Aboriginal and racial and ethnocultural minority groups, is expected." (p. 25)

Active participation in school programs and learning [was expected] by staff, parents, students, and community members, including [female and male] representatives of Aboriginal and racial and ethnocultural minority groups.

*Appendix D***Wilfrid Laurier University****Letter of Informed Consent – Questionnaire**

Dear Student Participant,

My name is Kevin Black and I am a graduate student in the Community Psychology program at Wilfrid Laurier University. During my graduate course work I have been exploring the social problems of racism and sexism in Canadian society and the educational system. Under the supervision of my thesis advisor, Dr. Susan James, I am conducting an exploratory study entitled: Understanding oppression through the eyes of students. The purpose of this study is to recognize how students understand the concepts of racism and sexism in the world, and evaluate whether anti-oppression teaching practices were used during their school careers.

This study involves completing a brief personal information form, providing three short definitions, and rating 10 statements based on personal reflections of your pre-university education. The 10 statements you will be rating are based on educational guidelines provided by the Ministry of Education and Training, such as “the causes and patterns of racism in Canada and the world were explored and challenged” and “all students saw themselves as active participants in the curriculum.”

Myself and my advisor will be the only people with access to the completed questionnaires; no one else will be allowed to view them. All data received from the questionnaires will be provided in aggregate form to protect confidentiality. I will keep the questionnaires and their data secure in a locked case at my home during and after the data-entry process. I will destroy them upon completion of my thesis (June 2000).

I estimate the amount of time required to complete this questionnaire will be 20 minutes. Written feedback from my study will be provided on the WLU Psychology research board or by mail prior to the end of May 2000. I will also be available by phone to discuss the feedback and answer any questions you may have.

Risks

Discussions of any important social issue, such as racism and sexism, can be emotional and upsetting. A list of support resources will be provided to all participants in case they feel the need to speak with someone regarding their discomfort at any time during this project.

Benefits

Participation in this research project helps add to the body of knowledge in this area of study. Specifically, it provides recent secondary school graduates an opportunity to give a "snapshot" assessment as to the effectiveness of schools at delivering anti-racist/anti-sexist education to their students. Information of this nature would be useful to both the secondary and post-secondary education systems.

Participation

Your participation in this research project is entirely voluntary; you may decline to participate without penalty. As you know, PS 100 students can gain an additional 4% of their course grade through participation in research or by writing short critical reviews of journal articles. You will receive 0.5% credit for completing this questionnaire through

the Participant Pool. You may withdraw from this research project and still retain your research credit. However, since the questionnaire is anonymous, you cannot withdraw from participation after the questionnaire has been handed in. You may also refuse to answer any questions (without penalty of course).

Confidentiality

In order to protect confidentiality, all information will be provided in aggregate form – never as individuals. Your name or any other identifying characteristics will not be recorded in my thesis. However, your gender and ethnic/racial heritage will be recorded because it helps give context to the information you may provide to my research; it will also be summarized in aggregate form.

Contact

All students are encouraged to contact me at ###-#### if they are interested in more information on this study. You may also contact my thesis research supervisor, Susan James, at 884-0710, extension ####. If you feel that you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, you may contact Dr. Linda Parker, Assistant Dean of Graduate Studies and Research, Wilfrid Laurier University, 884-0710, extension ####.

Consent

I have read and understand the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study.

Participant's signature _____ Date _____

Thank you for your interest and cooperation.

Sincerely,

Kevin Black (###-####)

Susan James (###-####, x. ####)

Appendix E

Focus Group Questions

How accurately do each of these statements² reflect the whole of your elementary and secondary school education?

Discussion Statement

- 1 We were taught to recognize minority values as well as the dominant values in our society.
- 2 The school curriculum included information about women, Aboriginal people and diverse racial and ethnocultural groups. The curriculum also included a diversity of role models from each of these groups.
- 3 Accurate information was conveyed about a broad range of cultural values, life experiences, and the diversity within cultures.
- 4 The school supported and integrated the perspectives of all students to assist us with living in a diverse society (e.g., diversity reflected in the contents of school library, displays, celebrations, school events, calendars, and food services).
- 5 All students saw themselves as active participants in the curriculum.
- 6 Teachers addressed any racism or sexism contained in the school curriculum (e.g., content, language, and illustrations).
- 7 The causes and patterns of racism and sexism in Canada and the world were explored and challenged.
- 8 Active participation in school programs and learning was expected by staff, parents, students, and community members, including female and male representatives of Aboriginal and racial and ethnocultural minority groups.

