

Critical Connections:
Teachers Writing for Social Justice

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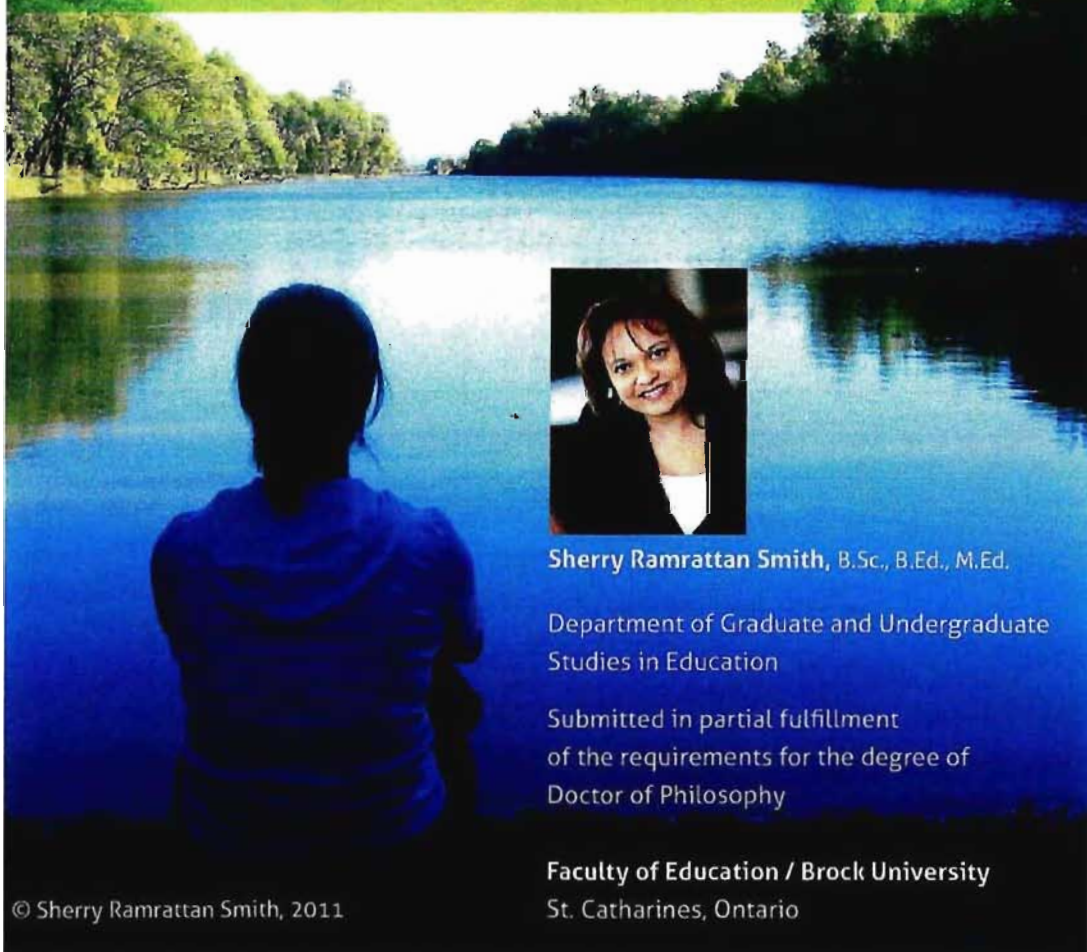
Submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Faculty of Education, Brock University
St. Catharines, Ontario



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Abstract

This qualitative research study explores how teachers who write social justice-focused curriculum support resources conceptualize curriculum and social justice. Curriculum used in schools reflects underlying assumptions and choices about what knowledge is valuable. Class-based, cultural, racial, and religious stereotypes are reinforced in schooling contexts. Are the resources teachers create, select, and use to promote social justice reproducing and reinforcing forms of oppression? Why do teachers pursue social justice through curriculum writing? What are their hopes for this work? Exploring how Teachers' beliefs and values influence curriculum writing engages the teachers writing and using curriculum support resources in critical reflective thought about their experiences and efforts to promote social justice. Individual and focus group interviews were conducted with four teacher-curriculum writers from Ontario schools. In theorizing my experiences as a teacher-curriculum writer, I reversed roles and participated in individual interviews. I employed a critical feminist lens to analyze the qualitative data. The participants' identities influenced how they understand social justice and write curriculum. Their understandings of injustices, either personal or gathered through students, family members, or other teachers, influenced their curriculum writing. The teacher-curriculum writers in the study believed all teachers need critical understandings of curriculum and social justice. The participants made a case for representation from historically disadvantaged and underrepresented groups on curriculum writing teams. In an optimistic conclusion, the possibility of a considerate curriculum is proposed as a way to engage the public in working with teachers for social justice.

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Love, support, and encouragement helped me to stay the course and complete this doctoral research. There was a constant supply of all three readily available from my family and friends. I share this accomplishment with all of you. My sincere appreciation is extended in particular to my parents Rose and Eric, husband Brian, son Benjamin, son Matthew and family, brother Rob, and, of course, our family pet Sparky.

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I would like to give special thanks to the women who opened up their lives to us by sharing their stories. Their courage, strength, and actions help to pave the way to a hopeful future.

We are all teachers and learners, each of us in our own way. This work is for all the people who dedicate their lives to the pursuit of social justice.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction



CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

As a teacher, I have often wondered why some of my colleagues actively pursue social justice goals through the curriculum and others do not. Furthermore, as a racialized female and immigrant to Canada, my interest in social justice is in part grounded in my experiences of being on the margins and also bolstered through my interactions with colleagues and students who share similar experiences. Together, as a group of teachers and students, we are inextricably linked by our stories. We have experienced and observed unfair situations just about everywhere and every day. Sometimes we choose to ignore these situations while at other times we step in to help. What are the factors that precipitate our decisions to become engaged and actively work against injustices? As a teacher who is committed to social justice, I have become increasingly curious about my motives and those of my teacher colleagues who are like-minded in their pursuit of social justice.

Social Justice and Curriculum: Why I Care

Over the thirty plus years of my work in education, I have collaborated with colleagues in many curriculum writing endeavours to create a broad range of social justice curriculum resources. The products we have created include pamphlets and posters, as well as online materials and school-wide kits. But are these materials really moving us towards our social justice goals? Or are they simply products of Eurocentric systems of education that perpetuate myths, misinformation, and stereotypes? Are educational institutions reinforcing the status quo and sanctioning only certain types of knowledge through curriculum? I decided to combine these two areas of interest, the pursuit of social justice and curriculum writing – both of which I am very passionate about, as a focus for doctoral research. I wanted to explore how teachers who write what I

refer to as *social justice-focused curriculum support resources* conceptualize curriculum and social justice. Curriculum resource materials focused on social justice and equity issues support the Ministry of Education's mandates, but are intended to help students learn how to critically probe into social issues, relationships, everyday interactions, and systemic inequities. I also wanted to find out what teachers who write these support materials say about their work and how they think about and understand their curriculum writing experiences. Although abundant literature about social justice (Affolter, 2006; Ball, 2006; Fine & Weis, 2005; Giese, 2008; McLaren, 2007; Park, 2008) and curriculum (Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, & Taubman, 2004; Reynolds & Webber, 2004; Schick & St. Denis, 2005; Slattery, 1995; Westbury, 2008) exists, the voices of teachers who advocate for social justice by writing social justice-focused curriculum are not often visible. This study is meant to provide a space to represent the experiences of those teachers and to contribute to filling a gap in this area.

Chapter Summaries

In Chapter one, I provide an overview of the research: including background information, context, the relevancy of multicultural and anti-racist education as springboards to curriculum for social justice, rationale for inquiry into curriculum writing, and research questions. Chapter two explores and discusses critical theory, critical race theory, feminist theory, and provides suggestions for curricular application of these theories. Historical conceptions and current interpretations of curriculum are included to demonstrate how a re-conceptualized understanding of curriculum can promote social justice in education. Chapter three explains the methodology of the study in detail: a critical feminist qualitative research approach, researcher-positioning,

participant profiles, participant recruitment, data collection and analysis, ethical considerations, and reciprocity. In Chapter four, I share extensive parts of my story to demonstrate how my experiences have informed my interest in social justice and curriculum and brought me to the work of curriculum writing. In due course, I theorize about these experiences and related significance. Chapter five is focused on the four women teacher-curriculum writers who participated in the study. Their stories are constructed from data analysis of interviews, focus group meetings, journals, and related shared documents. Chapter six provides a discussion of emergent themes from the study. In Chapter seven, I return to my research questions to provide ideas and strategies regarding teacher education and teacher practice. I outline a school-community collaborative approach for social justice education. I also include suggestions to support social justice curriculum writing, as well as areas for future research.

Overview and Background to the Study

What influences how we educate? Trends in education often change according to the political agendas of governments (McCaskell, 2005). Government political agendas may, in part, determine how curriculum is interpreted and promoted within particular educational jurisdictions. As governments change, different curriculum ideologies often become what influences schooling contexts. Eisner describes curriculum ideologies as “sets of beliefs about what should be taught, for what ends, and for what reasons” (1992, p. 304). Ministry of Education curriculum mandates are based on particular curriculum ideologies which are often linked to broader societal shifts and political ideologies (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009). Attempts to integrate and emphasize social justice into curriculum often mirror these shifts.

I focus on the span of time from the 1970s to the present as the context to explore how social issues were introduced into classrooms in Ontario. I select the 1970s to the present, 2011, because during this timeframe I was a student in Ontario, a teacher for 18 years within the educational system, and a teacher union employee for almost 12 years. These experiences shaped my understanding of curriculum and the importance of how social justice is emphasized in schools.

Federal Government Policy: Multiculturalism

In 1971, multiculturalism became an official policy in Canada and cultural difference was acknowledged as part of the Canadian identity (Government of Canada, 2007). By introducing this policy, the government's intention was to provide individuals (at least in theory) with freedom to maintain their various cultural backgrounds and traditions. These differences would contribute to the richness of the Canadian mosaic by promoting cross-cultural understanding and tolerance. In Ontario, the Ministry of Education mandates changed in significant ways through the decades that followed.

Ontario Ministry of Education Mandates

According to Labatt (1993), the Ministry of Education forced changes into the education system very quickly. She was critical of these changes and pointed to the fact that very few teachers were involved in writing curriculum resources in the early 1970s as an issue (pp. 211-212). The curriculum report and guideline, *Living and Learning*, introduced in 1968 by the Department of Education, still remained in place in the early 1970s (Ministry of Education, 1968). Labatt pointed out one of the limitations of the document: "It [the guideline] talked about equality for all people – except women. The entire book was written with male pronouns" (p. 105).

In 1975, Thomas L. Wells, Minister of Education, introduced *The Formative Years* into Ontario's education system. Building respect, understanding relationships, developing a sense of personal identity, and developing values were listed as aims for primary and junior students in *The Formative Years*. The small 24-page booklet summarized goals and curriculum expectations for the following areas: Mathematics, Language, Perception and Expression, Drama, Music, Visual Arts, Physical Education, Health, Values, Decision-Making, The Individual and Society, Science and Geography, and Canadian Studies (Ministry of Education, 1975). No authors were named. Labatt (1993) wrote that when the Ministry guideline, *The Formative Years*, was distributed to schools, "Puzzled teachers could not ask the principal what it meant because the principal often did not know" (p. 213). Perhaps this lack of direction was due in part to the limited size of the resource or lack of support for its implementation. Clearly, in-depth explorations of the topics could not be accomplished in such a cursory way.

In 1978, Minister of Education, Dr. Bette Stephenson introduced another guideline entitled, *Children With Physical Handicaps and Health Impairments* (Ministry of Education, 1978). The curriculum resource guide offered general information about addressing the needs of students with some forms of disabilities. The committee responsible for writing *Children With Physical Handicaps and Health Impairments* was comprised of two Ministry staff, two special education representatives, a principal, and a vice-principal. Although the document was only 12 pages long, it provided descriptors of medical conditions, offered teaching suggestions, and considerations for supporting students with special needs. The construction of the document involved educators and its contents proved to be useful. However, teachers continued to put pressure on their unions

to lobby for more curriculum changes from the government to address the growing diversity of students within their classrooms including immigrant populations and English as a Second Language (ESL) students. Teachers who were equity-minded wanted and needed additional curricular supports to assist them in addressing issues such as racism, sexism, and homophobia.

Teacher Union Involvement

By the late 1970s, the Federation of Women Teachers' Associations of Ontario (FWTAO), a large teacher union, began to take a more active role in articulating positions for curriculum change to address the myriad of students' needs identified by teachers. In a lobbyist role, FWTAO produced a variety of briefs and position papers on a number of educational concerns and presented them to the Ministry of Education (M. Dickson, personal communication, October 20, 2008).

The activist role of FWTAO met with some success because, by the 1980s, the Ministry of Education began to actively seek out more partners through teacher union involvement. In Ontario, teacher unions were organized under the auspices of the Ontario Teachers' Federation (OTF). The Federation of Women Teachers' Associations of Ontario, The Ontario Public School Men Teachers' Federation - OPSMTF, later OPSTF – the word *men* was removed, The Association des enseignantes et des enseignants franco-ontariens, The Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association, and the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation were all members of OTF. Representatives from these unions met regularly at OTF union meetings where they discussed topics of shared interest and curriculum concerns. OTF forums continue presently (2011).

Ministry-Union Collaborative Projects

As in the 1970s, the Ministry of Education continued to provide curriculum guidelines and memoranda that specified policies and instructional guidelines for teachers to follow. In partnership with OTF, the Ministry invited unions to participate collaboratively and support the implementation of mandated guidelines. Union affiliates were asked to name staff representatives to serve on curriculum committees. Curriculum committees then took leadership roles in submitting proposals to support various curriculum-related initiatives. For example, FWTAO took an active role from the 1970s through to the 1990s in promoting drug-free schools, gender equality, anti-violence initiatives, and multiculturalism (Labatt, 1993). With partial funding from the Ministry received through OTF, FWTAO embarked on several initiatives, one of which was an extensive computer training program. The computer training program involved several components: building computers, creating computer programs, developing a 'train the trainer' model where women teachers trained one another, holding conferences, and presenting workshops. By designing and implementing a comprehensive approach, women teachers began a process of disrupting the stereotype of the 'male computer expert' and gender issues emerged as a focus within the framework of technology. The computer training program was a catalyst for the development of subsequent curriculum support resources and implementation of related programs (Dickson, 2008).

FWTAO continued similar initiatives through collaborative efforts with the Ministry of Education to develop additional support resources about women and their work (e.g., a series of *Women of Canada* curriculum kits were developed). The kits' contents included artistic representations of women in politics, literature, arts, and sports.

The images of women in the kit countered stereotypic roles for women. The kits also contained suggested curriculum activities and reproducible worksheets for student use. Most of this development and writing was initially completed by federation staff but as the process evolved, teachers were invited and selected to act as focus groups to review curriculum materials. Later, as the process continued to evolve, more teachers were recruited to be writers. The selection process was carried out largely through local recommendations or based on geographic needs, knowledge of the topics, and interest in curriculum writing.

Teacher Union Initiatives

Funding for collaborative union initiatives often came through the Ministry to the Ontario Teachers' Federation (OTF), a governing body for teacher unions in Ontario. Union affiliates submitted proposals for curriculum projects and once approved, staff and members developed and implemented them. FWTAO had financial clout because of its large membership base and was able to further develop some topics and introduce and fund new professional development activities, such as an Aboriginal summer education program. Gender issues were introduced through the computer technology campaign. Subsequently, FWTAO's Status of Women Committee became involved in promoting anti-violence initiatives. With gender issues and anti-violence initiatives successfully introduced into the curriculum through support resources, other equity issues such as race relations and appreciation of cultural diversity - under the auspices of multicultural education - began to emerge as new focal topics, and unions continued to lobby the Ministry to promote and include more social issues in curriculum mandates.

By the late 1980s and early 1990s, critics of multicultural education were stating their frustration with the slow pace of change in schooling practices. Rezai-Rashti (1995a) comments on the reasoning of critics:

multicultural education came under criticism for its liberal rhetoric, its additive and supplementary character, and more, importantly, for its lack of analysis of power relations. (p. 88)

Teachers felt that multicultural education appeared to be more concerned with “social control than real social change” (Rezai-Rashti, 1995b, p. 4). In response to such criticism, anti-racist education emerged as another approach directed towards gaps associated with multicultural education. Hesch (1995) describes some of the goals of anti-racist education and how its focus differed from multiculturalism:

anti-racist educators focus their analyses on the origin and perpetuation of racism and the production and reproduction of “racial” inequality. Instead of developing programs and curricula to change children so that they adjust to the school, anti-racist educators are concerned with changing institutions, through such measures as the politicization of the formal curriculum, attention to the “hidden” curriculum, changes in the ways children are streamed and assessed, the hiring of more minority staff, and the promotion of those already hired. (p. 106)

FWTAO joined the wave of support for anti-racism during the 1990s and struck a provincial anti-racist education committee. The committee took on a leadership role in producing classroom resources and developing workshops for teachers. Anti-racist education curriculum inserts were featured in the union *Newsletter* magazine on a regular basis and an elementary school-wide literature-based support resource, *Untie the Knots of*

Prejudice, was piloted in several schools in Ontario (Ramrattan Smith, Rodriguez, & Saskoley, 1993). Through publicity of that program and other equity-based initiatives, anti-racist pedagogy became more accessible to teachers. The committee and union's efforts to include social issues in the curriculum were bolstered by the introduction of *The Common Curriculum* of the New Democratic Party under the leadership of Bob Rae (Ministry of Education, 1993).

The Emergence of Anti-Racist Curriculum in Ontario

Definitions of multicultural education and anti-racist education and their practical applications to curriculum have changed over time to address criticism, gaps, and emerging issues. Scholars and educators of both schools of thought refined the principles associated with multicultural education and anti-racist education to include a critical framework thereby applying much of the inquiry, engagement, considerations, and activism associated with the growth and evolution of critical theories. There is also evidence that government-mandated curriculum also began to reflect these changes.

The New Democratic Party (NDP) was the ruling provincial government in Ontario from 1990-1995. During that time, the Ministry of Education developed, wrote, and introduced *The Common Curriculum* under the leadership of Dave Cooke, Minister of Education and Training. Many education stakeholders such as Aboriginal peoples, public and separate elementary schools, and teacher unions were invited to and did submit responses to the draft curriculum. The list of groups, organizations, as well as individuals who contributed was provided in the last three pages of *The Common Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 1995, pp. 110-112). The comprehensive Ministry instruction guideline emphasized anti-racist education and integrated learning as

strategies towards inclusive curriculum and systemic changes within education. At 112 pages long, *The Common Curriculum* outlined policies and outcomes for grades one to nine and replaced *The Formative Years*. School boards were mandated to develop and implement policies on antiracism and ethnocultural equity such as, *Let's Understand: Antiracism and Ethnocultural Equity Plan & Implementation Policy* (Waterloo County Board of Education, 1995). The process of curriculum change which began in 1993 was expected to be fully implemented by September 1996. *The Common Curriculum* explicitly stated inequities that were to be addressed in schools. The following excerpt from the section, "A Focus on Excellence and Equity" provides an example.

Exclusion of the experiences and viewpoints of some social groups, such as Aboriginal and other racial and ethnocultural groups constitutes a systemic barrier to success for students from those groups and often produces inequitable results. Such inequities have been linked to students' low self-esteem, placement in inappropriate programs, and low career expectations. They have also resulted in a high dropout rate. (Ministry of Education, 1995, p. 11)

Teachers were given specific examples of social inequities within schooling processes in an effort to encourage them to engage in social issues as part of their school and classroom curriculum responsibilities.

In *The Common Curriculum*, the section on teaching spoke to the relevancy of meeting the varying needs of students and the importance of providing meaningful learning experiences. In the curriculum section, the first goal stated, "The curriculum must reflect the diversity of Canadian society" and further explained:

Students are entitled to have their personal experiences and their racial and ethnocultural heritage valued, and to live in a society that upholds the rights of the individual. Students will also learn that their society is enriched and strengthened by its diversity. (p. 19)

Culturally relevant and responsive teaching was emphasized and encouraged in order to consider sociocultural contexts and meet the varied interests and needs of students. By explicitly stating equity objectives, the Ministry left little room for confusion or for teachers to refuse to address topics such as race and difference. School boards were under pressure to examine their systems of practice and many scrambled to develop equity policies and gather resources to adhere to the Ministry mandates. However, the equity-minded goals of *The Common Curriculum* were soon abandoned (McCaskell, 2005).

Following another provincial election in Ontario, a new government was elected and its term of political office spanned 1995 to 2003. The newly elected Progressive Conservative (PC) government, under the leadership of Mike Harris, as the Premier of Ontario, brought in a new set of Ministry of Education mandates. The Progressive Conservative government removed equity and anti-racism language from curriculum expectations and almost simultaneously introduced a more comprehensive standardized testing program into the public schooling system (Kuchapski, 1998). According to Tim McCaskell (2005) in *Race to Equity: Disrupting Educational Inequality*, equity was “under siege.” The Harris government attacked equity-based initiatives and support on a number of fronts: they repealed the Employment Equity Act, eliminated pay equity, cut heritage language programs, and dissolved the Ministry of Education’s Anti-Racism and Ethnocultural Equity Branch (pp. 218-229). Carr (2007) states, “the PC government was

able to avoid mentioning the word racism publicly for nine years,” thereby relegating a broad range of equity issues to the margins (p. 225).

With “merit” and “sameness” as new Ministry of Education buzz words, public elementary school teachers were quick to identify a number of social issues relating to race, gender, class, ability, and sexuality that were evident within their classrooms. Teachers agreed that curriculum support materials were needed more than ever, particularly because they were omitted in government mandates (FWTAO Annual Meeting, 1995). In Ontario, teacher unions stepped up once again to fill gaps in the curriculum created during the Harris years. When OPSTF and FWTAO joined to form the Elementary Teachers’ Federation of Ontario (ETFO) in 1998, the development and writing of curriculum support resources continued as a focus for the new union. For example, one school-wide program, *Untie the Knots of Prejudice*, originally produced by FWTAO was expanded to include a wider base of social justice topics identified by classroom teachers. The original resource, as well as the new expanded version, used integrated literature-based approaches. Both resources provided suggestions for teachers to begin conversations with students and critically inquire into a variety of social issues such as racism, sexism, homophobia, and (dis)ability. In 1999, ETFO published *We’re Erasing Prejudice For Good* which was written by four teachers and an ETFO staff (Aoki-Barrett, Peer, Ramrattan Smith, Rodriguez, & Saskoley, 1999). Since ETFO’s inception in 1998, the union has continued to produce curriculum support resources in response to emerging needs of Ontario’s students as identified by ETFO’s 73,000 members (ETFO Annual Meeting Resolution Booklet, 2007a, 2009b).

The political pendulum swung again in 2003 when a Liberal provincial government was elected. This government remains in place at the present time, 2011. The Ministry of Education once again embarked on reviewing the elementary curriculum, revising curriculum mandates, and reintroducing equity-based language into their revised curriculum guidelines (Ministry of Education, 2010). The Ministry began consultations with a range of stakeholder groups and organizations, including teacher unions, and in April 2009, the first phase of a new policy, *Realizing the Promise of Diversity: Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy* was released and introduced into school boards. The initial document explained the Ontario Ministry of Education's plan to achieve a more equitable and inclusive schooling system - one that promotes social justice as a goal (Ministry of Education, 2009a).

As outlined briefly above, the provincial Ministry of Education is responsible for developing and writing curriculum mandates. Curriculum mandates provide the educational framework for teaching and learning. As discussed, over the past three decades, for the most part, Ministry-produced elementary school curriculum guidelines explored social justice topics in either limited ways or not at all. Teacher unions such as FWTAO and ETFO have maintained their commitment to social justice goals by producing a variety of curriculum support resources to supplement gaps in Ministry mandates.

Work and Interest in Social Justice

I use Schniedewind and Davidson's (2006) explanation of *social justice education* to provide a context for working for social justice through teaching and curriculum.

Education that aims to promote social justice provides background about the causes of inequality. It also offers ideas to foster fair and equitable schools, communities, and society. It addresses a variety of forms of discrimination - those based on race, gender, class, age, physical ability, learning ability, sexual orientation, religion, and language, among others. It examines the ways some individuals and social groups benefit from inequality while others are hurt. It stimulates awareness, ideas, and skills for change. We can think about concepts of social justice in terms of our own lives as well as teach them to our students. (p. 28)

Their explanation of social justice emphasizes the importance of a critical awareness of inequality - advantage for some and disadvantage for others - addresses the importance of examining why inequality exists, and advocates for developing skills and strategies for change. To teach for social justice is to gain an awareness and understanding of differing social realities, critically probe into the forces that create them, and create opportunities to work through conflicting perspectives, while always seeking fair and just outcomes.

Background

Over the past thirty years, I observed through interactions with colleagues that the ways in which teachers and educational workers engage in social justice education with students vary greatly. Some teachers include social justice topics in units of study frequently, some on a limited basis, and others appear to exclude them. As a teacher who writes social justice-focused resources that support Ministry mandates and addresses curricular gaps related to social issues, I am particularly interested in building my understanding and knowledge about curriculum and social justice. I want to explore these

fields through the eyes of teachers who, like me, choose to integrate social issues in teaching and learning experiences by writing curriculum support resources. Each teacher selected for this study has a personal and public commitment to social justice. I became curious about what moves teachers to do this type of work because of my motivation and work in the field of teaching. I wondered if and how the approaches that are used have evolved over time or might be adapted to remain relevant in the future.

My interest in social justice is very much driven by who I am: a racialized, Brown-skinned woman, and immigrant to Canada. I use the term *racialized*, (*racialised* in original) as Dlamini (2002) explains, to indicate that race is a social construct and to demonstrate the imposition of classifications of race. Although the term race includes Caucasians who are classified as belonging to the White race, the term *racialized* is most often used to refer to non-Whites since White racial identity is normalized and is usually the unspoken default position. Many Whites do not think of themselves as categorized into a race nor do they acknowledge privileges they enjoy because of their White skin (Carr & Lund, 2007; Caouette & Taylor, 2007; McIntosh, 1988,1989). However, I believe that people of colour are very well aware of their *racialized* status which often works to disadvantage them (Carr & Klassen, 1997; Ladson-Billings & Donnor, 2005; Palmer, 1997).

I immigrated to Canada at the age of 12 with my family and grew up in predominantly White neighbourhoods. My elementary and secondary schooling in Canada took place from 1969 to 1975. I attended one elementary school and two secondary schools. I was the only non-White student in my Grade 8 elementary school and one of two visibly racialized students in one secondary school and one of three in the

other secondary school. As a student, I often felt omitted from the curriculum since course texts and related materials seldom showed people of colour or highlighted contributions they made. Furthermore, my teachers rarely added anecdotes or supplementary materials to prescribed texts. All of my teachers except one, were White and able-bodied. I make an assumption that all my teachers were likely heterosexual since there were no openly “out” gay or lesbian teachers. In both secondary schools I attended, all my teachers were male except for three. The three female teachers had teaching assignments in Home Economics, Typing, and Spanish. My motivation and present stance of working purposefully through curriculum writing to address a broad range of issues of representation relating to race, gender, class, sexual orientation, age, and ability emerge in part from these early experiences in my schooling.

I have been a Canadian citizen for over thirty-eight years and I still choose to identify as an immigrant. In all likelihood the ‘immigrant’ identity that is imposed by others on me is because of the brown colour of my skin, or my lack of cultural capital about certain assumed rules of conduct or protocols that reveal themselves in day-to-day experiences and sometimes operate to keep me positioned as an outsider. My early experiences of trying to “fit in” at school and at various workplaces have deeply etched my ‘immigrant’ identity as a defining part of how I understand and enact my personal and professional roles.

In my past roles as a teacher, curriculum support resource writer, and facilitator of teacher development programs, I have developed and nurtured a keen interest in how social justice issues are envisioned, identified, and discussed in writing social justice-focused curriculum resources. I want to learn how to improve the work I do by deepening

my knowledge about varied approaches and understandings that teachers bring to curriculum development, interpretation, and the writing process. After over two decades of writing curriculum, I felt I was at a standstill in how I carried out my work. Although feedback received from teachers indicated that many liked and used the support resources that I co-authored and produced, I felt it was necessary to take time to critically examine my work and devote specific attention to building new knowledge that could inform my future endeavors and possibly those of future writers.

Statement of the Problem

Multiculturalism and anti-racism are two pedagogies introduced into schooling practices and curriculum during the past four decades. The former focused for the most part on individual change and relationships among groups while the latter targeted systemic inequalities. Teaching strategies associated with both these frameworks have been implemented in various ways in many schools over the past three decades (McCaskell, 2005). However, despite a variety of approaches including revision of Ministry guidelines and creation of new curricula, racism and other forms of oppression continue to surface in Canadian schools (Covell & Howe, 2001; Sefa Dei 2005; Gaskell, 2005). Sefa Dei (2007) believes there is denial and silencing of difference and race that work to maintain power and privilege for dominant groups. While many faculties of education and professional development programs provide opportunities to build skills that address literacy, numeracy, the arts, and sciences, fewer programs are available that challenge teachers to examine their equity and social justice mindsets or to reflect on how their beliefs and attitudes influence their curricular practices (Allen, 2010; Solomon, 2000; Solomon & Allen, 2001).

Young (1990) believes that oppression plays out in every-day practices since: oppression refers to the vast and deep injustices some groups suffer as a consequence of often unconscious assumptions and reactions of well-meaning people in ordinary interactions, media and cultural stereotypes, and structural features of bureaucratic hierarchies and market mechanisms – in short, the normal processes of everyday life. (p. 41)

Curriculum that is implemented on an everyday basis in schools reflects underlying assumptions and choices made about what knowledge is valued. In some cases, cultural, racial, and religious stereotypes continue to be reinforced. Family structures are sometimes depicted in limited ways and opportunities to have their experiences included continue to be denied to persons with disabilities. Do teachers use or produce curriculum support resources that work in ways that Young describes? Is it possible that the very resources that teachers may create, select, and use to promote social justice actually produce, reproduce, and reinforce forms of oppression? Curriculum from dominant, colonial, Eurocentric perspectives regulate power by imposing what knowledge becomes valued in schools (Ball, 2006; Cherian, 2007; Kuehn, 2007; Mogadime, Ramrattan Smith & Scott, 2007; Tilley 1998a). Curriculum continues to be a vehicle that can work to marginalize and silence some students, particularly those from designated groups including Aboriginal peoples, persons with disabilities, persons who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, two-spirited, and transgender (LGBTQ), racialized individuals, and women (Dion, 2009; Frazee, 2010; Guiney Yallop, 2004; hooks, 1995; Tateishi, 2009). As someone intimately involved in writing and producing curriculum support resources, I

feel a strong sense of responsibility to deepen my knowledge and am compelled to further investigate these concerns.

Purpose of the Study

This study centres on teachers who write social justice-focused curriculum support resources and enquires into the complexities of the process that this work entails. Emphasis is placed on the writing of curriculum support resources that are linked to Ministry guidelines and are designed to support Ministry mandates by connecting them in practical ways to a broad range of experiences that are representative of the diversity of social realities within schools and communities.

I explore this phenomenon with a qualitative orientation. Who are the teachers who choose to do this work and what draws them into pursuing social justice through curriculum writing? What do they hope to accomplish and how do they go about doing their work? How do these teachers think about and understand their contributions?

The study has three aims. First, it is designed to encourage teachers to consider how their goals for curriculum writing and the curriculum support resources that they develop are connected to their social justice beliefs, attitudes, and values, as the curriculum ideologies that inform their work. As a second aim, the study provides space for educators who are concerned about and committed to social justice to have their voices heard, their efforts noted, explored, and interrogated. Finally, my hope is that the study will provoke critical reflective thought about understandings of curriculum, social justice, and experiences of writing curriculum support resources. The design of the study places emphasis on the participants' individualized accounts and considers variations in their histories and lived experiences (Au, 2009; Henry, 1998; Mogadime, 2003).

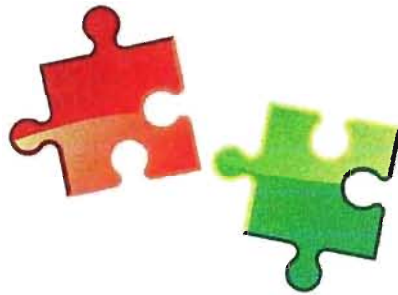
Research Questions

- What does a teacher curriculum writer consider as social justice curriculum?
Does this conceptualization differ from mandated Ontario Ministry curriculum?
- What are the experiences of teachers who volunteer to write social justice curriculum?
How do the participants' social justice beliefs and values influence their curriculum writing?
What group dynamics and critical opportunities are revealed in the process of curriculum writing?
- In what ways can stories of teachers who write social justice curriculum influence and support other teachers to become more critical consumers of curriculum and possibly social justice curriculum writers themselves?



CHAPTER TWO

Review of Relevant Literature



CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

This chapter provides a review of literature relevant to the topics of study. The review is divided into three main areas.

Critical Theory, Curriculum, and Social Justice

In the first section, I present a historical context of critical theory and demonstrate the relevance of using critical theory as the main theoretical framework for the study and discuss how critical race theory and critical research informed by feminist theories relate to the study. In the second section, I explore historical and current understandings of curriculum to demonstrate their influence on curriculum writing and practical applications in classrooms. The third section provides interpretations of social justice and the relevancy of a social justice mindset in working to reconceptualize curriculum.

Critical Theory: A Brief Historical Perspective

Critical theory is built on the work of scholars Max Horkheimer, Theodore Adorno, Erich Fromm, and Herbert Marcuse who were from the Frankfurt School in Germany. In a broad sense, the four scholars were interested in cultural critique but did not use “a unified approach” (Kincheloe & McLaren, 1998, p. 261). More specifically, they were involved in a form of social inquiry that followed for the most part, teachings of Marx and his critique of capitalism. In 1937, Horkheimer used the term “critical theory” in an essay called *Traditional and Critical Theory* (Rush, 2004, p. 11). Horkheimer claimed that the role of social life in building knowledge was disregarded in traditional theories. Later, he argued that critical theory and research could not be satisfied by simply increasing knowledge but must also include a form of self-conscious inquiry (Horkheimer, 1972). Toward those outcomes, critical theory evolved over time to address gaps identified by critique, such as its academic versus practical nature

(Eisner, 1992) and its tendency to remain at the “level of abstract theorizing” (Kelly & Brandes, 2001). In recent work, critical theory has been shaped by new knowledge and described as more explicitly action-oriented (Berry, 1998; Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005; Scott & Morrison, 2007).

As Kincheloe and McLaren (2005) state, “There are many critical theories, not just one and the tradition is always in evolution” (p. 303), thereby emphasizing the dynamic nature of critical theory. They state that a “reconceptualized critical theory” questions assumptions about societies such as the United States and Canada that appear to be “unproblematically democratic and free.” They explain that individuals in these societies are acculturated to “feel comfortable in relations of domination and subordination rather than equality and independence” (p. 303). In other words, this is the way most people are used to living and we become accustomed to our roles in maintaining how power relations are organized. Furthermore, many of us remain unaware of systemic unfairness.

In their study, Scott and Morrison (2007) define critical theory as:

a research perspective that foregrounds the notion of emancipation, so that it not only describes the world or generates knowledge about it, but also seeks to change it by detecting and unmasking beliefs and practices that limit human freedom, justice, and democracy. (p. 47)

A researcher working within a critical theory framework develops and uses a critical lens to examine and analyze experiences, events, and processes with an eye to exposing systemic inequities. Aligned with this overall objective is work that moves towards emancipatory ends by taking action for more just and equitable societies and a

better world. The definition offered by Scott and Morrison delineates three areas of emphasis: the importance of a critical stance or lens in working for a better world; the unmasking of beliefs and practices to more fully understand our individual and collective roles within structures of power; and the call for action to address injustices.

Common themes that emerge from the work of critical theorists are critique of beliefs and attitudes that play out in almost every aspect of social life and the sanctioning of some forms of knowledges through schooling practices (Allen, 2010; Apple, 1996; Au, 2009; Giroux, 1988; Tilley, 1998a). Paulo Freire (1982), Henry Giroux (1988), and Peter McLaren (2007) can be considered as three critical theorists who probe curriculum conceptions by questioning the construction of the social world and noting many complexities and challenges associated with disrupting the status quo.

Freire (1982) argued for “critical consciousness” (pp. 35-36). Critical consciousness comes from the term “*conscientizacao*” which refers to learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality” (p. 35). Freire spoke about freedom as being possible through an individual’s recognition of and desire to change systems of oppressive relations that work to maintain the “oppressor-oppressed contradiction” (p. 52). Freire’s teachings challenge each person to come to terms with roles as “oppressor” and “oppressed,” and to identify our places within such systems. According to Freire, when people learn to think and view situations more critically, we become better able to recognize how power structures shape our lives and can learn to identify limitations and/or privileges that are in place. Freire advocated for working peasants in Brazil integral involvement in their own struggle for change by using the literacy they gained

to challenge fear-induced structures that maintained the conditions of their labour. His work emphasized the empowerment of those individuals to confront the unjust power relations they faced.

Ellsworth (1989) furthers Freire's challenge by urging those who confront unequal power relations to recognize that they themselves "are always implicated in the very structures they are trying to change" (p. 310). Recognition of this type of positioning offers a way to open up to view some of the layers of complexity involved in understanding how structures reinforce and privilege particular perspectives and knowledges. Building upon these understandings is essential in critical research that identifies, explores, and seeks to challenge systemic injustices. In applying the work of Ellsworth (1989) and Freire (1982), it follows that teachers who write curriculum for social justice must come to terms with their positions – privileges and limitations - when they work within systems that are built on White, Eurocentric, able-bodied, heterosexist, and Christian frames of thought. If teachers who write curriculum understand their positioning in limited ways, then in all likelihood the curriculum they write will continue to perpetuate dominant views of the White systems they want to change.

Giroux (1988) follows a similar line of thinking and conceptualizes schools as "sites of resistance and democratic possibilities" for critical empowerment, where the production and transmission of knowledge can and should be questioned. He suggests "developing a pedagogy that promotes a social vocabulary of cultural difference that links strategies of understanding to strategies of transformation" (p. 105). Giroux's perspective puts emphasis on the importance of a teacher's role in guiding students to learn to question and challenge unfair practices. He also urges vigilance in examining

claims of the objectivity of knowledge and notes that the politics of teaching cannot be ignored. Further to Giroux's warning about claims of objectivity, Kelly and Brandes (2001) emphasize that teaching for social justice involves "shifting out of neutral" with respect to a teacher's beliefs and attitudes as well as pedagogy (p. 437). They point out that what teachers do and choose to use as text or supplementary materials can often expose the opinions, beliefs, and biases they hold.

In preparing democratic citizens, teachers play a key role in facilitating classroom discussions of social and ethical issues. In the many minute and seemingly mundane choices that teachers make when they facilitate such discussions (e.g., deciding which issues to recognize as social or ethical and worthy of class time), they enact at least a partial vision of social justice (or injustice). (Kelly & Brandes, 2001, p. 438)

When uncovered, acknowledging these perspectives and their implications are integral in the pursuit of social justice within a critical framework.

McLaren (2007) in his study of inner city schools further probed the "social habits and professional mindsets" associated with school life to reveal dynamics of power as well as social and cultural forms of domination and control. He names forms of domination such as "exploitation," "marginalization," "powerlessness," "violence," and "cultural imperialism" (pp. 42-43). McLaren draws attention to the idea that most people are unaware of their actions as oppressive to others. He believes that some teachers may "lack a critical and public pedagogy" that is requisite for helping students to learn to think critically in order to address inequities they may face (p. 41). He makes a strong argument for learning to critically question how knowledge is constructed when

he draws upon Freire's work: "Paulo Freire always said that critical pedagogy is about problem posing, not supplying stock answers. And finding the right answers are based upon asking the right questions" (p. 55).

Ball (2006) provides insight into how teachers may "lack a critical and public pedagogy" necessary for writing curriculum when pointing out that Teachers' beliefs and actions often reflect the middle class values taught to them through their own schooling practices and community norms. These values are then passed on and grounded through their roles within their schools and communities, becoming a cyclical process. Therefore, asking "the right questions," as McLaren and Freire suggest in the quote above, can become "messy and difficult" (Ball, 2006, p. 202). Teachers who write curriculum must learn to understand the "messy and difficult" nature of the work they aim to do by becoming aware that their social habits and mindsets can be resistive forces to the very goals they seek.

Freire, Ellsworth, Giroux, Kelly and Brandes, McLaren, and Ball draw out and help to make visible examples that demonstrate systemic ways that power relations play out in society and how assumptions and unawareness can perpetuate these systems of operation. The theorists emphasize the importance of critically examining our interactions through study of everyday routines we engage in and the roles each of us plays in maintaining unequal access, unfair distribution of resources, misuse of the positions of power we occupy, and the skewed societal views we propagate and perpetuate. They make strong cases for educating "well-meaning" people who function in society in ways that reinforce and perpetuate injustices and inequality to critically examine their mindsets and actions. The theorists argue for teaching and curriculum that

promote critical inquiry and they strongly advocate for activism in implementing strategies to address injustices.

Critical Race Theory

As teachings and understandings of critical theory evolved, gaps became evident. One such gap was the omission of what Hanks (2002) describes as “non-economic” issues (p. 96). Issues such as racism, sexism, ableism, ageism, and homophobia were not explicitly addressed historically in critical theories. Critical race theory addresses one such gap by emphasizing the necessity for acknowledging and interrogating how race is implicated within systems of power. Whiteness and White identity permeate all aspects of teaching (Berry, 2007; Carr & Lund, 2007; Solomon, Portelli, Daniel, & Campbell, 2005). Sefa Dei (2007) emphasizes that he has encountered “denial and silencing” used by White people to protect their privileges and absolve themselves of their social responsibilities (p. vii).

Critical race theory explicitly explores ways in which racial identity serves as a “mitigating factor” in power relations. Ladson-Billings and Donnor (2005) relate their own experiences in “returning to black” when their scholarly reputations become constrained by their racial identities (pp. 280-281). Each scholar presents scenarios where the dominant order exerts a hegemonic outlook, an ascribed stereotypic identity on Ladson-Billings and Donnor that reminds them of their “place” because of the colour of their skin. In her discussion, Ladson-Billings draws a connection between W. E. B. DuBois’s construct of “double consciousness” and related work in critical theory that came later from the Frankfurt School theorists. Ladson-Billings notes that DuBois’ name is “never mentioned in the same context as those of Max Horkheimer, Theodore

Adorno, and Herbert Marcuse” even though there are similarities in their work (p. 282). Through several examples, Ladson-Billings and Donnor present a strong argument that society is not ready or prepared for “the decolonized to talk back and ‘act up’” (p. 284). Instead, those who hold power prefer the ‘omitted’ and ‘silenced’ to remain so. Their argument has implications for teachers who write curriculum because they must be prepared to take up how power is mediated by racial identity and how race can work to keep some perspectives and knowledges from the official school curriculum – they must “understand curriculum as racial text” (Pinar et al., 2004, p. 316).

Delgado (1995) explains critical race theory as a way to “analyze the myths, presuppositions, and received wisdoms that make up the common culture about race and that invariably render Blacks (and other people of color) one down” (p. xiv). White-skinned people occupy the dominant default position and racialized people of colour automatically assume subordinate positioning. Taking up race as an integral part of critical inquiry exposes another layer of power relations that can be made visible and examined.

Critical Research

The main goals of research based in critical theory are to identify, confront, and challenge social injustices and to create knowledge that is emancipatory, thereby taking action to live and behave in more equitable ways. Achieving these goals involves dialogue and conversations that allow co-creation of knowledge while providing room for varied understandings to emerge (Fine & Weis, 2005; Kincheloe, 2005; McLaren, 2007). Prasad (2005) emphasizes that “crafting research in the critical theory tradition requires skepticism about the *innocence* of social and institutional practices, however

innocuous and commonplace they might seem” (p. 153). This skepticism is a catalyst for digging deeper to examine what often remains invisible. Critical researchers want to know: *who benefits?* The parameters of critical research demand an inquiring stance to seek out and use strategies that build understanding about “why” questions. In other words, critical researchers are concerned with explicitly stating reasons for wanting to change our individual behaviours as well as challenging and taking resistive actions against unfair systems within which we operate.

Critical theory provided a suitable theoretical framework for this study because “social justice contains an implicit challenge to the status quo” (Kuehn, 2007, p. 13). Furthermore, critical theory questions the hegemony of dominant discourses, challenges Eurocentric knowledge, and acknowledges the role of Whiteness in maintaining power and “validating knowledge about particular experiences while subjugating other concerns” (Sefa Dei, 2007, p. viii). I purposefully included a discussion of critical race theory in this discussion with a feminist theoretical orientation following in the next section because of the relevancy to my subjectivities and those of the participants.

Feminist Theory

Feminist theories represent a diversity of perspectives that aim “to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression” (hooks, 2000, p. viii). I draw upon the work of feminist theorists whose work of consciousness raising and empowerment relate to the following concepts in teaching and learning: the embodiment of care in curriculum; resistive measures to a patriarchal traditional curriculum; and the exploration of personal experiences as a method to build self-understanding and to better understand different social realities.

