A RECKONING OF PERSONAL VOLITION:
A CRITICAL AUTO-ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY OF TEACHER RESILIENCY IN
CRITICAL EDUCATION

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Raeleen Fehr-Rose, candidate for the degree of Master of Education in Curriculum & Instruction, has presented a thesis titled, *A Reckoning of Personal Volition: A Critical Auto-Ethnographic Study of Teacher Resiliency in Critical Education*, in an oral examination held on August 20, 2015. The following committee members have found the thesis acceptable in form and content, and that the candidate demonstrated satisfactory knowledge of the subject material.

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*Via Teleconference*
ABSTRACT

The overriding purpose of this research was to study sources of motivation for teacher resiliency in the practice of critical and anti-oppressive education. As a White teacher faced with a curriculum in which engagement with difficult topics such as these is optional, I determined that it would be valuable for me to understand the elements which helped to contribute to my meaningful and sustained engagement in these practices.

The research draws on the qualitative research methodology and methods of critical auto-ethnography and thematic narrative analysis. A critical perspective was used to analyze all texts and themes throughout the process.
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DEDICATION

It is with sincere thanks and appreciation that I dedicate this document to my family, particularly Dave and Phoenix Fehr-Rose, whose support (and patience) provided me with the inspiration (and sustenance) I needed to persevere.

It is due to the hard work and kindness of Greg Trombley and Kim Hollinger that I am able to still reach an upright position after the many hours spent pouring over my computer and data.

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Chapter 1: Introduction and Context

Purpose of the Study and the Researcher’s Viewpoint in Context

If, as Giroux (2006) suggests, “[p]edagogy … represents a commitment to the future, and it remains the task of educators to make sure that the future points the way to a more socially just world” (p. 32), then as educators it is logical to desire opportunities to both seek and implement change so that the process of schooling is more just and opens up opportunities for students to challenge the ideas and outlooks which stand to perpetuate the problems of today.

A teacher since 2011, I took a circuitous route to officially becoming an educator, and it is a path which undeniably has helped to shape my outlook and educational philosophy. I had a typical but also atypical upbringing in the context of my middle-class western Canadian schooling circles as a third-generation (White Settler) Canadian and one of two children of divorce within my small school of 74 students. I grew up within two separate homes at a time when such an arrangement was still very uncommon, and gained work experience from the age of eight when my younger sister and I began helping our mother with nightly office-cleaning jobs in order to afford extras like music lessons and new school clothes. Despite my family’s struggles to achieve financial security, these circumstances did not, however, negate or substantially diminish the fact that I have always received the privileges associated with being part of the White Settler dominant group.

My awareness, or more accurately lack-thereof, of the perks and benefits of this membership was challenged by two main events. The first occurred in my mid-twenties when one of my cousins, whose First Nations heritage is suggested by the colour of her
skin, took to borrowing our grandmother’s car to go out cruising on weekend nights at the age of sixteen, just as I and my younger sister had at the same age. The primary difference between our experiences lay in the fact that unlike us, without fail, every time my cousin borrowed the car she would find herself pulled over by a police officer, ostensibly to verify that she had permission to be driving the vehicle. It did not matter that she had the vehicle’s registration with her; every time, she would have to wait while the officer went back to his vehicle to contact my grandmother to ensure that my cousin truly did have permission to drive the vehicle. Suffice it to say that neither my sister nor I, with our extremely pasty white skin, had any such experience. In retrospect, my cousin’s encounters with the police forced me to analyze my experiences of privilege that I had taken for granted.

The second awakening came from a conversation that I had with my son during my late-twenties while he and I were walking home from a day in kindergarten. My son was telling me all about his new friend, Joshua, and how much fun they had had together that day before finishing with the observation that his skin is black. Like any good middle-class white woman, I immediately began to worry that my son was exhibiting racist tendencies by daring to actually observe – and aloud, yet! Where any neighbour could overhear us – that his friend’s skin was a different colour from ours. In hindsight, I am now very happy to state that my only response was to ask him whether it mattered that his friend’s skin is black. His response was a somewhat confused question of why it would matter, so I felt that I could rest easy that even if my son was aware that skin colour differences exist, he did not pass negative judgement against others based on them, and I was obviously doing all right as a mother thus far. The awakening part of
this particular experience came a few years later, when during an Education Foundations class for my undergraduate program I finally realized that I had been the one who was demonstrating racist behaviours and beliefs that day.

These two events were the main catalysts for my interest in being an antiracist educator, and as my understanding of the subject of antiracist education grew, so too did my commitment to anti-oppressive education in general. It took me many years and formal education on the topic to recognize that, within western Canadian society, Whiteness is afforded privileges that no other skin colour is given. I had experienced many things over the course of my early educational experiences which demonstrated to me that other characteristics, such as being male, being “able-bodied,” and being heterosexual, were afforded similar privileges. Most of these were privileges which I was fortunate enough to have been afforded simply by “winning the genetic lottery,” the main prize being Whiteness. In all those years, however, I had never stopped to truly think about the privileges I was handed simply because my skin was considered to be the right colour. This epiphany was something which I immediately realized I needed to know more about, because until then I had never thought about the fact that it is only people who have the luck of being White that are allowed to feel as though skin colour “has no meaning” and is “‘just human’” (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012, p. 119). I firmly believe that every individual both needs and deserves an awareness of the inherent fallacies of privilege, not solely those who happen to enter an Education program for their post-secondary training. However, the lingering question I am left with is, once armed with this knowledge, how do educators manage to create and ultimately sustain
their commitment to practicing critical and anti-oppressive education since, for some, it could very easily become a superfluous extra in the list of curricula to be taught.

This was not the first time that I had stopped to consider people’s motivations for their actions. Before making my decision to become an educator, I spent over a decade working within the banking industry as both a loans officer and training mentor. My experiences within this industry demonstrated to me that there are many reasons for individuals to perform, ranging from financial award, to knowledge that their performance will be assessed, to fear of loss of employment. The definition of perform, in this sense, relates to both the act of attaining or exceeding the employer’s expectations for how the various duties associated with the job are completed, as well as the employee’s adoption of an identity as someone who is a well-suited part of the employment environment and as someone who is capable of meeting those same expectations. The banking environment in which I worked provided me with many empirical opportunities to see the effects of failure within one or both of those definitions to performance, and the truth of the matter is that I had first-hand experience with this failure myself when I came to realize one day that the financial reward associated with high performance of my job at the bank was no longer sufficient to sustain my desire to remain in a job whose sales requirements ran tangential to my personal ethics and desire to help clients make informed decisions – a subject for another day.

Some may suggest that my experiences of performance motivation within the banking industry have little or nothing to do with the profession of teaching, where there are insufficient financial or employment repercussions for teachers in general (Kendel, 2013), and that my experiences in the banking industry have even less to do with the
question of why some teachers are successful at practicing critical and anti-oppressive education over the length of their career while others do not sustain the practice. However, I suggest that this is quite opposite of the case. Critical education, namely teaching which “attempts to understand how power works through the production, distribution, and consumption of knowledge within particular institutional contexts and seeks to constitute students as particular subjects and social agents” and which seeks to make students “critical agents actively questioning and negotiating the relationship between theory and practice, critical analysis and common sense, and learning and social change” (Giroux, 2006, pp. 31-32), is an overarching structure to the teacher’s practice as s/he works to create a “space where students should be able to come to terms with their own power as critical agents” (Giroux, 2006, p. 32). Anti-oppressive education is a complementary theory and ideology of practices, wherein the teacher focuses on working against the multiple forms of oppressions (Kumashiro, 2000). I observe connections within these two theories as they both strive to draw attention to the ways in which power and privilege, particularly White privilege, affect one’s view of the world. Unfortunately for teachers who wish to address these injustices and teach students how to “subver[t] and expos[e] social norms and power imbalances” (Johnson & Vasudevan, 2012, p. 36), as much as the Saskatchewan curriculum professes an aim to “facilitate an individual’s ability to participate fully and equitably in a variety of roles and contexts – school, home, and local and global communities” (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2008) there are no requirements or explicit support within the curricular outcomes for the practice of critical and anti-oppressive education to which teachers are expected much less required to adhere. Alternatively, it could be argued that there are tangible benefits
accrued by teachers for ignoring critical pedagogies since there are inherent risks in challenging and questioning the ideas that shape our world. If critical pedagogy is perceived as yet another “top-down add on” for teachers to incorporate and practice, and not as a pedagogy that benefits students and ultimately society, it is safer and easier to continue with established routines. The emancipatory goals and purposes of critical pedagogies are denigrated to another superfluous extra, a proverbial “fad” that distracts teachers from the real purpose of school.

Additionally, it should be noted that even if the practice of critical and anti-oppressive education were mandated as a required element of every teachers’ practice, while research has shown that the knowledge that one’s performance is being surveilled and critiqued has a tendency to improve individuals’ behaviour (Beaman, Klentz, Diener, & Svanum, 1979; Kluger & DeNisi, 1996), with only a few exceptions within most teacher’s careers, the surveillance of a teacher’s practice is not a regular occurrence within the profession (Britzman, 2003; Regina Public Schools, 2007). Certainly, teachers today are routinely observed and judged by the students in their classes and the parents of those students; however, these observations are more easily equated with anecdotal “customer feedback” than they are a formal management performance review. Accordingly, the extension of the business metaphor invites the question of whether it could be argued that teachers would be no different than any other profession in this regard and would increase performance assuming that s/he know that formative performance observation would regularly occur. It has been my experience that, due to the number of commitments associated with the role, it is rare that most in-school administrators can find the time to observe a teacher even a couple of times per year, let
alone on a semi-regular basis. Extending these thoughts specifically to the practices of anti-oppressive education, and based on my relatively diverse professional background, I was left wondering why some teachers start off and remain committed to regularly practicing anti-oppressive education within their classrooms while others merely pay lip service to its importance and allow it to be a practice whose importance is verbally acknowledged without any actionable follow-through.

**Researcher’s Context during the Research**

I presently have the privilege of teaching at a high school in an urban public school system within western Canada which, it has been suggested, is one of the most diverse schools in the city socio-economically, culturally, and linguistically. Numerically, its population falls squarely in the middle-range of those within the school’s system, and while those who attend the school have a deep appreciation for the sense of community which is created, it tends to have a negative image within the city (CBC News Saskatchewan, 2007; The Leader Post, 2015; Lypny & Melnychuk, 2014). During my first few months of working as a teacher, I was substituting at a different city high school when I had to listen to a principal threaten a class of students with the possibility that if they did not change their behaviour for the better so they could fit in at that school, then they would be forced to go to the high school where I now work. To say that the school at which I teach could use some positive public relations is an understatement.

While engaged in the period of my research, I taught three classes of grade 9 English Language Arts (ELA), and one split class of Core French 20 / 30. The make-up of my ELA classes is quite diverse, consisting of students from some of the most affluent
elementary schools in the community as well as some of the least. Some of the students’ families travel on vacation for every school break while others have already required their grade 9 students to find jobs in order to contribute to the family’s economic security. I have a number of students in my classes who speak English as an additional language, as well as many whose transience has already resulted in their attendance at over ten different schools within their educational history and who now have a number of “gaps” within their expected skills base. There are approximately forty-two different languages spoken by the students at this school, and representatives of around eighty-seven different countries. The school at which I teach is incredibly diverse, although neither the make-up of the teaching staff nor the media coverage about the school necessarily reflect this reality. The teaching staff are predominantly White Settlers like me, and the media coverage of the school has historically focused on sensational events, ignoring the diversity of the school’s population and the rich educational and community experiences that the school creates.

For the last several years, the high school at which I teach has produced the largest number of graduates who self-identify as First Nations, Métis, and/or Inuit for the division. A number of the students in my classes self-identify as well. Despite this, White privilege is still a topic which is difficult to address without immediate student objections, sometimes even from students who self-identify as a visible minority. Schick and St. Denis (2005) note that sometimes this is because “students are concerned that they will be made uncomfortable over the extent to which White privilege has enhanced [or perhaps even detracted from] their life chances” (p. 310). During the period of my research, a male grade 9 student who self-identifies as Aboriginal become quite heated
during a discussion of the myth of meritocracy, possibly due to his desire to eliminate the possibility that it applied to him and his own experiences. Along similar lines, I had a female grade 9 girl who is White object to our discussion of White privilege since she was tired of her generation being blamed for the problems created by previous generations since they never benefited based on the colour of her skin. In the latter case, this observation was made despite her professed commitment to social justice and a relatively in-depth study into the fallacy of race as biology and its real effects on people whose skin colour identities them as a visible minority. As is often the case, what she said did not match up with what she displayed of her beliefs, reflecting an “[i]deological incongruence … the dilemma experienced by individuals when their ideological or belief sets are incompatible” (Solomon, Portelli, Daniel, & Campbell, 2005, p. 153) as she tried to bridge the space between what she professed to believe in and what her privilege would allow her in that moment to consider true. In spite of, or perhaps due to these objections, I have remained committed to addressing subjects related to critical social justice since it is only through understanding that we can find change.