² Each of the above statements was adapted from the Ontario Ministry of Education and Training's (MET, 1993) *Antiracism and ethnocultural equity in school boards: Guidelines for policy development and implementation*. See Appendix A for a comparison of the verbatim MET guidelines and my questionnaire statements.

*Appendix F***Feedback Sheet**

Researcher: Kevin Black Advisor: Susan James

Title of Study: Understanding oppression through the eyes of students Ref: Code: 1570

Brief Description

In 1993 the Ontario Ministry of Education (MET) created a draft document entitled, "Antiracism and ethnocultural equity in school boards. Guidelines for policy development and implementation." This document contained eight guidelines for anti-oppression guidelines and practices and within the schools, such as "the causes and patterns of racism in Canada and the world [are] explored and challenged" and "all students [see] themselves as active participants in the curriculum." Many people within the education system – teachers, administrators, and government official alike – would say that the status quo is sufficient and that equity is indeed being taught in the schools. However, there are still others that would say there much more remains to be done. A fair and valid reply to this debate requires listening to the voices of the students. For this reason I chose to assess the depth and breadth of students' definitions for the concepts of equity, racism, and sexism. I also asked students to evaluate the quality of their entire education based on the visionary anti-oppression guidelines created by the MET (yet never enacted).

Two methods of data collection were utilized in my study: questionnaires and focus groups. 71 students participated in the questionnaire section, which included six others that participated in both the questionnaire and the focus group. Participants were

recruited at WLU through the Psychology 100 Participant Pool and an introductory Religion and Culture class.

This research is related to the PS 100 text in the section entitled "Prejudice and Discrimination" (pp. 672-680). Of direct relevance to my study are the sections that described the origins of prejudice (and social learning in particular) and methods of challenging prejudice. These sections of the text are pertinent since I focused on the degree that the formal school system had given students an anti-racist/anti-sexist education.

Summary of Findings

The questionnaire consisted of two parts wherein students were asked to: 1) provide a definition for sexism, racism, and equity; as well as 2) rate 10 MET statements regarding equity in the pre-university education they received. These results are summarized below:

- Sixty-five percent of students defined equity as 'equality,' which is not surprising given that they are both derived from the same Latin root. Equity was also associated with 'rights' and 'opportunity,' which is near to the true definition of equity rooted in justice and fair treatment. However, 21% of students were either unfamiliar or unsure of 'equity,' and thus they were unable to define it at all; no uncertainty occurred for either racism or sexism.
- The most frequently used word to define both sexism and racism was 'discrimination' (38% and 27%, respectively). Key words, such as 'prejudice,' 'stereotype,' and 'bias,' appeared fairly frequently (approx. 10% each). The majority of students

defined racism and sexism as some form of discriminatory thoughts or behaviour that occurred equally between people. Only two students acknowledged the Western history of these terms, specifically that women and people of non-European heritages have been the targets of these forms of oppression and exploitation.

- A C- or 61% was the overall grade that students gave the schools for anti-racist/anti-sexist education. Only three of the ten equity guidelines had more than 50% of students agreeing that they occurred more often than 'sometimes.' This supports other evidence that stated that any equity occurring in the curriculum is the result of specific teachers, and not by institutional design.

Two focus groups were hosted to gain an understanding from students of their recollections of anti-sexist/anti-racist education. The following are a summary of their observations.

- At most, students received a lesson on racism or sexism once during their school career, and during these curriculum units, only acts of overt racism and sexism were taught. Thus, covert and subtle forms of oppression, such as exclusionary history, were not explored and challenged. So too, students were not taught in schools how to recognize and critique the relationships of exploitation and domination that are common effects of oppression.
- Students did not consider themselves as active participants in the curriculum. Specifically, they were not participants in setting the direction of their own education or encouraged to incorporate their own life experiences into the curriculum in meaningful ways. In addition, community members were not invited to share relevant life experiences and thereby participate in the curriculum too.