Noddings (2006) describes critical thinking, passionate engagement, and personal commitment as ways to enact an ethic of care in teaching and learning experiences. She believes that most teachers hold a philosophy that they are responsible for the well-being and education for all children. Noddings advocates for “critical lessons” that promote dialogue, interaction, and engagement (p. 290). This critical orientation towards a caring and reconstructed curriculum puts the teacher in a role of parent, caregiver, or mother - a decision-maker and encourager, a model and an advocate. Henry (1998) explains such relationships and enactments of care as feminist teaching roles and dispositions (p. 35). In Henry's study, Black women teachers recounted their experiences and their stories indicated that an ethic of care and a nurturing stance were taught to them by significant women who were not necessarily their own mothers. Those roles were important in shaping children's growth and development.

hooks (1984) argues for activism and resistive measures to counter a biased curriculum that marginalizes and excludes some social realities. She states,

To be in the margin is to be part of the whole but outside the main body...Our survival depended on an ongoing public awareness of the separation between margin and center and an ongoing private acknowledgment that we were a necessary, vital part of that whole. (p. xvi)

hooks describes the mindset she took on to cope with the divisions that marked her family - Black Americans living in a small Kentucky town. She believes that seeing physical demarcations across the tracks such as paved streets, stores, and restaurants she was not allowed to enter structured her life and helped her to understand the limitations

that were imposed on how she lived her life. hooks explains that women “who are the most victimized” are often powerless to change their life conditions (p. 1). hooks draws connections to students who are powerless to change the traditional curriculum and schooling practices that are unfair. She questions broad assertions like “all women are oppressed” that tend to mask or disregard factors like class, race, religion, and sexual preference. Similarly, she believes that such factors are often disregarded by teachers who do not modify the curriculum or use teaching strategies that are culturally relevant. hooks believes that consciousness-raising activities are a necessary part of addressing differences in students’ lived experiences. She sees the relevance of activist work through curriculum.

hooks (2000) calls for literature to be written in many styles and formats to inform more people of feminist thinking and politics. She believes that children’s literature represents fertile ground for such changes.

Children’s literature is one of the most crucial sites for feminist education for critical consciousness precisely because beliefs and identities are still being formed...Public education for children has to be a place where feminist activists continue to do the work of creating an unbiased curriculum. (p. 23)

hooks suggests that children can learn strategies to become critically aware and they can begin to counter biases through curriculum inquiry.

Frankenberg (1993) understands the value of experiential knowledge. She suggests that “feminists have transformed accounts of personal experience into politicized and theorized terrain” (p. 7). In her study Frankenberg explored racism with White women teachers and she explains the process of investigating participants’ private

and daily activities as a strategy to move from individual experiences and enter into shared spaces where their actions could be theorized and understood as “socially and politically constructed” (p. 7). The concept of theorizing “from experience” holds the stories of women as a foundational element in how the women in her study “reinterpreted” and “remade” their experiences as they critically reflected on their narratives. According to Frankenberg, participants learned to see how their childhood experiences and relationships shaped their thinking about race and racism. She describes participants’ experiences, attitudes, and worldview as “micropolitics” that impacted on how social issues such as sexism and racism played out in choices and actions (p. 159).

Feminist theorists Noddings, Henry, hooks, and Frankenberg suggest ways to reconceptualize curriculum and make space for valuing various types of knowledges. Their insights are useful in a critical consideration of the process and content of curriculum writing for social justice.

Conceptualizations of Curriculum

Curriculum emerges from ideas about what should be taught and learned. It can be formed into concepts that can become normalized through ideas and practices of the dominant group that become filtered and propagated through society (Bordo, 1993). “Curriculum is often conceived as an authoritative prescriptive course of study used by a system of schools and is usually represented as a provincial standard” (Westbury, 2008, p. 46). Curriculum as defined by Westbury outlines the purposeful work of schools. However, some curriculum theorists suggest that schooling philosophies as they exist are divided and oppressive (Pinar et al., 2004; Oakes, Quartz, Ryan, & Lipton, 2000). For

this study, curriculum that is provided by the provincial government of Ontario is considered as the mandated standard or school curriculum.

Traditionally, mandated curriculum stems from a perspective where knowledge is treated as objective and factual – it can be taught, received, memorized, and regurgitated as needed (Freire, 1982; Giroux, 1988). Traditional perspectives continue to be reflected in some Ministry guidelines currently in use (Ministry of Education, 2006). Traditional interpretations and applications of curriculum can limit inquiry and discussion. Many teachers continue to view curriculum as narrowly mandated guidelines or standards-based requisites that are restrictive (Cherian, 2007). Mandated curricula may provide structure; however, many choices regarding content and delivery ultimately reside with the teacher and do not come from a particular book or resource (Eisner, 1985). Eisner (2000) further argues that students must create meaning from curriculum and the meaning they make of learning experiences may or may not be what the teacher intended.

Tilley (1998a) refers to school curricula as providing “sanctioned knowledge” that includes forms of knowledge(s) that are “welcomed and deeply embedded in schools.” Conversely, there may be forms of knowledge(s) that remain “subjugated” and excluded from school curriculum. Mandated curriculum can be limiting in a number of ways. First, curriculum guidelines are often stated in very general terms in the form of expectations grouped by subject area, (e.g., in elementary school – Language Arts, Music, and Social Studies) (Ministry of Education, 2010). Secondly, for the most part, instructions are written in ways that privilege White, Christian, Eurocentric, heterosexist, and able-bodied perspectives. Thirdly, curriculum mandates tend to minimize the effect that subjective positioning of teachers, educational workers, and students have on how content is

addressed. Fourthly, school curriculum often disregards forms of knowledge(s), thereby relegating some lived experiences to the margins, essentializing them, or omitting them altogether.

Social justice-focused curriculum support resources are meant to counter restrictive standards imposed by mandated curriculum and broaden the scope of curriculum. The resources seek to challenge knowledge that is “sanctioned” to include forms of knowledges that are often “subjugated” by including perspectives and experiences that may fall on the margins or outside of those privileged by Whiteness.

Historical Conceptions and Current Perspectives on Curriculum

Bobbitt (1941) introduced the concept of objective-based education. In the early part of his career, he proposed that the purpose of education was primarily to prepare children for adulthood. In describing curriculum in a section of his book entitled, “It Is Life That Educates,” Bobbitt states,

The purpose of education is to bring each human being to live, as nearly as practicable, in everything that he (*sic*) does in the way that is best for him (*sic*). The method of education is for each individual to carry on all his (*sic*) activities all the time, as far as possible, in the way that is best for one of his (*sic*) nature, age, and situation. In the education on any person, the good life is both the objective and the process.

The basic educational responsibility of the child or youth is to live the good life to the best of his (*sic*) ability; that of his parents and teachers, is to help him (*sic*) to do so. (Bobbitt, 1941, p. 5)

Curriculum writing is one part of a much larger process – curriculum development. Curriculum development is influenced by ideologies that are held about what curriculum should accomplish - its purpose. Bobbitt created five steps for curriculum development to accomplish the purpose stated in the excerpt: analysis of human experience, job analysis, deriving objectives, selecting objectives, and planning in detail. The achievement of objectives was emphasized. Although the model held great influence with educators, the streaming it supported actually worked to maintain stratified hierarchies.

Later in his career, Bobbitt re-examined his model and proposed major changes that addressed the relevance of curriculum to students. In his revisions, he emphasized that students' lives could not be planned in advance and noted the importance of considering their individual needs. Bobbitt suggested proper consideration of their individual differences in determining suitable choices. In his words,

It is evident also that the lives of the young people cannot be planned in administrative offices and the plans sent out to teachers who are merely to regiment the lives of the pupils according to the specifications. The education of free persons is in their living of their own lives. (Bobbitt, 1941, p. 228)

Relevancy and consideration of individual needs are two key points that emerged from Bobbitt's later work. Both points are explored in this study.

In 1949, Ralph W. Tyler introduced a scientific model of teaching where hypotheses could be tested in relation to expected learning outcomes. Tyler was influenced by the work of George S. Counts who outlined four categories for consideration in curriculum development. The fourth category was, "curriculum-making

and the scientific method” (Pinar et al., 2004, p. 149). Tyler took up the idea and went on to write a publication about constructing achievement tests that demonstrated the relevance of behavioural objectives to the teaching process. There were four basic principles to follow: “Define appropriate learning objectives, establish or design useful learning experiences, organize learning experiences so that they have a cumulative effect, and evaluate the effectiveness of the curriculum with an eye to revising those aspects that were not effective” (Tyler, 1975, p. 33). His ideas remained unchallenged for almost twenty years and became deeply entrenched in curriculum development and practice (Pinar et al., 2004). The ongoing concept of testing, and the use of behavioural objectives, first introduced by Tyler, are still very much integral parts of current educational structures. There is an element of criticality within Tyler’s fourth principle that is particularly relevant to this study – the concept of revision based on taking a close look at curriculum to determine what works and what does not.

Joseph Schwab characterized the field of curriculum as “moribund” and “unable by its present methods and principles, to continue and contribute significantly to the advancement of education” (Schwab, 1970, p. 1). In his work, the concept of *consideration* is emphasized. I believe Schwab may have had a goal for teachers to carefully *consider* their actions, by making space for the affective part of learning, but more so, to focus attention specifically on the needs of children who are in their charge. Schwab believed that students should be engaged in their education. He proposed a collaborative, incremental, and ongoing model for curriculum development. In his model, the learner group, as well as teachers and curriculum specialists, would work together to carefully *consider* the subject matter and sociocultural contexts in order to plan and

implement the curriculum. The process that Schwab outlined involved ongoing deliberation to ensure student interest and also sought to provide possible solutions to emerging concerns. According to Pinar et al. (2004), Schwab accused curriculum scholars of “single-minded and simplistic” views about subject matter for schools.

Schwab’s remarks highlight the complexities associated with the field of curriculum. Student engagement, the relational nature of teaching and learning, and acknowledgement of the sociocultural contexts remain as salient points in understanding curriculum, based on Schwab’s scholarly contributions. Schwab’s work in the 1970s marked the beginning of reconceptualizing curriculum from its traditional, limited understandings of curriculum development towards rich, in-depth views, and more meaningful understandings of curriculum.

Eisner and Vallance (1974) suggest five conceptions of curriculum: curriculum as the development of cognitive processes; curriculum as technology; curriculum as self-actualization or consumatory experience; curriculum for social learning; and curriculum for academic rationalization. The framing of these conceptions can be misleading because they do not adequately engage the complexities of schooling practices and tend to reflect abstract concepts about curriculum. The structure of five discrete and different conceptions of curriculum can camouflage the dynamic nature of curriculum.

Reconceptualized curriculum is not any *one* of these in isolation. However, Eisner’s later work (1985) affirmed the variable nature and complexities of curriculum when he described curriculum as “aesthetic text” and “institutional text,” serving to widen the parameters of curriculum and provoke thought about how curriculum can be understood.

Further work by Eisner (1992) has continued to draw attention to the complexities of curriculum development by examining six curriculum ideologies: Religious Orthodoxy, Rational Humanism, Progressivism, Critical Theory, Reconceptualism, and Cognitive Pluralism (pp. 306-319). In Eisner's view, curriculum ideologies work hand in hand with political climates and agendas to influence how curriculum is interpreted and enacted in pedagogy. When curriculum is developed, there is often a particular orientation that is emphasized. For example, in describing Progressivism, Eisner highlights the work of John Dewey, "...for Dewey, human life is a continuous process of constructive adaptation. Intelligence itself is not fixed; it grows" (p. 312). He explains that Dewey's progressivist stance meant that curriculum was to be "problem-centered" where a scientific model would be implemented (p. 313). This idea of a particular orientation is in keeping with Schwab's work which demonstrated a progressive orientation. These two examples show the lasting effect of a particular curriculum orientation.

Eisner describes critical theory as a curriculum ideology that informs how complexities within social issues are addressed. He states that an important question in critically examining curriculum is: "Whose interests are being served?" (p. 314). Eisner (2000) also emphasizes the centrality of teachers to the improvement of schooling and states, "unless teachers have a role to play in shaping curricula, inservice education programmes are likely to be ineffective" (p. 347). Although Eisner was referring to inservice education programs, he points to a crucial role for teachers in curriculum writing. He places a high value on the knowledge and skills that teachers bring to

curriculum since they are the front line workers who interact with students on a daily basis.

Eisner also urges teachers to examine the “hidden” curriculum of teaching and learning interactions. In his words,

The hidden curriculum consists of the messages given to children by teachers, school structures, textbooks, and other school resources. These messages are often conveyed by teachers who themselves are unaware of their presence...Hence, the hidden curriculum is often believed to serve the interests of the power elite, which the school itself is covertly thought to serve. (Eisner, 1992, p. 314)

His warning points to the power that teachers hold in their relational roles with students and their school communities. Teachers are key connectors who can work to reconceptualize curriculum and have a responsibility to carefully consider the messages they intentionally and unintentionally send.

Aoki (1993) makes insightful distinctions and inferences about curriculum that are useful in relation to curriculum writing for social justice. He refers to mandated guidelines, lessons, and units of study as *curriculum-as-plan*. He also makes reference to an “experienced curriculum” where programs and resources are transformed through the interaction of those involved in teaching and learning experiences (Aoki, 1986). Aoki explains that *interactions* within learning experiences provide for meaningful teaching. He refers to this interactive, experiential process of engagement in learning as *curriculum-as-lived*. An “experienced curriculum” and the conceptualization of *curriculum-as-lived* acknowledges sociocultural, political, and economic influences upon individuals.

In his study with post-baccalaureate teacher candidates, Cherian (2007) calls for connections to be made between standards-based teaching, social justice, and inquiry-based teaching. These types of connections may well relate to the experiential processes of engagement that Aoki proposes in describing an “experienced curriculum” or *curriculum-as-lived*, where, as Eisner suggests, teachers can play key roles.

A Case for a Social Reconstructionist Orientation

Schools are sociocultural settings where educational resources such as curriculum and teaching strategies are continuously implemented. The stories we hold and propagate about the purposes of curriculum and pedagogy can influence what is emphasized in curriculum writing and teaching. Apple (1996) states that:

behind every story we tell about education – even if only tacitly – is a social theory about what this society ‘really is’...these theories or social visions may be in conflict. We are in the midst of such conflicts today and education sits at center stage. (p. 98)

Education is at centre stage and educators are *on stage* each and every day making important choices and dealing first hand with the diverse needs of students.

A social reconstructionist orientation to curriculum looks to society for these needs and draws “from pervasive and critical social problems and from the hubs of social controversy” (Eisner, 1985, p. 78). Schools and schooling are seen as having the responsibility to cultivate attitudes and skills that move students to strive for a better world (Mann, 1974). Social reconstructionists believe that students cannot learn how to cope with problems or controversy by systematically avoiding them in school. In describing the aims of social reconstructionism, Eisner (1985) explains,

This orientation is basically aimed at developing levels of critical consciousness among children and youth so that they become aware of the kinds of ills that the society has and become motivated to learn how to alleviate them. (p. 76)

There is a *criticality* integral to curriculum within this orientation. Social transformation is also emphasized by calling for action. According to Slattery (1995), “just as the curriculum is affected by social conditions and values, so too can the curriculum help to reshape those conditions and values” (p. 36). Social justice curriculum writers take up this course of action.

Curriculum Writing

Although there is considerable information about what curriculum is and considerations for curriculum development in the literature, a gap exists about curriculum writing from the perspectives of teachers. In particular, it appears that teachers who write social justice curriculum have not shared their stories about curriculum writing through research. I draw upon an article based on an Indigenous case study that took place in New Zealand in the early 1990s (McMurphy-Pilkington, Pikiāo, & Rongomai, 2008). The article is based on a larger qualitative study that explored the development of Pangarau (Mathematics) where the first author worked with 17 Maori educators who were also curriculum writers. The findings do relate to this doctoral research because of its “emancipatory focus” and description of how a particular group of people who felt omitted from the curriculum because of language, worked to change the writing of New Zealand’s national curriculum policies to include the Maori language; however, the voices and stories of the curriculum writers are missing from the study.

Some literature relating to broadening the curriculum to make it more inclusive can be applied to this study. I discuss various factors that have received attention by scholars and are relevant to this study. The researchers raise questions and make suggestions that can influence the process and content of curriculum writing that seeks to promote a reconceptualized curriculum.

Agyepong (2010) writes that how curriculum is conceived and written is closely related to the professional development of teachers, the people who do the writing, and the types of strategies they use for engaging in social issues. She says that changing the types of classroom resources to include textbooks that portray diversity is a first step towards inclusion but feels strongly that much more can be done.

Agyepong calls for systemic changes within education. She believes that a crucial step towards a more inclusive system is to change the hiring practices to include people from a variety of races and cultural backgrounds because the field of education is “populated by predominantly White voices” (p. 77). According to Agyepong, “Changes in the curriculum would require that the dominant curriculum be reconstructed so that it represents the interests of all children” and she argues that such changes are more likely to occur if school boards increase the representation of diverse voices by hiring more people of colour as teachers (p. 79). It would follow then that the teaching population would become more diverse and this would increase the chances that teachers who are selected or who volunteer to write curriculum would bring a wider variety of experiences and interests to broaden the scope of curriculum.

Agyepong also suggests that all teachers be trained in anti-racist education in faculties of education, to equip them with a “critical understanding of their histories,

social conditions, race and difference in school and society” (p. 81). This type of teacher education could better equip teachers with a broad range of strategies in order to implement the curriculum in relevant ways and meet the variety of needs of their students.

Allen (2010), in discussing reconceptualizing Africentric school curriculum, states that “there is potential conflict between teachers and students’ social class backgrounds in framing identity” and that teachers should be taught “to examine their social locations and those of their students to identify possible areas of conflict” (p. 332). Allen argues that the form and content of the curriculum is often closely related to teachers’ identities, their values, and beliefs. When teachers write curriculum from limited and often middle class experiences, they can influence how school knowledge is formed and reproduced. He emphasizes the pivotal role that teachers play by the choices they make in discussing some issues while ignoring others. Allen calls for “a living curriculum” that openly acknowledges perspectives and identities of teachers and students can be in conflict.

The curriculum opens up spaces for teachers to involve their students in discussions around race, social difference, identity, and oppression. Students should be made aware of the status quo and to critique the established social order to work for change. (p. 336)

Allen’s ideas are supported by Giroux (1988) who suggests that schools are sites where conflicted beliefs and inequalities play out. James (2001) and Khayatt (2001) also support the idea that sociocultural backgrounds, values, perspectives, and identities must be considered and taken up in discussion of social issues.

Lopes (2010) writes that the traditional curriculum and processes within teaching tend to emphasize hierarchical status and competition with one another - whether it be for resources or the types of identities and habits that become valued. She says that as early as the age of three, children have learned forms of racism, sexism, and other social norms. She explains that a curriculum that emphasizes competition can reinforce notions of superiority to those who belong to the dominant group because the curriculum reflects their experiences.

It is these forms of systemic or institutional racism that are most in need of attention, for they reinforce the notion that racialized people, First Nations, Métis, Innu and Inuit peoples are inferior to their White counterparts. (p. 441)

Lopes calls for a curriculum designed for “real world” challenges where emphasis is placed on collaborative work and care is taken to ensure that the hidden curriculum is not reinforcing particular notions of superiority (p. 437). A collaborative approach to curriculum acknowledges that different experiences exist and makes space to include students whose experiences are often omitted or kept on the periphery. Collaborative approaches provide ways to acknowledge individual accomplishments and knowledge through activities that include listening, sharing, and discussion.

Au (2009) calls for critical analysis in the curriculum (Cherryholmes, 1988; Kincheloe, 2005). He wants students to consider their own experiences and “relate them to the complexities of history and society.” (p. 252) Au sees a critical lens and related strategies as important tools in “decolonizing” the curriculum. He cites his own experiences of being a student and having to remain “on the outside looking in” because there was no room in the curriculum for his voice to be in conflict with the teacher’s or

the text. Au advocates for a curriculum where students can meaningfully engage with one another and “critically question what textbooks and teachers say about the world” (p. 250).

Jordan and Stanovich (2004) found that spaces where students could talk and deliberate openly about issues rarely occur in elementary schools. Social justice curricula can embed these types of strategies into activities and lessons. McIntosh (2005) also writes about the benefits of critical frameworks within curriculum.

When curriculum serves as both “window” and “mirror,” students are helped to become whole-souled, complex people. I imagine them as potential citizens of the world, having developed both identities of their own and interconnectedness with others. We have found that when the curriculum serves students as both “window” and “mirror” their alienation and anger decrease, together with their violence toward themselves and others. (p. 32)

Often the pedagogy most influential in the work of teachers who are conscious of and committed to equity and social justice in schooling contexts is referred to in the literature as critical pedagogy.

Defining critical pedagogy is no easy task; however, ideas based on Kincheloe’s *Critical Pedagogy Primer* (2005) are used to create a working definition as follows: Critical pedagogy holds at its core a vision of social justice and equality and examines social, cultural, economic, cognitive, and political contexts associated with education and human interactions. Critical pedagogy challenges commonplace practices, processes, and assumptions in an effort to expose how power often operates invisibly. Critical pedagogy uses practices such as critical literacy to effectively take up issues of

social justice by becoming aware of and identifying social relationships and practices that keep dominant ways of understanding the world and unequal power relationships in place.

Critical literacy practices encourage students to use language to question the everyday world, to interrogate the relationship between language and power, to analyze popular culture and media, to understand how power relationships are socially constructed and to consider actions that can be taken to promote social justice. (Lewison, Leland, & Harste, 2008, p. 3)

Students can build their skills by analyzing the texts they use to find whose points of view are promoted and given authority.

Culturally relevant and responsive teaching is another application that uses a critical stance to empower students to value their histories and identities. Teachers who use strategies associated with these pedagogies help students to develop ways to be competent within their own culture and across different cultures (Banks, 2005; Gay 2000). Culturally relevant and responsive teaching can counter deficit thinking associated with difference. Students learn to challenge assumptions in text and schooling processes that can limit their opportunities because of their racial backgrounds, cultural practices, and home languages that are not English. Cultural knowledge and practices are integrated into their learning experiences. Teachers who enact these pedagogical stances take on the responsibilities necessary to build their understanding about how racism can affect students' self-esteem and resilience.

Teachers also find ways to interact with their students' families to develop strategies to

keep students from feeling alienated within the school system (Delpit, 1988; Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Tenorio (2009) suggests that “even very young children can explore and understand attitudes that they and their classmates bring to school each day” (p. 256). She wants curriculum to support children as they explore differences such as skin colour and stereotypes associated with gender roles. According to Tenorio, if we want children to be successful in society, then starting these conversations early and continuing them throughout schooling will help them to gradually understand the complexities in ways that are suited to their developmental growth.

We rely on our schools to be the place for a multicultural, multiracial experience for our children. We want to believe that learning together will help our students to become more understanding and respectful of differences. Yet so often we do not address these issues head-on. It is unlikely that sensitivity and tolerance will develop, that children will bridge the gaps they bring to school from their earliest days, without specific instruction. (Tenorio, 2009, p. 261)

Giese’s study (2008) supports this view. She states, “Language arts education can provide a good conceptual fit for social justice” (p. 3). Giese found that children’s literature provides a good bridge for delving into social issues with children through critical teaching.

...critical pedagogical approaches encourage stepping outside of the familiar and the unquestioned, in order to examine the powerful factors that shape one’s life and experiences and those of others. In stories, readers may become immersed in perspectives that challenge and even threaten their long-held beliefs, although at

the same time this can provide a distinctly powerful site for contestations and struggle...Literature study in the classroom may provide opportunities for students to recognize and interrogate the power of texts. (Giese, 2008, p. 25)

Below she comments on findings from her study.

The teachers viewed literature study as a powerful vehicle for social justice education because it invited both emotional and cognitive engagement with themes and offered multiple entry points to engage diverse learners. Students at all three sites [three different elementary sites in 2005 in Southwestern Ontario] appeared most engaged with texts and topics that were relevant to their own experiences, and when given opportunities to explore multiple interpretations.

(p. iii)

There is much to consider for curriculum writers including how identity is taken up, whose knowledge is being reinforced, and whether competition or collaborative approaches are emphasized. There is evidence that developing a social justice lens can begin at an early age and that literature-based approaches can be effective. The structure and form of curriculum as well as the content and strategies used by writers can address many of the suggested changes to make curriculum more inclusive.

A search for guidelines on curriculum writing on the internet proved to be an eye-opening experience. The factors above such as teacher identity, student identity, form and content of the curriculum, collaborative strategies, and inquiry-based approaches are not mentioned. Ministry of Education guidelines also tend to omit similar considerations (Ministry of Education, 1998; 2006). Instead, required elements of curriculum units most often included the following: Overview, Rationale, Objectives,

Strategies, Classroom Activities, Annotated Bibliography/Resources, Appendices, and Standards. How curriculum is reconceptualized by those who write it and addressed by teachers and students who enact it must also take into account perspectives that acknowledge that curriculum is value-laden (Nieto, 2004a; Pinar et al., 2004). As teachers write curriculum for social justice, their efforts in making content more inclusive is not enough, they must also simultaneously develop a battery of strategies that enable and build a social justice mindset and framework for critical discussion, raising questions as to whose values are being propagated.

Frymier (1986) draws attention to the heightened importance of curriculum materials in shaping the quality of education in our schools. According to Frymier, the essence of schooling is about what children do in school: “What they do, by and large, is work with curriculum materials – hour after hour, day after day. Such materials are the substance of schooling” (p. 63). Frymier advocates for improvement in the quality of curriculum materials to support inclusive learning. However, Shulman (1987) argues that although the quality of the curriculum is important, another critical consideration is that teachers must have the capacity to transform the content to make it relevant to the needs of their students. Shulman suggests that teachers build their “wisdom” through scholarship and research and personal and professional development (p. 15).

Pinar et al. (2004) make an important point about shifting ideas of “curriculum construction” that paved the road for teachers to understand why social justice curriculum is needed and supports the point made by Shulman about the importance of teacher wisdom.

Today public curriculum construction is located in the multinational textbook conglomerates, in state textbook adoption committees, in district or ministry curriculum guidelines. ...Where curriculum can be constructed now is in the “lived space” of the classroom, in the lived experience of students and teachers. In such space and in such experience, the knowing teacher and student can find passages from what is given (indeed, mandated) to the what might be, “a middle way” between strict adherence to the facts and to participation in flights of fancy, a “midpoint” between the idiosyncrasy and spontaneity of chaos and intimacy, and the predictable formalism of bureaucratic officialdom. Passages, middle ways, and midpoints can be discussed via the “pedagogical content knowledge” of a self-knowing teacher, a teacher who knows that her or his pedagogical obligation is not to deliver someone else’s mail. (p. 860)

Curriculum for social justice works within the “lived spaces” of the classroom and through the ‘lived experiences’ of engaged students and knowledgeable teachers.

Reconceptualized Mandated Curriculum: A Hopeful Future

Definitions are not fixed or static. Instead, they are contextual and often evolve over time. *Curriculum* is a term that continues to change to include new perspectives. The Ontario Ministry of Education (2009b) recently asked for feedback from education stakeholders on school curriculum guidelines that were in use. The Ministry’s goals were to improve the guidelines and assist teachers, educational workers, and the public to more fully understand the meaning of *curriculum*. The responses the Ministry received led to the following definition: Curriculum is more than “just the expectations in the curriculum documents.” Instead it [curriculum] is seen “as the sum total of program-related

activities, experiences, and learning opportunities, both formal and informal, for which a teacher takes responsibility” (p. 8).

The Ministry of Education (2009b) further explained that academic content is important as well as “the need to address social, physical, emotional, cultural, and developmental aspects of learning” (p. 8). Curriculum, in the context of the Ministry’s current and evolving definition, is reconceptualized and concerned with building understanding about what happens in schools and within the processes of teaching and learning (Pinar et al., 2004). The revised definition acknowledges that curriculum is situated in sociocultural contexts and makes room for discussion of how to improve its relevancy to the needs of students and capacity for including social issues. Teachers who write curriculum for social justice have long awaited and advocated for such changes to mandates.

Social Justice

There are multiple interpretations of social justice (Applebaum, 2009; Bell, 1997; North, 2008; Park, 2008; Picower, 2011). Bell (1997) and Park (2008) agree that social justice education is a philosophical approach that encompasses both a process and a goal. I present four explanations of social justice to demonstrate that Bell and Park’s two key points, process and goal, remain relevant even when details within definitions vary. The first definition describes social justice as it relates to teaching; the second one is from a teacher union’s perspective, the third one applies to social justice leadership, and the final explanation describes societal outcomes.

Ayers (1998) offers an explanation of teaching for social justice:

Teaching for social justice is teaching that arouses students, engages them in a quest to identify obstacles to their full humanity, to their freedom, and then to drive, to move against those obstacles. And so the fundamental message of the teacher for social justice is: You can change the world. (p. xvii)

By emphasizing engagement, scrutiny, freedom, and action for change, Ayers adopts a critical stance to explain social justice.

The Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario (2006) describes social justice as:

A concept based on the belief that each individual and group within a given society has the fundamental right to equal opportunity, civil liberties, and full participation in the social, political, educational, economic, institutional, cultural, and democratic freedoms and responsibilities of that society. (p. 59)

This description of social justice incorporates elements of Eisner's social reconstructionist orientation as well as a critical stance that is related to the work of Henry Giroux.

McKenzie et al. (2008) argue for defining social justice as "nonessentialized," inferring that each situation and context warrants its own meaning. They believe that leaders within the field of education who work for social justice must aim to "raise academic achievement, prepare students to live as critical citizens and structure schooling to ensure that students learn in heterogeneous, inclusive classrooms" (p. 114). Once again, criticality is emphasized; however, there is also an emphasis on raising academic achievement as well as suggestions for guidelines that relate to the structure of

the learning environment. There is a strong argument against one-size fits all interpretations of social justice.

Gewirtz (2001) offers the following thoughts about social justice, emphasizing societal outcomes:

Social justice has traditionally been understood as referring to the way in which goods are distributed in society. I want to suggest that social justice is more usefully understood in an expanded sense to refer to a family of concerns about how everyone should be treated in a society we believe to be good. Broadly conceived in this way, social justice can be said to encompass two major dimensions – a distributional and a relational dimension. (p. 49)

A critical stance is necessary in order to fully address both dimensions – distributional and relational. The distributional dimension calls for equality in sharing goods and services and calls attention to an individual's access to participate in society. The relational dimension is about how we treat one another and requires examination of what is respectful and equitable in terms of opportunities, interactions, and freedoms. Social justice curriculum writing encompasses both of these domains – the distributional aspect and the relational dimension.

According to McIntosh (2005), educators are constantly and consistently seeking to find and share insights to enlighten students, change the world for the better, and lead to developing more respectful, thoughtful, and caring local and global citizens. Many scholars agree that the pursuit of equity and social justice are worthwhile endeavors (Agyepong, 2010; hooks, 2003; James, 2000; McIntosh, 2005). Equity and social justice are terms that are often grouped together. Lopes and Thomas (2006) use a definition of

equity that refers to “the rights of individuals and groups to an equitable share of the resources and influence in society.” Equity means equitable “*access and outcomes*” (p. 267). Therefore, social justice curriculum writing must include analysis and challenges to unfair systems and practices. To work and write for social justice entails a commitment to the creation of equitable outcomes (Sefa Dei, 2003). However, focusing on equitable outcomes alone is not enough since the relational aspect of social justice also requires attention and commitment. Social justice curriculum must also include exposure to new ideas that can challenge current beliefs.

There are prerequisites to better prepare teachers and students for critical discussion. Probing into the relational dimension of social justice requires furthering our sociocultural understandings and examining our histories and that can mean learning more about our identities, experiences, and the varied contexts of our lives. It may mean probing into messy issues that relate “to distribution of resources, relationships, power and privilege, race, gender, sexual orientation, ability, policies, and responsibilities” (Cherian & Ramrattan Smith, 2010).

Curriculum writers who advocate for social justice are also concerned about how knowledge is formed, what types of knowledges are valued, and who has access to knowledge (McMurphy-Pilkington, et al., 2008). They want to broaden and strengthen the curriculum to include voices that were omitted and marginalized (Au, 2009; Lee, 2009). They want to take up the hidden curriculum (Eisner, 1985). Social justice curriculum calls for examining personal and institutional actions to see “both through and beyond existing social and cultural themes and conditions that act as barriers to an idealized understanding or perception” (Ferneding, 2004, p. 56). Barriers are often faced

by historically disadvantaged groups such as racialized individuals, Aboriginal peoples, persons with disabilities, and underrepresented groups such as persons who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, two-spirited or transgender. These groups of people have found the traditional curriculum to be unrepresentative and inaccessible because their contributions, histories, and experiences are usually omitted, essentialized, or stereotypically presented.

Park (2008) conducted a study to investigate how teachers defined, understood, and practiced social justice. Eight Kindergarten to Grade 12 teachers participated. Data were collected through interviews, classroom and community observations, and journals over a period of 15 weeks. Park's findings indicated that teachers used their empirical knowledge of social *injustice* to build their understanding of social justice. Social justice was understood through social action and practices that challenged social injustices.

Summary

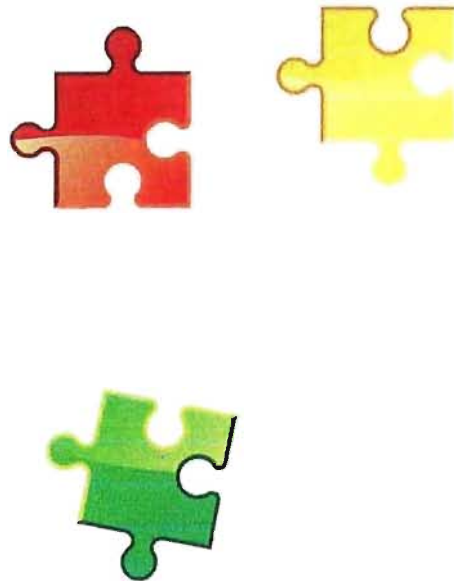
Reynolds and Webber (2004) emphasize that curriculum theory must be considered as a number of ideologies or methodologies "that move in multiplicities or lines of flight, not in dualisms or either/ors" (p. 2). The theories that Reynolds and Webber promote directly connect to the breadth of understanding associated with social justice. Social justice education is broad in scope and requires many considerations and strategies. It follows then, that curriculum writing for social justice involves more than just building awareness. It includes emphasizing commitment that comes from critically engaging in issues in meaningful ways, probing into personal and professional mindsets, and implementing a range of strategies for creating changes that are relevant to a variety of needs.

Social justice curriculum writing acknowledges difference(s), interrogates how difference(s) play out in daily life, and makes room for sharing multiple perspectives on various issues. A social justice curriculum pushes for action that can include developing policies that make visible the inequalities that are perpetuated individually and structurally, institutionally, and at societal levels (Cherryholmes, 1988; Kuehn, 2007). Social justice-focused support resources can provide viable links that help to make these critical connections and promote change within educational systems.



CHAPTER THREE

Research Design and Methodology



CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This study contributes to the fields of curriculum and social justice by investigating the complexities of teachers' experiences as curriculum writers for social justice. I envision this research as a resistive approach to limitations and restrictions that accompany mandated curriculum. The study is also "part of a liberation struggle" against dominant perspectives in the curriculum that are based on Whiteness (Henry, 1998, p. 9).

The aim of the research is to understand how teachers who volunteer to write social justice-focused curriculum support resources think about and understand their experiences of curriculum writing. This research also explores factors that promote and sustain the teacher participants' interest in taking up social justice through curriculum writing.

In this chapter, I explain my research design: selection of participants, data collection methods, ethical issues, and modifications that were necessary as the research progressed.

Why Qualitative Research?

This qualitative study focuses on experiences of four teachers who write social justice curriculum support resources. I consider these women as social activists who *reconceptualize* curriculum and make room for traditionally excluded topics such as race, gender, class, ability, and sexual orientation. I use a qualitative inquiry approach because qualitative methodology accepts possibilities of multiple realities, acknowledges the researcher's and participants' subjectivities, and provides tools for including traditionally excluded or marginalized voices. Qualitative research acknowledges the complexities and fluidity of life's experiences. By taking a critical qualitative stance, I acknowledge an

approach that provides space for participant reaction and emotional involvement (Frankenberg, 1993; Kincheloe & McLaren, 1998).

Qualitative research also lends itself to integrating multiple forms of data collection. Eisenhart and Howe (1992) state, "Methods must be modified, combined and even created to address the research questions that need study" (p. 658). Heeding their advice, a multi-faceted approach is utilized in this study so that multiple methods could be embedded in the research plan. The design of the study combines primary data sources: individual interviews and focus group interviews. Qualitative research entails an emergent design - one that allows for modification as the research process unfolds. This particular characteristic proved an important consideration since the research plan included three rounds of interviews, journaling throughout the time of the data collection, and two focus group sessions. This design provided flexibility and room for changes to occur, when necessary, during the study.

Denzin and Lincoln (2005) write:

although the field of qualitative research is defined by constant breaks and ruptures, there is a shifting center to the project: the avowed humanistic and social justice commitment to study the social world from the perspective of the interacting individual. From this principle flow the liberal and radical politics of action that are held by feminist, clinical, ethnic, critical, queer, critical race theory, and cultural studies researchers. (p. xvi)

This study falls within Denzin and Lincoln's description as it employs a critical stance and is framed by feminist pedagogy to explore and examine the phenomenon of curriculum writing for social justice from the perspectives of women teachers who take

on this voluntary work. I wanted to hear about their experiences to better understand why some teachers take up social justice through curriculum and teaching and to theorize about my experiences as a curriculum writer. The humanistic and social justice commitments are integral to this investigation.

A Critical Researcher's Lens

Use of a 'critical researcher' lens supports engagement in systematic critique of the construction of knowledge and social conditions (Fine & Weis, 2005). A critical researcher stance is one of "engagement and distance" as well as "multiple positioning" because of the fluidity of our identities and the roles we play (p. 68). As a critical researcher, I expose my subjectivities that may implicate me in the process of doing research. By opening up the process and interpretations to scrutiny, critical research, such as this study, attempts to counter accusations of neutrality and objectivity (Giroux, 1988; Kelly & Brandes, 2001). Kincheloe and McLaren (2005) suggest additional characteristics that are part of a critical researcher stance. For example, a critical researcher can view his/her work as a form of social or cultural criticism and use the following ideas as guideposts:

thought is mediated by power relations that are socially and historically constituted; facts cannot be isolated from values; certain groups in any society and particular societies are privileged over others; oppression has many faces and that focusing on only one at the expense of others (e.g. class oppression versus racism) often eludes the interconnections among them; and mainstream research practices are generally, although most often unwittingly, implicated in

the reproduction of systems of class, race, and gender oppression. (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005, p. 304)

The ideas are accompanied by a set of assumptions and can provide a mindset that is necessary to probe *normalized* activities and processes in which we participate every day. Reynolds and Webber (2004) reaffirm the importance of probing into that mindset in order to provide spaces for those who are often omitted from the curriculum. They call for “disruptive” action:

This kind of disruption *is* political because, although it seems like an “inconvenience” to those who are interested in maintaining the status quo of developing curriculum, to those who wish to disrupt it, it is to open up a “line of flight” in power and meaning for the use of those who are marginalized and excluded. (p. 5)

Multiple layers of complexities form the foundation of critical research. An inquiring stance, skepticism about practice, and resistive action are strategies that can assist us to critically examine how power is implicated in building and sharing knowledge. It follows then, that the juxtaposing of critical theory and a social justice stance can co-create an axis that allows us to probe and examine some of the established patterns that are usually associated with curriculum research in the traditional sense. This study offers one such “disruptive” opportunity, where the experiences of social justice oriented curriculum writers are carefully considered and critically explored.

Feminist Methodology

All participants in this study are women, including the researcher. Weiler (1988) outlines three characteristics in feminist methodology that can be applied to this study.

First, women begin their understanding and “investigation of the social world from grounded positions of being subordinate” (p. 58). Men hold the dominant positioning since male experiences form the norm. Secondly, feminist research emphasizes “lived experiences and the significance of everyday life” (p. 58). Emphasis is placed on social interactions and relationships between women, such as a woman researcher and women participants. In this study, subjective positioning through relationships between the researcher and participants are divulged and discussed. Thirdly, feminist research demonstrates political commitment to equality by taking up “personal experiences of subjugation” (p. 59). In this study, participants and researcher delve into their personal lives to share their stories and try to make sense of their beliefs, attitudes, values, and actions.

Webb (2000) emphasizes that feminist research involves an assumption that places experiences of women at the center of the social investigation (p. 35). For feminists, research is political. Topics are explored by examining how gender shapes them. Additionally, critical feminist research provides a way to probe the multiple subject positions with respect to race, class, and gender that researchers hold (Cook & Fonow, 1990). I believe it is important to consider ways in which gender plays out and informs curriculum writing. Furthermore, women teachers have formed the majority of writers for most of the curriculum writing projects that I have managed and co-authored. Leonard (2001) suggests that empowerment, ‘passionate scholarship’, giving voice to the silenced, acknowledging subjectivity, emphasizing the importance of interviews, and making research findings accessible are common principles and practices within a feminist stance (p. 192). This study draws upon feminist concepts of care, resistance,

and empowerment and embodies feminist research principles and practices that are outlined.

Researcher-Positioning

Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible.

These practices transform the world (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 3).

I applied an expanded version of Denzin and Lincoln's interpretation of qualitative research to this study. I view myself, not so much solely as an "observer," but instead as an "insider" (Fontana & Frey, 2005). I understand the importance of situating myself as a researcher, and exposing my subjectivities particularly since I theorize my experiences as a curriculum writer in Chapter four of this study. My race and gender as well as my shifting understanding of my socio-economic class provided filters for my developing critical lens and influenced how I worked with and related to participants, and how I represented their contributions to the study. Who I am and how I view the world influenced all aspects of this research. My personal and professional identities play out throughout the study. I am a Brown-skinned, racialized woman and I hold dear my immigrant experiences. I am the partner of a White man, mother of biracial children, a daughter, and a sister. I am also an English-speaking, educated professional and I carry some authority with colleagues who are teachers. These identities intersect and influence the types of questions I posed, topics that were emphasized, and conversations that followed (Razack, 1998; Shadd, 2001).

I knew the four women who were selected for the study. I felt that my familiarity with each of the participants was advantageous. I believe that knowing the women helped

me to gain their trust more quickly than if we were strangers who were just beginning to forge a relationship. I did not expect 'a question and answer period' but instead entered into the process aware of my moral and ethical responsibilities. In her study with women in prison, Tilley (1998a) referred to her researcher position as "someone familiar" and she described her thoughts about her teacher-researcher positioning.

I began to question how being someone familiar, a teacher-researcher, affected the research process. In particular, I became aware of how my familiarity, based on the relationships I developed with the women over time, enabled my research. (p. 319)

I stepped into the study with some understanding of my positioning and I predicted that I too would very likely bump up against this dilemma of being "someone familiar." Like Tilley, I was concerned about how my familiarity might affect the research process and I noted this in my field notes.

Now that I have selected my participants, I am very excited about getting started on the research. I feel happy that I know the women. I think that knowing them could be advantageous for this study.

One of them, Kate, I have known for a long time and we are friends. The remaining three, Sandira, Anne, and Aishwarya, I have gotten to know through work-related experiences. Yet, I am nervous and a bit anxious about how open they will be with me. Part of the problem in my mind is that I know they like me and respect my work, so I wonder if this will really turn out to be an advantage.

On one hand, it could make them feel comfortable enough to delve deeply into the topic. But I also have to admit that this relationship of knowing them could also

prove to limit the depth of the conversations. I mean, what if they don't want to say anything to offend me?

Some of this will depend on how comfortable I can make them feel about what they say – they have to know that this can't just be surface stuff. (Researcher, Field Note, April 5, 2009)

The entry above demonstrates my awareness as researcher, of the ambiguity of “being familiar” – it could stifle conversation or “familiarity” could be advantageous and facilitate a deepening of data. As it turns out, similar benefits and difficulties did arise. One benefit was that there was a collegial and welcoming atmosphere to our meetings. When I met with each of the participants individually, I felt each woman's support and enthusiasm for the study. The participants inquired into how things were progressing and came prepared with ideas they wanted to discuss. These types of interactions demonstrated to me that there were benefits to our familiarity. The difficulties arose from delving into their personal stories and revealing moments that came about as we reviewed transcripts and discussed some of their reactions as they read over their words. Therefore, it is important for me to acknowledge these connections and dilemmas that occurred in the research process and try to explain their implications. I delve more deeply into explaining how ‘familiarity’ played out in the “Ethics” section of this chapter.

Data Collection

I developed a conceptual framework with a three-part plan to address the research questions and collect data. Part one involved my work with four participants where I held three separate rounds of in-depth interviews with each participant and analyzed their journals. Participants also shared related materials such as magazine articles, lesson

plans, and published poetry. Part two of the data collection focused on interviews I did with my supervisor. I transcribed and coded the data following a similar process as I did with the four participants in part one. I constructed the chapter about my early schooling experiences and my curriculum writing history. I demonstrate my evolving learning as I theorize my experiences. Part three of the research plan involved data collection from two focus group sessions where the four participants and I met together. The sessions provided a context where as a group we discussed our curriculum writing experiences.

Participant Recruitment

The participants for this study were a purposive sample (Patton, 1990). I selected the four women from pools of teachers who served on various social justice and equity committees, wrote social justice curriculum resources, led equity-related workshops, and continued their learning about social justice and equity work through ongoing professional development and further education. I developed a list of potential participants by checking websites, newsletters, books, and my personal and professional networks. I initially contacted eight people. I entered into the recruitment process with a mindset to attempt to find participants who were from different ethnic or racial groups although any differences and similarities would be limited by studying four participants.