Research Question

The purpose of this study was to gain insights into the motivation of myself as a critical educator in order to better understand what element(s) acts as effective motivation to continue the practice of critical and anti-oppressive education over an extended period of time. More specifically, I sought to answer the question, “How do I as a White Settler female educator in Saskatchewan maintain and sustain resiliency in my practice as a critical educator, and what can I learn from these experiences in order to ensure lasting practice for myself?” I conducted my research using a critical auto-
ethnographic approach between the end of January, 2015, and the middle of April, 2015. My data sources included a daily journal which was added to at least once per day as I taught and an analysis of every one of my pre-service degree assignments, from both my Education degree as well as my simultaneously-taken English degree, as I sought a pattern of growth and understanding. These artifacts acted as the means by which I analyzed past and current assumptions and beliefs that I possess about teaching in general and critical education in particular. This process allowed me to engage in the “practice of self-criticism about the values that inform [my] teaching and [provide me with] a critical self-consciousness regarding what it means to equip students with analytical skills to be self-reflective about the knowledge and values they confront in classrooms” (Giroux, 2006, p. 31) not just today, but with the goal of maintaining the practice throughout my teaching career.

While journaling, I was careful to avoid any direct references to specific students so as to avoid any ethical issues with respect to journaling about my students.

Motivation

A career spanning over a decade within the banking industry provided me with ample empirical proof of the effectiveness of extrinsic motivators for increasing and maintaining positive performance, such as financial performance bonuses and free trips for the highest performers; however, over a decade under the United States’ No Child Left Behind (New America Foundation, 2014) program has demonstrated that the same motivating factors are ineffective and actually detrimental when implemented within educational settings (Brown, 2015). This has been demonstrated in the United States when teachers and administrators were rewarded based on their students’ performance
the way that insurance and pharmaceutical representatives are, resulting in academic fraud and test score manipulation (Bush, 2014; Lindsay, 2015). Add to this the veracity that the practices of critical and anti-oppressive education are optional curricular and pedagogical choices, and the result is that teachers who commit to these practices are left with motivating factors which are extremely ephemeral and function at the very definition of intrinsic motivation. To leave such important practices within a middle-grounds category in which the best that can be said is “some do and some don’t” is something which I view as insufficient if we are truly to do as our curriculum suggests and help “students learn about themselves, others, and the world around them … to define who they are and to explore who they might become” (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2008, p. 2).

The diversity of today’s classrooms is (and should be) increasingly acknowledged (Guo & Jamal, 2007; Guo, 2012; Sterzuk, 2008); however, despite these increasing acknowledgements, the status quo of privilege persists so more still needs to be done. Students of all backgrounds, abilities, genders, and sexualities need to come to realize that the idea of meritocracy is only true for those who fit within the narrow category to which it was originally subscribed (Pete, Schneider, & O'Reilly, 2013). While there are and have been programs which have experienced success with encouraging the spread of critical and/or anti-oppressive education, such as New Zealand’s Te Kotahitanga, which emphasized and encouraged culturally responsive teaching practices and classroom environments, such programs often require specific conditions in which they can succeed (Bishop R., 2009; Bishop & Berryman, 2009; Bishop & Berryman, 2010), none of which, to my knowledge, presently exist within my
division’s high schools. It was the realization that it would take more than just the introduction of an incredibly successful program of practice such as Te Kohatitanga to my division’s high schools, more in the form of a replication of the supports and procedures enacted within the original program, for it to have the same sort of success which sparked my interest in studying how and why critical and anti-oppressive teaching practices manage to exist in many classrooms despite a lack of support systems or programs to foster their existence.

Rationale for Study

There were several objectives that I sought to attain through my research. First, I considered and studied the challenges that critical educators report facing in their effort to sustain their practice. To my reasoning, this understanding was necessary in order to be able to provide circumstances and incentives which are repeatable by not just other researchers but by myself. Additionally, I wanted to understand what prompted the commitment to critical education and how this commitment changed the perspective of the practicing teacher. I believed this information would speak to the creation of the intrinsic motivation needed to sustain the anti-oppressive teaching practices. This was further complemented by my belief that it is necessary to understand the conditions necessary for resiliency in critical education so I, and perhaps even others, may attempt to replicate the same. Both empirical observation and quantitative research demonstrate the necessity of replicable conditions in the process of recreating results (Beaman, et al, 1979; Kluger & DeNisi, 1996). If something is not easily replicable, then the level of commitment drastically drops on the part of the participants. I additionally saw a need to look at and analyze the construction of my professional identity, with the intention of
ascertaining how I came to be the teacher that I am, how it compares with the teacher I hoped I would be, and how my practice matches up with my image of myself as a critical educator. I believed this information to be pivotal. While I have long considered myself an advocate of social justice, in both my pre-service and continuing teacher education, I have come to realize how much more I need to learn, as well as. My research further affirmed this observation.

**Theoretical Framework Overview**

This auto-ethnography draws upon critical, socio-cultural, and narrative theories. I filtered my auto-ethnographic data through both a critical lens and a socio-cultural perspective, and thematic narrative analysis was used to interpret my data. A critical lens was chosen since, within a scholarly context, the term critical reflects “an intellectual skill of analysis” (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012, p. 1) and the process of truly analyzing the meaning of what is said, done, read, and viewed, with a particular focus on whose story is told, how the story benefits or hinders different groups of people, and what the story says about the groups involved. In this specific context, it is the story of this white middle-class educator who has always experienced a level of systemic privilege of which many of my students can only dream. As an educator who is committed to critical and anti-oppressive practices, I acknowledge that my access to this privilege cannot stand as an excuse for inaction (Pete, et al, 2008), and thus critical pedagogy (Bartlett, 2014; Freire, 1998; Giroux, 1997, 2006) influenced my actions within the classroom as well as my research.

Thematic narrative analysis was chosen as the method used to engage with the data because, just as discourse analysis holds the assumption that “there is much more
going on when people communicate than simply the transfer of information” (Harvard University, 2008), thematic narrative analysis seeks to analyze the underlying ideas and beliefs associated with the associated texts. Thematic analysis allows the researcher to “see something that had not been evident … [to] perceive[e] a pattern, or theme, in seemingly random information” (Boyatzis, 1998, p. 3). Thematic narrative analysis was deemed the best approach because of its focus on “how the production of narrative account, both personal and extra-individual, are structured practices that are inculcated early on” (Harvard University, 2008). Since my analysis focused on the ways in which my views of myself as a practicing educator and an individual committed to social justice changed over the course of my undergraduate education and subsequent time spent teaching, I wanted to look at the stories I told, in addition to, as much as possible, those which I chose not to engage with or tell since “[e]very day, we encounter, observe, and then pass by numerous sources of information or ‘data’ useful in gaining insight about phenomena of interest to us” (Boyatzis, 1998, p. 5). In the case of my research, I specifically wanted to analyze and, ideally, identify the data related to those practices and intrinsic motivations which assisted in creating conditions to motivate and sustain my resiliency in the practice of critical and anti-oppressive education.

Methodology

As a research methodology, auto-ethnography differs from ethnography in that, although both describe people and/or their cultures, ethnography requires the researcher to study and write about others whereas auto-ethnography requires the researcher to study and write about herself (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011; Neuman, 2011). Historically, there has been a belief within ethnographic research that “the research
project is [or was] co-constructed by the researcher and participants” (Dutta, 2014, p. 91). Both auto-ethnography and ethnography acknowledge the idea that as researchers, “[w]e constantly make inferences – that is, go beyond what is explicitly said or obvious to see – and move toward what is really meant or implied indirectly” (Neuman, 2011, p. 423) and that it is necessary to constantly engage in “the practice of continually examining and evaluating our roles in specific social contexts” (Dutta, 2014, p. 93). It is the intention of the researcher to interpret the data which are the individual’s demonstration of culture through what s/he says, does, and thinks, in order to find hints of the social meaning behind those thoughts and actions. Auto-ethnography brings to this approach the intention of analyzing personal experience in order to gain understanding of the cultural experience (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011). Part autobiography and part ethnography (Dutta, 2014; Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011), auto-ethnography requires the researcher to critically reflect on her experiences within the context of her research (Dutta, 2014).

**Addressing the Detractors of (Auto-)Ethnography**

As with any research methodology, I acknowledge that there are potential weaknesses within the critical ethnographic method. The fact that “[t]here is no singular ethnographic identity that can be predetermined and bracketed” (Dutta, 2014, p. 93) is one such issue since the research form then becomes subjective and determined primarily by its practitioner. Another lies, as Jordan and Yeomans (1995) observe, within the fact that within critical ethnography specifically the practitioners’ “material location is often at odds with those whom they research” and the need to “ensure that research findings, which disclose sources of power and domination, do not decay within the research site”
This is less of an issue within the context of critical auto-ethnography since there is no divide between the subject and the researcher beyond the researcher’s willingness to provide honest analysis through research integrity to her own actions and thoughts. Masemann (1982) further notes that critical ethnography “uses a language and concepts derived from perspectives that are not ultimately the actors’” (p. 13) and the fact that “those persons being researched … have, relatively and relationally speaking, less power” (Pignatelli, 1998, p. 404) with a special focus on striving to change this. Despite the fact that my methodology will be a critical auto-ethnography, this last concern is not completely mitigated since the context for my study will by necessity be within the context of a space which has historically positioned me as the teacher above all others who regularly attend my space.

Anderson (1989) notes that historically, the “most serious methodological challenge has been the ‘validity issue’” (p. 252), namely the ongoing interpretation of qualitative research as less valid than quantitative. Accusations of mere story telling have abounded, leaving critical ethnographers in a “double bind … often viewed with skepticism not only by the educational research establishment, but also by fellow ethnographers who have taken care to build procedures for ‘objectivity’ into their work” (p. 253). Stinnett (2012) notes that more recently, “postmodernist challenges to the possibility of distanced, objective observation nearly dismantled traditional ethnography as a research method” (p. 129). Again, these concerns should be relatively mitigated by the fact that my research will be auto-ethnographic in nature; however, they are still concerns with which I needed to be familiar as a researcher.
Assumptions

Although my approach to the research was a qualitative one, my natural inclinations move toward the quantitative. Even the organization of my thesis is a testimony to the positivistic leanings I have had to fight from day one of this process – despite the ability to openly flaunt the “typical” form of a thesis in order to share my findings, the little voice in the back of my mind which takes comfort and pride in order and strict abidance to “the rules” kept saying, “No, we cannot possibly do that.” Due to these inclinations, I needed to be conscious of this tension, particularly as I went through the process of data analysis, in order to attempt to if not minimize then at least acknowledge my inherent biases, namely for quantitative research, from derailing my research.

It must additionally be acknowledged that my research follows from my personal understandings of privilege, oppression, and pedagogy, and my personal biases. While these certainly form the entire basis of a critical auto-ethnography, I believe they must also be acknowledged as characteristics of my research given that they represent my perspectives, understandings, and interpretations of these theories and practices.

Summary

In this chapter, I have addressed both my purpose and motivation for this study as well as my objectives as pertaining to my research question. It was my intention as a researcher to provide context regarding myself as a teacher as well as the school in which I teach, both within the community surrounding it as well as the larger community of my school division. I have attempted to acknowledge my assumptions and the potential biases associated with those as pertaining to my objectives and the theoretical
perspective with which I will approach my research. The purpose of these acknowledgements was to remain true to the critical auto-ethnographic form, as much as that form can be truly defined, as well as to provide greater context for who I am as a researcher.

In chapter 2, I will address the terminology critical to my approach and philosophical position as a researcher, and will seek to further clarify my position as a teacher who seeks to challenge her own White privilege and understandings of critical pedagogy and anti-oppressive education.
Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

My research question, “How do I as a White Settler female educator in Saskatchewan maintain and sustain resiliency in my practice as a critical educator, and what can I learn from these experiences in order to ensure lasting practice for myself?” is grounded in several main ideas and concepts. In this chapter, I will discuss my review of the literature concerning critical pedagogy and culturally-relevant education, the socio-cultural view of identity, the importance of resiliency in the classroom, and some of the possible reasons for student resistance to anti-oppressive educational practices and texts.

Critical pedagogy is multi-faceted, so a thorough examination of literature pertaining to it as well as its effects on students and classrooms was necessary as a starting point for my research. Along similar lines, I knew I required a deep understanding of the subject of anti-oppressive education since my practice drew upon both. Additionally, given that culturally-based (or culturally-relevant) teaching is an important facet of anti-oppressive education (Kumashiro, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1995), I decided it was equally important to expand my understanding of the theories and practices involved in such a topic.

Ladson-Billings (1995) notes the interchangeability of the labels including “culturally appropriate … culturally congruent … culturally responsive … [and] culturally compatible” (p. 129) education. Demmert (2005, 2011) makes reference to what he calls “culturally-based” education. In all cases, this refers to an attempt to correct the “problem of discontinuity between what students experience at home and what they experience at school in the speech and language interactions of teachers and students” (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 129) since “these factors must be accounted for in reaching a fair assessment of a student’s academic abilities and cognitive development” (Demmert,
2005, p. 17), particularly since “[i]ssues of culture, language, cognition, community and socialization are central to learning” (Demmert, 2011, p. 1).

Within this chapter, I also address research related to reasons why students (and teachers) may be resistant to critical pedagogy and anti-oppressive education, as well as factors related to resiliency and motivation for teachers.