- Women role models were rare, but a variety of multicultural role models were even more so.
- Students found it difficult to identify either dominant or minority values in society.
- Neither cultural diversity nor stereotypes were sufficiently explored in class.

Significance for Future Research/Recommendations for Action

Participation in this research project has added to the body of knowledge in this area of study. Specifically, it has provided a “snapshot” assessment from recent secondary school graduates as to the effectiveness of schools at delivering anti-racist/anti-sexist education to their students. I anticipate that this information will be useful to both the secondary and post-secondary education systems. Specifically, this information could be useful to university professors wanting to gauge the sophistication of incoming students’ understanding of these important concepts. The data provided by my research is also beneficial to schools when assessing their effectiveness at delivering anti-racist/anti-sexist education to their students.

These findings also reveal a need for critical pedagogy in schools and an increase in the amount of equity content within the curriculum. Moreover, the results show that most teachers need to be thoroughly educated in anti-racist/anti-sexist education and that the MET guidelines utilized in my evaluation need to become formalized expectations for equity within schools. The statistical analysis of my use of the MET guidelines indicated good reliability and validity, thus providing evidence to support the utility of introducing the questionnaire into schools to annually evaluate the quality of students’ education for equity.

*Thank you very much for giving your time to participate in this study;
without your participation I would have no research.*

*Appendix G***Focus Group Feedback Request**

May 18, 2000

Dear [Participant's Name]

The package you've received contains three items: 1) a transcript of your focus group; 2) a current draft of the results section from my thesis; and 3) the research participant feedback sheet.

If you wish to give me your feedback – Please read this material as soon as possible.

I have sent you this package because I want your feedback. When you look at the results section, did I get it right? Specifically, are the quotations you have provided accurately represented in my thesis and a good reflection of the discussion? I want to make absolutely certain that you have no concerns regarding the information you provided during the focus group

If you read through my results section and have any concerns or questions, please call me at (###) ###-#### and leave a message; I will call you back as soon as possible. If there are any quotations that you wish to have removed, I need to know as soon as possible. However, I do not anticipate that this will be a problem because I have worked hard to accurately transcribe the discussions; describe and analyze all points of view; and protect your confidentiality. I have done so because I respect and value the information you provided to me during the focus group discussion – after all, your quotations are the substance of my thesis!

I intend to defend my thesis in June. Therefore, if I have not heard from you by June 5, I will assume that you have no concerns with the quotations presented in my thesis.

Once more I wish to thank you very much for your participation – without your help I would have no research results! I hope you are enjoying the summer break, and I wish you all the best during your remaining years at WLU.

Warm Regards,

Kevin Black
MA Candidate, Community Psychology
Wilfrid Laurier University

*Appendix H***Wilfrid Laurier University****Letter of Informed Consent – Focus Group**

Dear Student Participant,

My name is Kevin Black and I am a graduate student in the Community Psychology program at Wilfrid Laurier University. During my graduate course work I have been exploring the social problems of racism and sexism in Canadian society and the educational system. Under the supervision of my thesis advisor, Dr. Susan James, I am conducting an exploratory study entitled: Understanding oppression through the eyes of students. The purpose of this study is to recognize how students understand the concepts of racism and sexism in the world, and evaluate whether anti-oppression teaching practices were used during their school careers.

This focus group is a continuation of the questionnaire that you have already completed. Six to ten focus group participants will be discussing the same 10 statements that were provided in the questionnaire. The 10 statements being discussed in the focus group are based on educational guidelines provided by the Ministry of Education and Training, . such as “the causes and patterns of racism in Canada and the world were explored and challenged” and “all students saw themselves as active participants in the curriculum.”

The focus group will be audiotaped to aid in the process of transcription and content analysis. Myself and my advisor will be the only people with access to the tapes and transcripts: no one else will be allowed to listen or read them. All data received from the questionnaires will be provided in aggregate form to protect confidentiality. I will keep

the tapes and transcripts secure in a locked case at my home during the data-entry process. I will erase the tapes upon completion of my thesis (June 2000).