I fully expected that most teachers who were curriculum writers would be White (ETFO, 2006; Schick, 2000; Schick & St. Denis, 2005, Solomon et al., 2005). White teachers continue to comprise the majority of the teaching population in Ontario. Their histories, social interactions, and privileges help to construct and maintain a system of dominance, one that is based on Whiteness (Sefa Dei, 2007; Carr & Lund, 2007). In 1997, Alice McIntyre wrote,

Every teacher I had in school was white like me. Every babysitter, store owner, relative, neighbor, and family friend who I came into contact with was white like me. And like others before me, I never thought about it. No one ever asked me about my whiteness. Being white remained an invisible, yet powerful force that was as much a part of my make-up as my gender, my ethnicity, my religion, and my social class. I just never really saw it. (p. 1)

I felt that by recruiting teachers from different racial backgrounds, I was able to hear their varied experiences of working within educational systems that were based on Whiteness. I used the four activities outlined above – leadership in serving on committees, curriculum writing, workshop presentations, and professional learning, as screening criteria and filters because I felt that these types of activities helped to demonstrate participants' personal and public commitments to social justice. By purposefully selecting White and racialized participants, I tried to provide space for varied understandings and approaches to social justice to emerge. My familiarity with the participants' visible identities coupled with their voluntary consent to be part of the study assisted with the selection process. The racial backgrounds of the final four participants who agreed to complete the study are as follows: one self-identified as White, two of the women were racialized, and one was Aboriginal.

I compiled a list of names to begin the recruiting process. Then I used a script to invite prospective participants by email, mail, and telephone. When participants agreed or requested further information, I sent them a package that included a cover letter, an information letter, two copies of an informed consent form, and an interview schedule of guide topics/questions along with a self-addressed stamped envelope for a signed consent

form to be returned to me. Eight packages were sent out in total. The group of eight potential participants represented a variety of racial groups - Asian, Black, South Asian, Caribbean, Aboriginal and White. Of the eight potential participants, seven teachers responded with interest. I had decided that if more than four teachers were interested in the project, then I would make a selection of four participants for the study based on their interest in the research topic and their willingness to make firm commitments to completing all forms of the data collection. I also decided to ask teachers who were not selected for this study if they would allow me to keep their contact information for future research possibilities or in case a selected participant decided to withdraw from the study.

Through further telephone conversations, four participants were able to make firm commitments to the study. The remaining three, although interested, were concerned about juggling other responsibilities and timelines. Two of the teachers were enrolled in the *Principals' Qualification Program* and one had family commitments to care for her parents. Fortunately, all three additional participants agreed to be back-ups or assist with future projects and this provided some peace of mind in case any of the four selected participants might have had to withdraw from the project. I also contacted the eighth potential participant who did not respond to further written communications once the initial package went out, to let her know that the study was going to proceed.

Participant Profiles

In this section, I present profiles of each of the four teachers who agreed to participate in the study. The profiles are synopses of their backgrounds and interest in the research topics. Within each profile, I include a section that discloses aspects of my relationship with the participant. I believe that this information serves as an introduction

to the women and can assist readers in more fully understanding their in-depth stories and discussion in the chapters that follow. The synopses also serve as quick reference pieces to aspects of their stories. Pseudonyms are used for each participant.

Participant One: Kate

Kate was born in Scotland and immigrated to Canada in her early twenties. She attended university in Scotland where she earned a Master of Arts degree. Kate received her teacher training in Canada and continued her education by taking several additional qualification courses while employed. Kate has taught at the elementary, secondary, and college levels and has also been an adult education instructor. She has worked in the field of education for over three decades.

Kate self-identifies as a White, immigrant woman of privilege, and as having a disability. She believes her equity consciousness became noticeable to her during her work as an instructor to adult immigrant women.

Kate and I taught together and have maintained our friendship. Of all participants, I have known Kate the longest. We share many interests, in particular, our pursuit of social justice. She is keenly interested in pursuing further education on the topic of social justice and was firmly committed to take time to reflect on the meaning of her contributions to curriculum writing. Kate has family members who have completed doctoral work and understands the significance of current research in changing practice.

Kate has co-authored and edited several books related to social justice themes.

Participant Two: Sandira

Sandira is of South Asian heritage and immigrated to Canada in her teens. She attended secondary school and university in Ontario. Recently, she earned a Master of Education degree. Sandira did her teacher training in Ontario and continued her education by taking several additional qualification courses while she worked. She has been teaching for eight years and has worked in three schools for the same school board.

Sandira self-identifies as a racialized, immigrant woman and describes herself as “Brown.” She believes her equity consciousness started quite early in her career. She recalled participating in equity training sessions that were sponsored by the school board in her first year of teaching. Sandira became involved with teacher union social justice initiatives in her third year of employment.

Sandira and I met through union work and have maintained a collegial relationship. She is interested in pursuing a PhD in Education on the topic of social justice and was interested in contributing to the study by exploring her role as a curriculum writer. She has a strong commitment to continuing her education and identifies her interest in social justice-focused curriculum writing as “a good fit.”

Sandira has co-authored resources, articles, and poetry related to social justice themes.

Participant Three: Anne

Anne was born in Ontario, Canada. She attended secondary schools in three countries: Canada, France, and England. She attended university in Ontario where she earned a Bachelor of Arts degree. Anne also did her teacher training in Ontario and

continued her education by taking several additional qualification courses during her teaching career. She has been teaching for nineteen years for the same school board.

Anne self-identifies as an Aboriginal woman who has Métis and Ojibwe roots. She is bilingual in English and French. Anne sometimes self-identifies as having a disability because she uses a device to enhance her voice capabilities in order to be heard.

Anne believes her equity consciousness started quite early on in her teens as she noticed injustices in how her classmates were treated and the general unfair treatment of Aboriginal people in her home community. Later, as a teacher, she participated in an equity training course and claims that her learning from that program was pivotal in helping her to advance her social activist contributions to a political level.

Anne and I met through union work and we have maintained a collegial relationship. She currently holds political office. Anne has a keen interest in equity and social justice issues and is highly committed to social justice teaching. She describes herself as willing to assist people who ask for help and was very interested in the topics of this study. She also likes to reflect on her experiences and her participation in the study provided a space for that type of critical reflective work. Anne has a strong desire to include Aboriginal perspectives in curriculum and saw this study as another opportunity to learn more about the field of inclusive curriculum.

Anne has co-authored resources at the school board level and for the teacher union. She has also contributed to resources for the Ministry of Education in Ontario. In addition, Anne created her own curriculum units that she has shared with colleagues at conferences and at her workplaces.

Participant Four: Aishwarya

Aishwarya was born in India where she attended secondary school and university. She earned a Master of Science degree and a teaching certificate prior to immigrating to Ontario, Canada. She did her teacher training in Ontario and has been teaching in elementary schools for one school board for eleven years. Upon arrival in Canada, Aishwarya worked as an early childhood educator since her teaching credentials were not validated until she completed her teacher training in Ontario.

Aishwarya states that she does not self-identify unless there is a specific reason for doing so and she was not asked to self-identify into a designated group until she came to Canada. When she does self-identify, she describes herself as having light brown skin and her identity as “racial minority.”

Aishwarya credits two union courses as specifically igniting her interest in equity work. She believes that both courses assisted her in taking explicit steps towards working for social justice and gave her tools to begin work at the school level and continue on to further work with the local teacher union, provincial union, and school board.

Aishwarya and I met through union work and have maintained a collegial relationship. She has a growing interest in building her knowledge in equity and social justice issues and is very committed to social justice teaching. She is interested in pursuing a PhD in curriculum studies or social justice in the future. Aishwarya was curious to see how this study would unfold and wanted to contribute by sharing her experiences of curriculum writing. Aishwarya describes her nature as very reflective and taking time to examine her actions appealed to her desire to learn more about herself and improve her teaching practice.

Aishwarya has authored resources at the school level as needs have arisen. She created a handbook for classroom volunteers and organized a forum for developing and sharing curriculum units with colleagues. Aishwarya has written articles and co-authored curriculum resources that relate to social justice themes.

Primary Data Sources

I describe three data sets: open-ended, face-to-face interviews with participants, interviews for Sherry's Story, and focus group interviews.

Data Set One: Open-Ended, In-Depth, Face-to-Face Interviews

I used in-depth interviews to collect data from four teachers who are curriculum writers. I looked to their personal journeys and queried into motivating factors that led them to curriculum writing, their understandings of *curriculum*, and *social justice*, and probed further into their vision and goals for writing curriculum support resources for schools. In discussing the technique of interviewing, Fontana and Frey (2005) recommend finding someone "empathetic," who is a member of the group being studied to act as an informant into the language and cultural codes.

The new empathetic approaches take an ethical stance in favor of the individual or group being studied. The interviewer becomes an advocate and partner in the study, hoping to be able to use the results to advocate social policies and meliorate the condition of the interviewee. The preference is to study oppressed and underdeveloped groups. (p. 696)

Although they describe ethnographic work, I applied their recommendation to this study. I view myself as an insider of sorts, "empathetic" as opposed to neutral – a teacher and curriculum writer who is privy to some of the language and cultural codes associated with

curriculum writing. I wanted to listen to the individual stories of participants but to also participate in conversations. I felt that my insider status as a teacher and curriculum writer was a definite advantage to facilitating dialogue with the women.

Fontana and Frey (2000) also emphasize that interviews are not neutral events but that interviewing is “inextricably and unavoidably historically, politically, and contextually bound” (p. 695). They speak to the subjectivity of what is asked as well as what is offered, and emphasized in answering. Burgess, Sieminski, and Arthur (2006) support their view and add that each interview is unique, socially constructed, and context-specific. I emerged from some of the interviews feeling as though I had entered into a “sacred space” with the participant. The weight of that responsibility felt heavy at times.

I also drew upon Frankenberg’s (1993) feminist understanding and approach to be “explicitly involved in the questions” taking into account elements of my own life experiences (p. 30). In fact, aspects of my story often emerged in the conversations with participants. In transcripts I coded parts of my story that emerged as “Sherry’s Story” (Research Codes, Version 4, p. 4). An example is included in Appendix A.

I used one-on-one, open-ended interviews. Open-ended interviews provided flexibility and room for trust to build and issues to emerge. There were three separate rounds of interviews in total. Each interview held with an individual participant was approximately 90 minutes in length and each consecutive one was held approximately four weeks apart. The process was as follows: In the first round, I conducted one separate individual interview with each of the four participants in this order – Kate, Sandira, Anne, and Aishwarya. Three to four weeks later, I conducted another round, and finally,

another three to four weeks later the last round of interviews took place. Three rounds of interviews afforded space for changes such as following up on details and also helped my interviewing technique to develop and evolve. Additionally, multiple rounds of interviews provided reflective time for participants to think about what was discussed, write in their journals, and complete their member checking responsibilities. As the researcher, the time between the interviews allowed me to transcribe the interviews and write out preliminary summaries for participants to check. A schedule of guide topics/questions was developed and sent out to the participants ahead of time. The guide questions provided the participants with general topics of discussion relating to the research questions and served as a reminder to participants and me that discussion of those topics could take place during the three rounds of interviews.

Over time, the process unfolded and evolved. I learned something from each interview about my interview technique and made changes that I thought improved the process. I noted my reflections on the process in field notes such as the one below focused on an interview with Kate.

I am a bit taken back by how this interview turned out after reading the transcript. I jump around too quickly. I need to figure out how to make this more of a conversation. And this disturbs me really because I know Kate well and I thought this [the interview] would flow pretty easily.

Perhaps I was too concerned about time running out or making sure I didn't forget something important. The transcript definitely shows that I left some topics too quickly. I will need to go back and ask Kate about her boyfriend and why she seemed so shocked by the name calling. I want to know more about that. I need to

slow down, think more about what is being said and how it relates to the study and then find ways to probe further. (Researcher, Field Note April 19, 2009)

Notes such as this one, helped to provide some direction as I prepared for the next round of interviews. I was able to give Kate and other participants more time to elaborate on points of their stories and by asking for further clarification or posing a question such as, 'Can you tell me more about that?' I learned to adjust the pace of the interview to facilitate further dialogue. Multiple rounds of interviews allowed me to make those types of changes.

Arthur (2002) states that in-depth interviewing can be very revealing since participants may not be aware of some of their views and attitudes that emerge during the interview conversations. Arthur's point of view was definitely supported through my experiences in the study. Quite often, participants found themselves surprised by the depth of emotion that surfaced while they recalled specific events.

I can remember sharing experiences with the women and laughing and feeling *oh I am home* and I am getting quite emotional just talking about it and I thought okay just being an immigrant is part of who I am. (Kate, Interview 1, April 2009, p. 6)

During that interview with Kate, her eyes filled up with tears and she seemed surprised by her reaction. Although I had read about similar situations, Kate's emotions also took me by surprise as my eyes welled up as well. I remember stopping the tape to give us a moment to regroup and get tissues. As her friend and as a compassionate researcher, I found her story to be moving and I reacted as such.

My Supervisor and I also used a similar interview process of consecutive interviews, to gather data for Chapter four, that discusses my experiences. I chose to include a chapter about myself because I wanted to explore my curriculum writing experiences. I felt that learning more about myself could better prepare me for exploring the stories of the participants. There are some important differences to note regarding my interviews and those that I completed with my participants. Although my Supervisor took the role of researcher to collect my stories, I went into the interviews feeling as though I was still in control of how the dialogue would unfold. She took on the researcher's role of asking the questions, but I had already thought about what I might say. I had written the guide topics/questions. Initially, the process seemed 'staged' to me. However, I was unprepared for what unfolded.

My Supervisor's skill in probing into my stories was far more developed than my own and soon into the first interview, I found myself very much in a participatory role. I was no longer the researcher, but the participant at the other end – the person being questioned. For example, in my first interview with my Supervisor, I was struck by how deep my feelings were about an event from a very early childhood experience that I recalled. As I shared the story, I choked up and began to cry. I had not anticipated that type of reaction and I felt vulnerable after exposing such personal emotions. I had anticipated the questions and thought about my responses, yet the dialogue had led me to an unexpected reaction. Although this was uncomfortable for me, experiencing that rush of sudden and deep emotion helped me to better understand and empathize with participants in my study who also exposed their vulnerabilities at various times throughout the study.

I also learned to accommodate participants' needs as they arose. In the first round of interviews, one of the participants, Anne, when she was talking about her self-identity, divulged that she had a voice disability and found it challenging to speak for long periods of time. She also outlined what I could expect when her voice became tired.

I sometimes self-identify with a disability because I lose my voice regularly and when I teach I have to use a voice enhancer so that I do not have to raise my voice... It [the interview process] is a fair amount of talking and you will find that my voice will get raspier and raspier and my speech therapists have said that I need to have a glass of water there and take a drink every ten minutes.

Sherry: Okay, thank you for letting me know about your disability. In order to accommodate you I want you to feel free to use your journal more and if there are parts of the interview that we are not able to get to today, then I am perfectly fine with having you answer the questions through your journaling or at another time and so on. I just want you to feel free to let me know how best to proceed and together we can make the changes that are necessary. (Anne, Interview 1, April 2009, pp. 2-3)

I offered Anne the option of selecting journaling instead of interviews if necessary, to accommodate her need.

Transcription of Participant Interviews and Member Checking

Following each individual interview, I transcribed the audio-taped interview and later sent the transcript with a preliminary interpretation to each participant. According to Tilley and Powick (2002), researchers have much to gain through the transcription process. They describe transcription as a useful bridge to the work of analysis. In my role

as a transcriber, I provided consistency in interpreting pauses, deciphering unclear words, and noting emotional stressors, moments of excitement, and comfortable rapport in the conversations. Participants' stories are presented in Chapter five as a form of counter storytelling as a means to expose and critique normalized dialogue, practices, and beliefs (Soloranzo & Yosso, 2002).

I used the strategy of *member checking* as an ongoing mechanism with each participant to give her opportunities to respond to my interpretation of each interview conversation. This ongoing process assisted immensely in checking accuracy of stories, completeness of descriptions, and fairness of interpretations (Creswell, 2005; Lather, 1991). Member checking also helped to maintain engagement with participants and continued to strengthen our trust with each other. For example, in the third interview, Aishwarya shared a very personal story about returning to India to visit her father. During one of their father-daughter conversations, she encountered some strong and unexpected feelings when they spoke about her family's inheritance. I wrote about my own feelings in my field notes after the interview to remind me to carefully consider my responsibilities as a researcher and as her friend and to be sure to acquire her permission to use the story.

Aishwarya shared some very personal details with me today. I feel worried about how to represent her story without giving away her trust. I really hoped that this would happen and now here I sit wondering how best to write about this.

(Researcher, Field Note, June 15, 2009)

I felt that Aishwarya trusted me enough to divulge her deep and personal feelings; however, I could tell that after the interview she was concerned about how her words

would be used in the study. I had to put myself into her situation to get a glimpse into her life – her roles as daughter, mother, sister, spouse, and now as a participant in this study.

I spent a significant amount of time deciding if and how best to include that story because it was definitely related to the study. I saw member checking as a way to connect to Aishwarya and gain her trust in my abilities to ‘tell her story.’ When I left that interview, I knew that she would be anxiously waiting to see how I would represent her story and connect it to the study. I also realized that if I took the time I needed to carefully consider her story and explain its relevance that when she did her member check, her trust and confidence in my abilities would be strengthened. She was pleased that I specifically sought her approval to include that particular story. All the women looked forward to receiving transcripts and preliminary notes. They wanted and needed that ownership and authority to verify their words and consider my interpretations.

Member checking also provided an ongoing mechanism towards transparency. I gave the participants time to read the material and respond with clarification and comments. Most often, their responses were correcting grammar or taking out a specific name that came up in the conversation. For the most part, transcripts remained unaltered. It was also through member checks that I realized that a second consent form would be an important addition to the study. Although the data were password protected and pseudonyms were used to protect the identities of participants, it became evident that their true identities could be revealed through details presented in the study – their profiles, work experiences, and personal anecdotes. I spoke to each participant about this modification after I wrote Chapter five. I explained that there was a possibility that they could be identified. I further explained that I would provide each of them with the

constructed story from Chapter five for member checking as well. I also asked whether they would each be willing to sign a second consent form indicating that I had informed them of the possibility that they could be identified. All four women agreed to the second consent form and I believe that their willingness to proceed demonstrated their trust in me and their understanding of the value of their stories to the study.

Data Set Two: Understanding My Curriculum Writing Experiences

The second set of data drew upon my personal experiences as a teacher who writes social justice-focused curriculum support resources. I constructed this section based on data collected from interviews I participated in with my Supervisor, recollection of key interactions and events that I presented as vignettes, and the history of my curriculum writing experiences. I refer to Chapter four as “Sherry’s Story” because many facets of my identity and life experiences are included. Pseudonyms are used. Chapter four represents a critical look at events that brought me to my work of curriculum writing and how that work evolved over time. I included examples and details about specific writing projects because I wanted to provide readers with a sense of my curriculum writing journey. Although the story turned out to be longer than expected, I believe the details within the chapter help to demonstrate that my understanding of *curriculum* and *social justice* has continued to develop over time through studies for a Master of Education, now for a PhD, as well as through research for resources that I continue to write. I also felt strongly that by taking an in-depth look at my experiences and theorizing them, I would be better equipped to understand the experiences of the four participants.

Through my employment, I was in a fortunate and privileged position of planning social justice-focused teacher professional development programs. My work experiences

enabled me to reap benefits of conversations with teachers and educational experts on a regular basis and provided opportunities for participating in ongoing learning experiences by attending, teaching, and co-facilitating a wide range of programs. Over the past 31 years, my understanding of curriculum and the scope of social justice support resources that I co-authored and authored also evolved. I included information about processes I used in forming writing teams and types of negotiations that I consider to be integral for the development of collaborative, long-term social justice-focused curriculum support resources. I also compiled over time, a list of *considerations for selecting writers* that I that is based on my developing critical lens and range of my experiences, as a practical tool for curriculum writers of future resources.

Data Set Three: Focus Group Interviews

I asked the four participants from the study to come together with me in conversation as a focus group for two separate interviews. At the sessions we discussed our experiences of curriculum writing: participating on curriculum writing teams, vision and motivation for our particular projects, and ideas about writing curriculum that holds social justice as a main tenet. The collective conversations from both meetings were audio-recorded and transcribed in the same manner as described in the collection of data set one, individual interviews.

Montell (1999) describes focus groups as “consciousness-raising and empowering for the research subjects, as well as the researcher” (p. 44). When I shared Montell’s perspective with participants they concurred that such critical conversations were insightful. Their comments indicated that it was rare to have opportunities to discuss collective experiences such as curriculum writing and that to take time to critically

examine the process was “personally and professionally satisfying and beneficial” (Anne, Interview 3, June 2009, p. 17). Kamberelis and Dimitriadis (2005) believe that focus groups can offer unique insights into how critical inquiry on a specific topic can create a context for engaging in real-world experiences. Marketplace focus groups often provide feedback to manufacturers that can guide their decision-making about the products they develop and sell. Similarly, focus groups can provide information about the process of curriculum writing and the strengths and weaknesses of curriculum support resources.

I used the focus group sessions as a problem-solving mechanism to help answer “why” questions and to begin to offer explanations that are socially constructed in the feminist tradition. As women, we speak and interpret our work from positions that are subordinate and our personal experiences fuel our political action as social justice activists (Frankenberg, 1993; hooks, 1984). According to Montell (1999) “because knowledge and meaning are collective rather than individual productions, focus groups can be an effective method for getting at socially produced knowledge” (p. 51). Goss and Leinback (1996) support this line of thought:

Focus groups give participants an opportunity to narrate their personal experiences and to test their interpretations of events and processes with others, and whether confirmed or disputed, the result is a *polyvocal* production, a multiplicity of voices speaking from a variety of subject positions. (p. 116)

These two opportunities for women teachers to collectively share experiences about curriculum writing became unique learning experiences for each of us as well.

Kamberelis and Dimitriadis (2005) suggest that some of the strengths and limitations of focus group work lie in the informal nature of the speech of everyday life.

For example, in focus group research, such as this study, the researcher works with the participants through conversation. The critical reflective nature of the conversations are strengths because they can lead to common understandings and collective actions. However, the conversations themselves are “never easy and always involve power struggles” (p. 890). The participants in the focus groups still speak and interpret the world from their subjective positions. Questions can help the participants to see that there are contradictory aspects to their varied lived experiences.

Kamberelis and Dimitriadis cite Kozol’s (1991) work that notes the importance of “space” for holding focus group meetings. His finding indicates that “official” spaces such as school sites can limit how conversations evolve. The focus group sessions in this study were held at a hotel. I took care to choose space with a kitchen and living room to provide a more informal setting. I wanted participants to feel comfortable and meet and speak with each other prior to the focus group conversations. Madriz (2000) sees the empowering value of focus groups. She finds that focus groups can shift the authority of the researcher and facilitate a safe space for women to talk about their experiences.

Focus groups can be an important element in the advancement of an agenda of social justice for women, because they can serve to expose and validate women’s everyday experiences of subjugation and their individual and collective survival and resistance strategies. (p. 836)

The women in the study appreciated the chance to share their thoughts and ideas and to listen to one another.

Secondary Data Sources: Journals, Email Correspondence, and Related Documentation

Participants were asked to write in journals throughout the study. I explained that the journal could be used for writing entries related to the study, such as a significant incident that prompted them to learn more about a topic, question their beliefs, or seek out advice. Journals were also used to record a memory of an event from their childhood or youth that they felt related to the study. Participants could also use the journals to note additional relevant information that they recalled later, following an interview, to record new thoughts that emerged from the discussion, or to prompt their memory for a future interview. Participants were asked to keep their journals for the duration of the study. They decided what sections they wanted to share in the study. Those selections of journal entries were analyzed.

All four participants submitted journal entries. Some were taken from the journal notebooks that were given to them at the beginning of the study, others were submitted by personal communication such as mail and email. There were 24 journal entries in total that were submitted and used in the data analysis. Writing in a journal can provide a pace that is decided upon by the participant and is less dependent on the questioning of others (Richardson, 2001). This technique of gathering data also provided space and time for individual critical reflective work. For Anne, journaling helped to accommodate her disability. Journal entries, email correspondence, and related documentation such as books and articles about the participants and their work that were submitted to me were used in data analysis. Together, these scripts represented a form of “life notes” and “woman talk” that corroborated primary data sources (Bell-Scott, 1994, p. 13).

For Chapter four, I used my PhD journals that I began when I enrolled as a student in 2005 as a secondary data source. I also drew upon related documentation such as articles I wrote or contributed to, work for my PhD in Education studies, a variety of resources that I developed, as well as outlines and notes for courses and programs I taught or co-facilitated.

Field Notes

I analyzed field notes from the 12 interviews, as well as both focus group sessions. Field notes served several purposes. For example, field notes described context and sometimes more fully explained the subjectivity of a particular stance or reaction. I used field notes to capture details about the interviews that I felt were relevant, but not captured on tape, such as impressions of mood, setting of location, body language, onset of emotion, and for describing the diffusion of tension-filled moments (Sanjek, 1990).

Data Analysis

I entered into this research study as a student, a teacher-curriculum writer, racialized, immigrant woman who has also benefitted from many privileges such as job security, education, and financial stability. Although many aspects of my story intersected with those of the participants, there are notable differences. Like the participants, I am a product of systems of education that are based on Whiteness. However, I have devoted years of study, first for a Masters degree, and now in my PhD studies to build my understanding about the contradictions within my life experiences – work in social activism as a form of resistance to Whiteness and my subordinate position as a Brown-skinned woman in a system that is based on White Eurocentric thought and

perspectives. It is from these contradictory positions that I approached analysis of the data.

Miles and Huberman (1994) suggest contemplating the question, “What were the main concepts, themes, issues, and questions” that were raised in the data. I used adaptations of their suggestions to help to draw out “salient points” from the interviews and marked these as quotes for easy access (pp. 51-54).

I started with a-priori codes which are tags or labels for descriptors or interpretations from the text. The idea was to get at the meaning of what was said. Codes served to organize the information. Miles and Huberman (1994) suggest creating a start list of codes prior to the research project, but they also caution there must also be room to discard or adapt these once the project is on the way. I developed a start list of 15 codes and explanations to begin the process of organizing the texts. These initial codes came from the general research topics/questions that I created for participants to use as guidelines for the sets of interviews (see Appendix B). By the tenth version of research codes, compiled from the various data sources, there were 101 research codes in use.

I wrote the codes onto post-it notes and posted them on a wall as I worked on the analysis (see Appendix C). This visual form helped me to combine related codes to form larger categories. The visual display also made the codes accessible for manipulating and checking the categories. Categories were further analyzed to draw out and connect with emergent themes or related points. I include a sample of a section of a coded interview to help to demonstrate the process (see Appendix D). Coffey and Atkinson (1996) suggest keeping detailed notes about codes and categories in order to build rationale for decisions that are made during analysis. That was sound advice since I often had to refer back to

the detailed descriptors. The themes and points were then interpreted, presented, and discussed based on the investigative questions of the study. I wrote marginal notes as well to draw out particular points and chunks of meaning (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994).

I examined each set of data as they related to my research questions and critical feminist theoretical framework looking for similarities and experiences that stood out as different from others. From those standpoints I developed my findings drawing upon evidence from interview and focus group transcripts. Additionally, I drew upon secondary data sources such as journals, field notes, and related documentation such as articles, lesson plans, poetry, and email communication written by and about the participants to support my claims and address the research questions. Chapter five presents participants' stories based on analysis of the data.

Ethics

There were ethical considerations for all aspects of the study. As a researcher, I continued to reflect upon issues related to the privacy of the women throughout the study: their reputations with colleagues, how their families might view stories that some of them might not have heard before, and whether I would interpret their words and represent their stories in respectful ways. I wanted to do respectful research, and I realized that there were many aspects to consider (Tilley, 1998b). Miles and Huberman (1994) offer a warning to qualitative researchers:

We cannot focus only on the quality of the knowledge we are producing, as if its truth were all that counts. We must also consider the rightness or wrongness of our actions as qualitative researchers in relation to the people whose lives we are studying, to our colleagues, and to those who sponsor our work. (p. 288)

Their words certainly rang true in relation to this study. Although the application to the Research Ethics Board is very thorough, ethical issues continued to emerge well into the writing of the analysis chapters of this dissertation. I discuss several examples: familiarity of participants, recognition of participants' identities, and connections to my workplace.

I decided early on that no colleagues on staff at my place of employment would participate in the study. However, as it turns out, all four participants selected for the study were familiar to me (Tilley, 1998a). At first, I was reluctant to select participants I knew, wondering how their relationships with me might play out. I worried that our collegial relationships might inhibit critique or negative talk about curriculum writing. I chose to openly discuss this concern with each of the women prior to confirming their selection as participants. Fortunately, the four women remained very interested and committed to the study. As it turned out, three out of the four were very much interested in continuing their studies and pursuing PhD studies in social justice. Furthermore, the four women represented very different cultural backgrounds and lived experiences, even though two of the four were of South Asian descent. Those differences and characteristics situated them as well-suited as candidates who fit my criteria of trying to assemble a diverse participant pool, that included White, Aboriginal, and racialized participants. I decided that their perspectives and their openness about our collegial relationships would enrich the study.

Throughout the study, I took care to protect the identities of participants by using pseudonyms and keeping data protected in a locked cabinet; however, as I worked through the data collection and continuing analysis stages, it became evident that some readers familiar with social justice support resources and also interested in this study

might be able to detect or recognize the identities of one or all of the participants. After much careful consideration and consultation with my Supervisor, I decided to make two important additions that we felt would address this concern.

Throughout the process of data collection, participants had ongoing opportunities for member checks of transcripts and preliminary findings. To address this emergent concern, I decided to go two steps further: First, give each participant her represented story from Chapter 5 for another member check opportunity, and second, create a second consent form advising participants of the possibility that their identities could be revealed. These two additional steps meant that each woman would be able to read her full written story that was constructed from the various data. Along with this decision, I spoke to the women individually and also communicated in writing about this concern and the strategies I planned to use to address the issue. I advised the women that I would require a second consent form acknowledging that they were aware that they could be identified. At that time, they were also reminded of the details about withdrawing from the study and the procedures that would remain in place if any of them requested that her data not be used. In spite of this emergent challenge, I was relieved that all four participants still chose to stay in the study and signed second consent forms. As a researcher finding a way to address this concern about the possibility of identification was very important since the study was well along in the process before this issue became evident.

Another issue that emerged related to my experiences in Chapter four and connections to my job at the time. On my first draft of the chapter, I included the names of resources I had contributed to and developed. I had also included excerpts from some

of the books. I later came to realize that there could be implications for my work and colleagues and I decided to remove much of the work-related information. However, because the research was initiated by my interest in improving my practice as a curriculum writer, there were some aspects of my work that had to remain in the study since they formed part of the data and provided contextual information for discussion of my curriculum writing history.

In general, dealing with ethical issues in this study required direct communication in some cases, heightened awareness to emerging concerns, and consultation with other qualitative researchers and my Supervisor on particular issues. Clearance and approval from Brock University's Research Ethics Board is included in Appendix E.

Reciprocity

All participants agreed that there were significant benefits personally and professionally for engaging in the study. The four women agreed that finding time to critically reflect on their work as curriculum writers was extremely beneficial. Although their commitment to the study took many hours of their free time: spending time on interviews, reading transcripts, writing in journals, and providing feedback, they felt that sharing information about what the work of curriculum writing meant was very worthwhile.

They also found it very beneficial to talk together in focus groups about their motivation and hear from one another about similarities and differences in their curriculum writing experiences. Most significantly, they felt that listening to one another's stories and sharing their stories through this study could contribute to building knowledge about teaching practice, social justice, and curriculum. The women believe

that by sharing their stories with other teachers, those teachers may find ways to critically examine the curriculum resources they use in their classrooms and take steps to build their critical consciousness and lens, and possibly someday write social justice-focused resources themselves.

Participants agreed that sharing their personal and professional journeys about writing social justice curriculum resources provided a method to document practical strategies for reconceptualizing curriculum. They also came to view their contributions to the study as resistive actions towards dismantling privileged discourses about curriculum writing. Below are specific comments from Kate.

It has been really good for me to look back on the curriculum writing that I did do because it has given me an opportunity to realize several things: first it has strengthened my resolve to continue my work in social justice; it made me realize that yes, I can actually accomplish something worthwhile and important; I can communicate my values and my thoughts.

Now that I work at the college level, I realize even more the value of what I have had a part in. I realize now that the curriculum writing experience was a really important and big part of my professional development and personal growth, perhaps even more important than many of the other things I did such as attend conferences, deliver workshops, and so on. (Kate, Interview 3, June 2009, pp. 23-24)

Anne believes that speaking about her curriculum writing experiences has offered her a way to try to make sense of choices she has made over time and provided a way for her to assess the positives and negatives of various aspects of her many professional

endeavours and the types of choices she has had to make. Laughingly, she described what she refers to as her “laboratory rat” experience, her contribution to this study.

I thought it was good to stop and think because it involved reflection and introspection. Well, actually I do a lot of introspection, but I never really thought about why I write, or why I was drawn into this direction, so I think that having a chance to do that has been very insightful and will help me with future endeavours. (Anne, Interview 3, June 2009, p. 16)

Aishwarya felt that the biggest benefit for her was to be able to talk and share ideas with other curriculum writers. The focus groups were very meaningful to her because it gave her an opportunity to have her voice heard and her experiences validated. But further to those benefits is the personal growth that she has gained.

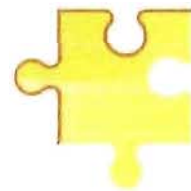
Even though it was difficult to make time for the interviews, checking the notes, writing the journals and so on, I had a unique opportunity to look at my practice, to think critically about curriculum writing. I had to face up to my actions and it will definitely help me in how I go about things in the future, personally, and professionally. (Aishwarya, Focus Group, Session 2, June 2009)



CHAPTER FOUR

Sherry's Story

(Towards Understanding My Curriculum Writing Experiences)



CHAPTER FOUR: SHERRY'S STORY: (TOWARDS UNDERSTANDING MY CURRICULUM WRITING EXPERIENCES)

This chapter draws upon data collected from interviews I participated in with my Supervisor, personal and professional experiences, focus group interviews, PhD journals, and articles, books, and resources that I have authored or co-authored. Initially, the idea I had for my doctoral research was to study myself - a type of creative, reflexive, autobiographical piece. I wanted to try to make sense of my curriculum writing experiences. I was curious as to whether I was “spinning my wheels” in my work of creating resources for social justice. I also wanted to better understand the strengths and limitations of curriculum resources. I was interested in how my lived experiences, perspectives, and knowledge influenced what I produced for teachers and educational workers to use with students. I embarked on PhD studies to improve how I did my work.

As I reflect upon my goals now, I see I really wanted to “theorize my experiences” (Ball, 2006). I use this expression as Ball interprets and explains the meaning of theory – theory is not a “perceptual straightjacket” but more a “set of possibilities” for making sense of my experiences (p. 1). My plan for this chapter is to put my experiences into the public domain. I am fully aware that this act and process can be ‘risky business’ because I am making an investment of my subjective self and opening up my personal and professional experiences to scrutiny and critique. Writing this chapter has caused me to look to the participants in this study as guides and models who were willing to open up their lives to me for study. Their stories pushed me to probe further into the choices I have made in teaching, curriculum writing, and leading social justice professional development programs.

I begin by explaining why I believe a “self story” is a suitable starting point for delving into critical work. I then present three vignettes that demonstrate my dual positions of marginalization and privilege. Next, by sharing further examples I discuss how early schooling experiences fuelled my interests in social research and describe my reasoning and specific strategies I have used to pursue social justice. Finally, I include additional scenarios and probe into my interactions with colleagues as I explain how my developing critical lens and growing knowledge base have influenced my conceptions of social justice, curriculum, and the work of writing and disseminating social justice-focused curriculum support resources.

Start with *The Self*

I offer my personal and professional experiences as places to start to critically examine curriculum writing for social justice. My experiences are for study and I do not claim them as “correct” or “models.” Instead, the examples and experiences, thoughts and ideas, strategies and discussion I share with readers also provide a method for me to learn.

I believe that this chapter is in line with descriptions about feminist self-study that Holman Jones (2005) provides. As I wrote it, I “remade myself” (p. 773). I shifted perspectives to look in at who I was and am. I felt it was deeply personal, a “love letter” to my children and family (p. 774). I wanted them to remember my stories and at the same time, I worried about how they would interpret such “partial, fragmented accounts” of my experiences (p. 776).

It is not often that one has an opportunity to critically consider one’s own work, so I welcome this (ad)venture. I am hopeful that the insights I gain will help me to further

my goals of working to build knowledge about how curriculum is envisioned, written, and implemented. I am committed to engaging in ways to change the school curriculum for future generations, particularly because I recently embraced a new role in my family as a grandmother.

Whose Curriculum is it? Where am I?

When I was in Grade 12, something disturbing happened to me that has continued to be a strong reminder of how powerful teachers can be. Teachers can make choices in curriculum content that model inclusion, but how students learn also depends on factors within the classroom that impact on their emotional well-being. In referring to the important role of educators, Youngs (1992) states, “What educators do and say (and how they do and say it) becomes the foundation on which many children will build their lives” (p. 162). I share a vignette as an example of how a teacher’s words and actions sent a strong message to me.

Vignette one.

I entered the Grade 12 Biology classroom with my boyfriend and we seated ourselves. We were a bi-racial couple, White and Brown-skinned - a ‘novelty’ of sorts at a school of White faces. A few students came in after us. Once we were ready and the bell sounded, the Biology teacher, Mr. Robertson, addressed us. He started the class by saying, “Did you know that Indians use curry to hide the smell of rotting meat?” His gaze was fixed directly on me. He continued, “Yes, that’s what they do, that strong smell of curry can mask the smell of rotten meat.” I felt as if my presence was central to his statements since his gaze never shifted from me. Why was he saying this? At first, feelings of confusion and then embarrassment swept over me as I realized that some of

my classmates were laughing while others seemed to be accepting his statements as true. I was the only racialized student in the class and even though he hadn't actually said that the meat my family cooked with the spice, curry, was rotten, I felt implicated. I also felt isolated and hurt because I was helpless to confront him about my feelings or the inaccuracy of his words.

Discussion.

Au (2009) retells a similar example of feeling powerless and marginalized in his high school class. His History teacher, Mr. Anderson, was talking about a fruit he ate while visiting China. The teacher called the fruit, "lee-chee." Au recognized the fruit from the teacher's description and attempted to share the way his family pronounced the word, "LIE-chee." But Mr. Anderson discounted Au's personal experiential knowledge and accused him of *mispronouncing* the word, lychee. His teacher told Au he was wrong and that he did not know the correct pronunciation.

In both our situations, Au's and mine, our teachers gave no thought to honouring our identities and lived experiences, and it appears they did not care about our feelings regarding what they said. Both teachers discounted the risks Au and I took, as students, just by being present in our classrooms. In my situation in Grade 12, Brown skin was a marker that set me apart, even from my boyfriend. Mr. Robertson never offered me the opportunity to comment or contradict. Instead, he simply moved on to the lesson, thereby eliminating space for my perspective to be heard even if I dared to confront him. My racial identity remained "unpacked" (McIntosh, 1989; Singleton & Linton, 2006). In Au's situation, Au mustered up the courage to speak, but his comments were dismissed and labelled as "unsanctioned" (Tilley, 1998a).

Noddings (1992) states that the main goal of education should be to produce competent, caring, loving, and lovable people (p. 174). But how does this happen? Surely it is not by silencing or diminishing the realities that students bring to school. Instead, as Thornton (2004) suggests, Noddings advocates for an interactive view of curriculum - one that validates the outcomes of interactions among teachers, pupils, and materials (p. 4).

That negative experience from Grade 12 is still as vivid as the day it happened. It remains as a guidepost to remind me of the power, we as teachers, hold. In trying to make sense of his own negative experience with his History teacher, Au states, "As students, we were always on the outside looking in, and he [the teacher] and textbooks were the sole authorities" (p. 249). Both our stories offer testimonials as to how teacher authority and power can be abused and misused to exclude interactions and subjugate some experiences, thereby keeping some students "on the outside." I share another example as a second vignette from my early schooling experiences in Canada to demonstrate how good intentions and everyday actions can contribute to forms of oppression and create situations that keep some of us apart and on the margins (hooks, 1984).

Who is Left Out? What are the Assumptions?

When I arrived in Canada at the age of twelve, I was placed in Grade eight. The students at my school were all White. Most of the students had lived in the community with a population of 860 since birth. I went from an all girls' public secondary school in Trinidad, with rigid rules and uniforms, to an elementary school where both boys and girls attended. Rules seemed to be flexible, and no one wore uniforms. It took me some time to get used to girls of ages 12 and 13, wearing makeup, short skirts, panty hose, and

high-heeled shoes. I was not allowed to wear makeup, short skirts, or high-heeled shoes at that age.

Vignette two.

The Grade 8 Physical Education teacher called us out to play baseball during the third week of school. I had just arrived in Canada and had never heard about baseball before. Everyone in the class seemed very happy to leave the classroom and go outside. Once outside, we were numbered off into two teams. No one spoke to me about the rules of the game and I was asked to go out to field to catch the ball. I walked over to the position that was pointed out to me. However, I was not used to a baseball. The ball came right at me and fast too. As I held up my hand to catch the ball, it was very hard and its speed was so quick, it knocked me over. No wonder many students had those brown oddly-shaped gloves on – to protect their hands! Everyone laughed and of course so did I even though I was very embarrassed and my hand was injured. What else could I do? But an even worse part of the game was yet to come - with my batting. I had never held a bat like that before because we used Cricket bats in the West Indies and even then I rarely played cricket. There was no way I could hit such a fast and hard ball so I kept jumping out of the way and eventually ran away with the bat in my hands. This time everyone was laughing except for me. My teacher made no attempt to address the situation. I felt embarrassed and frustrated. Although this incident lasted a relatively short time, the consequences of my actions stayed all through the fall and spring where I was always the last one picked for baseball teams, and baseball was very popular in Grade eight.

Discussion.

In looking back, what was my teacher thinking? Was I being used as “comic relief?” I doubt if something as cruel as that was his intent or that something similar would happen today. My lack of knowledge of baseball in all likelihood surprised the teacher and students because of the stereotype that ‘Brown people were athletes.’ However, a simple everyday event like that experience to a new immigrant Brown student, the only Brown student in the class - worked to position me as an outsider in my first classroom in Canada. I was not just the new girl who could not play baseball - I was the Brown girl who could not play baseball. As a reader, you may want to dismiss my example as something that happened decades ago in a rural community, however, I have come to see that my experience is not an exception.

Palmer (1997) and Shadd (2001) describe similar situations of “outsider” positioning where their “immigrantness” due to their skin colour plays out in their interactions and continues to force them to remain “outside” or to prove their “Canadianness.” Furthermore, many Canadians who are not White report feeling “alienation and a diminished sense of citizenship” in their interactions with people who are White-skinned (Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2003, p. 30). Discrimination, prejudice, and marginalization occur at all levels. Mogadime (2007) writes about the lack of historic support from the Federation of Women Teachers’ Associations of Ontario for publishing stories and research on the struggles of racialized women. According to Mogadime, “*Go For It!*, a landmark text about equity in employment for women teachers in Ontario [published in 1991] made only one scant reference to minority women teachers” and for the most part excluded their experiences (p. 6).

Everyday occurrences, whether as subtle omissions or rooted in the best intentions - at any level, whether in elementary school or in academia, can be hurtful and they can be perpetrated by any individual or group that holds power. In my years as a classroom teacher, I had parents who expressed “shock” to find out I was a teacher at their child’s school – in all likelihood because of my Brown skin; encountered a vice-principal who felt it was “no big deal” to have a head covering pulled off a Sikh boy – because that’s what he gets for going to a public school; and taught at a workplace as one of two women of colour where colleagues confused the two of us even though we did not resemble and our first languages differed. These experiences are part and parcel of having Brown skin and living and working in White systems.

Who Really Holds the Power and Authority?

When I applied for my job as an executive assistant for a Teachers’ union, I was interviewed by the entire executive of fourteen people while sitting at a boardroom table - I was at one end and they were at the other. At the time, I had already completed my Master’s of Education, but I felt isolated and uncomfortable looking at and being questioned by a room of predominantly White faces. It took me eight years, well into my PhD studies, before I applied for a position of additional responsibility as a service area coordinator, one of three positions available at the time.

Vignette three.

In 2007, I applied for one of three coordinator positions at my workplace and was successful in my interview. I was very happy to take on that position because I had embarked on PhD study and was brimming with ideas to share and carry out. Once I assumed my new role, one of my colleagues would often greet me with the words, “Here

comes our little Miss coordinator,” and sometimes introduce me to staff, guests, and even my partner that way. The tone was a sing-song and mocking, and it made me uncomfortable. Eventually, I confronted her and she laughed it away.

Discussion.

I have heard people say, “Why do you give people the power to treat you in subordinate and disrespectful ways?” I held a work position of privilege – financial security and authoritative voice - but simultaneously, I carried my Brown-skinned identity that worked to keep me on the margins of a system based on Whiteness. When I confronted my colleague, as a White woman she had the privilege of “laughing it away.” After all, it was “no big deal.” But we are not equals. I carry a history of labels – outsider, immigrant - of always having to prove myself and dispel labels because of my Brown skin. I held a position of added responsibility as “coordinator” – a label of privilege - but the ‘little Miss coordinator’ label was meant to diminish my authority and show me “my place” (Ladson-Billings & Donnor, 2005).