**Critical Pedagogy**

At the heart of it, critical pedagogy involves “attempts to understand how power works through the production, distribution, and consumption of knowledge within particular institutional contexts and seeks to constitute students as particular subjects and social agents” (Giroux, 2006, p. 31) in the hope of creating the conditions necessary for students to develop agency rather than continue to be vessels for others’ ideas (Freire, 1998, 2005; Giroux, 2006). It seeks to do much more than simply “create ‘communities of learners’ in classrooms, to bridge the gap between student culture and the culture of the school, to engage in cross-cultural understandings, [and] integrate multicultural content and teaching across the curriculum” (McLaren, Martin, Farahmandpur, & Jaramillo, 2004, p. 139). Instead, its focus is on inspiring true societal change through the process of encouraging analysis and critique of school processes often thought better left unquestioned. Given that the process of leaving such things unquestioned reproduces inequity while maintaining the status quo, critical pedagogy is a pivotal practice when seeking change.

While the goals of critical pedagogy are paramount, it must be acknowledged that there can be difficulties in attaining them which stretch beyond simple follow-through on the part of the practitioner. By this, I refer to several main issues. First, within any
dialogue, there is an imperfect understanding on the part of all those involved of what is truly involved in the dialogue. This includes subjects extending from the individuals’ understandings of the words themselves to the cultural significance to the subjects discussed. Bartlett (2005) notes that Freire “recommended that literacy teachers conduct ethnographic research in [their] students’ community, document their linguistic universe, draw ‘generative themes’ and key words from that local culture, and engage in a dialogue process with students to elaborate a social analysis” (p. 347) in order to be successful at teaching those students how to read. Freire’s suggestion reflects the call for culturally-relevant education for students, as well as the need to teach students to critique and analyze all texts they are asked to engage with. Accordingly, it is also important to find a way to authentically incorporate local and cultural knowledge into the classroom (Bartlett, 2005) and ensure that dominant discourses are interrupted and challenged within the space as well as within the educational exchanges. Lastly, there is a need to recognize that unless there is a transformed relationship between teachers and students, in which both the teacher and students are seen as possessing valuable knowledge (Bartlett, 2005), nothing can truly change within the classroom, and efforts to address subjects of privilege could be interpreted as only a lesson and not as an area which each student needs to analyze within his or her own life. According to Demmert (2005, 2011) and Bishop and Berryman (2009, 2010), these conditions need to be strived for in order for true success to occur, not only for those of the dominant culture, but for those students who have traditionally been marginalized and/or historically have not experienced success in school. While it is undeniably the job of the educator to create the necessary conditions for student to “begin to understand themselves as both a product
and producer of meaning” (McLaren & Hammer, 1989, p. 31), this can only be accomplished when we acknowledge that critical pedagogy “teaches [students] to become critically conscious of their own values and responsibilities in society” (Bell Soares & Wood, 2010, p. 487) and that this is important specifically because it “allows students to bring their own lived experiences into discussions, offering them opportunities for participation, engagement in higher levels of reading and discussion, and to understand the power of language” (Bell Soares & Wood, 2010, p. 487). This type of authenticity is marvelous for its ability to enable students to connect their lived worlds with their studies; however, it does potentially make for some unpredictable and lengthy lessons, two possible reasons that teachers may prefer to avoid it.

As mentioned earlier, the practice of critical pedagogy in my classroom, by necessity, required what Demmert (2005, 2011) termed “culturally-based education.” According to Demmert (2005), historically, a deficiency-model approach has been taken when looking at marginalized students in particular; therefore, attempts needed to be made to provide authentic inclusion of culturally-based education. I decided that this would be an important ideas as part of my attempt to create the necessary conditions for providing all of my students with agency and the self-confidence required to provide examples of their own knowledge and understanding within my classroom. These practices are intended to ensure legitimacy within the practice and experience of my teaching, as well as to provide opportunities for explicit instruction related to critical social justice. It has been my experience that students, regardless of their ethnicity, race, or other source of identity do not question why a particular text must be “read,” unless said text is related to a group which is not White. This has historically resulted in the
need to overcome objections before such texts can even be introduced, let alone be engaged with in a meaningful way. As Schick and St. Denis (2005) note, “[i]n spite of many fine efforts to make schooling more inclusive, public education largely remains reflective of White, Western, or Eurocentric interests” (p. 298). The subject of students’ resistance to texts and educational practices which challenge these dominant discourses is further addressed later within this chapter.

The Importance of Resiliency in the Classroom

Bobek (2002) observes that “[a]dverse situations serve as catalysts for the creation of resilience” (p. 202). Individuals who are not teachers and who have little desire to be such may (incorrectly) suggest that for a teacher every day presents yet another adverse situation. Bobek (2002) also observes that “[a] teacher’s resilience is enhanced when he [or she] is capable of assessing adverse situations, recognizing options for coping, and arriving at appropriate resolutions (p. 202). Coupled with the necessary resources for developing resiliency and the six protective factors defined by Henderson and Milstein (2003) which have been found to contribute to the development of resiliency, namely “purpose and expectations, … nurture and support, … positive connections, … meaningful participation, … life guiding skills, and … clear and consistent boundaries” (Taylor, 2013, p. 2), teachers can be better prepared to deal with the variety of situations which may occur, all in a day in the life of.

Taylor (2013) identified eight further “themes” which arose in her study of resiliency, including but not limited to “flexible locus of control” (p. 12), “optimistic bias” (p. 13), belief in personal autonomy, commitment to the profession and students, and the enjoyment of change. Each of these themes and factors should be considered
within the context of my research in order to ascertain their perceived importance and effect. Of note, and unlike my experience while employed with a bank, almost all of these factors and themes represent a form of intrinsic motivation. If, as Ryan and Deci (2000) argue, “[o]rientation of motivation concerns the underlying attitudes and goals that give rise to action – that is … concern[ing] the why of actions” (p. 54) then it will be important to ascertain the specific motivations at the heart of my own commitment to critical education so I can ensure that I maintain the practice over the course of my career. It will also be important to know what motivates my students to desire to make changes since the sociocultural approach to motivation suggests that “knowledge ultimately resides in the context of its use, in the practice of ‘knowledge communities,’ in which case, learning involves meaningful participation in the practices that characterize a community” (Hickey & Zuiker, 2005, p. 278), regardless of whether it is a school community, or one outside the educational setting. If, as Vygotsky (2012) suggests, “the primary function of speech … is communication, social contact” (p. 36) and a “‘knowledgeable’ individual participates successfully in culturally defined rituals and the use of socially defined tools … [thus] represent[ing] … the regularities of successful activity” (Hickey & Zuiker, 2005, p. 279) then it becomes all the more important, through critical education, to change our students’ perceptions of what an appropriate sociocultural ritual looks like and what they are willing to accept. If we accept that “learning is the increasingly regular and successful participation in practices in which that knowledge resides” (Vygotsky, 1978, as quoted in Hickey & Zuiker, 2005, p. 280) and that “through this participation, individuals strengthen their ability to participate more successfully” (Hickey & Zuiker, 2005, p. 280), then as critical educators
we must stay motivated to change what our students accept as knowledge so that their participation is within activities which promote critical social justice and self-reflection.

Inasmuch as the use of social tools and rituals can affirm one’s successful adoption into a social group, the use of these social tools and rituals can also act as part of the process for creating the social change one wishes to see. Hickey (2003) observes that “Vygotsky argued that any participation in the use of these tools necessarily changes those tools” (Hickey, 2003, p. 408), and as critical educators we have an opportunity to use some of our influence to affect the manner in which this happens. According to Vygotsky (2012), “a concept is more than the sum of certain associative bonds formed by memory, more than a mere mental habit; it is a complex and genuine act of thought that cannot be taught by drilling” (p. 158), so it is important for students to see examples of critical social justice within their classrooms and from their teachers if they are actually to be able to consider adopting the changed social rituals and tools as their own.

Within the larger context of teaching, resiliency is taken as a means of predicting which teachers are likely to have a long career in the field of education versus those who are likely to leave the field quickly. In the context of my research, the concept of resiliency was applied specifically to the practice of critical education, reflecting a desire to ascertain why some teachers manage to remain committed to such goals and regularly implement – both intentionally and during teachable moments – pedagogy which can assist in teaching students to critique and analyze existing power structures and the effects of those power structures. This information was valuable since it offered insights into reasons why and methods for how teachers can experience prolonged motivation in implementing critical pedagogy in their classrooms. Since critical pedagogy requires
explicit education in critical thinking, students and schools who practice these skills create individuals better equipped for higher order thinking.

Within the context of my research, this concept refers specifically to resiliency in the practice of critical education by White Settler teachers. I acknowledge the privilege associated with this sort of resiliency, since it is a choice for the educator as to whether or not she wishes to engage with critical education and critical social justice, unlike educators of visible minority status, for whom the engagement in critical social justice is a necessity rather than a choice. The reason for this specific focus has everything to do with my own status as an educator who sits in a position of privilege based only on the merits attributed to the colour of my skin, carrying with that all the “social and institutional status and identity imbued with legal, political, economic, and social rights and privileges that are denied to others” (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012, p. 99), and my desire to find the correct blend of circumstances and motivation to ensure that I spend my career as an educator helping my students to learn to effectively question privilege – whether they come from a place of it or do not. Sterzuk (2008) notes that “[t]he roots of Saskatchewan’s power imbalance date back to first contact between European settlers and Indigenous peoples” and “[a]ny attempts to justify Saskatchewan Whites’ dominance through arguments of a strong immigrant work ethic is, in fact, an attempt to erase the past one hundred and fifty years of colonialism” (pp. 10-11). It has been my experience that these are ideas and truths which White society within Saskatchewan actively attempt to forget or ignore. As a White educator whose privileged place in society allows her a choice as to whether she will daily choose to engage with challenging the dominant discourse, it was deemed necessary and important that I find
the source of my motivation to avoid the lulling effects of my privilege and continue to engage in what are often very difficult discussions and conversations. Given that “motivation concerns the direction and magnitude of human behavior, or more specifically (i) the choice of a particular action, (ii) he persistence with it, and (iii) the effort expended on it” (Dörnyei and Skehan, 2003, p. 614, as quoted in Fahim & Janpour, 2012, p. 76), it is important for me to realize and regularly implement those activities which act as motivations for me within my practice of critical and anti-oppressive education so that I do not simply re-center Whiteness, a process which recognizes that difference exists but ultimately permits Whiteness to remain unchallenged, but actually interrogate my Whiteness in an attempt to identify, address, and work around my (racist) assumptions of difference (Grimes, 2002).

Of the two types of motivation, intrinsic and extrinsic, it was most important that I find and reflect upon my sources of intrinsic motivation. This was particularly true since “intrinsic motivation energizes and sustains activities through the spontaneous satisfactions inherent in effective volitional action” (Deci et al, 1999, p. 658, as quoted in Fahim & Janpour, 2012, p. 76).

The socio-cultural approach is also important within the discussion of motivation and expectations of performance. Vygotsky’s socio-cultural theory of a zone of proximal development helps to explain that “movement through the ZPD is only accomplished with the direct help of more capable others (such as teachers and parents) [and] [t]his overlooks the assumption that physical tools such as books and computers also provide assistance that can define ZPDs. This is because socially constructed knowledge is represented in book, lab materials, computers, and other physical artifacts” (Hickey,
In this view, teachers provide the initial motivation so students will seek out their own resources to further their motivation and development. Teachers themselves, too, benefit from this as they find inspiration to continue their development as one who participates in critical reflection and critical social justice.

**Culturally-based Education**

I believed that it was of critical concern for my research that I needed to see and treat my students as individuals possessing agency, individual identities, and knowledge in their own right. As will be discussed in more detail within Chapter 4, this is something which I am still attempting to improve upon. Given that the practice of critical education requires this outlook and my intended subject of study involves resiliency in the very practice of critical education, it seemed virtually impossible to suggest that the conditions required for critical education could be replicated in the long-run without this element; however, within a class of at least twenty-five students which is diverse not just culturally but socio-economically, as well as within the various levels of preparedness that each student possesses for being at school, it is a far simpler thing to say than it is to do.

Demmert (2005) was instrumental in my endeavours to find focus for my practice, as I attempted to analyze and adapt for curricular outcomes which do not take into account the “extenuating circumstances” which would hinder some of our students from attaining outcomes “that may have been developed for a select group of students” (p. 16). I created my daily lesson and unit plan with the knowledge that the curriculum, as it presently exists, privileges students who subscribe and assimilate to the dominant discourse (Bishop & Berryman, 2009; Cartledge & Kourea, 2008; Schick & St. Denis,
It does this by assuming particular ways of knowing, of learning, and of thinking, and as much as it wants to be inclusive, it is a reflection of the dominant discourses which are part of the various levels of authority which shape it – provincially, divisionally, and administratively. By no means do I dare suggest that because I have read on the subject and can see the validity of the ideas expressed by Demmert and others on this subject that I could go forth and change the world, one grade 9 ELA class at a time. Rather, this research offered me ideas on how I could improve my praxis as a critical educator and reminded me that I needed to “[s]trive for intellectual humility” (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012, p. 167) and remember that there is so much more to education than writing a perfectly formed essay.

