

SHIFTING OUR FOCUS: TEACHER TRANSFORMATION
THROUGH ANTI-OPPRESSIVE EDUCATION

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Abstract

Shifting Our Focus: Teacher Transformation through Anti-oppressive Education

is a case study of how students experienced a justice-oriented graduate course for educators, and how their experiences had the potential to be transformative. Perspectives of fourteen participants were collected through focus groups, interviews, journals, and participant observation and were analyzed thematically using the constant comparative method. The conceptual framework for the study included both transformative learning theory and anti-oppressive education theory. Factors that foster transformative learning and three theoretical dimensions of anti-oppressive education that were deemed crucial to anti-oppressive education (Inclusive, Critical and Poststructural dimensions) guided the analysis within a transformative learning theoretical framework that examined whether participants' perspectives had changed and whether they had committed themselves to engaged activism.

The results of the case study indicated that, as well as providing opportunities for dialogue and critical reflection, the quality of instruction, authenticity of the instructor, course content and process all had a substantive impact on the transformative potential of anti-oppressive education. As well, the Inclusive, Critical, and Poststructural dimensions of anti-oppressive education served different functions within anti-oppressive education. The inclusive dimension provided a familiarity to participants but, by itself, did not lead to disorienting dilemmas that could be transformative. The critical dimension, with its emphasis on critique, led to subjective reframing that was emotional and transformative for participants new to anti-oppressive education, and led to objective reframing. The poststructural dimension supported the perspective transformation of participants by

providing a new lens through which to see inequity and a way to see their own social construction in equity in a way that was supportive. During a post-interview three months after the course ended, only one participant acknowledged completing their activism project. However, all participants new to anti-oppressive education were thinking differently and were moving towards activism. Those more experienced in anti-oppressive education, potentially because they had a perspective transformation at an earlier time, were engaged in activism.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my father who passed on his appetite for lifelong learning to me. I would also like to dedicate this dissertation to my family and friends. Thank you for your kindness, encouragement, understanding, and support throughout. This has been a long journey for all of us. To my wife Jill, in many ways this dissertation also belongs to you. I couldn't have accomplished it without your support and understanding. Thank you for encouraging my passion for learning.

Table of Contents

Abstract	i
Acknowledgements	iii
Dedication.....	iv
Table of Contents.....	v
List of Tables	x
List of Figures	xi
List of Appendices	xii
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	1
Social Justice Education	1
Purpose and Significance of Study	2
Research Questions	3
Context.....	4
Transformative Learning Theory	6
Anti-oppressive Education	7
Chapter 2: Review of the Literature	11
Transformative Learning Theory	12
Fostering Transformative Learning.....	21
Overview of Anti-oppressive Education	31
Approaches to Anti-oppressive Education	38
Poststructural Dimension of Anti-Oppressive Education	40
Critical Dimension of Anti-oppressive Education.....	50

Inclusive Dimension of Anti-oppressive Education.....	54
Connections to Transformative Learning	60
Summary.....	61
Chapter 3: Methodology.....	62
Questions.....	62
Philosophical Orientation to Research.....	63
Positioning Myself.....	66
The Case	67
Participant Selection.....	70
Data Collection.....	71
Focus Groups	73
Interviews	74
Participant-as-observer Observations.....	76
Student Reflections	77
Case Notes.....	78
Data Analysis.....	78
Bias and Assumptions.....	81
Trustworthiness.....	84
Ethical Considerations	87
Chapter 4: Findings.....	90
Research Participants.....	90
Course Content and Process.....	106
Creating safety and agency for students.....	111
Distinct Features of Course	113

Instructional Techniques.....	115
Learning Modalities	117
Activism.....	121
Opportunities for Dialogue.....	137
Reflection and transformation	144
Students' Concluding Comments About Course	145
Anti-oppressive Dimensions	150
Inclusive Dimension	151
Critical Dimension (Reflection and Critique)	160
Poststructural Dimension	182
Anti-oppressive education: a diversity of conceptualizations	192
Personal Journeys.....	195
Personal Change.....	210
Emotions, Discomfort & Crisis	223
Language.....	229
Community	232
Chapter 5: Discussion	236
What experiences and instructional aspects of the anti-oppressive education course did participants find significant in relation to their sense of transformation?	239
How did the participants understand the different anti-oppressive educational theories and practices as affecting change in themselves or others?	249
To what extent did what I have termed Inclusive Dimension, Critical Dimension, and Poststructural dimension discomfort the participants emotionally?.....	266

How did participants make sense of the social construction of identity and understand their own identities, or those around them, to have changed?...	269
Did participants enact teacher activism that would be evidence of transformation?	271
What were the personal changes as a result of participating in the course?..	276
Does anti-oppressive education have the potential to be a transformative learning experience for participants?	279
Chapter 6: Recommendations.....	287
The study in retrospect.....	287
Repositioning Myself.....	287
Personal thoughts about research and process.....	289
Reflections on the Research Questions.....	290
Reflections on the Research Methods	294
Implications for Theory	296
Implications for Practice	299
Personal support for participants	300
Course within a course	301
Extensions	303
Implications for Further Research.....	305
Longitudinal Study	306
Discourse Analysis.....	307
White Privilege as Theoretical Framework.....	308
Final Reflection	308
References	310

Appendices	330
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List of Tables

Table 1: Participants new to anti-oppressive education.....	92
Table 2: Participants with prior knowledge about anti-oppressive education	96
Table 3: Participant who provided historical context	100

List of Figures

Figure 1: The learning space.....	106
Figure 2: Course Agenda	108
Figure 3: How far will you go?.....	109
Figure 4: Course terms.....	110
Figure 5: Education that actively seeks change	183
Figure 6: How people learn their "place" in society	190
Figure 7: Socially constructing identity	353

List of Appendices

Appendix A: Invitation Letter for Participants	330
Appendix B: Consent form for Participants.....	331
Appendix C: Consent form For Faculty Instructor	333
Appendix D: University of Regina Research Ethics Certificate	335
Appendix E: Brandon University Research Ethics Certificate.....	336
Appendix F: Interview Guide	337
Appendix G: Course Syllabus	339
Appendix H: Course Outline.....	345
Appendix I: Course Themes.....	351

Chapter 1: Introduction

In the warm prairie summer of 2010 I had an opportunity to examine the experiences of students engaged in learning about anti-oppressive education in a graduate course for educators. I observed the process of anti-oppressive education in this keystone course for a Summer Institute geared toward social justice learning. There I collected perspectives, through focus groups, interviews, journals, and participant observation, of a number of participants who were in the course. *Shifting Our Focus: Teacher Transformation through Anti-oppressive Education* is an inquiry into how students experienced a justice-oriented course and how their experiences had the potential to be transformative. This dissertation is a study of teacher transformation.

Social Justice Education

Social justice education has grown significantly in recent years and is an “umbrella term encompassing a large range of practices and perspectives” (Agarwal, Epstein, Oppenheim, Oyler, and Sonu, 2010, p. 238). Those involved in teaching anti-oppressive education advance equity and social justice in ways that challenge diverse forms of oppression. Oppression may be understood to be a

social dynamic in which certain ways of being in this world--including certain ways of identifying or being identified--are normalized or privileged while other ways are disadvantaged or marginalized. Forms of oppression include racism, classism, sexism, heterosexism, anti-Semitism, ablism, colonialism, and other "isms." Anti-oppressive education aims to challenge multiple forms of oppression. (Center for Anti-oppressive Education, 2011, para. 2)

Anti-oppressive education is but one theory and practice of social justice education that is itself a broad term used to encompass many promising perspectives that seek greater equity. There are a number of “other theories, ideologies, epistemologies, and practices” that provide a similar impact in justice education (Spalding, Klecka, Lin,

Odell, and Wang, 2010, p. 191). These include, but are not limited to, “critical race theory (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995), Whiteness studies (Leonardo, 2009), ... culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2002), culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1992), and lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender (LGBT) education (Sears, 2005)” (Spalding *et al*, 2010, p. 191). Kumashiro and Ngo (2007) wrote that there is a “multiplicity of perspectives on anti-oppressive education...[in] a field that contains complex, incongruous, even conflicting perspectives. We believe that anti-oppressive education requires us to be reflexive about how any of our perspectives on teaching and learning are partial, and necessarily so” (xix). I share this viewpoint and acknowledge that I hold and express one of many interpretations of what anti-oppressive education is and could be.

Purpose and Significance of Study

The purpose of this study was to learn about the experiences of change for students in a course emphasizing anti-oppressive education. This study is of student’s experiences in a particular course and is not intended to be a study of the course itself. The significance of this study was twofold. First, and very simply, the study provided an opportunity to learn about how students experienced one form of anti-oppressive education. Part of the value of this research is that it moves social justice work forward by examining the field (Spalding *et al.*, 2010, p. 193). Second, this study provided an opportunity to understand if and how anti-oppressive education was a potentially transformative experience. It is important to understand the transformative potential of anti-oppressive education because changed beliefs, values and assumptions that lessen the effects of oppression can lead to substantive classroom and social benefits (Ball,

2006; Delpit, 2006). Cranton and Taylor (2012) encourage research that includes in-depth theoretical analysis using transformative learning theory and emerging perspectives.

In attempting to understand how anti-oppressive education might be a transformative experience, this study drew upon a modified version of Kumashiro's (2000b) approaches to anti-oppressive education. Although there have been a number of studies pertaining to transformative change within a social justice teaching context, at the time the study began I could find no studies designed around Kumashiro's (2002b) conceptualization of anti-oppressive education. As well, there were but a few studies that directly connected transformative learning to social justice education where a poststructural focus was evidenced and emphasized (Curry-Stevens, 2007; Dass-Brailsford, 2007; and Johnson-Bailey & Alfred, 2006).

Research Questions

Based on the broad research question "What are students' experiences of transformation in a classroom focused on anti-oppressive education?" this case study was designed to explore the following:

- a. What experiences and instructional aspects of the anti-oppressive education course did participants find significant in relation to their sense of transformation?
- b. How did the participants understand the different anti-oppressive educational theories and practices as affecting change in themselves or others?
- c. To what extent did what I have termed Inclusive Dimension, Critical Dimension, and Poststructural dimension discomfort the participants emotionally?
- d. How did participants make sense of the social construction of identity and understand their own identities, or those around them, to have changed?

- e. Did participants enact teacher activism that would be evidence of transformation?
- f. What were the personal changes evident amongst participants as a result of participating in the course?

Context

Like other universities on the Canadian prairies and around the world, social justice education has become an important aspect of preparing and in-servicing teachers. At a university on the Canadian prairie, a Summer Institute is offered bi-annually as “a dynamic time for exploring tenets of critical education with teachers, community leaders, and all those interested in addressing issues of in/equality, especially through schooling” (Schick, 2010, June 2, para. 2). The keystone course for participants in the Summer Institute is a course that focuses on teaching and learning about anti-oppressive education and teacher activism. This course, Anti-oppressive Education and Teacher Activism, is hereafter referred to as AOETA and, as mentioned, participants in this course were the focus of the case study. The aim of the course was to examine “politics of protest and activism that accompany theories of justice for social change with respect to race, class, gender and sexual orientation” (University of Regina, 2010, para. 1).

AOETA provided a site where there was good potential for transformative learning as participants frequently enroll in anti-oppressive education with the explicit aim to become more effective teachers. The purposes of the course, as described in the course outline, were for students to

- be introduced to the notion that all knowledge is “interested” and that school knowledge is productive of particular interests
- examine social justice issues and interlocking oppressions that include racism, classism, sexism, and [heterosexism]
- develop theoretical tools for social analysis: the nature of subject positions, power, hierarchies of oppression, dominance and subordination, myth of

meritocracy, interlocking oppressions, critical pedagogies, anti-oppressive education

- investigate the constitutive nature of human rights protections, social justice action and teacher activism
- participate in activities for learning with each other and with guest speakers; connect student learning across disciplinary lines
- describe plans for social justice action as it applies to the workplace or community (Schick, 2010a, p. 3)

There are a number of ways to take action in a critical fashion against oppression, all of them with a social change agenda (Shor, 1999). Common in much of the literature in social justice education is an awareness of the potential for deep personal growth when people become aware of their own implication in oppression that had previously been self-obscured. This often involves creating learning ‘crises’ and accepting that some learning may be emotionally ‘discomforting’ for participants (Kumashiro, 2000a; Montgomery, 2013; Pedersen, Walker, and Wise, 2005). In anti-oppressive education, inducing cognitive dissonance creates “psychological discomfort stemming from a perceived incompatibility among beliefs” (Pedersen, Walker & Wise, 2005, p. 22). The terms ‘crisis’ and ‘discomforting’ are similar in meaning to the concept of a disorienting dilemma that is found in Transformative Learning Theory (Mezirow, 2009). A disorienting dilemma is necessary for the critical self-reflection of assumptions to take place that may lead to transformative learning. Anti-oppressive education is also about understanding oppression to be a “systemic issue of social and political proportions” (Schick, 2010b, p. 47). Understanding oppression from this perspective may lead people to become activists engaged in the critical social justice work of dismantling unequal power relations.

Transformative Learning Theory

Transformative learning theory is a learning theory that examines the process of people being deeply changed (transformed) by learning experiences. As mentioned previously, this dissertation was designed to study students' experiences of transformation in a graduate classroom focused on anti-oppressive education. Coming from a psychological tradition, I wanted to study the change process of individuals involved in the course. Although transformative learning theory informed my research, I did not assume that the participants would necessarily have had a transformative learning experience, or that change of this type is a linear or solely rational process.

Transformative learning theory provided a strong theoretical framework for this study. It is important to remember that anti-oppressive education is an amalgam of different perspectives that includes teaching about how to provide education for and about the other, and poststructural and critical orientations (Kumashiro, 2000b). This critical emphasis, in particular, extended to the course where the participants were under study, as evidenced by the instructor of the course saying, "the term 'transformative learning' signals a critical pedagogy approach and is most definitely what the Summer Institute aims to be" (Carol Schick, personal communication, 2010).

Freire's consciousness-raising (conscientization) is critical reflection (Taylor, 1998, p. 17), and is an aspect of anti-oppressive education that may lead to transformative learning. This occurs through discussions of difference and oppression, when critiques of power and privilege become a part of the teaching and learning process (Brookfield, 2005; Kumashiro, 2000b). These kinds of activities may create 'discomfort' in the learner and lead to 'disorienting dilemmas' that can result in perspective transformation,

transformative learning, and ongoing questioning of power and oppression. A transformative experience in this dissertation is defined as a student in AOETA perceiving that they have changed in a substantive way following critical reflection, and subsequently seeking to take action in the world (Brookfield, 2005).

Anti-oppressive Education

Anti-oppressive education is an umbrella term that is used to refer to expansive theories and pedagogical practices intended to lessen hegemonic injustice that marginalizes and disadvantages the Other. This is challenging work, given that oppressive actions and systems can seem natural and normal, especially for those who benefit from unearned power and privilege.

Three Dimensions

Kumashiro and Ngo (2007) state, “the field of anti-oppressive education includes multiple theoretical traditions, with no consensus on how to teach in anti-oppressive ways” (p. xix). Anti-oppressive education has been organized for this dissertation into three dynamic and overlapping approaches based on Kumashiro’s (2000b) conceptualization of anti-oppressive education: Inclusive Dimension (*Education for the Other and Education about the Other*), Critical Dimension (*Education that is Critical of Privileging and Othering*) and Poststructural Dimension (*Education that Changes Students and Society*). The reason the first two approaches were combined is that *Education for the Other* and *Education about the Other* may be seen as largely constituting how educators may often think about and provide inclusive education. Kumashiro (2000b) encourages using an amalgam of the approaches he identified in order to broaden the ways that we conceptualize oppression and work to redress it (p. 25).

My organization of Kumashiro's approaches into these three approaches was also intended to honour his encouragement for opening up further spaces for poststructural perspectives in anti-oppressive educational work. Kumashiro (2012) supported this re-categorization (personal communication).

I have reduced anti-oppressive education from broad and amorphous topics and encapsulated it into three approaches in order to conceptualize the study. Anti-oppressive education is significantly broader than described here and, moreover approaches to anti-oppressive education are continually changing. Those who do anti-oppressive education continually adapt, blend, and modify their work in order to address the countless ways that oppression exists in research, as well as in the educator's and the educand's situated historical and social context.

Kumashiro (2000b) refers to the value of providing a poststructural dimension as "education that changes students and society" (p. 40). Poststructuralism may be understood to be "a continuum of critique that shares similar skepticism towards claims to truth in the human and social sciences" (Parkes, Gore, & Ellsworth, 2010, p. 164). Poststructuralism offers a means to examine socially constructed ideas, values and beliefs previously taken-for-granted as natural and normal in our modern world. For those who are learning through anti-oppressive education and are new to poststructuralism, poststructural epistemology may provide a new lens to understand the social construction of knowledge and difference, as well as identity and power. Poststructuralism may act as a catalyst for transformative learning because poststructuralism provides a means for individuals to perceive and understand their socially constructed world differently. However, poststructuralism is not the theoretical framework informing this study nor the

data analysis. Rather, it is one of three dimensions of anti-oppressive education (adapted from Kumashiro) that serve as foci for an analysis emphasizing transformative learning theory.

According to Kumashiro (2000b), a critical dimension challenges us to examine how power and privilege advantage some and disadvantage others. Such pedagogical practices are termed by Kumashiro (2000b) as “education that is critical of privileging and Othering” (p. 35). The Critical Dimension frames an ongoing questioning of social and historical factors that keep oppression intact (Powers, 2007). As well, the critical dimension creates the impetus for individual critical reflection, which creates the potential for transformative learning that can lead to activism (Brookfield, 2005).

An inclusive dimension is used to understand difference and oppression in order to address issues of safety for the Other, interpersonal interactions, and the school curriculum. These approaches include what Kumashiro (2000b) referred to as “education for the Other” (p. 26) and “education about the Other” (p. 31). The inclusive dimension examines our treatment of, and knowledge about, the Other (Kumashiro, 2000b, p. 35). The inclusive dimension focuses on teaching about and advocating for the Other by fostering pedagogy, content, and interpersonal relationships that support student diversity (Jordan, 2007; Ware, 2001). Here, meanings that are ascribed to socially constructed difference, both real and imagined, are best conceived using anti-essentialist approaches.

While anti-oppressive education is often positioned as an approach for educators in primary and secondary classrooms (Berlak & Moyenda, 2001; Kumashiro, 2001, 2009; Neito, 1999; Pederson, 1999), the context for my study is higher education and, more

specifically, teacher change in higher education. The focus here is on studying experiences of teachers who learn about anti-oppressive education as graduate students.

Case study methodology was used within this research framework because of the bounded case that was the innovative anti-oppressive education program. This methodology was chosen because it allowed the researcher to gain in depth knowledge of one form of anti-oppressive education as a participant observer and to determine if, and how, it was a transformative experience for the participants in this study.

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

Transformative learning theory provides the theoretical framework for this study exploring potential changes experienced by graduate students during an anti-oppressive education summer course about anti-oppressive education and teacher activism, hereafter referred to as AOETA. Transformative learning theory will be used to understand the extent to which the participants in an anti-oppressive education course changed. Thus, the literature review includes an examination of transformative learning theory with a focus on understanding transformative learning mostly from the perspective of personal change within a context of anti-oppressive education. The literature on anti-oppressive education will also be reviewed to provide important contextual information since the participants were participating in an anti-oppressive education course. Anti-oppressive education literature will also be explored to provide context for my own re-categorization of Kumashiro's categories of anti-oppressive education that form a part of my analysis of the data. It is the integration of aspects taken from Kumashiro's (2000b) work describing approaches to anti-oppressive education that were most intriguing and drew me to study a course focusing on anti-oppressive education and teacher activism (AOETA). There are three main parts to this chapter. The first part of the chapter provides a summary and critique of transformative learning theory as it relates to the topic of this dissertation. The second part provides an overview of anti-oppressive education as I have come to understand it, and the third part endeavors to draw from my understanding of anti-oppressive education to develop categories for use in the analysis of data.

Transformative Learning Theory

There are currently three primary discourses pertaining to transformative learning (Tisdell, 2012). One discourse stems from Canadian educator, Edmund O’Sullivan, who posits a model of transformative education where he “articulates a transformative vision for planetary survival” (Tisdell, 2012, p. 24). This discourse provides insight into “ecology, spirituality, sustainability, feminism, racism and arts-based ways of knowing,” and is generally quite philosophical (Tisdell, 2012, p. 24). This discourse was not chosen as the focus of this study because I wanted to focus on personal change as it relates specifically to classroom-based anti-oppressive education. Another discourse, begun by Jack Mezirow (1978), is based upon his theory of transformative learning. Mezirow (2000) developed a model to explain how adult learning can be transformative. Mezirow’s focus, and the emphasis of this dissertation, is based upon the individual changing as a result of encountering a disorienting dilemma that causes them to reflect on their assumptions. A third discourse that is incorporated into Mezirow’s transformative learning theory, is based upon emancipatory education, and largely emphasizes the work of Paulo Freire (1970). Freire made the connection between personal and social change through his concept of praxis, which is “the action and reflection of men and women upon their world in order to transform it” (p. 38). In emancipatory education, critical awareness in those being oppressed, as well as their allies, creates the primary condition for liberation.

Mezirow’s theory of transformative learning incorporated Freirian emancipatory education from its inception. The discourse of emancipatory education streams through this dissertation and is emphasized in anti-oppressive education and stresses “social

transformation rather than individual transformation—on challenging power relations based on gender, race, class, sexual orientation, dis/ability or religion” (Tisdell, 2012, p. 24). However, the unit of analysis of this dissertation is the individual, and not social transformation. There is an overlapping and integration of all three of these discourses in current dialogue about transformative learning theory, and the “learning lens” of Mezirow’s perspective has much to add to the “forms that transform” (Tisdell, 2012, p. 31).

Transformative learning happens when adults participate in activities that involve learning about a different perspective (worldview) and then integrate that different perspective into their current perspective, thereby expanding it. Fundamentally, a transformative learning experience is akin to a paradigm shift, but at an individual level. In this model of personal change, Mezirow incorporated theory that challenged the status quo, was critical of social forces and made sense of the social construction of knowledge (Kitchenham, 2008).

Transformative learning theory establishes that, as a function of taking on a new perspective, people go through a process that transforms their identity (Mezirow, 2000). In Mezirow’s (2009) most current conception of transformative learning, there are ten phases that people follow in some variation: (1) A disorienting dilemma, (2) Self-examination with feelings of guilt or shame, (3) Critical assessment of assumptions, (4) Recognition of discontent, (5) Exploration of options, (6) Planning a course of action, (7) Acquiring knowledge and skills, (8) Provisional trying out the new role, (9) Building competence and self-confidence in the new role, and (10) Reintegration of one’s self into the new way of being (p.19).

According to Mezirow (2012),

Transformative learning refers to the process by which we transform our taken-for-granted frames of reference (meaning perspectives, habits of mind, mind sets) to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, emotionally capable of change, and reflective so that they may generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more true or justified to guide action. (p. 76)

Transformative learning theory may be used to provide a way to understand the process of cognitive growth during discomfoting learning processes like diversity and equity learning (Curry-Stevens, 2004; Dass-Brailsford, 2007; Feinstein, 2004; Merriam & Ntseane, 2008; Taylor, 1994; Tisdell, 2007). Transformative learning theory is not formally a part of AOETA, although transformative learning has a close affinity with the critical dimension of anti-oppressive education (Morrison, Robbins, & Rose, 2008). This critical reflection upon assumptions has the potential to create cognitive tension, emotional discomfort, and can lead to transformative learning by creating disorienting dilemmas for the participants (Mezirow, 2012).

Although transformative learning theory is problematic in that it is based on modern humanistic¹ inquiry that is troubled in AOETA, transformative learning theory provides a useful tool to use to understand how people transform their meaning perspectives (their beliefs or assumptions about how the world works) as a result of experiencing disorienting dilemmas. As Foucault (1984) wrote, “we must not conclude that everything that has ever been linked with humanism is to be rejected” (p. 44).

¹ Humanism grew out of the Enlightenment and espouses grand narratives that continue to be problematic for marginalized people and is scrutinized and questioned by poststructuralists (St. Pierre, 2000).

According to Mezirow (2000), transformations “may be focused and mindful, involving critical reflection, the result of repetitive affective interaction or of mindless assimilation—as in moving to a different culture and uncritically assimilating its canon, norms, and ways of thinking” (p. 21). The emphasis of this dissertation is to better understand focused and mindful transformations as they relate to anti-oppressive education.

From a pedagogical perspective, there are two primary conditions that need to be met for transformative learning to occur: an environment that provides the learner with the potential to develop a disorienting dilemma and opportunities to critique and reflect within the setting (Taylor, 2009). Both of these are aims of AOETA. Other important factors also include the individual’s prior experiences, as well as a supportive learning environment that includes a holistic teaching practice, the awareness of personal and social factors, and opportunities to develop authentic relationships (Taylor, 2009).

While we may always be changing as part of teaching and learning processes, some learning experiences act as catalysts and provide opportunities for substantive life changing growth. According to Taylor (2009) transformative learning can happen when students become challenged to examine values and perspectives through which they make sense of the world, and their thinking becomes substantially changed by the experience. Transformative learning includes “the identification of problematic ideas, beliefs, values, and feelings; critically assessing their underlying assumptions; testing their justification through rational discourse; and striving for decisions through consensus building” (Taylor, 2009, p. 3). Akin to anti-oppressive education, transformative learning theory also recognizes the need for “crises” in learning in order to bring about

considerable personal change. Not only are feelings critical to personal transformations, but also “feelings must be intentionally evoked and engaged when the educational purpose is to foster transformative learning” (Yorks & Kasl, 2006, p. 46).

Transformative learning refers to being fundamentally changed by critically reflecting upon significant problems that we encounter in life, being mindful that “reflection is not an easy or purely rational process” (Mälkki, 2010, p. 47). According to Mezirow (2009), as a function of taking on a new perspective, people go through a process that changes their identity. Transformative learning changes the way we understand the world. This is different from other forms of learning because it is not “a change in what we know; transformation is a change in the way we know” (Kilgore & Bloom, 2002, p. 124).

Brookfield (2000) states that critical reflection in transformative learning theory involves “some sort of power analysis of the situation or context in which the learning is taking place” and engages the learner to consider their own “hegemonic assumptions” (p. 62). This change occurs through a reframing of one’s meaning schemes and propels people to “take action in the world in a way that feels authentically grounded in critical reflection” (Brookfield, 2005, p. 49). This changed way of thinking is tried and tested by the individual, and as the individual begins to feel confident and competent in this transformed thinking, they see themselves anew.

Transformative learning is thought to be an adult phenomenon (Merriam, 2004). It is believed that one must also be able to have a high degree of abstract thought in order for transformative learning to be substantive (Merriam, 2004). There is also some research that indicates that transformative learning is a function of postformal

(dialectical) thinking, or at least of highly abstract thinking. Postformal thinking is about being able to connect “two notions, concepts, options, or assumptions that seemingly exclude each other, but which appear as an integral part of the same reality. By rationally assuming the association of contradictory or even paradoxical views, we can expect a deeper transformation” (Alhadeff-Jones, 2012, p. 188). Postformal thinking may or may not emerge in adulthood; this type of higher order thinking is characterized by being able to recognize the complexity of problems and one’s emotional attachments to it, as well as what certain solutions make possible and impossible (Merriam, 2004). Student imagination also plays a significant role in transformative learning because we ‘see’ or ‘try on’ another frame of reference through imagining (Dirkx, Mezirow & Cranton, 2006; Mezirow, 2000).

Mezirow’s (2000) transformative learning theory “refers to transforming a problematic frame of reference to make it more dependable in our adult life by generating opinions and interpretations that are more justified” (p. 20). Transformative learning may occur as an epochal change or incrementally as the result of a number of experiences and their accumulated effect (Mezirow, 2012). Brookfield (2012) writes of Mezirow’s theory that:

The developmental imperative of adulthood is to transform one’s meaning schemes (sets of assumptions governing particular situations) and meaning perspectives (broader worldviews) so that they explain the disorienting dilemmas (situations that take us by surprise and cause us to question assumptions) we inevitably encounter as we journey through adulthood. In the process we alter how we see ourselves, our purpose in the world, and the way that purpose can be realized. (p. 142)

There are two major perspectives within transformative learning theory (Taylor, 2009). The constructivist and humanist perspective emphasizes the work of Mezirow and

maintains the individual as the primary unit of analysis. This perspective stresses the individual and their personal journey toward transformation and growth (Mezirow, 1996). The focus is on critical reflection with the emphasis on “self-critique of deeply held assumptions, which leads to greater personal awareness in relationship to others” (Taylor, 2009, p. 5). From this perspective:

Transformative learning attempts to explain how our expectations, framed within cultural assumptions and presuppositions, directly influence the meaning we derive from our experience. It is the revision of meaning structures from experience that is addressed by the theory of perspective transformation. (Taylor, 1998, p. 6)

The role of context and social change is seen as secondary to the individual transformation process.

The critical social perspective emphasizes individual transformation *and* social change. Within this perspective, critical reflection is “more about ideological critique, where learners develop an awareness of power and greater agency (political consciousness) to transform society and their own reality” (Taylor, 2009, p. 5; Brookfield, 2000). The critical social perspective is strongly connected to the Freirian pedagogy of praxis, which entails both reflection and action, and is more congruent with anti-oppressive education. Not only do people need to think differently, they also need to do differently (Brookfield, 2005). This perspective has as its focus “critically questioning social structures that are the basis of inequities and oppression” (Cranton & Taylor, 2012, p. 9). Mezirow’s work is not usually emphasized within this perspective because of his focus on individual transformation and not social transformation. However, there has recently been an overlapping and integration of these perspectives within adult education, which is “evidence of their mutual influence and integration” (Tisdell, 2012, p. 24). This

research also overlaps and integrates aspects of both perspectives by analyzing the perspectives of the participants to see, not only how they are thinking differently through the constructivist and humanist perspective, but also to examine the extent to which they are doing differently through the critical social perspective.

Students in the Summer Institute actively learn about oppression. Providing opportunities to critically reflect on assumptions is vital for transformative learning to occur (Merriam, 2004). Brookfield (2000) states critical reflection in transformative learning involves examining inequity and considering hegemonic assumptions (p. 62). Examining inequity, and one's own position in maintaining it, may cause disorienting dilemmas that may lead to a perspective transformation, which is a changed way of thinking. The changed way of thinking will need to be tried and tested by the individual, and as the individual begins to feel confident and competent in this transformed thinking, they see themselves anew. A transformative experience in this dissertation is defined as a student in AOETA perceiving that they have changed in a substantive way following critical reflection, and subsequently seeking to take action in the world (Brookfield, 2005).

As mentioned, there has been a shift away from emphasizing the constructivist and humanist perspective over the critical social toward integrating them together (Taylor & Cranton, 2012). Doing so is partly accomplished by using Mezirow's terms objective and subjective reframing to denote the difference. Critical reflection occurs through either objective or subjective reframing (Kitchenham, 2008; Mezirow, 2000).

Objective reframing refers to transformative learning related to our reflection on the external world and subjective reframing refers to transformative learning related to

our own introspection as it relates to the self. In objective reframing, there is critical reflection of assumptions “encountered in a narrative or in task-oriented problem solving” (Mezirow, 2000, p. 23). In subjective reframing, there is critical self-reflection of assumptions about a narrative; a system of economy, culture, politics, education, community or other (including conscientization); an organization; personal feeling and interpersonal relationship; and “about the ways we learn, including one’s frames of reference” (Mezirow, 2000, p. 23). Subjective reframing “is often an intensely threatening emotional experience in which we have to become aware of both the assumptions undergirding our ideas and those supporting our emotional responses to the need to change” (Mezirow, 2012, p. 75-76).

Transformative learning may occur through either objective or subjective reflection. Subjective reframing, closely linked to ideology critique, is much more personal and is about the person’s own critical self-reflection (Kreber, 2012, p. 329). So, while there are two perspectives, “transformative learning theory need not be about individual transformation or social change; it is about both” (Taylor & Cranton, 2012, p. 10).

Transformation occurs through learners living an experience wherein they critically examine their commonsense assumptions or wherein commonsense assumptions are questioned, or are experienced as inappropriate or dysfunctional in a new context. For example, individuals who are learning about oppression may have their beliefs questioned, and this is part of what faculty members, teaching in the Summer Institute, seek to do in their activities and classroom learning opportunities. Such questioning may invoke personal reflection and self-critique (critical self-reflection of

assumptions), which may lead to perspective transformation (Kreber, 2012). This learning process “is seen as socially constructed, so that it can be deconstructed and acted on through a process of dialogue and self-reflection” (Taylor, 2009, p. 6). However, learning does not necessarily have to be transformational; in fact, most learning is not (Mezirow, 2000). From the constructivist and humanist perspective, in order for mindful transformative learning to occur, there must be critical reflection that leads to substantive changes in the way one views oneself (Mezirow, 2000). Determining if, and how deeply, one may have changed is a highly individual process. From a critical social perspective, not only do participants need to think differently, they also need to take action and do differently (Brookfield, 2005), as “their individual and social transformation are inherently linked” (Taylor, 2009, p. 5).

There are a number of ways to foster transformative learning. A transformative learning experience is about changing a frame of reference through an experience or by acquiring new information that cannot be reconciled with the old. If the learner encounters information that seems against commonsense, they may disregard it. Or they may assimilate the information and create a new frame of reference that makes more sense, given their new understanding. Sometimes these experiences can be “stressful and painful and can threaten the very core of one’s existence” (Taylor, 1998, p. 7).

Fostering Transformative Learning

Transformative learning provides a strong theoretical framework by which to understand teacher change during AOETA because of the opportunity for critical and reflective dialogue throughout the course creating a learning environment that may induce disorienting dilemmas (Feinstein, 2004; Taylor, 2009). As mentioned previously,

Taylor (2009) identified five factors that promote transformative learning: opportunities for dialogue and critical reflection, a holistic orientation, an awareness of context, the learner's life experiences, and authentic relationships. Because of their significance to the present study, each of these five sections will be discussed below.

Opportunities for dialogue and critical reflection

Dialogue is a critical element of transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 1991). Based on the constructivist framework that supports transformative learning, it is believed that people experience transformation through dialogue. Dialogue may be either internal (through our inner voices) or external (through dialogue with others). Such dialogue is vital, according to Taylor (2009), for critical reflection to occur. Thus, “dialogue becomes the medium for critical reflection to be put into action, where experience is reflected on, assumptions and beliefs are questioned, and habits of mind are ultimately transformed” (Taylor, 2009, p. 9). Mezirow (2000) posits that ideal conditions for effective dialogue include: an access to more reliable and thorough information; an absence of a sense of coercion; a space and place to openly discuss alternative perspectives that is considerate of perspectives and feelings; “an awareness of the context of ideas and, more critically, reflective of assumptions, including their own”; an equitable opportunity to discuss perspectives, a strong desire to understand; and a continual desire to question, continue to learn and challenge common sense (p. 13-14).

Journal writing can also provide a potentially strong forum inviting critical reflection. Students in AOETA were invited to maintain learning journals. These “artifacts of the mind” are useful to the students and also serve as research data to explore the nature of each student's critical reflection (Taylor, 2009, p. 8-9). Writing can assist in

the meaning-making process because learners can go back to re-read their reflections at various points in the learning process. In a sense, the power of writing comes from recording subjective thought for later reflection and meaning making.

Mezirow (2003) speaks to the importance of discourse to promote transformative learning. Several studies develop a connection between equity based teaching approaches and the need for dialogue and critical reflection. Middleton, Anderson, and Banning (2009), who had examined white privilege through a meta-narrative approach, also expounded upon the importance of providing opportunities for self-reflection and discourse when having people examine oppression in order for substantive personal growth to occur.