I estimate the amount of time required to participate in this focus group will be 1-2 hours. Written feedback from my study will be provided to you by the end of May 2000. I will also be available by phone to discuss the feedback and answer any questions you may have.

Risks

Discussions of any important social issue, such as racism and sexism, can be emotional and upsetting. A list of support resources will be provided to all participants in case they feel the need to speak with someone regarding their discomfort at any time during this project.

Benefits

Participation in this research project helps add to the body of knowledge in this area of study. Specifically, it provides recent secondary school graduates an opportunity to give a "snapshot" assessment as to the effectiveness of schools at delivering anti-racist/anti-sexist education to their students. Information of this nature would be useful to both the secondary and post-secondary education systems.

Participation

Your participation in this research project is entirely voluntary; you may decline to participate without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. As

you know, PS 100 students can gain an additional 4% of their course grade through participation in research or by writing short critical reviews of journal articles. You will receive 1% credit for each hour participating in this focus group through the Participant Pool. You may withdraw from this research project and still retain your research credit. If you withdraw from the study after data collection but before completion of my thesis, your data will be removed from the final document, returned to you, or destroyed. You may also refuse to answer any questions (without penalty of course)

Confidentiality

In order to protect confidentiality, your name or any other identifying characteristics will not be recorded in my thesis. However, your gender and ethnic/racial heritage will be recorded because it helps give context to the information you may provide to my research.

Contact

All students are encouraged to contact me at ###-#### if they are interested in more information on this study. You may also contact my thesis research supervisor, Susan James, at 884-0710, extension ####. If you feel that you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, you may contact Dr. Linda Parker, Assistant Dean of Graduate Studies and Research, Wilfrid Laurier University, 884-0710, extension ####

Consent

I have read and understand the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study.

Participant's signature _____ Date _____

Thank you for your interest and cooperation.

Sincerely,

Kevin Black (###-####)

Susan James (###-####, x. ####)

Appendix I

Original Research Proposal

Principal Investigator: Kevin Black Department: Psychology (CP Program)

Phone:

Name of Research/Thesis Supervisor: Susan James

Full Title of Research Project: Collaboration for critical pedagogy: Social justice through Canadian education

Master's Research: Course Number: Thesis

Expected Starting Date of Study: February 2000

Checklist of Attachments:

- Proposed Consent Forms (see Appendices A and B)
 - Proposed Questionnaire (see Appendix C)
 - Proposed Interview Questions (see Appendix D)
-

Summary of Purpose and Methodology

The purpose of this intervention and evaluation is threefold:

1. Conscientization: this is a political education that involves awareness-raising in addition to the development and practice of a critical language. The focus of conscientization in this intervention is on sexism and racism in society;
2. Promotion of a critical pedagogical process that involves students in a way that is meaningful to them;
3. The creation of critical curriculum recommendations regarding sexism and racism directed to the school, Board of Education, and Ministry of Education and Training.

Critical pedagogy began with Paulo Freire's classic work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1973), and it continues today with the work of many other educators, such as Donaldo Macedo and bell hooks, who are critical of the status quo. Critical pedagogy is

a dialogue between teachers and students where several important abilities are strengthened. Students are taught to recognize, critique, and challenge asymmetric relationships (i.e., relationships of overt or covert domination) using their own valuable personal experiences. Explained in another way, critical pedagogy is the recognition that the personal is political: it is the recognition of the socio-cultural dynamics that exist in society that can oppress or promote certain groups based on arbitrary distinctions created between people (e.g., skin colour, religion, gender, sexuality); it is also the acknowledgement that democracy exists only when equity exists among all people.

The need for political education and awareness-raising regarding the social problems of racism and sexism was brought to my attention through several sources. One source was the Master's thesis of Community Psychology graduate, Melanie Wilson, wherein she found that students thought that an insufficient amount of classroom discussion was devoted to these important topics (1994). This conclusion was further validated by personal communications with numerous teachers during my work as an educational assistant at two local secondary schools. This lack of support for a critical education within the secondary school curriculum was coupled with my personal research of the Canadian history textbooks on Circular 14, the entire list of educational materials available and approved by the Ontario Ministry of Education and Training (MET), wherein I discovered that neither racism nor sexism were mentioned throughout Canadian history! In other words, the formal curriculum resources do not strongly support a critical education, despite the commitments of both the MET and Waterloo Region District School Board that equity must be ensured in the school environment.