As part of the process of culturally-based critical education, I decided it would further be my goal to help students identify the ways in which we presently “other” individuals in hopes of creating conditions for students to recognize this thought pattern in themselves in the future for the further hope of stopping it on an individual level entirely. I based this on the ideas of Botelho, Lewis-Bernstein Young & Nappi (2014); Cartledge & Kourea (2008); and, as previously mentioned, Demmert (2005, 2011). Botelho, Lewis-Bernstein Young & Nappi (2014) advocated for not only using multiple perspectives within the classroom, in the form of texts, as stories, but as ways of revisiting historical periods and events. They note that teachers must consider not only what to read, but specifically “who is represented, underrepresented, misrepresented, and invisible in the text” (Botelho, Lewis-Bernstein Young, & Nappi, 2014, p. 42); however, they note that the inclusion of such texts is not a quick fix to achieve the goal of “taking up the complexities of cultural experiences and power relations” (Botelho,
Lewis-Bernstein Young, & Nappi, 2014, p. 43), so teachers must still engage in critical discussion with the students rather than attempt to allow the text to do all the work.

**Student Resistance to Anti-Oppressive Educational Practices and Texts**

Students’ unwillingness to consider the possibility of their privilege, or even lack thereof in some few cases, is a possibility which needed to be considered throughout my research period, since the likelihood of objections of both subtle and overt natures had to be anticipated. In the case of minority students unwillingness to conceive of their own lack of privilege, it can stem from the possibility that they have “internalized racism to the extent that they may, at times, deny that racism shapes their lives on a daily basis” (Schick & St. Denis, 2005). Some of the objections on the part of the privileged students could stem from a “‘willful ignorance’” (Dei, Karumanchery, & Karumanchery-Luik, 2004, as quoted by Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012, p. 73). This is described as denial of information about the minority group on the part of the dominant group, intended to suggest a form of innocence and therefore a lack of malevolence as the dominant group refuses to consider alternative positions. This sense of, or perhaps desire for innocence stems from the ability as a White person to “‘be unmarked or unnamed [and to] simply embody the norm and not to have actively produced and sustained it. To be the norm, yet to have the norm unnamed, is to be innocent of the domination of others’” (Fellows & Razack, 1998, p. 341, as quoted in Schick & St. Denis, 2005, p. 308) which allows the dominant group the ability to justify their position through the idea that they themselves have done nothing specific to attain their privilege. Sensoy and DiAngelo (2012) state that denial of this privilege can manifest in many ways, including as a requirement for more information to prove the claims of the minority group, an insistence on debating
issues for which they have no experience or expertise, using nonexamples or referencing only exceptions to the lived reality of the majority of the minority group (e.g., Obama as president must mean racism no longer exists), or defensiveness, amongst others (p. 73). These discussions can be challenging because “[f]or white teachers and their students, examining one’s racial positioning is a challenge to one’s sense of self within a multi-racial Canada” (Schick & St. Denis, 2005, p. 308).

**Socio-cultural view of Identity**

The socio-cultural view on identity is relevant within my research, both from my perspective as a teacher and researcher as well as from the perspective of my students as learners, particularly since there are numerous overlaps between the two within the socio-cultural frame. Hickey (2003) states that “[s]ociocultural views characterize identity as a function of our practices, of our lived experiences of participation in specific communities (and therefore our competencies) rather than our beliefs or values” and that “if identity is negotiated with the social context, it can also reside there” (Hickey, 2003, p. 412). Schools cannot help but be very social communities, so these ideas have direct application within them. Socio-cultural theorists believe that “identity is not something that an individual turns on and off, or something that social interaction transmits to the individual. Rather, identity resides in the process of constant reconciliation, as multiple individuals work to reconcile their participation in different, competing communities of practice” (Hickey, 2003, p. 413) and that the individual’s “identity is negotiated as participants [in the environment] reconcile membership in competing communities” (Hickey, 2003, p. 413). The effect of this within the setting of school is a competing dichotomy between the individual’s public and
private identities, and even between the identities which exist when interacting with different social groups. This applies not only for the students but for the teachers as well, and the result can be quite powerful as “a variety of conflicting contingencies in the environment reward or punish participation and nonparticipation in the different practices” (Hickey, 2003, p. 413).

A socio-cultural approach to identity is also important because of its ability to help me consider the issues associated with students who often are those who counter the dominant discourses. This can be seen within the analysis of Wenger (1998) and his views on peripheral and marginal nonparticipation. According to him, “[p]eripheral nonparticipation is enabling because it conveys both opportunity and expectation for fuller participation [whereas] marginal nonparticipation is associated with an outbound trajectory relative to the particular community of practice” (Wenger, 1998, as quoted in Hickey, 2003, pp. 413-414). This means that, for marginalized students in particular, “[b]y the time [these] students are labeled ‘at-risk,’ their mutually constituted trajectory may be so misaligned with the knowledge practices of formal schooling that it is [virtually] impossible for most individuals to redirect it” (Hickey, 2003, p. 414). Nonparticipation, in this way, can mean that the expectations of behaviour – both bad and good – are determined by the student’s social group and any attempts to counter these expectations can actually result in “double marginalization” because “membership in one community by definition implies marginalization in the other, [so] crossing boundaries becomes exceedingly difficult” (Hickey, 2003, p. 414). The same could be hypothesized for teachers. Those who either do or do not identify as anti-oppressive and
or critical educators would be hard-pressed to find any semblence of legitimacy with their peers in the opposite camp.

**Summary**

In this chapter, I discussed my review of the literature concerning critical pedagogy and culturally-relevant education, the socio-cultural view of identity, the importance of resiliency in the classroom, and some of the possible reasons for student resistance to anti-oppressive educational practices and texts. These definitions were instrumental in the development of my research and data analysis, and they helped to inform my practices as a teacher as well.

In the next chapter, I will discuss my methodology for the study as well as my processes for constructing and analyzing my data.
Chapter 3: Methodology

I approached this research with a critical lens and a socio-cultural perspective, with the intention of “challenging [my own] regim[e] that limit[s] choices, constrain[s] resources and marginalize[s] identities” in order to address the “construction of knowledge that privileges the perspectives of those who have been subjugated” (Dutta, 2014, p. 92). Narrative and critical theories came to coexist peaceably within my research. This occurred despite as well as due to the fact that critical theory is focussed on emancipatory objectives while narrative, often, works toward interpretation or understanding because of the nature of my research itself: addressing the desire to analyze and critique own practices while identifying the motivators which will ensure continuing commitment to critical and anti-oppressive education. In order to identify the source of my motivation for practicing critical education and critical social justice, I believed it necessary to also identify my unanalyzed benefits and assumptions stemming from White privilege, so critical auto-ethnography was an ideal fit for my research. Auto-ethnography was chosen over other, similar research methodologies, such as self-study, because while self-study has a twin expectation that the researcher will improve her own practice based on the results of the research, auto-ethnography does not require this. Since I believe that I have already changed my practice and my beliefs as a result of my experiences with the study of anti-oppressive education and my goal was to analyze why this happened and how I can ensure resiliency for continued growth, the analysis of my practice in the form of an auto-ethnography was the best fit.
Critical Auto-Ethnography

Originally, my intention was to complete a critical ethnographic study of other teachers committed to critical education in order to analyze the motivations which have contributed to their resiliency of practice, but the lack of research on this specific topic led me to believe it would be equally important to turn my gaze inward as it would be to look outward since the texts written about teacher burnout do not address the specific issue of critical and anti-oppressive education, and the texts about the challenges of teaching critically do not explicitly address the subject of resiliency of that practice. I think it is important to acknowledge that this study is geared specifically toward the practices of White Settler teachers in my context, since it is only for White Settler teachers that the decision of whether or not to engage with critical social justice and whether or not to engage with and challenge dominant discourses is a choice.

Naturally, I looked to a number of sources in order to develop my understanding of the methodology. Dutta (2014) noted that one of the underpinnings of the philosophical approach to ethnography is the goal of “produc[ing] as accurate an account of … reality as possible” (p. 91). Since “people display their culture … through external behaviors … in specific social contexts” (Neuman, 2011, p. 423), but it is from our own interpretations of these behaviours that we determine the meaning of them, I believe it is pivotal that we analyze and critique our own interpretations as much as we attempt to analyze the actions of our source. The critical approach pushes the ethnographic approach further, noting that the true goal of “[c]ritical ethnographic research … involves disrupting the status quo and challenging those institutions and regimes that limit choices, constrain resources and marginalize identities” with the ultimate goal
being “to offset colonial models of ethnographic research, striving towards greater civic engagement, advocacy, activism, and collaboration” (Dutta, 2014, p. 92). It attempts to ensure that there is discussion of both the individual and the effect of structures such as class, patriarchy, racism, and sexuality upon the individual. Unlike conventional ethnography, there are no “attempts to view society with objective, scientific detachment [which] transform[s] disparate acts into a set of universal, homogeneous abstractions” (Quantz & O’Connor, 1988, p. 95) since critical ethnography acknowledges that there is no way for the researcher to avoid bringing in his or her own prejudices and biases and must therefore confront these things as part of the research interpretations. Quantz (1992) observes that

> critical ethnography is recognized as having conscious political intentions that are oriented toward emancipatory and democratic goals. What is key to this approach is that for ethnography to be considered ‘critical’ it should participate in a larger ‘critical’ dialogue rather than follow any particular set of methods or research techniques (p. 448)

and that “the contribution of critical ethnography to this dialogue lies principally in its ability to make concrete the particular manifestations of marginalized cultures located in a broader sociopolitical framework” (p. 462). As educators, we need to participate in this critical analysis since Fine’s (1987) observations about the forced silencing of black youth ring equally true today in Canada for students who are not part of the dominant culture and who dare to challenge the status quo (see also Schick & St. Denis, 2005; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012; Sterzuk, 2008).

Largely a “convergence of … trends in epistemology and social theory” (Anderson, 1989, p. 250) and heavily influenced by philosophies such as “phenomenology, structuralism, semiotics, hermeneutics, and linguistics” (Anderson,
1989, p. 250), when it was introduced, ethnography allowed researchers to view their participants as social actors (Anderson, 1989). Within this methodology, the ethnographer “bears witness to the voices and stories of people rendered marginal through a mix of discourse-practices” (Pignatelli, 1998, p. 404). As a critical methodology, it not only encourages the participants to share their voice and stories, but it ensures that questions can be asked about why these voices have historically been silenced or ignored, hence the emancipatory agenda of my research. These ideas were invaluable in my approach to analyzing my data since, as a White Settler female, I have experienced many privileges which a number of my students and co-workers have never received, so it required a constant refocusing on my part in order to attempt to ensure that I did not interpret something as a “given” which is only such for those fortunate enough to have the benefit of my skin colour (Bishop & Berryman, 2010; Schick & St. Denis, 2005; Sterzuk, 2008). The acknowledgement of these political, cultural, and social factors within the foreground of my research is one of the unique traits of critical (auto-)ethnography (Stinnett, 2012) as a means of providing cultural context for the perspective of the research. Critics of this research form “fou[s] on the persistent difficulties of ethical representation in ethnographic projects that pursue the best of intentions but into which often insidiously creep the problems of narcissism, paternalism, and the reinscription of colonizing techniques” (Stinnett, 2012, p. 130). To address this concern, I focused on practicing critical self-reflection as a researcher in order to analyze my own actions within the context of my professed adherence to critical and anti-oppressive education.
Context

Given that my methodological approach was a critical auto-ethnography, the participant in the study was me, a secondary language and literacy teacher. As previously mentioned, during the period of my research I taught three classes of English Language Arts 9 and a split class of Core French 20 / 30 each day. My teaching assignment gave me a variety of opportunities to gather data on my responses and interactions, regardless of the subject matter, since opportunities to practice critical social justice as often arise from teachable moments as they do from planned lessons. The school in which I teach is very diverse both socio-economically and culturally, and it provided a contextual setting in which I was challenged and (hopefully) was able to challenge stereotypical White Settler, middle-class ideas on schooling, society, and the education process. These circumstances were ideal based on my research goals since, particularly within the socio-cultural view, language is often seen as a means of constructing the world in which we live, as well as the identities that we embody.

Methods

As is typical of the research form, auto-ethnography, the subject within my study was, of course, me as a (learning and practicing) teacher, so I decided that one of the starting points for my research was to review and analyze my own words as a pre-service student within the Faculty of Education. To accomplish this, I completed a thematic narrative analysis of my own words and ideas as communicated through my pre-service class assignments. The essays, projects, and presentations I had written as an undergraduate were analyzed in order to create a list of themes (Boyatzis, 1998) by starting with a theory-driven approach, focused on the assumption that I attempt to
practice critical and anti-oppressive education which includes a focus on culturally-relevant texts and am an educator who is committed to critical social justice. Fortunately, I have a thorough archive of my undergraduate assignments, each of which I examined in my data collection process. As a Social Sciences and English major, quite predictably I completed myriad assignments directly related to topics and themes complimentary to anti-oppressive education and applicable to my current teaching assignment. Before completing a critical reading of my pre-service assignments, I made a list of the qualities related to each of the categories noted within chapter 2, intending to use this list as a map to direct part of my thematic analysis.