Dass-Brailsford (2007) teaches a graduate counselling course titled *The Psychology of Culture and Identity: Power, Privilege and Oppression* that has goals very similar to the goals of AOETA. Her research examined how participants in the course looked at their racial identity as well as their knowledge about power, privilege, and oppression. Through critical reflection and dialogue, her research sought to create understanding about how the instruction and content of the course led to potential transformative educational experiences. Her course provided a number of opportunities for disorienting dilemmas through readings, lectures, journaling, essay writing about critical issues, and critical media literacy. As well, she designed the course to maximize opportunities for students to dialogue with one another. The results of her study indicated that many students “displayed noticeable changes in their racial identity development, and in their thinking about Whiteness and White privilege” (Dass-Brailsford, 2007, p. 66). This was a similar result to a study conducted by Tisdell (2008) who found pop

culture and entertainment media useful for developing critical media literacy in her course on equity in higher education. In particular, she found use of popular media helpful to initiate dialogue with her students, foster their critical examination of processes of Othering and hegemony, and inspire them to create alternative narratives.

In another example, Mountford (2005) conducted a study that examined an educational leadership doctoral program in Missouri. The program was being redesigned using transformative learning theory as a foundational aspect of redeveloping, implementing and measuring the success of the program. Mountford determined that three learning components needed to be demonstrated in order to conclude that transformative learning had taken place (Mountford, 2005). The components included learning from one's personal experiences (instrumental learning), "learning that stems from the interrelationship between a person's assumptions and the socially constructed meaning" (communicative learning), and reflective learning (emancipatory learning) (Mountford, 2005, p. 221). Mountford noted that communicative learning was the most important of the three because it led to greater student engagement that facilitated their development as reflective learners. According to Mountford (2005), transformative learning takes place as a function of reflective learning. The efficacy of his program was partly evaluated on the basis of measuring the transformative learning of the participants. It was determined that the success of the program was partly due to the increased focus on instruction, which created more time for students to work together and more time for faculty to critically engage students. As well, there was a greater emphasis placed on group work as a function of the program. Providing opportunities such as these were determined to be necessary for transformative learning to take place (Mountford, 2005).

Curry-Stevens (2007) also conducted a study where she dialogued with, and provided opportunities for critical reflection to, educators involved in pedagogy with privileged learners. Her aim was to develop a “pedagogy for the privileged” that would work to undo systemic oppression (Curry-Stevens, 2007, p. 34). Curry-Stevens program, like others, endeavors to “affect a hopeful degree of critical consciousness by drawing teacher education candidates into critical examination of their complicated complicity in the causes, conditions, and consequences” of oppression (Montgomery, 2013, p. 15). The importance of becoming an ally was the most significant change in behaviour identified in Curry-Stevens’ research. She discussed that there appears to be a common experience of privilege where an individual’s “identity as privileged or oppressed fluctuates with the context in which it is situated” (Curry-Stevens, 2007, p. 37). This finding is very similar to Kumashiro’s position (2009) which recognizes that we need to understand power and privilege as context driven and operating within individual identities, which speaks to our need to understand that “supplemental identities serve to either moderate or exacerbate an experience of privilege, on one hand, and oppression, on the other” (Curry-Stevens, 2007, p. 37).

Curry-Stevens identified a number of emotional aspects that those who have privilege work through as a function of becoming more socially conscious, including “grief, fear, guilt, and discomfort, as well as positive emotions such as excitement, anticipation, and joy” (Curry-Stevens, 2007, p. 43). As well, Curry-Stevens (2007) identified that cognitive changes centred upon unlearning and relearning were also seen as an important component of anti-oppressive work. This is similar to Kumashiro’s

(2002b) writings where he speaks about the value of a paradoxical state of learning and unlearning. Kumashiro (2002b) writes that in this condition:

Students are both stuck and unstuck (i.e., distanced from the ways they have always thought, no longer so complicit with oppression) and stuck (i.e., intellectually paralyzed and needing to work through their emotions and thoughts before moving on with the more academic part of the lesson). Such a paradoxical, discomforting condition can lead students to resist further learning and unlearning and therefore may be seen by educators as something to avoid. Yet education is not something that involves comfortably repeating what we already learned or affirming what we already know. Rather, education involves learning something that disrupts our commonsense view of the world. The crisis that results from unlearning, then, is a necessary and desirable part of anti-oppressive education. (p. 63)

What is worth noting is that Curry-Stevens developed a pedagogical model that may provide a framework by which to understand transformative learning for privileged learners. The model was broken down into two parts. The first part focused on a confidence shaking process and the second part focused on a confidence building process. The confidence shaking process involved having participants develop an awareness of oppression, understand oppression as structural, locate themselves as disadvantaged, locate themselves as advantaged, and then begin to understand how they benefit from unearned power and privilege. The last step is to help participants understand their own implication in oppression. The confidence building process occurred next and was about teaching participants to know how to intervene, plan for future action, find a community of supports to help sustain momentum and make a declaration to act as an ally and activist (Curry-Stevens, 2007). Her model proposes a counter-hegemonic push for change and therefore focuses upon creating deep, transformative change for those who have privilege.

Holistic learning environment

A holistic environment is predicated upon creating a safe place in which to share and to work through emotional crises, and is emphasized in anti-oppressive education. Without students feeling that they are safe to think about and express their beliefs, they will not be able to challenge their own beliefs, values and assumptions. Expecting that learning is a potentially emotional enterprise is an important consideration in anti-oppressive education and is expected to provide much of the impetus for change (Kumashiro, 2009). Emotional intelligence is a significant element in transformative learning as well, because in order for a successful transformation, learners need to have the capacity for “emotional self-awareness, the management of emotions in one’s self and others, and the building of trusting relationships” (Clark & Dirkx, 2008; Taylor, 2001, p. 233). Emotional intelligence may be understood as the ability to be both self and socially aware, as well as being able to successfully manage ones emotions and relationships (Goleman, 2002).

There has been a shift in transformative learning theory from it being primarily a rational process to the acknowledgment that emotion is key (Dirkx, 2008). As Taylor (2009) stated “research has revealed that it is the affective ways of knowing that prioritize experience and identify for the learner what is personally most significant in the process of transformation” (p. 4). In order to foster transformative learning, students need to be exposed to more than simply a rational process; It is not just about ‘analyze-think-change.’ Participants in the Summer Institute may be more likely to learn through the process of ‘see-feel-change’ as they read about and discuss inequity (Taylor, 2009). Anti-oppressive education may be seen to weave together the emotional patterns of “trauma,

anxiety, resistance and mourning” (Berlak & Moyenda, 2001, p. 127) since the content of anti-oppressive education may be emotionally discomfoting (Kumashiro, 2009).

In a study germane to this study, Eichler (2010) carried out interviews with straight-identified ally activists of lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) people and interpreted them through the lens of transformative learning theory. He concluded that participants first needed to have an emotionally laden perspective transformation where they recognized their heterosexual privilege. The perspective transformation then led the way for participants to become allies and then activists.

From Mälkki’s (2010) perspective, emotions are a very important aspect of transformative learning theory. According to Mälkki, our emotional responses initially operate without conscious thought and direct an individual’s attention to a disorienting dilemma, which is a problem that needs addressing in order to alleviate discomfort experienced by the individual. Research demonstrating a strong connection between transformative learning and the affective domain of the learner moved transformative learning theory away from its privileging of rational thought. Currently, there is recognition within transformative learning theory that the whole person needs to be included in the learning experience- not just the rational aspects of the person. This means that the “affective, intuitive, thinking, physical, spiritual self” belongs in the classroom (Yorks & Kasl, 2006, p. 47).

Classroom considerations are also important for transformative learning and could include recognizing that students may be driven to complete tasks to get credit and a good grade rather than to enhance their learning. Another factor that may impact the potential for transformative learning is time. Students require time for transformative

learning and some students require more time than others. The three-week block of time set aside for the AOETA summer institute may be problematic. Some students may benefit from a longer period of immersion in anti-oppressive education than others. As well, group dynamics can also be a factor impacting upon critical reflection and dialogue because they may affect the capacity for dialogue and reflection (Taylor 2009).

Awareness of Context

The context of the learning experience also needs to be appreciated. Again, this is a critical and constituent aspect of anti-oppressive education. Taylor (2009) states that it is important to take into consideration “the surroundings of the immediate learning event, the personal and professional situation of the learners at the time (their prior experience), and the background context that is shaping society” (p.11). For example, some life experiences, like living in poverty or seeing friends being disadvantaged because of the racialization of their identities, may contribute to the likelihood an individual will experience transformative learning (Taylor, 2009).

Life Experiences

Life experiences of participants and the instructor in AOETA will impact upon the constructivist interactions in the course. The prior experiences of participants may contribute to the breadth and depth of their interactions with course readings and their participation in the class dialogue. According to Taylor (2009), the more varied life experience a person has, the greater the potential for, and magnitude of, transformative learning. Taylor (2009) suggests that it is important for instructors to understand how prior experiences may create greater or less resistance to change in some learners.

Authentic Relationships

Having authentic relationships, where teachers are able to develop meaningful, genuine relationships with students also flows well within anti-oppressive education (Johnson-Bailey & Alfred, 2006) and is an important prerequisite for transformative learning (Cranton, 2006; Cranton & Carusetta, 2004a, 2004b; Taylor, 2009). It is through building trusting relationships that students may feel comfortable sharing and taking risks in class. Teachers who teach humbly, recognize their own journey of unlearning, as well as that of their students, but also press forward through student discomfort for the sake of dismantling inequity, provide the basis for relationships that can affect significant growth in students (Montgomery, 2013, p. 16). Making the intentions of the teacher clear and working through issues around the authority of the teacher is a part of poststructural feminist pedagogy and anti-oppressive education, as is ensuring students have voice (Tisdell, 1998; Welch, 2006). This element is common to much pedagogy: students will learn better in a context when they are in an authentic relationship with their teacher. This “best practice” also translates to greater opportunities for transformative learning in the classroom because the participants are more comfortable and trusting (Cranton & Carusetta, 2004a, 2004b).

In another relevant study Johnson-Bailey and Alfred (2006), who self-identify as Black female adult educators, wrote about their own teaching in a social justice oriented course designed to promote transformative learning. They employed a political framework to facilitate consciousness-raising, activism, and a caring and safe environment. Implicit in this form of teaching, which is rooted in social justice, is a critique of Western rationality, androcentric theories, structured inequalities, and unequal

societal power relations. Postmodern perspectives were reflected in the teaching and writing of Johnson-Bailey and Alfred (2006). They stated that “we must acknowledge that there are not ultimate truths or validity to the values that Eurocentric ideals imply; more important, we must manifest this knowledge in our own transformational learning and teaching within our classrooms” (p. 55).

Their teaching practices involve poststructural considerations very similar to the ones that are considered within anti-oppressive education, such as the need in their program to acknowledge and support the affective and spiritual dimension of teaching. They also describe the use of feminist poststructural perspectives (Johnson-Bailey & Alfred, 2006) quite similar to those described by Kumashiro (2009). In their classroom they apply the critical dimension when working with students on issues of power. To them, empowerment indicates, “that the student has a sense of belongingness and equity as a full member of the class collective” (Johnson-Bailey & Alfred, 2006, p. 52). They believe that educators, who are working to transform learners, need to be heavily self-reflective themselves and benefit from having undergone a transformative journey so that they may most effectively teach to transform (Johnson-Bailey & Alfred, 2006).

Overview of Anti-oppressive Education

Since the participants in my study were participating in an anti-oppressive education course, this section of the literature review is intended to provide important contextual information about anti-oppressive education. It provides a contextual framework upon which to understand anti-oppressive education in two main ways. First, the section will illustrate how anti-oppressive education is positioned in the field of many other theories and approaches used to understand and diminish oppression. Second, the

theoretical foundations for anti-oppressive education will be articulated. Schick (2010c) makes the important point for anti-racist education, where she includes anti-oppressive education within it, that “anti-racist education is by no means a unified practice and it would be a mistake to suggest some kind of orthodoxy about what it should look like” (p. 47). Pollock, Deckman, and Shalaby (2010) cogently acknowledged that the field of social justice work is plagued by “conceptual confusion.” Therefore, this overview is very much situated in my own understanding of anti-oppressive education and is not intended to be universal or grand theorizing. Rather it is provided with the understanding that my knowledge is both partial and situated.

Anti-oppressive work

At its best, anti-oppressive education is a synthesis of disparate theories and different educational strategies brought to bear on oppressive discourse and practices (Kumashiro, 2009; Schick 2010c). Perspectives found in anti-oppressive education take up very similar positions as other critical approaches that tackle issues of inequity, including anti-racist education, which explores intersections of race, class, and gender in dominant discourses in education (Dei, 1996; Earick, 2009), and critical multicultural education approaches (National Association of Multicultural Education, 2011; Neito, 1999). Kincheloe and McLaren (2005) note “oppression has many faces and that focusing on only one at the expense of the others often elides the interconnections among them” (p. 304). Anti-oppressive education seeks to draw together disparate theories and strategies in order to better understand oppression and to educate others on how to lessen it.

Understanding oppression

Working towards social justice is difficult, given that we live in complex social communities that are saturated by “commonsense” knowledge and assumptions that conceal oppression. Therefore, it is worthwhile to present an understanding of how oppression operates at “individual, cultural, and institutional levels, historically and in the present” (Bell, 2007, p. 2). Oppression may be understood to be pervasive social inequality that exists throughout social institutions and in our individual consciousness. It is socially constructed and results in classification of individuals into groups that are differently advantaged and disadvantaged.

Oppression is “the fusion of institutional and systemic discrimination, personal bias, bigotry, and social prejudice in a complex web of relationships and structures that shade most aspects of life in our society” (Bell, 2007, p. 3). Domination often involves using force. Oppression, on the other hand, “designates the disadvantage and injustice some people suffer not because a tyrannical power coerces them, but because of the everyday practices of a well-intentioned liberal society” (Young, 1990, p. 41). In this way the structural aspects of oppression remain in the hearts and minds of good intentioned people who perpetuate stereotypes and work within bureaucratic and market driven competitive social systems. Through this lens, we need to understand

the exercise of power as the effect of often liberal and “humane” practices of education, bureaucratic administration, production and distribution of consumer goods, medicine, and so on. The conscious actions of many individuals daily contribute to maintaining and reproducing oppression, but those people are usually simply doing their jobs or living their lives, and do not understand themselves as agents of oppression. (Young, 1990, p. 42)

Oppression and oppressive beliefs can therefore be understood to be pervasive and internalized. Oppression is also restrictive, hierarchical and complex. People have power

and privilege, or conversely are disadvantaged, based upon group affiliations that are socially maintained and historically constructed. Individual identities and social groups are fluid and changing, as is the nature and impact of oppression.

Seeing identities as fixed and unchanging can lock people into certain identifications that are constrained by ossified systems that maintain inequity (Spivak, 1999; Smith, 1999). This is why poststructural writers warn “against the notion of a unitary subject and essentializing notions of group identity that ignore the fluid and changing ways that people experience themselves both as individuals and as members of different social groups over the course of a lifetime,” and in differing contexts (Bell, 2007, p. 10). Examining social and historical patterns of difference helps to understand how oppression works through these social and historical group identifications that are highly contextualized.

There is still a need to identify, understand and work against particular forms of oppression, such as racism, classism, and sexism, as well as other forms of oppression. But there has been a move toward examining oppression as the multiplicity of identifications (Kumashiro, 2000b; National Association of Multicultural Education, 2011). Anti-oppressive education is one such field that seeks to understand what is common to various forms of oppression and how to educate others about oppression, acknowledging that oppression is socially and historically situated across a myriad of diverse identities and experiences (Kumashiro, 2000b).

Young (1990) discusses five faces of oppression that result from relations of power. Her conception of oppression provides one of many cogent means to understand how oppression operates. One of the faces of oppression is exploitation. Exploitation

creates economic inequity through the unequal distribution of wealth and assets. This maintains a system of domination of one group over another. Marginalization is another face of oppression and occurs when a “whole category of people is expelled from useful participation in social life and thus potentially subjected to severe material deprivation and even extermination” (Young, 1990, p. 53). A third face of oppression is powerlessness. Powerlessness reduces the capacity of one to develop identities and abilities, as well as hindering one’s working and social life.

Two other faces of oppression also occur, but outside of those created through the unequal social division of labour. Cultural imperialism (a concept similar to hegemony) explains “how the dominant meanings of a society render the particular perspectives of one’s own group invisible at the same time as they stereotype one’s group and mark it as the Other” (Young, 1990, p. 59). This involves constructing the dominant groups experience as normal and universal, and by both stereotyping the Other and marking them as invisible. Through this process the dominant group’s stereotyped inferior perception of the Other is internalized and normalized by many. The last face of oppression is violence. The disadvantaged are exposed to more violence, which is seen as natural and normal by the dominant group (Young, 1990, p. 62). Oppression is pernicious, and anti-oppressive education seeks to understand and educate people about how oppression, and its consequences, may be lessened.

The Purpose of Anti-oppressive Education

The purpose of anti-oppressive education is to challenge and neutralize the historically created “hierarchies of socially constructed identifications” that have created and maintain “inequity through unequal power relations” (Schick, 2010b, p. 48-9). Power

relations may be understood to be the manner in which power exists “through the antagonism of strategies” in discourses and practices that manifests themselves in different forms of resistance (Foucault, as cited in Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1982, p. 208). Those living and working within this perspective would “agree that oppression is a situation or dynamic in which certain ways of being (e.g., having certain identities) are privileged in society while others are marginalized” (Kumashiro, 2000b, p. 25). Oppression exists in society’s schools and classrooms and, therefore, work to undo oppression, must also take place in these sites, amongst others as well (Giroux, 1997).

Anti-oppressive education includes “naming and actively challenging racism and other forms of injustice, not simply recognizing and celebrating differences and reducing prejudice” (Berlak & Moyenda, 2001, p. 92; Schniedewind, 2001). Dismantling racism, classism, sexism, anti-Semitism, able-ism, and colonialism, as well as ‘Other’ disadvantaged persons subsumed as “isms,” is the goal and work of anti-oppressive educators. But reducing oppression is difficult. Ladson-Billings alluded to the long, complex, and arduous journey of those seeking social justice that is echoed by Peterson (1999) who wrote “practicing critical pedagogy for social justice in education is not easy” (p. xii). When it comes to the messy and complex world of the classroom, instructing towards the ideals held for teachers does not conform to the neat theoretical conceptions of anti-racist, anti-sexist, anti-homophobic, and anti-oppressive education (Ladson-Billings, 2004).

Social change of notable magnitude doesn’t occur quickly. As an example, John Dewey (1916) wrote almost one hundred years ago that schools best serve students when they are places that correct unfair privilege and deprivation (p. 92). Although creating

equity is something educators typically strive for, Dewey's modern goal has yet to be realized. Inequity persists today and will likely continue to exist in the future, albeit in different forms affecting different marginalities (Young, 1990, p. 42). Trepagnier (2006) refers to silent racism to describe how people from the dominant group may unintentionally engage in acts in their everyday lives that maintain the status quo, which serves to maintain racial inequity. It is the subtle, supple, situated and multiple aspect of oppression that societies are steeped in, which is most elusive and requires educators' constant attention (Kumashiro, 2009). Anti-oppressive education seeks to "persuade people that the discourse of oppression makes sense of much of [their] social experience" (Young, 1990, p. 39) and that critical reflection leading to action can challenge and change the status quo.

Investigating and teaching anti-oppressive education

Broadly speaking, there are two aspects to anti-oppressive education, namely creating awareness of socially constructed inequities and implementing pedagogies to trouble oppression. The first is designed to create awareness of oppressive conditions and systems; primarily regarding the perpetuation of historically and socially constructed inequities of gender, race, sexuality, and class. The second aspect is to provide productive pedagogy to teach about ways to reduce oppression. The first aspect focuses on understanding how oppression works to disadvantage those who have less power and privilege than the dominant group, while the second aspect focuses on pedagogy to lessen the bonds of systemic oppression. Learning to understand the elusive and complex aspects of oppression is primarily taken up within the many diverse critical influences. Here, anti-oppressive educators work to identify and correct historical and social

imbalances that continue to marginalize certain individuals and groups (Earick, 2009). Many who work to illustrate oppression and the systemic means by which it operates have incorporated poststructuralism into their work. Such educators and researchers have recognized that internalized social and historical forces play a greater role in maintaining inequity than previously believed and that poststructuralism can provide a means to understand and counter it (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2008) by providing a means for us to think differently (St. Pierre, 2000).

The second aspect of anti-oppressive education follows from the first, and involves actively engaging in developing and teaching pedagogies that educate people so that they can better understand and work to reduce oppression (Kumashiro, 2000b). Social justice commitments in education “are certainly broad and diffuse but stem in no small part from the structural inequalities in our society that are reflected in—and perpetuated by—our schools” (Agarwal et al., 2010, p. 237). Thus, there are many approaches to teaching in anti-oppressive ways, each with relative advantages and disadvantages. Kumashiro (2000b) notes that practitioners use an amalgamation of approaches (p. 25). One approach includes the infusion of poststructural perspectives, which provides a lens through which to see and discuss inequity.

Approaches to Anti-oppressive Education

There is not just one type of oppression and, therefore, there is not just one type of anti-oppressive education. Anti-oppressive education may be understood to be a broad collection of pedagogies constructed from a wide array of critical influences including critical race theory, feminism (poststructural and psychoanalytic strands), cultural and multicultural studies, post-colonial theories, and queer theories (Kumashiro, 2001, 2006).

Oppression may be understood to be the “unquestioned norms, habits, and symbols, in the assumptions underlying institutional rules and the collective consequences of following those rules” (Young, 1990, p. 41). Anti-oppressive education seeks to question, challenge, and change these assumptions in order to create greater equity. Through anti-oppressive education, different research orientations and pedagogical approaches are brought together by the borrowing of parts for the purpose of understanding oppression and eliminating hegemonic injustice by committing to “social change through education” (Schick, 2010b, p. 47). That being said, careful attention is paid not to group all marginalized groups under one banner; the key is to provide a way to understand oppression that honours each marginalized identification and critique.

Anti-oppressive education is not about a belief in identifying and changing the defective character of advantaged students, but rather about challenging “hegemonic meaning-making and socialization processes” that are problematic (Montgomery, 2013, p. 15). In this way, anti-oppressive educators emphasize an “inside-out” approach. This approach works first through interpersonal change, “how we value others and see the world” and then through systemic change, changing the social “structures, assumptions, philosophy, rules and procedures, and roles” (Harro, 2007, p. 53), all the while being aware that societal change also fosters interpersonal change. Ultimately, the goal of anti-oppressive education is to change “the taken-for-granted manner of unequal power relations that organize and are organized through large and small discourses of social, material and ideological exchange” (Schick, 2010b, p. 48). However, lessening oppression is a very difficult, if not impossible task to achieve, given the complexity of oppression and our very implication in its functioning. Kumashiro (2004) wrote:

The reason we fail to do more to challenge oppression is not merely that we do not know enough about oppression, but also that we often do not *want* to know more about oppression. It is not our lack of knowledge but our resistance to knowledge and our desire for ignorance that often prevent us from changing the oppressive status quo. (p. 25)

Understanding and challenging our resistance to knowing offers a space to trouble taken-for-granted knowledge and to critique unearned power and privilege. Anti-oppressive education that seeks to create social change thus has the potential to be transformative for those involved in learning about it.

In this section of the literature review the following three dimensions that I deem to be crucial to anti-oppressive education are discussed: the Poststructural, Critical, and Inclusive Dimensions. As there is not only one way to do or to conceive anti-oppressive education, I speak from my own understanding of anti-oppressive education and draw extensively from Kevin Kumashiro's (1999, 2000a, 2000b, 2001, 2002a, 2002b, 2004, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2012) work.

Poststructural Dimension of Anti-Oppressive Education

Poststructuralism may be “best understood as a continuum of critique that shares similar scepticism towards claims to truth in the human and social sciences” (Parkes, Gore, and Ellsworth, 2010, p. 164). A poststructural dimension is understood by many to be an efficacious means of drawing awareness to our current social context to create greater social equity (Kumashiro, 2000b, 2009; Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005; Parkes, Gore, & Ellsworth, 2010). Theoretical approaches emphasizing poststructuralism provide a critique that enables us to learn about and begin to redress the myriad of ways in which oppression operates. Parkes, Gore, and Ellsworth (2010) wrote that by using a poststructuralist perspective in social justice work, “it becomes possible to identify spaces

of freedom for our own actions as educators that will allow us to work toward practices of freedom through which students can become other than who they are by refusing their inherited inscriptions” (p. 178).

Poststructuralism provides a means to understand oppression as situated, dynamic, and evolving; and to understand power as relational; and knowledge as local, partial and historical. It also moves from understanding the individual as a Subject that “exhibits agency as it constructs itself by taking up available discourses and cultural practices and [is] a subject that, at the same time, is subjected, forced into subjectivity by those same discourses and practices” (St. Pierre, 2000, p. 500-2). There are a number of concepts that I will take up in some detail because they are important concepts in anti-oppressive education generally, and also in this case study specifically. These concepts informed my analysis through a transformative learning theory framework, and were helpful in understanding my own experience as a researcher in this project. These concepts are ‘Othering and interlocking oppressions,’ ‘troubling knowledge,’ ‘power relations, contested knowledge and the social construction of identity,’ ‘creating tension,’ and ‘working through resistance.’

Othering and Interlocking Oppressions

Those who teach anti-oppressive education use the term “Other” to collectively identify those who have historically and are currently denied power and privilege and to signify their common connection to oppression. It is the identification of oppression as an “interlocking system of intersecting hierarchies based on race, ethnicity, class, age, gender, sexual orientation, ability status, nationality,” and not as isolated concepts, that is key to the success of anti-oppressive education (Schmidt, 2005, p. 117). Anti-oppressive

education aims to bring people together to recognize Othering that is troubling for us all; to examine Othering that one may have been unfamiliar with or that may be hidden within our own subconscious (Carlson Berg, 2012; Trepagnier, 2006).

Anti-oppressive education also insists in honouring each of the socially and historically constructed marginalized identifications while recognizing the interlocking/intersecting complexities of social oppression. Loutzenheiser (2010) wrote: “The fear of losing one’s place at the table can only begin to be rectified with theoretical understandings that demand that interlinkages and multiple sites of oppression are imbued through every analysis” (p. 137). That is, separate time and effort is still needed to teach about race, class, gender, sexuality, and other currently marginalized identifications so that anti-oppressive education does not fold back into the same hegemonic processes that it seeks to dismantle by amalgamating those who are marginalized into one “essentialized” group.

Troubling Knowledge

Youdell (2006) wrote, “serious attention is increasingly being paid to the problematic relationship between the ‘knowing’ subjects implicit to empirical research and the ‘troubled’ subjects of post-structural (sic) writing” (p. 514). Troubling knowledge involves a poststructural turn which has us “examine any commonplace situation, any ordinary event or process, in order to think differently about that occurrence – to open up what seems ‘natural’ and ‘normal’ to other possibilities” (St. Pierre, 2000, p. 479). Anti-oppressive education provides students with opportunities to trouble knowledge they already have in ways that disrupt, discomfort and problematize what they take for granted (Kumashiro, 2009). Students are challenged to learn about how they may “resist those

discourses that erase difference and naturalize disadvantage” (Parkes, Gore, & Ellsworth, 2010, p. 178).

Anti-oppressive education seeks to discomfort the learner by troubling knowledge students take for granted as common sense. Weedon (1997) speaks of common sense as a constitutive force in society that maintains difference through discourse. She suggests that common sense “relies on a naïve view of language as transparent and true” but language is actually “contradictory and subject to change” (p. 74). For instance, she states that “common sense tells us [gender difference] is natural and looks to science, social science, and psychoanalysis to prove this assumption” (p. 73). She also notes that the power of common sense comes from “its claim to be natural, obvious and therefore true. It looks to ‘human nature’ to guarantee its version of reality” (p. 74). Those who have influence frame arguments based on common sense to further their own positions (Kumashiro, 2012).

A familiar thread in anti-oppressive education is questioning and challenging common sense (accepted) knowledge, and the identifications that are constructed from it. Kumashiro (2000b) states, “Changing oppression requires disruptive knowledge, not simply more knowledge” (p.34). It is also necessary for people to examine their own self-interests and to acknowledge bias that can be introduced into the classroom in order to engage in “pedagogy about the unequal social, political and economic realities that shape their lives” (Schick, 2010b, p. 51). This is a difficult task, given dominant discourses of meritocracy and the sacrosanct belief in individual autonomy that are a part of students’ social experience, including school, and that keep unearned privilege in place (Schick, 2010b). Troubling knowledge may be accomplished by a “pedagogy of positionality that

engages both students and teachers in recognizing and critiquing how one is positioned and how one positions others in social structures” (Kumashiro, 2000b, p. 45).

For Kumashiro (2009), troubling knowledge means “to work paradoxically with knowledge, to simultaneously see what different insights, identities, practices, and changes it makes possible while critically examining that knowledge (and how it came to be known) to see what insights and the like it closes off” (p. 127). Kumashiro (2004) acknowledges that students need to be vigilant when learning: “How does this reading challenge stereotypes? How does it reinforce it? What does it leave unchallenged? What does it raise critical questions about? Whom does it leave invisible? Whom does it call on to contest their own privileges?” (p. 113). From this perspective, knowledge needs to be contested and continually interrogated. Anti-oppressive education attempts to challenge our “passion for ignorance” and to facilitate ‘unlearning’ common sense social constructions that continue to do harm (Britzman, 1998, p. 57). This type of education does not require students to ‘think like this’ but instead to ‘think differently’ (Kumashiro, 2009).

Understanding Power Relations, Contested Knowledge and the Social Construction of Identity

Although the notion of “power” as a social construct is a “contested concept” (Allan, 2011, para 2), understanding power relations and truth regimes is an important aspect of anti-oppressive education (Schick, 2010a). The concept of power relations, in some form or another, informs much of the way that Othering and oppression can be understood to operate, as it can “account for systematic asymmetry between groups of people” (McLaren, 2002, p. 36). The concept of power relations is based on the

scholarship of Foucault who understood power relations to be a productive force in creating who we are (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1982). Foucault saw power as largely relational (St. Pierre, 2000). Foucault also moves away from seeing power as top-down, repressive, limiting and controlling. According to McLaren (2002), Foucault contends that power “cannot be possessed because it is relational, shifting, mobile, and unstable.... Individuals do not *have* power, rather they participate in it” (p. 38).

Foucault (1980) wrote:

Power must be understood in the first instance as the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization; as the process which, through ceaseless struggles and confrontations, transforms, strengthens, or reverses them; as the support which these force relations find in one another, thus forming a chain or system, or on the contrary, the disjunctions and contradictions which isolate them from one another; and lastly, as the strategies in which they take effect, whose general design or institutional crystallization is embodied in the state apparatus, in the formulation of the law, in the various social hegemonies. (p. 92)

Power is reconceived to be ubiquitous, discursive, positive and productive (McLaren, 2002). Of interest to anti-oppressive educators are asymmetrical relations of power that lead to domination. Domination occurs when “relations of power ossify, lock together and become fixed” (McLaren, 2002, p. 166). Anti-oppressive education seeks to make these fixed unequal relations of power visible and address them.

Foucault destabilizes our modern structural understandings of power as he connects power and knowledge together. Power/knowledge is used “to signify that power is constituted through accepted forms of knowledge, scientific understanding and ‘truth’” (Gaventa, 2003, para. 3). Ideas taken-for-granted as truth (truth regimes) are understood to be socially and historically constructed through the interaction of power/knowledge (McLaren, 2002). From this perspective, power becomes implicated in the production of

knowledge and what constitutes knowledge we take-for-granted: “power produces knowledge, and in turn, knowledge produces power” (McLaren, 2002, p. 39). As well, “power is tolerable only on condition that it mask a substantial part of itself. Its success is proportional to its ability to hide its own mechanisms” (Foucault, 1980, p. 86).

One’s identity is constituted and constructed in resistance to power relations (Foucault, 1980). We exist together through a multitude of complementing and competing relational contexts, and if relational power is truly effective, then we are likely unaware of its very existence. We advocate for certain perspectives that serve our desires. However, there are a number of other competing individual, institutional, discursive, practices and objects, which may also become ‘crystallized’ together over time, that are involved in relations of power, which impede or complement our social life. So, although we can act within our own will, we are still subject to the destabilizing effects of power relations. Understanding power relations in this way may lead to disrupting the “taken-for-granted assumptions of students and teacher self-making and self-determinism [where] the problem of inequality is reduced to the bad choices of individuals and groups compared to the good choices and talent of others” (Schick, 2010b, p. 51). The modern notion of individual autonomy is challenged and complicated in anti-oppressive education in order to understand the social and historical creation of the “subject.”

Foucault’s ideas about the analytics of power, including disciplinary power, form the basis for understanding the social construction of identity. From this perspective, knowledge is constructed through discourse and social practices, and that what is taken as truth is contestable because it is a social and historical creation. This theory explains how “each person perceives the world differently and actively creates their own meanings

from events” (Burr, 2003, p. 19). Our identities are always “becoming.” As Burr (2003) wrote,

although the person, the subject, is constituted by discourse, this subject is yet capable of critical historical reflection and is able to exercise some choice with respect to the discourses and practices that it takes up for its own use. Within this view, change is possible because human agents, given the right circumstances, are capable of critically analysing the discourses which frame their lives, and to claim or resist them according to the effects they wish to bring about. (p. 121)

The social construction of identity is an important aspect of anti-oppressive education because its focus is on identity being constructed through discourse represented by texts, images and pictures.

Learning to “trouble normal” may free teachers from their blind adherence to pedagogical dogma based on their underlying beliefs, values and assumptions.

Understanding what constitutes and constructs us is important to educators and provides a way forward in the practice of freedom (Parkes, Gore & Ellsworth, 2010).

Creating Tension

Kumashiro (2009) speaks to the notion of creating tension by troubling common sense learning, as well as understanding knowledge as both partial and political. Students are taught to question what they may have unconditionally accepted as common sense knowledge so that they can question how common sense knowledge makes certain ways of knowing possible and impossible. Anti-oppressive education seeks to find hybrid zones where “our multiple strands of Self and Other rub up against each other in unexpected ways” (Scholl, 2001, p. 144). Bhabha calls this the “interstitial or in-between perspective” where learning takes place in more discomfiting ways (Scholl, 2001, p. 144). It is about challenging people to “construct disruptive, different ‘knowledges’” (Kumashiro, 2000b, p. 43). Teaching in this way serves to create uncertainty, difference,

and the possibility of finding that change is constant. However, learning that there is this tension can be an arduous journey for the student and teacher.

Educators should expect their students to enter crisis. And, since this crisis can lead in one of many directions--such as toward liberating change, or toward more entrenched resistance, etc.--educators need to provide a space in the curriculum for students to work through their crisis in a way that changes oppression.” (Kumashiro, 2000a, para. 5)

This tension is created because it is generally about breaking people loose from the “natural” and “normal” world to which they are anchored. Anti-oppressive education may, for some, be a “difficult, stressful, uncomfortable, unpleasant, and perhaps coercive” journey (Pedersen, Walker, & Fine, 2005, p. 23). For this reason it is crucial for anti-oppressive educators to compassionately monitor the level of emotional discomfort of students because of the potential for emotional trauma as they seek to “establish an equilibrium between the emotional and cognitive components of the learning process” (Adams, 2007, p. 15). Anti-oppressive educators teach through tension, but must also be supportive through students’ learning crises (Kumashiro, 2000a, 2009). Although these crises may be discomfoting for the learner, resulting in disorienting dilemmas or provoking resistance in the learner, they may also serve an important role in transforming learners.