This intervention and evaluation was designed so that a common weakness of most curriculum development processes would be overcome. This weakness is a distinct lack of student input into their own education. Although James Banks (1991) and others in the field of critical pedagogy recognize that "when students are empowered, they have the ability to influence their personal, social, political, and economic worlds" (p. 125) the student perspective is largely disregarded during curriculum development:

A significant voice has been missing from the books and articles that have been written about educating [female and] ethnically diverse populations, namely the voice of students. Usually research has been presented from the perspective of teachers, administrators, and experts in the field, virtually ignoring that of students (Maryann Semons, 1991, p. 139)

Therefore, it is not surprising that the outcomes noticed among many students from oppressed social groups are high drop-out rates, negative self-image, alienation, and academic achievement that is below proven ability (Gloria Roberts-Fiati, 1996). Moreover, given the environment described above, it is not surprising to discover that most students are ill-prepared to critically enter a society where discrimination, such as sexism and racism, exist.

A direct challenge to the social problems briefly described above is the use of critical pedagogy in education. This is a process which seeks to transform the education system so as to transform the governing values and actions of society to one of equity and justice. It should be noted that critical pedagogy occurs in both process and content. The process is one of engaging students in a critical dialogue of the status quo that specifically recognizes the diverse subjectivities and histories of oppressed groups of people. However, the process of critical pedagogy requires a curriculum content that is rich in terms of representing the diverse realities of all persons.

While individual teachers may strive to incorporate diversity and equity within their classrooms, the current curriculum does not provide this. Therefore, I propose to facilitate a process of conscientization, or “conscientização” as Freire (1970) termed it, within a classroom in the public education system. The specific focus of my education intervention is a dialogue between students and educators regarding the social problems of sexism and racism within both society and the school curriculum.

Thus, students would be engaged in determining what is missing from current curricula in terms of diversity in history, literature, and science. Leaders and educators of both genders and from within various cultural communities would be directly involved in highlighting some of the holes in the current curriculum and pedagogical process. These educational opportunities would be in the form of eight 75 minute weekly workshops that are integrated into the current curriculum of the classroom. The students would be enrolled from an English literature and an history class at a local Waterloo school and participation in this intervention would be included as part of their course grade.

From the voices of the student and teacher stakeholders, a document would be created that would specify some of the gaps in the current curriculum based on the expressed needs of the students. For example, the stakeholders may request more Aboriginal history, women role-models in science, and black writers. This document would also record the thoughts and feelings of the students as they (hopefully) experience a process of conscientization. I would like to see the students free to express what they have experienced, both in the critical pedagogical process and through the exposure to diverse viewpoints and learnings; moreover, I would like to see various modes of expression available, such as essaying, art, poetry, song, and journalizing.

This project has three basic phases: pre-intervention, intervention, and evaluation. The key task of the pre-intervention phase is the creation of a student-teacher Steering Committee. The intervention phase is the actual classroom discussions with the eight guest educators. The evaluation phase occurs when students reflect on their experience of the intervention and make recommendations for curriculum change. Throughout this intervention, I will be following a Participatory Action Research (PAR) model to discern with stakeholders the missing content from school curricula because its very nature is centred in a process of awareness-raising.

The participation component of the PAR methodology will be manifested in several ways. It will begin through a consultation process with the students and teachers on the Steering Committee. The PAR process expects each stakeholder to bring an awareness of their own educational needs and desires, in addition to a perception of the resources and possibilities available for this project; this will be provided by the Steering Committee during the pre- intervention phase. Further participation will then be demonstrated through the dialogical process between the guest educators and students as these stakeholders gain an opportunity to participate in personal conscientization. Lastly, participation will occur through the solicitation of student perspectives on the research process and recommendations for curriculum change.