At the same time that I engaged in the analysis of my previous ideas and work, I kept a journal of my daily practice. As discussed in the introductory chapter when I articulated the list of data sources, my resulting journal was comprised of in excess of seventy complete entries. Included within this text were my intentions and goals with each of my lessons as they related to critical and anti-oppressive education, the actual results related to each of these once the lessons were completed, and the unplanned-for teachable moments which naturally arose during the lesson or during unstructured time periods such as before class had begun or over the lunch hour. Since critical auto-ethnography is so often about analyzing why we do things “in a particular way, and whether or not [we] could have done any better” (Quicke, 2010, p. 239), I deemed it important to record as many of these passing thoughts as possible in order to be able to later provide a more detailed account of my thoughts, practices, and beliefs. Initially, I attempted to record my thoughts by using the voice recorder application on my phone; however, because the very students with whom I had engaged and wished to record an
accounting of were still sharing the same space with me and would continue to do so for some time, I deemed it impractical to continue the practice and instead moved to a journal of the same thoughts and ideas completed as soon after each incident as possible.

While recording these incidents and conversations, I was conscious of a desire to document them as accurately as possible with the idea of attempting to minimize my influence on their representation; however, as part of my analysis I attempted to remain very conscious of the idea that these very thoughts can be part of the privilege of my position. Interpretations of tone, phrasing, and the “end results” of any conversation that I engaged in are necessarily informed by my position and personal history (Adkins & Gunzenhauser, 1999; Banks & Banks, 2009; Stinnett, 2012). Given that my hope was not only to describe these interactions, but to use them as a means of finding my own motivations for resiliency in critical and anti-oppressive education in hopes of addressing the structural and cultural factors causing and replicating oppression (Adkins & Gunzenhauser, 1999), acknowledging these elements was paramount.

**Constructing the Text(s)**

Multiple data sets were used to construct the research text, with particular emphasis on my pre-service assignments. (For reference, please see Figure 1.) I transferred into the Faculty of Education from the Faculty of Arts (English) in May, 2007, so pre-service assignments written prior to this date were excluded from my data set when I was considering the parameters of my text. Initially, these assignments were reviewed chronologically by date since I was working under an assumption that, given that my revelatory moment related to the fact that I am racist occurred during a class taken in the Fall semester of 2008, assignments written prior to that semester would
demonstrate a different level of commitment to critical and anti-oppressive education than those written afterward. During this initial analysis, assignments were thematically coded based on subject matter as related to the topics noted within chapter 2, namely critical pedagogy, anti-oppressive education, culturally-based education, teacher identity, teacher motivation, and student resistance to anti-oppressive practices and texts. However, in order to avoid allowing my assumptions to completely colour my analysis, once I reviewed each of the assignments chronologically, I grouped them thematically in order to complete an analysis of whether discussion as related to the topics demonstrated increased personal understanding as my education continued to develop.

**Analyzing the Text(s)**

Constructing a personal narrative is interpretive in nature, so the data associated with it requires multiple explanations (Alhojailan, 2012). Thematic narrative analysis is the tool for completing an analysis of these explanations and narratives (Boyatzis, 1998). It provides “a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data. It minimally organises and describes your data set in (rich) detail. However, it also often goes further than this, and interprets various aspects of the research topic” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 6). My training in literary forms of analysis helped to inform and contributed toward my understanding of thematic analysis. Unlike narrative analysis, discourse analysis, and content analysis, thematic analysis is often not labeled as a specific analysis form while still acting as the method used. This is often the case in situations where no specific method is named at all (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis was chosen as the preferred method for my data interpretations since it is often an element of the previously named analysis methods, but thematic analysis is used “as a
way of getting close to [the] data and developing some deeper appreciation of the content [by] [r]esearchers interested in looking for broader patterns in their work” (Harvard University, 2008). As Braun & Clarke (2006) observe, “[t]hese different methods share a search for certain themes or patterns across an (entire) data set, rather than within a data item” (p. 8); however, as both (and either) an essentialist and a “realist method, which reports experiences, meanings and the reality of the participants” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 10), as well as a constructionist method which acknowledges that one cannot “treat people’s talk of experiences as a transparent window on their world” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 27), thematic analysis provided me with the opportunity to analyze and critique my thoughts and actions without being limited to a particular theoretical framework.

After assembling and coding my pre-service texts, I went through my journal entries and completed the same thematic coding process, both chronologically as well as based on my previously identified themes. It should be noted that thematic narrative analysis requires meticulous records and discipline of practice to execute this form of analysis. (For reference, please see Figure 2.) While completing this process, I attempted to keep in mind the possibility that additional themes would emerge during the analysis of the complete text. Braun & Clarke (2006) note that one of the often unanalyzed elements of thematic analysis is the (often unconscious) decision regarding what counts as a theme – namely, “what ‘size’ does a theme need to be” (p. 10). For the purposes of my research and to keep my data count manageable, after I had completed my coding, I determined that a pattern of topics needed to emerge a minimum of four times over the course of my data sets for it to be deemed an additional theme. I admit that this number
was somewhat arbitrarily selected; however, the majority of themes appeared far more
than four times throughout my data.

Once this process was complete, I analyzed the thematic data sets with a focus
specifically on my research question: “How do I as a White Settler female educator in
Saskatchewan maintain and sustain resiliency in my practice as a critical educator, and
what can I learn from these experiences in order to ensure lasting practice for myself?”
The purpose of this was to determine the specific factors which helped to develop and
sustain what can be best (and most poetically) described as my passion for critical and
anti-oppressive education. These factors are discussed within chapter 4.

Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to discuss my chosen research method, namely
critical auto-ethnography, and my reasoning for this choice over other methodologies. I
additionally discussed my chosen method, thematic analysis, for both creating my data
(text) and analyzing it.

In the next chapter, I will discuss my findings as well as the specific themes
which emerged as a result of my analysis.
Chapter 4: Findings

In seeking an answer to my research question, “How do I as a White Settler female educator in Saskatchewan maintain and sustain resiliency in my practice as a critical educator, and what can I learn from these experiences in order to ensure lasting practice for myself?”, my critical auto-ethnographic processes brought about some epiphanies which were enlightening as well as many which demonstrated how far I have yet to go in my work to be the kind of anti-oppressive educator that I desire to be. The process also demonstrated how important it is that I continue the activities which will help me on the path to attaining that goal.

My thematic narrative analysis of the data brought to light three major themes related to the topic of what can assist me in my resiliency as a practitioner of critical and anti-oppressive education: possessing a firm commitment to continuing to challenge dominant discourses, the need to seek ongoing developmental opportunities for creating, fostering, and inspiring my practice as a critical and anti-oppressive educator, and the need to take comfort in even the smallest “successes” that students have in changing their position and becoming more sensitive, if not outright committed, to the processes of critical and anti-oppressive practices themselves. These will now be discussed in greater detail; however, the theme for which I found the largest amount of data was a need for continuing my development as a critical and anti-oppressive educator. I wish to acknowledge the potential incongruity of an anti-oppressive framework being used to help a White educator. I would address that challenge in two ways: firstly, because the inclusive of critical and anti-oppressive education is optional, I must from moment to teachable moment make the decision to persist in my efforts to practice critical and anti-
oppressive education. Secondly, I teach in a milieu that at best pays lip service to the “cult” of anti-oppressive education, so the practice of this form of education requires intrinsic motivation if it is to continue.

Commitment to Challenging Dominant Discourses

One of the themes which emerged from both the analysis of my pre-service assignments and the analysis of my journal entries over the course of my research was a commitment to and perceived need for challenging dominant discourses. The topics of challenge can be seen as relating to several specific themes discussed below. Although the themes differ greatly, the consistency throughout each as related to my research question lies within the idea that despite my own perceived short-comings while dealing with, educating about, and or addressing situations related to each of these topics, there was a moment of conscious choice in which I acknowledged that I had a choice and was making an intentional decision to engage in a discussion of the topic with my students rather than simply pass it by. The reasons for why I engaged in the discussions varied somewhat, but there was always a moment in which my internal dialogue stated that yes, I needed to address the subject rather than letting it go.

Commitment to challenging the privileging of standard English.

My awareness of English dialect variations arose during my pre-service education. I first read and interacted with Sterzuk’s (2008) article, “Whose English Counts? Indigenous English in Saskatchewan Schools” in a Fall 2008 education class on teaching ELA, and I responded to it in a memoir assignment that I titled “Memoir of a Dialect Monomaniac.” Sterzuk’s article represented my first interaction with the idea of
“White Settler English,” and its study coincided with my study of Peggy McIntosh’s article on White privilege, amongst others. In her article, Sterzuk (2008) discusses the fact that “[s]chools reflect the culture and beliefs of mainstream society [and] [c]hildren who are not members of majority racial or ethnic groups routinely experience educational challenges that are not faced by those who are members of mainstream society” (p. 10) since the values dispensed by schools reflect those of the dominant culture. Due to this, “mainstream educators have traditionally relied on deficit theories to explain the academic difficulties experienced by minority children” (Sterzuk, 2008, p. 10) rather than consider the possibility that these children are properly formatting and expressing their ideas based on the structures they have been taught within their social groups. Sterzuk (2008) opened my eyes to the concept that my judgement and attempted correction of other’s grammatical forms was a reflection of my own privilege and an attempt to colonize rather than truly offer “help” (Fehr-Rose, 2008 i, p. 1), a patronizing tendency and urge that my privilege and position as a colonizer still force to me to address to this day. This misconception is rooted in “an economy of care that sometimes trades in cultural, gendered, raced, and classed assumptions about what the student needs or who s/he is” (Toshalis, 2012, p. 5). My commitment to this new perspective was discussed in a number of subsequent pre-service assignments, with comments such as “as teachers we are presented with the opportunity to change the way dialects are viewed” (Fehr-Rose, 2008 i, p. 5), or suggestions such as “[d]o a media analysis of the portrayals of people with accents as represented on … Canadian TV shows. Do they promote prejudices or promote justice to the cultural diversity of Canadians?” (Fehr-Rose, 2009, p. 3). The phrasing in these assignments suggests a commitment to the
knowledge I had gained as a result of Sterzuk’s article, and a deeper understanding of the biases faced by students whose home dialect is something other than standard English.

These ideas and my continuing commitment to them were reaffirmed within the discourse of my classroom. During the period of my research, I mentioned in two different journal entries conversations related to the subject of dialectical privileging and the validity of other dialects beyond the “standard” White Settler English variant. While I did not directly quote Sterzuk (2008) within my class discussion, I had internalized her position, and that of applied linguistics generally on the subject sufficiently to attempt to communicate to my students the idea that “no language or language variety is more developed than another; no language or language variety promotes better or more complex thinking than any other; there is no basis for the evaluative comparison of languages or language varieties” (Sterzuk, 2008, p. 13). Likely not coincidentally, these discussions with students allowed me to address assumptions on the part of the students that the speakers of the dialectical variety were demonstrating “intellectual deficits [which could] be attributed to speakers of minority varieties of language” (Sterzuk, 2008, p. 13) as a reason for why they were not speaking “proper” English.

While I did not read Sterzuk’s follow-up article, “Indigenous English and Standard Language Ideology: Toward a Postcolonial View of English in Teacher Education” (2010), during my pre-service education, my interaction with it as a graduate student helped to solidify my commitment to advocating dialectical variation. It acted as an opportunity to review what I believed that I understood about the topic and deepen my existing understandings, as well as a chance to compare these understandings to my ongoing practice within the classroom. Unless teachers use their position to challenge
biased views about language variations, students who speak a minority-variation are guaranteed to be negatively impacted. Aside from the social stigma they will have to deal with without an advocate, they will experience biases within the learning outcomes associated with curricular content, particularly when the outcomes relate to “proper” grammatical structure; they may be targeted for speech and language corrections, based on a mistaken assumption that their language variety is a reflection of a delay or disorder; and they may be targeted for remedial work, again based only on an erroneous assumption related to dialect (Riley & Ungerleider, 2008; Sterzuk, 2010). Within the class discussions that I detailed in my journal, I attempted to communicate these ideas to the entire class of students, not only the two different individuals who brought up the concern, as well as the idea that judgement of minority English variations is a form of privileging; however, that there is power associated with the ability to access both their own variation as well as the standard.

Now, I do admit to some level of pride and comfort related to my follow-through on my commitment to addressing the value of dialectical variations while in conversation with my ELA 9 classes; however, at two separate times during my research period an interaction with a grade 12 student in my Core French 30 class left me wondering whether I had failed in my commitment or if there are circumstances in which my previously banished internal “Grammar Nazi” is permitted to make a reappearance – particularly given that it seems she has not gone very far. In each of these two cases, the circumstances of the situation were thus: It was before the start of class and a grade 12 student in my Core French class, someone who is also in the grade 12 Advance Placement English class and who would therefore be participating in the AP English
final exams in May, 2015, used the dialectical variation “I seen” as part of his or her sentence. In each case, I immediately, and without conscious thought, corrected the individual by stating that the formulation should be “I saw” because “seen” is the equivalent of the “imperfect” tense in French and must be preceded by either “was” or “were.” In both cases, I noted within my journal that my justification for correcting these statements with the grade 12s but not the grade 9s related to the possibility that the grade 12s would soon be participating in the AP English final exam and needed to be very conscious of their phrasing; however, I cannot help but question this justification, particularly since the correction came so quickly and easily to me. I question whether my intentions were truly guided by an emancipatory desire to instruct these students on the power associated with a complete grasp of the rules of standard English (Delpit, 1988) given that I did not partake in a conversation about the power associated with its use in the way that I had with my grade 9s, or if it was simply a reflection of how easily I can regress to my privileged understanding of what “proper” grammar is within the English language. Critical literacy practices include examining multiple perspectives, allowing authentic voice, and “recognizing social barriers and crossing borders of separation” (Stribling, 2008, p. 34) amongst others. It is my assessment that my quick and unthinking “correction” did not fall within anything remotely related to these practices. While I remain committed to the idea that there is no one “proper” form of English, while recognizing that some variations or dialects carry more power and prestige than do others and ensuring that my classroom practice includes educating students about this idea, the fact that I did not engage in a discussion of the power associated with the different variations with my grade 12s as I did with the grade 9s suggests to me that I
have not entirely let go of my own biases on the subject, and that I have additional work to do in this matter.