Creating tension is difficult because modern education is based upon a rational and humanistic context. There is not much opportunity for other kinds of knowing to be expressed in classrooms, or to place affective learning before rational learning (Britzman, 1998). For example, it is difficult for teachers to leave their role as knowledge transmitters (Freire, 2003). Kumashiro explains that in order to move beyond the rationality expected in classes, he encourages people to be given the place and space to

step outside of their comfort zone in addressing what is taken as common sense: “the desire to teach students outside the mythical norm, cannot revolve around solely the desire to reason; it must also involve a desire to attach and touch, a desire to enter stuck and uncontrollable places, and a desire for crisis” (Kumashiro, 2000a, para. 12).

Working Through Resistance

According to many who work within anti-oppressive education (Brookfield, 2005; Butin, 2002, 2005; Kumashiro, 2000b, 2002, 2009; Schick & St. Denis, 2003, 2005), students can resist learning about the complex and emotionally laden topics relating to social justice. The reasons students resist learning about “socially complex, culturally saturated, and politically volatile content knowledge” are complicated (Butin, 2005, p. 1). For example, the socially constructed beliefs of individualism (DiAngelo, 2011) and meritocracy (McNamee & Miller, 2004) that posit success or failure in society is an individually determined and equitable process, are examples of the underlying belief that “our race, class, or gender, are not important to our opportunities” (DiAngelo, 2010, p. 4). Troubling these and other discourses that many take-for-granted as true, can lead to resistance that may trigger the “outward display of emotions such as anger, fear, and guilt, and behaviors such as argumentation, silence, and leaving the stress-inducing situation” (DiAngelo, 2011, p. 54).

One of the concerns of those who do anti-oppressive education is how rationality can be privileged above affectivity (Kumashiro, 2000a). Therefore, a strong emphasis is placed on the affective domain during learning. Weedon (1997) writes that one’s identity (the subject) is constituted by “the conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions of the individual, her sense of herself and her ways of understanding her relation to her

world (p. 32). To ignore the affective experience would be to perpetuate enlightenment thinking historically privileging rational thought and masculinity above all else (Tisdell, 1998).

Kumashiro (2000b) wrote, “we often desire the silencing of Others, and we desire the continuation of normalized teaching and learning practices” (p. 4). Hegemonic practices in classrooms and society silence the voices and practices of the marginalized and/or amplify the voices of the empowered/privileged. These institutionalized practices work to give voice to and favour those who are already are privileged (Giroux, 1997; Solomon, Portelli, Daniel & Campbell, 2005) and make it more difficult to discuss racism and other forms of systemic inequality (Schmidt, 2005). As well, “those in positions of power and authority—for example, educators—construct discourses that are often academically and emotionally debilitating to the ‘racial other’” (Portelli, Daniel & Campbell, 2005, p. 147).

Our resistance to examining our own implication in maintaining inequity may stem from our unconscious desire to continue to be advantaged. This desire remains hidden from our awareness by the unconscious process of personal subjectivity (Berlak, 2005, 2008). Assisting students to become aware of their unconscious desire to maintain the status quo is a significant aspect of anti-oppressive education (Kumashiro, 2007).

Critical Dimension of Anti-oppressive Education

The critical dimension in anti-oppressive education seeks to make clear and undo inequity and ultimately, generate more activism that leads to less oppression (Freire, 2003). The critical dimension focuses on understanding the structures that support varied hierarchical systems of oppression and how they work to create identities and inequity.

That being said, critical theorists are also informed and often embrace ‘post-discourses’ because, as Kincheloe & McLaren (2005) wrote, “critical researchers informed by ‘post-discourses’ (e.g. postmodern, critical feminism, poststructuralism) came to understand that individuals’ views of themselves and the world were even more influenced by social and historical forces than previously believed” (pp. 303-304). This means that there is the growing recognition that structural approaches cannot represent the degree to which oppression impacts groups and individuals differently due to people’s complex and multiple identifications. Critical theory evolved over time and involves enacting positive social change. Originally based on challenging and changing economic and class disparity, Karl Marx conceived critical theory in his theory of Historical Materialism (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2008; Breuing, 2011). Marxist scholarship seeks to “illuminate the ways in which people accept as normal a world characterized by massive inequities and the systemic exploitation of the many by the few” (Brookfield, 2005, p. 2). The Marxist critique historically involved removing the ideological illusions that created a ‘false consciousness’ that made it possible for people to willingly suffer unequal treatment. It is still about learning to recognize the “couching and masking of privilege, and teaching critically involves unmasking or making visible the privilege of certain identities and the invisibility of this privilege” (Kumashiro, 2000b, p. 37).

More recent work has focused on critical conscientization, which focuses on creating personal and collective awareness and seeks to change social and political contradictions that maintain social inequity (Freire, 2003, 2005; Kincheloe, 2008; Kincheloe & McLaren, 2008). Morrison, Robbins, and Rose (2008), who conducted a meta-analysis of culturally relevant pedagogy, state “it is through critical consciousness

that students are empowered with the tools to transform their lives and ultimately the conduct of our society” (p. 443). It is the explicit desire to make students aware of hegemonic forces and make “explicit the power dynamics of mainstream society” (Morrison, Robbins, and Rose, 2008, P. 442) so that they can “critique current social inequities” (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 476).

According to Guba and Lincoln (2008), critique and transformation is the aim of critical theory (p. 194). According to Guba and Lincoln (2008), the purpose of critical theory is to create positive social action that creates possibilities for emancipation. This works to catalyze social transformation for all toward more equity and justice (Guba & Lincoln, 2008). However, critique and transformation are modern epistemological aspects inherent in anti-oppressive education, but remain problematic to poststructuralists. One of the challenges is that “consciousness-raising puts into play a modernist and rationalist approach to challenging oppression that is actually harmful to students who are traditionally marginalized in society (Kumashiro, 2000b, p. 39). Butin (2002), an early detractor of Kumashiro’s anti-oppressive approach, pointed out that because of this connection to liberatory pedagogy, “anti-oppressive education is presumed to work through a rational discourse of overcoming, and the myth of the autonomous individual as an agent of self-transformation remains central” (p. 14).

One of the most influential notions of how modern power operates comes from critical theory through the concept of hegemony (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2008). Hegemony explains how dominant groups maintain power without having to resort to coercion or violence. Hegemony operates to subjugate in such a way that “a dominant group can so successfully project its particular way of seeing social reality that its view is

accepted as common sense, as part of the natural order, even by those who are in fact disempowered by it” (Bell, 2007, p. 10).

Some pedagogical tools may have hegemonic effects. As Montgomery (2008) wrote, things like “school history textbooks...are also violent in their effects insofar as they disseminate and legitimise hegemonic knowledge about racism, for example, as simply what bad people or bad countries do” (pg.86). Kumashiro (2001) wrote “history textbooks.... collude in the privileging of hegemonic versions of history” (p. 4). Some of the most notable examples of critical theory come from those who critique this hidden curriculum (Anyon, 1980; Apple, 2004; Freire, 2003; Giroux, 1997; hooks, 1994, Kumashiro, 2009; McLaren, 1997). As long as teachers are blind to the knowledge that they are transmitters of both the prescribed and the hidden curriculum, the latter based largely upon a model of inculcation and hegemonic social transmission, they will be incapable of effectively engaging in anti-oppressive education (Ladson-Billings, 2004). Those involved in this pursuit challenge curricula found in schools in order to critique how teachers and students current educational systems perpetuate oppressive ideologies and practices (Apple, 2004; Freire, 2003; Giroux, 1997; Kumashiro, 2009; McLaren, 1997). This kind of critique helps initiate thinking, in both staff and students, about whose identities and interests are being represented and valued in school.

The critical dimension may create awareness of hegemonic ideologies and resistance toward inequitable social structures (Kumashiro, 2000b). Critique from a modern perspective also identifies taken-for-granted knowledge and challenges people to reflect on their own ways of thinking and being, and to take action towards change (Brookfield, 2000, 2005). Thus, there is potential for transformative learning through the

critical dimension as individuals critically reflect upon inequities and become active participants who work to change dominant ideologies and support marginalized students (Brookfield, 2005). The critical dimension works from the realization that what is considered to be 'normal' is actually contested knowledge. It is this act of raising peoples' consciousness to taken-for-granted knowledge and the relativity of normal, which is at the centre of the critical dimension in anti-oppressive education. The critical dimension is also at the heart of personal transformation and social change; it is through people critiquing their power and privilege and recognizing that they are implicated in oppression, that transformative learning may occur.

One of the most challenging aspects of anti-oppressive education is the facilitation of critical reflection by teachers on their own practice. Hidden in plain sight is the political and social implication of power relations on dismantling inequity. In many ways, peoples' conscious and unconscious thoughts, feelings and attitudes maintain inequitable systems of domination and create resistance to thinking deeply through the critical dimension (Kumashiro, 2009).

Inclusive Dimension of Anti-oppressive Education

Anti-oppressive education also manifests itself through inclusive pedagogical approaches as education for and about the Other (Kumashiro, 2000b). I have brought together Kumashiro's (2000b) approaches of *Education for the Other* and *Education About the Other* in this dimension to represent what I see as approaches that provide for the inclusion of the Other. The inclusive dimension is about learning how to create a successful learning environment for all students, including those who fall outside of the mythical norm. Education for and about the Other emphasizes examining "one's

dispositions toward, treatment of, and knowledge about the Other” (Kumashiro, 2000b, p. 35).

Teachers are both ethically and legally obliged to teach in ways that support different ways of learning and being in the classroom, regardless of race, gender, social economic status, sexual preference or disability (Ware, 2001). Although inclusive education means different things to different people, in this instance it is used to refer to teaching about and advocating for setting suitable learning challenges, responding to students diverse needs, and overcoming potential barriers to learning and assessment for individuals and groups of children based upon student difference (Jordan, 2007).

A common strategy used in Anti-oppressive education is to provide teachers with opportunities to teach in ways that support those who are disadvantaged. The goal here is to create ways that include dialogue and honest discussions about difference, so that teachers can provide safe and emotionally nurturing classrooms and schools for students who are the Other. Pollock et al.’s (2008) textbook provides examples and practical suggestions to educators for supporting marginalized students. Their work aims to raise racial consciousness in educators and to provide useful ways “to counteract racial inequality and racism on a daily basis” (p. xiii). For example, one section specifically addresses the need to help students of color meet high standards through the use the concepts “high help” and “high perfectionism.” High help refers to communicating to students how it is helpful to ask questions, and that the teacher loves to help students when they get confused and make mistakes. High perfectionism refers to how teachers can be constantly encouraging students to work towards understanding and accuracy in their assignments. Both of these techniques resulted in “good behavior, positive peer

supports for achievement, and persistent effort” for marginalized students (Pollock et al., 2008, p. 78). Inclusive strategies such as this provide a means for educators to discuss whom the Other is and how they are being disadvantaged, as well as what teachers can do differently (Pedersen, Walker, & Wise, 2005).

As Kumashiro (2000b) reminds us, “lessons about the Other need to include learning to resist one’s desire to know, to essentialize, to close off further learning. The goal is not final knowledge (and satisfaction), but disruption, dissatisfaction, and the desire for more knowledge” (p. 34). Otherwise, inclusive approaches will lead to more of the same, with the difference being that the oppression may just be more compassionate. As Schick points out, there is a political agenda found in modern versions of inclusive education that seeks to create equitable and accessible schooling for marginalized individuals, all the while ignoring entrenched relations of power that maintain insidious disparity (Schick, 2010b).

There is a strong recognition by those who provide education for the marginalized of how oppressive treatment and attitudes are internalized. Oppressive treatment may manifest itself maliciously to create trauma and illness for marginalized students (Ponterotto, 2006; Young, 1990). For example, students who are marginalized are more likely to be anxious and miss school due to illness (Ponterotto, 2006). This happens when Othering defines and secures the identity of the dominant group through stigmatizing the Other. What is worth noting from this perspective is how being the Other is still seen as maladaptive and not of the norm (Jordan, 2007; Ware, 2001). Othering by those who have power and privilege can, from this perspective, be seen as a symptom of the pathology inherent in the creation and maintenance of inequity (Wilkinson & Pickett,

2009; Taylor & Cranton, 2012). Even when there is empathy for the Other, the binary that separates and maintains difference, because it is not critically inspected, is left intact (Kumashiro, 2000b). Simply providing more knowledge about the Other does not lessen inequity (Britzman, 1998). Therefore, the most significant weakness of relying on an inclusive approach alone is that Otherness may become the object of inspection, where little attention is placed on how power and privilege operates within those who have unearned power and privilege (Kumashiro, 2000b; Brookfield, 2012). Without critical self-examination, the self-observed desire for those who are privileged to remain privileged remains unchallenged.

There are nonetheless a number of positive aspects of the inclusive dimension. One of the most beneficial outcomes of the inclusive dimension is that it is intended to make schools helpful places for marginalized students. This means having a school environment where all students can feel that they belong (Jordan, 2007; Ware, 2001). Talking about the Other's context may make things better and can lead to more inclusive and supportive classrooms. For example, providing information about various sexualities in health class, as natural and normal, is an inclusive act.

Inclusive and supportive practices in education are strongly endorsed by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2005). The inclusive dimension labours to develop the 'contact hypothesis' whereby the goal is to have disparate and potentially conflicting groups in close proximity to one another in order to develop stronger intergroup understanding through dialogue and proximity (Kerssen-Griep & Eifler, 2008). Although existing stereotypes may be reinforced and further entrenched if inequity is not critiqued and challenged (Troyna & Edwards, 1993),

the contact hypothesis aims to “reduce prevailing intergroup tension” through learning about the perspectives of the Other in hopes of creating greater equity (Pedersen, Walker & Wise, 2005, p. 23).

Inclusive approaches attempt to provide places and spaces where harmful actions and inactions occur less often against the marginalized. These strategies focus on educating students and teachers about who marginalized students are, and what their experiences have been, with the intention of bringing awareness and making things better for those students. Inclusive teachers “acknowledge the diversity among their students, and also embrace these differences and treat their students as raced, gendered, sexualized, and classed individuals” (Kumashiro, 2000b, p. 28).

The inclusive dimension works toward the creation of safe spaces within the school and classroom, by using pedagogy and curricula in supportive ways (Kumashiro, 2000b, 2009). Anti-oppressive education that teaches directly about diversity, and does not pretend it doesn't exist, are also examples of this perspective (Kumashiro, 2000b). The goal is to have explicit conversations with teachers about how they can encourage diversity and support student learning. Providing awareness to teachers to support students who identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered youth in school would be examples of inclusive strategies (Sexuality Education Resource Centre, 2011; Walton, 2005). Teaching about how to provide culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995) and differentiated instruction (Tomlinson & Imbeau, 2010) are also examples of these approaches. Providing a safe place is also an important aspect of inclusive approaches and may be specific areas where marginalized students can go and feel secure and ‘normal’. Examples of these spaces could include “anti-bullying initiatives to create a

safe school place, [and] gay-straight alliances that create an affirming space” (Carlson Berg, 2012, p. 15).

One objective of the inclusive dimension is to build empathy for the marginalized because “invoking empathy can reduce racism levels” (Pedersen, Walker, & Wise, 2005, p. 23). However, “oppression does not reside solely in how individuals think about, feel towards, and treat one another, and thus, empathy cannot be the panacea. It is necessary, but not sufficient” (Kumashiro, 2000b, p. 35).

Practitioners also try to correct harmful, distorted, and misleading stereotypes and myths about marginalized students in order to reduce prejudice (Kumashiro, 2000b; Pedersen, Walker & Wise, 2005). Providing education about those who are marginalized can counter debilitating negative stereotypes and beliefs in assimilation and dysfunction (Freire, 2003; Ponterroto, 2006). Concepts of assimilation and dysfunction are two common concerns in anti-oppressive education because they refer to the manner in which those who represent the dominant ideology exercise their power over those who are marginalized. In assimilation, dominant ideology exists at a cultural level through ethnocentric beliefs. In dysfunction, dominant ideology is exercised through the medical model as pathologies in abnormal psychology. For example, while the American Psychiatric Association now recognizes homosexuality (as well as lesbian, gay, and bisexual identities) as being “normal” expressions of human sexuality, prior to the 1970s homosexuality was identified and treated as a mental disorder (Eichler, 2010). Any attempt to broaden what is considered ‘normal’ is helpful in supporting the inclusion of students who are marginalized.

I divided anti-oppressive education into poststructural, critical, and inclusive dimensions to facilitate understanding about the context of my study and my experience as researcher and to provide a means for the data analysis that follows. Creating these artificial distinctions has limitations because the dimensions of anti-oppressive education cannot simply be encapsulated into the three discrete categories I describe. For example, the inclusive dimension is difficult to separate from critical and poststructural theory because the inclusive dimension is used by and for the Other to work towards alleviating their oppression. Critical approaches move beyond providing education for and about the Other to examine whose voices are heard or not heard in classrooms and in curricula (Apple, 2004; Freire, 2003; Giroux, 1997; Kumashiro, 2009; McLaren, 1997). This kind of critique serves as a catalyst for teachers and students to question whose identities and interests are being acknowledged and supported in school. Poststructural approaches provide a means to see underlying social constructions of identity, power, and knowledge and move “toward acting to change dominant discourses by participating in developing and presenting alternative discourses” (Carlson Berg, 2012, p. 17).

Connections to Transformative Learning

Generally speaking, anti-oppressive education is intended to be transformative. The transformative aspect of anti-oppressive education seeks to create productive tension that challenges the status quo through critique, and obliges the learner to examine his or her own resistance, discomfort, and potential implication in oppression. In the end, though, the goal is to create activists who choose to take action against the status quo that is oppressive to different social and historical identifications (Kumashiro, 2000b). Anti-oppressive education has the potential for deep learning about difference and oppression

for participants. The critical reflection upon assumptions, when it leads to doing differently in the world, constitutes transformative learning (Brookfield, 2005).

Summary

It is this infusion of multiple epistemological perspectives that makes anti-oppressive education a complex, but exciting area in which to work toward greater social justice, freedom and personal transformation. Moving beyond the inclusive dimension to critiquing power and privilege and using a poststructural dimension is fundamental to anti-oppressive education and is more likely to lead to the personal transformation of individuals and to activism that can change participants and the system. As long as teachers are blind to the knowledge that not only are they transmitters of the taught curriculum but also the hidden curriculum, which is largely based upon a model of inculcation and social transmission, they will be incapable of moving towards education that is critical of privileging and Othering (Kumashiro, 2000b; Ladson-Billings, 2004). From this perspective, through a poststructural dimension of teaching, teachers will be empowered to understand their advantaged position in the classroom and will appreciate themselves and their students as complex cultural and social beings (Allen & Hermann-Wilmarth, 2007).

Anti-oppressive education has the potential to deeply change those who participate in learning about it. This study aims to analyze the extent to which the experience of an anti-oppressive education class was a transformative one for graduate students and to do so by considering especially the transformative potential of what I have described as the poststructural, critical, and inclusive dimensions of anti-oppressive education.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This qualitative research study used case study methodology to explore the experiences of teachers taking a course focused on anti-oppressive education and teacher activism (AOETA). I begin the chapter by describing the philosophical orientation that informed the present study. Then, I will define case study methodology and provide a rationale for why I chose to use a case study design to explore how AOETA potentially changed participants and their thinking. This is followed by an explanation of the methods used in this case study. Then, I discuss in detail the limitations of the study, my researcher biases, and the trustworthiness of this research. I conclude Chapter 3 with a discussion of relevant ethical considerations for this case study.

Questions

As previously discussed in chapter 1, this dissertation was designed to answer the broad research question “What are students’ experiences of transformation in a classroom focused on anti-oppressive education?” In particular, the study explored the following sub-questions:

- a. What experiences and instructional aspects of the anti-oppressive education course did participants find significant in relation to their sense of transformation?
- b. How did the participants understand the different anti-oppressive educational theories and practices as affecting change in themselves or others?
- c. To what extent did what I have termed Inclusive Dimension, Critical Dimension, and Poststructural dimension discomfort the participants emotionally?
- d. How did participants make sense of the social construction of identity and understand their own identities, or those around them, to have changed?

- e. Did participants enact teacher activism that would be evidence of transformation?
- f. What were the personal changes evident amongst participants as a result of participating in the course?

Philosophical Orientation to Research

Research paradigms are basic belief systems that represent a particular worldview and are based upon ontological, epistemological, and methodological assumptions (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Each researcher's beliefs about what is real (ontology), and how they believe they know what is real (epistemology), significantly impact how they conduct research to find out more about this reality (methodology) (Wilson, 2008). I am committed to a constructivist research paradigm as I identify with constructivism as a pedagogical approach and as an inquiry paradigm. In order to be an effective researcher, each researcher needs to understand their particular research paradigm.

Within the constructivist paradigm, there is an ontological position of valuing relativism, which means believing that there are "local and specific constructed realities" (Guba & Lincoln 2008, p. 257). The ontology of constructivism is based on the belief that realities are socially constructed and pluralistic (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 195). It is precisely this premise, according to Guba and Lincoln, which necessitates qualitative inquiry to understand the human world (Patton, 2002, p. 96). According to constructivism, the form and content of mental constructions (constructs) are held by individual persons or groups and are built (constructed) through social interaction. Hence, constructs are not right or wrong. Instead, it is the quality of information and the sophistication of understanding that build the goodness of fit of the construct.

Constructivism is about recognizing the “unique human experience of each of us” (Patton, 2002, p. 97).

Within a constructivist paradigm “the conventional distinction between ontology and epistemology disappears” (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 111). This is because the researcher is “interactively linked so that the ‘findings’ are *literally created* as the investigation proceeds” (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 111). Therefore, epistemologically, knowledge is understood to be subjective and exchanged through genuine interaction with research participants. From this paradigm, research is conducted in a way that values and allows for the social construction of knowledge. Constructivism, along with postmodern critical theory, is a postmodern paradigm (Guba & Lincoln, 2008). A constructivist paradigm shares a common framework with the critical dimension: “In both critical theory and constructivism, knowledge in itself is not seen as the ultimate goal, rather the goal is the change that this knowledge may help to bring about” (Wilson, 2008, p. 37).

Constructivism is the research paradigm that resonates within this researcher and is a supporting factor in the choice of case study methodology. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2008), case study connects well with the ontology and epistemology of constructivism because of their common philosophical roots. Those who study from a constructivist perspective have as central questions “How have the people in this setting constructed reality? What are their reported perceptions, ‘truths,’ explanations, beliefs, and worldview? What are the consequences of their constructions for their behaviors and for those with whom they interact?” (Patton, 2002, p. 132). The methodology of

constructivism is naturalistic. It takes place in the natural setting and puts the inquirer *in situ* with the phenomenon being studied.

Constructivist methodology is also iterative, hermeneutic and dialectical in approach (Given, 2008). This case study was iterative because there was the continuous interaction between data collection and analysis, hermeneutic because of the constant seeking of meaning making through my own interpretation of what was taking place, and dialectical because it primarily involved meaning making through dialogic interaction. Hermeneutics fit well into my methodology, except that from a hermeneutic view, meaning making is understood to be a negotiated act, not a socially constructed one. Hermeneutics is the recognition that “interpretation *is* understanding” (Schwandt, 2000, p. 194). From this position, there is a “hermeneutical spiral wherein understanding is the constant reformulation of preunderstandings” (Unger, 2005, p. 5). As well, from a hermeneutical position, we can never be outside of our inherited socio-historical construction of the world with all its “standpoint, prejudgments, biases or prejudices” (Schwandt, 2000, p. 195). Thus, hermeneutics is about becoming cognizant and engaged with the tension created by working within our socially constructed ideas that condition our interpretations (Schwandt, 2000).

I tried to be conscious of my own underlying socio-historically constructed biases and prejudices around the topics found in anti-oppressive education as I worked to understand participants’ experiences. For example, one of the things that I attempted to do was to pay attention to my emotional state and to think about my thinking. I also conversed quite a bit with other members of the class and joined a small table group so that I could be genuinely involved in the learning. Immersing myself in the class by

forming relationships with the students, and participating in all of the activities available to the group. As well, refraining from the comfort that would be available from connecting with the instructor and assistants during the course was also helpful in understanding the case. Field notes provided a space to reflect on my thinking at the time. These field notes were much like a diary that helped me make sense of the experience.

Positioning Myself

At the outset of the present research, anti-oppressive education was somewhat new to me, which had significant implications as research progressed. For example, I was being affected by learning about my own implication in oppression generally, and in racism in particular. I do position myself in this study as an ally because I locate myself as someone who, in many ways, has unearned power and privilege, which I acknowledge and desire to remedy (Bishop, 1994). However, for many marginalized people, it is hard to find and trust allies (St. Denis, 2010). This is in part because there are still unequal and unjust social, economic and political mechanisms that maintain ossified systems of dominance for those, like me, who currently benefit from unearned power and privilege. One of the most important things to remember is that “oppression and privilege goes to the very core of our socially constructed identities” (Aveling, 2006, p. 267) and, because I am a white male, I am deeply entrenched in certain privileges that often go unnoticed and that I take for granted.

At a fundamental level an ally is one who genuinely listens, and can understand cultural differences without presuming to know (St. Denis, 2010). An ally is a person who is genuine, honest, positive, open-minded, willing to learn and can make an effort to change their ways and create a place and space for those who are minoritized to be

leaders (St. Denis, 2010). That being said, an ally is someone who does not work with the Other, but for the Other; and not for his or her sake, but for his or her own sake (Aveling, 2006, p. 264). I wrote this dissertation as an ally with the recognition that I have so much to learn.

This research required a keen awareness of how learning about anti-oppressive education was impacting the research participants and affecting me. I recognize that people interpret the social world through pre-existing beliefs, values and assumptions in order to create understanding. Therefore, it was important to remember the reflexive aspect of this research in order to reflect on how I was interpreting what I was experiencing. One of the most significant challenges was being able to use the language and concepts being discovered in the course with ease when speaking to research participants. It was also challenging to be aware of competing ontologies and epistemologies rattling inside of me (e.g. the different conceptions of truth, power and identity that I was being exposed to as a participant observer in AOETA), and my attachment to those ideas and beliefs that seemed normal and maintained my unearned power and privilege. In some ways, the students taking the course and I grew alongside each other, as our knowledge about anti-oppressive education developed. Being both a learner about anti-oppressive education and a researcher in the course has been a transformative learning experience for me.

The Case

I used a constructivist research paradigm and Merriam's (2009) case study methodology in order to examine teacher transformation through anti-oppressive education. "Case study is an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system"

(Merriam, 2009, p. 40) and the key to a strong case study is that the object of study be “a unique, specific, and bounded system” (Stake, 2005, p. 445). Case studies can be used to understand the culture and social interactions of a group, to understand changes in organizations over time, and to “examine the inner workings of people’s thoughts and emotions” (Bernard & Ryan, 2010, p. 43). Merriam (2009) wrote that case study “has proven particularly useful for studying educational innovations (p. 49). Merriam (2009) also wrote that a case study “might be selected for its very uniqueness, for what it can reveal about the phenomenon, knowledge we would not otherwise have access to” (p. 46). This was the situation for students participating in AOETA.

AOETA takes place within a Summer Institute where social justice is a central feature. This was the third summer institute held at this Canadian prairie university. Most, if not all, of the students took a second class in the afternoon. For students, one of the advantages was that they were able to accrue six credit hours in three short weeks. The tradeoff for six credit hours in such a short timeframe was, in some instances, an excruciatingly large workload. The afternoon classes would complement this (AOETA) morning class but also provided specific course requirements for the various degrees sought by students. One of the more popular courses was the research methodologies course. All three of the complementing courses had critical theory, anti-oppressive education, and activism as central axes for the readings and assignments. One of the instructors, when he introduced himself to the group on the first morning of AOETA, said to the students “Good on you for taking the institute, and hopefully it will be transformative.” This desire to see substantive personal growth and change was a part of

the year-long planning for the summer institute and was characteristic of all of the Summer Institute courses.

The bounded case is the innovative program AOETA and the units of analysis, its participants. This course ran from July 6 to July 27, 2010 in the mornings from 9-12, with Friday as a study day. AOETA was the keystone course and made an excellent choice for a case study because of the opportunity to learn about the students' experiences and their potential for transformation. Altogether, there were thirteen days of the course. Although students were the focus of this case, it was the students' participation in this innovative program that bound them to the case. This single case study has the students "embedded within" (Merriam, 2009, p. 49).

The 13 participants had not taken AOETA before, although some who entered the course were more experienced with anti-oppressive education than others. Many had not had any explicit instruction in anti-oppressive education, although some students had taken a course or two prior to this course and had some preliminary exposure to poststructuralism and/or anti-oppressive education.

One participant, who attended AOETA for the first few days, was outside of the bounded case because she did not continue after the first few days and complete the course. She wanted to participate in the study and had taken the course both times it was offered before, but chose not to audit the course this time. She continued as a research participant where she provided a historical context about the transformative potential of AOETA over time. She also took a Summer Institute course during the afternoon.

Participant Selection

Purposeful sampling was used to select participants who formed the ‘units of analysis’ for this case study. Purposeful sampling can be understood to be choosing the site and participants for the case study based upon an informed understanding “of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study” (Creswell, 2007, p. 125). For this case study I wanted to understand the experiences of, and the potential for transformative learning of, students engaged as learners in anti-oppressive education. The content and timing of the AOETA course, offered at the Summer Institute, provided the opportunity to study the phenomena about which I wished to learn.

Research participants consisted of students taking AOETA who voluntarily chose to participate in the study. Specifically, all students who were registered in the course were sent a letter through the Faculty of Education at the university one month prior to the commencement of the course. The letter indicated the purpose of the research and invited registered students to participate in the research project. These potential participants, who were all students in the course, formed a typical and purposeful sample because they “reflected the average person, situation, or instance of the phenomenon” (Merriam, 2009, p. 78). The students in the course were the rich ‘units of analysis’ that were studied in depth. However, one cannot escape the bias introduced because of participant self-selection. This sample is based upon student self-selection: those who chose to be involved in the research.

Students were sent a letter informing them about the project (Appendix A) and were asked to complete and return a form in the self-addressed envelope indicating their willingness to participate in the study (Appendix B). Registered students could also

submit their information via e-mail. Also, at the conclusion of the first day of the course, a lunch was provided for all of the students in class and a presentation was made, discussing the research. Several students in attendance chose to become involved in the research at this point. In all, there were 13 participants as units of analysis who continued as students in the course and one participant who discontinued the course and was outside the bounded case. No students discontinued as research participants, despite having other significant demands placed on their time during the institute. Throughout the study, pseudonyms are used when referring to individual participants to protect their identities. Alexis, the student who had taken AOETA the other two times the course was offered, chose to attend the first few classes of AOETA. She took part in the Summer Institute as a member of another class offered as a part of the Summer Institute. As mentioned earlier, she provided an historical context that became an element of this dissertation.

I chose to examine those participants who were taking AOETA. This was the bounded case. In all, 13 participants were involved as units of analysis in this study and the 14th participant, who was outside of the bounded case, provided important contextual information about how AOETA had the potential to be transformative, and provided a means to learn about the Summer Institute more generally. All participants in the bounded case, except Jackie who joined the study one week into it, engaged fully in the process from beginning to end.

Data Collection

Case study generates a great deal of data. Researchers need to consider how complex the methods used to acquire the information need to be and how much of the information may be lost when it is recorded for later analysis (Bernard & Ryan, 2010).

Merriam (1998) points out that “understanding the case in its totality, as well as the intensive, and *holistic* description and analysis characteristic of the case study, mandates both breadth and depth of data collection” (p. 134). This is exactly what made this case study such a strong methodology to use within this bounded case. Because one of the fundamental elements of case study research is to gain multiple perspectives when carrying out the research, the process of data crystallization, or triangulation, was used (Merriam, 2009).

Triangulation refers to using multiple data collection and interpretation perspectives, based upon an interpretive-constructivist epistemology (Merriam, 2009; Stake, 2005; Yin, 2009). However, postmodern researchers involved in similar types of research are increasingly using the term crystallization to refer to ensuring the trustworthiness of the research (Merriam, 2009). Crystals are prismatic; what we see very much depends upon the perspective from which we view it. Using the term crystallization represents the partiality of what we know and seek to understand. Crystallization reflects a distancing from research orientations seeking a fixed truth that can be found in the post-positivist origins of the term ‘triangulation’. Instead, there is a move towards representing, more fully, the multiple realities and representations of postmodern perspectives (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005). Crystallization is an appropriate term to use in this research and indicates a more postmodern appreciation for what is still a dissertation based upon an interpretive-constructivist ontology and epistemology.

As well as keeping case notes, I chose four methods of crystallization for this case study: (1) beginning and ending focus groups, (2) interviews, (3) participant as observer observations, and (4) document collection in the form of participant journals. There was

also an opportunity to do some other document collection. The opportunity to collect anecdotal documents emerged when I recognized that students would be completing and publicly presenting a project on activism. Merriam (2009) acknowledges the emergent characteristic of qualitative research in general and case study specifically. I chose to add this information to the sample, both through collecting information in the interviews and by asking participants if I could view and take a picture of their projects. Some students also chose to e-mail me their projects and paper submissions from the course.

Focus Groups

Focus groups are also referred to as group interviews (Fontana & Frey, 2008). Two focus groups were conducted in this research (See Appendix F for focus group discussion points). One focus group was conducted at the beginning of the course, on the third day, and another was conducted on the second last day of the course, with the last day of class being an opportunity to present the activism projects. Focus groups are used to stimulate discussions beyond what might transpire during a one-on-one interview between a researcher and a participant. Focus groups foster an exploration of perspectives that are similar and different (Bernard & Ryan, 2010). The focus groups were used to discuss how people felt about anti-oppressive education and their participation in the course at the beginning and end of the course.

Both focus groups were conducted in the Dean of Education's conference room at the university. The focus groups were conducted during participants' lunchtime, as this was the only time when all participants could attend. Because of the hectic schedules of the students, and in order to create a relaxed and friendly learning environment, lunch

was provided. The focus group questions were presented on PowerPoint and then read aloud and discussed with participants.

There were eleven participants in the first focus group. One participant in the research study was not able to attend the first focus group due to illness, and was interviewed separately the next day. Alexis, the participant outside of the case, did not attend the first focus group because she had taken the course previously and may have influenced the thinking of the participants who had not taken the course before. Jackie, who chose to become a participant one-week after the course had started, was also not involved in the first focus group. I asked Alexis and Jackie the focus group questions during their first individual interview. All participants attended the second focus group. The second focus group was conducted at lunch following the last morning of instruction.

Interviews

Research participants were interviewed once during the Summer Institute in July and again in October according to the strategies articulated by Bernard and Ryan (2010), Merriam (2009), and Patton (2002). The first set of individual interviews were conducted in an interview room on the same floor where the course was taking place, using an interview guide (Appendix F). Participants were asked a series of open-ended questions pertaining to their rationale for taking the course, and their perceptions of how the course might inform their future teaching. Probing was used to support the process (Bernard & Ryan, 2010). The interview room created a relaxed setting to conduct the interviews. Each in-depth semi-structured interviews lasted approximately 40 minutes.

A second, more informal, interview took place in October. The purpose of this conversation was to examine participants' experiences and perceptions of anti-oppressive

education after some time had elapsed since they had taken the course. Specifically, the second interview explored with participants whether they perceived changes in themselves and their teaching, as well as their reflections on the course. Prior to the second conversation, the first interview transcripts were provided so that each participant could be reminded about what had been discussed earlier and could speak to any potential changes they might wish to make to their transcript. Merriam (2009) speaks to the value of this kind of member check because it helps to ensure trust and provides an opportunity for the participant to verify that what was recorded was what they intended to say. One participant chose to make several minor changes. None of the other participants made changes to their interview transcript.