The actual data for my thesis research will be given through the following methods:

- Pre- and post-intervention focus group questions
- Mid-intervention evaluation
- Personal journals and final essay
- Recommendations for change

Each of these is described in detail below.

Proposed Procedures

I have broken down this research project into three sections (steering committee, intervention, and evaluation), each described separately below.

Steering Committee: The first responsibility of this committee will be to become familiar with the objectives and methodology of this project so as to provide suggestions and recommendations for change in the following areas (see Appendix I-A):

1. Objectives: are they feasible?
2. Critical pedagogy: how can it be made to work most effectively in their classroom?
3. Methodology: is this an effective framework for action?

Student Steering Committee members will also be asked to reflect on their past education in terms of pedagogical process, anti-racist/anti-sexist content, and their personal understanding and awareness of oppression. The catalyst for this focus group discussion will be the guidelines for the implementation of equity in the curriculum provided by the Ontario Ministry of Education and Training (MET) in their 1993 draft publication entitled *Antiracism and Ethnocultural Equity in School Boards: Guidelines for Policy Development and Implementation* (Appendix I-B). The focus group discussion will provide a four-person baseline for comparison once the intervention is complete and the evaluation begins.

Intervention: This phase involves eight guest educators presenting workshops on the theme of the representation of women and people of diverse non-Western cultures in history and literature. The following is a table that provides a proposed schedule of topics and objectives. Each topic would be presented during one class period 75 minutes

in duration and these sessions would occur weekly, although the teachers may deem it necessary to meet biweekly on occasion.

Session	Class	Topic or Theme	Objective
1	English	The Experience of Oppression	Experience both sides of an oppressive social relationship through drama
2	English	Women and "Minorities" in Media	Explore the influence of the media with emphasis on stereotypes and oppressive images and story-making
3	English	Structural Racism	Examine the social structures supporting racism
4	English	Structural Sexism	Examine the social structures supporting sexism
5	History	Remains of Slavery Today	Discover the colonial artifacts in today's dominant Canadian culture
6	History	Women in Science/History	Explore the exclusion of women role-models in history
7	History	Aboriginal History	Discuss the history of Aboriginal people excluded from history
8	History	Asian Canadian History	Discuss the history of Asian Canadian people excluded from history

The two teachers participating in this intervention will support this initiative through their efforts at integration of the guest educator's topics and material into the regular classroom curriculum. They will also cooperate in this project through assigning each student a grade based on their participation in the research process.

Student participants will be required keep a journal that will be used by them to record their reflections at the conclusion of each presentation. After the eight sessions are complete, these journal entries will have chronicled much of the process of conscientization that has occurred. Thus, during the evaluation phase it will form the basis for students to reflect on what have they learned about oppression through systemic racism and sexism, in addition to what their thoughts are on the process of critical pedagogy.

At the midpoint of the educational intervention, each student will be requested to provide written feedback in the following areas (see Appendix I-A):

1. What do you think of the guest educators' presentations?
2. Do you have any recommendations or changes to suggest?
3. Do you have any personal safety/comfort issues that we should be aware of?

The results of this questionnaire will be provided to the Steering Committee who can then address any critical concerns before continuing with the process.

Evaluation: This phase of the project involves the evaluation of the intervention, specifically addressing these three questions (see Appendix I-A):

1. What have we learned about racism and sexism in our society, the curriculum, and ourselves?
2. What was this experience of critical pedagogy like, and was it worthwhile?
3. What recommendations would we like to make to schoolteachers and administrators, the Board of Education, and the Ministry of Education?

As mentioned above in the previous phase, these questions for final reflection will be in the form of a short summative essay focussed on each student's personal learning, both process- and content-wise, from this critical pedagogy intervention. These essay responses will form the basis of my research findings wherein a content analysis will be conducted and selected quotations will be chosen that represent the depth and breadth of student thought on the issues discussed above

The Steering Committee will also participate in the evaluation by considering the following questions during a second focus group (see Appendix I-A):

1. Should this project be done again, and if so, would they change anything?

2. What are the next steps to have the school move toward equity in the curriculum?
3. Has their understanding of oppression altered noticeably? How would they complete the MET checklist for implementation of equity in the curriculum now?