**Drawing attention to the myth of meritocracy.**

I was first introduced to the idea that meritocracy is a myth, and that for many individuals – namely those who are not White, male, able-bodied, and heterosexual – the American dream is closer to a fairy tale than it ever could be a goal, while taking an educational foundations class on the subject of (critiquing) multi-cultural education, and this class forever changed my perspective on myself and my position in this world. My epiphanies were well-documented in the assignments associated with the class as I observed that “[i]t is an unfortunate reality that there is incentive for white people to ignore … inequality on the basis that any attempts to rectify it will result in our need to ‘give up the myth of meritocracy’” (Fehr-Rose, 2008, p. 3, quoting McIntosh, 1989, p. 111) since “[i]gnorance … is a luxury afforded to those of us who are white and who have ‘the authority to establish what [is] to be considered “truth” regardless of the opinions of the people of color’” (Fehr-Rose, 2009, p. 5, quoting Delpit, 2005, p. 26).

My epiphanies began with the introduction of Peggy McIntosh’s (1989) article on White privilege and culminated with the incredible insights and perspective of Zeus Leonardo’s (2004) response to the same, and while they certainly did offer me new information and ideas on subjects which I had previously believed myself to be well-versed (i.e. yes, I really do need to acknowledge that I possess racist and other oppressive ideas and that my attempts to deny such things only perpetuates the status quo), my analysis of the rest of my data demonstrates continued need for growth and development on this topic, even as I continue to attempt to illuminate the concept for my students.
In addition to touching upon the subject while still in the educational foundations course, the subject of meritocracy was addressed or discussed within several assignments which I wrote after the class. In all cases, the tone and phrasing I used is suggestive of what I can only equate to a religious convert: I had seen the light and would go forth and sin no more. If only it were that simple. My research journal makes reference to several thoughts that I had during the period of my research about a boy who is both in my homeroom as well as one of ELA 9 classes and which demonstrate that I have not fully internalized the notion that the myth of meritocracy is persistent within our society. On the other hand, the thoughts quite effectively demonstrate that I easily fall prey to the belief that “structural barriers to equality ha[ve] been removed and that [we] liv[e] in a color-blind society based on meritocracy” (Schick & St. Denis, 2003, n.p.). I suggest this based on the fact that I expressed frustrations over the boy’s consistent lack of attendance and what I note as an “unwillingness” to use class time given for completing a novel study or to submit assignments. What I fail to comment on is the possibility that this boy is Aboriginal and his family lives quite a distance from our school, over in a “core” (read: low socio-economic) neighbourhood. I do not acknowledge that there could be and, rather, are as confirmed by our school’s Aboriginal Advocate, a variety of reasons for his lack of productivity and attendance. I did not note it, but I know that my thought processes ran along the lines of the idea that other boys (read: who also self-identify as Aboriginal and who are perhaps more fully assimilated into White educational expectations) in the class also come from difficult circumstances, but they are always in class and do their best to complete the work. My thoughts reflect a selfish assessment of the ways in which this boy’s lack of attendance and work production
inconvenience me, as well as a lack of awareness over the ways that my expressions of frustration tie directly into meritocracy’s false assumption that “[p]eople are victims because they choose to be victims” (Schick & St. Denis, 2003, n.p.). My demonstrated belief that “all that is required to get ahead is hard work, talent, and effort” (Schick & St. Denis, 2003, n.p.) disturbed me as I completed my thematic analysis. At no point in my recorded observations did I stop to consider reasons why the boy may not be able to, or desire to be at school, or why he has a long history of school absences, or even why his numerous previous schools each noted a violent outburst but we have not experienced anything like that all year. Instead, all that I focused on was the idea that if he does not pass ELA 9, it will be a direct result of his lack of attendance and effort. Belief in meritocracy is sadly alive and well in my White privileged mind. Certainly, the socio-cultural assumption that “learning involves meaningful participation in the practices that characterize a community” (Hickey & Zuiker, 2005, p. 278), and a student cannot participate unless s/he attends, seems to support a position that my concern is solely about the boy’s development, but this is not from where my judgement stemmed. My judgements demonstrated my unconscious and ongoing participation in the myth of meritocracy and the oppression of already-marginalized students through participation in cultural deficit theorizing, namely the “explanation that minoritized groups do not achieve in society because they lack the appropriate cultural values” (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012, p. 59), like valuing regular school attendance and the submission of class assignments. Rather than practicing the enlightened perspective that I had laid claim to, in actuality I had to find myself guilty contributing to the propagation of the revictimization of the marginalized and oppressed (Schick & St. Denis, 2005). While
these realizations did not support the idea that I am a practitioner of critical and anti-oppressive education, my reflection on the knowledge that I still have much room to grow and develop my practice supported my research, which indicated that “[a]dverse situations serve as catalysts for the creation of resilience” (Bobek, 2002, p. 202). If this is the case, what could be more inspiring for a teacher committed to critical and anti-oppressive education than the realization of how directly her actions have supported and reproduced oppressive and marginalizing beliefs?

Within that same educational foundations assignment that I discussed my enlightenment and commitment to challenging the myth of meritocracy, I referenced a quotation by J.K. Rowling about the character “Mad-Eye” Moody by noting that he “believe[d] we need to face the world with ‘[c]onstant vigilance’” (Fehr-Rose, 2009, p. 1, quoting Rowling, 2000, p. 189). I fully admit that I need to exercise more constant vigilance within my own practice and within how I view and think about students and their individual circumstances if I am to be the anti-oppressive educator that I desire to be.

Despite the previously mentioned troubling realizations, not everything related to the subject of challenging and teaching about challenging meritocracy within my classroom was negative. During the period of my research, actual class discussions on the subject of meritocracy, and how it relates and ties in to the subject of White privilege, generally went well – as defined by a number of students who observed that they had never thought of things in that way before. There was one instance in which a boy who self-identifies as Aboriginal was quite vehement in his denial that meritocracy was a myth and that he was capable of “earning” an equal opportunity. As Schick and St. Denis
(2003) note, he preferred to believe that “success is attributed entirely to individual effort” (n.p.). Continued discussion on the subject outside of class time, and providing contextualization in the form of a discussion about recent news reports concerning the number of CEOs just named John or David outnumbering all CEOs who are female (Wheaton, 2015), eventually resulted in the boy acknowledging that both historically and presently, privilege has been given to those individuals who fall in the classification of White, male, able-bodied, and heterosexual. My research journal notes that the boy admitted he could see how this was troubling and ran counter to the idea that everyone in our society has equal access to opportunity and choice. This admission demonstrated his willingness to let go – even just a little – of his desire to sustain the comfort that the myth of meritocracy offers: the possibility that every person’s achievements are a reflection of his or her merit only rather than simply a reflection of the reality within our society that is White privilege.

These conversations tie into differing sides of my identity, as defined within socio-cultural theory. On the one hand, the conversation with the grade 9 boy in which he came to agree that not every person has equal access to the same opportunities seems to support my identity as a critical and anti-oppressive educator as it fits into the “[s]ociocultural views [which] characterize identity as a function of our practices, of our lived experiences of participation in specific communities” (Hickey, 2003, p. 412); however, my willingness to judge the other boy for his lack of attendance and assignment completion without consideration of his exact circumstances suggests to me that my inclusion within this community not complete or always warranted. It is a dichotomy which I have not fully resolved within even my own mind, but the existence
of this dichotomy suggests to me that increased humility and consideration for other’s positions will be necessary if I am to grow as an educator and a person. One recurrent realization in my research has been the constant reminder of the need for humility as I falter in my efforts to be an anti-oppressive educator. I am reminded of the need for humility while embarking in critical and anti-oppressive education. Freire (1997) notes that “[d]iscovering himself to be an oppressor may cause considerable anguish, but it does not necessarily lead to solidarity with the oppressed” (p. 30). I believe this observation demonstrates that humility is pivotal not only with viewing the missteps that I take but, likely even more-so, the moments when I believe I have had some level of success.

**Acknowledging the power and position of White privilege.**

Connected to, and arguably inextricably linked to both the subject of privileged language variations and meritocracy, the subject of addressing White privilege both formally and informally within my classroom was an ongoing focus for my ELA 9 classes in particular during the period of my research. Due to this, it is not surprising that there were several instances related to this which showed up in my journal notes; however, it is a theme of whose awareness I can also trace back to my academic and personal growth during my educational foundations course, and then on throughout the rest of my pre-service education. Further, it is a subject with which I was (and am) still grappling when it comes to my own culpability. In one of my culminating assignments for the class on educational foundations, I note that

I realize now that I needed to qualify the observation I made to my son, because it is not society which considers it inappropriate to acknowledge the colour of a person's skin; it is white middle-class society which
considers it inappropriate, most particularly when that other person does not have white skin.
(Fehr-Rose, A response to "White privilege" revisited, 2008)

When I read this statement during my research, my recorded observational response was, “No, Rae. It was not just white middle-class society, but you who considered it inappropriate because you were still being a racist. Own it and do better.” My desire to deny direct accountability and ownership of my thoughts was reflective of a continuing desire to distance myself from “the bad Whites” who are openly racist, and an ongoing reflection of the ways that I reflect the colonized identity. It was a continuing attempt to participate in “colorblind ideology [which] makes it difficult for us to address these unconscious beliefs” (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012, p. 108) and continued to demonstrate my refusal to acknowledge the possibility that “Whiteness is the default position of the human [in our society] and it is unnecessary to qualify one with the other. A white person need not describe his whiteness because it goes without saying” (Leonardo, After the glow: Race ambivalence and other educational prognoses, 2011, p. 684). Contrary to the principles of anti-racist education, which “recogniz[e] racism as embedded in all aspects of society and the socialization process; [with the idea that] no one who is born into and raised in Western culture can escape being socialized to participate in racist relations” (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012, p. 119), my attempts to deflect my role and position within my own story as it related to both the perpetualization of Whiteness and racist actions in general demonstrates that I had not entirely acknowledged the fact that I was and am part of the institutions and traditions which help to keep racism alive (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012) and that I still benefit from these structures of dominance daily. Sensoy and DiAngelo (2012) state that racism should not be defined as “something
that only some people are, but as a system that impacts everyone” (p. 124). Accordingly, no one living within Western society has a choice about whether they participate in racism since it is not something which can be avoided. Due to this, we each must do our best to challenge it.

Within my classroom during the period of my research, there were several opportunities to challenge ideas which supported White privilege. My continuing efforts to understand and pass on to others an understanding of the idea that becoming aware of one’s Whiteness and the privileges associated with it by merit only of one’s skin colour is a first step to challenging racist ideologies, but that it is even more valuable to “acknowledge[e] how one’s whiteness translates into political and social structures responsible for racial domination” (Leonardo, 2011, p. 684) resulted in a number of interesting discussions and student responses. One which stood out for me was written by a female student who considers herself to be a social activist, but who, after numerous articles, presentations, and assignments, still could not see her own involvement as a recipient of White privilege. She claimed to have never received any benefit from the colour of her skin and wished that her generation would stop getting blamed for things done by older ones. This, despite our engagement with McIntosh’s White Privilege list in November of last year and again in March, and despite two different presentations by teachers who could provide specific accounts of the way that White privilege had played a role in their or their children’s lives. Sensoy and DiAngelo (2012) note that “defensiveness signals that the ideology of individualism has been challenged” (p. 147). I would argue that not only is “[t]o point out the relevance of our group memberships … to challenge a privilege to which we often feel entitled: the privilege to see ourselves and
be seen by others as individuals, outside of social groups” (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012, p. 147), but that this is a privilege very specifically bestowed upon those who have White privilege. Within society, people of colour are not given a choice about whether or not to acknowledge their membership within that group; it is taken for granted that the acknowledgement will occur. This White student may have felt challenged and uncomfortable by the possibility that she was being treated in the same manner in which students are when they are of a visible minority, just as I have. When I first wrote about this, the focus was solely on the student, and I ignored the ways in which I have historically, and in a continuous way, have had the same thoughts. As Freire (1997) reminds us, we are “made and remade” (p. 30). Reflective practice in this matter continues to leave me confounded with what I could have done differently in order to try to assist this student with her understanding; however, her lack of acceptance of the idea did not negate for me the successful understanding that was brought to many other students on this subject, both those who self-identified as White as well as many who did not.