The second, more brief conversation, provided me with an opportunity to ask clarifying questions about the first interview that had been discovered during my initial analysis. As well, the second interview focussed on how participants were living their lives differently as a result of the course and in particular, how and if they had been able to implement their activism project. This interview took approximately 30 minutes. The interview occurred in the place of work for nine of the participants, by phone for three, and in the homes of the final two participants. The transcript from the second interview was e-mailed to participants within a month of the interview with a personalized thank you note and with a request to bring forward changes, errors and omissions as a member check. While a significant number of participants e-mailed me back thanking me for the experience, no participants brought forward changes.

During the interviews, participants were asked about changes that may have occurred in their thinking and teaching. Since transformative learning is a highly

individual experience, it was the participants' perception as to whether they had changed that was honoured and presented in the findings.

Participant-as-observer Observations

Merriam encourages researchers to include the following details in their field notes: physical setting, participants, activities, interactions, conversation, subtle factors and one's own behaviour (Merriam, 2009). Based on Merriam's suggestions, I collected information presented in class and made notes on the method of presentation and how students appeared to be reacting to the course content and methods. I also participated in the class by joining and working with a table group. However, the one thing that I did not do is speak out during whole class activities because I did not want to introduce my perspective to the class, which could introduce bias. I also kept notes and reflected upon my participation in class in order to account for the possible effects of the content and pedagogy of AOETA upon the class and me. Bernard and Ryan (2010) write "participant observation involves immersing yourself in a culture and learning to remove yourself every day from that immersion so you can intellectualize what you've seen and heard, put it into perspective, and write about it convincingly" (Bernard and Ryan, 2010, p. 42). Because I was also working very hard to be a class participant, this turned out to be a very challenging part of the research process. I found it very difficult to critique what was going on in the class as an observer when I was working hard to participate in the class. To counter this, I took more content-related notes during class and then made personal notes at the end of each day.

On the last day of class, the students spent the morning discussing and viewing their fellow students' activism projects. Although I did not create an activism project, I

did talk to participants and collect information about their projects on the last day of class as a function of my class participation. Each of the students in the Summer Institute had to complete a project; all students in the class, including the research participants, appeared to take great pride in discussing their activism project. Questions pertaining to the follow-up on the individual activism projects emerged as a focus of the October interviews.

Student Reflections

A self-assessment journal was a part of the course expectations for AOETA. The journal was a place for students to record their thoughts and reflections about the course and I had asked if I could view the self-assessment journal at the conclusion of the course. All of the research participants chose to submit the same journal that they had written for the class. Three of the 13 research participants chose not to share their journal with me. (Two participants said that they didn't keep a journal and one participant committed to sending the journal, but didn't.) Alexis kept a journal of her learning reflections from the afternoon course she took at the Summer Institute, which she shared with me.

Participation in the study was voluntary. As well, participants were informed at the outset that they could choose to participate in all facets of the process, or choose not to participate in some aspects. Some students chose to include articles they had written as a part of AOETA and several participants chose to include essays they wrote for other classes being held during the institute that summer. One student brought to the first interview an essay she had written in a course prior to the Summer Institute. She felt the

essay would provide clarity about her understanding and work as an anti-oppressive teacher activist.

Case Notes

As the researcher, I acknowledge that I was a fundamental and unavoidable construct in the “creation of the inquiry process” (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, p. 84). This is where I incorporated the hermeneutical aspect of constructivism in this case study. Because of my own relative ignorance in this AOETA subject area, my own changing perspectives, as a participant in the course, were collected through case notes. These case notes became an important aspect in the analysis and, when reread during the analysis process, supported the development of a deeper conceptual understanding of research questions (Merriam, 2009).

Data Analysis

The goal of data analysis is to make sense of the information gathered as it relates to both the research questions and the theoretical framework of the study. This process required that I move back and forth between deductive and inductive reasoning in an attempt to create meaning (Merriam, 2009). A total of 577 pages of single-spaced text were generated from the interviews, two focus groups and the collection of 11 student journals in the summer, as well as the brief interviews in the fall. Twenty-nine themes were identified using the constant comparative method described by Merriam (2009), some prescribed because they were included in the interview questions (deductive) while others were generated as a result of the analysis (inductive).

According to Bernard and Ryan (2010), analyzing text is a complex task that requires one to discover themes and subthemes, describe the elements of the themes,

create hierarchies, apply the themes to the text, and create links to the theoretical models (p. 54). Making sense of the data required that I consolidate, and interpret what was observed, as well as what people had said and written (Merriam, 2009). Merriam encourages researchers to use the constant comparative method of data analysis, regardless of whether grounded theory is being used, because, “all qualitative data analysis is primarily *inductive* and *comparative*” (Merriam, 2009, p. 175). Therefore, I used the constant comparative method to make sense of the data.

The most important feature of a case study is “conveying an understanding of the case” (Merriam, 2009, p. 203). Making sense of the case comes through the analysis of the data and the cogent presentation of the findings constructed through data analysis. The process of deductively and inductively generating categories is data analysis (Merriam, 2009) and Bernard and Ryan (2010) refer to the same process as “finding themes” (p. 53). In keeping with the case study methodology articulated by Merriam, the process of category construction followed the steps Merriam established for doing data analysis.

One substantial aspect of the analysis is that I used the information derived from the interviews and the focus groups “as proxy for experience” (Ryan & Bernard, 2000, p. 771). NVivo, a computer based software program, was used through the entirety of the data collection and analysis phase to assist in the organization and analysis of the myriad of qualitative ‘data’ generated as a function of the qualitative research process. Merriam (2009) and Denzin and Lincoln (2008) recognize “data management methods and computer-assisted models of analysis” as effective tools to use in qualitative research given the significant quantity of qualitative material procured during the research process

(p. 34). This is especially true for the substantial amount of data collected in case study research (Merriam, 2009, p. 203). NVivo was used to manage and store the data, and to assist in meaning making through coding text (Bazely, 2007; Richards, 2002). NVivo is one of the programs recommended by Bernard and Ryan (2010) to make data analysis of large and small datasets less difficult (p. 91). NVivo provided a helpful tool to organize and manage the information so that it was easily retrievable (Nvivo Working Group, 2010).

Data analysis was continuous during this study, but there were periods of far more intensive analysis after the conclusion of the second set of brief interviews in October. The first significant phase of data analysis occurred at the conclusion of the Summer Institute and the second significant phase occurred following the interviews in October. As stated by Merriam (2009), “the much preferred way to analyze data in a qualitative study is to do it simultaneously with data collection” (p. 171). However, this was more difficult than anticipated due to the time constraints of the course and the demands of being a participant-observer in the course.

All of the information was digitized so that it could be maintained within NVivo. This included making copies of student journals that could be stored within the NVivo database. All of the other records were generated and maintained using digital media. Interviews were transcribed and coded using the framework set forward by Merriam (2009) and Bazely (2007). This work was done as data was being collected. However, the intensive data analysis took place several months after the end of the research participants’ contributions.

Bias and Assumptions

Assumptions

There are a number of factors that may have influenced this study because of the methodology used. Clarifying these assumptions will benefit both the reader and the researcher. I have chosen to use a case study design (Merriam, 2009) to examine the experiences of participants in an innovative anti-oppressive education graduate program in Education. A case study is “an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system” (Merriam, 2009, p. 40). In the design of this case study, I used interviews, participant observation, student reflections, and focus groups to gather information.

An important assumption that I made was a causal inference about anti-oppressive education causing transformative learning to take place. This assumption introduced a bias toward believing that participants will have had substantive transformative learning. This bias can be seen in the construction of the questions for the focus groups and the interviews. I did not intend to ‘judge’ the degree to which participants took up anti-oppressive work. However, the fact that I was looking for change may have had the respondents speaking about and finding change where they may not have thought about or found before. I thus chose not to use the term transformative learning or share specific information about transformative learning theory with the participants.

Delimitations

Delimitations are choices made by the researcher in the design of the study that should be mentioned because they provide the context for the boundaries that define this case. One of the boundaries of this study was that I wanted to study the participants in AOETA, since its primary focus was anti-oppressive education. Because anti-oppressive

education is a part of the Summer Institute in general, it would have also been interesting to study the experiences of students who only enrolled in one of the afternoon classes.

Limitations

Limitations are shortcomings, conditions or influences within the research design that may be of concern. Case study research may be either qualitative or quantitative. The present research was designed to be entirely qualitative, and research based on qualitative work has to be recognized “as a poor basis for generalization” (Stake, 1995). Therefore, the value of case study as a qualitative research methodology is based upon the researcher interpreting his case carefully and thoughtfully, being cautious to avoid generalizations beyond what has been explored in the case. It is incumbent upon the researcher to allow for those who are the units of analysis of the case to present their multiple realities, the different and even contradictory views of what is happening “so that we may make assertions based upon their lived experience and not our own” (Stake, 1995, p. 12). So, although this research is intended to explore experiences of students in AOETA and how they relate to elements of transformative learning, it would be imprudent to make sweeping generalizations beyond this case. The descriptions and analysis are intended to support the reader to make their own inferences based upon their own personal experiences in their particular context (Merriam, 2009; Stake, 2005). For example, the transformative learning that may occur during the AOETA course cannot be construed to be the reality for all similar courses on anti-oppressive education nor for all students taking the AOETA course. However, there may be some commonalities in the themes and findings that a reader may find transferable to other settings.

One of the shortcomings would be in the participant selection. Participation in this study was voluntary, meaning that the students self-selected for the study; the research participants were those who chose to be involved in this research. Therefore, the participant ‘sample’ reflects students who chose to be involved in this research, and may not reflect the perceptions of those who were reluctant or did not choose to be involved in the research. This self-selection bias may have had an impact on the research results. For example, these participants may have been more confident that they would be positively perceived as research participants because they had a previous connection with anti-oppressive education and strongly identified with it. This may have created a situation where the research participants may have been more predisposed to the notion of transformation learning; they may have had more or less extreme thoughts around anti-oppressive education than other students in AOETA.

As well, I used NVivo, a type of computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) for data management and analysis. While there have been a number of potential concerns raised about using CAQDAS in qualitative research, there are also a number of benefits (Johnston, 2006; Weitzman, 2003). One aspect that should be articulated as a potential limitation is that, in many cases, I am using the transcribed individual and focus group interviews- the text- as proxy for experience and not as the object of analysis (Ryan and Bernard, 2003). Because of the epistemological tradition of anti-oppressive education, it may have been more desirable to use the text as the object of analysis by doing a discourse analysis. However, I have chosen to do a thematic analysis and use the text to provide a “‘window into experience’ rather than the linguistic tradition that describes how texts are developed and structured” (Ryan &Bernhard, 2003, p. 290).

However, by using the text as proxy for experience to describe and analyze text, I may have inadvertently obfuscated some of the subtle nuances and language structures inherent in the “linguistic character of field data” (Silverman, 2003, p. 340).

Trustworthiness

Merriam (1988) speaks to the issue of validity and reliability in case study and she recognizes that the “emerging criteria for quality in interpretive inquiry be based upon considering the relational aspects of the research process” (p. 200). For this reason, I will discuss the implications of validity and reliability in my research through the lens of constructivism as it applies to this case study methodology. In Guba and Lincoln's (1989) *Fourth Generation Evaluation*, they establish criteria for judging the quality of qualitative research. The trustworthiness of this case study is based upon its credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008).

Credibility

According to Guba and Lincoln (1989), credibility may be seen as the internal validity of the study. Research that is credible matches the represented reality of the researcher to the co-constructed realities of research participants. In other words, what is written and described is a good picture of what research participants saw as their reality. Merriam (2009) wrote, “Internal validity deals with the question of how research findings match reality” (p. 213). This was accomplished in the research process through crystallization, member checks, observation, and by clarifying the researcher’s ontology and epistemology.

Transferability

Transferability may be understood as external validity or the generalizability of the findings (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Transferability is a significant issue in qualitative research in general and case study research in particular. According to Merriam (2009), the issue of generalizability is perceived as a substantial one because it is difficult to infer much from a single case. This is why the purpose of case study is to develop a deep understanding of a particular phenomenon. However, one may be able to apply a general understanding from a particular case. The key to transferability is to have rich, thick description, and “when rich, thick description is used as a strategy to enable transferability, it refers to a description of the setting and participants of the study, as well as a detailed description of the findings with adequate evidence presented in the form of quotes from participant interviews, field notes, and documents” (Merriam, 2009, p. 227). Another part of creating transferability is in describing how typical the case is. In this way, readers can decide whether their own situation is similar enough to the one described in the case. Lastly, researchers can examine the individual units of analysis (participant stories) within the case study and this may allow for some degree of generalizing within the case study. The perspectives of the historical participant may also contribute to the transferability of the case.

Dependability

Guba and Lincoln (1989) stated “dependability is parallel to the conventional criterion of reliability, in that it is concerned with the stability of the data over time” (p. 242). Merriam (2009) refers to reliability as “the extent to which research findings can be replicated” (p. 220). In quantitative research, dependability is generated through the rigor

by which the researcher adheres to the scientific method. The same is not true for qualitative research. In qualitative research, researchers design their methodology in the context that research will be emergent and that the researcher will be reflexive. Therefore, in order for qualitative researchers to attain dependability they must clearly document the changes and decisions. Guba and Lincoln (2001) refer to this method of keeping track of what the researcher does as an inquiry audit; Merriam (2009) refers to this as an audit trail. In this study, my field notes provide the audit trail. These notes became important in documenting decisions that were made, themes that emerged, and how methods evolved. NVivo provided a tool to support the research process. I was able to attach notes about insights into the decisions that were made and the subtle influences that were affecting such decisions. As well, these notes became ‘data’ analyzed as a part of the research. Merriam (2009) recognizes the value of crystallization, both in methods of data collection and analysis, in order to achieve a high degree of dependability in research.

Confirmability

Scientific objectivity is parallel to the concept of confirmability (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Merriam (2009) does not explicitly discuss the notion of confirmability. However, Lincoln and Guba refer to the importance of the inquiry audit in developing a high degree of confirmability. As a function of this research process I have also maintained an inquiry audit (audit trail). The inquiry audit is an important element of the research process because one can follow how the researcher has accounted for things like the “values, motives, biases, or political persuasions of the Inquirer” (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, p. 243). Again, using NVivo to provide a central repository for all of the

information collected throughout the research process, the information that makes up the inquiry audit was kept in the case study database.

Ethical Considerations

Without competent and veracious researchers, interpretations may go awry. Merriam (2009) states that valid and reliable conclusions from research necessitate “conducting the research in an ethical manner” (p. 209). In order to ensure that this research was conducted ethically, the design of the present study was vetted through the University of Regina’s ethics committee (as well as that of Brandon University, where I am an employee) in order to ensure that the rights of participants were respected. “The University of Regina considers the protection of the dignity and welfare of human research participants to be of paramount importance” (University of Regina, 2009, p. 1). Informed consent was acquired from the AOETA instructor (Appendix C). Ethical provisions were made for the possible risk to research participants; this research was considered to be “low-risk.” The consent form, requiring the signature of the participant and the researcher, made reference to the following items as required by the ethic committee and suggested by Creswell (2007): (1) the right of participants to voluntarily withdraw, (2) protecting confidentiality, (3) a statement about the potential risks to participants, and (4) the benefits, (5) and the purpose and procedures of the study (p. 123).

Prior to the course beginning, all of the students in the class received a letter indicating that I would be in the class to inquire into their willingness to be research participants. As well, participants received a letter that explained the research study as well as potential risks to research participants. I also met with the instructor of the course,

to discuss my proposed dissertation research. She received and signed a letter of consent indicating her willingness to allow this research to be conducted in AOETA. In addition, at the beginning of interviews and focus groups, I reviewed the consent agreement with participants.

I also worked with due diligence to be ethical as a researcher. I provided an ethic of care during individual interviews to support several individuals as they worked through some of the challenges of anti-oppressive education, such as disorientating dilemmas or the experiences of guilt, anger, and shame, etc. I did this by taking the time to hear their personal stories and providing them an opportunity to vent their guilt, anger or shame in a supportive environment. This was important, particularly when participants discussed their own implication in what they came to know as oppressive acts. As a practicing counsellor, and a certified member in good standing with the Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association (CCPA), I verily believe that I provided an “ethic of closeness, of care, of proximity, or of relatedness, and hold that morality must be theorized from an experiential basis, specifically in the experience of the I-thou relationship” (Schwandt, 2000, p. 204).

Chapter 3 provided my philosophical orientation and a detailed explanation of the case study methodology and methods used in this study designed to explore how AOETA potentially changed participants. This was followed by an explanation of the methods used in the case. As well, a discussion of researcher biases and limitations, the trustworthiness of the research, and the ethical considerations was included. Chapter 4 presents and discusses the findings about participants, the course content and process, the

perspectives of anti-oppressive education (inclusive, critical, and poststructural), and the potential for transformative learning and personal change.

Chapter 4: Findings

As previously outlined in Chapter 1, this case study was designed to explore the question “What are students’ experiences of transformation in a classroom focused on anti-oppressive education?” I wanted to examine the experiences of research participants as they participated in anti-oppressive education in a graduate-level course. As well, I wanted to understand how, if at all, participation in the anti-oppressive education course led to transformative learning by participants. The purpose of Chapter 4 is to examine the findings of the research, particularly, to provide a detailed examination of the deductive and inductive themes that emerged from the analysis of the information collected.

There are three major sections of findings. The first section provides an introduction to the research participants and includes select demographic information, which is then followed by an overview of the anti-oppressive course content, classroom environment, and process in order to understand how anti-oppressive education has the potential to be transformative. In the second section, themes that emerged from the analysis of participants’ interviews, focus groups, and documents pertaining to poststructural, critical, and inclusive dimensions are presented. The third section describes the participants’ experiences of the transformative potential of anti-oppressive education. The intent of this chapter is to respectfully portray the perspectives of the participants through the use of thick, rich description. A critical examination of these perspectives will be taken up in Chapter 5.

Research Participants

The bounded case was the innovative program on anti-oppressive education and the units of analysis were the participants taking this course focused on anti-oppressive

education and teacher activism. In addition, one person, Alexis, who was a student in the Summer Institute, but not a full participant in this particular course, was also a research participant. She was originally a participant in the course, but had elected to not formally enroll in the course again. She had attended two classes, as well as the lunch meeting, and indicated a desire to be involved as a participant in the research. She said she had taken the course in 2006, the first time the course was offered, and then again in 2008. She provided a historical perspective of how students in this course live and experience anti-oppressive education long after they have completed the course, as well as providing a more general understanding of the Summer Institute. She participated in the individual interviews, completed a journal about what she was learning in her afternoon course at the Summer Institute, and attended the second focus group that occurred at the conclusion of the course. She did not participate in the first focus group because it would not have been appropriate, as she had already taken the course.

In all, thirteen participants were involved as units of analysis in this study and one additional participant provided a historical context. The decision not to withdraw the additional participant from the study was predicated upon her desire to participate in a dialogue that was not offered when she had previously enrolled in the class, and is in keeping with a primary goal of qualitative inquiry, which is, quite simply, “to obtain as many perspectives on a topic as possible” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 26).

No participants withdrew from the study (or were withdrawn from the study), despite the significant expectations of this research, as well as the need to maintain a strong commitment to the academic requirements of the Summer Institute. The age range for participants was broad, from twenty-five to fifty-five and the average of the ages for

participants was thirty-eight and the median was thirty-five years of age. There were eleven females and three male participants in the study. Of the four males taking AOETA, three chose to participate in this research. Participants were given pseudonyms in order to ensure anonymity. Arlis, Candace, Carrie, Crystal, Darla, Jarrod, Kalyn, Kristin and Lana were new to learning anti-oppressive education while Jackie, Cam, Noreen, and Sarah had taken similar graduate courses at the university where this course was offered or at another Canadian prairie university. Alexis was the participant who provided the historical context and who had attended the course twice before.

In order to make sense of the dialogue and thematic analysis, the following section provides the personal context and the participant’s rationale for taking the course and what they expected to learn as a result of the course. Table 1 includes information about participants new to anti-oppressive education. Table 2 includes information about those who were more experienced with anti-oppressive education at the onset of the course. A response to the question, “What does anti-oppressive education mean to you?” is also included as a question for those participants more experienced with anti-oppressive education. Table 3 includes information about the participant who provided a historical context.

Table 1: Participants new to anti-oppressive education

Rationale for taking course	Learning Expectations
Arlis	
<p>“I was forced to take this class. It was suggested by my counsellor, this is my first university [graduate] class, ...She said it would be a good class.” Arlis wanted to become “more open-minded.” He thought it unrealistic to believe he or anyone else would easily be able to</p>	<p>“I think we all do the best we can. I don't think any of us are slackers, so to go back and say “I'm going to change the world,” it's not going to be a real reality, because we all are busy as hell.”</p>

“change the world.”

Candace

“I'm the same as Lana, because we signed up for classes together. And it was the same thing. We would have signed up no matter what the class was. We had already decided that this was a Summer Institute summer and then when we saw what was offered we were excited and hopeful for what it could be.”

“What I hope to do is to teach kids, how to instill [anti-oppressive education] in them on the inside, so that they don't lose that so that they're not going to be the bystanders standing on the side as they get older...so they can use their voice for good things and have that power...”

Carrie

“It was a way to do two classes and I'm just starting. ... I loved university when I was in university so I thought this is a good way just to feel back in university and get that really intense feeling you get part way through.”

Developing “Self awareness. I think too, the voice, having a voice and one person can make a difference, and I really believe in that.”

Crystal

“I just got accepted into the masters program in April, and it looked like a very good way to get two classes at one time, I'm taking the thesis route, 5 classes and when I talked to my supervisor, and because my passion is the Hutterian learning, and that's what I want to write my thesis about and I do feel that they've been oppressed, when I looked at the title of the summer course I thought this would be ideal for what my intent will be and when I asked my supervisor she said “of course” so that's how I came to be here.”

“I want to take what I'm learning and understanding and apply that to the Hutterian situation, which I believe have been an oppressed group in our education field for their lifetime, in such a way that I'm not going to go and say to them, but I want to understand where they're coming from and what I can do to make a difference, and so that's what I want to get from this.”

Darla

“I think the title of the course, Anti-oppressive Education and Teacher Activism, that's something I have a real personal interest in. Since I've been working at [a community college], I've

“I am hoping to become more self aware I guess....I think I want to gain some tools, like the information already that I've read so far is going to be very helpful to help me rationalize why it is like this, instead

had one or two incidences where I realized I haven't really dealt with a lot of issues. And I need to know more on how to deal with certain issues, even though I come from a unique background, I would say. I still need to learn how to deal with certain things, so I think that's my big motivator, that along with, a couple of my colleagues suggested this was a very good course to take.”

of feeling so emotional or passionate, be more rational and be able to work through it. That's what I'm hoping for myself.”

Jarrold

“The bulk of my career was spent in a community school. I witnessed too many really quality people [struggle] and maybe I was a part of that as well, and I mean you just did things that were oppressive without knowing what motivated you to behave that way. [I want to] figure things out and help move things along. It goes against every moral fiber in my body to be in a classroom in July, though.”

“I just need to raise my own level of consciousness and I find that I'm sort of in the middle of a triangle between students, parents and teachers. And so, if I'm going to challenge anybody, I better be able to support them.”

Kalyn

“This [course], I definitely wanted to take! It's hard to synthesize that. For me, it is the justice issue. So many issues have arisen in my career that I wouldn't have been able to predict as a student teacher.”

“I wanted to learn more. I wanted to learn how to speak out, how to be more of an activist, because I see myself in that way. But within the structure of a school, how do you do that? How do you really do that? And I know we're not always learning the “how-to's” but I guess maybe being in this class with other like-minded individuals, you get the confidence and a greater awareness...”

Kristin

“I've always been, since my internship, interested in teaching English as an additional language. And since I've started my teaching career, there seems to be more and more call for that. I've taught in

“I think I'm also like many others, just looking for more self-awareness and when I think about myself in the class, it's quite overwhelming. All this information, and you feel like there's so many different

a community school with so many children from different places like Sudan, Ukraine, Colombia, El Salvador, lots of different places and so I'm thrilled that U of R is now finally offering an EAL certificate that can also lead to a Masters. So I wanted to get started right away and this is what was offered in the summer institute and the anti-oppressive education class seemed to fit in so well."

points of view and so many ways to think about things. I just want to make sure that I'm always thinking about my students and when certain situations come up that I'll have more knowledge and understanding to be able to help them. I've always been a strong supporter of multiculturalism and really teaching that, especially to younger kids, even more so than anti-racism, focusing on the positive, you know, multiculturalism, foster an understanding and things like that."

Kristin wrote in her journal "I just want to learn as much as possible and become an even more open-minded person. I'm willing to work hard and be open-minded, to take in new information and try to look at it from all perspectives."

Lana

"I think more of it is the fact that through the year when you take a [university] class you just feel like you're in it and then you're back in your school and you're totally out of it and then ... you don't really connect the same way. [Candace and I] both just thought the three weeks together would be an opportunity to really be involved in it and not have all the pressures of teaching and extra curricular, and all those other things going on, so that you could just enjoy the class and learn some things, and spend the time really in it and not thinking about all of those other things."

Lana wrote in her journal that she wanted to "be more deliberate in my words and actions in promoting appropriate social norms to my students."

Some participants who were new to anti-oppressive education chose to take it mainly for programmatic reasons in order to fulfill program requirements. Others took it

because they heard it was a course that would be beneficial to them as teachers. While several other teachers took it for personal reasons, such as their friend was taking the course and AOETA fit into their timetable and timeline. The reasons for taking the course were varied. For example, one student talked about desiring to gain a better understanding of multiculturalism, while another student discussed how she wanted to learn how to be a better teacher on a Hutterite colony. All of the students expected to learn about how to teach in anti-oppressive ways in order to help them be better teachers and their students be more engaged learners. In general, participants new to anti-oppressive education anticipated that, going forward, the course would help them develop greater self-awareness as anti-oppressive educators and become more open-minded.

Table 2: Participants with prior knowledge about anti-oppressive education

Rationale for taking course	Expectations	What does Anti-oppressive education Means to you?
Jackie		
“[Anti-oppressive education] is really important because this brings about citizenship, and especially in a grade seven/eight classroom, citizenship is huge.”	“I’ve been looking forward to the next part of the course. Because so far during this course, it’s been a lot of repeat between what we did in 820 last fall...”	“It’s twofold. Number one, it’s teaching students about oppression, and speaking directly about the ways that people are oppressed. But it’s also practicing teaching in a way that doesn’t oppress anyone. So I mean, those things are both so huge, but I think that if we are going to practice education in a way that doesn’t oppress anyone, we have to tell kids what we’re doing.”
Cam		
“I do think it will be an excellent learning opportunity and finally	“I have been trying be a very inclusive teacher, I feel, for the last four or	“Finding as many ways as we possibly can to trouble normal and get away with it.”

I'm moving into a high school social studies position. So I'm very energized, wanting to use some of this stuff with a little bit older students.”

five years, and after I took [another course from the instructor in] the fall, I went into the classroom and the only way I felt I could approach anti-oppressive education was to do it head on. Like direct instruction, talking about these things and we did some of that. There was some unpacking that happened and – but, it's so much deeper than that and there's so many other subtle ways that anti-oppressive educators need to help students to do those things and create spaces for them and so I think diving deeper helps me to just think about ways that will affect my teaching practice.”

“I've heard this from a few of the people, there's two people in the class that have taken [the instructor's] fall course and I think from conversations with them, they want action. They're like ‘okay, we're unpacking, we're unpacking our suitcases’ and getting all this white privilege and all these things out there and that's a journey for some, now, I want more concrete ideas about what I can do to start fighting this.”

“There are some real tough decisions and sacrifices to make if you're going to live within your beliefs.... if it's really internalized. Action will feel natural. That's what I think. I think that if we really believe these things at our core, especially as educators, it's almost our responsibility to act and do things. And, I'm doing little things, but how far are you going to go?”

Noreen

“I think that this has been a journey I've been on for a long time, in terms of being interested in anti-oppressive education, although I don't think that's what I would have called it a long time ago. And so I started taking classes like this in my undergrad.... I've had a lot of profs already and then started my masters and the first class I took was the same one as Cam in the fall with [the instructor] and it's just been really awesome and amazing so I just really wanted to continue it and this opportunity came up.”

“I think that expectations that I have for the class is just to continue on a process of self-awareness and self-study and I think that's a difficult question to say what are we going to say differently or do differently as a consequence of this class because I think the consequence of taking this class will be hopefully lifelong and will be instituted in a number of different areas whether it's just being conscious of the language that you use of being more aware of the scenarios that are happening around you. I don't know, I think it's just a heightened level of consciousness that is going to be one of the biggest impacts of that and then how you choose to act on that heightened level of consciousness.”

“I think [anti-oppressive education] is ... flipping the lens and using teachable moments so that you can make people aware. Like me, growing up, I had no idea how privileged I was, and then, all of a sudden being exposed into a world that didn't [have privilege]. I didn't realize those things existed. So I think it's teaching the children to recognize the fact that they have what they have, and hoping that in doing that they're not going to be oppressing anyone else in the meantime by just being, “well I've always had privilege” and it's giving voice to the other people.... It's the teachable moments, those things that come up in a day all the time, and it's just taking that opportunity to explain to the students why it's going on the way it is and how it can be readjusted.”

Sarah

“I guess I would trace back a little bit further. When I was a high school teacher in Saskatoon, many of my Aboriginal students wrote about and talked about the racism that they faced on a daily basis and I wondered what I could do. And so I went to

“I don't think I came with any specific expectations, I just wanted to enjoy the experience of being part of the program because I knew that it would be fun and exciting and that I would learn a lot. And I think because I'm white, a white woman, working in anti-racism, I wanted to see also how [the

“[Anti-oppressive education] wouldn't take place in a classroom. I guess you could have some shared space but an anti-oppressive school would look very different from the schools that we have now. There would be a shared learning community of colleagues that come together to enquire about questions they have about themselves and the world.”

the [name of university] to do a masters of education trying to ask the question ‘What do we do about the pervasive racism in Saskatchewan as community members and as teachers?’ And the things that they pointed out to me, I saw everywhere, it was so clear.”

instructor] positions herself and how that positioning is different and the kinds of languages that she uses, the discourses she uses within the classroom, I thought would be interesting to me. So that's something that I thought would be positive.”

Jackie had taken a different journey to become an anti-oppressive educator. As well as taking a graduate course that focused on Aboriginal perspectives, she had also been a participant in Jane Elliot’s (20005) *Indecently Exposed*, an anti-racist workshop/simulation based on a ‘shock and awe’ approach used to expose the hidden racism among participants. Cam had just moved schools, but had been trying to teach in anti-oppressive ways in the core area school where he had taught the previous year. Noreen, who identifies as white, had been teaching and living in an Aboriginal context most of her life. She reported that she was actively teaching in anti-oppressive ways as much as possible. Sarah had completed a Master of Education and was taking the course as part of her doctoral work. Sarah had completed a master’s thesis that examined the nature of anti-racism among teachers and Sarah had taught a course similar to AOETA at another university in Saskatchewan. Sarah, seconded by the Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, divided her time between teaching anti-oppressive education in high school and university settings. All of the participants with prior knowledge about anti-oppressive education strove to gain more knowledge to become more effective. They were hungry to

become better anti-oppressive educators. These participants understood anti-oppressive education to be, among other things, teaching in an honest and open way, growing self-awareness, and “troubling normal.”

Table 3: Participant who provided historical context

Rationale for taking course	Expectations	What does Anti-oppressive education Means to you?
Alexis		
<p>Alexis did not take the course during the summer of 2010, although she was there for the first two days. She had taken it twice previously and was considering auditing the course but decided to only take an afternoon course at the Summer Institute instead.</p>	<p>“I have felt personally freed by not having to have a new truth. But that I can learn new things, and as I learn them, you bet, I’ll put them out there and I’ll do my very best to incorporate that in terms of self and in terms of whatever my educational form is.”</p>	<p>“For me, it’s about an ability to totally acknowledge the reality of the world that we are in and know that there are other possibilities; Know that this has been created. It really then becomes our own journey and it becomes all about us, because it is really what we can do in the ...cause I think another trick is that it has nothing to do with what is out there, it is all about what we can do inside of ourselves. It becomes our own work.”</p>

Since Alexis provided a historical perspective, a summary of her contributions is provided in the following section. Because she is outside of the case, her thematic analysis was done separately. The perspectives of the other participants are analyzed as an aggregated group and are presented later in the chapter.

For Alexis, understanding anti-oppressive education means, “always noticing or being aware of who does have power or who doesn't, or who's being represented or who's not. Alexis could certainly identify with the challenges the students in AOETA faced learning the material. She said, “I remember feeling confused and I remember saying

‘what do I do with this?’ and I remember feeling – anxious doesn't even come close:
‘What do I do with this in my life?’”

Alexis said that “[poststructural] theory is really familiar to me now” and that “poststructuralism doesn't mean that everything is relative because I've watched some people be paralysed by that. That nothing is truer than anything else, so I guess again, it depends what you privilege.” Seeing the world through a poststructural lens was of value to Alexis. She recalled how she could identify those who knew the language and had internalized the concepts of anti-oppressive education during the time that she was learning them. She said:

I think I've always been able to spot the people that were further along than me, and the way I would say that is, “they seem freer, they seemed free on the inside.” You know, not to be too much “inside-outside”, but they were just moving through life in a different way than I was.

Alexis identified with those who have been historically marginalized due to their sexual preference as several people very close to her had self-identified as gay. Alexis also felt she has been marginalized in her profession because of her gender. For Alexis, she places her passion for anti-oppressive education in the philosophical origins of her feminist leanings:

I just love where feminism has gone. I love where feminism's gone in this century and I think in the nineties as well when we started to look at the idea of intersecting identities and that – like that – that's so great because then how the race and class and orientation and education and height and weight, it all comes in and so all of those things are constantly present to me in every interaction that I have.

Alexis reflected on the question teachers had in AOETA: “How am I going to integrate this into my classes with all the other pressures already on me?” In her journal she wrote, “The teachers in [the afternoon class] are overwhelmed.” Alexis also recalled

“when I took my first class [from the instructor] in 2002, I was overwhelmed, too – with the ‘how of teaching for social justice’.” Of the instructor teaching AOETA, she said, “I trust [her] implicitly.” Although the compressed schedule is difficult for students, Alexis was confident that the courses are set up to be within the capacity of the students “because I have such trust for the people who are running this, I just believe it's not beyond what a graduate student can handle because they're just such sensitive and thoughtful teachers.” She said that after she had taken AOETA the first time:

I couldn't talk about it at all after that. I couldn't really work with the concepts, all I could tell was when I was in a situation in my workplace where something was up and the only thing that helped me at that time was that little guideline that [the instructor] gave, and I can't even remember the whole thing but she says sometimes the only thing you can do is interrupt or disrupt. And the only thing I could do after the first class was to interrupt things that seemed racist or sexist or problematic.

Alexis also felt that the readings were valuable in getting at the theory underlying anti-oppressive education. She said, “I think that a lot of articles we're reading are so good because they do include story, but then they do the deconstructive piece and then they do the reconstructive piece.” She affirmed the quality of the literature by saying, “I think [the readings are] outstanding, both the ones that [the instructor] uses and the ones that [the afternoon instructor] uses. I don't think that they could be better.”

Alexis also valued the activism that has become a part of AOETA and said “it's been so helpful to me to see that we are activists.” She recalled that in earlier iterations of the course, there wasn't the same commitment to activism. For her, teaching about activism was crucial as it was about “living out the things that we talked about theoretically all summer.” All of the students in the Summer Institute completed an activism project as part of their course requirement. Alexis' activism project was her:

Life project of working in North Central with Aboriginal folks and sorting out what the work is, what my place is, how to move forward and a specific piece of that would be at a regional level as I am one of the few white ministers [doing this work].