Khayatt (2001) described an incident that relates to my point. After living in Canada for several years, she applied for Canadian citizenship and was asked about her “old” country, Egypt – dress, food, public transportation (p. 80). In her words, “they spoke in stereotypes on purpose.” She was ascribed an immigrant identity and she decided to jokingly play along. But Khayatt states that she did not view the comments as racism. She explains that because of her privileged social class background, she would hardly qualify as “a woman of colour” (p. 81). Khayatt and I have different lived histories (Allen, 2010; Henry, 1998). There are differences in how we take up our labels. She can “jokingly play along,” while I suffered feeling alienated.

Background and Early Schooling

I was born in San Fernando, Trinidad and immigrated with my family to Jamaica when I was three years old. I lived in Jamaica for about six years while my father worked and studied. When I was nine years old, we returned to Trinidad. I emigrated from Trinidad to Canada with my family when I was 12 years old. English is my first language.

As I reflect on my early experiences as a student, my understanding of schooling was quite simplistic. I went to school to learn things - mostly by memorizing them. I attended many different schools.

My parents lived in a lot of different communities, so for one thing, I had to shift schools a fair amount and I would say that in the first twelve years of my life I shifted schools about every couple of years or so. (Sherry, Interview 1, April 2009, p. 2)

Much of my elementary schooling in Trinidad and Jamaica consisted of regurgitation of facts with little room for creative thinking. My schooling experiences reflected Freire's "banking model" (Freire, 1982). I explain the anxiety I felt in preparing for standardized testing at the age of 11 years, in the excerpt below.

It [preparing for the test] was very much geared to reproducing correct answers or what was prescribed as correct. I remember being absolutely stressed out for that exam [Common Entrance Exam]. In fact, we [classmates and I] were stressed out for months before we took it because we had two practice sessions. Every person in my class was anxious and worried because we only got two chances to do the Common Entrance, one chance each year. So if we didn't pass it high enough, I

think we had to achieve 60% to pass, then that meant we would not likely get to select the top choice of schools. If we failed we would have to go back to school again and try the test the next year, it was like repeating a year. (p. 11)

It is no wonder that as a teacher I oppose the widespread use and heavy emphasis on standardized testing. It narrows the curriculum and can turn the focus from teaching and learning to measuring and competing. Hargreaves and Shirley (2009) argue that education which focuses on standardized testing and test scores can distract from what is really needed to meet the diverse needs of students.

Pack your building with teachers who have a single-minded focus on raising test scores in the basics and you don't have a learning organization, but rather an ingrained distraction from the core tasks of teaching and learning in a diverse community setting. (p. 26)

My early schooling experiences did little to promote critical thinking and creativity. Instead, it was through play that my creativity emerged and my family nurtured that environment since I was an only child for ten years. I invented imaginary friends, travelled to far off lands, and had conversations with my toys. I played in a hammock that was a taxi, sometimes a bus, and at other times a plane.

I became aware of differences in skin colour quite early on. At the preschool I attended in Jamaica, there were children from many different racial backgrounds and I recall noticing that my skin colour was in the middle.

The headmistress and teachers at the school were all White except for one - Miss Grant who was Black. Within the school there were lots of White children, and children who were from mixed racial backgrounds, Black and Asian children, and

so on. ...The teacher would ask a question or ask for a volunteer to do something, and many hands would go up. My hand went up a lot but I was rarely selected.

Susan: But you were in the middle [shades of colour] so who was selected?

Sherry: In that particular school it was mostly White children who were selected.

(Sherry, Interview 1, April 2009, p. 3)

My cousins often shared similar stories about skin colour. One story that stood out for me was about the types of jobs that people with light Brown skin could get. People with light Brown skin could work in banks and doctors' offices. I knew quite early on that shades of colour could limit or advantage a person. I felt lucky to be "in the middle."

Later in my schooling, in Canada – from Grade eight and through secondary school - I began to realize that Brown-skinned people like me were not represented in texts and supplementary materials. There was a noticeable absence of people of colour as role models – teachers, bankers, doctors, politicians - and their contributions were for the most part, omitted.

On May 14, 2009, a *Toronto Star* front page feature news story headline read: *Racism in Canada: The darker your skin ...the less you fit in.* Immigration reporter, Lesley Taylor wrote, "What's the biggest barrier to immigrants feeling they belong? After 41,666 interviews in nine languages, researchers find it's not religion. It's not income. It's skin colour" (Taylor, 2009, p. A1). The lead researcher, Jeffrey Reitz, said, "It came down to race." He went on to explain that in Canada people tend to think that racism is a minor problem, but even Canadian born children of immigrants who are not White, experience discrimination (Reitz, 2009, p. A6).

I was raised on a White curriculum. Essentially, I am a product of Whiteness (Carr & Lund, 2007). But until quite recently, the concept and implications of Whiteness remained unexplored territory for me. In *The Great White North? Exploring Whiteness, Privilege and Identity in Education*, the concept of Whiteness is explored through a series of questions such as:

Do most White people even know that they are White? Do they use their privilege to deny or ignore their racial identity and, simultaneously, infer inherent racial attributes to the “Other”? If White people do not know that they are White, how can those who are in positions of power, many of whom are White, effectively understand and challenge racism and unearned privilege? (pp. 2-3)

Drawing upon the work of Berry (2007), Frankenberg (1997), and McIntyre (1997), I understand Whiteness in the following ways: It is carried out as if it is the norm; it is essentially invisible in nature; it is condoned through discourses that leave its benefits unchallenged; and it is powered by Protestant, Christian, White Eurocentric thinking and behaviours.

I have come to understand that the schooling process of Whiteness began in my birth country of Trinidad, continued when I moved to Jamaica, and has continued throughout my schooling in Canada. It is only relatively recently, as a graduate student, that I have taken the necessary time to critically reflect on why I think and behave the way I do and to “decolonize” my experiences (Au, 2009).

Growing up in the West Indies, I read British books, learned British History, and followed the teachings of the colonizers. I memorized facts, regurgitated poetry, and sang songs that I never really understood, such as “My Bonnie Lies Over The Ocean” and

“The English Country Garden.” I remember my teachers at Stratford Girls High School, which I attended when I was eleven years old, were all White women except for my Geography teacher, who was from India. Mrs. Motto had Brown skin like me, but she spoke with a British accent and always wore saris. No one in my family wore saris. In fact, I can remember when my mother bought her first sari. It was just before we came to Canada – she wanted to have something that connected her to her grandparents. My teachers and their teachings were at a distance from the realities of my life, family, and friends. I felt apart from them and the realities of their worlds and mine seemed vastly separated. Their teachings and stories told me that such worlds that I read about existed, but I remained on the “outside” always hoping to catch a glimpse of such unfamiliar events and ways of being.

Education was very important in our family. I remember my father working and studying at the same time. He would have his study papers out on one side of the table, I would have my homework notebooks and texts on the other side. I understood the value of education from a very early age - education was a kind of ‘mobilizer’ to a better life. I noticed how my uncle who worked at teachers college and his wife, a school principal, had more material goods such as a big house, car, piano, and television. Education helped our family to acquire financial stability over time, and when my father was ordained as a minister – it seemed to shift us into a different social class. When I was born, my parents were very poor and we lived in a dirt house with no running water. My father’s continuing education helped him to get better jobs and this improved the living conditions for our family.

In 1976, my father passed away in Canada. I was 19 years old. My mother went back to school and I have similar memories of her - working and studying at the same time. During that period of time, I attended university but also held a full-time job. Without my father's guidance and financial security, my mother and I both turned to education as a way to improve our life conditions. I have used that model of life-long education to this day, always seeking out opportunities to improve my education, while I continued to work.

Becoming Canadian

Even with my early schooling founded in Whiteness, my personal experiences of trying to fit into a predominantly White Canadian society were challenging. I see now that being "unaware" of the implications of living and working in White systems was a major obstacle to how I understood my life experiences. For example, I was puzzled why people were always asking me where I was from because I had Brown skin. I constantly had to explain where I lived before I came to Canada. But in the context of living in a small, rural, White community with one Brown-skinned family, I was "exotic," a "novelty" and I evoked curiosity.

People seemed to be "looking in" on us - well we had to always be on our best behaviour, that kind of thing, because there were all these church people who talked about what we did. (Sherry, Interview 1, April 2009, p. 8)

As a minister's daughter, I had become used to 'being in a fishbowl' which carried with it scrutiny and inquiry from people in the church congregations. But being the only Brown family in two small, rural White communities made us feel as if we were being constantly observed. I continue to feel like this - "watched" - even throughout my career and

married life. It is as if someone is waiting and watching for me to make a mistake. In her book, "And don't call *me* a racist!" Mazel (1998) explains that just as there is invisibility to the advantages of being White, conversely there are "invisible" disadvantages for people of colour. These disadvantages cannot always be explicitly named (p. 19).

I still carry around facets of that accumulated hurt from trying to be "Canadian." When I studied for my Master's of Education, I wrote extensively in an effort to try to understand my experiences. Richardson and St. Pierre (2005) suggest that writing is an important skill, particularly for self-understanding and making sense of our experiences. "Students are taught to be open – to observe, listen, question, and participate. But in the past, they were not taught to nurture their writing voices" (p. 960). I wrote about some of the situations that kept me in my "immigrant" status and fuelled my constant struggle to be accepted as "Canadian." Some of the changes I made over time included, changing the types of clothes I wore, losing my Trinidadian accent, and, as an adult, eventually hiding part of my identity through the use of my married name, Smith (Ramrattan Smith, & Bickram Ramrattan, 2000). Smith held less baggage and required much less explanation. Smith provided me with much needed anonymity and solace from questions and scrutiny. At my prior teaching workplaces and for the past 12 years, as a teacher union employee, I have continued to face subtle forms of prejudice and discrimination such as being ignored for my opinion, dismissed when I raised concerns, and assigned extra work to keep me busy. Furthermore, I have had to work for social justice within systems based on Whiteness with respect to hierarchical structures and policies that claim fairness – but only to those who know the 'hidden' rules (Bourdieu, 1977). Even when I thought I had learned the rules, they could be suddenly changed or interpreted in ways that seemed to

disadvantage me. Over time, I realized that the support systems that were in place to prevent 'disadvantage' could not be accessed unless I was able to convince others that there really was a problem. There was stigma attached to confronting racist actions when the majority of my co-workers were White. I could be labelled as a "trouble maker" or "whistle blower." I learned that being Brown-skinned meant you had to know more and work harder and even then to expect nothing to go as it should. I also learned that I had to accept the consequences of speaking out, so I became selective about the issues I raised. Palmer (1997) discusses similar concerns as she shares the high expectations that were laid out for her sister and her.

I was told once that if White kids were performing one-hundred percent, Black kids had to perform two-hundred percent to succeed. My sister and I found this to be true. Throughout our grade-school years, on into high school and university, it wasn't enough to do our best. We had to out-perform: read more than the assigned chapter, do the best class projects, deliver the best presentations and write essays worthy of publication, and even then, A marks proved very elusive. (p. 8)

Even though I am a product of Whiteness, my Brown skin colour and the reified assumptions that go with it have worked to keep me at a distance and subordinately positioned.

Interest in Social Justice and Curriculum Writing

As an adult preparing to enter a profession in education, teachers college did little to change my early internalized view of schooling. I understood curriculum as what was taught by the teacher and what was learned by the student. My job was to produce good lessons that covered Ministry mandates. My lesson plans followed a structured format

with objectives, materials, method, and evaluative components. In teachers college, the instructor and associate teachers always checked the lesson plan format. It was not until I stood in front of my very own first class of thirty grade three students that I began to realize the scope and power of curriculum. When I saw those eager little persons willing to take in *all* that I had to offer, it was only then that I started to really pay attention to the many responsibilities associated with my role. I was not only a teacher, but also a caregiver, friend, and guide (Henry, 1998; Mogadime, 2003).

My motivation and commitment to social justice comes mostly from my very early experiences of not feeling included in curriculum. (Sherry, Interview 2, May 2009, p. 3)

During our second interview, I explained to my Supervisor how my personal experiences fostered my interest in social justice. Initially, my early efforts were simply aimed at ways to engage my students in learning by connecting to their interests and covering mandated curriculum content. Later, I began to give more attention to increasing the representation of diverse cultures in my classroom materials. I sought out children's books that showed people of colour, biracial families, and dual language books. These were relatively simple yet relevant ways to change my practice because within my classrooms there were growing numbers of English as a Second Language students. I felt that such changes could acknowledge their identities and provide ways to make them feel comfortable at their new school. I did not know much about anti-racism or critical theories to guide my decisions. The changes and adaptations to my practice were intuitively appropriate for connecting to my students.

Allen (2010) critiques such a seemingly “surface” approach to creating inclusive learning environments because, on its own, important considerations such as social class, race, and gender are not taken up. I now understand his concerns as valid. However, at the time, I felt that even such small actions were making a positive difference because I was changing my practice to use materials that were more inclusive, even if only in pictorial representation and text. I would argue now that personal growth and professional development has to begin in a context that is relevant. Connecting to students’ interests and more inclusive representation in literature were valid and meaningful starting points for me. Shifting from those starting points would take me to the next incremental steps in my learning and practice.

Later in my career, I sought out opportunities to serve on school board, local union, and provincial union committees. I was often the only teacher of colour present at board and union meetings. Although these voluntary appointments afforded me new learning opportunities, I often felt isolated because of my colour and also because many people attending the meetings seemed to know one another as friends. I wondered why there was such a lack of teachers of colour who worked for the school board and teacher union when there were growing numbers of children of colour in the classrooms. For example, at the local community high school of 1 200 students that my sons attended, there were no teachers of colour until the year 2000, even though approximately 25 percent of the student population was racialized.

I puzzled over how little the curriculum reflected the children in the classrooms and how best to acknowledge their difference and meet their diverse interests and needs. I felt frustrated for my own children whose experiences at school did little to validate their

biracial identities. Instead, they were teased about their colour and marginalized by racial slurs. These personal situations coupled with stories from students in my classroom always brought me back to the issue of representation. Racialized teachers' perspectives were missing from many of the decisions that were being made about curriculum and teaching and the school curriculum omitted many peoples' experiences, particularly those of students who were Aboriginal and racialized.

I persevered with 'infiltrating' educational systems locally and provincially. At least, that is how the process seemed to me - one of an outsider trying to get in. Although I felt 'alone' at times, I realized that my presence on workgroups and committees enabled me to learn about processes for change and understand the rules. I made a commitment to myself to continue my involvement in such opportunities. I distinctly remember being present at a local union meeting in the 1990s where an elected union official stood up to speak against a motion for designated group representation on the union executive because she felt they must "merit" their appointment. As the only racialized woman in the room, I felt I had no choice but to counter her argument because there was an implication that racialized people would not likely "measure up" to standards because they lacked the skills and knowledge that were necessary to effectively carry out the role. But there were always consequences to such oppositional actions. Although it would be difficult to prove that consequences were directly targeted to my actions, I sincerely believe that there were occasions when decisions were made to 'teach me a lesson.' After such oppositional encounters, when workgroup trips were planned or additional responsibilities allocated, I was quite often not selected. There were other times when budgets and allowances for anti-racism committees and workgroups that I served on were

slashed. It was not long before I realized that those in power wanted me to know my “place” (Ladson-Billings & Donnor, 2005).

Defining Curriculum: An Evolving Definition

During my second interview, my Supervisor asked me to explain my understanding of curriculum to her. Later, as I read my words, I realized that I had learned a lot about curriculum from interactions with colleagues, reading books and articles, attending workshops and conferences, serving on committees and workgroups, and pursuing graduate courses for masters and PhD work. These experiences together helped to shape how I currently understand curriculum.

I think that the way that I see curriculum and curriculum writing is that they are tools that can capture the mind and heart together. So it is not just about how we think, but also about how we feel. Those two [cognitive and affective] are very closely linked in teaching and learning. So how you write and enact curriculum has to come from both places. Curriculum is no one thing – it encompasses pretty much everything from mindset to action. It involves what is taught as well as what is not taught.

I think it involves careful consideration of many concepts and experiences. For example, if a person is sailing along in life and leads a life without any barriers, or has never experienced prejudice, or enjoys privileges that are just taken for granted, then the school curriculum likely reinforces that type of lived experience. In all likelihood that person would feel things are just fine as they are. But for people, like myself and those of us who experience disadvantage, prejudice, and marginalization, I think we have found that the school curriculum omits and

negates our experiences. That is why we want so desperately to change it. We want to bring our personal experiences and histories to the whole process of writing and enacting curriculum.

How curriculum is understood, evolves, based on interactions that we have with others – negative and positive. These interactions are sometimes outside of our own experiences and can work to broaden our knowledge. Sometimes it [curriculum] is shaped by having to counter unfair assumptions and attitudes that propagate dominant views, and other times it is directly linked to very, very personal events - things that have happened to us. I want to make sure that there is room in the curriculum for these things - our thoughts, ideas, and perspectives. I also believe that curriculum should relate to what exists in society. It needs to be shaped by the differences in people's realities. By that I mean, we can't just pretend that everyone is the same and everybody is treated equally. We know that there are power structures that exist where some people have certain privileges and others don't. We know that poverty exists. We know that discrimination, sexism, racism, all of those things, homophobia exists. I believe that acknowledging what is going on in society helps us to build a curriculum that considers our differences and is more relevant to the various needs of students within our classrooms. (Sherry, Interview 2, May 2009, p. 2)

In my detailed explanation of curriculum to my Supervisor, I wanted to make sure I got across the scope, evolving nature, and complexities of curriculum - it is racialized, political, gendered, *etc.* (Pinar et al., 2004). From this context, I advocate strongly for a social justice approach to curriculum and curriculum writing.

I believe that curriculum should come from what exists in society because that gives it relevancy and can make learning experiences more meaningful. Schools are populated with students who speak different languages, are affiliated with different religions, and have differing sociocultural backgrounds and interests. I know that power structures exist and some people have certain privileges and others do not (McIntosh, 1989). I know poverty exists (Jain, 2009). I am aware that discrimination, sexism, racism, and homophobia continue in schools (Schniedewind & Davidson, 2006). Openly acknowledging the realities of society – good and bad - is an essential and foundational piece in order for teaching and learning to be relevant. Many scholars also support this view and believe that curriculum must come from needs identified in society in order to effectively guide teaching (Apple, 1982; Eisner, 1985; Mann, 1974). I understand now that my views fit within a social reconstructionist orientation. I look to society with a critical eye to identify needs and work to “reshape conditions and values” towards the goal of contributing to a better world.

In promoting social justice goals, I have tried out various strategies only to find that some of my efforts to promote change have shut down conversations and blocked my goals towards equity and inclusion. One such roadblock emerged when I attempted to create a management-staff committee at one of my workplaces. My objective was to establish an ongoing method to discuss issues relating to forms of prejudice and discrimination that were occurring at the workplace. When I raised the idea at a staff meeting I had support from both staff and management. Even when meetings were scheduled well in advance, management representatives were often the ones not attending. Other forms of “blocking” came from being dismissed or having concerns

mislabelled under a less offensive category. Sefa Dei (2007) describes such practices as forms of denial. For example, in my work in schools, it was not uncommon to have racism or racist behaviours, such as name-calling to Mexican Mennonite students broadly categorized as bullying by the authoritative voice of an administrator.

Is this really fun? Who is being mocked?

I was teaching at a large urban Kindergarten to Grade 8 school and experienced a school-wide Halloween parade. Students and staff had a tradition of dressing up to celebrate Halloween. During the parade, some White students were “dressed up” as Indians carrying bows and arrows. Their faces and parts of their bodies were painted red and they wore “skins.” There were other students who were painted yellow and wore wigs with straight black hair and rice-paddy hats. Those students were “dressed” as Chinese people. The parade started in Kindergarten and progressed through each class in an additive formation with Grade 1 filing in, then Grade 2 and so on. There were a number of Aboriginal and Chinese students at the school who were present and also in the parade.

Vignette four.

Following the Halloween parade, there was a regular staff meeting scheduled. I raised my concern about stereotypes that were being perpetuated through the “dressing up” aspect of the parade and the students whose identities were being “mocked.” Several teachers spoke up in agreement to indicate their concern. Together as a staff, we discussed the situation and developed a suggestion that for the next year the whole school - staff and students - would try an orange and black theme for the parade. There was support for the change from staff and management.

Following that initial discussion, a staff social justice committee was struck and there were at least four subsequent staff meetings with time allocated to creating a comprehensive plan to educate students and parents about reasons for the change. The plan included: classroom work and anti-racist lessons to disrupt stereotypes; a series of newsletter messages related to various ongoing school and community equity initiatives; speaking to the school council about the plan; and notifying parents about the change from a Halloween “dress up” parade to one with an orange and black theme. Yet, one week prior to the ‘new’ parade date, on a Friday at school dismissal, the school administrator hurriedly called a staff meeting to announce that she was considering going back to the original format of the Halloween parade because there had been a complaint about the change. At the meeting, all eyes turned to me to argue the case and attempt to re-convince the school administrator of the necessity for the change. Even though there was support for the change throughout the year, no one else seemed willing to step forward and speak up.

Discussion.

Such experiences are not uncommon for me. I have noticed that when confronted by “authoritative” persons, particularly within workplaces, supportive networks can break down. Fear and threat of repercussions can prevent colleagues from challenging those in power. Situations such as the one described above have led me to take steps towards more collective resistive actions, such as work within committees and writing teams where individuals share responsibilities and can support one another for change. Confronting injustice is one strategy towards justice (hooks, 1994; Park, 2008). I believe

that speaking out - whether individually or collectively - is a necessary resistive action towards dismantling social injustices.

Early Curriculum Writing Experiences

I have always loved to write. I wrote poetry, stories, and diaries as a girl and later as a young woman. My first curriculum writing projects were done specifically to meet the needs of students within my classroom. I needed lessons that suited the wide scope of interests of my 30 Grade three students and fulfilled Ministry mandates. I created lessons and units to try to engage them in learning and also to meet their varied needs. As one of those efforts, I developed an entire unit that used music to integrate various subjects. Another Grade three teacher who heard about the curriculum unit from students in my class, asked me to share the unit at a school divisional meeting and that initial positive experience encouraged me to write additional lessons and units with the purpose of sharing them with colleagues. However, in examining such early experiences associated with curriculum writing more closely, I can now see that the ways in which I connected with my students did little to consider sociocultural factors (Allen, 2010) or address issues of difference (James, 2001).

Union – Federation of Women Teachers' Associations of Ontario

In the early 1990s, I was selected to serve on a provincial union committee, the FWTAO Anti-Racist Education Committee. It was through work on that committee that my passion for curriculum writing was ignited. I worked with supportive and knowledgeable women. The Anti-Racist Education Committee proposed that a new curriculum support resource be created. The goal of the resource was to encourage elementary school teachers to change the type of literature they used in their classrooms

to be more inclusive - meaning more representative and reflective of various ethnicities, cultures, and lived experiences in Canadian societies. A colleague on the committee and I were selected to work with a union staff representative to write a draft resource. We decided upon an integrated literature-based approach that connected the relevancy of social justice to curriculum as plan (Aoki, 1986). The books featured in the resource had strong story lines and showed people of colour, people with disabilities, Aboriginal peoples, and different family structures such as single parents, same sex parents, and extended families. The stories provided a structure for us to develop a plan of related activities that could start to engage both teachers and students in thinking and talking about difference, in particular race, ability, and sexual orientation (Brown, 2010; James, 2000; Khayatt, 2000). The resource was linked to Ministry expectations to demonstrate its relevancy. At that time, *The Common Curriculum* was in place and an anti-racist focus matched well to Ministry goals (Ministry of Education, 1995, pp. 9-11).

The structure of the resource was another important consideration. The three authors agreed that addressing social issues was not a one-time endeavour. We did not want the lessons to be used only in February as Black History, or just in June for National Aboriginal Day. Instead we agreed that year-round usage could better promote ongoing learning and curricular application. The resource provided practical strategies to integrate and explore social issues throughout the year in various subjects of the official school curriculum. The structure of a ten-month cycle to match the months that students were in attendance at school, for most schools in Ontario, was used to organize the lessons.

Through collective experiences in schools and work with teachers and educational workers we realized that some teachers tended to stay away from topics and words like

race, racism, prejudice, and discrimination. Evidently, some teachers do not believe that social justice teaching is a worthwhile endeavour (Kohl, 1998). Since one of our goals was to engage teachers who might not delve into the topics by choice, a conscious decision was made to use general themes - ones that we felt were already being addressed in school on a regular basis. By showing that social justice issues were already embedded in common themes, we felt that teachers would begin to see the relevance of probing more deeply into their current topics.

The process to produce the resource was long and intensive: a three-year development phase, a three-year pilot phase, and publication six years later. *Untie The Knots Of Prejudice: A Literature Based Anti-Racist Education Resource Kit* was available to teachers province wide (Ramrattan Smith, Rodriguez, & Saskoley, 1996). Once the document was published and available for sale, FWTAO sponsored workshops to support its implementation across the province through teacher locals, in conjunction with school boards. Teachers attended workshops and discussed the social issues more fully. Professional development was a key component for making effective use of the resource. Teachers had opportunities to read some of the stories and discuss ways that the suggested activities could be modified for specific needs within their classrooms and schools.

In my recent role as a teacher union staff responsible for professional development equity programs, two additional steps of support held high importance in how equity and social justice programs for teachers were designed and carried out: additional funds for related professional growth opportunities such as equity training and attendance to conferences were available through the union to support teachers in

building their knowledge and professional learning communities were established where teachers met to discuss current research, share and inquire into their professional experiences, and build supportive networks.

I have come to understand that it is necessary to provide a variety of programs and opportunities for teachers to build their knowledge in order to effectively use curriculum to address racism, sexism, and other social issues. Teachers need to come to terms with their denial of difference (Sefa Dei, 2007), attitudes of colour-blindness (Delpit, 1988) and White privilege (McIntosh, 1989). When teachers find critical opportunities to explore and discuss topics such as Whiteness (Carr & Lund, 2007) and Critical Race Theory (Ladson-Billings & Donnor, 2005), in conjunction with current research, they begin to better understand their roles and responsibilities of working within White systems. Teachers can then more confidently begin to take steps to confront their prejudices, come to terms with their privileges, and begin to work more effectively to change the inequities of such systems (Freire, 1982).

Union – The Elementary Teachers’ Federation of Ontario

In 1998, FWTAO and OPSTF amalgamated to form the largest elementary teacher union in Canada. The Elementary Teachers’ Federation of Ontario (ETFO) had about 65,000 members at its inception. By 1999, teachers and educational workers were asking for new resources to support social justice. The needs came from issues such as bullying associated with racism and homophobia arising in classrooms and communities. Once again, under the leadership of ETFO staff, Bev Saskoley, a new writing team was formed. This time I was one of four teachers who were selected to be writers.

Together with the union staff representative, five writers created a new ETFO resource that introduced more social justice themes. The new resource, *We're Erasing Prejudice For Good* expanded upon many of the previous themes and included a teacher's guide with year-round activities as a separate book (Aoki-Barrett et al., 1999). In total, there were nine books in the new school-wide kit. There were also sections that included booklists, teacher resources, community engagement opportunities, and school-wide activities. *We're Erasing Prejudice For Good* was linked to the mandated Ministry guidelines. Many school boards across the province of Ontario purchased the kit, in many cases one kit per school. ETFO continued the model used by FWTAO of providing workshops to support members in their social justice learning and endeavours. The school-wide program has maintained its appeal with teachers and was updated in 2002 with a supplement, *Respecting Cultures and Honouring Differences*. In 2011, a new expanded arts-based version, *Social Justice Begins With Me*, funded jointly by the Ministry of Education and ETFO is expected to be released. The plan for the new kit is to include scholarly articles, community engagement sections, and updated school-wide tools. These components would work in conjunction with art-based presentations to schools.

A Caring Mentor

The experience of having my knowledge and experiences valued was rare until I encountered Bev Saskoley. In my first eight years of teaching, I spent summers and evenings taking more and more courses, always feeling I had to prove myself worthy of being hired in a permanent position when people with less teaching credentials and additional qualifications were being hired. Even as union staff, I felt a need to use the

clout of degrees as proof of my knowledge. For example, when I was first hired I was asked to develop a brochure about bullying. I felt confident that my 18 years of teaching had prepared me for the assignment. I produced a pamphlet that covered many aspects of bullying. However, a person in authority dismissed my experiential knowledge as irrelevant to the task. Instead, she described me as “too nice” to know about the topic. As individuals, we all hold knowledge. Yet it is easy for some to have their knowledges sanctioned while for others like myself, the knowledges we hold can become subjugated by bureaucracy and people in power who do not appear to fully understand or uphold social justice principles.

The experiences of the women on the FWTAO Anti-Racist Committee, many of whom were not White, were sanctioned by the staff representative, a White woman who held authority, but who was also a caring mentor and her support made a world of difference. I remember getting a real sense that she valued the diversity inherent in our lived experiences, varied histories, and divergent interpretation of events. Our knowledge and perspectives were never in question. Instead, we were challenged by her to put that knowledge to test by forging a shared vision that could expand upon what was sanctioned in school. This often meant engaging in personal work that involved taking time to stop and think – the work of critical reflection on how we developed our beliefs and values and the effects of those on the children in our care.

Curriculum Writing as a Means to Promote Social Justice

My schooling history demonstrated that curriculum through text propagates certain topics, images, and issues as “sanctioned.” I use sanctioned as Tilley (1998a) does to indicate knowledge that is approved for use in schools. In my schooling experiences in

Canada from Grade eight and through high school, I rarely saw images of people of colour. If I did, the person was someone as famous as Mahatma Ghandi or Martin Luther King Jr. It was rare to read a book with a main character who was not White. Eisner (1992) might describe the “hidden” curriculum that was being taught as indicative that being a *White* person was important or that White people made more significant contributions and were therefore worthy of being in texts.

As a curriculum writer, I realized that in order to be in a text people of colour would have to be written in and that people who were historically disadvantaged and underrepresented would have to be the ones to do the work of addressing such unfairness. I used this awareness and ‘acknowledgement’ of omission to influence how I selected the very first writing team I convened, following a model used by Saskoley who was my mentor, and working within the guidelines of union policies. According to Kincheloe (2005), a critical pedagogy invites debate amongst diverse points of view because they can enrich the learning that takes place. I adopted this philosophical stance to guide my selection for the first writing team I assembled and those that followed.

One curriculum writing strategy that I believe has had marked success through the resources I have authored and co-authored is the act of writing myself into curriculum support resources (Focus Group, Session 2, June 2009, p. 12). I was schooled on a curriculum that was for the most part, exclusionary. Aboriginal peoples were stereotypically represented. Text and illustrations were heterosexist. Racialized peoples were seldom mentioned. People with disabilities were often portrayed as “incapable.” For many years, school curricula have perpetuated perspectives and values of dominant groups. I wanted to change the restrictive and exclusionary nature of curriculum by

opening up the process of curriculum writing to include more voices and perspectives - in particular, those that were historically omitted or marginally and stereotypically portrayed.

I believe that representation within writing groups can provide a viable way to bring people with varied histories and experiences together to share information, collaboratively strategize, and broaden school knowledge. Women, Aboriginal peoples, racialized people, and people with disabilities are groups that are historically disadvantaged. People who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, two-spirited, and transgender have also been treated marginally and their experiences have been underrepresented in the traditional curriculum. Feedback from teachers and the demand for curriculum resources indicate that social justice support resources and materials are being used (A. Campbell, personal communication, February 26, 2009; S. Neale, personal communication, December 8, 2009; D. Solomon, personal communication, March, 2010). At the present time (2011), financial support to create more inclusive curriculum materials continues to flow from teacher unions and the Ministry of Education. Increasingly large numbers of applications for union-sponsored projects indicate that there are growing numbers of teachers and educational workers who are willing to take up curriculum writing as a responsibility and believe that they can make a positive contribution through curriculum writing to change schooling practices.

However, such efforts to change curriculum are not without challenges or criticism. A colleague drew a perspective to my attention that I had not previously considered: that writing curriculum as a means to counter social injustices could be viewed as a "soft" approach - one that was meant to appease dominant authoritative

voices rather than confront their prejudices. I realize now that such a sweeping perspective can shut down attempts towards change because of the dismissive tone and should have garnered more of my attention. Categorizing all social justice curriculum as “soft” was an attempt to diminish the strength of curriculum writing in precipitating systemic change.

One of my main goals for writing social justice-focused curriculum support resources is to engage teachers and educational workers who may not be interested in changing their practices and traditional conceptions of curriculum (Sherry, Focus Group, Session 2, June 2009). But finding a balance between engaging people in social justice and equity issues and turning people off is a tightrope walk. As a Brown-skinned woman who is trying to do social justice work in a system of predominantly White teachers, it is easy for my White audiences to dismiss my work as “something personal.” Although it is personal, it is also more than that - curriculum writing attempts to draw teachers and students into critical thought about school knowledge and systemic injustices. Therefore, not all social justice curricula can be dismissed and misrepresented by a sweeping characterization as “soft.” Instead, I would advocate that social justice curriculum materials be examined more critically because ‘hard’ issues such as addressing racism, sexism, ableism, heterosexism, and other forms of injustices are in all likelihood foundational elements. But teachers may lack the critical perspectives necessary to effectively address such topics (Kincheloe, 2005; McLaren, 2007).

As a teacher who writes and uses social justice curriculum resources, I am well aware of their limitations. Providing a resource and thinking that it is going to be an effective tool for just anyone to use is naive and unrealistic. I have encountered teachers

who work in predominantly White communities and are also White. Some of the teachers refuse to use stories and social justice curriculum resources to delve into stereotypes and racism because they say, “That’s a nice book and great resource but it doesn’t apply to my school.” Although these teachers may be well-intentioned, their dismissive attitude can indicate that they remain unaware that they are avoiding the implications of being White and working in predominantly White communities. They are not able to connect how race is not just associated with visibly racialized groups of people. It appears that they do not understand how their accrued privileges and benefits can and do influence sanctioned school knowledge and how teaching-learning experiences are affected by their avoidance and omission of particular topics and discussions. Yet, these are precisely some of the people who would benefit from engagement in social justice issues.

Does it really matter whether you name it [the topic] as a racial slur at the beginning and say this book is about racism or develop the lesson to show how self-esteem can be affected by racial slurs? In both cases you are still delving into the topic of racism because the strategies and prompts are provided. If you are achieving the same outcome and engaging someone who needs to become engaged in the topic of race, doesn’t that work as well? I am talking about finding creative and practical ways to make the topics and issues of social justice relevant to all teachers not just the ones who already believe in working for social justice.

(Sherry, Interview 2, May 2009, p. 6)

I believe the strength of social justice curriculum is underestimated. Critics who would refer to this approach as “soft” might be making an assumption that there is a complicit avoidance of core social justice issues or an unwillingness to probe into them. But as a

curriculum writer, nothing is farther from my truth - writing myself into curriculum is anything but soft. It is emotional, scary, and full of personal risk. I want to have the issues named, discussed, and addressed but not in ways that deter the very people I want to engage.

Furthermore, the alternative is to continue writing books and lessons about racism and leaving the people who are not interested in such topics to choose to ignore them. I believe that more than one approach is always necessary when you work for social justice. Remember, we [curriculum writers] are not claiming that this is the best or better approach, but simply that it is one that has the potential to connect to a group of people we want to reach. We want them to consider the complexities of social issues that lie unexplored within the mandated curriculum.

(Sherry, Interview 2, May 2009, p. 8)

I acknowledge that there may be materials that claim to be 'social justice-focused,' but do not delve deeply into the complexities of issues. However, I defend my stance based on my work and the collective voices of the participants in this study (Focus Group, Session 2, June 2009).

Writing social justice-focused curriculum support materials is a resistive way to work within a system that is based on Whiteness (hooks, 1984). Furthermore, the process of writing curriculum is sanctioned within union and ministry educational systems and can allow access to financial support, provide a means to educate teachers and students province-wide, and bring together allies who want to address injustices within curriculum and what constitutes school knowledge. Curriculum writing provides a viable method to change an aspect of the educational system from within (Slattery, 1995).

Critical Opportunities

The first writing team I brought together was composed of seven women. They were not selected solely because of their skill in writing. Learning from their diverse points of view and acknowledging their differences in backgrounds and lived experiences were key considerations. Furthermore, I saw the value of their collaboration as a unique professional development experience that I believed had the potential to change not only curriculum, but their teaching experiences in the years to come as well, for the better. I include a list of *considerations for selecting writers for social justice-focused curriculum support resources*, but it is important for me to add that the very characteristics I outline are ones I continue to develop over time (see Appendix F). I also share *a memorandum of questions to consider* when selecting social justice-focused curriculum resources that may also be useful to guide the structure of curriculum writing endeavours (see Appendix G). Both lists are by no means complete. I continue to revise and add to the lists as I build my knowledge.

Further Challenges

There was definitely a contradictory and ambiguous nature to my role as staff - I wanted to create change, but was working within a restrictive context. I felt constrained by not being able to express the “politics” associated with my personal beliefs (Collins, 2000; Weiler, 1988). On occasion, during staff discussions about employment equity, I felt particularly targeted and isolated because of my race (Singleton & Linton, 2006). Such situations were challenging when the focus of my responsibilities was to plan and implement equity and social justice programs.

A second challenge came with writing and producing social justice curriculum resources and figuring out strategies to make all of the ideas accessible through text. Information expressed through text is not always accessible or current. Furthermore, viewpoints of the writers in particular contexts represent the limitations of their collective knowledge at specific points in time. For example, terminology can change - heterosexual versus heteronormative - leaving an impression that resources are out-of-date or irrelevant.

A third limitation is related to funding. Writing teams often came up with great ideas, but inevitably their wish list was cut back due to financial considerations. Even when resources are produced, they are not purchased by everyone, so often teachers who might benefit the most from suggestions in a particular resource do not have access to it. Attached to funding is also the support necessary to confidently use a particular book or poster. Social justice topics require critical conversations and teachers are often too pressed for time to engage in adequate discussion about particular social issues, especially ones that are outside of their experiences. Time constraints and restrictive school-based support for building knowledge can also limit how resources are interpreted and used.

Applying My New Knowledge

My efforts in curriculum writing for social justice are fuelled by my desire to see schools and communities as caring and supportive places (Noddings, 1992) and sites of resistance (McLaren, 2007). I am fortunate to be able to take time to critically examine my experiences and through the process I have come to accept the limitations of my knowledge and the imperfections of my learner's stance. By embracing this stance, I can

continue to deliberately and systematically seek out ways to work collaboratively with others, thereby benefitting from our collective knowledge and individual strengths.

When I first began to write curriculum, I let my intuition and personal experiences guide the changes I implemented. I concentrated my efforts on connecting to students' interests and changing illustrations and texts. By learning about multiculturalism, anti-racism, critical theory, and feminist theory, I began to find ways to delve deeper into social issues. For example, I had taken steps to change the books in my classrooms to make the selections more representative of Canada by including different languages, people with varying abilities, racial and cultural diversity, and a range of family structures. However, as I learned more, I decided to review the books more closely. As I went through the books I had originally selected I began to question the legitimacy of authorship (van Dijk, 1993), male-female role stereotypes (Gallagher, 2006), and pay more attention to the hidden curriculum (Eisner, 1985). I realized that social issues such as racism, sexism, anti-Semitism, and homophobia had to be explicitly named and discussed.

Through graduate study, I found viable tools to further my knowledge and gain new ideas and strategies to carry out equity and social justice professional development for teachers and educational workers. I began to understand the concept of Whiteness more fully, the relevance of Teachers' identities and histories to the enactment of curriculum and the decisions we make, the restrictions and possibilities that play out through gender identification and the attitudinal barriers associated with social class. As I continued to build my knowledge experientially and through study, I worked to provide similar opportunities for teachers. I realized that like me, they would need opportunities

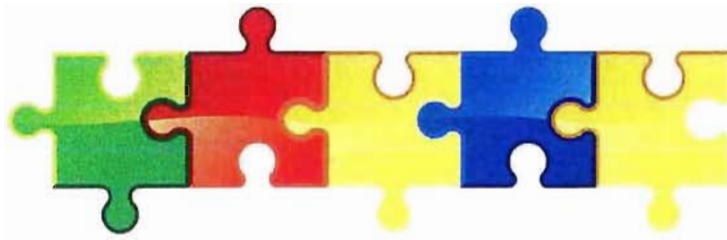
to build new knowledge and critically reflect on their practice. I wanted teachers to see how applying critical theories to practice and feminist theories and their applications could precipitate changes and a reconceptualizing of curriculum.

My heightened awareness and new knowledge helped me to develop a series of professional learning community programs for teachers. I worked with representatives from academic communities to assist teachers to probe into topics such as Whiteness and privilege, identity and history, gender roles and heteronormative structures. These programs and discussion forums provided essential steps in Teachers' social justice professional growth that were previously missing or explored in cursory ways.

I saw the benefits of approaching curriculum writing from a critical stance and I began to take careful notice of whose perspectives were missing. I questioned myself about normalized and commonplace events. I identified and scrutinized motives for decisions, noting the effects of power differentials. I took particular interest in observing hiring practices - were they changing? I wanted to know "whose interests were being served" (Eisner, 1992). My focused attention to carefully and critically *considering* everything led me to creatively think about our interactions with one another and the types of choices we make on a daily basis. In Chapter seven, I introduce and explain a vision for curriculum that emerged from this study and my learning - a vision for a considerate curriculum.

In closing this chapter, I believe that taking time to write my story has proved to be a valuable method of self-examination. As I charted the course of my curriculum writing journey, I have been able to better understand my beliefs, values, and actions in the context of who I was then and who I am becoming. There have been many "Aha!"

moments. I see many pitfalls of curriculum writing and practice far more clearly now and know that many more will emerge as my critical lens widens and as I build my knowledge through future study and work with colleagues. Most importantly, I can now use the knowledge I have gained to more confidently assist teachers in taking up social justice issues through their curriculum endeavours.



CHAPTER FIVE

Participants Share Their Stories



CHAPTER FIVE: PARTICIPANTS SHARE THEIR STORIES

In this chapter I present windows into the lives of the four women writers who participated in the study. Their profiles were included earlier in Chapter three. I begin by expanding upon details of their profiles to situate their experiences. Based on the data analysis, I present aspects of their histories that relate to their social justice commitments and to their curriculum writing experiences. I also select pivotal experiences represented in the data that portray their growing critical consciousness and desire to engage in curriculum writing as forms of empowerment and social activism (Mogadime, 2003; Scott, 2004).

Kate

Kate was born in Scotland. She is qualified to teach elementary and secondary students, as well as adult education. Her additional qualification certificates include French, Drama, and English as a Second Language (ESL). Kate taught at two secondary schools and two elementary schools. She currently teaches at a local community college.

Kate is White and English is her first language. She describes herself as “being older.” At the time of the first interview, she was sixty years old. She self-identifies as having a disability, “I have rheumatoid arthritis which is a chronic condition.” She also describes herself as “an immigrant woman of privilege” (Kate, Interview 1, April 2009, p. 2).

Kate and I worked together for a number of years. We were both involved in school board and union initiatives. We built a collegial relationship and when I decided to begin studies for a PhD in Education, Kate was very supportive and she was interested in the topic I chose to research. I was very pleased when she agreed to be a participant in my doctoral study.

Interest in Social Justice and Curriculum Writing

One of Kate's employment opportunities in Canada was working for a non-profit community-based organization which delivered ESL instruction to immigrant employees at their work sites. In work site settings, Kate ran "intercultural communication courses." One of the objectives of the intercultural communication course was to examine barriers, including language, to effective communication. For example, there could be instances when a supervisor might think that communication was happening well in a particular work environment because the worker would smile and nod. However, the supervisor might at times mistakenly believe that the smiles and nods meant that the employee's comprehension was good and instructions were being understood when instead those mannerisms were just forms of politeness to authority.

Kate became aware of her equity consciousness while working with immigrants. This 'awakening' happened in about her second year of doing workplace education with adult women, workplace supervisors, and managers. She became even more aware of equity issues when she developed rheumatoid arthritis at around the age of 40. She describes her growing interest in social justice as a result of many changes that occurred around that time of her life.

It was a combination of having a disability and not being a young woman anymore, becoming older and losing the importance that society attaches to youth. I was also in a difficult marriage for a number of years and it was a combination of circumstances that helped me to have some understanding of what it is like to be struggling and somewhat oppressed. And this feeling of not being able to do a whole lot about it; or having to work hard to deal with it. I think that is when I

began to understand equity issues better, when I was beginning to have some experiences of it [feeling marginalized] myself. (Kate, Interview 1, April 2009, p. 5)

Kate was involved with her teachers' union during her career in elementary teaching and served on the local executive. During that time, Kate decided to apply to be a curriculum writer for a social justice support resource that the teacher union was planning to produce and was selected. The project she embarked upon took about three years to produce. Additionally, Kate worked at other projects related to curriculum writing. She provided content and served as an editor for two community-based resources, one on conflict and communication, and another on social action related to custody and support of dependent children.

While serving on her local executive, Kate was also involved in planning special events locally such as, Race Relations Retreats. She enjoyed planning and participating in activities where she could meet teachers from outside her school board. She believes that those types of events helped her to "further her understanding" of issues that were not commonly observed or discussed locally. Kate also presented equity workshops within her school board and served on a provincial teacher union committee.