It should be noted that my practice of challenging White privilege within my classroom is an area that I believe requires a great amount of growth. For too long, I have allowed my practice to focus on “confess[ing] [our] privilege rather than … tak[ing] antiracist action” (Lensmire, et al., 2013, p. 411). As a result of my research I, like others, believe that “[W]hite privilege pedagogy demands confession from students [but that] confession is a dead end for antiracist thought and action” (Lensmire, et al., 2013, p. 412), so it will be necessary as part of my growth and development as a critical and anti-oppressive educator to institute within my practice and planning a more
reflective and intentionally critical and anti-oppressive focus, particularly since as a part of the dominant group, I need to acknowledge and teach that White people are not just privileged but are oppressors, and that this is “related to the positioning that benefits from oppression, rather than actions that individuals take [and that] [e]ven those oppressor groups that fight against oppression … can be considered oppressors” (Davis & Steyn, 2012). It has become my belief that it is not enough simply to acknowledge our privilege; we need to also explicitly acknowledge how that privilege oppresses.

**Challenging ideas related to gender roles and sexual identity.**

Students who have known me for any length of time know to expect to be challenged and engaged in a conversation if they make a comment which can be construed as racist, and they know to expect the same if their comments are sexist or homophobic in nature as well. This does not necessarily stop comments from being made, but it often results in other students addressing the issue on my behalf before I even have the opportunity. It is common to hear replies beginning with the phrase “Fehr-Rose doesn’t like that because…”

Rather than viewing the frequency with which I hear that phrase uttered as a source of frustration, I choose to view it as a sign of progress. I noted within my research journal that on one particular day, I heard that phrase or something similar to it no fewer than eight times. To me, this reflected eight different times that students had internalized my concerns and chose to, at least for that moment, attempt to address the belief themselves. If “identity is not something that an individual turns on and off, or something that social interaction transmits to the individual [but] [r]ather, identity resides in the process of constant reconciliation, as multiple individuals work to reconcile their
participation in different, competing communities of practice” (Hickey, 2003, p. 413), then the students’ desire to support and honour my position on the subjects of gender roles and sexual identity may in turn reflect their acknowledgement that what I have attempted to teach them is a part of that identity.

While I could find no references to or discussions of these topics within my pre-service assignments, the profusion of examples from my research journal provided me with sufficient opportunities to analyze the topic for the purposes of my research.

Seeking Ongoing Developmental Opportunities

Many have discussed the importance of teachers connecting with professional learning communities or seeking out various forms of professional development (DuFour, 1998; Hord, 1997; Lieberman, 1995), and I do not debate the importance of learning communities for fostering professional development; however, what I found most effective in focusing my efforts and assisting my ability to be self-reflective about my practice was personal and individual interaction with scholarship on the subject of anti-oppressive education. Throughout the period of my research, from the end of January, 2015, to the middle of April, 2015, I was reading additional texts on the subjects related to my research question, and I found that my ability to analyze my actions, address situations and or comments which arose in my presence, and plan for future practice was greatly enhanced by the texts with which I was interacting. The ideas in the texts spurred my own thought processes and forced me to constantly reconsider my ideas.

Initial patterns of scholarship leading me to experience moments of epiphany on my path toward becoming an educator who acknowledged her White privilege and strove
to use it for something more positive were found within the analysis of my pre-service assignments and reflections, both for my Education as well as for my Arts degrees. As previously aluded to, the introduction of the texts by authors such as McIntosh (2005), Delpit (1988), Leland & Harste (2005), Leonardo (2004), and Stanley (1999) amongst others forced me to begin to acknowledge my White privilege and the racist perceptions I held. However, much as White Settler Canadians love and identify with the “discourse of ‘Canada the Redeemer’” (Schick & St. Denis, 2005, p. 298), there is an undeniable sense within these “more enlightened” assignments of “Raeleen the Redeemer,” that person who had once held racist views but now knew better and would therefore go and sin no more. There is no acknowledgement of the subtle ways in which I still benefited from White privilege. An example of this lies in the very fact that I fully expected to be able to go out and tell people about their own White privilege (which, of course, would result in each person’s conversion to understanding) without any expectation of accusations of me operating from an agenda or demonstrating “reverse racism” (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012, p. 44). It was only because of my White privilege that such an expectation could be permitted to exist, and this situation is precisely what occurred as a precursor to the conversation with the grade 9 girl who expressed her frustration over her generation being blamed for the actions of previous generations, suggesting, of course, that racism and other forms of oppression no longer exist today. Afterward, I noted my surprise that a girl who expressed commitment to social activism would hesitate to acknowledge the ways in which she unconsciously contributed to oppression (Fehr-Rose field note dated March 18, 2015). The irony of this is twofold: I was ignoring my own continuing complicity in that moment while I kept my focus on the student’s perceived
unwillingness to accept my brilliant teaching, and I was once again allowing White privilege to hold everyone’s attention rather than assess the ways in which it was oppressing other students in the classroom and school.

It should be noted that, as discussed within the context of needing an intrinsic reason to commit to the process of critical education and critical social justice, my pre-service assignments and reflections demonstrate that unless the practitioner has experienced an epiphany about his or her own complicity in and regular benefit from White privilege which has led to a commitment to self-reflective practice, it is entirely possible to routinely interact with texts which discuss ideas related to these subjects without the practitioner internalizing the message or noting his or her abetment for the continuation of the dominant discourse. For me, change within my mental processes and daily practice only came about once I experienced my epiphany about my unwitting collusion to maintain the status quo, namely the incident of the discussion with my son, and through regular interaction with scholarship on the subjects of anti-oppressive education and White privilege. Without these interactions and regular reminders, I have illustrated that it is all too easy to cave to the siren’s call of doing the easy thing for a White Settler educator and refocusing the blame not on myself and the systemic racism of our educational institutions, but on the students who have had to deal with their exclusion from the very systems from which I benefit every day of their lives.

An example of the way that these interactions with scholarship on the subject help to refocus my practice and ability to actually act as a critical educator occurred after rereading Schick and St. Denis’ (2005) article, “Troubling National Discourses in Anti-Racist Curricular Planning” during the period of my research. Ideas from the article
forced me to reconsider my attempts to honour and “accommodate” within my lesson planning what I had actually mentally referred to as “‘cultural difference’” (p. 306). This occurred during a lesson I prepared which involved having the students participate in small talking circles in order to discuss and analyze a short story we read as a class. I had mentally congratulated myself for making this attempt to teach in a way which might connect with a small group of Aboriginal youth in two of my grade 9 English Language Arts classes who routinely did not attend and had completed few assignments, thus were all failing my class. As Schick and St. Denis (2005) point out, however, these thought patterns suggest that cultural difference is “a quality that racial minority children, especially Aboriginal children, are said to have and which is given as the reason for any lack of school success” (p. 306). Contrary to socio-cultural theory, I was not concerned with education which promoted instruction on “‘learning to learn, developing skills and strategies to continue to learn, with making learning experiences meaningful and relevant to the individual, with developing and growing [the] whole person’” (Williams and Burden (1999) as quoted in Fahim & Janpour, 2012, p. 77). There is a subtle difference between the two: the former, which had been the underlying motivation of my actions, is a result of racist judgement and a desire to place the educational failure squarely on the shoulders of my students (Schick & St. Denis, 2005) and the latter promotes making connections with the students to learn what would best serve them individually. Even my assessment of the failure of this lesson demonstrated a desire to place the blame on the students, as noted by observations which included phrasing such as, “Given the regular absenteeism of the students this lesson was intended to support, it is perhaps not unsurprising that they were unwilling to say much within even the small groups of
students who were virtually strangers to them” (Fehr-Rose field note dated February 24, 2015). My lack of consideration for the many ways in which our model of school rewards students who assimilate to the Eurocentric model of school (Sterzuk, 2008) resulted in a failure to create circumstances which would have directly benefited the very students I purported to desire to support. None of this is to suggest that I should stop making the attempt to improve my practice and offer all of my students opportunities for meaningful engagement and skill development. As Pete, Schneider & O’Reilly (2013) note, my “limitations are not excuses for inaction” (p. 106).

Evidence of my need for professional development did not only appear within my daily lesson planning and teaching. As I interpreted the data from my research, I initially believed it would be necessary, never mind possible, for me to strive for as little bias of interpretation as possible in addition to the critical approach I took to how I interpreted both my data as well as what I consider to be a demonstration of bias. I acknowledge now how naïve it was to hold the belief that I could remove my own bias was and the ways in which this belief contradicts the very precepts of constructivism and critical ethnography, which state that “power is crucially implicated in what is constructed as truth” (Dutta, 2014, p. 98, italics in original), so as the teacher (read: authority figure within the class) and researcher (read: interpreter of my own actions) it is inconceivable to believe that I could ever put aside my own bias. Additionally, the truth of the matter is that this plays directly into the same myth of Whiteness as a quality which can be set aside as if removing a hat from my head further demonstrates my need to constantly strive for improvement in both my roles as a teacher and a teacher-researcher. Certainly, that the goals of critical ethnography and critical pedagogy so closely match the goals
that I purport to have for the effect of my teaching and the climate of my classroom should mean that I did and will continue to need to closely monitor how I choose to interpret events which occur as I go through my data collection. Also certainly, despite, or possibly because of the fact that I agree with the goals of critical ethnographic research to “disrup[t] the status quo and challeng[e] those institutions and regimes that limit choices, constrain resources and marginalize identities” all while attempting to construct “knowledge that privileges the perspectives of those who have been subjugated” (Dutta, 2014, p. 92), I needed to approach my data interpretations conscientiously; however, it was stunningly easy for me to put all that aside within the “moment” of teaching and not realize the part that I was playing in reproducing dominant discourses until later, when I analyzed my notes and observations of the day. Aside from the example previously mentioned within the context of how I perpetuated dominant discourses regarding the standard English dialect, an example of this occurred during my study of a Norse folktale when, after reading the short story, I asked the students to discuss in small groups the question of what things in life should be treasured. Once the small groups seemed to have completed their discussions, I asked one person from each group to share the details with the large group. I noted that my selection of the particular spokespeople from each group was based on a desire to select someone who would thoroughly and accurately relay the details of the conversations; however, in later analysis, I found myself horrified to realize that the vast majority of individuals I selected were White despite the fact that many of the groups had at least one member who was a visible minority. Despite my professed commitment to emancipatory, critical, and anti-oppressive education, the people I allowed to have a
voice and to represent everyone else in the class were the ones who were most similar to me. These observations further affirm the need to constant and regular interaction with scholarship related to critical practice and anti-oppressive educational practices, if for no other reason than to keep myself humble when faced with precisely how far I have yet to go. It is still entirely too easy for me to slip into the “sense of normative superiority” (Schick & St. Denis, 2005, p. 308) to which White educators often fall prey.

**Viewing Student “Success” as Motivation**

In this context, “success” is a term that I use to refer to changes, both big and small, which demonstrate deeper student commitment, understanding, or even just openness toward critical reflections and or anti-oppressive topics, shown in many different ways, as discussed below.

Prior to my research, I would have looked solely for large examples of change, and would have seen small changes as only the start to a transformative process. However, I now know differently. For two students within our group of grade 9 students, success with the process of critical and anti-oppressive education came in the form of them no longer loudly and vehemently expressing their opinion that the anti-oppressive subject matter was “stupid” or “unfair.” Both of these were comments which were made by one of the students in particular, a boy who came to us at the start of the year quite proud of the idea that his family “is racist.” A loud and often well-spoken student, he demonstrated himself to be someone who other students would choose to follow, regardless of the other’s individual stances in his absence.

In my remaking, I now see the boy’s increased silence in a profoundly different way. If not an acknowledgement of agreement with what we were discussing in class,
then was at least reflective of a willingness to listen, and it became particularly noticeable in February of this year with the start of our Traditional Narratives unit in ELA 9. Earlier in the year, the boy had been very strong in his objection to our use of a Thomas King (1999) story, “Borders,” to illustrate family dynamics. He objected on the basis that he could not relate to someone living on a reserve and refusing to acknowledge citizenship with a country and suggested that someone not being able to relate to his position was also “stupid.” While I had noted fewer objections on the part of this boy to topics related to critical and anti-oppressive education since that time, his restraint became particularly apparent when he read through with no objections a traditional First Nations creation story which explained that stories were originally given to humans by a rock and several interesting observations about characterization within the story.

While this boy was not necessarily openly supporting anti-racist leanings and discussions in the class, neither was he contributing to or responding with racist comments or perspectives which the opportunity arose as he would have just several months before. I determined this to be a sign of success within our attempts to offer new perspectives to students since his willingness to be silent and not contribute to the hateful speech allowed for other, perhaps quieter voices to speak out against it with less likelihood of objection.