Alexis recalled that she first engaged at a very emotional level with anti-oppressive education; she felt that others might judge her negatively for her commitment in this area. As a feminist, Alexis said, “I still feel some embarrassment, or shame might be too strong. Stronger than embarrassment, less than shame – to be so passionate about these things.” She acknowledged the emotionality of this work. She said, “The unreal situation in the Summer Institute is that people get so tired and they're a bit afraid, and the interesting thing about that is we know that that brings emotions a little closer to the surface.” Alexis strongly identified with her and other students emotional commitment to anti-oppressive education:

There's still a part of me that wishes that I could just sit here and give you the goods without acting like I care in the least. And that is such old stuff. It's just so old. And yet, like when [a student in the afternoon class] speaks about her – then the emotion just rises when she talks about [an article read in class]. I have nothing but respect for it. There is nothing in me that goes, “oh that is pathetic!” It could not be further from my mind. I feel “okay, this matters.” And equally, when [another student in the afternoon class] is sarcastic and defensive and hostile and this and this, I think, “wow, this matters.” This matters because that's really emotional stuff and I feel it's there almost regardless of where people – what emotions people are demonstrating.

The importance of the content and its long-lasting impact was evidenced in the discussions with Alexis. For example, as she reflected on a part she had taken when she took AOETA that was also used in this iteration of AOETA, Alexis said:

There is a component in the institute where [the instructor] talks about how Education is structured differently for inner city schools, for middle class schools, for elite schools, etc. Some students are taught in order for them to go out and be behaved in society. The middle classed to some extent is taught in schools to go out in schools and be managers. The elite are taught right off the bat to go out

and lead and then say the Montessori, kind of the creative middle class are taught to go out and be creative and whatever.

Learning about poststructuralism, particularly the social construction of knowledge was important to Alexis. She said of:

knowing that poststructuralism and knowledge is partial because for me, that means I don't have to have it in the bag. I don't have to ever completely get it because it's just not possible.

Alexis reflected that when she had been in AOETA before:

We were challenged as teachers and as people in places of power to do something with that, to teach differently. We were taught that there is no such thing as neutrality and that gives me a base line permission to stop apologizing for the angle with which; from which I take up all my work. And that is to be, to notice where power is, to name power where it is, [and] to locate myself in that.

Alexis' experience in AOETA compliments her work in the afternoon class. She said that while she was not in this AOETA course, the theory that she learned in AOETA has been foundational, and therefore, "the theoretical stuff that [the afternoon instructor] is giving to us is not putting me in any kind of distress at all. The afternoon course, which focuses on curriculum, "is about understanding how to read the world as text." As previously mentioned, there were a number of people in the afternoon that were also taking the morning class concurrently. She acknowledged that it was of value to have people at different stages in learning the language of anti-oppressive education in her afternoon course:

It is valuable to have people at different places in the spectrum in the class. So I was taught by the students who were afraid or defensive or confused by what I was saying and I was very much helped by people like [a participant who was more knowledgeable about anti-oppressive education from the morning class] who was right there with me every step of the way and kept saying "Take it further, go further, go further."

In some ways, this was similar to the experiences she had outside the academy when discussing anti-oppressive education. She recalled that learning about anti-oppressive education in class is similar to how difficult doing anti-oppressive education in the world beyond the classroom can be:

The class was a microcosm of [the outside world] for anyone that wanted to see that. So for me there was that there, entire people saying “You are on track, keep going.” And the people who looked at me like I was crazy, so I have got to make a decision based on that. How am I going to move forward, do I stop? They say “Wow, I must be off base.” Or do I trust the people saying “Keep going, keep going.” Everybody in that class this summer would have had to make that decision on one way or another. Who do we listen to? And that for me certainly challenges my assumptions all the time. There is never going to be one happy response when we do critical analysis with this kind of work. It is not the popular path.

Alexis was reminded and supported by the instructor and her afternoon instructor talking about how crazy-making doing this work can be:

You will feel crazy in a lot of your workplaces when you start doing critical analysis. When you start critiquing power in your workplace. People will look at you like you are crazy; you will need some friends and reference points and colleagues on your side if you are going to do this work.

Alexis articulated how much she valued what she had learned and appreciated how she had learned in AOETA specifically, and at the Summer Institute generally. She affirmed the value of learning about anti-oppressive education. She also indicated that she saw the world differently and was taking action to lessen the oppression of the Other.

The course content and process was also a vital aspect of participants’ experience. The next subsection provides findings that emerged from the thematic analysis about the course content and process that participants found relevant and meaningful for their success and learning.

Course Content and Process

The purpose of AOETA was made explicit from the first class through the course syllabus (Appendix G). The course syllabus included the ‘menu for each day’ of the course, as well as detailed information about course assignments and a schedule for the required and optional reading. The thematic content of AOETA can be found in the course outline (Appendix H) and in the course themes (Appendix I). AOETA took place Monday through Thursday from 8:30-11:20 a.m., July 5-26, 2010. The classroom room was a large, carpeted, general-purpose room that was a comfortable space for the instructor, two teaching assistants, and the approximately forty students taking the course (Figure 1). There was also a break room set up in the faculty lounge, located directly across the hall from the class for students and staff to use during their breaks. A teenager, who was the daughter of one of the administrative staff members, looked after this inviting and comfortable room, as well as the preparation of beverages and snacks.



Figure 1: The learning space

Every student received a coiled binder of photocopied readings at the start of the course; as well, students required two books as readings for the class. All of the readings connected to the purpose of the course. Specifically, they examined the social inequalities of racism, classism, sexual orientation, and sexism with the constant theme of taking action to change inequity. The one book was *Everyday Antiracism: Getting real about race in school* (Pollock, 2008) and the other book was *Against common sense: Teaching and learning toward social justice* (Kumashiro, 2009). The course agenda (Figure 2) established what would be happening in the course over the next three weeks. Every reading matched the theme of the day and was discussed by the instructor and as a component of the seated group work that students were required to do daily (Appendix H). The instructor worked from the front of the room and the members of the class were three to four persons per table. Each morning started off with a welcome and a conversation led by the instructor based on the theme of the day. There were small group, large group, and whole group activities that took place following the conversation that either extended the initial presentation or examined the required readings for the course.

EC&I 822 Anti-Oppressive Education and Teacher Activism:

How Far Will You Go?

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday
July 5 Opening Syllabus Routines Lunch courtesy of research project Day 1	July 6 Poverty and Disability Day 2	July 7 Normalizing Oppression Tough Guise (VHS) Coffee reception Day 3	July 8 <u>Racialized identities and racism</u> Racial minorities, FN and Métis issues, white privilege Day 4
July 12 Sexism and Sexual orientation Guest — Ed. Dean Dr. James <u>McNinch</u> Day 5	July 13 Racial formation in Canadian history 1pm — Field trip to <u>MacKenzie Art Gallery</u> 4 to 6pm Social event Day 6	July 14 What constitutes activism? Guest — Ms G. Knudsen, SSBA, on legal aspects of teacher activism Day 7	July 15 Teacher activism Day 8
July 19 Action and Allies Interview with <u>Kevin Kumashiro</u> 10pm Day 9	July 20 Action in Education Panel of education activists Lunch is provided Day 10	July 21 Action and Allies Day 11	July 22 Practice talking back Coffee reception Day 12
July 26 Academic Poster Session Barbecue lunch Day 13			

Figure 2: Course Agenda

I have included the major themes discussed in class in order to provide a greater context for the learning that was taking place during the institute in Appendix I. AOETA was a pass/fail course, in which there were a number of assignments that needed to be completed to a satisfactory level in order to receive a passing grade in the course. Each student wrote two critical reflections on the assigned readings and wrote one piece that was shared within a group of approximately ten other people on the theme of becoming a critical activist educator. As well, each student kept a journal of personal reflections;

created five activist footprints; and prepared an activist poster project that made clear how the student would move towards activism through research, curriculum development, or instruction. Each of these categories of assignments were weighted, with the greatest weight (40%) being set aside for the culminating activist poster project where students displayed and discussed their academic poster assignment on activism.

A large, handmade poster signaled to the students the purpose of the course: ANTI-OPPRESSIVE EDUCATION & TEACHER ACTIVISM: FOW FAR WILL YOU GO? (Figure 2). Students were told that the red footprints across the poster were ‘footprints’ made by a young person. Every learning objective, as well as a daily schedule was in the course syllabus (Appendix G).



Figure 3: How far will you go?

A focus on activism was present throughout the course. This was clearly articulated the first day when students worked through defining anti-oppressive education and developing a picture of what it means to be an activist, as well as discussing some of

the obstacles people face when they become anti-oppressive educators. The ‘footprints for activism’ were recorded and placed around the entire classroom so that at the end of the course, activist footprints encircled the class. Students were also introduced to the language of anti-oppressive education. Students had a list of twenty-nine terms that they would be learning about during the course. These new terms were clearly visible at the front of the classroom for the duration of the course and can be seen in Figure 4:

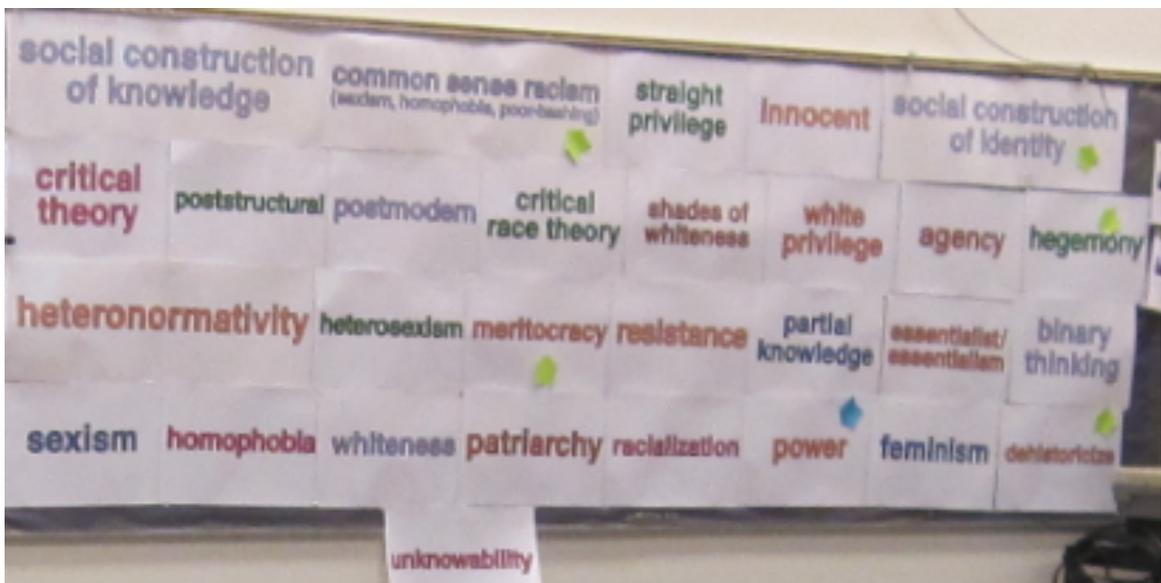


Figure 4: Course terms

As well as class readings (Appendix H), there were a number of important class themes that were the central focus of the course over the three weeks that created a potential for disorienting dilemmas. A number of these conversations and readings drew the student toward understanding their own social construction. The themes were: (a) Power and Disability; (b) Normalizing Oppression; (c) Racialized Identities and Racism; (d) Sexism and Sexual Orientation; (e) Racial Formation in Canadian History; (f) What Constitutes Activism; (g) Teacher Activism; (h) Action and Allies; (i) Action in

Education; (j) Talking Back. As well, there were several guest speaker presentations and social events throughout the course. The course themes are detailed in Appendix I. All of the research participants in AOETA spoke highly of the quality of content, organization, and instruction that was threaded through the entire course.

Creating safety and agency for students

A sense of safety and agency was fostered in AOETA. The instructor said on the first day “this course and class is a safe space and place to critique what is going on in this class and in society.” The instructor encouraged students to “indulge yourself; indulge your intellect; and indulge your emotions. It is a graduate course that will make you think, the application of what we are doing may come later.” The instructor had extended an invitation to students to speak about their discomfort throughout the course, and to think deeply about what they were learning. She said that she didn’t want “clones” of her. An example of having a safe place for students to speak up came when a student, who was quite frustrated since she believed that the instructor had shown too lengthy a video on hyper-masculinity, raised her hand to object. The student said that to watch the video *Tough guise: Violence, media, and the crisis in masculinity*, in its entirety, “was oppressive.” The student said to the instructor and the class that the members of the class only needed to watch five minutes of the video and they would have known what it was about. The rest of the time could have been used to talk about practical solutions to the problem. The instructor thanked the student for taking a risk and speaking up, and explained why she wanted the students to watch the video.

Students reported that they felt they could discuss issues that were personal and important to them. Crystal said that she was able to openly discuss and think about issues

like sexual preference that she may not have thought much about before. She felt this was, in part, because she was not judging sexual preference “in that strict Catholicism that it could easily be.” Crystal said, “I feel safe here to explore it.” Kristin, Arlis and other research participants talked about having private conversations with the instructor to help resolve tension in their learning. One thing that was discussed in class was the process of unlearning and, in that session of the course, a student assistant had a shirt that said “Unlearn.” To start the class, the t-shirt was pointed out to everyone.

When students were learning about white privilege, the instructor said that she wanted the students to: “Notice white guilt and move through it. Don’t stay with it. Guilt is not productive. We need to get over ‘it’ and move through ‘it’.” The instructor had also challenged students to be critical of what was happening around them in society. She said, “being critical is a part of a being a good citizen.” She encouraged people to recognize that this is what we are supposed to be able to do in a democracy. She said:

We can always be optimistic that there will be positive changes. We should not be innocent or naive. If we say that we are a good country, we need to be able to talk openly about these things. This is how we create change that is good for everyone.

Students were encouraged to think deeply about that which they took for granted, including power, and especially socially constructed power. She wanted students to reflect on big ideas like, “Who isn’t in the [teaching] profession anymore? Did the discourses of what it means to be a good teacher move these people out of the profession?” She wanted to make it clear to the students in the class that emotions are important in teaching and learning. Being a good student (and teacher) sometimes means, “you don’t always have to be nice.” One of the expressions that made an impact with several students was the expression, “The mouse has to know where the elephant is going

to step. But the elephant doesn't have to know where it will step." The instructor used this expression to refer to unequal power relations.

Distinct Features of Course

There were several distinct features of this course that are relevant to this study. One was the value of the poststructural notion of troubling knowledge, which is juxtaposed to traditional banking models of education that result in accumulating more knowledge, that was a part of the learning experience of the students. Kalyn said, "In education we have a notion that 'you take a class, and you fill up the kid.'" AOETA was designed differently. The course reflected the need to trouble the knowledge that participants already had. Kalyn said, "it wasn't just a class for me and so we were on this intense journey for three weeks but it was just a snapshot in time of where I needed to be, where I needed to grow."

The course was designed to be pass/fail. However, participants were still very concerned about their marks and getting a "P." For example, Jarrod said during the first interview, "I still got my 'P'" in reference to a paper he had submitted. Carrie had said, "the pass/ fail allows you to absorb the material better, without the stress and pressure to absorb it. So when the pressure's off, you seem to absorb it more." The desire to do well became about a personal journey. Jackie noted making the course pass/fail

focuses on the discourses we've always had about what marks should be, and as much as I'm an anti-oppressive educator, my first reaction was "oh my gosh? What about my average?" But then I passed through that and went "it's about time that somebody [made courses pass/fail]."

According to Candace, the combination of the pass/fail approach, along with the assignments and the discussions, made "her re-evaluate who I am as a person, who I am as an educator and got me really excited to start the school year!" Candace wrote in her

journal “I am very happy that this course is pass/fail. It takes the stress off and allows students to focus on learning, without the pressure of a number at the end.” Kristin also responded in her journal and wrote:

My response to learning that the class was pass/fail is a sense of relief. I feel good that I can relax and just learn and enjoy learning. I always strive to do my best and I can do that in this class without added worry and stress.

For Kalyn, the large variety of activities and opportunities were very significant for her in the course. She said that one valuable thing for her was that Kevin Kumashiro attended via videoconference into the class to talk, through a personal conversation, about the book he wrote and that students were reading as a part of the course. For Kalyn, “he really modeled the world, the global learning....I was excited about his ideas and passion about what we were discussing in the class.”

Kalyn was constantly struck by the way the class was brought to life. Kalyn said that one of the biggest values in the course:

was making the learning truly real, you know [the instructor] brought in experts and we were from all over the place and we weren't just teachers from one little school or one little school division. We could see already, we were nuts and bolts of a bigger global framework...

There was also a Ning for the students to use to interact with the faculty at the Summer Institute and to access resources. The Ning is an on-line social network free and available for students to use. However, no participants mentioned the importance of this on-line social network in the interviews or in their journals. The Summer Institute was also offered during the first three weeks of July and provided an opportunity for students to complete two courses in three weeks. For Jarrod, this was a negative. Jarrod expressed that he would have benefited from the course being over thirteen weeks because the compressed three-week program felt like he was “on a treadmill.” Noreen saw the value

in providing opportunities for substantive personal growth because of the condensed format of the course. She said:

[The Summer Institute] is just set up so cleverly too. The whole two courses in three weeks is very inviting to people; they want to take it. So I see people there that would normally avoid things like that, that are taken into this, and once they get there, they are like, Whoa.

Lana also echoed this sentiment, she said:

I think the fact that it is three weeks where you come for eight hours every day; I think that intensity helps contribute to that transformation. You know if it is a once a week class for three hours I don't know that it would have the same impact that it does, you know because you can go for three hours and you go home and you throw your books on a shelf and you are busy with all other kinds of things especially in the summer when as a teacher you can finally relax. So you are more into it too because you have the time, so doing it in that space of three and a half week period, I think that is the biggest thing that contributed to its transformation in people. Because you hear the things every day, you are reminded of it every day and you can't not think about it.

Instructional Techniques

Every participant mentioned the quality of the instruction as an important part of the course. The instructor's teaching style maintained the participant's dignity during discussions of sensitive subject matter. Arlis and Carrie both said, the instructor's "class is awesome." All participants enjoyed her speaking. Jarrod thought that the instructor asking students at the end of her discussion, "Who wants the last word?" gave classmates a sense of agency. Jarrod also said, of the instructor's oration, "there's a time to listen to a guru on a topic and just sit in awe a little bit. I don't know if that's everybody's style of learning, but it motivates me." Crystal said, "What I valued the most was the delivery and the understanding that the instructor built for us and with us." Arlis, a Franco-Canadien, had an example of the instructor creating a personal connection with him. He said:

She brought out some resources that she had that we had to read, and she had it in French. So she just shows up to me and goes 'This might be for you....I think it

starts with [the instructor] because she's passionate about [creating equity], so it snowballs.

Participants admired how the instructor spoke patiently and with eloquence about anti-oppressive education when using a didactic instructional approach. Lana said:

I think she is an amazing speaker, like I could have listened to her for hours. The sound of her voice, and what she says, and it's deep, and it hits you on a different level, but it wasn't some, like sometimes you get tired of listening, or you get antsy or whatever, but I could have just sat there and listened to her for a whole day. She just -she was knowledgeable- but it was her presentation style.

Cam had written the following in quotation marks in his journal pertaining to one of the instructor's profundities. The quote read "Oppression is not logical, and so when we think about it we can't think about solutions in logical ways." The students were able to connect with, and use the expressions that were presented in class to understand oppression and how to counter it.

Carrie said, "I like how she started things for the first hour, talking about what we had read the day before." To again echo the quality of instruction, Carrie said:

Giving us her perspective about it, like she went in a whole bunch of different directions when she was up there talking but it stemmed from what we had talked about or what we would be reading, right? And she would talk and lecture and discuss, she would ask questions, she would get us involved too. I don't know, I never felt she was giving us a lecture, I don't know what you would call it, she was giving us her opinions sort of, but then she was, she'd bring it around and ask us, you know; she was very smooth on how she would do that right. Because she would get us involved, let us talk about our perspective and then she would challenge us, and sometimes it was uncomfortable sitting in your chair because she [thought] we should be questioning ourselves too.

Crystal also enjoyed her communication style. She mentioned it was "her talks."

Crystal said:

She gives a lot of analogies, 'this is like this', and that really spoke to me, But the learning came from listening to [the instructor] and her lectures because I find her delivery, she's just very genuine and she's very calming. She's not – she never calls on you to make you feel bad, she asks people to share and I'm always so

happy for those five or six that love to talk! I'm a listener! But I never feel like she's going to all of a sudden point to me. And her subtle humour!

The quality of teaching and the organization of the Summer Institute made it easy and safe for students to be engaged in the learning. However, the instructor also used a broad range of learning modalities.

Learning Modalities

Reading

There were a number of articles and two books to read in the three weeks of the course. Reading was a significant part of the course; the reading 'primed' students for the conversations and learning that would take place in class. Jackie said, "There are a few articles that I read that shifted my thinking....I learn through reading. That's always been where I learn the most." Kristin said, "I really do enjoy the readings, especially in this class, they're easy to read and enjoyable, and I especially like the ones that have given examples of people's actual lives and things that they've experienced in different minority groups."

Noreen said:

The literature that we've looked at has been really valuable because it helps you to situate yourself and to examine yourself through self-study because I think that a lot of the things that you read, you see yourself in and say "oh."

The research participants commented that the readings were excellent and challenging. Kalyn echoed a number of students' thinking about the reading when she said, "For me, the readings have been so enlightening." The readings were relevant and provided an unfamiliar perspective for most participants. They were also demanding because of the challenging language and subject matter of the books and articles. Many participants talked about choosing to read the material even though they found it difficult

to find the time to get to it due to the short duration of the course. Arlis talked about how he changed from being challenged by the reading, to being engaged in the reading. He said:

At the beginning, I was like, “What the! I still have to read 129 pages before I go to sleep!” and stuff like that, to being on the weekend going, “Okay, cool, I've got one more reading to do,” or finding five minutes and wanting to read it, instead of going, “Damn, I've gotta read it.”

Carrie also made a conscious choice to read all the material and said:

I know lots of people are saying, “You don't have to do all the readings”.... I have been reading everything, but last night before I got my mark, I was only going to pick two. I was going to read the title, read the first paragraph of all of them and then decide what interested me. And then [my husband] said “you know what, by reading them all, this is where you have to let your mind go. It gives you more depth. It gives you more depth if you read all of them.

Carrie said she learned to critique the writer behind the written word and understand that, they too, position themselves in a particular way. As a part of the course, Carrie acknowledged that she learned to:

Trouble what I am reading.... Where are they writing from? Why are they writing what they are writing? Where are they coming from? Why are they saying what they are saying about this topic? We had to take apart the stuff that she had given us to read and we had to critique it, think about where the writer is coming from, who is writing it, what perspective ... what backpack are they wearing with them when they are doing this writing...

Talking

Participants worked within the same table group every day, with there being additional whole, large and small group experiences throughout the three weeks. One student spoke to the strength of using lots of table work as a helpful approach that provided an opportunity to know your table group very well and develop other relationships in class. Kalyn said “We had to sit in groups and then we had our little

cohort in amongst the whole class and so that there was a consistency of coming to the table ... it was very comforting for all of us.”

Sarah recalled that being in a group provided an opportunity to “talk with people, which is one of my top ways to learn rather than reading a million articles.” The dialogue between people was important. Cam said, “I always learn from other people's comments and perceptions.” Jackie also found value in being able to work and talk as a member of a group. She said, “There is nothing better than learning from other people who are learning and excited about their learning.” Working together with classmates, as well as talking about readings and presentations, was a positive and constructive exercise.

Kalyn said:

I think it's ‘all good’ and everything leads you to something else. You may think one thing and think you're on the right track and then somebody in your group says something else and you're changing your thinking and it's not even that anybody's right or wrong, it's just that we're all trying to do the best that we can and get our minds around this whole thing— it's almost like, I always say “the more you know about something, the less you think you know.”

Noreen echoed participants’ comments about being able to talk about what they are learning when she said, “I find the discussions super valuable that I've been able to have with people.” However, there was a heavy workload attached to the Summer Institute. Jackie said that she would have preferred to do more talking about what she was learning outside of class but because of the time constraints and workload, she “had to disappear a lot from family and go to read and do homework.”

Several participants said that they liked talking about what they were learning during our research interviews and found a one-on-one conversation helpful. Kalyn said, in reference to our interviews, “to have you as part of our class was an added bonus, I think, and I am so glad that I had the opportunity to be more into, to have some of these

conversations.” Arlis said, “There should be a psychological part in all this, because it was all, ‘Change the world!’” He was making reference to the idea that there was value in spending time one-on-one discussing and reflecting on his learning.

Writing

For some, learning best occurs when they are writing. Although all students implied they benefited from this learning modality, it was Carrie who said directly that:

I like doing the papers... I don't like getting graded on them, but – when you do the papers, you take an article, you go more in depth, and you have a greater understanding than you would when you just go through and highlight it....

Listening

There were also many opportunities in AOETA to hear personal stories from classmates and from presentations. Like Cam, many participants enjoyed “hearing stories and hearing relevant examples to our lives.” Cam said he preferred listening to presentations because “I think of myself as a fairly emotional person so [listening to people’s personal journeys] for me, is what this is about.” Students heard from a number of presenters who joined the class in person or they came to us live through video-conferencing. For example, one presentation provided information about legal matters and another about anti-oppressive education.

Reflecting

Journaling was one of the expectations for students in the course and one of the things they were asked to do as participants in this study. Noreen said, “journaling is huge! ... it's so important to look at where you've been and where you're going....It's the examining of yourself and being able to look through your own actions, your own existence, your own experience and analyze that.” Not all participants found journal

writing easy. Carrie was challenged to write in her journal and wrote what she felt her instructor wanted to hear. She felt her journal reflections “won't even be the truth.” For the journal that I was to get from Carrie, she said in the fall interview:

You can look at it, but I will put in there – because I know she's looking at it too – so she's going to get what she wants to hear. And you're going to get in that ‘Oh! I just discovered this about myself!’ . Because that's what this class wants, you to discover yourself, and.... I'm not going to write it.

Most of the students felt, as Jackie did, that “writing’s always helpful.” Sarah had been journaling quite a bit, in part, because she felt ‘isolated’ being away from home.

Arlis said:

I've written more journals now than I ever have, just because it's fun to argue with yourself instead of saying something and somebody going, “Oh you're full of beans!” I can argue my thing and then say, “Here. Read it. If you care, good. If you don't, good.”

Doing

Students also had to come up with “Footprints for Activism,” discussed earlier, and an activist project. In the footprints for activism, students had to provide examples of what they had done to take action against oppression and post them around the wall of the classroom on an 8 ½ by 11 inch footprint. However, the most significant ‘doing’ was in the activism project, which is discussed in more detail in the next section.

Activism

This course was dedicated to learning about anti-oppressive education and teacher activism. In order to gather information about the role that activism played in the transformative potential of anti-oppressive education, participants were asked to reflect on activism during both interviews. Participant insights on activism and its potential for transformative learning are discussed in the following two sections.

Reflections on Activism

Participants were interested to learn about activism. For example, Darla said, “activism is something that I've been very interested in because I've always been such a passive person and so I think that would be something I would really like to get involved in.” After Kristin gained confidence in doing her activism project and understanding the need to go beyond basic multiculturalism, Kristin said during her fall interview, “The monkey's off your back, kind of thing. You're free to just move on and really become the activist and do things, now that I've settled my own personal identity-type issues. I can move on from there.” In order for Kristin to become confident as an activist, she felt she needed to resolve her own personal issues around multiculturalism.

Jackie had also valued doing an activist project and had taken the time to write in her journal about taking action once the course was over. She had made a commitment to do her activism project by writing a testimony of how she would take action in the fall.

Jarrold said during the first interview that he was going to go back to his school “as an activist, with a few more skills, knowledge and attitude that's appropriate to move things along, being respectful of the practice [of anti-oppressive education] should be in the classroom.” However, he felt that time constraints were going to be a significant issue. He said:

The people I work with won't have had [AOETA], I can't dedicate thirteen days to trying to build an idea of what activism in our school means. If I can bring this to a fine point, we'll talk about it for a morning before we open up this fall, and we will reflect on it a few times this year and I guess that will have to be how I keep learning and how I hope that the people I work with learn [anti-oppressive education].

Jarrold said, “My responsibility is to communicate vision to the community. To make sure that we're on a road, this is a new road.” Jarrold also reflected on the:

Need to find a way to weave [anti-oppressive education] into the fabric of what happens every day. At the end of the class when we talked about, “what are you going to do?” Well, I think I'll provide some common prep time for teachers. I work in a tiny school, so I can take the high school down to the library and we can have a student senate and talk about “what does anti-oppression mean to us here?” Show them an agenda that's blank and say “how do we move this along?” Let's build it. Let's learn together.

Jarrold had embraced an activist approach to anti-oppressive education but recognized that the teachers who comprise his staff have not been immersed in anti-oppressive education and would not have the concepts or the language developed in class. So, while Jarrold wanted to “be an activist,” he recognized that this work would be difficult to do when he returned, as principal, to his school. The teachers will not have “some of the discourses that were talked about.” Jarrold said that you can’t push people too far. In fact, his words were “you can't push a community off the cliff either.” Jarrold saw a disconnect between the common sense learning taking place in class to the common sense understanding that prevails in his community. When it came to the task of being an activist for anti-oppressive action in his school, Jarrold said:

I'm not pessimistic that when I walk into our staff meeting, I know there's going to be discomfort and I'll reference it that way, in the most respectful manner possible. “You're going to be uncomfortable, it's not about blaming, right?” And I'll tell them, “you're going to have GAS by the end! That's okay. If you don't, that's okay too. But we have to get busy on this.”

The concept of GAS had emerged in the group that Jarrold was working with and refers to the Guilt, Anger, and Shame (GAS) people feel when they realize that they have been implicated in oppression. Jarrold commented that his message to the staff would be to “breathe your own air first’, I'm pretty sure that you fix yourself. That almost gives people permission, though, to never act, that ‘well I am working on it. I'm working on me.’” Jarrold said he wasn’t going to let staff not act. He had taken up the instructor’s

metaphor regarding the importance of starting with oneself when doing anti-oppressive work: “people need to put one’s own oxygen mask on first, before attempting to help others with theirs.”

Jarrold said, “I’d like to have T-shirts made with the graphic, “put the oxygen mask on yourself first,” that’s my first activist activity that I’d like to give that to my teachers and to my staff and say “wear this, try it on, look in the mirror when you’re wearing it and you’ll learn a lot!” This comment went back to what the instructor had said at the beginning of the class and was, obviously, an important learning for Jarrold.

Participants recognized what an activist was and desired to become activists during the course. They also were aware of the difficulties that can arise when “spreading the word” once they returned to work in the fall. As well, all participants but one were aware that participants needed to work from the inside out. That is, they recognized the importance of personal transformation.

All participants in the course were expected to create an activism project in order to successfully complete the course. The projects were very different in scope and focus, and are described below according to those who were new to anti-oppressive education and those who were more experienced.

Participants completed activism projects and were asked to speak about them during both interviews, but primarily in the second interview. What follows is the participants’ explanation of their activism project and their explanation of how they were able to implement their project. I also include insight into the connection between the participants’ journey with their activism projects and their personal journey of transformation.

Activism projects

New to anti-oppressive education

Arlis: High School Students are Now Able to Succeed on their Own

Arlis's activism project was to develop a thesis that would examine the indicators of success for high school students that are living by themselves. In particular, Arlis wanted to study the underlying social issues and supports that are required for students living on their own to succeed in school. Through this research project, Arlis wanted to understand, "what is success?"

Arlis had not done anything on his activism project when I met with him in October of 2010. He had just started to meet with and talk to students who were living by themselves who may be potential research participants in his study, but he had not begun any formal investigation of this problem. Although Arlis may have had a perspective transformation, he had not begun to do differently by doing his activism project.

Candace: Unothering Autism

Candace's "activism project was about autism and how to 'unother' it." Candace was inspired by a "little boy who's in grade one this year." She had taught him kindergarten the year before. Candace said:

The kindergarten kids, when he was in the class, totally loved him and looked out for him and they didn't see him as different. And that class had this class community that was amazing and so that's what inspired this project and has ultimately inspired me to do a thesis, and so I wanted to extend that. I wanted to extend that into the school setting so it's not just that one grade, one class that has that crazy compassion, that understanding that [the student] might be a little bit different, but he's still fun. So my project was trying to extend that into the school.

The goal of the project was to teach him how to play games and interact with other kids and to educate the students about learners who are exceptional. Candace wanted to understand and teach about what autism is, what makes him different, what

makes him the same, and just making it so the students were aware of him and accepted him. Her project was about “making it normal.”

When I met with Candace in October of 2010 she said that her research project had evolved. Candace said:

It's evolved because the reality of the class I have. Obviously they're an interesting bunch, but they're my priority, right? I need to get these guys to learn and ready to go, but then in the same way, I still have this crazy compassion for [the exceptional learner] and he's going to be in my class next year I hope!

But in terms of my actual plan on my project, I don't think that I – I still have it. I kept it because I really like it, but I haven't followed it step by step. I think I've adapted to what this class needs to understand what he has and then when I'm outside with him at recess, sometimes it's awesome and we can interact with others and some days it's like all my energy just to keep my eyes on him. So you have to adapt because the reality is, once you're in a school, it changes.

Candace had also adapted her activism project to suit the changing context of her classroom. It is difficult to know whether she had moved to engaged activism with her adapted plan or whether she was able to rationalize her desire to do the work she had set out to do in her activism project. Adapting her activism project could be another subtle form of resistance to doing differently.

Carrie: Diversity in Resources

Carrie's activism project was to “build kits for a unit in Social Studies and it would have a whole bunch of resources inside it.” She wanted to find books and videos and stuff to use as a lens to make sure that the kit had different perspectives in it, not just one voice. The kit “would have many voices and how I would go about that and putting a sheet in to get people to say what did they like, what do they think, you know.” However, Carrie “hated doing the project.” Carrie said:

I couldn't find anything that I wanted to do because I was in between two jobs, there was nothing I could do and I didn't know what my job looked like and then if I was in a classroom it would have been a totally useful project but I was going

into a job that had no job description, nobody could tell me what I would be doing.

It was hard for Carrie to come up with an authentic activism project because she didn't know what she was actually planning for. When I met with Carrie in the fall, she was not doing her activism project and was not adapting it so that she could do it in her new setting. This participant had not been able to engage in the activism that would have been indicative of a transformative learning experience from a critical social perspective, in part, because she had chosen not to pursue a relevant or meaningful application of the activism project.

Crystal: Unlearning: Becoming an Activist for the learning of Hutterian

Children

Crystal's "activism project was research based and focused around the Hutterian learning." During the first interview during AOETA, Crystal mentioned that she had originally wanted to do a thesis that would advocate for supporting the Hutterian lifestyle through what resembled a Freirean pedagogy of liberation. But once immersed in AOETA another question emerged, where Crystal wanted to understand:

Where I fit in this, because I don't truly know that the Hutterites might even think themselves oppressed. They might not believe that, because they like the rigid desks, it's – this kind of teaching, no extra noise, not the teaching that we were taught and so I don't know if they'd even be open to me trying to point out that... but I don't know what that question is for my thesis yet, but I've engaged in it a lot, you know I wanted to do a lot more background reading about the Hutterites.

When I talked to Crystal in October, she was "more aware of the fact that if they don't view themselves as oppressed that is going to be a very difficult thing to work with..." Crystal was not working on her activism project because she said, "I am needing more graduate understanding to move forward with where I will go with the writing."