I asked Kate what prompted her to participate in joining a curriculum writing team for the union. Below in one of her journal entries, she comments on her motivation for taking on a writing project and then talks about what she had to offer to the other writers on the team and the project. Her love for writing and her strong commitment to social justice drew her into the project.

I love to write, and had been interested and involved in anti-racist work for a number of years, intercultural communication training, and anti-racist workshops. Also, working on the first project rekindled my interest in writing, and in editing. I realized that I had some ability in those things.

Delivering workshops to teachers made me acutely aware of the narrowness of much of the curriculum used in the system, as well as the narrowness of the understanding and perspectives of many of the teachers [on racism]. It was not uncommon for a teacher or principal to initially state that there was “no racism in my school,” and after an in-depth workshop have a shift in that idea.

I brought the perspective of living with a physical disability, rheumatoid arthritis, as well as education work at a range of different levels [to the writing task]. As we worked on the project, I understood the real value of having different experiences and perspectives in producing a rounded, finished product. We can only try to “walk in the other person’s shoes,” but can never truly live their experiences. I began to realize that having different voices on the writing team was deliberate, so that there were voices present from different racialized groups, sexual orientations, and abilities, as well as range of experiences. (Kate, Journal Entry 1, April 2009, p. 1)

Kate is interested in pursuing further education on the topic of social justice and was interested in taking time to reflect on the meaning of her contributions in curriculum writing. Kate has family members who have completed doctoral work. She understands the significance of current research in changing practice. These are Kate’s words about why she wanted to be involved in this study:

It's probably because I secretly nurture a desire to do it myself I think, that is part of it. I have always wanted to go back to school and take some courses and maybe do some research, I am really interested in that area, it would definitely be in social justice...that would draw me in. I know that, and I have known that for years. So that's what I would do. So I think I have nurtured that idea. (Kate, Interview 3, June 2009, p. 25)

Kate's Experiences

I selected some significant events from the stories that Kate shared in her interviews. Each one demonstrates Kate's developing awareness of injustices, her location and subjectivity, and her willingness to critically reflect and act on situations she encounters. The incidents highlight her immigrant status, her ascribed role as a member of the "equity police," her shock at particular situations that relate to racism, and her growing awareness and understanding of her experiences and those outside of her own.

Developing a Critical Consciousness

Early in her career, Kate delivered ESL instruction in various workplaces. She taught "intercultural communication courses" to new immigrants and observed that "very often the supervisors in the workplaces were White, Anglo Saxon, and their employees were from a variety of different racial backgrounds" (Kate, Interview 1, April 2009, p. 1).

During our first interview, Kate recounted a story about being in a small room and teaching a class with approximately 15 women in attendance. As Kate told me the story, and quite early into the interview, she became emotional and started to cry. She said, "I can remember sharing experiences with the women and laughing and feeling – Oh I am home – and I am getting quite emotional just talking about it" (Kate, Interview 1, April

2009, p. 2). The open expression of her emotions took us both by surprise, even though I was fully aware that within the intimacy of interviews, emotive responses could occur (Fontana & Frey, 2000). It was at this very first interview of my doctoral study that the tremendous responsibility I held as a researcher was re-emphasized and that Harding's words, "Stories are gifts" became real for Kate and me (Harding, 1992, p. 60). From that moment, I became connected to her story in a more intimate way and I later questioned deeply how best to preserve the "sacredness" of that moment.

When Kate immigrated to Canada, she lived in a rural town in Ontario for thirty years. For five of those years, she taught at a local elementary school. She taught French at first, then Special Education, and finally ESL. According to Kate, if anything vaguely connected to anti-racist education came into the school – a brochure, an email, a resource, it was automatically passed on to the ESL teacher. The assumption was always that the ESL teacher was the only person at the school who would be interested. Kate described this as being very "irritating" because no one else appeared to want to take responsibility for any type of social justice endeavour or to organize and share related materials. For social justice, Kate was the point person and often, not always by choice.

Kate also spoke of her colleagues' characterization of her as a result of her social justice focus – she developed a "reputation." She described a situation where she entered the staff room when a colleague was telling a joke. A teacher listening reacted by trying to stop the joke saying, "SHHHH! Kate's here!" Kate's presence meant the staff gathered could not hear the rest of the joke. It was an uncomfortable and awkward situation for her to be in. However, Kate said she tried to defuse the tension by asking if the joke was racist or sexist, but that did not improve matters since the colleague who was telling the

joke said - it was both. At times like this, Kate felt she was labelled as “the equity police.” In talking further about it, Kate did not seem to mind the label, because she felt the tone was “light-hearted.” Furthermore, she could see that her colleagues were building their awareness of the inappropriateness of some of their actions. Unfortunately, they still required her presence as a reminder. Kate noted that being “the equity police” was her ascribed role and by applying that label to her, most of the staff stepped outside of the additional duties she undertook thereby absolving themselves of their equity-related responsibilities. Colleagues clearly demonstrated to Kate that social justice work was not to be a shared responsibility of the staff.

Kate also emphasized a family member’s characterization of her as a “socialist, feminist do-gooder.” She believes the label came about because she was becoming a stronger and more confident person due in part to her involvement in new interests such as federation work. The label was likely meant to diminish her efforts. Put-downs and labels, according to Kate, come with the territory of social activism. However, she offered a caution.

You do have to be careful because it is very easy to be labelled as the equity police. There are times that I have heard myself and others sound ‘righteous’ and you have to be very cautious that you don’t do that [tell people the right way to behave] or come across in that manner because you won’t get the desired response from people if you come across in that way (Kate, Interview 1, April 2009, p. 9).

Although Kate was ‘marginalized’ by labels from her equity endeavours at a later stage in her teaching career, delving into some of her early experiences helped to shed light on her lack of awareness of privileges that her White skin carried.

Kate shared an early experience, one that occurred before she came to Canada. She described dating a man in Scotland, who she explained was “half-Chinese.” Kate says she was drawn to him because of his ‘difference’ from people she knew. There were not very many racialized people in her community and circle of friends. However, Kate’s mother had an inclusive attitude and that encouraged her to develop a similar attitude towards difference. Kate said that she was “shocked” when her friend described incidents of name-calling and racial slurs that he encountered. Kate recounted another story related to her workplace education experiences in Canada where she began to understand the implications of race. This one was about a man of colour who had immigrated to Canada from England. Kate said that the man became very frustrated when people said they understood his immigrant experiences.

When I was in workplace education at a session in Toronto and I talked about my experience of being an immigrant, I can remember another person there who I think had immigrated here from England. He responded to my comments with anger and at the time I was very taken aback. Now I realize that what he was saying was that I had not come to the realization that I was such a privileged immigrant. I hadn’t come to that realization – I hadn’t gotten to that point. He was saying that it was easy for me because I had the right kind of accent, White skin, and so on. He didn’t exactly berate me but he told me that I shouldn’t assume that I even began to understand what he faced as an immigrant. It felt harsh to me at

the time but it also brought the message home to me very clearly. And I later realized that he was absolutely right. (Kate, Interview 1, April 2009, p. 8)

Kate's growing awareness is very evident in this excerpt because she realizes that her race and language provided her with certain unearned privileges and there were differences in "immigrant experiences" that she had not previously considered (McIntosh, 1989; James, 2000). Kate was able to "reinterpret" her interaction and reaction in an effort to build her understanding of difference (Frankenberg, 1993).

During our second interview, Kate recalled something from her childhood that has had a part in her resolve to work for social justice. Kate remembered that her older brother had teased her a lot in her childhood. In her words, "he was very racist and homophobic too, but yet he is my brother and I love him" (Kate, Interview 2, May 2009, p. 18). She felt she was unfairly treated as a girl, and perhaps those early experiences had served as a catalyst for her interest in social justice and eventually led her on her journey to develop resources to counter those experiences.

Curriculum Writing for Social Justice

Kate wrote extensively about her curriculum writing experiences in her journal. She found journaling to be an effective tool for reflecting on the processes of curriculum writing (Richardson, 2000). She said that curriculum writing helped her to realize that she has a voice and engaging in writing was a good way to use that voice. Curriculum writing provided a way for Kate to address unfairness and establish respect, respect for her own uniqueness and respect for difference.

She believes that there are some important differences between her equity endeavours as a workshop presenter and a curriculum writer. Kate feels that writing

curriculum involves a greater depth of thought because it involves “the big picture,” “what you want to convey to students” and “what you want the teacher to do.” She explained that curriculum writing is multi-layered and requires a good working knowledge of best practices for both the teacher and the student.

When you are writing curriculum, you have to go to deeper levels than when you are simply preparing a lesson on a story. You have to think about it [what you are going to write] more thoroughly. I particularly notice it when I am writing curriculum with a team of teachers because then you are getting input from other people. So then you have collective thinking which is often much richer than one person’s focus. Working on a team also helps to broaden how you approach and delve into a topic. I know it affirmed my beliefs but also broadened my understanding in many ways. In my case, curriculum writing provided a way for representatives from various oppressed and underrepresented groups to try to make alliances to work for the common good. (Kate, Journal Entry 3, May 2009, p. 3)

One of Kate’s experiences was being part of a writing team that was comprised of Aboriginal women, racialized women, out-lesbian women, White heterosexual women, and Kate who was White and also self-identified as having a disability. Kate explains that as the group worked together, they helped one another to develop better understanding of issues that were often outside of their own experiences and to inquire into assumptions that the individuals brought to the table (Kincheloe, 2005).

I don’t think that you can necessarily assume that someone who is very active in anti-racist work for example, is necessarily going to understand heterosexism and

homophobia. Now, I think that is improving over time but I think forming alliances and trying to understand the issues of other groups – well the process of curriculum writing really affirmed that for me because in the writing team that I worked with, there were women who were representing various groups, historically disadvantaged and underrepresented groups and there were differences in how we saw things. (Kate, Interview 3, June 2009, p. 4)

She explained that each person on the team brought different skills and understanding of issues. Sometimes a person understood anti-racism well, but did not have a good knowledge base about heterosexism. These individual limitations became evident early on in the process of discussing issues. According to Kate, they had to help one another further their understanding of issues through collaborative discussion (Lopes, 2010). If the team conversation became too focused on disability, for example, someone else would raise another issue or perspective for consideration and people would have to stop and think about how to include those concerns and new ideas as well.

I think that the actual process of the discussion and writing really deepened my understanding of the complexities of the issues involved in how you reach people in the first place, and how you motivate them to think more deeply and think differently, and how different groups and experiences can strengthen each other's understanding. (Kate, Interview 3, June 2009, p. 5)

Kate believes that the writers on the team had to grapple with the task of how to best present suggested activities for lessons because it became clear to them that they were writing for a wide audience of teachers – some of them with very little understanding of social justice and some who were already strong, equity-minded advocates in their

practice. The writing team was faced with doing the front line work of embedding strong pedagogical principles in content and creatively structuring the format in order to facilitate effective practical classroom applications of the resource.

Kate views curriculum writing for social justice as a process of unlearning her assumptions such as “normalized” experiences and figuring out ways to increase the breadth of experiences in mandated curriculum (Carr & Lund, 2007). She remembers reading a story about a family with two dads and a boy in her class interrupted the story to say, “We were told in Sunday School that they [families with two dads] were evil” (Kate, Interview 3, June 2009, pp. 2-3). Incidents like these are not dismissed by Kate. Instead, she uses them to serve as markers and catalysts to push students to move beyond their own experiences. Kate encourages her students to talk to other people and find out what they think. She wants curriculum to be from more than one perspective. In the case of the boy in her class, she wanted him to know that other family structures do exist and they should not be prejudged as “evil.”

Kate also wants students to ask questions. She warns that as teachers we cannot make “vast life experience claims and assumptions” and she believes that curriculum writing can help to change such perceptions. As a curriculum writer, Kate includes strategies such as open-ended questioning (Mogadime & Ramrattan Smith, 2007). For example, Kate believes that when a teacher reads a story to students, she wants to find ways to engage them in learning from the story. To her, this works best when the teacher makes room to connect to experiences and interests of the students whenever possible (Schwab, 1970; Aoki, 1993). These connections can be dissimilar and unfamiliar, but can validate the child’s lived experiences.

So when you tell a story, you don't need to jump in with prescribed ideas of what the student should pull from it...Instead, we need to help them to open their minds and wonder about things, events, and what the story is saying to them...And there are often very valid reasons why a student would say a particular thing. (Kate, Interview 3, June 2009, p. 3)

I asked Kate about her understanding of social justice curriculum during the second interview, but because Kate enjoys writing, she asked if she could write her explanation in a journal entry instead. In the excerpt below, she describes social justice curriculum in relation to “a good education.”

Social justice curriculum teaches students to think, and to consider viewpoints different from their own. Each of us is shaped by our life experience. Our values are formed from what we are exposed to in family life, and, increasingly with modern technology and communication, by society around us. A good education enables a student to sift through all of this and develop perspectives and understanding of the world. Embedding social justice into curriculum equips the student to be aware of differences and that there are many perspectives that are valid. Social justice curriculum can enable the student to think and reflect, and not take everything at face value. (Kate, Journal Entry 5, June 2009, p. 2)

Kate believes that mandated curriculum traditionally has been very narrow in scope. In the excerpt above, she argues for broadening the curriculum to embed various perspectives – one where students can see their life experiences in relation to others, whether similar or different. Kate understands the need for the relational aspect of curriculum and keeps that goal in mind as she develops activities in her curriculum

writing efforts. Kate also emphasized the need for openness in class discussions so that students would feel comfortable and safe enough to share their unique experiences.

She told me a story of a girl who explained that only her brothers got birthday cakes, but the girls in her family did not. Below is part of a conversation where she discussed the girl's comment and her reaction.

When I hear a student sharing that [as a girl she would not get a birthday cake] with me and forming her own perspective, it sort of changes how I view the situation. You start to realize that her life is very, very different from mine. Her experiences are very, very different from mine and I think in curriculum writing, if you can find a way to encourage that kind of sharing and interaction, then, that brings the curriculum to life. And of course in the classroom you also have to have an established comfort level, where it is okay to share that kind of thing...So students learn there are other ways of being. (Kate, Interview 3, June 2009, p. 9)

Listening to Kate, I could tell she felt her role as a curriculum writer carried a heavy weight of responsibility. She wants to include her experiences and those of her students, but she wants to go even further – to connect them to experiences and interests that are outside of their own, those that may be dissimilar. Kate believes that providing choices through a variety of activities and hearing about differences in experiences are two ways to strengthen the curriculum through writing (Kate, Focus Group, Session Two, June 2009, p. 8).

For Kate, one of the main goals of social justice curriculum is “to encourage or teach students to think.” Additionally, she wants to “provoke teachers to think as well” (Giroux, 1988). In writing resources, she thinks that including “a few questions for

teachers to reflect on their practice” may help to create or lead to better teaching and learning situations. She emphasizes that we are all learners. She cautions that language and tone are important considerations for writers since they do not want to be seen as condescending or only striving to be “politically correct” (Kate, Interview 3, June 2009, p. 13).

Kate recalled professional development sessions where teachers mocked social justice resources as “politically correct.” She realizes that comments like that are “put-downs” and can be a way to ignore or shift their responsibilities. However, she firmly believes that broadening mandated curriculum to include social justice perspectives is something that everyone is capable of doing. In her view, what is needed to bring teachers on board are approaches in writing curriculum support resources that incorporate strategies that emphasize consideration of teachers’ and students’ experiences, critical reflective thought, and most importantly, an encouraging tone.

I asked Kate to tell me more about the team writing and collaborative process. Kate applied to be a curriculum writer because she wanted to rekindle her love for writing. She said that she always loved to write and curriculum writing appealed to her because it offered a place for her to blend her two interests – writing and anti-racist work. Kate said that during work with the other members of the writing team, she began to gain confidence in her abilities and she felt that her ideas were valued.

I realized that one person’s weakness, was compensated by another person’s strength. I quickly learned which member of the team to ask about shaping a story, or about grade appropriate activities. Mind you, with a long term project, there were some disagreements within the group. But these were easily resolved

through discussion, mostly because a tone of mutual respect had been established at the onset of the project. (Kate, Journal Entry 6, June 2009)

When Kate first met her writing team colleagues, she recalled that they spent time talking about themselves – their work experiences, and personal commitments to social justice. They also took additional time to collaboratively develop ground rules for respectful interaction. According to Kate, the two initial phases were very beneficial. All team members were part of the process and the commitments they wrote served as guideposts for respectful interaction. The *commitments* were posted each time the group met so when disagreements occurred, they could easily glance at their statements to guide their conversations. An example of the commitment statements is included in Appendix H.

Kate read Ann Bishop's (2002) book, *Becoming An Ally*. She said that the information helped her to better understand how to make connections among social justice issues and become more cognizant of her position as a person of privilege who does equity work. But she credits working on the writing team for helping to shape her growth in social justice issues outside of her experiences and knowledge base. She said that as they worked to meet their objectives for the resource, they had to find ways to build their own knowledge (Shulman, 1987). The process worked both ways.

We were intent on building awareness and understanding of the issues around sexism, ableism, homophobia, and racism. We worked hard to try to weave all of these into one document. Our goal was to find ways to enhance the teacher's and students' understanding of the complexities of these issues. (Kate, Journal Entry 2, April 2009, p. 2)

She described some of the strategies that the team used in their writing. One strategy was to try to elicit a connection between a particular issue or circumstance within a story to a real-life situation. For example, she explained that in trying to understand a challenge related to being a person with a disability, a teacher or student might think of a relative or friend whom they had witnessed as having similar struggles to be fully functioning and be accepted in society. She felt that the group tried to develop stories in ways that enabled those type of connections. Another strategy was to think of times when they felt isolated by a particular circumstance, such as speaking a language other than English or eating a food that was not known to others who were present. By raising questions about such moments and discussing them in depth, students could learn to connect their feelings to how they interpreted experiences.

Challenges and Benefits of Curriculum Writing

Kate readily admits that curriculum writing for social justice requires many big commitments. She discussed some of the challenges and benefits during the second session of the focus group. First, curriculum resources take time to produce and the process of team building and establishing respectful rapport extend the process even more. But she believes they are essential pieces for effective collaborative work. Furthermore, she suggests that such a design embeds principles of social justice into the act of writing curriculum.

Kate was able to participate on the writing team because she received release days from her teaching duties at the school board. But those days, approximately ten days in total, were not enough time for her to complete her portion of the project. Most of her responsibilities of collecting stories in interviews, writing them up, and checking them for

approval, were done on her personal time. Sometimes, she had to make changes to her project agenda to accommodate family commitments and vice versa. Kate received a small honorarium for her efforts. She said her commitment to the project was driven by a personal desire to change the curriculum, not by financial gain. She jokingly said, “We were not in it for money – that’s for sure.”

Selecting content was another challenge. Kate recalled lively discussion on the team as to what topics to pursue in the resource. Inevitably, there were some topics that had to be set aside due to restrictions on the structure of the document and financial considerations. But she felt that team members were well aware that they could face criticism for not including some topics.

One of Kate’s writing projects took place during the period when Mike Harris was the Premier of Ontario and the Progressive Conservative government was in power. She said that the climate of government-union relations was a very confrontational one and particularly so for teachers who were working for social justice. An oppressive tone seemed to permeate every aspect of teaching and very little support was available for individuals who wanted to continue their efforts. Citing this example, Kate believes that government agendas can sometimes interfere with curriculum and disrupt it in ways that are not always beneficial for students - a narrow, restrictive curriculum with no regard for social justice. However, she has also seen that at other times government changes can be beneficial. She cites *The Common Curriculum* as one that supported social justice goals. But Kate expressed some scepticism during the focus group discussions regarding the new equity and inclusion policy proposed by the current Liberal government (2011). She

feels that unless supportive mechanisms are in place for the implementation of the policy, very little change will occur within the system.

Although there were roadblocks and challenges throughout the curriculum writing experience, Kate felt there were also significant benefits personally and professionally. She felt that she had grown in ways that she had not anticipated. She became more confident and assertive. As a published writer, she became known in her school community and at the school board level. Curriculum writing led to additional opportunities such as training to be a workshop presenter and professional development opportunities to further her knowledge. Kate also included her work in her curriculum vitae when applying for new employment positions.

Through her team writing experiences, she was able to connect to people outside of her home school board and in some cases continue friendships. The resources she co-authored marked accomplishments that could be shared with family and friends. Most importantly, Kate believes that the learning that took place through her collaborative writing projects helped to build her critical lens and put her in a mindset which has fostered her desire to learn more about social justice.

Connections to Sherry's Story

I provide these comments to explain how a particular aspect of my identity played out in how I heard and reacted to one of Kate's stories. I believe my comments will help to demonstrate how my racialized identity influences my reaction and analysis of certain incidents.

When I considered Kate's story about dating a man who was not White, I became very aware of my positioning as Kate's friend and my identity as a woman with

Brown skin. Kate's reaction of "being shocked" at racial name-calling actually shocked me. It gave me an uncomfortable feeling about how to react - as a researcher and friend - and make sense of what I heard. At the time of the interview, I did not pursue the story further. I tried to get this 'abruptness' across as I wrote about the incident in Kate's story. I "jumped" on to another story. It was not until later when I read and re-read the transcript several times and eventually shared it with my Supervisor that I realized that I avoided probing further into that incident of Kate's story. Discussing the situation and my reaction to it has helped me to come to terms with an aspect of my story (Sherry's story) - my 'avoidance' of difficult situations.

I have noticed that people around me use avoidance quite often, but this time I was the one "caught" using it. Avoidance is a strategy I have used before when conversations in various situations have become difficult or uncomfortable. At first, I dismissed my avoidance as a mistake of a novice researcher. However, after considering my reaction of very quickly moving on to a different topic, I realize that the choice to move on may have been due to my own frustration with Kate's "shock." I was in a situation with a friend, who I know to be very committed to social justice, yet getting glimpses of her at another stage of her life when I did not know her. I believe that her story exposed our positioning, she as White, and me as racialized (Tilley & Powick, 2007). It marked some of our experiences as distinctly different. But such a situation also provides a way to talk about how our racialized selves can affect our understanding of the "same" story (James & Haig-Brown, 2001; Tilley & Ramrattan Smith, 2008). Teachers who lack a critical lens may use a similar strategy of avoidance and that can keep them from delving deeper into issues because, like me, they may discover aspects of

themselves that are surprising or possibly contradictory to their goals. But avoidance can limit the learning that can take place. Acknowledging difference and having opportunities to talk about difference can help us to broaden and deepen our understanding of issues. I was able to go back to Kate in our second interview and explain why I needed to know more about that story.

Sandira

Sandira is of South Asian heritage. She immigrated to Canada in her teens and considers her “immigrant” status as part of her identity. She attended secondary school, university, and teachers college in Ontario. Sandira is diligent about continuing her education and throughout her career has pursued additional qualification courses, recently completing a Master of Education. During the time of this study she was enrolled in part two of the Principal’s Qualification Course. Sandira has been teaching for over eight years and has worked in three schools all for the same school board. She has taught most grades up to Grade five and she currently works at a school with approximately 800 students and 40 staff.

Sandira self-identifies as a racialized, immigrant woman and describes herself as “Brown.” English is her second language. At the time of this interview, she was 31 years old. Sandira and I met through union work and have maintained our collegial relationship through work-related activities. I was very happy when Sandira chose to participate in my doctoral research.

Interest in Social Justice and Curriculum Writing

Sandira believes her interest in social justice started quite early in her career. She recalls participating in equity training at the school board level in her first year and

becoming involved with the teacher union in her third year of teaching. Sandira is interested in pursuing a PhD in Education on the topic of social justice and thought that this would be a good way to learn more about parts of the process. She has a strong commitment to continuing her education. She enjoys writing and identifies her interest in social justice and curriculum writing as “a good fit.” She felt that her rapport with me was open and strong and she also wanted to contribute to building knowledge about a field that holds strong interest for her. Sandira admits that she is curious about how I will present the study, represent her voice, and her experiences.

She believes that curriculum writing has helped her to work towards one of her goals for strengthening the mandated curriculum - including diverse experiences that also include her own. In her first interview, she talked about why she liked to write.

Writing helps me to think through situations. Curriculum writing does the same thing. As I write, I think and as I think, I write, it is a cycle. Sometimes I think about situations that the students told me about, other times it is about my own experiences. Most of what I think and write about has not been included in the curriculum that is used in schools. That’s why I wanted to write social justice curriculum. (Sandira, Interview 1, April 2009, p. 9)

In that same interview, later on, she described one of the benefits of being on a writing team:

The most important thing about being a part of a writing team was it [the experience of writing together] took things that I experienced personally, and experiences of my students, and experiences from other people on the team and

placed them right into the classroom curriculum and students could relate to them.

(Sandira, Interview 1, April 2009, p. 6)

She wants to include experiences that are relevant to the diverse needs of her students and she believes that being a curriculum writer for social justice has provided her with a way to make those types of connections.

Sandira's Experiences

I present excerpts from the interviews that highlight the following key points:

Sandira's immigrant experiences and her efforts to overcome her outsider status, her perception of how others see her and limitations that accompany such perspectives, and her struggle to demonstrate her credibility as a leader.

Developing a critical consciousness

In our first interview, Sandira described some of her experiences associated with immigrating to Canada at the age of fifteen and trying to fit into Canadian culture. As she describes, "It wasn't easy," but she was determined to make it work. The process took time, first as a student, then later as a teacher seeking work, and further along in her role as a teacher. The events that unfold in her stories show Sandira as an outsider seeking a way to gain 'insider status' in three educational contexts.

One is coming to Canada from a country where I looked like everyone else in the country and coming here to this country and realizing that I looked different and I tried to fit in and tried to figure out who I am and tried to become part of Canadian society. I was fifteen at the time so it was a high level of adjustment coming here and trying to fit in. (Sandira, Interview 1, April 2009, p. 3)

Sandira is not White. She believes that her colour works as a visible sign that “stereotypes” her and limits her opportunities (Palmer, 1997).

Although Sandira attended university and teachers college in Canada, she still recalls her difference in skin colour, Brown, as a point of attention, particularly when she was looking for employment.

Going through university I seemed to fit in and I was doing okay and then when I went through the interview sessions for a job, I knew that they [the interview team] looked at me differently. (Sandira, Interview 1, April 2009, p. 3)

Sandira felt that her colour was a barrier to getting permanent employment because of stereotypes associated with people of colour – such as, they are not capable. Furthermore, English is her second language and interviews were held in English. But she was eventually hired into a permanent teaching position and saw her colour as a marker of her role.

Getting that job and being a part of that community was really important for me as a new teacher and I realized that I was different, I was *the Brown teacher* (emphasized) in the community and I had a role to play in that. (Sandira, Interview 1, April 2009, p. 4)

Sandira was placed in a school that had a high population of Brown students. I asked her if she thought this placement was purposely done and if she thought her colour had played a role in getting her the job. She believes that her colour had played a role in securing her employment because of the large number of Brown students at the school and “there were only White teachers.” She felt that she was the “lucky” one.

Later, in the same interview, I asked Sandira, since she has been in the role of teacher now, for eight years if she still saw herself as *the Brown teacher*.

Yes. For sure. But I am in a community where there are a lot of Brown students so I feel as if I have a big role to play, a significant role, and that means taking on whatever responsibilities that may be part of that role. (Sandira, Interview 1, April 2009, p. 8)

Two months later in our third interview, the term, “Brown teacher” emerged again, this time as a marker of someone who must prove her credibility.

I have mentioned to you [Sherry] many times that if you are a Brown teacher, a South Asian teacher, you are known to be a supply teacher in this board. You are not known to be a “real teacher.” Your credibility will always be questioned and if you ever go into a new school, and I have gone into three schools, well in the beginning you are always questioned and you need to prove yourself. You have to prove who you are and you have to rise up to the challenges because you are always going to get, well, who is she? Why is she here? How did she get this job? Even though we [teachers] might have the same qualifications, I am the one who is always going to be questioned.

Sherry: So what I hear from that then is, there is a double standard.

Sandira: Yes. I don't think I would go in with that attitude on my shoulders but I know that there is. I know that internally. (Sandira, Interview 3, June 2009, p. 5)

Sandira believes that in her board, skin colour denotes a marker of status. Brown-skinned teachers are not “real teachers.” Furthermore, she acknowledges that there is an

'invisibility' to prejudices that exist. However, Sandira is willing to take on additional responsibilities because she wants to be a "role model."

If I look back, my roles were not only to be a role model and be a teacher who represented the students, because there were very few of us in the school board. I had many responsibilities. I had to also translate sometimes at school. I had to connect to parents who were immigrant parents who were often working at two jobs so maybe they couldn't help with the reading log at home, for example. So what was I going to do? I had to do whatever it took to make that child successful.

(Sandira, Interview 3, June 2009, p. 6)

Sandira felt an obligation to carry out additional responsibilities associated with her role. As she became more confident in her role, she began to take notice of interactions within her school community. This led her to inquire into schooling practices.

So I started to question things like, why are the parents not coming in for open house? Why are the parents not talking to the teachers? Why aren't the parents questioning certain things? Well you know, they hold the school in such authority that they don't question it. They are probably not used to it [questioning authority] in their cultures. (Sandira, Interview 3, June 2009, p. 6)

These types of concerns and additional responsibilities prompted Sandira's decision to become more involved in her union. She saw the union as a place to be mentored and taught how to handle the challenges she began to face in her career. She wanted to "see the path to successfully meeting the challenges." Although the union provided her with training opportunities and professional development options, she did not feel that any

doors were opened to her. Instead she says, “I definitely had to open my own doors and make my own way.” Furthering her education was one strategy that gave her good results. Therefore, her commitment to educating herself remains strong.

Sandira raised the issue of her professional identity throughout the three interviews. She feels that she is often misjudged by her stature, dress, and physical appearance. She definitely believes that the colour of her skin is at play in how she is perceived (Shadd, 2001).

I make a conscious effort to dress appropriately for events and so on. I want positive attention so I don't joke around a lot. I want to be taken seriously. I am conscious of *who* I want to portray but also I think about how people *see* and *judge* me.

Sherry: You are talking about the types of judgements that people make about your professionalism, based on physical appearance and so on?

Sandira: Yes, it is important to me to always keep that in mind. (Sandira, Interview 1, April 2009, p. 7)

Sandira said that she carries visible labels with her – minority, racialized, South Asian, and with these labels come stereotypes and judgements about her credibility (Razack, 1998; OHRC, 2003). More than once she was questioned as to how she was selected to be a workshop presenter and there were other times when she was asked if she was a teacher. The implications are that she may not meet the criteria as a presenter or that she might not hold the qualifications necessary for teaching.

She becomes discouraged by judgments that she believes are unfairly made about her. She views them as barriers to her goals for equity and inclusion. Sandira shared an

example of travelling with a White female colleague who was shadowing her to learn more about an equity workshop presentation. Sandira had completed the presentation many times before and agreed to have the colleague shadow her to learn more about the presentation. In conversation with those in attendance, it became clear that teachers in the audience assumed that Sandira was there to watch and shadow the White colleague. This and other similar experiences have led Sandira to believe that assumptions and professional credibility are nearly always made in favour of White-skinned teachers as being the leaders and Brown-skinned teachers are the learners or ones who are there to shadow and continue to build their knowledge. That is another reason why Sandira has developed such a strong commitment to furthering her education and building her knowledge. She wants to be able to counter those types of unfair judgements by amassing her credentials. Sandira explained that these types of situations are invisible barriers that racialized teachers often have to face throughout their careers.

What I find is that you do almost have to be overqualified to accomplish getting in [to teaching and positions of added responsibilities]. You need those credentials on your side in order to get in whereas another person [who is White] will likely get their foot in the door much, much easier. You can't compare yourself to that person because you will never be there so you have to be really overqualified to get in and prove yourself and work so much harder to get there. Or you can give up, I mean, because it is much easier at times to give up because there are so many obstacles! They are not obvious [to everyone else] but they are there.

(Sandira, Interview 2, May 2009, p. 3)

Sandira described and emphasized the “invisibility” of injustice - she knew there were prejudices present but could not always name or identify them. Sometimes invisibility occurred through extra work that came with being a social justice teacher because she was used to taking on extra things to do because no one else would volunteer to do them. There were other times when she felt that concerns she raised were dismissed because she was labelled as the “Brown teacher” and ‘anti-racism’ was seen as her main cause. These types of individual and daily struggles sometimes left her feeling isolated and marginalized from her colleagues. However, she saw curriculum writing as a way to explore and address invisibilities such as prejudice and discrimination.

Curriculum Writing for Social Justice

For Sandira, curriculum is about teaching content that is required by mandates from the Ministry. However, she quickly qualifies that explanation by saying that social justice curriculum has to do with “the *way* you teach, or *how* you teach the mandated curriculum.” She explains this by saying that the manner in which students’ interests and cultural connections are included can give them a strong message about the relevancy of the curriculum. Sandira says that being a curriculum writer allowed her to use open-ended questions in lessons she wrote to provide flexibility for curriculum to evolve and expand to become more inclusive. She also inserted her voice and issues raised by her students.

If you cannot engage the student who is the learner, or you can’t teach to the learner’s experiences, or if you can’t ask the learner about what is relevant and needs to be learned, then that is a problem. I, as a teacher, choose to adapt the curriculum and make it more engaging to the learner so that she or he can become

interested in learning...students need to see themselves represented and they need to have their lived experiences validated. That's why I believe in social justice curriculum, it can help to make those connections. (Sandira, Interview 2, May 2009, pp. 3-4)

Sandira further explained what curriculum meant to her.

To me curriculum is what we have to follow as a teacher. You have to teach the curriculum. What we have to do as teachers is to change that curriculum by focusing on equity and social justice, so what that means is we have to find ways to change it [mandated curriculum] to do both. (Sandira, Interview 2, May 2009, p. 6)

She explained that putting her experiences into a resource gave her some reassurance that students would be able to relate to parts of the curriculum, whereas before, some of their experiences might not have been acknowledged. For Sandira, that is what social justice-focused curriculum is about – providing a space for experiences that have traditionally been excluded (Lee, 2009). As a writer, she was able to have some “authority” by creating her own lessons and modifying units of study within her classroom and school. But having her voice at the table with a writing team was a bonus because more perspectives were raised and a greater audience could be served. Sandira feels that social justice is a bridge that brings the required standards of mandates to the relevancy and lived experiences of students (Aoki, 1993).

Sandira recounted an early experience relating to her immigration to Canada that she says was similar in nature to an experience of an English Language Learner (ELL) in

her class. She shared the story because the experiences of her students play out in her curriculum writing endeavours.

When Sandira arrived in Canada and was registered to attend her first school, she had to go to the school board office to be assessed. The completed assessments were then all sent directly to her school site. When the results were available, she learned that she did not do very well in Mathematics. She recalls the look of surprise on her parents' faces. They kept saying to the teacher, "No, no, she is very good in Math." However, the assessments indicated that Sandira should be registered into basic level Math. This was devastating to Sandira and her family because she needed advanced Math credits in order to attend university. Fortunately, Sandira's principal found a way for her to take some extra courses, so that she could eventually qualify to take advanced Math, the prerequisite for university studies. But Sandira had been stumped by the low grade she had received in Mathematics. It was not until she confronted a similar situation where an ELL student in her class was also experiencing difficulty with the Math assessment tests that she gained a better understanding of her experience many years ago as a new immigrant student. In Sandira's case, the Math problems were written out in English words and she had not yet learned "English" for directions, such as north, southwest, east and so on. In order to do that series of Math questions, Sandira would have needed to be able to distinguish and interpret English directions and then draw the corresponding geometrical pictures. However, she did not know the English words needed to carry out the required tasks. Observing the student in her class who was facing a similar challenge helped her to better understand why she was not able to carry out that series of instructions in her own assessment.

It makes me think about English Language Learners. They are just learning English. They only know certain aspects of the language and there is so much else going on. It can be so frustrating for them because they can't show their knowledge. It also shows the importance of communicating with parents because my parents insisted that I wanted to go to university and so I had that opportunity, because if they didn't – well I wouldn't have been a teacher. (Sandira, Interview 3, June 2009, p. 7)

Sandira uses her curriculum writing as a way to provide many different levels of activities so that students are more likely to find ways to connect to the curriculum and feel successful in their efforts. Providing more choices also helps students to feel more independent and capable since their skills are often only judged by their English proficiency. She believes that her experiences led her to be a strong advocate for students because she feels that many immigrant parents might not take as active a role as her parents did and for new immigrant families, navigating the schooling system can be a daunting process.

Walking the talk is more important than following guidelines at times. Policies are there to help. But when you want these students to be successful, any student, not just ESL students, you have to take on that responsibility to do whatever it takes to help them. (Sandira, Interview 3, June 2009, p. 9)

To her, writing curriculum that is focused on social justice helps her to move her agenda of anti-racism forward, but through it she has also learned how to broaden her conception of curriculum. That means she needs to be responsive to needs as they arise. She keeps vigilant about being 'aware' so that she does not miss opportunities for "teachable

moments” to assist her students and engage them in current, relevant, and emerging issues.

Sandira enjoys being part of curriculum writing teams. She discussed two projects during the interview. One writing team was relatively small in number and the other writing team was much larger. Both teams included representatives from designated groups – that is members who self-identified in the following categories: racialized; Aboriginal; having a disability; gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender. She enjoyed the different perspectives offered during their team writing discussions and believed that the varied histories and diverse points of view broadened her views on many issues. Discussion provided her with opportunities for professional growth.

I asked Sandira why she thought she was selected to be a curriculum writer. She emphasized the following points: her passion for writing, her social justice interests, and added that she was likely selected because she had something to contribute to the team. I asked her about when she first met the other writers and looked around the room, whether she thought about aspects of her own identity and the diverse points of view represented.

Yes, I thought I might be bringing a racialized perspective among other things, maybe. The writers who were present wanted to bring various perspectives to the writing project - we were a very diverse group.

...I think it is a good thing to have many different voices on the writing team. A positive aspect is that people who usually do not have their voices heard and might not normally get selected to write curriculum, were present. They got picked and now they had the opportunity to have their voices included. That is not

usually the case...I feel privileged to write curriculum. (Sandira, Interview 3, June 2009, p. 3)

However, Sandira emphasized that diverse representation has to be partnered with merit to give credibility to the resource. She suggested that “Brown” teachers are not usually the ones selected to write curriculum. She feels that sometimes colleagues assume that writers for social justice curriculum are selected only because of their designation and not because they “merited” the selection - meaning they were not appropriately qualified to be there. I asked her to explain this further.

I think sometimes when designated groups get together and work on a project, other people who are not from designated groups have an assumption that the team members were selected solely because of their designation and not because of their credentials or merit. I think both pieces are important and go hand in hand. But what if there was a team of all White teachers who got together for a project, I don't think anyone would question their merit. (Sandira, Interview 3, June 2009, p. 4)

It is a frustrating cycle of always having to prove herself because of her colour, but one that she has grown used to.

Sandira explained that many barriers she faced are “the invisible sort” and that she believes that people who are racialized expend a lot of energy in trying to overcome these invisible barriers. She says that people who self-identify often tell people in authority such as union leaders, administrators, and school board officials about their experiences in the hope that the barriers that are identified can be addressed. But she finds it frustrating that research projects are continually conducted and findings are

presented, yet very few changes are ever implemented. It is a frustrating cycle. Sandira feels the strain associated with the slow pace of systemic change. She cited two equity research reports in the past eight years, completed for the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario where staff and members were asked to identify barriers to equity and social justice goals (Frank, 2006; Hanley, 2009).

Sometimes I can't quite figure out exactly what they are or if I can even name them but I think the barriers are there. When I have been able to identify them - it doesn't seem to make any difference because people just ask for another report. I know that they are there. My ability to overcome them takes a lot of persistence and I think it takes a lot of work and commitment. There are a lot of people who are racialized who in my opinion give up because meeting the challenges becomes too much, it becomes too difficult for them to continuously meet these obstacles. (Sandira, Interview 1, April 2009, p. 1)

Sandira acknowledges that change takes time to occur. In the case of implementing social justice curriculum, Sandira believes that directions for these types of initiatives must come from the top – directors, superintendents, and administrators - as well as from the grassroots – teachers, educational workers, parents, and students.

Curriculum writing has been a “good fit” for her goals. She felt that by writing her experiences and those of her students into curriculum resources, their lived experiences can be validated through inclusion. As we discussed curriculum writing further, Sandira and I agreed that even though a curriculum resource is only a tiny piece of a much larger entrenched system, it can still work against the injustices of a much larger system because curriculum is part of the inner circuits of the system.

We are all required to use curriculum. It's a good place to start to make changes.

Some views have been excluded and it's time to make room for them.

Social justice curriculum is a way to do that. (Sandira, Interview 3, June 2009, p. 10)

She suggests that curriculum writing for social justice addresses teaching and learning situations and provides a way to change school knowledge. She acknowledges that systemic change requires a critical force within the teaching population and she believes that such a critical force can come from teachers who write for and enact social justice.

It takes time to change the system and it takes many people. You need people who can write for social justice and also the people who can teach for social justice in order to make a difference. (Sandira, Interview 3, June 2009, p. 10)

I asked Sandira to share her thoughts about why some teachers choose to engage in social justice issues, while others may not. In her experience, teachers who use a social justice lens tend to come from a history or background that makes that lens important, as is the case for her. Her immigrant experience had a strong influence on her social justice commitment.

I see things going on with students in my class that remind me of my experiences.

I was an ESL learner and had to do tests that were unfair because the Math questions were written in English and I hadn't learned the words yet. I also know that the choices the students make can limit what happens to their education options later. That happened to me and I don't want that to happen to them.

(Sandira, Interview 3, June 2009, p. 12)

Sandira thinks that some teachers, because of various types of privileges they may enjoy, whether it be gender, skin colour, socio-economic status, or being able-bodied for example, may not see the need for developing or using a critical lens to change their practice. Others just simply make the excuse that social justice teaching is far too complicated and it would be too difficult to incorporate all “those types of teachings” into the curriculum, so according to Sandira, they will not even try.

I think curriculum and school structure are based on White westernized society and values. That is just the way things are done. So when someone comes in and starts talking about using social justice curriculum, people who have been doing things a certain way tend to become uncomfortable and question whether that type of change needs to be there. I mean we are talking about educators who are often great teachers, but they do not understand the *need* for the changes.

For example, they do not understand why the curriculum has to change for English language learners. These types of teachers do not see that the students need to get what they need to succeed. Some of these teachers don't see the need for these types of changes. But now, as a racialized person, I understand and know that these changes are important because I have walked in those shoes. I know what it is like for example, to need ESL instruction, so I would never deny students a social justice curriculum, because it incorporates what they need to learn in order to succeed. (Sandira, Interview 2, May 2009, p. 5)

Sandira's identities as a Brown-skinned, ESL, immigrant plays out in her curriculum writing. She wants to include stories about those experiences, the emotions, the obstacles, and the strategies she used to cope. One of the related documents she submitted for

analysis was a poem that was published about trying to fit into Canada (Sandira, Published Poem, Related Documents, #1). In the poem, she describes the struggle of maintaining part of her home identity such as beliefs and language with conforming to what is valued in her new homeland. But Sandira insists that coming to terms with the many aspects of identity is something that every child needs to learn and value.

Sandira shares her experiences because she wants immigrant students to relate to some of those experiences, feelings, and actions and she also wants the students who do not have those experiences to learn about them in order to better understand their classmates and their own privileges. Sandira admits that identifying privileges she enjoys has helped her in her curriculum writing. She believes that acknowledging privileges whether one is Brown or White can help people to better understand their lived experiences and improve their interpersonal relationships.

I asked Sandira about how teachers might become better equipped to teach within a social justice framework. She believes that professional development, such as attending equity workshops and professional learning communities can play key roles in developing a social justice mindset. Social justice programs helped her to understand aspects of her identities, privileges and limitations, and also provided insight into her relational roles with colleagues. She learned about power differentials and how policies and procedures promote certain perspectives. But Sandira believes that for learning to be useful, it must go hand in hand with critically reflecting and questioning practice. She readily admits that she holds herself accountable and rises to the responsibilities associated with being committed to social justice by following those steps.

We all have room to grow. I am not perfect and there are a lot of times I look at my own actions. I think, that lesson didn't go too well, how can I change that? But if I just keep doing the same thing well nothing is going to change. I think that equity needs to be embedded into everything – every subject, not just Language Arts. So it is a matter of questioning and reflecting and if you do come upon something that makes you feel uncomfortable or unprepared, figure out how to get the help you need.

You know some colleagues, will come up to, let's say the topic of racism and think, I don't really know how to talk about racism. Well, they need to understand why it is they want to *avoid* it. They need to understand why. The teachers need to understand their biases and identify their lack of knowledge and then go out and learn what they need. Social justice curriculum can help them to get started.

(Sandira, Interview 2, May 2009, p. 5)

Sandira explained her frustration with “quick fix” solutions that are offered at some equity programs she has attended. She says that sometimes the presentations “lack the depth of understanding of the issues” and come across as simplistic because gender or race are not discussed (Stitzlein, 2008). She believes that it can be difficult for some presenters to get the complexities of issues across if they have never “walked in those shoes or done the work to build their own knowledge.”

Sometimes they know the definitions or best practices, but there is still a missing piece of the lived experiences - it just gives a fuller and more realistic picture.