The successes I have seen this year and through the period of my research are not always as subtle as that. Occasionally, they come in the form of students have perspective-changing epiphanies which lead them to want to find opportunities for societal change. An example of this came in the form of a discussion and the subsequent actions that discussion inspired on the part of a different grade 9 boy after we started a
full-class study of the novel *Speak* in late March. Prior to reading the book, I advised all of the students of the mature subject matter of the novel and the fact that we learn over the course of the novel that the protagonist, Melinda, was raped before the story began. Once our initial novel-study class was finished, this boy stayed back in order to continue discussing the subject matter with me. It was he who made the eventual connection between the way that the main character is treated in the novel and the idea that we live in a rape culture which blames the victim of the rape rather than supporting him or her. While we have not completed our unit as of this date, this boy has already proclaimed that at least one of his chosen assignments will have something to do with advocating on behalf of victims of rape in hopes of changing public perceptions about who is to blame when an atrocity such as that occurs.

I was also able to find intrinsic motivation in the fact that I have a group of grade 9 girls who now each daily ask me for a piece of candy. While such a thing may seem strange inspiration, it is the fact that these requests stem as a result of a class conversation that we had about the ways in which boys are socialized to ask, if not outright take what they want, whereas girls are often taught that doing such a thing is wrong and inappropriate (Babcock, Laschever, Gelfand, & Small, 2003). The girls had heard me observe that this is problematic since one usually does not get what one does not ask for, so the girls had started to daily ask me for a treat in response. While it was a small request and a small gesture, I interpreted it as reflective of a desire to affect change where and how they can. Naturally, I give them candy every time they ask. In the absence of rewards such as these, it is the intrinsic motivators which sustain a critical and anti-oppressive educator and allow for resiliency of practice.
While I was not able to find significant references within my pre-service assignments to my position on gender roles and or sexual identity, there were many references to such within my research journal based on conversations I had with students. Two in particular stood out as significant as sources of motivation for me since they reflected growth and a changed perspective on the part of the student.

The first was a conversation with a grade 9 boy (Fehr-Rose field note dated February 4, 2015). I have never hidden from any of my students the fact that I am a feminist, but given the way that social media and the media in general have perverted that title, the reaction of many of my students to this pronouncement was appalled disgust. All except one grade 9 boy. In January of this year, in the middle of a class on a topic which was completely unrelated to this, the boy asked me what it means to be a feminist. In response, I decided to capitalize on a teachable moment for the class and drew everyone’s attention to a poster I had on my classroom door which I created based on an article by Kreitler (2012) titled “Why Men Need Feminism Too (Really, You Do!).” In the article, Kreitler (2012) states that “[e]ven though women are oppressed in many ways that men are not (let me be clear about this: in many, many, many ways), the system of traditional gender roles that we live in harms ALL people” (Kreitler, 2012, n.p., italics and capitalization in original). After a large-group discussion of this concept as well as several others, the boy declared himself to be a feminist, too.

Now, at times I can show a bit of healthy skepticism, so I was not certain how long it would last that the boy would claim that title as part of his identity, but when the subject came up again in March, this time with a slightly different group of grade 9s, including one who has a tendency toward outspoken negativity, the boy still declared
himself to be a feminist, despite challenges by the other boy and other students in the class, and he even went on to explain why he is, culminating in his restatement of the idea that every person benefits from feminism. Moments such as these help to reaffirm why it is that I take the time to have discussions such as these with students, and why I continue to try to use teachable moments to educate students, even when a positive outcome is far less than assured.

An example of when I am not certain if I am going to capitalize on a potential teachable moment occurred in March (Fehr-Rose field note dated March 18, 2015). A completely different boy than those previously mentioned made a sexist comment in the middle of class, suggesting that a female student’s unwillingness to talk to him while the class was supposed to be completing an assignment was a sign that it was “that time of the month.” This was a boy who had made many other inappropriate comments over the course of the school year, others of which will be addressed shortly, and my research journal chronicles the fact that there was a brief moment immediately after the comment in which I considered allowing the girl to continue standing up for herself, particularly since she was already demonstrating skillfulness at doing so; however, I wanted the entire class to understand precisely how inappropriate and unacceptable such a comment was. So, rather than allowing the girl to deal with it quietly, unlike how the boy had expressed the possibility, I decided that the misogyny behind his comment required the attention of and a discussion by the entire class in hopes of dissuading any of them from ever daring to suggest such a thing again. While I’m not certain that the boy who precipitated the conversation was fully convinced, subsequent comments by other students in the class suggest that more than a few others were.
As demonstrated with the previous story, on some occasions, the motivation to continue pursuing critical and anti-oppressive education cannot be found from addressing an issue with a particular student, who then realizes the error of his or her ways and changes forever. This school year, there have been several interactions with the grade 9 male student previously referred to which certainly could not be considered inspirational for those teachers looking to see demonstrable examples of growth or change in a student’s attitudes and beliefs. This is a student who already had a history over the course of the school year of voicing inappropriate and intentionally racist and sexist comments in the middle of class. One such opinion was stated during my research period and was related to our class’s study of a unit on Traditional Narratives, including but not limited to stories from a variety of First Nations groups. During the large-group reading of one story, in which a non-fiction account was given of a female warrior who came to earn the respect and admiration of her fellow warriors, the student interrupted the reading to loudly proclaim that the story was “stupid” and that “Indians wouldn’t do that [i.e. allow a woman to become a military leader] because they weren’t advanced enough. We wouldn’t even have done it.” My research journal comments indicate that my immediate desire was to silence his voice by declaring his observations inappropriately stated and poorly timed, a response which would have eliminated any possibility of engaging in meaningful conversation about his comments in hopes of bringing about an opportunity for him to consider the story and his perceptions in a new light, but I did not have the opportunity because several students jumped into the conversation to express similar ideas. One boy in the group, who notably started the school year with rather oppressive ideas of his own but who, I would like to think,
through the process of engaging with critical and anti-oppressive ideas presented to him within our classes over the course of the year, has become an advocate for women and other marginalized groups, began asking the other boy questions to help him consider his words and position. Several girls in the class added their position to the conversation and engaged in debate with the boy when he attempted to justify his stance. The overall effect was a student-led analysis of the boy’s comments, in which the other students attempted to help the boy change his viewpoint.

As I review these pages, I find myself thinking about how good Whites will find a way to note their goodness even in the face of recognizing their own complicity in social oppression. The construction of the “good White teacher” is a powerful one which I continue to address and re-address on a daily basis within my own practice and perspective on everything I do and have done.

**Summary**

In this chapter, I have addressed my findings based on my analyses of my pre-service assignments and research journal. Connections have been made between these findings and my literature review, as well as chosen methodology and the lenses through which I determined it best to analyze my research. Subjects included, but were not limited to the different dominant discourses which I specifically focused on challenging within my classroom and teaching, the need to seek developmental opportunities which are best suited to inspiring me as a teacher and researcher committed to critical and anti-oppressive education, and the ways in which student’s new understandings related to these topics can be viewed as forms of successes and act as motivation for continued practice.
In the next, and final chapter, I will discuss my final thoughts and my recommendations for future study.
Chapter 5: Discussion

The purpose of auto-ethnography is to gain insight through the intentional analysis of personal experience so as to better understand one’s experiences (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011). Within the context of my research and intended research goal of addressing the question, “How do I as a White Settler female educator in Saskatchewan maintain and sustain resiliency in my practice as a critical educator, and what can I learn from these experiences in order to ensure lasting practice for myself?” the auto-ethnographic approach served my expectations. It required me to be reflective in and of my practice and my analysis of whether that practice matched with my stated goals. The story that my research told displayed insights in the forms of both gaps and successes, and both the areas for improvement as well as the areas in which I can claim success will provide motivation for continuing growth and improvement of my praxis. Since thematic narrative analysis is grounded in the coding of a story in multiple ways in order to ascertain the common themes running throughout it, my analysis of my data displayed areas of focus, as discussed in chapter 4. While for others the motivations may differ, in the case of my study, the themes which were most dominant in the search for my sources of motivation to ensure that I found resiliency with my practice of critical and anti-oppressive education as a White settler educator were related to my need to constant reflection on my own practice and the need to pay attention to even the small ways that students have demonstrated their apparent compliance with the practices that I have encouraged. The auto-ethnographic method was pivotal to these discoveries.

Unlike other teachers, for whom “[w]ithout a commitment to anti-racist education, Aboriginal teachers, like other racial minority teachers, find themselves
isolated, marginalized, and restricted in their efforts to work as agents of change” (St. Denis, 2007), as a White teacher whether or not I engage with and promote a commitment to critical and anti-oppressive education is entirely up to me and my conscience. I have the luxury of determining moment by teachable moment whether I will remain true to my convictions or take a brief recess on the whole social justice thing and get back into it another time. Fortunately for my ability to gain a peaceful sleep at night, thus far I have remained committed to engaging in the often emotionally-charged conversations which stem from a commitment to critical and anti-oppressive education. The discovery of a number of areas where I fall short of my own standards for praxis, rather than dissuading me from my commitment, has renewed my commitment to using the insights gained through the process of my research in order to establish routines and practices which will enhance and constantly challenge me in continuing toward better teaching.

What seems clear based on my research is that continued growth and practice of my skill as a critical and anti-oppressive educator will require ongoing engagement with those facets which help to keep me focused.

One of the areas in which I have additional work to do is the continued development of my practice and understanding of the pedagogy related to linguistic bias toward “standard English.” As noted within my data analysis, I too easily fall prey to a privileged perspective on English dialects or social variations. Given that the “correction” of a dialect could represent the (un)intentional silencing of an already oppressed voice (Leland & Harste, 2005), it is extremely important that I strive to improve my understanding of the topic so I can improve my own responses and help to
offer emancipatory information which might empower those students who I previously would have silenced. Delpit (2005) notes that “[f]orcing speakers to monitor their language for rules while speaking, typically produces silence” (p. 50). If I wish to ensure that my practice is emancipatory, it will be pivotal that I also ensure that I remain focused on bettering my own reactions to displays of English dialects.

Another area which I will focus on developing growth and improvement is within my awareness and treatment of the myth of meritocracy. The results of my data analysis have demonstrated that I am far too inclined (which is to say showing any form of endorsement or agreement whatsoever) toward the support of equality over justice. As I previously observed, my practice will require increased humility and consideration for other people’s positions so I am able to grow as an educator as well as a person. I see connections between this subject and the previous subject of English dialects insofar as my treatment and understanding of what I treat as “normal,” given that as a White Settler my understanding of normal will always default to a privileged position. If I am to demonstrate any sort of growth as an educator or person, I will need to more fully adopt the critical and anti-oppressive practices to which I claim to ascribe as I endeavour to amalgamate the expectations of the curriculum and school culture with my expectations of my own pedagogy since they will not always fully synthesize with each other. A deeper understanding of the ways in which meritocracy operates and hides within our society will improve my ability to act as an advocate for those that it has historically oppressed and as a tool for emancipation as well.
Recommendations for Future Studies

The merits and effectiveness of parental and student feedback as a means of encouraging teachers’ performance growth, as compared to a more formal process such as a teacher performance development review, is an area which could be studied as an off-shoot of this research. Such research could address and be related to the question of for whom schools exist as well as the question of how each of these factors act as sources for either and or both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation for teacher behaviour in general.

Given that this study represents the motivations of a single individual engaged in critical and anti-oppressive research, what seems clear to me is the need for other individuals’ accounts. Examining narratives of others’ experiences would provide insights which, the quantitative researcher inside of me notes, could be used to look for consistencies of pattern. Given that “[m]otivation is not observed directly but rather inferred from the teachers’ behavioral indexes such as verbalizations, task choices, and goal-directed activities” (Cardelle-Elawar, Irwin, & Sanz de Acedo Lizarraga, 2007, p. 569), I believe it would be valuable to gain an understanding of the motivations of other teachers who practice critical and anti-oppressive education as well. Since the majority of my motivational factors and triggers were intrinsic, specifically relating to both “operant theory (Skinner, 1953) [which] maintained that all behaviors are motivated by rewards (i.e., by separable consequences such as food or money), [so] intrinsically motivated activities [could be] said to be ones for which the reward was in the activity itself” (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 57) and to “learning theory (Hull, 1943) [which] asserted that all behaviors are motivated by physiological drives (and their derivatives), [so]
intrinsically motivated activities [could be] said to be ones that provided satisfaction of innate psychological needs” (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 57), the study of other teacher-practitioners of critical and anti-oppressive education would provide some indication of whether this were the case for others as well.

Armed with such information, we would be able to ensure resiliency of practice of critical and anti-oppressive education for more White Settler teachers. Given that “[r]esiliency is a critical element that teachers need to meet [the] challenges [to] remain in the education profession” (Taylor, 2013, p. 1), it would be valuable to gain a better understanding of the factors which create resiliency for this particular subject since “an understanding of motivation is essential to those who lead and manage” (Addison & Brundrett, 2008, p. 79) any form of change. My own experience through this research and data analysis has been an increase in understanding of the tools and behaviours which motivate my practice as a critical and anti-oppressive educator, resulting in better resiliency in my praxis of the same. To be able to offer supports which sustain others in their practice of critical and anti-oppressive education can only result in improvements for all who are touched by the experience.

Summary

Using a critical auto-ethnographic method allowed me to gain a better understanding of myself as a critical and anti-oppressive educator. The process provided me with insights which will allow me to sustain and enhance my practice for years to come, while reaffirming that it is a practice which I desire to remain committed to keeping.
It is my hope that others may find these insights valuable and perhaps even inspiring for their own pedagogy.
Figures

Figure 1
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