This last question can serve as a comparison with the responses provided by students during the pre-intervention phase

Problems and Lessons Learned from my Initial Collaboration

For the benefit of anyone following my this research design at some point in the future, I have included a summary of the reasons my original project was halted. Below are the three primary criticism I encountered during the process of collaborating with a local school; these may be potential concerns at other school settings that would need to be overcome before a similar intervention and evaluation could be accomplished. They were

- the possibility of “bad press” and the potential for teacher bashing when morale was already low enough within schools,
- a belief that students do not know the curriculum and are therefore unable to evaluate it (thus, they could not make ‘recommendations,’ but only ‘observations’); and,
- a demand from the school administration that the participating teachers needed to review the published papers of each guest educator and preview their presentations before inviting them to the class. A concomitant concern was then raised that the teachers would thus be additionally over-worked (in addition to the typical teacher’s busy schedule) and that my project would only increase this workload.

Overall, I would recommend beginning the process of collaboration one school year prior to any anticipated critical pedagogy intervention. This would allow plenty of time for negotiation, problem resolution, and mutual learning. I add this last item because it may be necessary to educate other teachers and administrators within the school system regarding critical pedagogy and Participatory Action Research and while this is most assuredly a worthwhile endeavour, it will be necessary to give a lot of time and energy before they are comfortable with these 'new,' revolutionary ideas and practices.

Description of the Proposed Population

Research participants will be secondary school students, all 17-18 years old, from an OAC History class and an OAC English class. A total of four students, two from English and two from History, will participate on the Steering Committee for this project.

Recruitment of Participants

The teachers from each class have agreed to participate and incorporate the guest educator's presentations into the classroom curriculum. Therefore students could be considered a captive population because the presentations are guaranteed to occur in their classroom. Therefore, students will be encouraged to participate and will be compensated by a grade given by their teacher based on the work they produce. However, any student who chooses not to participate will either not attend the presentation, or they will attend the presentation but not complete the work (e.g., journal writing). All potential participants will receive a letter of informed consent prior to the commencement of this intervention and evaluation. Student Steering Committee

members will be approached to participate based on the recommendation of their teachers. Each student from this group will receive a separate letter of informed consent prior to her or his participation on the Steering Committee.

Free and Informed Consent

This is assured through the discussion of the Letter of Informed Consent, and receiving it signed by the student or parent/guardian.

Children (Consent)

Any students 17 years of age or less will have the informed consent form signed by his or her parent or guardian before participation in this project.

Captive and Dependent Populations

Since this population of participants could be perceived as captive because this intervention and evaluation is integrated into their classroom work, they will be given the option of not attending the presentation or attending the presentation but not participating in the discussion and class work. There would be no penalty for non-participation.

Risks

Racism and sexism are two social problems that are very pervasive and insidious. For this reason they are very emotional. Ethical consideration must be given in two main areas or this intervention could cause more pain than it is intended to prevent. These two groups of people are:

- Those people who hold racist/sexist beliefs or practices This is a rather all-inclusive group since I would assert that virtually everyone has either a discriminatory belief, or at least an unwitting practice whose outcome is discriminatory. This group of people may feel guilt, shame or ignorance upon realizing their place in a society that supports discrimination.
and,
- Those people who are the recipients of racist/sexist beliefs and practices. My proposed social intervention includes a process of awareness-raising which may cause some anguish, in addition to a sense of disempowerment and disillusionment for anyone just developing the ability to recognize the covert and subtle forces of discrimination that are manifold in society.

In response to these ethical considerations, I have proposed to use Participatory Action Research as an opportunity to gradually raise awareness and respond to the problems of racism and sexism through dialogue involving student stakeholders. I believe it is the use of dialogue and the gradual process that will be the key elements to balance these ethical considerations. In addition, school counselors will be available on-site to speak with students regarding any important issue that may arise. For those who may prefer an alternative, a list of local resources will also be provided to serve the same counseling role within each students' cultural community.