However, Crystal said she was "unlearning" so that she could be an ally for the Hutterian

community. Without the intention to do so, Crystal may be substituting new discourses of unconscious oppression for old. While not having the knowledge to move forward at first appears reasonable, her choosing not to engage in her activism project also seems to suggest that, from a critical social perspective, authentic transformation is much more difficult to attain than expected and that people can provide logical and reasonable responses for not enacting anti-oppressive education.

Darla: Impacts of Residential Schools: The Other's History

Darla did her activism project on residential schools. In particular, she examined her dad's experience in residential school and how the legacy of residential schools has affected Canadian society. Darla "wanted to present [about residential schools] in the classroom using the medicine wheel and how residential school has affected not a few people but Indian people across Canada and how it has affected every aspect of their being." In her words, she wanted to connect "the emotional, the mental, the physical and the spiritual and how [residential school] really stripped all those areas away from Indian kids in droves." Darla said that she got very emotional when she was writing her project up.

When I met with Darla in the fall, she indicated that she followed through entirely with her project and presented it to the health records people and managed quite well in her presentation. This suggests an important transformation through the critical social perspective because, not only was Darla thinking differently, she was also doing differently. During Darla's presentation, the staff and students were very "enlightened to know that this was a fact in Canada because they never had heard about it ever." Darla had made an evaluation form to give people who attended her presentation at work. In Darla's presentation, a person who identifies as non-Aboriginal started to cry. The soon

to be mother asked “Why? Why would that even make sense to do that to those kids?” This lady was deeply affected by Darla’s message. Darla indicated that presenting her project was different and difficult because her “father used to say ‘People do not want to know about residential school.’” Darla is “more accepting of [ignorance about residential schools] now because of [the instructor’s] class.”

Jarrold: Social Justice in Education: Administrators as Leaders

Jarrold’s activism project was “a thematic study of Principals and how they approach social justice.” The goal was always to work within the leadership realm and to change school administration to be more socially just.

When I talked to Jarrold in October, the direction of the activism project had “turned the corner a bit.” He said “I am not having too many conversations with Principals, but with Directors and [the Human Resource] Superintendent. This Friday we are pitching this to our Assistant Director and [Human Resource] Superintendent.” Jarrold said, “for [his school division] they are getting the ‘full meal social justice deal’ and we are willing to take a chance on that and we think that it will be well received in our Division.” Jarrold had committed to and was moving his staff toward a social justice mandate. However, he referred to the challenges of speaking to a staff, who had not attended the Summer Institute about social justice, given that “it is quite theoretical, you know, and in some ways distant from the day to day tasks that you do.” The acknowledgement that the theory is difficult to grasp and far removed from its application in the modern world could be a subtle form of resistance to meaningful transformation or it could be an honest reflection of how difficult this work is to do in an educational system built for a modern world.

Kalyn: Sticks and Stones: Factors that Keep Teenage Girls in Abusive Dating Relationships

Kalyn was a full-time student working on completing her graduate degree. Her activism project was designed as a research study to examine why teenage girls are attracted toward and stay in abusive relationships. Kalyn was still working on her study design and was continuing to take graduate courses. She reflected on her activism project during the second interview. Kalyn had certainly been thoughtful about enacting anti-oppressive education. Once again, she still desired to learn more so that she could do differently, which speaks to the complicated nature of engaged activism necessary to demonstrate transformative learning from the critical social perspective. Her desire for more education could be another compelling rational discourse to justify inaction. She said that she had been thinking:

About teaching at the YWCA, I mean the YWCA will always be working with that and extending that into my class will always be something I will be committed to. Especially with so many themes and ideas and discussions you can bring up about dating violence and connecting it to them and supporting their endeavors and supporting students.

Kristin: Beyond the Tip of the Iceberg: Rethinking Multiculturalism

Kristin's activism project had three sections and was focused on "multiculturalism and going beyond multiculturalism." The three sections were "looking at myself, looking at my students, and looking at my classroom environment." The first part, looking at myself, meant to "think about things in a different way." When I talked to Kristin in the fall, she had extended the main ideas of her activism project to another graduate course she was taking at the university that was looking at teaching grammar to students who have English as an additional language. Kristin said, "one of the things we have to do is

present a chapter on new grammar perspectives and mine was about spoken grammar. I even found myself making connections to our anti-oppressive education class.”

Looking at students was the second part of her project. Kristin wanted her students “to start using those questions.” During our fall interview, Kristin pointed to the board where the questions had been posted since September. The questions were “Who is represented, who is not represented, and how are they represented?” Kristin said she wanted “to get to the point where the kids are thinking about [the three questions] more and more and more.” Kristin also worked at “creating that safe environment where everybody feels welcome and everybody feels like they are treated fairly.”

Staff members at Kristin’s school are encouraged to take on a social justice initiative in their classroom. This had led to an emergent plan when I visited her in October. Kristin said:

Social justice is one of the main themes this year for our school system. So that’s good, I don’t know what I am going to do yet, it could be something internationally, it could be raising money for charity or it could be something simple like making sandwiches for one of the shelters or something like that.

Kristin acknowledged that her activism project had shifted a little bit. Kristin said she does the same things, “but maybe just with a different outlook.” Kristin had worked to initiate her project, but it was different due to the changing context she found herself in the fall. Kristin had worked hard to engage herself in activism that was linked to her project, which is very suggestive of her transformative learning. This goal of engaged activism may have been easier for Kristin to enact since the school had a social justice theme that focused teachers on doing anti-oppressive work.

Lana: Earth Day...Every Day

Lana's activist project was to create more awareness on how dependent people are on oil products. When I met with her in October she said she plans on implementing the project in April. Lana was very excited and pointed out her belief that anti-oppressive education:

Is far more effective with five year olds rather than forty-five year olds because once you've hit that age you are just the way you have done things and change is just such a big thing to people, whereas at this age they are pretty flexible.

Her project is on "taking care of the Earth" She wanted kids to understand:

The whole idea of the oil spills that we have had, and that they are our fault, and if we weren't so reliant on the oil industry, we wouldn't have such a need for that and those two things wouldn't happen. So I wanted the kids to know what types of products that we have that are oil based things or that we need oil to make plastic bags or high heel shoes or whatever that may be.

Lana was feeling excited to implement her project in the spring because of the positive impact it might have on the parents and community, and is suggestive of a perspective transformation.

More experienced with anti-oppressive education

Jackie: The Circle of Courage: Self-assessment for Learning Rubric

Jackie, in a positive and fun way, declared that her activism project "is really quite cool." Her activism project was to use the Circle of Courage, developed by Martin Brokenleg, "to have kids see where they fit on the Circle of Courage with all the problem solving that they did in math."

When I met with Jackie in October of 2010, she had already infused the Circle of Courage into the outcomes in Math in the form of a rubric. She did this as a way to help students see the value in working collaboratively with each other. Jackie had turned her activism project into action. She would say that she had a perspective transformation some time ago and now, she was doing differently in her classroom by using her activism

project. Jackie's activism project was spoken very highly by other students, as if she had very clearly wanted to create something that she would be able to use in the fall, which is a further indication that she was engaging in activism. She had a transformative learning experience that led her to sustained activism that would likely have happened whether or not she had created an activism project in AOETA. Her transformative learning experience had become as much about enacting social change as it was about personal transformation, a key indication of transformative learning through the critical social perspective.

Cam: The Roots of Inequity: Exploring Student Perceptions of Poverty

Cam's activism project was to have the high school students that he teaches examine their privilege in order to "analyze the ways that they construct their own privilege and how they had come to understand their social position." Cam had pointed out in the first interview some of the challenges of doing anti-oppressive education in public schools. He said:

Learning in discomfoting ways is easy when you're in a classroom as a student, you get one perspective, but the kids aren't going home and relaying what they've learned or their ... experience in the most articulate way. So they tie onto those words and you know 'Oh we're learning about homosexuality in social studies class' you know, well that's going to ring some alarm bells.

When I talked with Cam in the fall, he said he has been actively working on his project through conversations he has been having with students, but he hasn't been documenting what he has been doing. However, as Cam mentioned, this was intended to be a graduate thesis requiring ethics approval and a formalized approach for gathering the information that Cam had yet to do. Cam said:

The work has begun without maybe me planning it to begin. But if I am to use it for any academic purpose I need to get on it and start to track and do it as I intended to do and I don't even, I have to sit down and reread it, I have just gotten

disconnected and just started teaching. And I need to make some decisions whether I am for sure going to do the thesis stream because that would impact that too.

Cam said, “The successes have been many. I mean, relationships with the students have been wonderful, the conversations have been rich, the behind closed doors, it’s been great.” Cam had also had a perspective transformation some time ago and was now engaged in a modified version of his activism project that was moving forward in spite of not having completed the necessary ethics work so that he could use what he was doing towards his graduate degree. Cam was also engaged in social change and personal transformation, key elements of transformative learning through the critical social perspective.

Noreen: Tapwewin

Noreen’s activism project was to design a program to examine residential schools as sites of genocide. In her project, she wanted to raise awareness of the connection between the residential school legacy and the atrocious behavior that is a part of Canadian history. She wanted to show students residential school sites in various areas of Saskatchewan and in Brandon, Manitoba. She wanted to take “students there with survivors of those experiences to develop a critical empathy.” The purpose was to develop in students “a sense of responsibility which then can lead to social activism.” Because of the magnitude of developing and implementing the project, the idea has been scaled back where she is “looking at those same kinds of concepts and that same process... [but she] might implement it in a local context.”

Noreen said in the October interview, “it is still something I think I want to continue to look at, but probably just further down the road.” She said, “it is not that the project itself is too large or anything, but just that certain things need to happen before.”

Noreen wanted to make sure she had a proper understanding of “historical empathy, of historical consciousness, and of the semeiotics of empathy....Otherwise it is just like I am tossing the kids into the fire. It is cruel actually.” Noreen discussed her profoundly different approach to the world as a result of learning about anti-oppressive education (a perspective transformation) and her desire to actively engage in anti-oppressive work. So, it is difficult to know whether Noreen’s delay in engaging in the touch work of anti-oppressive education is a subtle form of resistance or genuine concern for the welfare of her students. Noreen also communicated to me during the fall interview how she was teaching through critique in her classroom and engaging students in conversations that, while discomfoting, were also important because she was challenging hegemonic meaning-making and socialization processes in her classroom.

Sarah: Talking Back: Student Subjectivities in Public Schools

Sarah’s project had morphed to “Talking Back, Looking at Student Subjectivities and Counter-Narratives in Public Schools.” Sarah is a PhD student; she plans to use this activism project as her dissertation. Sarah has been “doing change” for a number of years. She is interested in “actually writing a dissertation on my topic, and of course I want to go further with it because I want it to be an exemplar for other teachers that want to do this kind of work.” She said she wants to continue

to work with a group of teenagers. And I am inspired daily by just their energy and their excitement on writing about youth. I will maybe ask some of them to be part of my study eventually once the course is over and just keep being reinvigorated by how you take this up, and I want to see what happens to them after a course like this.

This activism project has really been a springboard for Sarah to plan out her research agenda for her dissertation. She said:

I am really excited. And the thing is I am not just going to use student interviews, I am going to use artifacts as well, like their own artwork and their own poetry and short stories and writing that they have created from my class that I know are counter-narrative, I can see they are, and so my dissertation will be the creative piece that I want it to be, it'll have an artistic quality that I really wanted it to have because I really feel that the learning that we do, I don't know, it is so organic and it is so multi-levelled and it incorporates everything.

Sarah was also enacting her activism project in a substantial way. She had used the time in class to clearly articulate and plan her dissertation research. Sarah's perspective transformation had occurred earlier as a result of other experiences and she was continuing her engaged activism, as a leader in the class and through her work. Sarah's transformative learning journey had become about social change as personal transformation, and reflects a transformative learning experience through the critical social perspective.

All but one participant reflected favorably about being asked to complete an activism project; some were able to use the project as a jumping off point for their personal journey towards being an anti-oppressive educator. Most participants developed projects that were close to the things that were important to them, were identified as disorienting dilemmas, and were critically reflected upon during the course. Participants took responsibility for creating their activism projects seriously, in part because they were required to make a public presentation of their project, and because it was a substantive part of the course evaluation.

Two of the 13 participants indicated that they had followed through with their activism project as planned. Seven of the 13 participants indicated that their projects had been adapted to fit their current teaching context, were being implemented later on in the year, or were in varying stages of progress because there was a substantial research

aspect to it. Four participants indicated that they had not done anything further with their project to date, although three of the four indicated that they planned on doing so, but at a later date. One participant did not enjoy the exercise because she was going to a new job and did not know what the position would entail. She was not working in any way on her activism project and had no plans to do so.

Participants who completed their projects and linked them to a research project used the activism project more as a vehicle to advance their agenda as a graduate student than as an activist. All of the students who did an activist project as a function of intended research for their graduate degree had made substantive changes to it or were not currently working on them.

Opportunities for Dialogue

As previously discussed, course information was presented through numerous modalities, including dialogue. New and complex course information was presented through readings and via lectures through a dialogic approach. That is, through teacher talk and then student talk. Participants said that the course offered a variety of ways to interact with the learning. A common theme was that listening and reading primed participants to benefit the most from dialogue. Jarrod commented that “group reflection and discussion and sharing, those are the most powerful parts.” Other participants also held a similar perspective.

Opportunities for meaningful dialogue were abundant throughout the course and were built into the structure and process of the class. Kalyn said having an opportunity to discuss things during our interview and the focus groups had been helpful, she said that being able to discuss things has “truly been a gift because even just as I've been sitting

here fleshing things out with you, because I too process through talking, it helps.”

Regarding the course, Jarrod said, “It’s an excellent model for adult education, that there's a social aspect to it. We're in these pretty high functioning groups and there's trust... and we do share from the heart.”

All participants discussed finding opportunities to dialogue. Jarrod’s group had extended their time together so that they could engage in conversations, and said “we meet over lunch hour and have informal brainstorming.” Sarah dialogued with her table group, but also used her journal as a method to extend her personal dialogue even further. Jarrod had preferred journaling because, as he said, “I feel selfish going home, the whole day's been mine, while my wife has the family, and it feels like downloading.” Arlis was also not talking about the course with his wife. However, he did explain what he was learning about to his parents and found the act of translating the material from English to French very challenging. He said, “How the hell do you translate it? So it's almost like a general explanation of, ‘here is what I'm doing’.”

Cam felt that he and his partner were working together as anti-oppressive educators. Cam said:

I surround myself by like-minded people or at least try to, and it's easy to convince yourself that you live in a very progressive world and then you're exposed through various comments, even from educators and academics that you are like “okay, okay really?” And there's been a bit of that in this class for me. I'm hearing a few comments, being like ‘okay, well... And a lot of it has been more in the table group discussions and smaller discussions, which is also interesting, because there are some people being really hit hard by some ideas that they find discomfoting and it's not surprising, I've seen it a lot, but it's always a learning experience for me-there's new ideas.

During the first focus group Cam indicated, “talking about [anti-oppressive education] with someone who[m] you care about and can talk about it, I think, is

important.” Participants also thought that it is fairly easy to engage in conversations about anti-oppressive education because “everybody has had some experience with these ideas.” Candace said talking to someone is:

definitely a good support for me ... otherwise it's really easy to get, to feel isolated and get like, really bogged down by all of the negative realities that exist, and if you don't feel like you have a support group in being active and working against that, then it's easy to get caught up and I think that, overwhelming negativity of it all.

Some participants were talking to their partners; others were talking to parents and other family members about the content they were learning. Kristin talked with her husband “who is quite open to it.” Kalyn had her parents to talk to throughout the course, but she said, “Mostly I’ve been dialoguing with the people in the class.” Kalyn said she was talking about what she was learning in class with her family and partner. She said:

Last night I came home with some things that were really troubling and I said “I hate that this is troubling me!” and I came home and I was checking some stuff on the computer and got frustrated and went to have a nap and then they called me for supper so I came upstairs and I was still grumpy and so finally I said, “Look! This is what is troubling me! And I hate that it's troubling me!” and we started to talk.

Jackie also mentioned that she mainly talks to her classmates. However, she has talked to her husband, who has been very supportive overall in Jackie’s journey to become an anti-oppressive educator. Because he is a history teacher, she said he has clarified certain aspects of some of the readings.

Noreen said “I talk to my dad a lot, about a lot of these things, I have a good friend of mine who's also a teacher, I talk to her about a lot of these things.” Noreen said that she and her friend

have a lot of good conversations about a lot of things. And not just things that are happening in this class, we're the same age, we worked [together] and we had a lot of conversations about what was happening around us. Just that critical

discourse is really valuable to be able to have that with people. Just some of the people I hang around with, some of my friends, my family. I actually get to have these conversations when I go home, with my parents; these are the kinds of things we talk about, so it's awesome.

Lana talked mainly to Candace but also to her partner about what she was learning. She said, "I don't think you could have listened to [the instructor] and not have changed." She said she has a supportive partner who "just looks at me and rolls his eyes, like 'why can't a teacher come home and just be a person?'" Lana said, "I think even if you didn't have somebody, it rattles around in your mind regardless of – I might talk to Candace but I still go home and it's still bouncing around, I'm thinking about different things."

Lana and Candace also drove to and from the university to their rural communities together every day. Lana said, "because Candace and I drove together all the time, we would talk about it on the way home." They would ask each other, "What did you think of that?" or "I never noticed or I never really thought about that before."

Candace also mentioned "I'm talking a lot to Lana about it, who's my good friend, we taught together three years ago and we've taken all of our masters classes together so far, so I've talked a lot to her about it." Candace acknowledged being very busy during the course "I eat, live and breathe it." Candace also found time to talk about the course when not doing coursework. For example, Candace said:

On the weekends and stuff when I see people, I do talk a little bit about it and for example, I'm going to see a friend today that I haven't seen since I've taken this class and I sent her a text before this and said, "I hope you're prepared to listen to me!" Because I think I've got a lot to say about it now.

There were also opportunities for challenging conversations. Carrie related an interesting conversation that she had with her husband about the course. She recalls a time when they were relaxing together and says of their conversation:

So I said, 'I'm going to talk to you about your white racism'. And he goes 'I'm not racist'. I said, 'yes, you are'. 'No, I'm not, I dated –he dated a Métis woman for like, twenty years about, he was with her. ...so he says 'no, I'm not racist.' I said, 'yes you are, you have white privilege blah, blah, blah blah'. 'Well, that's university hokey pokey blah, blah, blah, fluffy stuff.' He goes, 'yes, there is white privilege but' he said, 'I do not exert that in any way, shape or form.'.... He's very much aware of white privilege but he doesn't consider himself racist...."

Crystal had engaged in conversations with her family. She had talked to her husband about some of the content in the course but he is quiet person. Crystal had discussed homophobia with her extended family but

because of my husband's opinions, my son's opinions (we have three son-in-laws) they make the crude jokes about the gays and there's just that talk, now I'm so aware of it that I don't know where my place is in changing that.

She also had talked to her daughter and son-in-law in Regina, both of whom are teachers. When talking to them about Aboriginal issues, Crystal said her son-in-law had said, "I don't know why we have to do so much about the Indians, because we should be doing it about the Ukrainians and about the – you know." Crystal believed that, "he's not ready to engage in the conversation that would push my thinking a little more or engage in the conversation so most of it happens right here in class."

Having conversations about anti-oppressive education can be difficult as well, Noreen said:

Sometimes I just don't feel like talking or trying to have this conversation because people can be isolating in a sense though too because – just as an example, the other day I was out for lunch with my friend and I tried to bring it up a bit. She was talking about marriage, she's getting married, and I was like, we've had these conversations about, you know, male patriarchy and these rules and she was like "Oh that's too deep for me, I don't want to go there." And I'm like, okay, so, all

right. So I feel like sometimes they can be very isolating or even ostracizing conversations when you bring them up with people who aren't comfortable about them and aren't comfortable talking about these kinds of things too so, it's hard balancing.

Jackie had also talked a little bit to her sister during the course. She said:

But it's something that I find is a topic that when we're dealing with our immediate family, we want to approach gently, because my family comes from – my family as in my siblings – come from a different perspective and so rather than dealing with it excitedly and aggressively, I tend to mention a little here and then pull back and engage in discussion.

Jackie recognized the importance of relationships in creating opportunities to critique what was happening in class and for critical reflection. She said:

We can write, we can reflect ourselves, but then we stay in one little box and we don't really see everything. So with relationships, when you're talking to somebody else, they can reflect back to you and so you understand more about your world and about yourself.

She extended the idea of quality relationships to fall beyond family and friends.

Jackie said:

My relationships with my students are very significant to me and it becomes necessary to get personal where I consider it personal, where I'm coming from in my journey with understanding white privilege and I share that with my students who are sharing personal things back and so I think relationships help you to understand everything.

Sarah explained the value she placed in communicating this work. For her, the dialogue was no longer primarily about trying to understand it, but was about getting the word out. Sarah said:

I talk to everyone about the work that I do all the time. But I don't think of it as “my work,” I think of it as “our work.” So I think the relationships are key in anti-racist or anti-oppressive education but that's because that's how people learn. We think we're learning in isolation, but even if we're “alone,” we're learning maybe with texts, like different texts, it could be media, it could be written word it could be – and those texts are shaped by other people and created by other people and so there is a story or a narrative that's being shared with us. So we think that we can learn in isolation, but really we never are.

When Sarah is home, anti-oppressive education is important in her life. She said:

I don't think there's a single person in my life that I don't talk about my work with. There's no one that I wouldn't constantly talk about my work with. But it might be in a variety of different ways, so say, like I don't come home and go "here's my day at work," but something my daughter will be engaged in, I might ask her a question about it.

Noreen also dialogued with others to get the message out. She said:

Conversations are always meaningful. It's great that this is research that you're doing, that's part of the reason I agreed to participate. I think it's valuable, I think the more people that start thinking about it, I think the better off we'll be in terms of finding or changing and evolving – it's a revolution, right? Not in the sense of us all grabbing guns and overthrowing power structures, but I think it's a more meaningful revolution because it's changing the way we do things and the way we think about things and that's a long lasting revolution. A revolution that occurs through military, never lasts because you haven't won the hearts and the minds of the people, but through education I really think that's possible, so I think more research like this and more teacher education programs like the summer institute that are happening, I think that things have changed a lot since I started my undergrad.

Dialogue was critical to the potential perspective transformations that followed for a number of participants. Participants stated that they extended the dialogue beyond the classroom to include lunch and other breaks. As well, participants dialogued with those outside of the course with whom they felt safe like friends and family that shared similar views. Participants chose to surround themselves with like-minded people who shared their new set of commonly agreed upon "common sense." The importance of trust and an ability to dialogue that was "shared from the heart" was an important aspect of the course. As well, the importance of dialogue in transformative learning is substantial. Those participants new to anti-oppressive education found ways to engage in conversations about anti-oppressive education that were emotionally positive and could lead to perspective transformation. Those more experienced with anti-oppressive

education acknowledged that they sought out like-minded people who shared a similar perspective about anti-oppressive education and valued taking the lead in classroom conversations that could facilitate growth (perspective transformations) in their classmates.

Reflection and transformation

Candace succinctly summarized the process of change in anti-oppressive education in a statement about the process of transformative learning and personal change. She said:

Learning and listening only takes you so far. It's through the doing and the talking and all those sorts of things that take you further and let you understand things deeper. And so when I listen to [the instructor] talk and I think, "She does a fabulous job and I learn so much from her!" But she takes me to a certain level, but it's through the dialogue and all those other opportunities that we have, that take me even further.... You listen, you learn and then you talk, and the talking forces you to be even more reflective because in hearing what [someone else] has to say, I can be like, "Yeah! No, I agree with you on that! And also this!" And it extends it, which is probably one of the most powerful things, because you learn from each other and I think that's awesome.

Sarah described her growth in the course and that of her fellow participants like this:

Well I think we all came into this class at a different stage in our development, I'm going to call it, as anti-racist educators. We're all moving in a different space so we're all at different places now but the really cool thing about it is that we can see what other people – I as a person who probably started this journey about five years ago, can see when certain things start to dawn on – and I have to say, it makes me so excited to watch – I had a conversation with Jarrod the other day in the lunch room and he was saying how ... he's just so excited, he's got the GAS. The Guilt, Anger, Shame and I remember being there and it's so exciting to see somebody else go through that pain! Because you're like, okay, and you just want to help them through it. But we all have to get through it and that appetite for reading more about anti-racism and I think the thing is, we all come from a very similar place. And hopefully we'll all [become anti-oppressive educators], but what makes me the most excited about this is that we're only going through this process because we're put into a situation and so that gives us hope for the rest of the people that we work with in our everyday work world, is that if we can just

provide that situation, it doesn't have to be an intense grad class, it could be just a few things, we can get other people on board, so it's a message of hope I think.

The message of hope and of being on a learning journey resounds in Sarah's testimony about the learning that was taking place in the course. It was the message of hope that was so encouraging. Kalyn had realized that she could never be the same person she was before the course had started. She said the following, which strongly suggests a transformative learning experience, during the fall interview about the course and her desire to create change:

You can't go back now. It's like, when you peel away the onion, when you take the blinders off; at what point will you be drawn to action? At what point will you move? Am I going to stay stagnant, and if I do, at what cost? I mean, why I'm thinking of scripture right now is beyond me but, it's sort of like in the Bible when you knowingly sin, it's one thing to steal if you didn't think stealing was wrong, if you didn't know that that was wrong, but if I know it's wrong and I leave with your computer, and so now I know so much more the stakes are higher and being called to do more because I know more.

This course was about change. Acknowledging the importance of dialogue—safe dialogue—was important. Safe dialogue was about having difficult conversations that could lead to GAS, and providing a comfortable place for those conversations to happen, where there was compassion and understanding, was significant. A safe learning environment was a necessary part of participants' personal growth. In particular, this safe learning environment provided a place and space for the subjective reframing for those participants new to anti-oppressive education.

Students' Concluding Comments About Course

There were a number of comments made by those new to Anti-oppressive education about being participants in the course. Crystal, who reflected on the course not

being a linear process, said, “I don’t think any journey is a straight line.” Jarrod had felt that the work was difficult but important. He said:

I’m not about being in a classroom in July, but I wouldn’t miss it for the world. It’s difficult. It’s strained to do the readings and to have the time to reflect through journaling on the readings and then to do the content of the afternoon class and they mesh very well together, but the learning is a bit oppressive.

Examples like the above and the example of where the student found a film to be “oppressive” illustrate that students could easily understand and relate to the idea of oppression, even if only half-heartedly. Students identified how they were invigorated by the content and by being provided the opportunity for personal reflection. Arlis said:

I guess that’s what is interesting in this class and you can feel the energy when everybody’s in that class, everybody’s talking before, after, “did you read this article?” And you’re going for dinner and you’re talking about this class. It’s almost like this class has become a passion for everybody.

Candace also shared this sentiment:

I don’t think I’ve ever taken a class where I’ve enjoyed it this much. I mean I enjoy school; obviously I have been good at school, hence why you continue, right? School worked for me, but this class really makes me think and really makes me uncomfortable at times.... It definitely makes you think and that’s what I like about it. It challenges what you believe and what you’ve thought.

Candace had indicated her desire to grow as a person through taking the course and the pleasure she felt when this happened. She had embraced the notion that there is pleasure to be found in learning, like that found in this class, which leads to greater personal awareness. Her desire for deep personal change that would make her frames of reference more dependable in adult life made her an eager participant in the course. During the course, her desire for social change may have been secondary to her desire for personal growth.

Darla realized that she needed to continue to question “the dominant discourses.”

Darla, who self-identifies as Aboriginal, added:

I think this class was really a lot of self-reflection for me. I had myself seeing myself as in a position that I was always faced with oppression and discrimination and racism and you name it. Me and my family and my extended family, and I could write a book, probably a thousand books, on this stuff, about the experiences but I see myself as, “Well I'm not that way” or, “I've experienced this, so I'm not that way” or, “I grew up on a reserve, so I'm not that way.” I realize that I have that perception of myself and I'm realizing in this class that I am that way.

The biggest realization for Darla was how we are all implicated in oppression through our internalized beliefs, values and assumptions. While Darla was very much invested in personal growth and change, she was also learning through the critical social dimension of transformative learning theory, connecting more to social change. In her journal Darla wrote:

I appreciate how things are coming together in this class. It feels like months ago that we started this class or I think about the understandings that I am developing— all the ‘isms’ are not just words out there but realities of dominance and privilege from some perspective—racism, sexism, gay, lesbian, homophobia, whiteness, shades of whiteness, when I think about how all this has occurred in eight short days, I wonder how my mind can make sense of it? I wonder about the intensity of how it was introduced? The idea of “critical” [that was introduced] today, helped pull the thinking together for me. Thinking critically—not just taking [things] for granted.

At the end of her journal, Crystal took the time to give a few final comments and ended with the following statement:

Am I feeling weighted? Absolutely not! I am feeling invigorated and activated. I am only starting my journey but I know I am not alone. I have no preconceived notion of where I'm going, only hoping to understand myself deeper and find my place as an ally for Hutterian learning.

This statement echoes the concept that learning is not a linear process with a fixed destination in mind, and how teachers need to give up the notion that they can determine

what students will learn. Kalyn had reflected in her journal, “To be here in this class has been a luxury to learn, to think. I am so grateful.” Kalyn, who connected to the personal growth and change aspect of transformative learning theory, also wrote in her journal about how busy she was as a teacher and how this course had given her time to reflect and think. She wrote about the hectic quality of teaching in school:

We are kept so busy, no time to pause and discuss real issues and give a critical eye to the school we work in.... How can I view my work, workplace tasks I am being asked to do critically, without time to pause? The longer I have taught the busier I have gotten—more mandates, projects passed down to teachers.

The research participants who had more experience with anti-oppressive education found the course valuable as well. Noreen benefited from the personal growth that is afforded to someone as they engage in dialogue about anti-oppressive education and assist others on their own journeys of personal growth and change. Her transformative learning journey had become as much about personal transformation as it was about enacting social change. She said:

For me, it's been an interesting experience too, because I had already started this process before because I had already taken classes with [the instructor] ... and so I felt myself going through a different process. I wasn't encountering this guilt and shame and this sense of identifying with my own whiteness. I had already gone through that process so it was interesting for me to experience going through this other process of continuing my own learning and then recognizing other people that are just starting out on that journey and just dealing with my own experiences within that.

As mentioned, given the stress and workload of teachers, being an anti-oppressive educator is likely to be a challenge. There is the potential that the learning completed here will be forgotten or not taken up once participants go back to their classrooms. Arlis, during the first focus group said, “the day that you get your pass in your class, you're all

going to go ‘that was a great class! And it goes on the backburner!’ And I know how many times that happens in my own life as well!”

Jarrold, the administrator, was concerned about the additional workload of making anti-oppressive education a part of a teacher’s responsibility in the classroom. He asked, “does this just become another layer to what they're expected to do, to what I'm expected to do?”

In her journal, Kristin also reflected on the challenges of being a teacher and the burden of trying to implement anti-oppressive education:

I agree about the burdens of teachers and feeling like we need to fix and change the world. The onus is on us for so many things. Before starting my master’s [degree], I actually remembered being stressed and upset while taking certain classes in my bachelors because I was upset about all of the injustices in the world and feeling like I wanted to help and solve all the world’s problems-but I can’t, it’s too much... I think that there is no quick fix, but it’s important for me to have an awareness that I keep in the back of my mind, and perhaps it jumps out in the moment that I need it.

These participants recognized that personal growth and change is not sufficient and that the doing part of anti-oppressive education would be the most difficult, given also the barriers to changing the status quo that exist beyond the Summer Institute.

The Summer Institute reinforced Noreen’s connection to the people who want to learn about anti-oppressive education and to the ideas found in anti-oppressive education. During her second interview, three months after the Summer Institute, she said:

You are talking about anti-oppressive education and anti-racism, looking at post-colonial theory and that’s my life right now. It’s everything that I am doing all the time. In terms of activism, I think that is something I have been a lot more conscious of this year since taking that class. Just being conscious of doing things and encouraging my students to do that in their own way too. So different projects and assignments and lots of current stuff that’s going on. Just being conscious of that in different ways.

For Noreen, being an anti-oppressive educator is:

just modelling it, I find so much of it; it's just the conversations that come up. So for example, kids are really into hip-hop right now. And so we talk about that. "Well let's talk about the music you're listening to. What is it saying? How are women portrayed in that? What does that teach you about being a man?" I talked about that with my students. "What does being a man mean to you? Where have you learned that?" And I think so much of [creating change] is just having those conversations, and kids, they want to talk about, they want to talk about that. It's their life!"

Noreen continued:

It's just that you have to think it. You have to live it. You can't leave it at the university door, you have to take it home with you and you have to talk about it with your kids and you have to re-examine your relationship with your partner and I think that's uncomfortable for people.

So it appears that first participants need to experience a perspective transformation through the critical self-reflection of assumptions and then move into doing differently. Transformative learning is always about personal growth that can sometimes lead to enacting social change. As Noreen reminds us, doing differently can also mean to model how to dialogue in ways that can assist others to a perspective transformation. Noreen also indicates how her past perspective transformation continues to impact her life. Her personal growth and change continues on incrementally after her perspective transformation some time ago. She is not only being the change she wants to see, but also leading the change she wants to see.

The next sections discuss the three dimensions of anti-oppressive education and how the participants articulated their conceptions during the interviews.

Anti-oppressive Dimensions

This section provides examples of the dimension of anti-oppressive education that include the inclusive dimension, critical dimension, and poststructural dimension that emerged during the thematic analysis. Although it was possible to write in the literature

review about each perspective as if it were independent, it was very difficult to distinguish one perspective from another during the thematic analysis. What follows are examples from the interviews, focus groups, and journals of the different perspectives that participants identified and discussed, beginning with the participants' inclusive strategies.

Inclusive Dimension

The inclusive dimension imbues social and historical constructions and is based upon Kumashiro's (2000b) notion of providing education for and about the Other. An inclusive dimension was found in the transcripts and journals of participants and was an important part of class discussions. At its best, the inclusive dimension creates safe and supportive spaces within schools, and fosters greater understanding of marginalized groups of students. However, these approaches can also lead to stereotyping into fixed and immutable identities where teachers see the Other as problematic and in need of help. Thematic analysis revealed that participants often had stereotyped beliefs and had a deficit notion of the Other at the beginning of the course but many participants were soon able to articulate an awareness of their own and others' limiting beliefs. Examples of such transformation, as articulated by the participants, are documented below.

The first example of being aware of seeing the Other as fixed and immutable identities that need remedying is one that was identified by a participant. He was reading *Everyday Antiracism: Getting real about race in school*. The book focuses on how to successfully teach students who are minoritized. He said he found the task "funny because it was all about labeling and how you deal with it." Another example of this kind of thinking, where one's identity is seen as an Other where there is inferred an essence

that is seen as unified and fixed (as opposed to variable, fluid, very mixed and always changing) comes from an interview with Lana at the beginning of the institute where she expressed her desire to be ‘color blind.’ The meaning behind being color blind was that she does not discriminate based on the color of someone’s skin. She said:

I think as a teacher, I’m just making a difference in the life of a child. I don’t think of where they come from or who their parents are or what they know or don’t know. I just think about that person as an individual and I look at it that way more so than “this child is First Nations, this child is Caucasian, this child is Chinese, I just don’t really think like that.

By the end of the course, Lana understood her previous perspective to have been problematic and had worked to see things differently. She understood her need to be aware of how she racialized students and how this could be unintentionally affecting how she provided for those students in her class.