Equity work needs to be happening all the time, social justice work needs to

happen all the time and we have to be thinking about how best to do it. (Sandira, Interview 2, May 2009, p. 16)

Sandira explained that everyone has a responsibility to work for social justice. But along with that responsibility, there must be room for those who have been marginalized to have their perspectives included. She believes that social justice-focused curriculum resources provide a way to do ongoing equity work and writing curriculum gave her opportunities to contribute to strengthening the curriculum by making it more inclusive. She also gained valuable skills and knowledge from the process.

I asked Sandira if she thought it was possible that her goals for social justice could be misdirected through curriculum, if it was possible that curriculum could perpetuate myths and stereotypes, and misrepresentations and biases. She responded by saying that curriculum cannot be perfect and there is always room for differences in interpretation. But Sandira believes that the work of writing and enacting curriculum is ongoing work and must be reviewed critically on a regular basis. She says she regularly takes steps to improve her efforts and believes that all teachers have these responsibilities. "It is important to analyse, critique, and assess yourself and your progress just as you would critique someone else. It is necessary to take those steps for writing curriculum and teaching curriculum" (Sandira, Interview 2, May 2009, p. 10).

Sandira discussed challenges and benefits of her writing team experiences in the second focus group session. These are included below.

Challenges and Benefits of Curriculum Writing

The biggest challenge in team writing for Sandira was finding time to complete all the work that was expected when the group left their sessions. Although she received

release time days from the school board, those were used for collaborative work. Sandira had many other commitments – committee work for the local union and school board. She was also taking courses. She felt that the projects took “a lot longer to complete” and that meant contributing a lot of her personal time. The honorarium she received was minimal, so improving financial compensation is something that she believes should be considered in future endeavours.

Sandira felt that there are assumptions that as the racialized person on a writing team, that she was speaking for all South Asians. She was very aware of the limitations of her knowledge in that respect. She does believe in representation but feels that writing teams should be larger in number to include more points of view. Generally speaking, she explained that most of the decision-making was collaborative. However, sometimes there were heated discussions and it was helpful to have ground rules for communicating respectfully.

Sandira felt that there has been an increasing lack of support for teachers to take time from their classroom duties to write curriculum. She believes that school board officials, including school administrators, need to build their understanding about collaborative learning opportunities such as curriculum writing.

Sandira says she has learned valuable lessons from being on writing teams and writing curriculum. She learned to remain quiet to observe and listen at times, while at other times, she learned to be courageous and state her opinion, but also back down if necessary. She fully admits that staying equity-focused and producing social justice resources requires a type of “balancing act” - one that warrants the pursuit of knowledge and ongoing dialogue, but also demands flexibility and careful consideration of what is

best for students.

Sandira felt that the learning that took place from collaboratively working with the writing team went far beyond the completion of the project.

I was motivated to be there and honoured as well. I thought, I am going to learn a lot from this experience. I already knew that I liked to write, but I also knew that I could improve. Everyone there helped me to learn and I am still learning as I reflect on the work we did. That's the thing about equity and social justice - there is always more to learn. Even now I get feedback from colleagues who use the resources - they will offer new ideas. On the team, that's what we did. We listened to ideas, offered opinions, and tried to help each other to understand the issues more fully. (Sandira, Focus Group, Session 2, June 2009)

Sandira has used her curriculum writing projects on her curriculum vitae and said that it has helped her to find new ways to continue her social justice work. She described receiving a phone call from a superintendent who asked her if she would like to discuss the Ministry's new equity and inclusion strategy. She believes that she was noticed because she was named as an author in published resources.

She also believes that a huge benefit came from meeting new people and hearing new ideas. She says that each time following a writing session, she returned to her classroom full of new ideas.

Connections to Sherry's Story

Sandira and I share many commonalities. Among them, one that stood out for me was our immigration experience. Sandira was 15 and I was 12. We both sought to "become Canadian." Sandira wrote a poem about trying hold on to her cultural heritage

while trying to “fit in.” I have my notebook of poetry that detailed many aspects of my attempts to “fit in.” I felt a strong connection to those aspects of her stories. Studies show that racialized people have a much more difficult time becoming accepted as Canadians (Palmer, 1997; OHRC, 2003). I also thought about Kate. She was also an immigrant but she did not mention trying to “fit in” in her stories. Once again, race influences our lived experiences.

Sandira and I also believed that accruing credentials was a way to legitimize our knowledge and provide us with an authoritative voice (van Dijk, 1993). I empathized with Sandira as she told her stories about seeking employment and coming to terms with her role as the “Brown teacher.” That was also my experience. In my school board, I was often the only racialized teacher at schools, meetings, and professional development activities. Sometimes I would look around the room and be pleasantly surprised to find another racialized person. But like Sandira, I often found myself with many additional responsibilities because of my role. For Kate, Sandira, Anne, Aishwarya, and me, teacher workload issues were part of our common experiences as social justice advocates (Bascia & Ramrattan Smith, 2010).

Anne

Anne was born in Ontario, Canada. She attended secondary schools in Ontario, France, and England. She attended university and teachers college in Ontario. She has been teaching for over 25 years. Her current school has a total population of about 400 students and the majority of students are White. There are a few racialized students and about ten percent of the students are Aboriginal.

Anne was 49 years old at the time of the first interview with her 50th birthday within a week. Her Aboriginal roots are Métis and Ojibwe. She sometimes discloses that she has a disability because she uses a device to enhance her voice capabilities.

Anne describes being a mother as one of her most important roles. She believes that being a parent has impacted on her professional role as a teacher because the broad spectrum of skills related to 'mothering' has deepened her understanding of issues that emerge in teaching and learning. Anne is well connected to her home community as well. She coaches soccer and teaches karate. Anne is a Shodan. She has a first degree black belt in karate. In addition to her coaching and community teaching, Anne has also served on local associations such as the Francophone Association of Ontario. At school, Anne mentors teachers and says she likes to pitch in wherever she is needed. One of her interests is problem solving, so her colleagues and administrator often approach her with problems and seek her out for her insight in finding solutions. She says that people sometimes talk about her as a contradiction in terms, soft and feminine, yet strong and confident, but these are just characteristics of her many identities.

Anne and I met through union work. She has been involved in several union equity programs. She and I have maintained our collegial relationship over the past ten years. I was delighted that Anne was interested in my doctoral study and agreed to participate. Anne enjoys reflecting on her experiences and she believes that her participation in this study provided a space for that type of critical reflective work. She also has a very strong desire to include Aboriginal perspectives in curriculum and saw this study as another opportunity to learn more about the field of inclusive curriculum through the lens of "curriculum writer."

Interest in Social Justice and Curriculum Writing

Anne's curriculum writing experiences started about twenty-two years ago. She describes her interest in writing as one that has blossomed as needs have arisen. As she recalled, there were no French curriculum resources available to teachers at that time in her board, so she took up the challenge to create some. Further to that initial experience, Anne co-authored various resources at the school board level and for the teachers' union provincially. She has also contributed to resources for the Ministry of Education in Ontario. In addition, Anne created her own curriculum units that she shared with colleagues at conferences and at her three workplaces.

Anne recalls her own elementary school experiences as being void of Aboriginal content and discussion of Native issues. She stated that up to Grade six, she did not learn anything about Aboriginal people. These early experiences motivated her to work to change the curriculum and her experiences indicate she has remained firm in her determination to achieve an inclusive curriculum.

Anne has a keen interest in equity and social justice issues and is highly committed to social justice writing and teaching. She describes herself as willing to assist people who ask for help. Her family, colleagues, and students often seek her out to ask her advice or opinion and she feels that her personal and professional experiences have helped to shape how she carries out that role.

Anne emphasizes that she wants to use social justice resources herself and that is another primary reason why she volunteers to create them. However, she also feels that she can share information with her colleagues and encourage them to use more inclusive materials through the resources she chooses to develop. She went to school in Canada

until Grade six and then she and her family moved to France. These are some of her comments about how she remembers the curriculum in her early years of schooling.

During my schooling, I don't remember learning a lot about Aboriginal people, but I only went to school in Canada until Grade six. Then my family moved to France. Up to Grade six I don't remember anything about Aboriginal people in school and then in France, we definitely did not learn about Aboriginal people (laughs). And in England, I just remember history focusing on the European wars and nothing outside of Europe. I don't remember hearing about Columbus. They focused on Napoleon and Nelson as historical figures. (Anne, Interview 1, April 2009, p. 11)

Anne felt that she and her family were "tolerated" more in England because the people thought they were "White Americans," but she added that "they were not very tolerant of people from other cultures."

I remember that they were not nice to people from Pakistan and other countries and they were sure they [people coming into the country] were all trying to invade their country and take all the jobs and so on. But they never saw me as a threat. It was easier for me to fit in than my brother. My brother hated being called Yankee and so he would rise to the occasion and yell back which is exactly what the other people wanted. (Anne, Interview 1, April 2009, p. 13)

Those early experiences laid the foundation for her vigilance in working to include Aboriginal perspectives and other social justice issues. She understands that race and gender and other facets of identity are also 'acted out' in schooling. She wants these and other factors such as ability and sexual orientation to be taken up and not dismissed.

She recounted two examples where her insights have helped to build awareness of Aboriginal perspectives. The first one was about an opportunity she had to review a curriculum document for the Ministry of Education. A list of objects was to be distributed to students and they were instructed to identify the items on the list as animate and inanimate objects. A stone was listed as one of the objects to be classified. Anne pointed out that the task might have proved to be a difficult one for Aboriginal students since one of the teachings is that all parts of nature are animate and she recommended listing a different object instead of a stone, such as a chair or table. Anne believes that if someone had taken even opportunities like that small one to change things back when she was in elementary school, it could have made a difference for Aboriginal students like her. Even small attempts to modify the curriculum could have validated some of their cultural teachings. Such a change could have provided a way to show that there are more perspectives to how objects are viewed and perhaps led to attention to other situations. But Anne emphasizes that Aboriginal knowledge was often unsanctioned in schools and for the most part has continued to be that way.

In the second example she described an activity where children in kindergarten were asked to identify toys as gender specific. She says she wrote up and down the pages of the document that she was reviewing, stating that toys are not gender specific, but that marketers make them gender specific. She believes that children should be allowed to have all types of toys and applies this principle to other situations such as colours. She often thinks of herself and her early experiences in many of her teaching and learning situations and makes choices that she believes will improve early educational experiences for students.

I say to them that all colours are made for all people and if pink or purple is your favourite colour then that is just fine. The boys have pink t-shirts and pink shirts. There are no colours for girls, there are no boy colours. There are no toys for girls, there are no toys for boys. Those categories are artificial things made up by marketers. We just don't need to buy into that. (Anne, Interview 2, May 2009, p. 13)

Anne believes that students in her classroom feel safe and free to express their identities whether it is through expressing that they like to pretend to be a girl, wearing a broad spectrum of colours, or writing about their feelings. To Anne, a social justice curriculum provides the context for this type of freedom and safety to grow and learn. Anne takes pride in her efforts as a curriculum writer because she works hard to find ways to encourage teachers to implement these types of changes through the resources she develops.

Anne's Experiences

I describe Anne's frustration about misconceptions of Aboriginal peoples, her own experiences of living abroad and "passing as White," and her attempts to engage her students in critical thought through a variety of strategies.

Developing a Critical Consciousness

Anne describes misconceptions that people have about the physical appearance of Aboriginal children and where they live. For example, a common misconception is that Aboriginal people live only on reserves. In reality, many Aboriginal students do not live on reserves, but assumptions remain that they do. She believes that her efforts in curriculum writing can work to eliminate some of these misconceptions.

Aboriginal people today may look like they are part of the White cultural group. I remember my principal a few years ago saying something like, “We only have a few Aboriginal students,” and I said, “well there are four in my own class!” She [the principal] has a picture in her mind that they will have darker skin and dark hair whereas the majority of Aboriginal students in my school have really pale skin and freckles and they have either blond hair or really, really pale brown or red hair. I think there are only two who have dark hair. Most of them just blend in. And you know they are Aboriginal and they just get by. (Anne, Interview 1, April 2009, p. 16)

Anne understands these stereotypes and misconceptions very well because they are part of her own experiences. She has had to “get by.” “I have had similar experiences too. I have had people say to me, “Why don’t you just say that you are White?”” I asked Anne how she feels when people make statements like that to her.

It feels really odd. I just say, well, that’s not my identity. I identify as being Aboriginal. Yes, I could pass off as being White...It’s a part of who I am [being Aboriginal] and it would be denying a part of my experience...We don’t erase a person’s history or culture just because we pretend we can’t see who they really are and I think a person needs to know who they are and embrace their heritage. I have students in my class who have blond hair and blue eyes and they are not any more or less Aboriginal than those with the dark hair and dark eyes. (Anne, Interview 1, April 2009, p. 17)

Anne believes that taking up issues of identity is important for White students as well as those who are not White. But she adds that many of her colleagues are reluctant to

delve into these issues because they feel unprepared for how the conversations may evolve or worried that they may be implicated in misguiding a particular discussion.

She also feels that it is important to teach children by example and she tries to incorporate Aboriginal teachings in everyday experiences in the classroom. She likes her students to see her doing things that others might not choose to do such as catching a spider and taking it outside to go free. She uses a circle formation in her class because she believes that it is important that students see one another as they speak and listen since these actions can shape their images of one another as teachers and learners. She taught her students to use a talking stone so they could see the value of listening to one another and speaking to each other. She said that eventually, the students in her class did not need the stone to guide their conversations. They just learned to follow respectful ways of interacting but they knew enough to ask for the stone when situations called for it. She encourages her students to question why things are a certain way. She teaches them practical strategies to use when difficult situations arise and they are not sure what to do. For example, she asks her students to mentally put themselves in certain situations when they see unfair treatment and question themselves about how they would feel and what help they might need. She believes that strategies like that can introduce students to concepts like empathy and care and lead them to make better choices.

Anne believes that by using a variety of methods to make her classroom more inclusive, students can feel that their identities are validated and take more pride in becoming 'visible' for who they are. She recalled a situation where after reading a book about Bannock, she decided to prepare it from a recipe, with the class. One of her students was so excited about the fact that she knew how to make Bannock that he

brought in his Band card to show her. He had never told a teacher before that he was Aboriginal. She emphasizes that situations like that one also has a positive effect on children who are not Aboriginal because they start to take notice that not everyone is White and not everyone's experiences are the same. In other words, they begin to notice and develop an appreciation for difference (James, 2000).

In Anne's curriculum writing she often includes the strategies she uses in her own class because she has first-hand knowledge of the results. She believes that teachers are interested in practical ways to introduce social justice in their classroom so when she develops lessons and suggested activities she thinks about her students' experiences and her own as guideposts.

When Anne was eleven years old her family moved to a small community in France. She describes the town as bearing the marks of war since there were many amputees and bullet holes in the window shutters of houses. It was there that she first noticed and felt the sting of prejudice and being misjudged.

In the town we lived in, well several adults were missing limbs, and they [people in the town] were very, very prejudiced. I remember students picking on the Algerians. They picked on my brother and me too. They would sometimes call us names, like foreigner because they didn't want new people in their town. They [school officials] held me back a grade. I wasn't put in the grade I should have been in because my teacher lived across the road from us and before I actually went to school, he kind of tested us and he thought I was weak when it came to Math and that was because we had worked in the decimal system in Canada and

in France they would put a comma to show the place for thousands - it was a different system. (Anne, Interview 1, April 2009, p. 11)

The teacher made a decision about Anne and her abilities in Mathematics. But Anne had always been a strong student in Mathematics. She felt that her overall capability in Math she was misjudged by her teacher. She had not yet had the opportunity to learn small differences in how certain aspects of school subjects, such as decimals versus commas in Math, were carried out.

Anne describes her family as poor, saying that before they moved to France, both her mom and dad held three jobs. Upon arrival in France, in their new community, she says that the social class system “was a real eye opener” for her parents. In France, her father was able to secure a supervisory position in a factory. This helped to change their financial status. From time to time, her father would invite co-workers over for dinner to socialize. However, she remembers a particular incident where another supervisor was a guest for dinner at the same time that a worker was invited and the evening was “full of tension.” The guest who was in a supervisory position, like her father, did not want to mix with workers since they were in different social classes. She said that those types of experiences proved to be ‘good education’ for the family. They were able to see first-hand how prejudices can play out.

However, Anne acknowledges some advantages regarding her experiences of living outside of Canada. Anne admits being able to speak both French and English was advantageous and so was “passing” for White. She describes taking steps to make her proficiency in both languages and “passing for White” work for her while in school in France.

I could flip easily from one language to the next without thinking about it and the people in France thought it was amazing that we could flip back and forth in both languages. Because we looked White, they didn't know we were Aboriginal. Even though I had long hair, I knew I looked more Aboriginal when it was parted in the middle, so I just never parted it in the middle and so people just never made the connection that I was Aboriginal. When they did make a connection that I was Aboriginal they would always think 'bows and arrows' and 'wearing no clothes.' (laughs) (Anne, Interview 1, April 2009, p. 12)

Although Anne's schooling in France and England focused on "European perspectives," particularly on wars, Napoleon, and Nelson, she maintained strong ties to her Aboriginal identity and saw those adaptations with respect to language use and "passing for White" as part of what was necessary to survive and thrive in foreign countries. Those adaptations allowed her to blend in to predominantly White communities.

When Anne returned to Canada in Grade 13, she became more keenly aware of the omission of Aboriginal content in school curriculum. In her words, "I knew I was Aboriginal, and I knew many people from the town I was in were also Aboriginal, but I don't remember learning anything about Aboriginal history in the school" (Anne, Interview 1, April 2009, p. 11).

As a teacher, Anne says she has read extensively about the lack of knowledge that students who graduate have about Aboriginal perspectives because these perspectives are often left out of history books and classroom discussions. Her colleagues also tell her that they are hesitant to include content about Métis, Inuit, or First Nations peoples because

they are unfamiliar with the topics and issues and they “don’t want to sound like they don’t know what they are talking about and they don’t want to be disrespectful.” As a curriculum writer, Anne feels she has an important role to play in addressing these excuses and providing ways for teachers to learn about Aboriginal content as they include it in their work with students. She also believes that teachers have a responsibility to further their knowledge of Aboriginal issues on their own and that this goes hand in hand with using social justice support resources. Anne would like to see more representation of Aboriginal peoples on curriculum writing teams because in her opinion “there aren’t enough resources out there” that address Aboriginal issues or include Aboriginal content and perspectives.

So something like that is important to me, to have actual Aboriginal people working on the curriculum documents so the histories of our peoples can be included. This is what is necessary to get the proper perspectives and to have respectful perspectives of our experiences, not that people from other cultures wouldn’t be, but history is generally told from the perspective of the conquering people and it is not always the histories of the peoples whose land was taken over.

(Anne, Interview 1, April 2009, p. 10)

Curriculum Writing for Social Justice

I asked Anne to tell me about her conception of curriculum. Her passion for social justice becomes clear as she elaborates at length on her motivation and goals for the students in her care.

When I think about what curriculum is, I think about many things. Part of it is what the Ministry of Education tells us that we have to teach to students and they

have many curriculum documents that they provide. The other part is what we bring to the curriculum and that is our own experiences and our perspectives on the various topics that the students have to learn...I use my critical lens to make sure that while the students are meeting Ministry mandates, they are also developing an understanding of equity and social justice. I want them to learn to respect the rights of people in their classroom, and the community, and in the world in general.

So for me, I work with the curriculum and I feel that we need to change how people view curriculum and look at broader goals that make us better people. We want people to be more understanding and willing to include everyone in our conversations and so on. It might not be the standard conception of curriculum but I believe that the students leave with a good sense of who they are, and who other people are. They are also not afraid to question things. They become critical thinkers and question practices and are not afraid to stand up for the rights of others and themselves so that they know they are all valued. My main goal in teaching is to help to develop good citizens. (Anne, Interview 2, May 2009, p. 2)

I asked Anne why equity and social justice are at the forefront of her conception of curriculum. She believes that her understanding of curriculum has evolved over the span of her teaching career as she has become more aware of the limitations of Ministry mandates.

It is important to me because equity and social justice don't seem to be embedded in the curriculum and yet it is part of who we are and how we relate to one another. In Canada we are a blended group of people and yet people tend to

experience life through their own little narrow visions. We often base what is normal on what our parents told us and teachers told us. And for me, in a small community, where the majority of teachers and people are from a dominant group, it becomes even more important for students to hear other perspectives because when they step outside of our sheltered community, their eyes will be opened for them...I like to take the time to explain things to students, like, you can't always just believe something because someone says it. You have to take time to learn about people and things and make your own decisions.

I think that is part of the reason why I believe it is so important to teach my students about equity and social justice. It is important for them to realize that we all have rights, not just the people who are in the dominant group. And it is our responsibility to make sure that there is room to include everyone and everyone's stories are told and that we are not excluding people who are outside of our experiences or cultural background.

I used to try to please the government or the administrators of the day and now I don't worry that much about them and what they have to say - as is often the case they keep changing their minds anyway. I just keep my goal of good citizens in mind and that guides my curriculum decisions. (Anne, Interview 2, May 2009, p. 2)

For Anne, finding ways to connect the curriculum to students' interests, social realities, and needs are key aspects of what brings the curriculum to life (Portelli, 2010). Teaching straight from a book does not provide a feasible way of making those types of relevant connections. She sees her role as a curriculum writer as providing a service that can help

to make those personal connections to students so that they can come to value a range of experiences that are similar to theirs but also ones that are different than their own.

Curriculum has to take on a type of personality of the people who use it too. It is a great way to inform teachers and students and it becomes more relevant when actual teachers are working together to create a document or stories. They use experiences from students and their own to inform what they put in. (Anne, Interview 2, May 2009, p. 5)

Anne believes that teachers must take responsibility to make things better and more inclusive. But she also emphasizes that teachers need help in knowing how to use the resources and how to talk about inclusive curriculum to students, parents, and community members. She believes that everyone has a role in promoting social justice.

Anne is a strong advocate for training, professional development opportunities, and conversations about current issues in teaching. She believes that not everyone understands the whole process of curriculum writing because so often teachers see a lesson plan and they consider it curriculum. Social justice curriculum resources can take a longer time to produce because of the complexity of issues that emerge in discussion and the careful consideration that must be put into how ideas are represented in text. In her opinion, no one should rush through writing a curriculum resource. She sees the process of curriculum writing as its own type of professional development, but readily admits that people tend to have an over-simplified view of the process.

You have to be able to listen with an open mind, and the process is slow because it gives you time to do those types of in-depth thinking and critical reflection. I think that it [curriculum writing] was a professional development activity for me

because I learned a lot about the scope of curriculum and the types of considerations involved. I am not sure I would have had such a chance to think so critically about curriculum if I hadn't been a writer. (Anne, Interview 2, May 2009, p. 10)

In her classroom practice, Anne wants her students to learn how to be advocates for social justice. This goal was emphasized in all her interviews.

I take that [being a social justice advocate] to be one of my most important roles as a teacher. So if I can then share ideas and strategies with other teachers by writing curriculum based on books that are already out there that have social justice themes, then I am not only providing a service to my students but I am also providing a service to other teachers across the province.

I think it is very difficult to change the ideas and conceptions of parents, but with students, we can try to make them more aware of the realities of today than their parents were. Times change and perhaps their parents may find it difficult to keep up with the changes. But if we can work with students and teachers and from there change how they view equity and social justice then we would be building a better society for tomorrow. So that is where my motivation comes from and what interests me in writing curriculum resources. That is what drives my instruction.

I don't strive to turn out brilliant mathematicians, or fantastic scientists. Instead, I want the children to be good people and to know how to get along in society and to be contributing members of their local societies. I feel that at the end of the day if the children are advocates for social justice, then I have done my job because

they will have the skills they need for fulfilling lives. (Anne, Interview 1, April 2009, p. 15)

Anne gave an example of the intrinsic rewards of her teaching. She talked about a student who participated in a public speaking contest and was asked to select a book as a prize. He went over to the table to make his selection and saw a book by Deborah Ellis who is an author of other books they had read in class. He was very excited about the book *Mud City* and immediately expressed his enthusiasm to be able to choose it. In Anne's mind, that student had made a connection to topics such as 'overcoming adversity,' that Deborah Ellis raises in her books, and concepts of compassion and empathy that she and his classmates had discussed in the classroom. She had ignited a spark for him. When he saw the selection of books that he could choose from, he went right over to Anne and very excitedly said, "Look Miss, I am choosing a book that we haven't read yet, it's by Deborah Ellis, and I can't wait to read this one." That moment felt good to Anne. She could see that he was genuinely interested in those topics and seeing that enthusiasm in her student is the kind of reward that makes her feel as if she is doing a good job.

As a writing team member, Anne fully admits that she was a learner. She regularly exposed her learner identity to her students. For example, she shared her journey of curriculum writing with them as they worked on writing activities in class. As Anne completed drafts of her lessons, re-wrote sections, and made choices about the graphics and artwork, she spoke about the steps she was taking as a writing team member and she found that her students were keenly interested in her learning. According to Anne, it showed them the relevancy of similar steps they were using to shape and edit

their own work. Students could see that their teacher was continuing to grow and learn just as they were.

I enjoyed the process [curriculum writing on teams]. I thought it was a good process. I enjoyed working with the group and making the connections and bonds that we made. I also made connections with my students about the process. I'd say, well I did this draft and handed it in. I would tell them about how we would work together and make changes to one another's work to make it better. They were involved in their own writing processes. So I would say, well when you write something for the first time, it's not done - it has to be edited. I remember when we were choosing the design for the cover, I showed my students the various choices and they voted on which would be a suitable one and they were fantastic! (Anne, Focus Group, Session 2, June 2009)

Anne's commitment to curriculum writing is driven in part by her whole-hearted belief that her efforts can make a difference. Even when her audience is predominantly White and she delivers a workshop on a resource that she has co-authored to them, she feels that it is well received. She says that teachers ask a lot of questions about what they can and cannot say, but often they come up afterwards to thank her for doing the workshop and for creating the resource.

I just like to write curriculum and I feel that it's helping teachers in the classroom and ultimately it helps me too because I end up with a resource that I can also use in the classroom. I hear teachers say all of the time that they don't know how to approach social justice, or equity, or Aboriginal Education, and if we have resources that can help them and we point them in that direction...it can make it

easier for them to do the work [of taking up social justice in the curriculum].

Often, people want to do the work, but they might feel uncomfortable doing it.

They are not sure how to go about it. This can help. (Anne, Interview 3, June 2009, p. 5)

Anne says that resources can help, but she emphasizes that teachers need to also seek out opportunities to build their knowledge because what they know and do not know can influence how they use the resources.

Although her curriculum writing experiences are many and have varied in scope, Anne does not view herself as an “expert.” When she headed up the team for her first efforts in producing curriculum for French teachers, she believes that the role of “expert” was ascribed to her. She became the “judge” of what content was appropriate for use and what content was not. At that time, Anne had only been teaching for a few years and she felt tremendous pressure from the group. However, Anne’s determination helped her through the situation and she accepted the responsibilities, persevered with the project, and the final product was well received by her colleagues.

Anne has been writing lessons and units of study throughout her career in teaching. She finds that she has to continue to do that in order to meet the wide range of needs within her classroom. She says that for most teachers, writing lessons and units of study is part and parcel of their work since Ministry guidelines are very general and have to be modified for practical application.

Anne explained that she preferred her later writing experiences where she was part of a team of writers. For the most part, being part of a collaborative team where responsibilities were shared equally and a joint vision was forged and pursued was much

more enjoyable and professionally stimulating. She also feels strongly that the composition of writing teams, where representation of historically marginalized groups and underrepresented groups were important considerations, is a good model for writing social justice curriculum. In her opinion, representation should be required for all writing teams, but particularly for teams that develop and write social justice-focused curriculum resources. Anne is the first to admit that she does not speak for all Aboriginal communities by being on a writing team, but the positives of including at least one Aboriginal member in the representation outweigh the negatives associated with essentialist critiques. Since writing teams are usually small in number, in her experiences, seven or less, it is not always possible to have more than one person as a representative from a particular group identity.

Anne also spoke at length about a curriculum writing experience of unequal distribution of work. The goal of the project was to produce an Aboriginal curriculum resource for use at the school board level. The writers selected were mostly Aboriginal but there were some allies¹, who were not Aboriginal. Anne explained that there were several groups of writers and each group was responsible for writing different sections of the resource. In her particular group, there were three people who were Aboriginal but from different communities, one man and two women. The man was assigned the role of team leader and was also paid more than the two women. The decision for him to be the team leader looked to be an arbitrary one and women were not given the opportunity to

¹ An ally is a member of an oppressor group who works to end a form of oppression which gives her or him privilege. For example, a white person who works to end racism or a man who works to end sexism (Bishop, 2002, p. 152).

apply for that position. According to Anne, the man who was assigned to be the team leader did not do any work, was often late for meetings, and eventually had to be taken off the project. She found that whole experience very frustrating, particularly because she felt the man was given the leadership role because of his gender. She knows that stereotypes exist at all levels and told the story to emphasize that gender bias continues to surface.

Anne described another curriculum writing experience where she felt that teamwork and equal distribution of work significantly improved the quality of the final product and the experience of team writing. This time, she worked with a larger group of people who supported one another in their learning and took on equal shares of the work. Within that writing team, there was representation from various historically marginalized groups and underrepresented voices and she felt acknowledged for her knowledge and experiences about Aboriginal communities. Although the project took about three years from beginning to published product, she felt that her understanding of issues improved significantly.

Colleagues on the team shared a variety of their personal experiences that helped her to understand situations that were outside of her own. Some of these experiences included learning about the prejudices that same sex families face in their communities and how children with invisible disabilities such as schizophrenia are stigmatized in their schools. Anne said that the experiences of collaboratively writing curriculum helped her to build her knowledge about the complexities of curriculum. For example, additional articles were provided about particular points of view. The team read academic articles and discussed how key points applied to the resource they were developing. She

remembers the Peggy McIntosh (1989) article about White privilege and there were also articles about gender bias. Anne commented further on the process of that particular curriculum writing experience.

I think it was a fantastic process because everyone had their own strengths and weaknesses and they each brought something different to the table.

If you are writing curriculum in isolation you don't necessarily get as many ideas as you would if you have other people to discuss things with. They come up with possibilities that you may not have thought about independently and opportunities to incorporate some subject areas that you might not feel as strongly about as another person. So it's great to have all these different perspectives. Another thing is we are not neutral people and we bring our histories and so on to the project and it can be emotional. But it makes for a richer document because you are not just getting one voice you are getting multiple voices and you also have more filters and each person can assist and support you.

There are other people there who can help you to be 'politically correct' – that is they are up on all the current terminology, or share their knowledge about a particular topic and so on. They also fill you in about what happens at other schools because you may only have the experiences of your little community to draw upon. So it's good to get people from different backgrounds and different subject areas to share their knowledge. The conversations are richer and it makes the document that much better when you draw upon more voices and experiences.

(Anne, Interview 2, May 2009, p. 7)

I was curious about the emotional aspect she described above and asked her to explain what she meant by saying “it can be emotional” and to elaborate on how the team members were able to form a cohesive vision for the project.

Well in the discussions with others, you sometimes feel passionately about a certain thing and you have to be able to convince people that it is worthwhile to include a certain perspective. For one thing, they may not have even thought about a particular issue and so on. Or if someone is making a remark about something you did, you might feel badly and try to defend it so yes, it can be emotional. (Anne, Interview 2, May 2009, p. 7)

Anne explained that she liked the format and structure of the writing process. It began with team members getting to know one another personally. Participants shared information about why they were interested in the project and other details about their work experiences. After that, they collaboratively developed ground rules for working together.

When we first met we spent quite a bit of time on developing these commitments or statements that helped us to realize it wasn't about how good we were individually, but more about how good we were together and the purpose of the book was first and foremost in our vision, it was for our students. (Anne, Focus Group, Session 2, June 2009)

She emphasized that the time spent together before writing was very important because it laid the groundwork for respectful interactions.

As a self-identified member of a designated group herself, a Métis woman, Anne embraces the concept of representation of various groups, such as historically

marginalized groups of people, to be on curriculum writing teams. She likes the concept because she believes that not all groups of people have been given the opportunity to contribute to texts, resources, and curriculum. For the most part, curriculum represents the voices of the dominant population and it is often White perspectives that are presented.

I think it [inclusion of diverse representation for curriculum writing teams] should be the model for curriculum writing because we are in a multicultural society and most of the curriculum documents that we look at are written by predominantly one cultural group and they often do not pay the proper attention to other self-identified groups. By specifically asking members of various self-identified groups to write, knowing that they are already teachers and that they can write obviously, because they have degrees already and work with curriculum on a daily basis, I think that should be the model for curriculum writing. This way we include more voices and we benefit from creating more inclusive curriculum that will benefit our students more because they are more likely to have their experiences reflected in the curriculum. They are not just reading and looking at books that feature ideas from one dominant group. (Anne, Interview 2, May 2009, p. 8)

I asked Anne what she would say to people who might oppose representation of people from designated groups to write curriculum. She counters this by saying that it would be unfair not to bring them in because curriculum would then continue to exclude certain perspectives. By including diverse representation, it is at least one step towards becoming more inclusive. She also believes that a writing team model that includes “representation”

provides a way to explain the limitations of the traditional curriculum and the reasons for trying to make it more inclusive. She says that she has often taken time to explain to colleagues why representation of designated groups is an important step towards equity and social justice.

Anne believes that teachers find resources written by other teachers to be more credible. Furthermore, she argues that reading about the authors - their work and motivation - can also strengthen the credibility of a curriculum support resource.

Some people might think that it is not fair to bring in people who self-identify, but then I think that those are people who believe that the way that things are done now is just fine, and there is only one way of doing things and they do not want to change. They want to maintain the status quo. They don't realize that Canadian society is changing and we have to recognize all people and make space in the curriculum for all the students we teach. Conversely, what is their fear? How can more points of view hinder the work of inclusion? (Anne, Interview 2, May 2009, p. 8)

Challenges and Benefits of Curriculum Writing

In describing roadblocks and challenges she faced, she said that a big challenge was being viewed as an "expert." As she recalled that particular writing team experience, she explained that on one hand she wanted to create the resource because it was needed, but on the other hand, too much responsibility was allocated to her. At that time, as a relatively new teacher, she had limited experiences to draw upon and was unsure about her ability to carry out the project effectively.

Anne emphasizes that curriculum writing is very time consuming and for the most part, the resources are relatively unnoticed. She says that she sees resources that she knows are “very good” sitting on library shelves covered in dust because they were not introduced to teachers. She would like to find ways for teachers to be kept aware of current resources, be given opportunities to use them, and share their experiences.

Anne admits that there is little or no financial compensation for curriculum writers and that, most of the work is voluntary even though it is a very important and big job. When there is compensation, the honorarium is usually quite small. But Anne emphasizes, writing curriculum is always a choice she will make because she believes her efforts make a difference and financial compensation is a “bonus.” But she added that curriculum writing is not for everyone because in her experiences, she used a lot of personal time.

She recalled the challenge she experienced when there was unequal distribution of work on one of the projects she did. She said that it is very important that team members do their fair share of work and that their commitments stay strong to the end of the project.

Anne says that the support of parents, school administrators, and the Ministry are important considerations in how curriculum is valued. If there is a lack of support, it can be difficult for teachers to take time to serve on curriculum writing teams.

For Anne, the biggest benefit of curriculum writing is having curriculum that is inclusive. She feels pride in her efforts and likes to use the resources she co-authors and share them with colleagues. She shares them with her students as well. Curriculum writing also improved her professional profile and connected her to other teachers and

educational workers in her school community. She believes that working on teams helped to hone her communication skills.

Anne explained that working with diverse groups of people to create a resource is a very valuable professional development experience because it is rare to have opportunities to collaborate with colleagues and carry on discussions over long periods of time. She said that over time, friendships grew and continued. Often, colleagues on the writing team emailed each other with teaching ideas, new opportunities for professional development or to have an opinion on a strategy or school policy. She felt that her co-writers formed a supportive and caring network that extended well past their time together on the projects.

Connections to Sherry's Story

Anne's commitment to putting Aboriginal issues into the curriculum reminded me of my desire to change curriculum to be more inclusive. But there were other aspects of her story that caused me to think further about mine. Anne was able to "pass as White." I was "in the middle." Being in the middle afforded me many privileges that were not experienced by my brother whose skin colour was darker. But being in the middle was also confusing at times because people who were White sometimes labelled me as "Black." But being Black entails a different history (Henry, 1998). Although I have experiences of discrimination and prejudice to draw upon, I am not able to speak as or adequately represent the voice of a Black woman. My social justice work within contexts of White systems can sometimes relegate individuals like Anne (Aboriginal) and me (racialized) to an essentialist positioning and I have become more aware and careful of such predicaments.

Aishwarya

Aishwarya was born in India where she attended secondary school and university. She earned a Master's degree in Physics and a teaching certificate prior to immigrating to Ontario, Canada. When she arrived in Canada, she was assessed and given 12 credits out of 18, not sufficient for her to be able to teach here. Aishwarya took employment as an early childhood educator because her teaching credentials were not validated. She continued that job until she completed her teacher training in Ontario.

When she first applied to teachers college she was "sent a letter stating that she didn't have enough Canadian experience" (Aishwarya, Interview 1, April 2009, p. 5). It was not until much later when a principal at the daycare site where she worked brought her another application that she eventually applied again to teachers college and subsequently did her teacher training in Ontario. Since graduating, Aishwarya has been teaching in elementary schools for a large school board for eleven years. During the past eleven years, Aishwarya has taught in two schools and most of her work has been with primary students. She has also been involved in preparation time coverage for students from Kindergarten to Grade eight, teaching a variety of subjects.

At the time of the interview, she was 44 years old. Aishwarya says that she does not choose to self-identify as racialized unless there is reason to do so and emphasizes that she was not asked to self-identify until she came to Canada because in her home country the majority of people had Brown skin. When self-identification is requested, she describes herself as having light brown skin and describes her identity as "racial minority" or a "woman of colour." Although she understands the purpose, she finds self-

identification labels to be restrictive, but she does admit to checking the box with a caption of 'racialized.'

She remembered that she and I first met through a union program where she self-identified as racialized. She was curious about the content of the program and decided to apply. Her union involvement first began when she received a promotional flyer advertising an outreach program for racialized women. A colleague on her staff brought the program to her attention and recommended it. Aishwarya surprised me by remembering some of the details. She said she was pleasantly surprised that her dietary requirements as a vegetarian were met and her absence was accommodated due to a religious day observance. Since that time many years ago, she has been involved in several union equity programs including an intensive year-long leadership program. Aishwarya says her union training motivated her to think about taking action to make changes to the educational system. She and I have maintained our collegial relationship.

Aishwarya chose to participate in the study because she wanted to contribute to how social justice and curriculum are understood. She hopes that teachers will be able to read research studies like this one to help them understand the process of curriculum writing and make more informed choices of resources they use in their classrooms.

Interest in Social Justice and Curriculum Writing

Aishwarya has a growing interest in equity and social justice issues and is very committed to social justice teaching and her role as a curriculum writer. She is interested in pursuing a PhD in curriculum studies or social justice in the future. Aishwarya was curious to see how this study would unfold and wanted to contribute by reflecting upon and sharing her experiences of curriculum writing. Aishwarya describes her nature as

very reflective and taking time to examine her actions appealed to her desire to learn more about herself, her curriculum writing endeavours, and teaching practice.

Aishwarya also has a keen interest in writing. She loves to write. She remembers writing in journals in her youth and continuing her writing in various ways throughout her careers. Whether it was notes for studying or units of study, writing has always appealed to her.

Aishwarya has also worked on school board committees, local union and provincial committees, school committees, and presented a variety of equity workshops. At one time, she found that she was serving on several committees at many levels. There seemed to be so much to do and she wanted to make a difference. Yet she felt frustrated by the very, very slow pace of change. Aishwarya made a decision to examine her efforts more closely. That led her to streamline her choices by eliminating some of her committee obligations. One of the reasons that Aishwarya gave up some of her committee commitments is she found that sometimes the members of some of the committees had a set agenda and she had a growing concern that the work they were engaged in at times seemed to be at a surface level and did not address the complexities of social justice in effective ways. She felt that she needed to re-direct her efforts to areas where she could have some influence. Aishwarya looked to the field of writing curriculum as a means to engage further in the complexities of issues and move her social justice agenda forward.

Aishwarya's Experiences

I present some key points that demonstrate Aishwarya's varied experiences and her attempts to question situations she faces: stories that describe her attempt to enter the

work force as an immigrant to Canada and have her credentials recognized; scenarios that demonstrate her conflicted positioning of being implicated in a system that maintains classist standards and one who questions them; and, as a binding thread throughout her stories, her growing understanding of how race, gender, and class play out in everyday events.

Developing a Critical Consciousness

When Aishwarya first came to Canada, although she was a trained teacher, she had to accept a job in early childhood education as a child care worker for the YMCA/YWCA until she completed teacher training in Canada. The child care centre where she worked was part of a public school building.

Early on in Aishwarya's career, the principal of the main school requested that she assist the school staff to call a student who was new to the country down from a tree. The student was a young girl. Aishwarya explained that teachers and the principal had tried unsuccessfully to persuade the girl to come down from the tree. The child had refused and staff became worried for the girl's safety. Aishwarya was curious about the incident so she went to see how she might help. She remembers calling the child's name in a very calm manner and asking her to come down. Aishwarya was successful in her attempt and the child climbed down. Aishwarya recalls that the principal was very thankful for her assistance. Aishwarya said the girl had Brown skin but Aishwarya spoke of her success in getting the child down from the tree as a result of the tone of her voice and her conflict resolution skills. Later, as I probed further into the story, she acknowledged that race may have been a factor.

Sherry: That is a very interesting story. How did you feel when they came to get you that first time or the first time you connected with that student? Did you think about your colour?

Aishwarya: At the time, no. It wasn't until I reflected upon it later. I know that I had completed behaviour management courses and I think she just responded to my tone of voice.

Sherry: Oh, Okay. Anything else?

Aishwarya: But having said all of that, the child didn't know me. She just happened to be in the facility where I was working. To some extent, I do believe, now, that it [race] had a role. Being of colour, there was some common ground between the two of us. It was just the way she responded.

...And looking back I see that she was a child of colour and I don't know if that was the reason, because I was the only staff who was a person of colour...All I had to do was walk up to her and say, "Melanie, come down" and she just came and walked with me. But so many people had tried unsuccessfully to get her to come down. (Aishwarya, Interview 1, April 2009, p. 4)

Aishwarya believes that the principal was impressed with the way she handled the incident and later he was the one who encouraged her to go into teaching. The same principal brought her an application for teachers college at a nearby university.

Aishwarya said that she was very frustrated when she was first told that she would not be able to get a teaching job when she already had such good credentials.

Well back home, once you finish your Masters you are able to work in a private school. Not only did I have the degrees and the curriculum credits, I had the

practical experience of working for a year teaching Grade five/six. It felt as if I was not good enough. But I was coming to a new country and I was trying to take everything in. It made me frustrated, but at that time I just accepted it as if, well I am just new here. (Aishwarya, Interview 1, April 2009, p. 5)

Aishwarya felt that she had already worked as an “accomplished professional” in her home country, but here in Canada it felt to her as if she were starting at “point zero again.” When Aishwarya applied to teachers college in Canada, she had a choice to self-identify and having not done this before she felt unsure about what to do. On one hand, she believed she merited acceptance into teachers college without categorizing herself, but on the other hand, she had been told by friends and colleagues that self-identification might be beneficial in helping her to get into a particular type of program. Eventually, she made the decision to apply to the “Access Initiative Program” which uses information about a student’s personal history, socio-economic status, and identification into historically marginalized groups as supportive considerations in the decision-making process for teacher candidate selection. She was accepted into that program.

When Aishwarya was first hired to work as an early childhood educator she felt that she experienced some disrespectful treatment by co-workers at her workplace. She shared one incident that remained fresh in her mind.

Now coming from my background in India, there were certain expectations of me, what I could and couldn't do. But in my job here, there was a rule where you had to mop the floor including the washroom floor if you worked in the day care program. So one day, a child had an accident, and they [co-workers] asked me to do the whole clean up. They said, “It’s part of your job!” If it was a school-aged

child, it would have been part of my job, and then I would have definitely done it. But technically it was their job but they didn't want to do it....That was the day I decided that I would tell my husband I would not be going to work if they treated me that way....You know, it wasn't even what the job was, it was more about how I was told and I felt I was being disadvantaged. (Aishwarya, Interview 1, April 2009, p. 8)

Aishwarya felt as though her co-workers were purposefully forcing her to do duties outside of her role. In addition, there were expectations from her home country around the types of duties she could do and this posed a dilemma for her. She was very emotional in recalling this story. She credits her determination to succeed in part to the learning that came out of that incident and truly appreciated the support of her partner in helping her to cope.

Since Aishwarya had mentioned that there were certain expectations that related to her cultural background, I wanted to know if the expectations she mentioned were related to a particular socio-economic class or caste, so I asked her for further clarification.

Sherry: Can you tell me a little bit about what that is like for you because you left one country where you had certain rights and privileges and I think it would relate to the whole topic of privilege. And then you were taken from one setting into another, so you certainly had to adapt.

Aishwarya: Yes, I have to admit that I am a different person now than I was then, in India. I wasn't a bigot or anything like that but we are shaped by how we are raised. If you are raised a certain way then for the most part that is how you live

unless of course you are exposed to something different. Or you could come to a realization one day where you start to question: *Why* am I doing what I do?

Raised in India, back home, I realized that there were certain things that I didn't question. Now when I think about them, I do question them now.