Benefits

The benefits to this research project are contained within the objectives stated in the first section of the ethical review. Briefly, they are the fostering of a political

education; meaningful student engagement in their own education; and the creation of recommendations for curriculum development

The conscientization or awareness-raising component of this intervention is meant to assist students in the development of a ability to think critically regarding our society and their place in it. At the conclusion of this intervention, students would hopefully be better prepared to participate in the struggle to transform a world where the social problems of racism and sexism exist. In addition, the provision of opportunities for developing the personal capacity for critical thinking will serve all students who choose to gain a post-secondary education.

The opportunity to participate in the creation of recommendations for curriculum development is a unique opportunity for students. This component of my evaluation is intended as an empowering experience for students who have traditionally been excluded from this process. The experience of inclusion is of primary benefit to the participants; however, there is benefit to other students in the educational system given the recommendations are heeded and equity within the curriculum is increased. Finally, this process of meaningful student involvement in the research process (via the Steering Committee) and their education (via the guest educators' presentations and the evaluation) sets a high standard for future curriculum development initiatives.

The final benefit is also the overarching purpose of this project: to bring the experience of equity and a discussion of anti-oppression work into the classroom and lives of students. If I can achieve this goal, then I have used my research to make a difference.

Confidentiality

All student work cited in my thesis will remain confidential. Only the gender of the student will be attached to the quotation because the student's gender may be important for contextual purposes, given the subject of this thesis research.

Any student work I wish to cite in my research findings will only be used after I have received approval by the student.

Compensation of Participants

Participants will receive compensation in the form of a grade assigned by their teacher based on the class work (e.g., final essay) they produce. Although much of the work being graded will form the basis of my thesis research, I will not be involved in the grading of said work in any manner; as with all schoolwork, this is the teacher's responsibility.

Feedback to Participants

Participants will receive written feedback.

Appendix I-A
Interview Questions

Pre-intervention Steering Committee focus group:

1. Are the project objectives feasible?
2. How can critical pedagogy be made to work most effectively in their classroom?
3. Does the project have an effective framework for action?
4. How would you complete the MET checklist for implementation of equity in the curriculum?

Mid-intervention evaluation:

1. What do you think of the guest educators' presentations?
2. Do you have any recommendations or changes to suggest?
3. Do you have any personal safety/comfort issues that we should be aware of?

Post-intervention class discussion and final essay:

1. What have we learned about racism and sexism in our society, the curriculum, and ourselves?
2. What was this experience of critical pedagogy like, and was it worthwhile?
3. What recommendations would we like to make to schoolteachers and administrators, the Board of Education, and the Ministry of Education?

Post-intervention Steering Committee focus group:

1. Should this project be done again, and if so, would you change anything?
2. What are the next steps to have the school move toward equity in the curriculum?
3. Has your understanding of oppression altered noticeably? How would you complete the MET checklist for implementation of equity in the curriculum now?

*Appendix I-B***Steering Committee Questionnaire**

Reflect on these questions: how do each of these statements³ compare with your own education and that of your classmates?

Discussion Statement

- 1 We were taught to recognize minority values as well as the dominant values in our society.
 - 2 The school curriculum included information about women, Aboriginal people and diverse racial and ethnocultural groups. The curriculum also included a diversity of role models from each of these groups.
 - 3 Accurate information was conveyed about a broad range of cultural values, life experiences, and the diversity within cultures.
 - 4 The school supported and integrated the perspectives of all students to assist us with living in a diverse society (e.g., diversity reflected in the contents of school library, displays, celebrations, school events, calendars, and food services).
 - 5 All students saw themselves as active participants in the curriculum.
 - 6 Teachers addressed any racism or sexism contained in the school curriculum (e.g., content, language, and illustrations).
 - 7 The causes and patterns of racism and sexism in Canada and the world were explored and challenged.
 - 8 Active participation in school programs and learning was expected by staff, parents, students, and community members, including female and male representatives of Aboriginal and racial and ethnocultural minority groups.
-

³ Each of the above statements was adapted from the Ontario Ministry of Education and Training's (MET, 1993) *Antiracism and ethnocultural equity in school boards: Guidelines for policy development and implementation*. See Appendix A for a comparison of the verbatim MET guidelines and my questionnaire statements.

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