Kristin also realized the challenges of the stereotypical thinking inherent in the Diversity Week going on at her school the week of the October research interview. In fact, when I arrived at the school students and teachers were dressed in their traditional ethnic garb and had brought food to represent their ethnic background. Because Kristin was a new teacher at the school, she didn’t want to take on how the stereotyping could be problematic because she didn’t want to challenge the status quo. She said:

You just feel it, so it is not so easy being a new person in the school. I can’t exactly; well like today it is diversity week, I could run with that, right? I could have said “Well, anti-oppressive this and that.”

At the beginning of the Summer Institute, Crystal provided another example of the challenge of an inclusive approach. She said she wanted to study the Hutterites “as the rescuer.” She placed the Hutterites as the Other- deficient and in need of help. Later in the course, she had changed her topic to move away from this perspective toward

unlearning her biases within the social and historical context so that she could become an activist for the colony and not approach what she was doing through a deficit notion. This shift in her thinking was an important aspect in her perspective transformation. Crystal wrote in her journal that she wanted to know, “How do I take the understanding that I will gain and build and apply it to my teaching on the colony?”

Darla self-identifies as an Aboriginal person. One of the concerns about providing education about the Other is that certain people, who fit the stereotypical portrait of that marginalized group, are chosen to represent the Other. This approach does not take into account the complexity of our identity, but rather sees identity as fixed and immutable. However, Darla indicated that she felt comfortable in the role of being a spokesperson for Aboriginal people. Darla said, “that does happen to me and I guess I point that out in some cases, I do point out to them that that’s not what I think. So I try and speak up in that manner.” Darla has chosen to teach a course focusing on Aboriginal perspectives in her work setting and she acknowledged, “It is a lot of pressure, but I think it’s important to do that now that I have the words...”

Darla was also challenged to come to terms with some of the stereotypical ways that “the way we look can affect how people perceive us.” Darla said, “My elementary school years really affected me regarding identification.” As a result of her appearance she said:

I really ended up to be in the middle of things when I was growing up and my sister told me this many times, because I was very fair – I was really fair when I was little, I had almost blond hair when I was small...and I have green eyes.

She said:

I really didn’t fit in with the white people because they knew I was an Indian and took the Indian bus and I didn’t really fit in with my own people because I was

like a little white girl and so that really left me in a middle position there and of course my sister, who's a year and a half younger than me and very vocal and outgoing and very smart, she used to come to my aid many times.

Darla began to recognize that her former school classmates subjected her sister, who was easily identifiable as an Aboriginal person, to more racism. As a result of learning about how she had been subjected to less racist acts because she was not as identifiable as an Aboriginal person, Darla, with the concomitant mental anguish, realized that she needed to be more compassionate to this socially constructed difference that had resulted in more racism directed at her sister. The school where she had attended as a child had not provided safe places and spaces for her or her sister, nor had the school personnel been able to provide an inclusive environment. This reflection on something that she had never thought about before was disorienting for Darla and led her on her personal journey and perspective transformation.

Kristin, who self-identified as Ukranian-Canadian, struggled with stereotyping. She worked at understanding some of the challenges of Canada's policy on multiculturalism and how people stereotype. She reflected on the challenges of stereotypes in her journal as a part of her personal journey and perspective transformation. She wrote:

I don't know if I think that culture should be done away with because it's part of our natural human development. It fuels the fire to creating art, music, etc.... But I realize that it also creates society, which dictates how one should be acting. So what's the answer? Understanding, acceptance, breaking down the stereotypes. Also, I believe that having a cultural background has led me to be more interested in other cultures and accepting of them and realizing all the similarities that connect us as human beings. I also think that perhaps racism is created through fear of what we don't understand, of what is different.

Participants also began to understand the need to provide culturally relevant teaching, but that they also needed to incorporate a critical element; they believed that it was vital to do more than just be inclusive.

This desire to critique the invalidity of stereotypes is suggestive of the critical reflection of assumptions and of objective reframing. Kristin's statement above seems to indicate a lack of awareness of how her perspective as a member of the dominant group influences her thinking. She implies that some people have a cultural background and others do not. Her statement underlies the need to reflect students' comments back to them and invite critical self-reflection. This critical self-reflection occurred during the course for Kristin in her journal responses and fostered her perspective transformation. Cam spoke to some of the challenges inherent in using culturally appropriate teaching in the classroom. He wrote in his journal:

It is possible to do some of these things and not provide an anti racist education that is critical and transformative. Being culturally sensitive for example is great but on it's own could be simply labeled as inclusive education. Once again there is no approach that is complete. All knowledge is partial and each approach must also be used specifically in the context. The approaches to AR [anti-racist] education are flexible and forever changing. Part of being critical is being able to change.

Cam's insight into the complex nature of this work was indicative of his past perspective transformation and his commitment to critique and action within the critical social perspective of transformative learning theory.

Lana was also challenged to infuse Aboriginal perspectives into the classroom. She was discomforted by her being positioned as a person who was expected to 'know' what is important to provide as education about the Other:

There's some frustration for me. I think when I read articles and it says that you have to understand that some of these First Nations kids will come to your

classroom and they won't have a lot of knowledge about their own culture. And I just don't understand why it's my responsibility to teach that necessarily. If it's important to you, how come elders in your community or your parents or your aunts, uncles, family, how come they haven't given you some of that spiritual content, or that cultural experience? But then they come to school and I'm supposed to teach it, but I don't even really know what it is that the parents want their kids to know about their culture and I want to be politically correct and not make mistakes. I just wish that the families would give more input and show that they're doing things too.

Lana felt conflicted about the paradox of Othering to teach about the Other that is inherent in providing education for and about the other. This disorienting dilemma led to her critical self-reflection of assumptions she held regarding Aboriginal perspectives and was a significant aspect of her perspective transformation. She said:

I don't understand sometimes people tell you "no you can't do that" and then some people say, "yeah, you can do that" and then a First Nations person says "sure! You can do that!" and then – but it's not clear. So that's my issue, that's my concern.... I think I've always been a little frustrated about that. That in school, that I'm pretty vocal in my school about the fact that we do First Nations art or dance but I just think that's hokey and that we're not really doing them any justice and that the kids get such a superficial understanding. And yet every school that you go to, that's what they're doing. But it's because of the "not sure what to do" that people are just keeping to what's safe. It's safe to make a teepee with your kids without having to dive into any deeper issues.

Lana was also able to articulate the need to go beyond providing an essentialized perspective of First Nations students and was appreciative of the approach she was learning through dialogue within the class and with the literature she was reading as a function of the course. Lana said:

First Nations content is something that is super valid in Saskatchewan and Regina, so that's something that's important. But then I also appreciate that it still leaves you with things to grapple with; it's not just filling our heads, either. We talk about the kids and teaching and learning and how we just teach them things and tell them things and they don't get the chance to expand themselves by thinking and problem solving. And so I think it's good that they're not just giving us a bunch of answers. You still leave grappling with things and I think that's important.

Lana had resolved this dilemma by the end of the course. It was important for her to know that there aren't simple solutions and that teaching First Nations content needs to include critiquing unearned power and privilege. She felt that teachers who teach First Nations content will do fine and be supported if they are approaching lessons using critique and that it is all right for teaching like this to be discomfoting and less predictable for students and teachers. Lana had turned her objective reframing inward to subjective reframing. She had moved toward the critical self-reflection of assumptions that led to her perspective transformation. Lana said:

Because if it felt [comforting], you'd go back to your classroom and implement all these things and then if it didn't go well or kids are frustrated, then you wonder why, right?....So at least when we know we're wrestling with things, and thinking about things and not sure of things, at least we know that's how the kids are going to react and then we're in a better place to approach that if you know how you reacted and you can relate to that.

A positive orientation and a desire to provide education for the Other seemed to be bound to those who could identify with, or had a proximity to, those who were Othered. For example, Kalyn recalled that when she was growing up there wasn't a lot of diversity where she lived. She said:

We had maybe two Aboriginal students in our class. I mean, this was [a posh area] in Regina and ... school was pretty white. We had a couple black kids at that point. [The school were I attended] was pretty white. But certainly by the time I got to university, life got more colorful.

Still, Kalyn could identify with those who were marginalized because she also had a cousin who was "different" from other kids his age:

He was hit by a car when he was five and so he has a mental and physical disability and the brain injury is such that he'll get quite angry and walks with a noticeable gait and if you're with him, people will think that he's drunk, the way that he drags his one foot, and people will ask if he's been drinking.

Kalyn could empathize with the Other's experience of inequity because she had contact with someone who was affected by inequitable treatment. As well, Kristin could identify with difference and empathize because her husband had recently emigrated from the Ukraine. She could see the difference and the inequity at play as he navigated the social context in Canada. These examples speak to the importance of relationality in creating social change. The more someone can relate emotionally, and understand the perspectives of the Other, the easier it is to identify with them and imagine their perspective, and critically self-reflect on one's own assumptions (Kerssen-Griep & Eifler, 2008; Pedersen, Walker & Wise, 2005).

Lana had grown up close to a reserve in Saskatchewan and had students who were Aboriginal in her classes throughout public school. She said:

It was different, especially with my dad as a principal, and when we had first moved to [a small community near a reserve] he really hadn't had any working situations where he had worked with First Nations people so that was our whole family's first exposure. And dad was pretty determined that if these kids were going to come to school, they were going to learn. And so a lot of days, the bus would show up and it would be half empty. Well dad would hop into his van and go out to the reserve and knock on doors until he was full and then he'd bring them into town.

Schools for Lana's father could represent assimilation into the dominant culture and deeply held majority beliefs about what kind of learning is important. Lana seemed to endorse her father's desire to rescue Aboriginal students through assimilation. This speaks to the challenge of transformative possibilities in socio-historical contexts.

Jackie could identify and emphasize with minoritized students because she had participated in an anti-racist workshop presented by Jane Elliot, an internationally recognized anti-racist educator. She had also developed a brain injury and felt that this gave her another way to identify with students who have challenges and have been

socially constructed as less capable. She said: “I guess regarding the brain injury and then going and connecting that to some of the things that we’re talking about in class right now, like meritocracy.”

Noreen grew up alongside a First Nation community. She had moved beyond seeing the social construction of difference as normal and natural toward seeing it as oppression. During her youth, the dominant thinking around Noreen associated being around Aboriginal people with danger. She recalled:

My parents were very – it amazes me actually the things that they were supportive of me doing because there was a certain level of, I mean things were dangerous. A lot of things happened in our community, there was a lot of violence and stuff. My parents were very supportive of me. When I was in high school, I dated somebody that was Aboriginal for a really long time and I was in a lot of situations where I was around people that things could have been dangerous and my parents just talked about it very openly and made sure – empowered me to make positive decisions for myself at a young age. So I think that has had a big influence on where I am at the age of 25 as compared to a lot of people relating to these topics at a later stage in their life.

Participants perceived that they were using inclusive strategies and understood education for and about the Other. As evidenced in the above examples, AOETA enabled the participants to be able to identify the problematic nature of the inclusive dimension and how it manifested itself in their thoughts and actions. Thinking about the problematic nature of the inclusive dimension, through critical reflection, precipitated several perspective transformations. As well, numerous participants emphasized that the inclusive dimension was not sufficient to dismantle inequity, and that it also needed to include the critical dimension for participants to think differently. The critical dimension, with its connection to critique and activism, provided a means for participants to understand how inequity was operating around them, and led to transformative learning within the critical social dimension.

Critical Dimension (Reflection and Critique)

Understanding the importance of critical reflection was a very important aspect of AOETA. Participants in the research study realized the importance of being able to critique. Jarrod said, “the critical lens is probably the most important to support people. And if you can get teachers thinking critically about their practices, then [you can] start the conversation with students.”

Candace said that “critiquing power and privilege is very, very important because having grown up and not really critiqued power and privilege and just accepting things the way they are, I've lived a very naive life....” Candace used this conversation to segue how she could be doing a better job teaching about Aboriginal perspectives and said:

I think the critical reflection is making me want to become an even better teacher and even more powerful. ...and I've recognized that in not saying some things, something's being said in the silence.

Jackie commented that:

We may change, but I don't think change is useful unless we can figure out why we have changed. And so critical reflection is central to figure out where we're coming from, so we know where we're going.... On a personal level, critical reflection is looking at who we are, where we come from and being able to connect the dots...

Noreen brought the Freirian quote “Washing one's hands of the conflict between the powerful and the powerless means to side with the powerful, not to be neutral” (Freire, 1985, p. 102) to our conversation. She said:

We like to believe in this myth of meritocracy that by not saying anything we're not taking a side but the reality is that by not saying anything we're siding with the powerful. And I think that by saying something, you're taking an active stance on something by addressing it.

Crystal acknowledged that she was still learning about critical pedagogy. She said that teachers would benefit from reflecting on “what kind of a teacher do I want to be for

these students?” Crystal wrote in her journal, “The idea of ‘critical’ today helped pull the thinking together for me.” For Darla, it is about “questioning” and being a little more critical of “could we do things a little bit more different in ... the delivery of our program.” Kristin said it is “just questioning everything, thinking in a different way or questioning what's beneath everything.” This example of critique falls within the critical social perspective of transformative learning theory because it involves developing a critical awareness of the action and reflection required to change our teaching practices and create social change.

Another consideration for teaching about the critical dimension, according to Kristin, is the need to foster empathy. Empathy creates an emotional connection between the person and inequity and can trigger disorienting dilemmas related to subjective reframing (Mezirow, 2012). Noreen echoed this belief. Noreen said:

empathy is so important because once you feel something for something, once you emotionally invest in it a little bit, then it makes you want to get deeper into it. And then you have to be able – so when you feel emotionally connected to something, you have a relationship with it then you want to be able to examine that and that's where the intellect comes in.

For Noreen, having a critical conscience means:

that you have to think it, you have to live it. You can't leave it at the university door, you have to take it home with you and you have to talk about it with your kids and you have to re-examine your relationship with your partner and I think that's uncomfortable for people.

Noreen did not elaborate on why talking about such matters was uncomfortable.

She just felt that it was. Lana said that critical reflection is:

not just reviewing it as a list in your head of what you did that day. It's more the things that [the instructor] leaves you with, you think about those things and in different perspectives too. ‘How do I feel about that issue from the perspective of a lesbian female?’ or ‘how do I feel about that from the perspective of a Chinese student who's just come over to Canada and doesn't know English’. I just try to

think about not just my perspective but how that – what we might have learned that day, how that impacted that child or this child and why it's important... Because if you don't reflect on most things critically, you just stay where you are. You don't change your way of thinking ...

For Arlis, understanding critical reflection meant, “realizing the situation of everything from white privilege to whatever, or what we're doing, or how it's been made, or even the whole fact of living in this world.” When asked about whether understanding what critical reflection meant has had an impact on him, Arlis said, “ I would say so because you're actually reacting in your head differently, you're controlling your emotions differently.” Arlis was able to give practical examples of how he had helped the “underdog.” Through subjective reframing, on more than one occasion Arlis referenced from past experiences helping someone who was homeless, hungry, poor, or in need of a ride. For Arlis, it was also about becoming aware of the power we have in how we dress and the privileged role that we have. He said, it’s realizing that kids may be “on the defense as soon as we start talking” because of the power imbalance. Arlis was mindful of the need to reflect upon the nature of power relations.

It also seems pertinent that the critique be usefully applied in the field - to praxis. Candace said, “Today when we talked about critical pedagogy, I didn't feel discomfort but I felt challenged.” A critical approach opens up the learner to the possibilities of transformation and to elevating our expectations for learners engaged in learning about anti-oppressive education. Candace believed:

Critiquing power and privilege is very, very important because having grown up and not really critiqued power and privilege and just accepting things the way they are, I've lived a very naive life and I think when you critique power and privilege and when you think of those things and when I think, me as a white person can get pulled over by a police officer and talk myself out of a ticket or – all those sorts of things that I've taken-for-granted and never would have associated with my skin color, but now, seeing that – and I think that even with

my little grade two students, I can teach them that too, that you know, because things are unequal sometimes and because you're white, you have that sort of privilege going for you.

Candace was able to speak to the application of critical reflection to her teaching practice. She said:

I think the critical reflection is making me want to become an even better teacher and even more powerful, and I know the students I'm getting next year. Some of them are fairly weak and I'm thinking like, "Oh what can I do with them? This is so exciting!" And how can I get them excited about learning again...

Candace wrote in her journal:

This class has made me reevaluate my entire knowledge, and I am now unlearning. I am left though, with the question, how do I address these concerns and realities in my grade two class? I look forward to discovering this. Today we got to reflect on critical pedagogy—it was AWESOME. It's great to be able to start thinking about how to put this in the real world. I wish I could jump right into the school year and teach critically, engaging students and let them lead their learning.

Candace's journal had another reflection where she acknowledged that she was "still torn on how to exactly apply this to grade two-but I am so excited to try." This excitement about moving forward establishes Candace's commitment to being on a personal journey and may be evidence of a perspective transformation where she has worked through and resolved her dilemma. She felt confident and competent and was moving towards doing differently with her new perspective.

Carrie also felt very strongly about the positive benefits of critique for a classroom teacher. For her, critical reflection was:

taking a look at your practices because if you're talking about teaching – if we're talking about teaching, or your actions, looking at what you've been doing more with a hyper focus and without bias, which is sometimes hard, without bias, to see what the effects of what you've been doing, are. And the "without bias" is hard, because it's very – and I think it's hard for all of us to admit that maybe we need to fix some things and that's the discomfort.

Noreen preferred to use the term critical in relation to raising critical consciousness. For her, it is about:

asking a lot of questions and examining how you're implicated in that and so not only looking around and saying "why is this happening?" but also "how does that affect me? How am I implicated in that? How does my existence –" not necessarily your actions, because it doesn't necessarily ever have to do with your actions, how does your existence as that being either perpetuate that or break that cycle? I think too often people get caught up in the idea of "actions" – "but I didn't do that!" it's not about "doing," it's about "being." It's not about acting white, it's about being white. You can just be in a room and being white, you're acting that out on that room and the people in that room and that space. So I think that's pretty important to think about too.

Kristin said:

Discomfort comes first and then once you get past that, I think you have to get past it almost and then you're always going to feel it as you start to question things in society but when you get over that first hump, somehow it just makes it a little bit easier. And the way to get past it is by thinking about it, writing it down, trying to move on from there, do something about it, think in a different way, how am I going to teach my kids differently? I've already been thinking about that Kumashiro book. Lots of those questions I want to incorporate into my teaching and it's nice to actually have those there because sometimes you don't know where to go.

While critique can often be about objective reframing, these participants had engaged in critique that was about subjective reframing. They had turned critique onto themselves through the critical self-reflection of their assumptions and were thinking about how they were implicated in oppression and needed to do differently.

For Kristin, the challenge was in learning how to help others become involved. She said, "Okay, I know all this, and I know that I have to think this way and I know how I'm thinking, but how do I make somebody else think that way? That's a big thing." Kristin knew she has to think differently and she wanted to make others think differently too. Thus, Kristin felt an obligation to "make" others think differently rather than creating spaces for divergent thinking. This paradox is important to recognize because it

demonstrates the challenge of engaging others in anti-oppressive education in a humble way.

Sarah connected an analysis of power to critique. She said, “I've seen critiques without [an analysis of power], and they're not critiques.... I just think that in order for us to be able to critique anything within our lived experience, I think we can't ignore the power that's at play.” For Sarah, a critique would be asking questions like, “Who decides?” She said in a way that acknowledged her humility:

All of our decisions, what stories we tell about ourselves and about the world, what stories we legitimize, because these stories shape our lived reality, like ideologies and discourse, shape our lived reality. And they also – our lived reality is seen through that lens, so we don't see things as they are, we see things as we are.... A critique allows that continual questioning, disruption and problematizing in a variety of different ways.

Cam was aware of how difficult and challenging the material was for members of the class and how the critique, although not easy to absorb, is good to embrace. Cam said:

It's easy to convince yourself that you live in a very progressive world and then you're exposed through various comments, even from educators and academics that you are like “okay, okay really? Okay.” And there's been a bit of that in this class for me. I'm hearing a few comments, being like “okay, well...” And a lot of it has been more in the table group discussions and smaller discussions, which is also interesting, because there are some people being really hit hard by some ideas that they find discomfoting and it's not surprising.

Although Cam did not express what he meant by being ‘hit hard’ by the topics, he was paying attention to the emotional discomfort surrounding the disorienting dilemmas arising from participants engaging in critique. Cam had expressed in his journal the value of the critical dimension in anti-oppressive education and his role as an activist. He wrote:

A common theme that seems to guide learning in this course centers on forcing ourselves and our own beliefs to be examined under a critical lens. While discussing the Kumashiro article this morning, which envisions four main

approaches to anti-racist pedagogy, it became clear to me that the first two approaches, Education About the Other and Education for the other, operate under the faulty assumption that by including alternative perspectives and teaching about other cultures and traditions we will somehow create equality. They also assume that there is nothing inherently wrong with the dominant culture. Critical pedagogy forces us to recognize privilege and challenge normative beliefs and systems that are at the roots of these inequalities. Imagining a 'turning upside down' of the social structures, which reinforce oppressive and normative practices, should be the ultimate goal of transformative and critical anti-racist education. I am beginning to see myself as a critical theorist. Not only do I believe in the need for transformative societal change in order to empower oppressed peoples. I think that an examination and understanding of our oppressive history is key to identifying solutions and healing for the future.

Cam had touched on a keystone aspect of anti-oppressive education. He had appreciated that Education For and About the Other, without critique could not lead to transformative social change, which draws our attention to the critique and action that is found within the critical social perspective of transformative learning theory (Taylor, 2009). Cam had a desire to foster engaged activism in participants of AOETA.

Sarah said:

When I'm talking and thinking about critiques, [the Kumashiro article] is something that I might slide on the table someday and have people think about, because I think it's important that we think about that. I think too though, my constant critique, I try to turn the lights on myself as often as I can, I think sometimes I do a really good job of it, but lots of times there's things I don't see, like I don't – obviously – they're blind to me.

Again, Sarah's turning the critique on herself is indicative of her humility and desire to work through the critical self-reflection of assumptions. She is pointing to her own personal journey and growth that is evidence of her continued subjective reframing.

Noreen, who provided several critiques in her journal, provides an example of a critique. This critique involves objective reframing, as Noreen does not turn the critique to the critical self-reflection of assumptions. Instead, she focuses on a desire for change that is external to her, based on the critical reflection of dominant societal assumptions. In

this critique, following a visit to the McKenzie Art Gallery to see an exhibit that was a very colonial pictorial of Indigenous peoples, she wrote in her journal:

I looked around at the paintings and was frustrated by people's comments of "look how he captured THEIR eyes"..."Look at what THEY are wearing"...there was so much Othering happening and people were not even questioning their own language! They were also not asking the critical questions of why were people portrayed this way? Why this pose? Why these colors? What were these people like? Who were they? What were their families like? Who's voice is being represented in these pictures/paintings? Who is NOT present in any of these images...for example...women! I found the whole exhibit was also frightening as there is no story behind any of these paintings. Even in the notes that he has written beneath his photos there is not an overt explanation of what happened.

Several other themes connected to the inclusive dimension but more relevant to the critical dimension emerged as dominant clusters in the thematic analysis and are discussed by topic below. The critiques of homophobia and white privilege were substantial and were subcategories under the broad heading of recognizing privilege. As well, discussions of homophobia and white privilege were foundational for the disorienting dilemmas that are discussed later, and were most important in the personal changes that were identified. While the themes of homophobia and white privilege had aspects of the inclusive dimension, it was not possible to have them stand without including the resistance and the critique that is a substantial part of what participants discussed. As well, these themes went beyond naming difference and are taken up by participants as they engaged in the emotional discomfort of working through their own thoughts and feelings about the subject as a critique. They had invested in discussions of power and privilege. It is almost like there is a hybrid part between the inclusive dimension and the critical dimension. They are therefore discussed through the critical dimension.

Creating Tension and Discomfort: Recognizing Privilege

Recognizing privilege was the construct most talked about by all participants in this study. Noreen had recommended that when students in the course were working through understanding their unearned power and privilege, they need to start with the “twelve step process, the first step is getting people to recognize that and there's that culture of fear, and that culture of denial that doesn't want even an initial step of recognizing that we have a problem.” This recognition of how learning about anti-oppressive education was connected to their personal journey is significant as it explicates the importance of the subjective reframing aspect of the transformative learning experience.

There were two concentrations of items in the critical dimension that are worth exploring in further detail because of how they challenged participants' view of 'normal' and led to disorienting dilemmas for the participants. They are taken up within the context of resistance to these issues. The first is around the issue of homophobia and the second is white privilege.

Several participants were frustrated with the level of resistance to change from those new to anti-oppressive education. Noreen said, “Something I really struggled with in the last few weeks has been my resistance to resistance.” In particular, she struggled and felt frustrated when:

people were getting caught up in that whole idea of guilt or anger or shame or denial or whatever, I was – I think I still am, I think I'm still dealing with that, but I was very resistant to that. I was like, ‘Okay! That's great that you feel that way, but isn't it great that you have the privilege to feel that way?’ So I felt very – I don't know, and that's something that I really struggled with is learning, or trying to be patient, that some people aren't open to a lot of anti-racist or anti-oppressive theoretical concepts yet.

Noreen said she felt like telling them to:

“Hurry up.” Especially people that have been teaching for decades or people that are almost done their Master’s degree and they are just encountering this for the first time. “I’m like are you serious, where have you been? What classes have you been taking?” So I am very impatient with the process because, literally, people are dying because of the inequities and the power and privileges that we have in our world. So it is very convenient to me for the fact that white people get to take their sweet time and come into these processes.

Nicole’s frustration stems from her desire for activism. She wanted participants to not only get to the point where they think differently, but to do differently because she knew all too well what can happen through inaction.

Cam acknowledged that he was frustrated by comments like “we all know this! That, to me, is an ignorant statement. Sorry, but I think it is.” Cam said:

[being ignorant] is a defense mechanism, but it's not really taking time to think about what we know and what we don't know. But there is a piece that is finding new meanings within. Like, you can make a lot of – most of this oppression is invisible. So opening your eyes to it is, I think, a big piece. We can say “all people are equal,” we can make a lot of general judgment statements, and a lot of these individual articles maybe do open your eyes to forms of oppression that were previously invisible to you.

Cam said, “[Anti-oppressive education] is learning through crisis, that's what Kumashiro would say. I'm learning through crisis, thriving on crisis.” While some are impatient for others to hurry up and move forward with their learning/action, others seem to be asking for time and patience. As Lana said, “It seems so obvious. It's like, how can you resist this? It's oppression, we need to move beyond this, so when people resist, you're just like, you just must not be getting this, let's go over it again.” Once again, Noreen made a comparison between working through the guilt, anger, and shame (GAS) inherent in anti-oppressive education and adopting “the twelve step process, the first step is getting people to recognize [they are implicated] and there's that culture of fear and that

culture of denial that doesn't want even an initial step of recognizing that we have a problem.”

With the exception of Jackie, those with more experience with anti-oppressive education were united in their desire to move participants in AOETA along in their journey toward becoming anti-oppressive educators. They also were aware of the power of resistance through intellectualization and by “just needing more time.” Noreen, who had taught courses as an anti-oppressive educator, seemed to have the most compassion and tolerance, recognizing how disorienting dilemmas destabilizes people and that, unfortunately, transformative learning of this magnitude takes time.

Creating Tension and Discomfort: Homophobia

Some conversations seemed more challenging to participants in the present study. These conversations had the potential to create disorienting dilemmas. However, if the conversation was too provocative and too emotionally laden for the participants, it seemed to create resistance to the event acting as a disorienting dilemma to the degree that the students shut down before the material could be presented in its entirety. In the first example, a particular speaker who was speaking about heteronormativity challenged the thinking of a number of participants during the introduction to his presentation to the class. Kalyn had said that she “did not appreciate [this] particular speaker.” Crystal wrote about her discomfort and lack of knowledge about sexual orientation in her journal. She was becoming conscious of her beliefs around sexual orientation. She wrote:

This was an uncomfortable class today. I have never been in a place where I have had to think about or build understanding about homophobia/gay/lesbian/bisexual/ transgender/transsexual. I have not had to think about my beliefs about these ideas—are people predisposed or do they learn these characteristics?

The speaker introduced a number of controversial points in a paradoxical way to demonstrate some of the ways that “being gay” is seen, not as different, but as deviant, and how this deviancy is taken as common sense. He wanted to “trouble normal.” As Cam aptly pointed out that one of the challenges this speaker was addressing was that “it's been socially unacceptable to be racist for a long time, but it hasn't been socially unacceptable to be homophobic for a long time and in many circles it's still very much accepted.”

While all participants indicated places where white privilege operated in their lives, there was also very clear discomfort by several people, about the speaker's message. Several participants mentioned their frustration with the speaker and several participants' strong articulations of distress were found in their journals. However, it is difficult to know whether participants were objecting to the issue of sexual orientation or whether the common sense demonizing of homosexuality in society troubled them. This is because in all of the cases provided to the class, there was a significant power differential between the person who was challenged with a crime and the victims of the crime. The person who gave the presentation also had institutional power over the group, as he was in a senior administrative position at the university where this research was conducted. What was being argued was that if the crimes had been between a male and a female, they would still have been seen as abhorrent but, since they were between males, they were seen as even more abhorrent and, indeed, deviant.

Cam, who was conscious of the need to focus on homophobia, wrote the following in his journal about the presentation:

I believe there was truth in much of what [the speaker] had to say about people's perceptions on homosexuality. Once again, many of the demons we are facing in

this course are the ones that are less visible. Most of us would attest to being open and accepting of alternative sexualities, however I feel that [the presenter] tested many people's level of comfort with a few elements of his lecture, which made a lot of people uncomfortable. While some of his more tongue and cheek commentary was shocking for some, I believe his assertions regarding the Sheldon Kennedy case was really what made people upset. [The speaker] suggested in reference to the Sheldon Kennedy story that, "It takes two to Tango." He also mentioned that the [public reaction] to stories about men who sexually harass young women are much softer than men who sexually harass young boys. In conversations after the class I found that people's reactions were very strong. Generally speaking the class was very uncomfortable in particular with [the presenter's] comments about Sheldon Kennedy.

I am uncertain whether I agree with [the presenter] on the Sheldon Kennedy issue, however, I think that he was purposefully testing people's level of comfort. It is through discomfort that many of us are able to identify our real emotional positions on certain taboo topics and issues. I relate this to Kumashiro's work on learning through discomfort and through crises. Sometimes it requires exposure to shocking material or ideas in order to challenge our normative assumptions and beliefs. I believe that exposing our own comfort levels is a good way to gauge how far we have come on our journey.

Darla had said, "So it doesn't pay to be a nice guy in some respects and that's what I say with gay/lesbian issues! It's something that people really don't want to really deal with, I think. And so, I really appreciated that he was in my face and went for the shock factor."

Lana was a participant who took exception to the message presented. Lana said:

I was really offended and I just can't really let that one go. I think if you would have recorded that speech and sent it to the [local newspaper] that would have made headlines the next day. And I think he'd be in a lot of trouble for some of the comments he made. And I don't think that some of the things that he said will work to improve anti-oppressive education. I think that's the thing that almost turned me off.

She had this to say in her journal about the presentation:

I question his thoughts on Graham James, Sheldon Kennedy, and Theoren Fleury. I felt that by saying they engaged in [consensual] sex with their coach, they were being victimized again. Also the words "it takes two to tango" were unsettling to me. These boys were 13 to 15 years old and do not make a choice to engage in

sex with their coach. Graham James used his position of power as their coach to abuse these hockey players.

Crystal was succinct in her critique: “Well that struck a chord, the discomfort of the openly gay, lesbian, that kind of thinking.”

Jackie was another participant that was troubled by the presentation. She wrote the following in her journal:

I’ve been working through my feelings about [the speaker’s] talk yesterday. I was surprised by the discussion of blatant gay sexuality on the beach, the ‘top’/’bottom’ reference, and other points that emphasized that gay life is predominantly about sex. I am both surprised at his treatment of this topic, and surprised at my own reaction to it. I thought I was more liberal than I obviously am. However, perhaps I’m not wrong in reacting this way. Perhaps this was an inappropriate way to talk about masculinity to this audience. Then again, I don’t think it would be inappropriate to deliver something less shocking, if [the presenter] believes that this indeed does best describe what it’s like to be a gay man.

After the presentation, a gathering was held at which the students would have the opportunity to more informally interact with the speaker. Later in her journal, Jackie wrote:

Upon reflecting on the afternoon at [the speaker’s] house, I have come to the conclusion that some students did not go because of him. I don’t have any proof of that, except that one of the women who objected to what he said asked me if I was going, and said that she wasn’t. She really didn’t want to go. She didn’t tell me why.

All of these fairly long quotes indicate with great clarity how people interpreted what was communicated to them in different ways. Those who were more experienced with anti-oppressive education were less interested in the message and less about the content, and gave themselves permission to be discomforted and to make sense of the discomfort. I suggest that this way of thinking through a dialectical thinking approach makes sense, given that these participants had experienced a perspective transformation

at an earlier point in time. Those new to anti-oppressive education, with one exception, strongly resisted the message and when discomforted, seemed to shut down and resist to the degree that the underlying message regarding inequity and systemic oppression was lost. Participants weren't able to engage in either objective or subjective reframing that could support a transformative learning experience.

Creating Tension and Discomfort: White Privilege

All participants referred to the term white in reference to privilege during their interviews or in their journals. Creating awareness of white privilege was an important aspect of the course as it created the basis for understanding the unearned power and privilege of those whose skin is light colored. White privilege is prevalent in Canadian society and is a part of post-colonial discourses. Carrie was challenged to accept that white privilege applied to her. Carrie said:

I felt that with the whole whiteness, invisible, unconscious acts that we do, the white privilege; that makes me feel uncomfortable, because I don't feel privileged. I understand the concept. I know without a doubt that if we were in some social situation, were there were people of all different backgrounds, poverty, age, men, women and race, the whole... I would be one of the privileged.

Carrie also said:

I guess maybe there were a few things that made me feel a little guilty still because you just, it's that [white privilege] that I thought I was past and maybe I am not quite past. Like I said nobody is perfect, right. And so when you are in the classroom and you are teaching and you are thinking and you are giving all the perspectives and you are trying to be empathetic and understanding and not saying this is right or wrong but this is just the way it is. Trying to even be doing what you are doing from a white perspective, well then how else; I can't be a black person to give the black, I mean, you know. If I tanned myself a little, well you know and so I think it pissed me off. I can't get past that, I can't help being white, I would like to say "Okay now I am going to turn and pretend I am black or I am going to pretend I am native or I am going to give a guys perspective now because now I am pretending...." I can't do that I can only be a white female.

What is interesting to note is that Carrie stated, “I don’t feel privileged.” This indicates that until people can critically self-reflect on their position of privilege, they are not able to apply the inside-out approach. This also indicates the complicated nature of anti-oppressive education in that people, through their own multiple intersections of difference, can identify as privileged and oppressed within different situations and contexts. For example, one of the challenges that Arlis felt he needed to explore was how he is both advantaged and disadvantaged as a Franco-Canadien in Saskatchewan. He said, “everybody I think are looking at it as white privilege, I’m white privileged.... But I’m also the minority and I’m looking at how it’s been influencing me.” Arlis said, “So I guess I get that double, I have the power, yet I know exactly what it feels like to be the underdog. I’ve had a taste test of the menu I guess.”

Arlis said:

The discomfort is when we were talking about Aboriginals. I always see the aspect of French and that always – and even in one of my journals, I said that I don’t even consider myself “white” because we’re a minority. In Saskatchewan there are only 7,000 that are “labeled” French. So I guess that’s my discomfort all the time, almost being defensive.