I question them now, but I didn't back then. For example, cleaning toilets – back there I never had to do it. It was not my job and it was looked upon as work for people from a particular class [or caste]. But from the class that I belonged to, people never had to do that on their own. So when I was exposed to that in Canada, it was new to me. It was not so much that I was asked to do it but it was *how* (emphasis) I was asked that bothered me more. It was not part of my job description. I would usually go above and beyond in my role as an ECE assistant teacher. I never cared if I was asked to stay back for extra time for example. It was more about what I was being asked to do. I know I was being disadvantaged. But also looking back though, now I think it was my own bias that made it so emotional. My bias – I was too good to do that type of work. I felt that way at that moment when I was asked. (Aishwarya, Interview 3, June 2009, p. 18)

Aishwarya's stark honesty came across as she shared that revelation. It was such a personal story and she had summoned the courage to acknowledge her bias at that time. She had revisited that part of her history with a goal of making sense of it (Frankenberg, 1993). Aishwarya said that now when she travels back to her homeland, she has a "new set of eyes" to observe how things co-exist (Kincheloe, 2005). She says she sees people doing certain jobs that she now easily manages on her own but she still hears the justification from those around her that "they are lucky to find work to do." But she

readily admits that there are contradictions for her and that they have become more evident as she has developed her equity and social justice lens.

Aishwarya's family provided a strong supportive network to her when she immigrated to Canada. That strong supportive network was in play later on when she enrolled in teachers college and she subsequently found out that she was pregnant. At that time her mother and father, both teachers, decided to come from India to Canada to assist her with the baby so she could complete her studies. She describes sitting and typing her assignments with the baby in the bassinette or nursing the baby and reading her books for study. Aishwarya describes herself as a perfectionist, never wanting to give up on anything and willing to do whatever is necessary to succeed.

While attending teachers college, during one of her placements, she describes a host teacher who sternly scolded her about her choice of words and use of English. English is not Aishwarya's first language. She speaks four additional languages, one of them being her mother tongue. Aishwarya recalls the embarrassment she felt when she addressed the students and the associate teacher later spoke to her.

I said, "Boys and girls, what was the weather like today?" And she was an English major and she pointed out that I used past tense instead of present. I will never forget that sentence for the rest of my life: She said, "So English is your second language. That is not how we speak to the students. You need to model quality language when you are speaking to students." (Aishwarya, Interview 1, April 2009, p. 14)

She felt unfairly treated by the teacher – the sentence could have worked in describing what had taken place in the weather. But it felt as though the teacher was finding ways to

criticize her. For example, the teacher also often changed Aishwarya's assignments "the night before" leaving her little time to modify her plans or create new ones. In recalling that particular placement of practice teaching, Aishwarya says, "It was a very difficult situation for me. Her support was minimal." Although Aishwarya was frustrated by the lack of support of her host teacher's efforts, the authority of the teacher in assessing Aishwarya's efforts in using English and carrying out assignments severely limited Aishwarya's ability to complain about that incident and other similar interactions because she felt that voicing her concerns might worsen the situation or further jeopardize her success in the program. However, she felt that eventually she did earn the respect of her associate teacher by making sure that her lessons were above and beyond her associate teacher's expectations.

Later, in our third interview, Aishwarya, became very emotional as she shared another deeply personal story about her father and brothers. The story was about her family's property to be inherited and shared in her family. Traditionally, girls give up their share of property to the boys in the family, but in Aishwarya's case, on a recent visit to India, her father asked her how she wanted to see the property divided. She felt he wanted her to continue in the traditional way and she questioned him about it. Deep inside though, Aishwarya realized that she was being treated differently because of her gender and it went against all her own efforts in social justice teachings, particularly strands of her curriculum writing efforts that focused on gender equality (hooks, 1984; Frankenberg, 1993). Aishwarya describes her growing mindfulness of the contradictions that accompany social justice efforts.

It shook me up to some extent. Sometimes I feel that working in this area we move two steps forward and we come back a step. And I think that happens whether it is in the workplace or personal. Sometimes, I think, oh my – it's almost as if someone is there to always show you your place in the hierarchy. And in those times, I feel really frustrated. That is why I am so glad to do this type of work where I get to say things, and do things that I really want to do, things that are really important about rights and relationships. (Aishwarya, Interview 3, June 2009, p. 21)

She says that conversations like that one with her father demonstrate the complexities of working for social justice. There are many aspects to consider: traditions, cultural expectations, and particular contexts. She has learned that sociocultural contexts cannot be ignored (Allen, 2010).

Curriculum Writing for Social Justice

Currently, as a seasoned professional, Aishwarya directs her attention to the needs of her students and the community she serves. She describes noticing name-calling occurring at her school, particularly in the junior and intermediate grades. The incidents were being labelled as “bullying,” but Aishwarya sensed that there were deeper issues not being addressed. At her school there are two major dominant cultural groups and name-calling was occurring between the groups. She thought that issues of racism and classism were being grouped under the umbrella term of “bullying.” She said, “It was easy to give that label of bullying and not deal with the real situations.”

She decided to take on a leadership role in working with a school committee to send a survey home to parents in order to collect their input on the situation. She

understood the relevancy of drawing upon community input (Eisner, 1985). Using the analysis of the data gathered to guide their actions, the committee invited parents to come into the school to participate in a series of presentations from guests speakers in a roundtable format and to listen to the perspectives of their children. The parents also had a chance to meet and talk to one another and school staff. The program, planned by the committee, addressed many issues related to class and race, and was very well received. That program became an annual event for the school community because it focused on cultural barriers and complexities of race and class, and created a “safe” space for questions and continuing dialogue. First and foremost, the children of the community - their well-being and safety - were the priorities. In a journal entry, Aishwarya described the process in detail.

Over the years we have had several after school events focusing on what we as staff thought were the needs of our school community. But there weren't significant numbers of parents showing up for these events. Our equity committee developed and implemented a survey to help us determine the varying needs within the school community. The community got to have their voices heard. We learned that parents were struggling with the realities of making a living in a new country, looking for work, juggling cultural differences related to parenting responsibilities, homework, and discipline issues. We decided that formal presentations would not be as effective as more intimate dialogue. We developed a community roundtable format as a pilot and it was well received by parents and staff. (Aishwarya, Journal Entry 3, May 2009)

However, Aishwarya says that it is not often that this type of thought and attention goes into committee work and she eventually reached a stage of frustration with other types of committee work where she felt she needed to move away from “getting things done nicely.”

She realized that she wanted to delve more deeply into the issues, so she turned to social justice curriculum resources, first using them, and later writing them. Aishwarya says that her experiences in using resources that teachers had created appealed to her on many levels – her students liked them because they were interesting and developmentally sound, they corresponded to Ministry mandates, and students were learning to understand the realities of one another’s experiences. The format of curriculum with social justice issues embedded, appealed to her because the format was easy to follow and teacher friendly. She liked having a range of activities to choose from. She also began to connect to her colleagues by sharing resources with them and pointing out ideas from resources she had used. But there were still areas that Aishwarya felt were not being addressed, or were omitted. She decided to become a writer to help expand the school curriculum and make it more relevant for her students. Aishwarya had a goal of making cultural connections in the curriculum. She wanted her students to learn how to interact in respectful and caring ways - ways that fostered pride in their individual identities. More importantly, she wanted to help them to become good decision-makers (Goleman, 2006).

I think that anything that deals with social interaction when it is linked to curriculum is usually taken a bit more seriously. I think at the end of the day, education is for a person to become successful in life and live peacefully with other community members. If you look at a broader definition of education -

people should not only be book smart, or get skills-based learning, but there are also the social and emotional parts to consider. To me, intelligence involves the whole person, we want students to be high-functioning members of society and I think that as educators we have a responsibility to take this on. (Aishwarya, Interview 3, June 2009, p. 8)

Aishwarya's early efforts in curriculum writing arose out of needs in her Kindergarten classroom. She recalls working with several volunteers who required certain types of information for their work with the children. Aishwarya decided to create a *Handbook for Volunteers* and she says the book is still in use. After that, she led a group of Kindergarten teachers to produce curriculum units that they could share with one another. According to Aishwarya, "It was just being creative and thinking beyond what you usually do every day." She says a consultant once told her to put her name on a booklet she had created, so she could get credit for the good work she had produced. But credit has always been on the backburner for Aishwarya. She does the work because she believes it makes a big difference to students, their families, and the community.

Aishwarya remembers being a bit unsure about how the efforts of her first writing team would unfold. She felt reassured when she met the group because she realized they all brought certain strengths and a variety of histories and lived experiences that she thought would make the resource more inclusive and effective. Their differences proved to be advantageous and collaboration was good because the group followed a respectful protocol that was established together at their first meeting. After the team members introduced themselves and talked about themselves personally and professionally, they spent time discussing how to communicate in respectful ways while making decisions

about content and editing. Aishwarya believes that the discussion was very helpful because the group referred to their protocol from time to time during the writing of the resource. She remembers that each person's contribution was valued and taken seriously. Issues were discussed with the outcome of finding common ground in mind.

I remember vividly how we talked to one another and shared ideas. Sometimes we didn't agree on how things were worded when we read someone else's work and we had to keep an open mind, but make a case for changing the language to make it [the resource] more inclusive. But people were respectful in how they did that. I just said to myself, look this is my first time doing team writing, so I want to learn from this. Plus, there were people with different life experiences, from different family structures, from different racial groups than me. I wanted to learn from their experiences. (Aishwarya, Interview 3, June 2009, p. 11)

But Aishwarya also felt troubled at times, sharing so much of herself in her curriculum writing but she readily agrees that courage and risk go hand in hand with social justice work.

I truly believe that ideas alone are not valuable. We need to do more to move people to become engaged in social justice. Ideas alone cannot work if they are not attached to some action or implementation. I knew that I was part of a dynamic group of women teachers and together we had a wealth of knowledge and experiences that could contribute to making a significant difference in how our students are taught in our schools. But the process involves risk. We have to put ourselves into it.

What we say to our students in class matters but what matters even more is what we hold back or choose to ignore consciously or unconsciously. As educators, our instruction is driven by curriculum. A narrow view of curriculum can stifle or overshadow more meaningful learning experiences which can shape the future of our students by how they become engaged with issues and later carry out their roles in society.

When we tell a story, we always have to remember whose story we are telling or whose interpretation of the story is being shared with students. They need to know that there are many perspectives that are excluded from curriculum. They need to know that some of these perspectives are omitted from the history we are taught or that dominant perspectives shape our current text books. (Aishwarya, Journal Entry 4, May 2009)

Aishwarya wants every teacher to use social justice curriculum resources. She explains that the wide range of suggestions provides ways for novices to learn while those who already know about social justice teaching can feel supported in their work. She cites an example from her classroom practice where students read a number of books with main characters who have non-Anglo Saxon names. By investigating “what’s in a name,” students have opportunities to hear about one another’s names, understand meanings that the names hold, and learn about how to pronounce a person’s name correctly to show respect. Aishwarya feels that lessons such as this one can draw any teacher into developing a social justice lens.

Although she uses social justice curriculum resources effectively, Aishwarya believes that professional development opportunities must go hand in hand with

curriculum resources if they are to be implemented successfully. Part of her reasoning for this is the “sharing and talking” aspect of teacher learning and that comes from interactions with one another where various perspectives are brought forward. She also revealed that another important aspect of learning for her is gaining new knowledge that helps her to critically examine and revise or modify her practice. She cautions that “these are things you cannot get from just opening and using a book.”

Challenges and Benefits of Curriculum Writing

Aishwarya described frustrations she felt with being part of a team. She explained that there was a need for flexibility – with points of view, timelines, and decisions about what to keep and what to eliminate. One of the team members who had cancer passed away before the book was published and so the group also mourned her loss. She recalled, “There was so much going on, professionally and personally.” But she felt that curriculum writing provided the group with a place to put their feelings, discuss day to day events, and try to make sense of the realities of their lives. Team members drew support and comfort from one another. Aishwarya believes that there was a lot of professional growth from her curriculum writing experiences but it takes time to reflect and note the types of learning that occurred.

Aishwarya also emphasized that time commitment is a huge consideration for anyone who may be considering taking on a writing project. She spent a lot of personal time on the writing, but sums up her contribution as “very worthwhile” because it matched her personal and professional goals. She turned to curriculum writing because she “felt her voice was not being heard and her experiences were omitted.” Aishwarya said that she was very lucky to have a supportive administrator who valued her

contribution as a curriculum writer. But she added that colleagues have commented to her that they have missed out on similar opportunities because there was no support for them to leave their classroom duties.

Aishwarya readily admits that change takes time and there is often resistance to implementing new ways of doing things. She believes that there needs to be a “paradigm shift system-wide” in order to implement new Ministry initiatives and more inclusive curriculum.

There needs to be collaboration within various equity groups and government agencies to make policy changes and provide support for implementation of those policies. There is a greater need for accountability to ensure social justice practices are not merely confined to paper work. These types of changes would put social justice curriculum where it needs to be - in every classroom.

(Aishwarya, Journal Entry 5, June 2009)

Aishwarya felt that the biggest benefits of curriculum writing were the changes she was able to make in curriculum. But along with that she talked about being “noticed.” She said that colleagues at work started to take her more seriously and she even had a phone call from the director of education of the school board. Aishwarya said that her husband also talked about her curriculum writing and was very proud of her efforts.

She explained that working with a diverse group of women was very professionally stimulating and that she left the writing sessions feeling very enthusiastic to set ideas in motion in her classroom. The women were very encouraging and knowledgeable. She felt she gained a lot from hearing new perspectives. The women on

her writing team also shared resources and information about other professional development opportunities. She wrote in her journal about her experience.

It was an incredible experience of working with a team of professionals. Some of them had already done curriculum writing. The discussions we had over the appropriateness and application of certain ideas and strategies broadened my view tremendously. Our conversations allowed us to deconstruct and then reconstruct activities to ensure they were sustainable and practical for teacher use. The variations in our background knowledge and personal experiences also helped to shape our interactions as a team - I highly recommend it. (Aishwarya, Journal Entry 4, May 2009)

Aishwarya explained that she learned to see limitations of her perspectives and gained new insights into the many layers of social justice work from her endeavours on writing teams.

In her team writing experiences, Aishwarya felt that writers often shared their personal experiences and assisted one another with difficult choices they are faced with making because of community pressure or dated school policies. She believes that to successfully work with colleagues from varying backgrounds, skills, and experiences, to produce a resource requires qualities such as patience, open-mindedness, and persuasion. Aishwarya says that collaborative work can feel extremely successful and she feels that the projects she co-authored brought her great satisfaction because she knows that they are being used.

Connections to Sherry's Story

Aishwarya's story of her interaction with her father brought her face-to-face with the contradictory nature of social justice work. There were benefits and expectations that accompanied her connection to a particular socio-economic class. Her story reminded me of contradictions and constraints I faced at work. On one hand, I had a lot of autonomy to carry out equity programs while on the other hand, I was forced to remain silent about my personal beliefs because of my staff commitments. Like Aishwarya, I have had to accept my role in how situations unfold as I try to bridge different contexts.

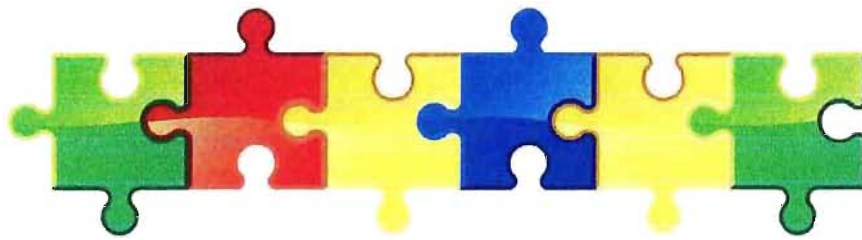
One of Aishwarya's stories caused me to think about the people who hold power over us - those in authority positions. Aishwarya described her interactions with her associate teacher. Aishwarya was hesitant to confront her because she needed a good report. I know that feeling, whether waiting for a performance appraisal or being assessed for a permanent contract, through work or study, power differentials matter and do play out. Aishwarya and I seemed to have chosen the road of appeasement - doing everything possible "to bring the person around" and for me, still, it is a bit of a gamble as to whether such appeasements are effective strategies towards acceptance and inclusion.

Shared Experiences and Interests

All participants in this study shared interests in writing, used journals and diaries in their youth and/or wrote stories or poems. During their early teaching experiences, they all created lesson plans and units of study that were modified to work toward social justice goals. Additionally, participants shared the common experience of immigrating – three of the women immigrated to Canada, and one immigrated to countries outside of

Canada. The participants held their “immigrant” experiences as foundational pieces of their identities.

All of the participants were also involved in positions of added responsibilities in the union and at their respective school boards, either delivering workshops, writing curriculum, sharing information with colleagues, or working within their school communities to build learning about social justice issues. During the time of this doctoral study, the four participants were employed in the field of education.



CHAPTER SIX

Discussion of Findings



CHAPTER SIX: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This study explored the perspectives of teachers who voluntarily choose to write social justice-focused curriculum support resources. The four participants selected for the study demonstrated public and personal commitments in pursuing social justice. The study provided opportunities to explore with the participants the process of curriculum writing and their experiences as writers. Through this research I also examined my experiences as a teacher-curriculum writer. This chapter presents themes that emerged from analysis of data gathered from face-to-face and focus group interviews, participants' journals, and related documents.

Emergent Themes

I discuss five emergent themes: 1) Critical Understandings of Curriculum and Social Justice in the Writing of Social Justice-Focused Curriculum Resources, 2) The Influence of Curriculum Writers' Identities on Social Justice Understandings and Curriculum Writing, 3) Reconceptualizing Curriculum as a Method to Change Sanctioned Curriculum in Schools, 4) The Collaborative Process of Writing Social Justice-Focused Curriculum as a Unique Professional Development Experience, and 5) The Impact of Political Ideologies of Stakeholder Groups on the Writing of Social Justice Curriculum.

Critical Understandings of Curriculum and Social Justice in the Writing of Social Justice-Focused Curriculum Resources

Critical understandings of curriculum and social justice are important in the writing and implementation of social justice-focused curriculum resources (Lynch & Baker, 2005). All participants emphasized that social justice-focused curriculum support resources can make a difference for the purposes of creating an inclusive atmosphere or

even in cases when teachers use them solely to represent difference. The participants strongly cautioned that teachers need to engage a critical lens to effectively use these types of resources to promote social justice. They used examples from their personal experiences to demonstrate the development of their critical lenses. They emphasized that without critical perspectives and an in-depth understanding of what constitutes social justice and equity goals, teachers can reinforce rather than deconstruct stereotypes and biases that marginalize students. Participants pointed out that there are pitfalls to using social justice-focused curriculum without taking time to build knowledge about topics and issues that relate to Whiteness, racial identity, and privilege.

Mogadime (2002) argues that critical educators can enact pedagogy that supports students in “developing critical voice” so that they may ultimately participate in the kind of social change that changes the world for the better (p. 6). Teachers’ attitudes, beliefs, and values also influence how issues are taken up in the classroom (Solomon, 2002). Therefore, social justice-focused curriculum support materials are best written and implemented by teachers who take time to build their professional knowledge of social justice by first developing an understanding of their own selves with respect to attitudes, beliefs, values, and practices (Noddings, 2006; Palmer, 1998; Solomon, 2002) and furthering their knowledge about experiences that are often outside of their own through community, inquiry, and study (Cherian, 2006; North, 2008; Sturman, 1997).

The four women demonstrated their commitment to professional learning by allocating time to continue their education as they worked. Some took additional qualification courses while others participated in union or board professional development programs. They agreed that another way to improve their knowledge about

social issues was through interaction within diverse groups of people with differing social realities. Such opportunities also helped to change how they understood curriculum and social justice and were particularly helpful in engaging them in unfamiliar issues. They were able to identify gaps in the curriculum and become more aware that some forms of knowledge are not sanctioned as school knowledge (Tilley, 1998a). All the women participated in various union outreach social justice professional development programs that were for groups that were designated as historically disadvantaged or underrepresented. They emphasized the need for such programs to continue because equity goals can be discussed and common objectives can be pursued. Aishwarya noted that equity-seeking groups are often put in positions of competing with one another for resources. In her article, "Stand up and Be Counted! Identity and self-identification" Khayatt (2005) writes,

Not all identities carry the same relation to social power...When the union asks its members to self-identify it is for many reasons. It may want to track the membership for fair representation and make space for various members who might be feeling left out. It may be to justify the introduction of various policies that can provide support for minorities. The combined voices of a group might be heard more readily than a single person's. Or it may be to create a community of practice whose members have a commonality they want to have recognized. (p. 30)

Anne offered these words of advice, "All teachers can benefit from seeking out opportunities to learn about issues that are outside of their experiences because learning

can broaden our perspectives on issues and it can make a huge difference in how and what we teach” (Anne, Journal Entry 5, June 2009).

Participants agreed that critical pedagogy, critical inquiry, and discussion are core strategies for teachers to use to develop their own social justice lens and to apply in shaping curriculum for social justice. Nieto (2004b) and Banks (2005) support such strategies because they provide learning opportunities through practical application in classrooms.

Participants’ stories demonstrated their life-long commitments to improve their understanding and knowledge of social justice issues. They wanted to keep current on issues. Three of the four teachers were interested in pursuing PhD study with a social justice focus to further their academic knowledge in social justice. One teacher joined a national social justice committee and planned to seek out opportunities for study internationally. Participants agreed that writing social justice curriculum helped to clarify their motives, strengthened their resolve to uphold social justice commitments, and fuelled their desire to continue to build their knowledge. The processes of learning and writing were symbiotic.

Participants also pointed out that critical understandings of curriculum and social justice enabled them to focus their writing efforts on the benefits of using social justice-focused resources while considering limitations and constraints associated with such materials. The women in the study shared similar pedagogical philosophies of social justice. They agreed that “the teaching of social justice is a delicate and dangerous proposition” (Cherian, 2006, p. 133). They also admitted that their conceptions of curriculum and social justice have continued to evolve over time. They clearly

differentiated their perspectives from colleagues who did not have similar social justice commitments. They believe that teachers who choose not to use social justice curriculum may not want to take on additional responsibilities necessary to build their knowledge, adding that time commitment is an important consideration. Participants also felt that some teachers who opt not to use curriculum resources may not have been personally affected by social injustices and, therefore, choose to regard cases of injustices as exceptions. Another possible reason cited for not using social justice curriculum was that some of their colleagues view social justice work as an “add-on” and claim the curriculum is already crowded (Focus Group, Session Two, June 2009). Participants noted that some teachers’ actions indicate that they do not understand the relevance of social justice to Ministry mandates and believe that a social justice curriculum takes time away from covering the ‘real’ curriculum. In her work with practicing teachers, Bolak (2006) found that teachers enrolled in a graduate study program she taught often initially cited time constraints as a barrier to integrating critical pedagogical strategies in their lessons. However, following focused work on creating culturally responsive plans and integrating multicultural concepts and practices in their classrooms, teachers in the course agreed that there were many benefits for their students and that they became more aware of their responsibilities for implementing ethical and inclusive teaching strategies that address social issues (p. 145).

Participants agreed that ‘stages’ of awareness, engagement, and activism in social justice and equity issues can build and indicate an individual’s understanding of the complexities, ambiguities, and contradictions that accompany social justice work. Their social justice commitments on union, school board, and community committees enhanced

their knowledge of issues and provided opportunities to move through such stages. However, participants argued that sometimes too much is expected from social justice-focused curriculum materials and that in reality resources can only accomplish so much. Whether the resource is on a data storage device, in the form of a film, an online version, or in printed copy, they emphasized that there are limitations that should be considered. Their most common concern was that some resources available for classroom use only touch the surface of social justice topics. They cited this as an important reason why curriculum resources must be examined critically. Sandira explained that as she wrote curriculum, she became even more aware of limitations of resource materials through group discussion.

During the second focus group session participants recalled how members of their writing team talked about the use of social justice-focused materials. “Some people felt that on a very basic level, books and stories provide windows into other people’s problems and once discussed, in the particular context of the story, those problems or issues can be easily dismissed” (Focus Group, Session Two, June 2009). Other writing team members countered this argument by saying that for some teachers, even a “surface” discussion may be more than they might choose to do without a resource to follow. But the four women felt that by using books that show people from other countries, exposing students to different languages, depicting many types of family structures, and including people with varying abilities, students would at least become familiarized, even if only in a superficial way, to differences. However, they reasoned that in order for change to occur in the variety of books included in libraries and classrooms, teachers and school administrators need to value the representation of

difference in materials available to students and understand the many benefits that exposure to difference can bring. Even if there were changes in the materials available to students, the participants warned that representation alone is not enough and teaching for social justice entails multiple factors. Without a critical lens, the use of social justice-focused curriculum materials can continue to propagate essentialist perspectives, stereotypes, and overgeneralizations.

The curriculum writers in this study were also equity and social justice workshop presenters and understood the importance of providing support programs such as workshops and communities of learning where teachers could dialogue about the complexities of social justice work. They agreed that social justice-focused professional development programs can support teachers to more confidently and effectively use curriculum resources. Kate explained that social justice content can easily be trivialized by sporadic and over-simplified delivery. "It is also important that the delivery of social justice content not be treated as an add-on or as a once-a-week-for-twenty-minutes topic." She emphasized that social justice curriculum must be provided in an ongoing method and packaged in ways that are practical and relatively easy to integrate, "or it will be shelved (literally) or possibly turned into a food and dance type of presentation" (Kate, Journal Entry 5, June 2009).

Bolak (2006) explains that teachers can learn to integrate strategies such as literature circles, critical questioning, and response diaries based on particular focus questions when they plan units of study on any curriculum subject (pp. 143-144). She cites an example of a teacher who was inspired to make changes in her practice when she did research at her school and found that 100 percent of students in a work release

program were White, when only 61 percent of the school's population was White. The teacher began to educate her colleagues about the unfairness. Bolak argues that teachers are more likely to make these changes when they develop their critical lens and understand "their sphere of influence has sociopolitical ramifications" (p. 145).

The Influence of Curriculum Writers' Identities on Social Justice Understandings and Curriculum Writing

Teachers are often well-meaning in their enactment of curriculum, but can benefit from deepening their knowledge of their subjective positioning and the privileges they carry (McIntosh, 1988; Frideres, 2007). Aspects of the participants' identities influenced how they understood social justice and wrote curriculum. Participants confronted cases of injustices either personally or through their interactions with students, family, and colleagues (Park, 2008). Their stories indicated that each of them experienced both privilege and marginalization in their personal and professional lives. As the women enacted privileges that were part and parcel of their lived experiences, at times they also experienced forms of marginalization that appeared to be closely linked to the fluidity of their personal and professional identities. They connected these experiences to aspects of their identities such as gender, race, class, sexual orientation, age, and (dis)abilities.

Racial identity, in particular, surfaced across the data sets and was emphasized in different ways. Khayatt (2001) explains that privileges a person carries can affect whether or not the person takes up a particular aspect of their identity or if that aspect becomes dominant in a particular context. Studies with teacher candidates point out that White teacher candidates often do not consider their race as a factor in their teaching and they tend to deny privileges that are linked to their White skin (Frankenberg, 1993;

McIntyre, 1997; Solomon et al., 2005). However, other studies indicate that teachers who are racialized, do consider the implications of their race (Tilley & Powick, 2007; Mogadime, 2003).

Racial identity was taken up by participants in this study. Kate became more aware of privileges her White skin carried and how such privileges affected her understanding of similarities and differences in experiences. Helm (1990) describes stages of White identity and even though the stages have been critiqued for appearing to be discrete and separate, there is evidence that Kate shifted in “stages.” She was able to detect and more fully understand differences within experiences that appeared to be similar, such as being an immigrant. According to James (2000),

In attempts to show acceptance and /or tolerance, at times we tend to talk about “sameness.” ...Asserting such commonality implies that there is nothing unique about the experiences of a particular individual or group, and that one person’s experience with difference is the same as another’s. (pp. 14-15)

James argues that assertions of commonalities can disregard historical and cultural realities and misrepresent differences in experiences.

The participants’ identities formed the basis for challenging stereotypes. Sandira challenged a stereotype in her school community and school board about Brown-skinned teachers that relegated her to the margins (hooks, 1984). Instead, she countered that marginal positioning by choosing to accept her role model status as a Brown-skinned teacher in a full-time teaching position and took on additional responsibilities associated with that role. Her acceptance of and dialogue about such a role is indicative of a resistive action to the White Eurocentric-based educational system within which she works (Carr

& Klassen, 1997). Similarly, Kate sought ways to improve her role in promoting social justice as a White ally (Bishop, 2002).

Palmer (1997) discusses skin colour as a marker of not belonging or remaining an outsider in countries that are predominantly populated by White-skinned people. In her book, “...*but where are you really from?*” she discusses how skin colour can work as a barrier for people who are not White to be accepted as Canadian and she emphasizes that racialized people often have to prove themselves as capable because of their perceived subordinate positioning within systems that are White. As a racialized woman, like Sandira, I appreciate the understanding and work of White allies, while concurring with Palmer’s perspective. Racialized participants, including the researcher, in this study have turned to education as a way to fight racist attitudes within the White systems in which we do our work by acquiring “authoritative voice” to build our credibility (van Dijk, 1993).

Anne owned up to being able to pass as White because of her light skin colour, bilingual fluency, and by changing her hairstyle. These characteristics and factors helped her to avoid racial slurs and allowed her to fit in to various educational systems that are based on Whiteness². Sefa Dei (2007) states that Whiteness is “a system of dominance” that is “never invisible to those who daily live the effects of White dominance” (p. ix). Anne’s understanding of her own experiences as a student helped her in her role as a curriculum writer and advocate for Aboriginal students in her classroom who use similar

² Patterson (as cited in Frankenberg, 1997) defines Whiteness as: “the culture that dominant peoples of the world possess; it was created socially and structurally by a society. Whiteness can be defined by several strong features including, capitalistic market society structure; belief in progress and science, possession of modern concepts of family and societal group structures based on individualism, competition, social mobility, and belief in Eurocentric cultural, philosophical, and economic superiority” (p. 104).

techniques to blend in and learn within the constraints of a traditionally Eurocentric curriculum. Anne worked through writing to make Aboriginal teachings visible.

Participants also recognized the need to consider how being differently abled was portrayed and discussed in their curriculum writing. Kate sought out people with disabilities when she gathered interviews for the curriculum resource she co-authored. According to Kate, “It was an opportunity to show that people with disabilities are not one-dimensional but have many capabilities.” Kate explained that as a person with a disability, changing how people with disabilities are perceived was an important personal goal in her curriculum writing (Kate MacLeod, Interview 2, May 2009, p. 8).

Anne explained that her early childhood experiences of living in a town populated with many war amputees helped to guide how she created activities for lessons. She said, “I like to include several activities that can provide choices for students who are differently abled.” Anne recalled that when she was evaluated in teachers college, her associate teacher was impressed that she had already considered such ideas in her lesson plans (Anne, Interview 2, May 2009, p. 14). Anne also believes that her disability is a constant reminder to make room for discussion about differing abilities in the resources she writes. She said that colleagues on her writing teams appreciated when she spoke up to remind them about including such perspectives in their lessons and she noticed that they became more aware of disability issues through the questions they raised. Pohlman (2008) explains that meeting the needs of students with disabilities and building understanding about being differently abled may mean “swimming against the tide” of what is considered the norm. He explains that “walking the walk” comes back to the individual commitments we make for change (p. 244).

Participants agreed that students' identities must be validated through curriculum. In their writing, they worked hard to include many different family structures including families with two dads, two moms, single parent families, and extended families. They felt that acknowledging sexual orientation was also an important consideration for validating students' identities, developing their self-esteem, and acceptance by their peers. They critiqued their own schooling for being heteronormative. Aishwarya remembered reading books with only family structures consisting of a mom, a dad, a son, and a daughter. She said that members on her writing team who were lesbian and/or bisexual helped her to understand the importance of checking what she wrote to ensure that there were not heterosexist biases (Aishwarya, Interview 2, May 2009, p. 15). In an *Equity Audit* for the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario, Frank (2006) recommended that the organization "deliver anti-racism and anti-homophobia training to all members [teachers, educational workers, and staff], focusing on subtle forms of racism and homophobia, as well as attending to what is specifically hurtful and objectionable to persons belonging to historically marginalized groups" (p. 14). Participants in this study agreed that they grappled with ways to "make visible the invisible [markers of identity]" in their curriculum writing (Gallagher, 2006, p. 71). They looked to their colleagues and community agencies to assist them when necessary.

Caouette and Taylor (2007) point out that racist attitudes and meritocratic thinking can limit opportunities for marginalized individuals in spite of their efforts to improve their status and credibility through education.

Mainstream Canadians may well cherish equality of opportunity in principle but may not be conscious of the fact there are social groups in society that do not enjoy equal access to all opportunities... Specifically, advantaged people believe that individual ability and hard work can actually produce opportunities, and then paradoxically, argue that it is the responsibility of the disadvantaged individual to make up for any systemic barriers that confront them. This paradoxical reasoning places the burden of responsibility on the wrong agent: instead, systemic barriers should be fought at the mainstream societal level, not the individual level.

Forgotten in the process is that society needs to be restructured so as to level the playing field... If the social system does not provide for a level playing field, then disadvantaged group members will always suffer from inequality, despite their best efforts to increase their personal skills and abilities through education. (p. 85)

The experiences and strategies that participants used to combat racism, homophobia and other forms of marginalization are linked to their own struggles to validate their identities and are driving forces and key factors in how they addressed difference in their curriculum writing. They did not avoid or dismiss the issues. Instead, the women worked from places of acknowledging their varied and shifting identities to embed strategies that encouraged students to discuss the multiple facets of their identities. This was important to the women because they understood how certain identities are privileged over others.

Reconceptualizing Curriculum as a Method to Change Sanctioned Curriculum in Schools

Participants agreed that only some forms of knowledges are sanctioned in the school curriculum. They believe that social justice curriculum can work to challenge the status quo and dominant ideologies through the ways it raises questions, explores multiple perspectives on issues, and suggests relevant actions to disturb the rigid norms of schooling that are usually set out by White, Eurocentric, Christian standards. By writing curriculum, teachers saw their work as a way to work within the system to change it. Their curriculum writing endeavours were resistive forces (hooks, 1984).

Their team writing provided them with opportunities to explore factors that influence how they critically assess curriculum resources they select for classroom use. They created critical questions and criteria to guide their decision-making and inquire into content of texts and supplementary materials: What was the author's background? Were there stereotypic illustrations? Whose point of view was being ignored? What was the hidden curriculum? (Eisner, 1985).

Participants revisited burning issues that they faced at various stages of their lives: feeling as outsiders; not having their lived experiences validated; and struggling to prove themselves as capable. They responded to similar needs that were brought forward by their students and sought out strategies aimed at specifically addressing many of those concerns. According to McIntosh (2005), *caring for* involves not only immediate responses, but also concern for the future. Their collective efforts in reconceptualizing curriculum provided ways to connect to their past experiences, consider the present needs of their students, and work towards a more equitable future.

Participants agreed that their understandings of a reconceptualized curriculum embodies a caring approach (Noddings, 1984). In their practice, they embodied an 'ethic of care' by taking on roles of decision-makers, guides, and enacting motherly roles (Henry, 1998; Noddings, 1984). In her classroom, Anne modeled ways to respectfully share and listen to ideas by incorporating structures such as teaching/learning circles and using a talking stone. Anne explained that becoming a mother had influenced how she took up certain topics in her classroom and writing. She said she would think, "How would my children feel about that?" (Anne, Interview Two, May 2009, p. 7). Anne said she became more vigilant about constructing opportunities where students' cultural backgrounds, histories, and lived experiences could be affirmed. Kate took time to address issues of prejudice that were raised about same sex families. She saw those occasions as teachable moments. Aishwarya shared an example of a lesson she wrote where she designed questions based on interactions between her two children (Related Documentation, Aishwarya, June 2009).

The women sought out creative ways to engage students in their learning by providing choices of books and activities, encouraging students to share their home knowledge, teaching them how to question their interests, and demonstrating how to develop steps towards taking relevant and age-appropriate actions.

As critically conscious teachers, they wanted to structure the lessons they wrote and discussion prompts included to precipitate actions connected to experiences that would be meaningful to their students' interests and lives, but also push them to think beyond their own experiences. Mogadime (2002) encountered teachers who successfully implemented such strategies in their classrooms (p. 11).

Cherian (2006) groups the types of strategies the participants used in their writing under an umbrella term of critical teaching (p. 127). In his article, "Can You Spare Some Social Change?: Preparing New Teachers to Teach Social Justice in Times of Educational Reform and Standardized Curriculum" Cherian provides an example where one of his students meets with resistance as she attempts to embed strategies for promoting social justice in the curriculum. In the words of his student, "My associate teacher does not want me to teach any issues of social justice in student teaching. She says the curriculum doesn't have room for that stuff. If teachers don't want us to teach social justice, maybe what you're [Cherian] teaching is unrealistic." Cherian explains that his teacher candidate students need to be convinced of the value of critical teaching and understand the implications for not embedding social justice principles and content. The four participants in this study clearly demonstrated their conviction to social justice by making space in their curriculum writing for the "missing pieces of the puzzle" of school curriculum because they have come to understand the value of questioning "the relationship of their beliefs and social conditions to others around them" (p. 127).

Anne's Aboriginal identity fuelled her need to reconstruct the curriculum to broaden what is sanctioned as school knowledge to include Aboriginal perspectives and history. In schooling, she felt left out of the curriculum as contributions of Aboriginal peoples were omitted or stereotypically essentialized. According to Anne, Aboriginal peoples were portrayed as "naked and carrying bows and arrows." Dion (2009) explains that she felt confused by her Aboriginal /non-Aboriginal mixed identity, particularly during her schooling experiences. In the following excerpt, from her book *Braiding*

Histories, she explained that her situation was different than that of her mother who was forced to completely deny her heritage in order to be accepted.

My mother was born and raised on the Moravian Thames Reserve near Chatham, Ontario. When my siblings and I were children, we didn't talk about being Indian; our mother had been convinced by the Canadian government's policy of forced assimilation that it was best to forget being Indian and simply act white.

(p. 6)

As Dion points out, it was expected that Indians act White. In all likelihood, 'acting White' helped her mother to get by but there was no other choice. It was expected. Aboriginal identity was "erased."

In Dion's second story, she shared her reaction to a letter she received from her son's teacher. The letter, which was about a concluding celebration to a 'Native People' unit of study, began as follows:

"Dear Parents: You probably by now have seen and heard enough about Native people." When I [Dion] read that, my immediate response was anger and a kind of shock that comes from the experience of wounding. For me, the notion of "hearing enough" was an impossibility (p. 7).

Anne's school curriculum was void of Aboriginal content. Like Dion, she wanted to "hear more." In one of her stories, she talked about children who look White but are Aboriginal. Even her school administrator did not notice them. For Anne, curriculum writing has been a strategy to broaden and deepen the curriculum by including Aboriginal perspectives and providing a way to 'hear more' of what was once omitted.

Not all teachers agree with a reconceptualized curriculum. Some describe its

concepts as “radical stuff” (Tilley & Powick, 2007, p. 108). In their study with graduate students completing a Master’s of Education in curriculum studies, Tilley and Powick “examined the complex processes by which race, class, sexual orientation, and other socially constructed categories intersect and influence children’s and teachers’ classroom experiences, with specific emphasis given to interrogating racial identity” (2007, p. 108). They explain that White teachers in their study understood curriculum “as a vehicle to ‘fit in’ issues related to cultural difference and racial identity,” but at the same time they felt that only certain subjects were appropriately positioned for those types of discussion (p. 113). In contrast to that attitude, the approach that Anne took with her class was much different. Aboriginal content was not something to “fit in,” instead Aboriginal teachings were embedded as integral parts of the learning environment and curriculum. Furthermore, Anne expressed her opinions - whether explaining a concept to Ministry officials or providing reasoning for a particular choice - and was not neutral in her teaching (Kelly & Brandes, 2001). She felt that her explanations for the choices she makes in teaching can demystify her social justice endeavours as a curriculum writer and teacher. She also encourages her students to develop and share similar reasoning for the choices they make.

The women drew upon examples from their teaching experiences to affirm students’ home languages, family structures, and religious practices as they developed and wrote resources. Aishwarya included stories about Diwali in Language Arts study and research activities about Ramadan in Social Studies.

Participants agreed that as women they are very aware of gender biases such as stereotypic representations of women and work and the imbalance of power depicted

through male-female relations in text. Anne felt that her students appreciate seeing her capabilities in Karate. She wants them to learn about various roles she plays. She pointed out that she and her students use post-it notes as a strategy to label one-dimensional or biased portrayals of individuals or groups of people when they encounter them in their school work so they can discuss them further. hooks (1984) makes a case for such strategies to address sexism and other forms of misinformation. She cites children's literature as a key place to begin social justice teaching.

Lee (1985) has been a long-time advocate for acknowledging and making room for all the social identities that students possess, in the curriculum. Pollock (2008) writes, "Children and youth need to understand that they are disadvantaged or privileged by a social system that they, like educators, can help to make more equitable" (p. xxii). Participants in this study engage in social justice curriculum writing as a method to include forms of knowledge and ways of being that have traditionally been unsanctioned as school knowledge.

The Collaborative Process of Writing Social Justice-Focused Curriculum as a Unique Professional Development Experience

The collaborative process of writing social justice curriculum provides a unique professional development experience for teachers to build their knowledge and probe into their attitudes, beliefs, and values. Teachers can learn how to work with one another across differences as they come to terms with the reasons for thinking and teaching the way they do. On several occasions, participants pointed to teamwork as a pivotal stage in their professional and personal learning. Social justice-focused teaching and curriculum writing requires creative thought and debate about how best to present

information because of the value-loaded content and emotive responses that they can elicit. The women in the study believe that the process of writing social justice curriculum, based in part on the diverse experiences and histories of the members on the writing team, and on their own subjective positioning, worked to provide an atmosphere and structure that precipitated critical thought and discussion. They all felt strongly that they learned from the experience, but in different ways.

Generally, they felt the knowledge they brought to the table was acknowledged by other team members. Additionally, they felt their colleagues challenged them to move outside of their zones of comfort. They also felt that the most growth occurred when they were challenged to shift in their thinking. As the participants confronted one another with differing perspectives and debated within their writing teams, they began to understand and realize that they had to find ways to embed similar opportunities and experiences in the resources they were writing.

The teachers looked to critical pedagogy and critical literacy as viable strategies to achieve their objectives (Kincheloe, 2005). They agreed that curriculum should be social justice-focused in order to make content relevant to the students in their care. They strongly argued that any teacher could use social justice-focused support resources to help students make sense of their experiences and build their understanding of experiences outside of their own. They understood that teachers would implement curriculum resources based on their skills and knowledge about social justice and students' understandings would vary. Their task on their writing teams was to attempt to accomplish these social justice goals by creating and pursuing a shared vision in their writing. Williams and Cooney (2006) support the idea that children can learn about

concepts of equality and inequality, empathy, and advocacy. They recommend that curriculum be created in ways that can begin conversations about these and other social justice issues.

Each of the four women had previously worked with the researcher to co-author a social justice curriculum resource. The researcher structured the team writing projects so there were similarities in the process. These similarities included: diversity within team composition;³ creating shared commitments for respectful interactions during team writing sessions; working together in writing teams for a period of one to three years; creating and delivering workshops for teachers on resources that were co-authored; and receiving feedback on their work from colleagues. The women agreed that these parameters helped to create an atmosphere of shared commitment, openness, and collective learning. The participants and writers on their teams often shared feedback they received from colleagues about the equity presentations they delivered and current social justice issues.

Findings from this study suggest that writing curriculum for social justice is a multi-layered, complex endeavour that is negotiated by the writers individually, as a team, and influenced by many factors. The participants act as mentors to one another to help each other through the “abyss of the theory-practice divide” (Cherian, 2006, p. 128). During their curriculum writing sessions, they shared research articles and teacher resource texts. They pointed out strategies that could be used in developing activities.

³Diversity within team composition meant that within each writing team there were representatives from historically marginalized communities and underrepresented groups of people. These could include people who are racialized, Aboriginal, who self-identify as having a disability or who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender.

This study suggests that writing for social justice is a process of learning – about the self and the other. Their ‘shared commitments’ to one another provided a safe context for their differences to be taken up. Palmer (1998) writes, “When I do not know myself, I cannot know who my students are” (p. 2). He believes that meaningful teaching and learning starts with teachers’ exploration of their identities, personal and professional histories, and the contexts of their teaching and learning experiences. Noddings (2006) agrees with those perspectives in, *Critical Lessons: What Our Schools Should Teach*, when she writes, “Possibly no goal of education is more important - or more neglected - than self-understanding... We need to ask not only what we believe but why we believe it” (p. 10). Participants in the study often confronted their beliefs and were challenged to consider how their experiences shaped their values.

Participants felt that working with other women on writing teams for prolonged periods of time provided multiple opportunities to think about and discuss both personal and professional aspects of their lives. Anne said that she probed into personal choices such as why she wore her hair the way she did and professional decisions such as why she arranged her class formation as a circle. Anne felt that by opening up aspects of her life and sharing them with her co-writers, she became even more critically aware in her relationships with colleagues and students. She credits her improved self-understanding in part to her work on particular social justice curriculum writing teams and points to lasting friendships with team members as evidence of the strong and supportive bonds that were formed (Anne, Focus Group, Session 2, June 2009).

Capers (2004) calls for teachers to take the lead in their professional learning by stating “teachers must be at the forefront of those efforts” (p. 153). The participants

agreed that they learned from and taught one another as they worked together on writing teams for extended periods of time. Sandira described her relationship with her writing colleagues as one that “evolved in a natural way” (Sandira, Focus Group, Session 2, June 2009). The women also felt supported by one another in their individual learning. As they critically reflected on their lived experiences and practices and wrote themselves and their students’ experiences into curriculum, the women felt that they stepped into a process of ‘spiral’ growth that continues, long after the team writing experiences, to shape their understanding of curriculum and social justice. They believe that their collaborative experiences of creating a social justice-focused resource provided a context to question everyday assumptions and examine how societal and institutional structures can perpetuate inequities. They came to understand curriculum as gendered, racialized, and political text (Pinar, 2004). The women also emphasized that they felt as if they were in charge of their learning. They had collaboratively structured ground rules for their interactions, selected topics for discussion in the resource, agreed upon a cadre of strategies for use, and negotiated how best to present the lessons while keeping in mind the varied understandings of teachers and students in regards to social justice issues. They sought out, shared, and discussed professional resources and research articles to collaboratively guide their knowledge and they grew to accept their roles as “transformative intellectuals” (McLaren, 2007, p. 253).

Discussion in the two focus group sessions pointed to a shared understanding that the writing of social justice-focused curriculum resources is a process that involves personal, professional, and intellectual aspects, as well as, as Aishwarya explained, “a willingness to go there.” The women felt that their professional and personal learning

improved from the process of writing social justice curriculum in collaborative teams because they pushed each other to critically delve into their differences by considering multiple perspectives. One common reason cited was that the diversity in backgrounds, knowledge, histories, and lived experiences that team members brought to the projects helped to ‘structurally shape’ such a forum. Kate described her experiences as very positive and rewarding.

While it [the social justice support resource] was a lot of work, the curriculum writing process was a very positive and rewarding one for me. Seeing our writing and work in print was very satisfying. Probably even more important than the recognition of our contributions, was the feeling that we were making a difference. We were broadening the educational experiences for teachers and students and hopefully changing their perspectives. Working on the project also strengthened my resolve to continue with social justice work. Seeing that, yes, my voice can be heard, reinforced my motivation to integrate social justice into curriculum. It was possible. But it also emphasized for me the importance of weaving social justice values into my current work in education and remaining open to new possibilities on issues. (Kate, Journal Entry, April 2009)

The participants agreed that they engaged in fierce and courageous debate at times (Scott, 2004; Singleton & Linton, 2006). Ladson-Billings (2006) writes,

I love this notion of “courageous conversations.” Think about what it implies. I can think of numerous times in my life when I have had to have a courageous conversation. Typically, I have had such a conversation with someone in whom I

am deeply invested - my spouse, my children, my parents - and I deeply care about the outcome of that conversation. (p. x)

Ladson-Billings explains that teachers must be willing to engage in similar conversations with colleagues to think critically and confront their ideas and perceptions.

The Impact of Political Ideologies of Stakeholder Groups on the Writing of Social Justice Curriculum

Curriculum is political and political ideologies of stakeholder groups can affect how curriculum is conceptualized, written, and enacted in classrooms (Eisner, 1992; 2004; Pinar et al., 2004). Educational stakeholder groups such as government, unions, scholars, and public education coalitions can influence many facets of curriculum. Participants agreed that their experiences as curriculum writers were greatly impacted through provincial government changes, union leadership, academic perspectives, and public debate about social justice.

Participants agreed that their teachers' union commitment to social justice provides support for their individual efforts and their work with students. However, throughout their careers three of the four women experienced several changes in Ministry of Education curriculum for elementary schools. All of the women feel that their union's commitment to supporting their work as social justice advocates through funding writing projects, developing equity workshops, and providing social justice professional development opportunities, remains strong.

Labatt (1993) and Rottmann (2008) support the participants' perspectives about teacher union equity commitments. The researchers argue that teacher unions have a strong history of maintaining a social justice focus throughout governmental changes.

Whether working collaboratively with the Ministry of Education on particular projects or funding projects independently, teacher unions have continued to develop and publish social justice curriculum support resources for use in classrooms and provided social justice professional development programs for their members. This continued even throughout the period from 1995 to 2003, a time of strife and confrontation between the Progressive Conservative government led by Premier Mike Harris and teacher unions (McCaskell, 2005). FWTAO and later, in 1998, ETFO continued to bring together teachers to write social justice-focused curriculum. In 2001, ETFO published a support document for teachers in response to the omission of equity and social justice issues by the PC government. *Blurred Vision: Rethinking The Ontario Curriculum* urged teachers to consider aspects of education such as critical thinking, environmental awareness, media literacy, and diversity in education (Aoki-Barrett et al., 2001). Michael Ignatieff (2000) was quoted in the resource advocating for change.

Women seeking sexual and economic equality, aboriginal peoples seeking recognition of their title to land, ethnic minorities seeking protection of their culture, and same sex couples seeking rights equivalent to those afforded heterosexuals. [From the perspective of these groups] ...the history of the past forty years is a story of freedom painfully fought for and far from achieved. (p. 113)

Many scholars agree that teacher unions should promote social justice in all aspects of their work, whether that commitment takes place through defending public education, promoting the rights of teachers, emphasising professionalism, or demonstrating commitment to children and learning (Bascia, 1994; Rottmann, 2008).

Teacher unions often rely on their members to bring issues forward and many resources have been written by teachers to address topics such as heterosexism and homophobia, sexism, and disability. In May, 2008, Education Minister, Kathleen Wynne, when addressing teachers of the Antiracist Multicultural Education Network of Ontario, thanked teacher unions for their role in keeping equity and social justice on the agenda. She said that teacher unions have been a driving force in promoting equity.

Participants indicated that they did not always feel supported as writers for social justice. Anne remembered attending annual meetings during the years from 1995 to 2003 where the union budget was discussed and teachers brought forward motions to continue and improve equity and social justice programs because the PC government, under the leadership of Premier Mike Harris had embarked upon erasing social justice and equity from the curriculum (McCaskell, 2005). Carr (2007) describes the direction of the government as one where “equity was not included” and an adversarial atmosphere permeated government-teacher relations.

The participants agree that even though their work as writers for social justice continued through union opportunities, there was often resistance to social justice initiatives from administrators and within their communities when social justice-focused curriculum was implemented during those years. Kate recalled that one of the reasons for the resistance was that administrators were no longer members of the teacher unions and were viewed as managers of the schools who were there to carry out the Ministry of Education’s mandates. Generally, they felt that social justice curriculum was ‘dismissed’ and ‘set aside’ because the government propagated views of meritocracy and sameness and social justice was viewed as an “add-on” to a full curriculum. But three of the

participants who were teaching during that period of time continued to write and implement social justice curriculum in their classrooms. They describe their efforts as “resistive actions to a restrictive and narrow curriculum.” As curriculum writers they felt strongly that the tone and mandates from governments can and did influence how their work was viewed and carried out - whether it was welcomed as school knowledge or dismissed as “special interests” (Focus Group, Session 2, June 2009).

Conversely, there were times when the participants felt that their social justice efforts were supported and valued by the government. Kate recalled how the process of writing a support resource was “much easier” because social justice goals were embedded in *The Common Curriculum* which was in place by the Ministry of Education. She felt there was a synchronicity in their efforts to promote social justice and team members were enthusiastic about their writing. According to Kate, the tone was a direct contrast to the oppressive atmosphere of writing for social justice under the Mike Harris “siege on equity” (Kate, Focus Group, Session 2, June 2009).

Sandira pointed to the current Ministry’s Equity and Inclusion Policy as a possibility for a united stance for social justice curriculum. All the participants expressed hope for a new era of change due to the availability of funding again for Ministry and union projects (ETFO, 2010). However, Kate, whose career has spanned over three decades and several curriculum changes had a sobering reminder that policies do not necessarily transfer to practice. She and the other women remain hopeful that teachers and school boards will receive the financial and professional supports that are needed to implement the new policy. They agree that the tone of inclusion is one that is much more conducive for their work as social justice curriculum writers.

Participants felt that scholarship and academic perspectives have helped to keep social justice on the curriculum agenda. The women gave examples of focus topics such as gender equity, homophobia and heterosexism, disability issues, and White privilege that have been explored in their curriculum writing efforts. Academic research and social justice debate can influence the curriculum (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009; Leithwood, McAdie, Bascia, Rodrigue & Moore, 2004). Whether exposing cultural biases of standardized tests or taking up themes of Whiteness and privilege, many racialized, Aboriginal, and White scholars agree that taking up social justice in curriculum must continue to remain a priority (Sefa Dei, 2007; Dion, 2009; McIntyre, 1997). Books such as, *The Great White North? Exploring Whiteness, Privilege and Identity in Education* have enabled teachers to connect research to curriculum. In particular, when teachers have opportunities to engage in discussion and communities of learning and work with educational scholars, they can deepen their understanding of social justice and keep current on issues (ETFO, 2007b, 2008, 2009). Cherian (2006) calls for Professional Development Schools where teachers can receive training from mentors and work with scholars from faculties of education “who can guide them in implementing the theoretical aspects of critical pedagogy into their classroom work” (p. 132). Such efforts can support teacher commitment to social justice and equity.

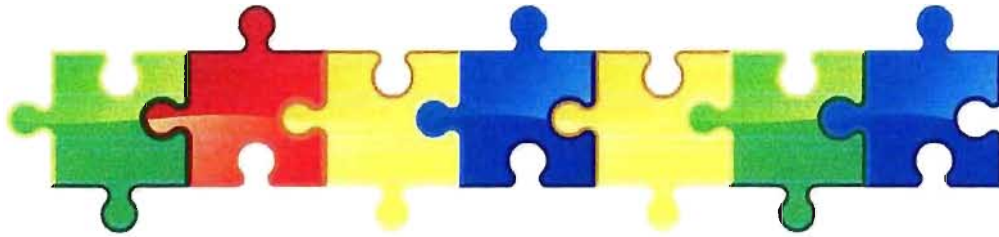
Participants recalled feeling supported in their social justice efforts by community groups who were empathetic to their causes. Aishwarya remembered a group of parents who thanked her and her colleagues for planning and implementing school forums for discussion of social justice issues. The women agreed that public coalitions can also foster a climate of social justice in schools through their lobbying of government,

creation of support resources and alliances with other grassroots groups that have similar goals. All the women cited People for Education as a supportive community group.

People for Education is a parent-led organization that works to support public education by monitoring the educational system through participatory research and taking positions on emerging issues. Local gay and lesbian groups were also cited by participants as allies who promoted the use of social justice-focused curriculum resources. One such group is Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG). PFLAG advocates for LGBT equality and also provides a variety of curriculum support resources. The Ontario Human Rights Commission also provides support for schools by issuing a variety of reports related to topics such as racism, gender, and disability. The Ontario Human Rights Commission has also collaborated with teacher unions to develop social justice curriculum materials such as *racism hurts* (Dawar, Honsberger, Ramrattan Smith, Ratwatte, & Shaw, 2008).

Educational stakeholders can and do influence whether social justice remains an important consideration in curriculum and whether curriculum writers feel supported in their efforts. Whether structurally through guidelines or through supportive endeavours such as lobbying or sharing current research - the political ideologies of stakeholder groups do impact how teachers who write curriculum do their work. The participants in this study point to the adversarial versus accepting atmosphere for their efforts as well as union and community support. Participants agree that there is a need for educational stakeholders to find more opportunities to work together. It is important that like-minded groups continue to share their learning and resources to pursue and promote social justice through curriculum in a variety of ways. These steps can assist in making the concepts

accessible to everyone and also help stakeholders to remain united and vigilant in their efforts to confront and eliminate injustices.



CHAPTER SEVEN

Implications of The Study

Suggestions to Support Social Justice Curriculum Writing,
and Recommendations for Future Research



CRITICAL CONNECTIONS: Teachers Writing for Social Justice

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CHAPTER SEVEN: IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY, SUGGESTIONS TO SUPPORT SOCIAL JUSTICE CURRICULUM WRITING, AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

In this final chapter, I revisit the research questions to discuss them in conjunction with the findings from the study and insights from my story. I also discuss implications of the study for teacher education and teacher practice. I suggest a path for further inquiry into the curriculum writing process and implementation of social justice-focused curriculum support resources and conclude with final thoughts about curriculum and social justice.

Purpose of the Study

This study provided a way to learn about the experiences of curriculum writing from teachers who work from a social justice framework. Through open-ended interviews, focus groups, journals, and support documents, I explored their perceptions of curriculum writing, their motivation to do the work, and their goals for taking on this type of voluntary work in addition to their teaching responsibilities. I was curious to know whether their experiences were similar to or different from one another and I wanted to theorize my experiences as a curriculum writer. I also wanted to find ways to support teachers who may be interested in writing curriculum resources that promote social justice.

What Does a Teacher Curriculum Writer Consider as Social Justice Curriculum?

Social justice curriculum is no *one* thing or method, but rather consists of multiple strategies, inclusive content, and most importantly, a variety of skills and creative thought and actions that aim to eliminate discrimination and foster fair and equitable schools and communities (Schniedewind & Davidson, 2006). Social justice curriculum can be

understood as a series of approaches to teaching and learning that critically examine all aspects of interactive experiences, school knowledge and practices, and systemic processes within education. Social justice curriculum is not covered through the use of a book, a pamphlet, poster, or bookmark in isolation, but instead is a process that engages such materials to critically probe into messages that are visible and invisible, and social issues and circumstances that relate to power, access, equitable resources, and respectful interactions.

Participants indicated that there are teachers who feel that they must choose between Ministry mandated and union-produced equity resources - that the latter is social justice curriculum, while the former is not. Teachers who do not see the two as integrated or compatible need to see the curriculum links listed on a page to make those types of connections (between mandates and social justice support resources) and to feel reassured that they are following Ministry directives. Fortunately, this teacher perspective is changing through the introduction of several new Ministry-union initiatives that are currently being undertaken by the Liberal government in Ontario. New social justice-focused curriculum resources that are produced collaboratively by the union and the Ministry may help to alleviate teacher tension about covering mandates thus promoting wider usage. The curriculum writers in this study demonstrated that application of theories and critical strategies to teaching and learning experiences can help to build teachers' understandings of social justice and how curriculum is perceived and enacted.

Participants' stories indicated that their understandings of social justice curriculum remain in evolution. In working from the explanation of social justice that Gewirtz (2001) provides and addressing the relational aspect of social justice, participants

indicated that the processes of enacting social justice through curriculum writing and teaching include: developing a critical consciousness, questioning and unlearning assumptions, inquiring into social habits and mindsets, critiquing beliefs and attitudes, asking who benefits, learning to perceive forms of oppression, probing into how knowledge is constructed, and identifying whose knowledges are sanctioned. In working for social justice as a goal as Bell (1997) suggests, participants see themselves as social activists who pursue equitable outcomes in relationships, schools, communities, and societies through resistive actions such as reconceptualizing the school curriculum.

What are the Experiences of Teachers who Volunteer to Write Social Justice Curriculum?

The teacher-curriculum writers in this study creatively imagine hopeful possibilities for schools and societies. Participants emphasized their personal experiences of injustice as catalysts in precipitating their engagement in curriculum writing and becoming critically conscious in their teaching. They were attentive to their interactions with students, noting their interests, and taking time to learn about the sociocultural contexts of their lives. They worked to broaden and deepen the school curriculum by embedding social justice principles through strategies such as inquiry, critical discussion, and example.

The curriculum writers demonstrated strong, life-long commitments to educating themselves through study and interactive experiences with colleagues whose social realities were often very different from their own. Through such experiences, the women learned to apply critical and feminist lenses to the school curriculum and became aware of gaps and biases. By applying their knowledge to their daily experiences at school and

beyond, they developed a better understanding of their privileges and their roles within White systems. Participants shared experiences from their own learning endeavours to emphasize that learning is a continuous process that informed how they carried out their vision for social justice through curriculum writing. All the women had plans to continue to further their education following their participation in the study.

Participants in the study often stepped out of neutrality to open up to their students, the processes of their thinking, the reasoning behind their choices and actions, and their vulnerabilities. They integrated social issues such as race, gender, class, ability, and sexual orientation in curriculum and teaching. They also took on leadership roles in their communities, forging bonds between school and community groups. Such actions demonstrated their tremendous courage and strong commitments to social justice.

The possibility for teachers to engage in writing social justice curriculum has been influenced by government and curriculum changes in Ontario. Participants felt that as teacher relationships with various governments changed, so did their work related to curriculum writing. Several of the women in the study wrote curriculum during the adversarial climate of the 'Mike Harris years' and emphasized that the process was challenging. There was little support from school administrators who did not want teachers taking time off from teaching duties to write social justice curriculum because social justice was relegated to 'special interest' status. Participants felt fortunate to be currently experiencing a climate in Ontario where alliances between the Ministry, teacher unions, and community groups are beginning to be valued. Writing for social justice in this context constitutes a much healthier and thriving environment that can provide possibilities for positive change.

In what Ways can Stories of Teachers who Write Social Justice Curriculum Influence and Support other Teachers to Become more Critical Consumers of Curriculum and possibly Social Justice Curriculum Writers Themselves?

The stories of the teachers in this study are inspiring because the women expose their strengths and vulnerabilities. They are “real” people who demonstrate how taking time to critically reflect on practice can be beneficial professionally, and also personally. The women found ways to re-think and theorize their experiences. Their stories clearly illustrate that becoming a critical consumer of curriculum involves educating oneself to effectively understand concepts of equality and justice, as well as inequality and injustice. Their qualities of perseverance, patience, empathy, and compassion represent them as effective models for teachers to emulate.

The teacher-curriculum writers featured in this study inserted their personal experiences and beliefs into mandated school curriculum to broaden and deepen its scope and relevancy. They believe that teachers are best suited to write curriculum since they are charged with the responsibilities of enacting it. They chose to share their stories to engage teachers who might not normally select to take up social justice through curriculum because they understand the realities of teachers’ lives - finding time to embark on new learning is always a challenge. The women, all of whom attended teachers college in Ontario, felt that they learned very little about integrating social justice perspectives into the curriculum during their studies and teaching practicums. They believe that social justice-focused curriculum writing involves personal, professional, and intellectual investments and want to emphasize that growth is incremental and that we can all start somewhere. They want their colleagues to think

about the critical opportunities that curriculum writing can provide - personally, professionally, and for students.

Implications for Teacher Candidates and Practicing Teachers

Social justice is both a process and a goal (Bell, 1997). Therefore it makes sense to begin the process in teacher education early and use integrated approaches to including social issues at the university level (Cherian, 2006; Solomon & Allen, 2001).

Teacher candidates can benefit from experiences and discussions that help them to develop self-understanding. This process can include probing into how their beliefs and values are shaped and informed by their histories, sociocultural backgrounds, and positional and political contexts (Palmer, 1998). Teacher candidates need to be better educated about how their work within White Eurocentric systems affects the pursuit of social justice (Sleeter, 2001). Social justice curriculum, when embedded in teaching practicums could support teacher candidates who are building their knowledge of types of strategies and opportunities to implement social justice curriculum. The use and critique of social justice materials could also raise their awareness of the strengths and limitations of such curricular resources. It would also be advantageous for teachers and teacher candidates to explore how Whiteness and forms of privilege can perpetuate oppressive conditions. This process of exploration can begin in faculties of education and continue throughout teachers' careers as they participate in union, school board, and Ministry professional development activities.

Teacher candidates and practicing teachers can benefit from working regularly with community groups that hold similar social justice goals. Whether through coalitions in multicultural contexts, speakers who interrupt stereotypes, or integrating social justice

content into the curriculum, these types of partnerships can create a cohesive approach to social justice and expand the circle for change.

Educational Stakeholders

There is an urgent need for educational alliances. Such alliances could include Ministry officials and staff, teachers, educational workers, administrators, and community groups working together to create new learning opportunities and to demonstrate the relevance for understanding and advancing social justice causes and initiatives. Examples of alliances could include teachers working with Elders from Aboriginal communities, inviting speakers who are activists for human rights, or supporting networks that build global connections. The Ministry of Education and teacher unions can continue to find ways to work collaboratively in developing social justice curriculum as mandates so that social justice is no longer viewed as an additive or optional component, but rather is seen as an integral component of curriculum and teaching-learning experiences.

Furthermore, educating the public about school initiatives relating to social justice is an essential step that is often overlooked. Public education can counter misinformation, myths related to meritocracy, and stereotypes associated with social justice endeavours. Why would we not want to engage such a critical mass in this important work? “Social justice education should not be under the veil of ignorance” (Park, 2008, p. 204). To reclaim the phrase, it makes “common sense” to engage the public - parents, caregivers, families, and communities - in the pursuit of social justice. We can all share the responsibilities and reap the benefits associated with such a goal.

Adequate funding for social justice professional development is necessary. School boards can use funds for activities such as local curriculum writing teams where specific and relevant social justice issues can be discussed, explored, and addressed in classroom resources. Further to this, an important goal of writing teams for social justice curriculum resources should be to bring together people whose perspectives can broaden and deepen the scope of curriculum and the content of what constitutes official school knowledge. Writing teams for social justice would benefit from including multiple perspectives on issues. Ideally, to address gaps in the curriculum, writing teams would include representatives of historically disadvantaged or traditionally underrepresented groups, such as women, Aboriginal representatives, racialized individuals, persons who self-identify as having a disability, or self-identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and two-spirited individuals, and representatives of cultural and religious diversity.

A Considerate Curriculum: A Shared Commitment towards Social Justice

Findings from this study indicate that a critical mass committed to social justice is necessary for systemic change. In order to mobilize such a force, a shared conception of curriculum is necessary, one that unites school and community in understanding and enacting socially just principles. I propose a concept of curriculum that encompasses how we relate to one another in everyday routines, choices, and actions. I refer to this shared conception of curriculum as *a considerate curriculum*.

A considerate curriculum can engage school and community in taking up our differences, similarities, practices, and actions with an aim to improve our understanding of one another and can emphasize how what we do each day matters. Conceptually, it can creatively open up curriculum to everyone – not just as the work of teachers,

educational workers, and students - but instead curriculum becomes situated in everyday actions and interactions within schools and also outside, among friends and families, and extends to our responsibilities as community members and citizens.

The concept of a considerate curriculum builds on Aoki's (1986) view of curriculum as interactive and experiential, Gewirtz's (2001) emphasis on the dual nature of social justice work as both distributional and relational, and Eisner's (1985) advocacy for including social issues to strengthen the school curriculum. Social justice curriculum, reconceptualized from these perspectives, emphasizes differences in our histories, variety in our lived experiences and needs, and subjectivities of our positioning – embracing them together to be included as sanctioned school-community knowledge (Allen, 2010; Giroux, 1983; Tilley, 1998a). A considerate curriculum is reconstructionist in orientation and looks to the realities of our lives to determine what is relevant (Eisner, 1985; Mann, 1974; Schwab, 1970).

Annette Henry (1998) argues for classrooms to invite “controversial conversations” saying that they are essential in building students’ “self-understandings” (p. 7). Lewison, Leland, & Harste (2008) believe that critical conversations should begin in elementary school so that students can explore topics in developmentally appropriate ways. Such conversations are necessary when there are students who may feel ostracized because accommodations are not made for their religious practices within their schools or their traditional understandings of female-male roles come into conflict with the school curriculum. Social justice curriculum can help to bring critical conversations into the classroom. But as importantly, those conversations can happen outside of the classroom as well. Participants in this study believe they should be happening everywhere.

Theories can help us to understand our actions and choices and re-align them (Ball, 2006). We can apply theories to drive changes we want to see and simultaneously we must *carefully consider and critically examine* our actions. These key steps require synchronized attention and are often overlooked. By enacting a considerate curriculum there can be a starting point for each of us, whether at home or at school – we can begin with examining our individual daily actions. Daily actions count and require attention because they impact on our feelings, interactions, and whether we feel supported or isolated in our classrooms, workplaces, and communities.

In his tongue and cheek look at Whiteness, Lander (2008) states:

An interesting fact about white people is that they firmly believe all of the world's problems can be solved through “awareness” meaning the process of making other people aware of problems, magically causing someone else, like the government, to fix it. (p. 21)

As we have seen through examples cited in this study, curriculum is often treated as a ‘political football’ tossed around by governments. The call to action is to all of us. There is no ‘magical’ solution as Lander points out. *A considerate curriculum* has the potential to fuel positive changes because it calls for each person to examine everyday interactions and explore ways to improve how we relate to one another including how power plays out in everyday life experiences.

A school administrator once told me, “I like to treat everyone the same - it's only fair!” How does such a perspective conflict with a Toronto newspaper front page headline, “Race, poverty matter as early as Grade 3?” (Rushowy, 2009). In the article written by education reporter Kristin Rushowy, there is a “call to action” for attention to

how socio-economic considerations play out in children's learning environments.

Researchers Janet O'Reilly and Maria Yau note the learning gap starts at a very early age and that the "biggest discrepancies are among different racial groups, followed by income groups" (O'Reilly & Yau, 2009, p. A1). Social justice matters and studies such as the one featured in the article serve as reminders to us that the playing fields within education are not equal. As teachers and educational workers we have important roles in addressing relational and distributional aspects of social justice, but we must continue to find ways to build support outside of our workplaces.

Awareness and engagement in social issues must lead to joint action. Much of my work in curriculum writing has been directed towards the practice of teachers and educational workers. Study for my PhD has prompted me to creatively think about how to engage families in learning more about curriculum and social justice. Studying critical issues through stories can provide students with opportunities to investigate ways of being that are similar to their own and can acknowledge their experiences. However, more importantly, stories can provide a vehicle that goes outside of what is similar and familiar to provide insight into other ways of being that are also valid and can be acknowledged.

In 2010, my son Benjamin and I co-authored our first two children's books in *A Considerate Curriculum* series (Ramrattan Smith & Smith, 2010). The books are based on interactions within our family and explore everyday actions and events. An example of the first book in the series is included in Appendix I. I believe that such books in conjunction with focus questions and critical teaching strategies can be used to extend the circle of conversations about social justice outside the confines of the classroom.

Suggestions to Support Social Justice Curriculum Writing

Teachers and educational workers who are selected to write social justice curriculum should be able to explain their vision of social justice, social justice learning, and how they have applied aspects of their learning to their educational endeavours. Curriculum writers should be paid for their work and share the copyright and monetary benefits with governing and funding bodies since such work requires professional skill and significant time commitment. Financial compensation is also a signifier of what is considered to hold importance in our societal systems.

More opportunities for scholars and practicing teachers to explore social justice research should be provided. These may include action research opportunities for teachers in their classrooms, but also more collaborative professional learning opportunities where scholars work with unions and the Ministry to research social justice initiatives of practicing teachers. Teachers who participate in such activities continue to improve their practice and use their studies as “stepping stones to continued growth” (Alber, Edgerton-Netke, & Kypros, 2006). Benefits from such initiatives can include sharing findings across stakeholder groups and with the public.

Careful thought should be given to how changes in government can manipulate curriculum mandates and be counterproductive for teachers and educational workers who write and implement social justice curriculum. Students and parents are often left confused when curriculum guidelines change and little is done by governments to support the changes or to educate the public so that they can understand why changes are being made. It may be beneficial and more effective for representatives of stakeholder groups to collaboratively make decisions regarding sweeping curriculum changes to ensure that

knowledge, understanding, social justice, and creativity remain key goals. Structural change with respect to curriculum requires integrated, long-term approaches (Cherian, 2006; Lawrence & Tatum, 2002).

Finally, teachers, educational workers, administrators, union staff, and Ministry staff should be required to demonstrate their social justice learning throughout their careers and explain practical applications of their learning. This type of accountability remains an essential step in the process of reconceptualizing school curriculum.

Recommendations for Future Research

Banks (2006) writes, "Scholars and researchers who view social justice as a key goal of their research and who interpret social justice as promoting educational equality for marginalized groups are highly vulnerable to being perceived pejoratively as 'advocates,' rather than scholars." However, Banks explains that such research "can make a difference and help to humanize our troubled and divided society" (p. xiii). It is my hope as a critical researcher that further research related to curriculum writing for social justice will convince educational stakeholders to take actions to challenge injustices within curriculum and teaching. Like Banks, I believe our actions can make a difference.

Three of the participants in this study were of South Asian heritage. There are commonalities in our stories, particularly in relation to our race and the disadvantages we experienced when attempting to acquire permanent employment and to advance our careers. As one of the three, I see a goal of my research as supporting racialized women who often face prejudicial barriers that work to keep us from achieving our career goals and I would like to explore this topic in more depth in the future.

In future, I would also like to pay more attention to the influence of gender on the work of teaching and curriculum writing. This initial study involved only female participants and gender factored into the stories the participants shared. I would like to explore more comprehensively, themes such as resistance to a patriarchal, traditional curriculum (hooks, 1984) and the ways in which race and gender intersect and influence the work and process of curriculum writing (hooks, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 2006). Another study could also investigate curriculum writing experiences of male and female teachers to provide further understanding of gendered perspectives.

Additional research can be conducted to examine the effectiveness of using social justice curriculum with students over time. Findings can assist with understanding how students: self-assess their growth and development with respect to difference, value their histories, and recognize forms of privileges and marginalization. Feedback from teachers can also provide insightful ideas to modify and improve curriculum resources.

More research on teachers who write social justice curriculum can contribute to building knowledge about how the process of team writing adapts and changes over time. Such research can assist with examining further the concept of social justice curriculum team writing as a viable professional development equity program. The stories of the teachers can continue to provide windows into the personal aspects of what drives social justice curriculum.

Research is needed to explore how teachers who embark on professional learning, whether through curriculum writing for social justice or social justice professional learning communities, implement the theories and suggestions they learn by changing their practices. Findings could influence the types of professional development activities

that are offered and given priority for funding. Teachers could also report on how they assess the effectiveness of their social justice programs.

More research on collaborative ventures between universities and unions can provide information about how academic research can influence what is prioritized for social justice professional development programs that are offered to practicing teachers.

More research is also needed from the voices of teachers who embark upon social justice curriculum writing and want to share their personal and professional growth through autobiographical accounts. Our stories serve to connect us to one another and can help us to develop and maintain a caring community for learning (Cohen, 1998).

Concluding Thoughts

Curriculum should be accessible to everyone. It is ours to modify, creatively interpret, and share, always with the mindset of making it more inclusive. Enacting a considerate curriculum is a means to a hopeful future. Imagining such a school or society means creatively working in partnership with families and community groups to share responsibilities and support one another in our commitments for social justice.

The act of writing curriculum for social justice is a political one where motives and perspectives will be questioned. Some people may view the development of social justice resources as a subversive act. Instead, the participants and I see writing for social justice as a multifaceted, proactive strategy that demonstrates resistance to dominant norms and the status quo while working within the restrictive constraints of a White system. As teachers and writers for social justice, we want more from curriculum – a place for omitted and marginalized experiences to become part of what is sanctioned as school knowledge, a place to disrupt the status quo, a place where each of us feels

respected and valued for who we are. From such a place, curriculum can lead to empowerment and action for change.

Without social justice as a foundational structure of curriculum and teaching, as teachers and educational workers, we may continue to perpetuate the very injustices we seek to end. I close with the words of Frances Moore Lappé who reminds us that “Every aspect of our lives is, in a sense, a vote for the kind of world we want to live in” (Beecroft et al., 2002, p. 148).

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APPENDIX A

Coded Research Showing Sherry's Story

This excerpt from a conversation with Kate during interview three is about sharing social justice curriculum with community groups.

strategy

S: So you could use words like, consider rather than do.

K: Yes, that would be better.

strategy

S: Would it be better to say to teachers: please consider your own experiences with disability because discussion from this lesson may require you to draw upon such experiences or interactions with a person with a disability.

S.J.
circles

K: Right, right. Well its not right or wrong. Instead you would be asking them to reflect. I think that what is making me think about this is the liberal religious organization I am involved with. I belong to the Unitarian Universalist Congregation. I have been involved with working with some of the younger children because they have a morning session that is for children. If a section for community was available it would help people in the church and other organizations to reflect and think about where they stand on issues - whether they know enough or whether they need to learn some more.

reflect
+
thinkcritical
reflection

S: Yes I think I know what you mean. I have started to critically reflect on my own history of curriculum writing and I am realizing that some of those pieces have as much importance as the activities I have written out for students in a lot of ways.

K: Yes for sure.

Socio cultural
contexts
Strategy

S: The next resource that is on its way will have more pieces to encourage teachers to think about their identities and histories and so on. There may as much for teachers as students.

K: That would be really good because teachers need to be reminded of those aspects of teaching.

limitation

S: When I first began, my focus was really with getting materials out there.

K: There weren't very many resources out there really.

relational
experiences
interactionperspectives
learningrethink
Sherry's
Story
re-evaluateidentity
historySherry's
Story

APPENDIX B

Research Codes with Explanations

Research Codes - Version 1 Revised - November 10, 2009

Italics indicates an emergent code

Possible Codes	Description
Background	Participant talks about education, teaching experience, heritage
Challenge/limitation	Participant faces a situation where she encounters an obstacle to equity work
Critical lens	Participant reflectively critiques a particular event or action, with an eye to assessing/improving her behaviour or reaction or becoming more inclusive
Curriculum	Participant talks about mandated Ministry of Education guidelines or what is taught
Equity Issues	Topic relates to equity or actions towards equality
Familiarity	Indicates a collegial relationship between the participant and researcher or among participants
Identity	Participant discusses aspects of "who" she is and/or factors that shaped her identities
Interest in the topic	Participant gives reasons why she is motivated to do the work
Privilege	Participant describes unearned advantages based on race, sexuality, income, ability, etc.
Race	Participant discusses specific issues that relate to race
Self-Identification	Participant provides information about her various identities and roles, some may not be obvious

Significant incident/event	Participant describes events that may precipitate critical analysis that often leads to transformative actions. Sometimes the description of a specific situation holds a particular emotive memory.
Social Justice	Participant describes ways to make the world, community, school, personal life better, more inclusive, equitable
Strategy	Participant uses a particular action or line of thinking to try to resolve an issue
Study	Information relating to the structure or format of the research project

APPENDIX D

Sample Page of Coded Focus Group Interview

	The group is discussing how to get people to use social justice resources	
multifaceted approach systemic change	K: But resources on their own are not effective. You need support. In order to get anywhere you need principals engaged and you need the school board administration to buy into it. I mean it's great to have teachers involved and excited but for <u>system-wide change</u> you need all levels of support.	Support authority power brokers
multifaceted approach	A: Definitely. You need that because you need financial support - to buy books, for in-service, for student materials, education, all that sort of stuff.	financial support
connect to community	K: Yes, I agree.	
awareness critical lens engagement	A: Resources should always have a booklist because you can share that with colleagues, parents, your librarian, anyone who comes into the school. I try to make a note of good new books I see to add them to my units.	booklist accessibility to resources
	Aish: I think I have become a lot more creative since I started to write curriculum. I am always looking for ideas and <u>paying attention</u> to things, even in magazines, looking at flyers, I think - how could this work in a resource?	creative connections
implementation	Sand: Well going back to getting teachers to use social justice resources, I think for my generation, at my school, it works better when it comes from the top down - then we just have to do it. There is no choice. At my school that is how it is. When I think of all the amazing resources out there, from ETFO and other school boards, but the one our board liked best was the school-wide kit, then all of a sudden, there was funding for a kit for every school in the board. But not only that there was money for workshops for representatives from every school That gets teachers going on using it.	authority power brokers funding PD
	S: Do you think that if the Ministry approved social justice resources well, would that make a difference?	sanctioned resources
teacher attitude	K: I am not sure that it would. There are those who would still try to do things the old way.	teacher choice of curriculum

APPENDIX E

Clearance for Research from Brock Research Ethics Board



DATE: March 26, 2009

FROM: Michelle McGinn, Chair
Research Ethics Board (REB) *Michelle K. MC*

TO: Dr. Susan Tilley, Education
Sherry Ramrattan Smith

FILE: 08-265 TILLEY/RAMRATTANSMIT
Ph. D.

TITLE: Critical Connections: Teachers Writing for Social Justice

The Brock University Research Ethics Board has reviewed the above research proposal.

DECISION: ACCEPTED AS CLARIFIED

This project has received ethics clearance for the period of **March 26, 2009 to September 30, 2009** subject to full REB ratification at the Research Ethics Board's next scheduled meeting. The clearance period may be extended upon request. *The study may now proceed.*

Please note that the Research Ethics Board (REB) requires that you adhere to the protocol as last reviewed and cleared by the REB. During the course of research no deviations from, or changes to, the protocol, recruitment, or consent form may be initiated without prior written clearance from the REB. The Board must provide clearance for any modifications before they can be implemented. If you wish to modify your research project, please refer to <http://www.brocku.ca/researchservices/forms> to complete the appropriate form Revision or Modification to an Ongoing Application.

Adverse or unexpected events must be reported to the REB as soon as possible with an indication of how these events affect, in the view of the Principal Investigator, the safety of the participants and the continuation of the protocol.

If research participants are in the care of a health facility, at a school, or other institution or community organization, it is the responsibility of the Principal Investigator to ensure that the ethical guidelines and clearance of those facilities or institutions are obtained and filed with the REB prior to the initiation of any research protocols.

The Tri-Council Policy Statement requires that ongoing research be monitored. A Final Report is required for all projects upon completion of the project. Researchers with projects lasting more than one year are required to submit a Continuing Review Report annually. The Office of Research Services will contact you when this form *Continuing Review/Final Report* is required.

Please quote your REB file number on all future correspondence.

MM/an

APPENDIX F

Considerations for Selecting Writers for Social Justice-Focused Curriculum

Support Resources

Over the years, people have asked me about the types of qualities I look for when I select people to write curriculum. I offer the following points as a beginning to a list. I emphasize that what I share here comes from my own experiences and is not intended to be a checklist, but rather a catalyst to promote further thought and ideas about the types of qualities that might shape how curriculum for social justice is written.

1. Writers would have empathy and demonstrate sensitivity to issues outside of their experiences. This is an important consideration since our attitudes are often evident to others by words we select, words that inadvertently slip out, and the types of actions we suggest, promote, and take.
2. Writers would offer assistance through the text rather than demand it. Too often we turn off our colleagues by using confrontational language. This does not imply a “soft” stand, but rather one that can open up dialogue and willingness to try out something new. Curriculum writers are learners too and we ought to make this clear to our colleagues with whom we hope to connect through the text.
3. Writers would know the strengths and limitations of classrooms. We would see the value and efficiency of practical applications and ideally we would understand the theories behind the choices we make in order to explain the stances we hold.

4. Writers would be firmly rooted in their commitment to social justice. We would understand the importance of individual efforts in making change through the ripple effect of actions. However, more importantly, we would see the larger picture and understand the effectiveness of the power of the collective in confronting systemic injustices. We would take actions to make alliances and build collaborative communities.
5. Writers would understand that the journey of writing involves risk and courage that will likely cause us to bump up against our current beliefs. Yet, we would assume a stance of willingness to stretch and reach outside the limits of our 'comfortable' thinking to be open to new ideas.
6. Writers would understand that attitudinal change often involves mental shifts and these types of changes in attitudes can count even more than public recognition and achievements. Changes in attitudes are not always quantifiable, but are significant since they can affect our relationships with one another.
7. Writers would think more about others and focus less on ourselves. We would understand our work as stewardship and service. We would understand that our experiences are limited by our histories and knowledge and we would find ways to engage our communities in the learning that we pursue.
8. Writers would be collaborative and work for the collective good. We would pride ourselves in our compassion and careful consideration of experiences outside of our own.

9. Writers would understand how to integrate concepts of care into the everyday tasks of teaching and learning. We would bring love, passion, and emotion to the cognitive processes of learning and teaching.
10. Writers would understand there are no simple solutions in social justice education. Instead, we would begin with our own critical examination of our selves. We would aim to build understanding about complexities of decisions and creatively find ways to work together for the betterment of all.

APPENDIX G

Social Justice-Focused Curriculum Resources: A Memorandum of Questions to Consider

1. **Is the resource teacher friendly?** Is it practical for daily teaching? Does it follow a predictable layout and structure such as materials listed, references, and additional resources? Does it offer a range of activities for varying abilities?
2. **What makes it credible?** Who are the writers? Was there a diverse group of writers? What were the selection criteria for the writing team? What theories informed their decisions in the writing process? How do their experiences influence the content and promote further discussion?
3. **Is the resource relevant to the lives of the students?** Do the activities draw upon their histories, cultural backgrounds, and identities? Are there opportunities for students to embed their knowledge and experiences?
4. **Does it challenge Eurocentric knowledge?** Are multiple perspectives presented when possible? Is there space to build new knowledge from communities that have been omitted or marginalized?
5. **Are students learning how to critically question knowledge?** Are sources such as text being examined? Are biases discussed? Who are the authorities? Whose voices are omitted?
6. **How are conversations, discussions, and dialogue incorporated in teaching and learning?** Are there opportunities for talking and sharing to enable learning about and from one another? How is an environment that supports honesty and trust, confidentiality, and curiosity developed?

7. **Are individual experiences valued and considered?** Do students have opportunities to share their experiences and differences? How are these considered in enriching the learning experiences for everyone? Are students' first languages valued?
8. **Is social justice being promoted as ongoing learning and work?** Are there particular strategies that can be called upon throughout the year? Does teaching and learning continue throughout the school year as opposed to one-time sessions? How is this communicated to families and communities? Are there opportunities to connect home and school as well as school and community?
9. **Are a variety of social justice topics such as racism, sexism, ableism, heterosexism, and anti-Semitism included across the entire curriculum?** Are students learning how to make connections among the “isms” or are various types of oppression pitted as competing for resources and priority? Are they learning about intersectionalities? Are connections being made in all areas of the curriculum? Are teachers aware of connections between the support resource and Ministry mandates? How are these connections conveyed to families and community?
10. **Are there opportunities to discuss power differentials and the structures that promote or perpetuate disadvantage for some groups?** Are systemic barriers examined? Are the complexities of situations discussed so that students can begin to understand that not every problem has a simple solution? Are they learning to notice “who benefits?” Do they engage in finding solutions by activist actions?

11. **Do activities and discussion promote engagement in current issues?** How are students learning to take action against injustices? Are they probing the causes of current issues by examining historic actions? How do they share their learning?
12. **Are students learning about collective actions?** Are students learning how to meaningfully interact, learn from each other, and support one another? Do they have opportunities for individual thought and actions as well as collaborative discussion and collective action?
13. **Are there meaningful ways for engaging the community?** Are social justice goals and strategies communicated through newsletters, open-houses, school council meetings? What is in place for input from the community or support from families or individuals? Is social justice discussed and promoted as a shared venture?
14. **Are definitions or a glossary of terms provided?** Are students learning correct terminology and noting the importance and evolution of language? Are they building their knowledge about how to speak about various social justice topics and issues? Do they have meaningful opportunities to share their learning?
15. **Are support materials and opportunities for further learning listed?** Are there ways for students to continue to explore topics and issues through books, websites, films, and community contacts? How can they apply the learning from the classroom activities to real life situations? What structures are in place to facilitate their endeavors?
16. **What supports are in place to assist teachers in their social justice-focused professional growth?** Are resource books, community agencies, workshops,

courses, and conferences listed? What financial supports and professional networks are available to encourage teachers and educational workers to continue to learn and share their knowledge?

APPENDIX H

Example of Commitment Statements for Respectful Interactions

Respectful interaction includes:

- Confidentiality
- Seeking clarification
- Participating with the right to pass
- Making suggestions based on care and concern
- Challenging each other to grow within a safe and supportive community
- Using personal and professional stories to clarify ideas
- Communicating with humour and respect
- Taking care of one another
- Providing sufficient time to reflect and respond
- Valuing the diverse perspectives offered
- Looking out for each other
- Feeling free to be yourself and how you self-identify
- Accepting the fluidity of varied identities
- Sharing the airtime
- Being ourselves and voicing our needs and opinions
- Listening to one another
- Respecting each other's opinions
- Avoiding assumptions about each other
- Being non-judgemental
- Asking: "What good can come from this conflict?"

- Giving each other the benefit of the doubt
- Respecting timelines
- Being aware of group members' individual needs
- Valuing openness, honesty, risk-taking, reflection, flexibility, creativity
- Checking in with ourselves and one another about these commitments throughout the process of writing

APPENDIX I

Brothers: Best Friends Growing Up

Brothers: Best Friends Growing Up

SHERRY RAMRATTAN SMITH and BENJAMIN ERIC SMITH



HOW DO YOU SHARE YOUR LIFE? Two brothers invite you to share their adventures of growing up together. Readers will relate to the variety of activities and simple but memorable moments. Love and support are key messages in this engaging story.

Brothers: Best Friends Growing Up is the first book of *A Considerate Curriculum Series 2010* by Sherry Ramrattan Smith.



ABOUT THE AUTHORS

SHERRY RAMRATTAN SMITH has a long standing commitment to social action in equity-based curriculum development. She often uses children's stories to begin conversations about a variety of social justice topics. Sherry believes that by sharing our life experiences and posing critical questions, we can become more accepting of our differences and learn strategies to be more inclusive.

BENJAMIN ERIC SMITH is a musician. Ben enjoys writing stories and songs.



Photography by
BRIAN JOHN SMITH



Note: Colour Graphics – Puzzle Pieces

Working for social justice involves many *pieces* such as ideas, strategies, theories, perspectives, and pedagogies. This study is a small contribution to a much larger unfinished puzzle. The colour graphics are a representation of how I conceptualize my work in curriculum writing for social justice at the time of this study.