Understanding white privilege was a challenge for Arlis because he felt the sting of oppression because of his Franco-Canadien identity, which led to Arlis finding it challenging to identify with White privilege. He said:

We’re always talking about Aboriginals and if I can be honest, even this morning, Aboriginals was said like seven times. And I know how society is right now into integrating Aboriginals, but my last journal, and you should read it, it was about reflecting on the bilingualism of it. Like how many things are there about French in all the curriculums, never mind the Aboriginal and it’s supposed to be our second [official] language!

Arlis struggled to acknowledge his position as a white privileged person because of his Franco-Canadian identity. After the class on white privilege, Arlis responded in his journal with the following:

Take the time to look in the curriculums and you'll notice that there is a big kick right now to implement the natives but never mind the French... Even if it's a bilingual country, I don't see the representation we should have. Now, we boast that we are a great country with much diversity. If the country was all that and a bag of chips, shouldn't we be proud enough to implement many core cultures in our education.

Talking constantly about white privilege, I can probably imagine and rightly assume that there are many Canadians that don't feel Canadian.

As the above text also articulates, Arlis seemed resistant to transformation regarding white privilege because he also felt marginalized as a Franco-Canadian.

Crystal grew up in a rural community far from Aboriginal students and was new to the term "white privilege." Crystal said in our first interview,

I'm most discomforted by the fact that I didn't even know that it was out there: That white privilege; our whiteness; our shades of whiteness are something that I would be that person that would say, "Why didn't they ever teach us that? Why didn't I know that?" and I guess maybe I have to conclude that I was never in a place that would bring that to my attention.

In the above quotation, Crystal seems to be saying that because she was educated in a predominantly white community there was no need to discuss the Other and no reflection upon her identity as part of the normative dominant group. Crystal was working through the emotional discomfort associated with her perspective transformation. In her journal Crystal wrote:

I was not aware that I was part of the dominant group identity by virtue of being white. – Denial and evidence of oppression. – Resistance to seeing myself as privileged. – Being privileged has negative connotations. That would be why I have never thought of myself as privileged. I do not want to be a bad guy. – I don't see myself that way.

Crystal's personal journey and growth were transparent as she worked through subjective reframing by moving from being ignorant of oppression to understanding herself to be implicated in oppression.

One of the things that participants acknowledged was that anti-oppressive education takes an emotional toll in ways that seem to supersede the toll taken on those subjugated by the actual oppression. It is hard to come to terms with how our social construction implicates us in being an oppressor. Kalyn said:

The Aboriginal topic somewhat is making me uncomfortable because I feel like I don't know enough and – this is what I really feel, since we're being honest. I'm so tired of hearing about it. Isn't that terrible? That's what I feel. And I have so much information in my head that I want to know about all these immigrant people and I'm like “what about them?” and then I think, “you chose to come to U of R, you moron!” So I'm having that dance of letting go of myself, my racist self on that topic, I guess.

Kalyn also acknowledged how difficult the course had been for her and her perception that this university was a place that focused on Indigenous peoples. She had found the last week particularly difficult for her as she worked through the discomfort associated with her perspective transformation through the critical self-reflection of assumptions. She said:

It's like I slammed into a cement wall and it's just below the surface realizing I'm so not where I want to be and I'm so not who I want to be and I have so much more to do. And so even though I've been on this journey for awhile and the onion layers is a journey – I don't feel that I've gone in a circle, but I'm moving along and I'm learning new things and I'm still moving forward, which I think is a good thing, but as the bumps in the road come, I have enough self awareness to realize I don't know all that I thought I did, all that I want to know and I'm not as anti-oppressive and anti-racist as I would like to be.

Participants found it difficult to maintain their whiteness as innocence. Sarah said that she could “see it even now at grad class right now and the white people in there, it is actually comical how often they will, you know, pronounce their innocence to racism.”

Sarah felt that a number of participants talked about how “they are completely innocent of racism.” This resistance to change seemed to be strongly attached to Whiteness. She also thought that a number of her classmates saw themselves as “white knight[s], you know, I protect my Aboriginal faculty from the racism in the school.” This inability to identify with oppression, particularly White oppression, complicated the capacity for participants new to anti-oppressive education to work through the subjective reframing associated with their perspective transformation. When the Whiteness blinders were removed, most participants new to anti-oppressive education seemed to be involved in epochal change in this area. Sarah found it fascinating how, even in a class geared towards anti-oppressive education, that there is a natural tendency to forget how:

Our systems constantly work to protect white people, so in other words when anti-racism comes in and starts to mess around with [our privilege] I will see both white and Aboriginal people rise to protect white people from this and it is like, but there is no protection of what Aboriginals face on a daily basis.

Protecting privilege through hegemonic thinking and social systems is natural and normal to even those who are the Other. Critiquing the very institutional and normative practices that reinforce difference was difficult work that was discomfiting and resisted by some participants. However, a number of participants were coming to terms with their own role with internalized racism. Kristin said:

I think it has been a hard journey, but a wonderful one at the same time. I think one of the hardest things is that idea of being a racist. It's easy to accept that I'm privileged maybe, but being a racist? When I have really loved working with community school kids from so many different kinds of backgrounds and I've always thought that I try my best to do everything I can for them and now, from all this learning in this class, I realize that I don't mean to, and I don't want to, but I do have these stereotypes and these ideas in my mind... there's this humble part of me that doesn't want to admit that I felt that. And at the same time, there's this part of me that in the back of my mind, wants to use those feelings as an excuse for not being racist, which is something I've had to realize.

A number of things are worth noting in this dialogue. First, was that Kristin struggled to name herself as privileged. Second, she continues the internalized dialogue that maintains the power imbalance by acknowledging herself as a good person because of her efforts to do everything *for* “them.” This resistance to change started with her resistance to critical self-reflection of her own assumptions, including her construction as a privileged person and then her rationalization of being a “good person” who, from her position of power and privilege, works for the betterment of the Other. She also acknowledges the tension between her new thinking about being privileged and how this was creating an emotional imbalance within her. Kristin acknowledged:

growing up in this very white privileged society and not really having any communication or knowledge of different people growing up in [a small town in] Saskatchewan! And that bit of oppression which I don't really want to say because I'm not a minority at all, but that whole idea of ‘don't talk about it, you guys are fine, forget about it’.

She felt troubled about her Ukrainian background and how that related to her ‘whiteness’. Kristin had worked hard to maintain her Ukrainian culture and dance. She perceived her valuing of Ukrainian culture as being tied to valuing multiculturalism. AOETA troubled the foundations of multiculturalism, including the absence of any substantive discussions about the power differential and inequities between the dominant and less dominant groups in Canada. Kristin said: “You almost feel selfish or wrong for acknowledging [your Ukrainian heritage] but I think it's a big part [of my identity].”

For Kristin, she had become aware that “I am white and I am privileged and I don't deny that and now I can move on.” Kristin said that she was beginning to understand “the shades of whiteness.” In her journal, Kristin wrote:

After reading the article on exploiting whiteness, it did make me question my own [whiteness] and the reality and how easy it is to deny your own racism. Racism is

a nasty word and makes people feel as though they're bad people if they're called a racist (especially if they are not consciously so). Not to make our upbringing and society an excuse for having racist thoughts, but it definitely is the main reason. Most of us wouldn't choose to be racist, whereas some people do. In order for white people to accept the idea that we are racist, perhaps the definition, the feelings and connotation behind the word, need to be altered in order to make a smoother and easier transition into its acceptance. I also think that as white individuals it would help to admit as a group that we are all racists or have had moments of racism. I also don't want to be made to feel like a bad person, however, because I happen to be white.

Kristin's need to come to terms with how her internalized racism was commensurate with her desire to lessen the negative social connotations attached to racism. This subjective reframing was commensurate with her moving past her resistance to seeing herself as privileged and led to substantive personal growth and transformation.

Candace also acknowledged that she had become "more aware of my white privilege or my – what I do that just make the judgments on people because of what they're wearing or how you see them or, things like that." For Candace:

The whole First Nations culture that has really been – that topic this week particularly has really challenged me, just because some of the things I didn't know. Like I definitely did obviously know that the Europeans came in and took over, but I didn't realize that the First Nations people were good farmers and then we decided no, let's take away all their machinery because they can't be better than us! You know, things like that that I had no idea and so I think that that's what's challenging for me.

Candace wrote in her journal about her new understanding of anti-oppressive education and anti-racism:

Anti-oppressive education has been an amazing class so far. All the readings, vocabulary, etc. are forcing us to unlearn our previous notions. It makes us become more aware: racism isn't just individual acts, and that being a white privileged person I am unknowingly oppressing others. This bothers me and forces me to reflect on my life....

I find it disturbing to think back on my life and reflect on everything. I still appreciate my great childhood but how do I unlearn the whiteness that has been taught to me and oppresses others?

In relation to not wanting to give justice to Aboriginal perspectives because she works in another province, and not Saskatchewan, Kalyn acknowledged, “I can’t continue to play that card in my head.” She became aware that she was not valuing Aboriginal perspectives and had previously justified this by rationalizing it as unnecessary because of the relatively low percentage of Aboriginal people residing in her home province. She explained that her thinking had changed during AOETA, a result of her perspective transformation, and that she now wanted to further her reflection about her beliefs.

Jackie reflected on growing up in a large family. She remembered that her dad impressed on the family that “we were the rich ones in the community.” For Jackie, this was a perfect example of meritocracy and her privilege. She reflected, “In that context, I didn't consider myself privileged, I considered myself the daughter, rightfully so, of a man who was rightfully rich.” She said that because she had become aware of being in the position of having unearned privilege, “I can’t deny it’s there.” She also recognized that identity “has a whole lot to do with social constructs.” In contrast, Lana said:

Well the whole notion of white privilege. I really hadn’t thought about that as deeply before, but in terms of standing up for what you believe in or standing up for other people I think I have always been like that actually to the extent that I drive some people insane close to me. It’s like, “Did you have to say that to that person.” I can’t help it, because if I think it is wrong then I will tell you that I think it is wrong, like I have always just been like that. Yeah, I think it makes you realize where your place is in society a little bit differently than what maybe you thought before. Maybe I didn’t realize that I was as privileged as I am when I really look at my life and yeah, you just don’t realize. Sometimes we don’t think about it as much as all of us should.

In speaking from a place of privilege, Lana positioned herself as a person who was there to help. She felt that to dwell on white privilege was unproductive. Lana was

committed to transformation and activism. She maintained the discourse that racism and discrimination were a thing of the past and that people need to move on from this stance.

She said:

My personal opinion is that you can't just overcome yourself with guilt for what happened in the past. All you can do is improve the future. ... It's done, and it's terrible, but the only thing we can do is make the future better and that's your part and if you don't do that, then you should feel guilty, but if you're doing your part, well then you shouldn't be stuck in that spot where you still feel terrible about what happened a hundred years ago. I don't think you can move forward if that's where you are.

Through AOETA students learned to identify the problematic nature of many “common sense” inclusive strategies and to critique power and privilege. Working through this area was a deeply personal and emotional journey for participants. Some participants were challenged in this area and were resistant to thinking differently. They denied their implication in oppression in an emotional way. However, once participants understood their emotional discomfort as a part of what they needed to work through as part of their journey to becoming anti-oppressive education, and engaged in the critical self-reflection of assumptions, an aspect of subjective reframing, they moved towards wanting to engage in the activism that they saw as liberating.

Poststructural Dimension

The Poststructural dimension presented in AOETA facilitated a deeper understanding of the social construction of knowledge, identity and power and the participants began to deconstruct dominant discourses and practices. Participants new to anti-oppressive education were challenged but excited to use the language of poststructuralism during the course. Those already familiar with poststructuralism and anti-oppressive education were better able to use the language of poststructuralism. Lana,

a newcomer to anti-oppressive education, had jotted down in her journal that teaching through a poststructural dimension was not as much about transmitting knowledge as it is about the need to “Disrupt, interrupt, disturb, disengage, refuse, disarm” what is known. She had moved away from the notion of the individual as autonomous and did not see the process of anti-oppressive education as pathologizing. Instead she saw the process of trying to make sense of how we are constituted and constructed through dialogue, and how we need to examine how we are being hailed to become certain identities.

She had also tersely summarized some of the insights she had understood about the theory behind anti-oppressive education from a lecture given by the instructor. I have included her notes as Figure 6. Participants understood that education that actively seeks change was important.

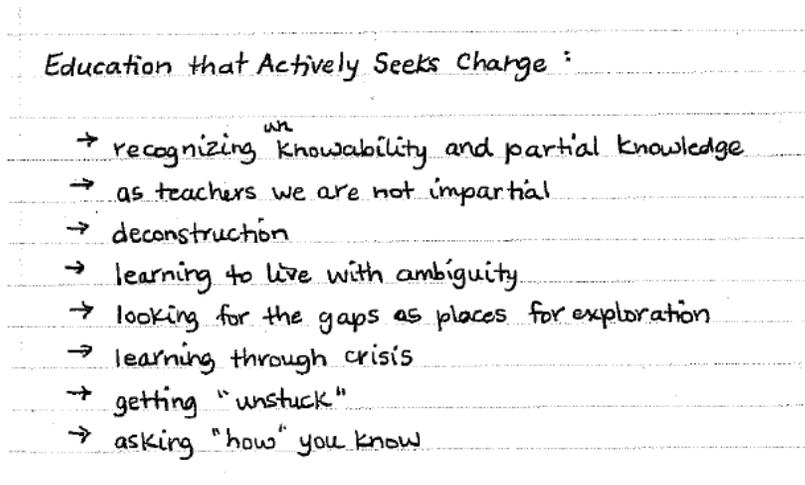


Figure 5: Education that actively seeks change

Participants understood and could put some concepts into words and apply them. Arlis felt that using poststructural terminology would be “helpful.” Crystal said, “I find those terms engaging and that helps the understanding better.” Those who said they used poststructural thinking acknowledged that poststructuralism enabled them to see through

the fallacy of “common sense” thinking. Carrie referred to ‘troubling’ the reading and writing that she was doing. Darla, who self-identifies as Aboriginal, had inferred during the fall interview that the term “common sense” was the same as her word “intangible.” Many of the concepts that she had difficulty discussing before the course were difficult because “you can’t really name it.” She referred to not being able to explain, before the course, the inequality and racism that she felt was normal. Darla said:

Things are done so insidiously that you can’t really put a name to it a lot of times. And that is what I have experienced all my life, these weird things that you know you don’t belong, and you know you are being pushed out of jobs and stuff like that, but you can’t really say that it was blatant this or blatant that because it is so insidiously done that you can’t name it.”

According to Darla, learning about inequity through the poststructural theory of the social construction of identity had been a helpful part of her personal journey of transformation.

Cam found Kumashiro’s book helpful in understanding anti-oppressive education and its poststructural emphasis. Cam said during the first interview near the beginning of the course:

Kevin Kumashiro’s piece about some of the common sense thinking about schools and then he goes on to talk about learning through crisis and learning in discomforting ways and how that’s super important and challenging all of our ideas about what a school should be. There’s some pretty challenging stuff in there in terms of re-envisioning school, so I appreciate that, and it’s also felt empowering to be like “no, we need to do this, it’s a demand for action” and it’s really placing a high importance on anti-oppressive education as maybe supplanting some of our other core subjects.

Sarah was able to use the language of post-structuralism. She had said that poststructuralism is “really powerful.” Noreen, communicated the following insight:

There are lots of different theories, lots of different frameworks that you can use to view inequity or injustice, but I think the thing that I like about poststructuralism is that it makes you question even the very concepts; because

the concepts themselves are constructed when you look at poststructuralism, so if we talk about inequity or injustice.... It allows a lens or a framework, to be critical of everything, including the concepts, not just the systems.

Noreen's description is the essence of the different lens of anti-oppressive education.

This epistemic difference was an important aspect of participants' perspective transformations.

Noreen said that the major reason she likes poststructuralism is because it is "about examining everything." Noreen valued learning from a poststructural perspective because "it talks about the whole idea of [there] being different truths, so there is not really one truth, there is always different views of something." Understanding the social construction of knowledge was important to the change process because it moved people away from the idea that there is just one truth towards understanding that there are multiple truths and perspectives, which are all of value. Learning to humbly value different perspectives was significant in participants perspective transformations.

She also valued an indigenous perspective and saw it as an alternative lens to see the western world differently. She said that it is important to be able to provide a different way of framing reality in order to have people see things differently. Noreen gave an example from another class she took that moved away from western ideology toward indigenous perspectives. In this class, Noreen said:

We sat in a circle every day; we started every class with a prayer or a thought.... We had people that would come to our class and do part of their presentation in another language using images and other languages to support that, or the discussion of other languages.... I guess the problem I'm at is, I look at this class, the Summer Institute, and it's hugely important, and I keep forgetting that people are at different stages and I guess that's something that I'm struggling with today.

Noreen said that she tries to bring these teachings to her own classroom and life.

Appreciating that there are other epistemologies that hold value was also significant. This desire to appreciate multiple perspectives was important for Noreen. She said:

I look at my own practice and what I do in my own classroom and there are still certain things that – I mean, we sit in a circle, but at the same time I still do lectures, and of course I'm conscious of that, and I'm conscious of trying to incorporate different things. We have an elders program at our school so some of it is made very easy for me, really. We have teepees set up year round so we can use that as a teaching space and that's great. But I guess it's just the conscious – I look at the idea of talking about anti-oppressive education and what we're actually doing in practice.

The following statement by Sarah concurs with Noreen's notion that there are a number of ways to disrupt a Western paradigm and to work to bring them to life in classrooms:

Because a poststructural paradigm is a western paradigm, do I think that that is the best one for me right now? Yes, I would say that is the most powerful for me right now and is working really well for me, and my understanding. However, I think there are other languages and other philosophies.

Sarah brought up Kumashiro's (2000b) perspective that there are similarities between poststructuralism and Buddhism. Sarah also supported the notion that:

Many people that engage in indigenous languages and indigenous knowledge and paradigms find [this alternative perspective] very disruptive as well and I agree that it is a deconstruction, it is a different paradigm, it is a different way of looking at the world and it is a different language that accesses different understandings and meanings of the world. So, I would never say there is only one. I think for me, with my English language and my context of being raised in a Colonial model, I think poststructural is the best for me to use."

The opportunity to provide alternative meaning-making experiences for participants is tantamount to them seeing that there are different ways to make sense of, and therefore experience, the world. Poststructuralism facilitated Sarah's perspective transformation by providing a means to think about things differently and to deconstruct

that difference. Noreen also added that while poststructuralism provides opportunities for critique, “it doesn’t demand action from people. It’s like ‘Oh, these are all the things that are wrong, let’s think about that and we all view it differently, these are all different perceptions and we can just think about it’.” Therefore, one can interpret from her comments that poststructuralism may be a catalyst in subjective reframing leading to personal growth, but it does not have the engaged activism associated with the critical social perspective of transformative learning.

One of the comments that came out of the interview with Noreen was the idea that the current method of teaching anti-oppressive education maintains the traditional Western approach to education. It is based upon a largely didactic focus. Noreen said:

I look at something like anti-oppressive education and I think it's a really valuable philosophical idea but at the same time, even in the classes that we're taking right now, the summer institute, we're still doing things in this western ideology, we haven't changed half the things that are being done. The classroom is still set up the same way, the language is still the same, the time structures are still the same, so yes, we're talking about anti-oppressive education but we're still utilizing the same method of education.

Noreen implied that anti-oppressive education should go beyond western ideology and embrace different ways of teaching and perceptions of being.

Sarah articulated some of the deeper aspects of a poststructural dimension when she talked about understanding human interaction through a poststructural lens in anti-oppressive education. She said:

So when you start to show [us] how heavily we are socialized to have certain ideologies and beliefs and we start to unpack that, I think there becomes, there are some frustrations with that because you believe that you are very individualistic and very independent and you think your own thoughts and you believe your beliefs and when you start to see that there is something much more happening there, it can be scary and frustrating. It can also be liberating because you start to see things and view things and think things in a completely different way, which is empowering actually. I believe that that unpacking of that socialization process,

those identity constructions can create new spaces for new ideas and new thoughts.

By providing a poststructural dimension to the learning that was taking place in AOETA, participants were able to understand the social construction of knowledge and difference in a way that was liberating—not pathologizing. They also learned to understand truth as something to be contested and not to be proven.

Social Construction of Identity

One of the questions that I asked participants was whether they saw their identity as solid and fixed or as fluid and changing. I wanted to see what connection participants would make between their personal understanding of identity and social constructionism. Participants indicated that they see their identity as fluid and changing. As participants in learning and life, they saw themselves as always becoming. Sarah said:

Identity construction is extremely powerful and as I said, it doesn't take many different examples to show people where they start to see it, but it is that internalization of it; starting to question yourself, that is the most important thing.... The power of language to create those new spaces, anti-oppressive spaces, is one of the keys, because that is how we communicate with each other, that is how we communicate ideas.

Arlis's perspective was simple and to the point. Referring to how contextualized our identities and behaviours can be, Arlis said, "I would say [our identity] is changing all the time, depending on who's around you. Depending on who's noticing you."

Several participants compared their journey as a teacher to their personal journey of change. Participants also recognized the important role that the social context plays in identity change. Several participants placed a higher degree of importance around discourse in creating our identity. Crystal said:

[Identity] is formed by who you – it is a social thing – I believe it's a social thing because we're naturally social beings and so when I just reflect on who I've been

over the course of time, especially when I reflect on the fact, you know, just getting married and then eight kids, that's an evolving process of who I – it's been socially constructed. I would have had to “be” in the roles I've had to serve.

Several participants realized and spoke to the role the teachers have in the social construction of others' identity. Kristin said:

One of the big ones that I got out of [AOETA] is just the whole idea that people are always treated in a certain way and if they always feel that way about themselves how can they ever get out of that. Something I have always kept in mind, but now something that I am using in my vocabulary with other people too, like even lower level learners I find that if you always treat them or assume they can't do things or treat them in a certain way or they are treated differently somehow they are always going to feel like that's where they are.

Candace noted how we construct the normal and abnormal in our classrooms. She made an analogy between identity construction and teaching:

I don't think that you can be the same teacher you were, any year! I've only taught for four years, [I'm] going into my fifth, but I can honestly say that of my four years teaching kindergarten, I never once taught exactly the same, you know? You have to change who you are and teach a little bit differently for each group of kids, because each group of kids comes in with their own baggage or their own privileges that you need to rise to.

Following AOETA, Candace had become aware of how inequity is socially constructed in her own classroom. For example, she said:

I think – this is actually something I talk about all the time with people and I think what happens is – for my kids that have had [a student with autism] in their class for – he'll be normal. I think he'll be normal to some of them in particular, all the time. But as new kids come into that group of kids, that haven't been exposed to it at an early age and they start flagging it as abnormal, then I think that that's what brings voice to [inequity].

Through the course, Kristin recognized the fundamental importance of understanding one's own identity. Lana had drawn in her journal the triangle from the lecture on identity construction and had written at the top “People learn their place in society” (See Figure 7).

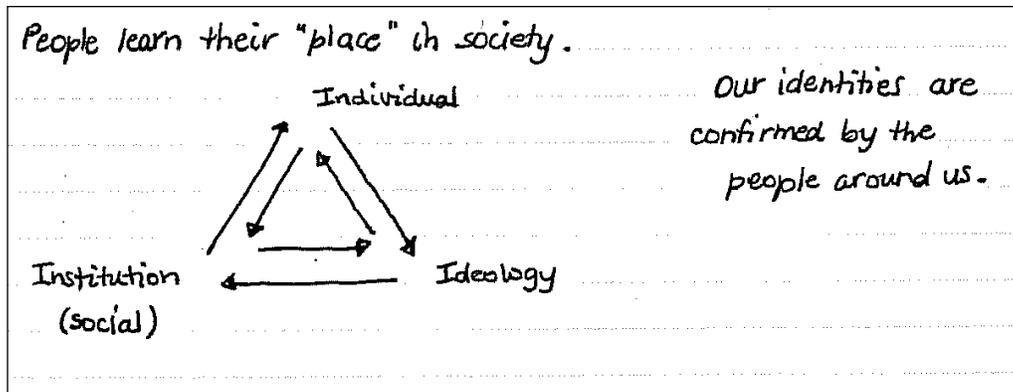


Figure 6: How people learn their "place" in society

Lana's comments reference identities being socially constructed. Darla wrote in her journal about her understanding of the social construction of identity and how she may now be able to use it as a means to understand previous racism and her personal journey. Darla wrote that there had been:

Lots of discussion on race, racialization, white privilege, whiteness and how racism is perpetuated. I like the fact that [the instructor] keeps reminding us that we are "nice" people and because of this we might have GAS. I can say that I have suffered all of these feelings. The guilt and shame earlier in my life, and later anger, which I now realize was misplaced. Had I been aware of how racialization, white privilege etc. is constructed, I may have been able to handle situations better. I hear so many comments no matter what circle I am in and now I feel that I may simply question remarks without feeling any anxiety or anger.... I share my roots with my students sometimes with trepidation, as I don't know what the response will be, but I think I will feel more comfortable and accepting of what will occur. This gives me confidence in my ability to encourage others to share and be proud. My heart goes out to others who are also suffering from GAS. I have been enlightened.

Darla's realization that all of the social constructions of difference are constructed and can be deconstructed through discourse was pivotal for her perspective transformation and may, in part, have led to her comment, "I have been enlightened."

Noreen understood that a big part of what was happening in AOETA was that students were examining their own social construction. She said that a major part of the

course was to “examine our identity construction, let’s examine everything, that’s what I like about it.”

Through understanding the process of personal change and growth, Jackie explained the social construction of identity. The concept of social constructionism is also an important aspect within transformative learning theory. She said:

I think we have certain building blocks that are nature and through my experience, I would say it has a whole lot to do with social constructs. For me to be this white privileged kid growing up in rural Saskatchewan and then because I wanted to get into education and move to a university city, my identity began to change through the people that I met and definitely the relationship of me to my world and my immediate world, as soon as my immediate world changed, I changed and so not to say that people should change if they move, but people do change when they move because when you observe things, you learn things and when you learn things, you change. So I guess it's silly to think that identity isn't a social construct because if identity isn't a social construct, then we're talking about people were born and grow up and refuse to change, they get stuck in their ways and they don't learn.

Cam connected to how we perform our identity. He gave an example of performance and said, “that's just a little thing, but it's an example of performing your [identity] and not being aware and so, those are really learning experiences that can affect your identity too. But I think in relation to those that you're with too.”

Cam was also able to connect how “white men can really be chameleons, we can exist in so many spaces so comfortably.” In this example, being aware of how privilege provides a means for our socially constructed identities to “fit in” was an important realization regarding White, male privilege that, in and of itself, would be an important aspect of understanding how we perform our identities more easily with power and privilege.

A growing awareness of the social construction of identity fostered personal growth and perspective transformations. Learning about identity construction was

important and freeing for participants as they journeyed to become anti-oppressive educators. I suspect that without the poststructural approach participants may have resisted even more because they would have seen themselves as deficient and bad. Instead, they were able to see how they were hailed to certain malleable and changing identities through discourses, which were based on hegemony and ossified systems of dominance that could also be changed.

Anti-oppressive education: a diversity of conceptualizations

One of the themes that emerged from the participants was their perception of anti-oppressive education as both a *lens* through which to understand oppression and a set of *tools* that teachers could use in order to work differently with their students. The reason this theme emerged was that some participants, particularly those who were more experienced with anti-oppressive education, believed quite strongly that it was more than a collection of tools. These participants also described learning about anti-oppressive education as “*a journey*,” “*a lifestyle*,” and as “*empowering*” and “*transformative*.” All of these terms relate to some participants belief that anti-oppressive education was first and foremost about personal transformation. However, those new to anti-oppressive education saw the need to be given tools that would enable them, as educators, to teach in anti-oppressive ways. They did not reflect on the lens approach like those with more experience in anti-oppressive education did.

Related to the toolkit conceptualization, Candace said:

One of the biggest tools I'll take with me, and not just sit back quietly, but I'll say, “What do you mean by that?” or like [the instructor] said about learning to speak back against oppressive comments, “Could you repeat that? I didn't think someone like you would say something like that.”

Noreen, who was more experienced with anti-oppressive education, said, “I think that you just need the little things that are tools that you can put in the toolkit, so critical consciousness, critical theory, self study, those are all tools that you're tossing in that tool kit.” She also saw the need to have tools. However, those tools were really conceptual frameworks and not just educational approaches.

Candace said:

I think it's given us the skill just to see things differently. I think it was even on *So You Think You Can Dance* last night and one of the judges said something and I stopped and I was like, rewind it, I said, “He didn't say that, did he?” I think before, I would have just skipped over that, but it was just so oppressive, what he said, and I don't think I would have noticed, I think many people probably didn't notice, but it's just that we see things totally differently.

Of the lens, Jackie said:

The critical lens is probably the most important to support people and if you can get teachers thinking critically about their practices and then starting the conversation with students, right. If we examine the bibliography for ELA 30 and just have a critical conversation about what's not there.

Cam made the point that he saw anti-oppressive education as a lens, and not a toolkit. He said:

I was just going to make a quick comment if I could about the toolbox. I think I've said this before, but it's really hard to compartmentalize that as being like taking something out and using it. That's something that isn't what this is about. It's a lens, it's a – whatever you want to call it, but a tool is not what I see it as.

Cam and Kristin saw learning anti-oppressive education as being on a personal journey. The idea of being on a personal journey towards becoming anti-oppressive educators was brought up in the second focus group and supported as a common theme. This acknowledgement of the perspective transformation was significant. Candace commented that before her lens was “rose-colored” and now it wasn't. Crystal said that

Anti-oppressive education “isn't something that you put in the classroom or in the school. It's a lifestyle.” Sarah said:

I just find that people who engage in the real work of themselves with the theories and the ideas, it just starts to come naturally too. It's not that you sit down and think, “Okay, what strategies do I need or what resources do I use?”

Sarah also said that, “I see [anti-oppressive education] as something really empowering and positive for teachers because it's about us, it's about what we can do. And we can do a lot to change what's happening.”

Cam said:

I think that as you internalize these ideas it begins to come naturally that you will act. You don't compartmentalize it as “I'm taking time to do this,” but you are simply responding as a human being because that's who you've become. And that's a pretty transformative piece but I think that's the hope as educators, as activists, that that's what will happen and it won't become more work.

Sarah said:

We have to see each other too as tools, because we're learning in relation to each other and I remember with my pre-service teachers in particular, everybody comes in and they're open to it at different times and in different ways, and then they hang out at night and have conversations, they go for a beer, they would chat on Facebook, they would – this class, they became sort of obsessed with the material from this class, and they were always talking, talking, talking and then they'd come back and share, and I realized how much they were teaching each other.

For those new to anti-oppressive education, the toolkit analogy represents them wanting and expecting a collection of ideas on how to teach in anti-oppressive ways. Those with more experience had a different perspective. They understood that learning about anti-oppressive education led to a perspective transformation. It is interesting to note that there wasn't the awareness for those new to anti-oppressive education that, from the perspective of those more knowledgeable about anti-oppressive education, it is really

first and foremost an inside-out approach predicated by a perspective transformation. It is hard to say how things might be different if they had this knowledge.

The next section takes up the potential for transformative learning in AOETA. This section begins by examining potential disorienting dilemmas and participants' reflections according to those who are new to anti-oppressive education and those who had more experience with anti-oppressive education. Then, the theme of personal change is discussed, as well as the subthemes under the topic of personal change that emerged inductively through the analysis.

Personal Journeys

One of the reflections to which people alluded was the need, as anti-oppressive educators, to work on one's self first. That is, participants expressed a desire to begin with personal reflection instead of continuing to focus uniquely on knowing and changing the Other. All of the participants, except one, discussed this idea. There was other learning that created tension and discomfort for the participants as well. The tension, discomfort and the individual reflections of participants are discussed below. Analysis of the participants' contributions revealed a difference between those who were new to anti-oppressive education and the remaining participants. Hence, the two groups are presented separately.

New to Anti-oppressive Education

Arlis

Arlis didn't believe the class was going to change him. In the first interview he said, "this class isn't going to change my personality or my beliefs." The discomfort and tension that Arlis may have encountered was around his desire to be more inclusive. He

was able to recognize relations of power inherent in education, in his school, and in his classroom. Arlis wrote in his journal:

[Teachers] need to be open to students' needs and less to our own. We need to communicate after every little moment and make sure they were going in the right direction and make sure we are happy with the results. Through its readings Dr. Kumashiro often uses the term "we" as our teaching team or school system. So why don't we use this technique in our classrooms? We tend to use they and us: the teacher and the student, and even worse, I against them. I don't believe we are a team in the classroom. And I don't understand why that is. Are we scared to lower ourselves to their level? if we are to fight against oppression, I believe it will have to be a team effort or no baby steps will take place towards the greater goal of having an anti-oppressive world.

In the October interview, one of the disorienting dilemmas that he navigated was changing the lens- seeing things through the student's eyes, or from the Other's perspective. Anti-oppressive education works against paradigms that position the student as the problem. Arlis explained that he had begun to see "oppression through the kids eyes." It was through this critical reflection brought on by the teaching and readings that, in Arlis's words, "the little light bulb that goes on, going, 'Oh! I never thought of that!' You're actually reacting in your head differently, you're controlling your emotions differently." Thus, while Arlis was adamant at the beginning that participation in AOETA would not change his beliefs, after the course he reported changes in his thinking indicative of a perspective transformation.

Candace

Discomfort and tension for a number of participants occurred when they recognized their own unearned privilege. Candace said, "I felt that I had so much unlearning to do." She said:

Before, I would have said things like, "I've worked hard to get where I am." And I still think that I've worked fairly hard, but I know that I've had the privilege of my parents backing me up, and my parents paying for my university the first time and

all those sorts of things, and I recognize that that's me being white and why I have those sorts of privileges and I think that now, I recognize that the marginalized people and First Nations people and other ethnicities that are the minority, don't have those sorts of privileges and so that makes me think – it makes me feel upset that I would have said before that I worked hard for anything, because I don't have to work nearly as hard as other people and I think that's rocked my values and beliefs.

She reflected on how she had made assumptions about those who have been marginalized. Candace said:

I've reflected a lot on this, but driving down the core of Regina, before I even get there, I lock my doors or if I'm driving downtown and I see someone who looks a little rough, most likely, they're not white, I will lock my doors. And I just think the power in that, I'm just making assumptions and I'm being racist in those sorts of moments, and I'm not saying now I'm going to go drive through the city of Regina and go into the “sketchy neighbourhood” and leave my car unlocked, but what I think this class has done, has made me realize the things that I do and it rocks my beliefs and it makes me think – it just makes me re-evaluate everything.

Candace also talked about her realization of how her social position and status might have a negative influence on her interactions with those who are marginalized:

Even now, when I think of parent-teacher interviews and my interviews with families that have come from other countries or the poor First Nations families that come in for interviews, I think how I'm going to do those interviews is going to be so different because you know what? It's gotta be intimidating here and me using my big words, or whatever. And I've always been someone who tries to say, “I really love this about your kid” and stuff, but I think I can do an even better job of it and I think that this class has taught me and made me believe that I need the parents – I want to create a relationship with the parents no matter where they are. And I mean, I've always been someone who, like if a kid invites me to their dance recital, I go, or ... Christmas, I go. But I think I can do an even better job of that, and I'd like the community of my students to know that I value them and go to their things and treat their parents with the utmost respect, because I do have that for them, I just think I can do a better job showing it.

Although Candace indicated that her “values and beliefs” were “rocked” as a result of the course and that she is actively reflecting on her own beliefs and behaviours, her latter statement still seems to contain a number of assumptions and stereotypical beliefs about the Other and, thus, serves to illustrate that large-scale transformation can

be elusive. For example, she seems to position herself above the “poor First Nations families” and assumes that they would find big words intimidating. That being said, Candace had committed to a journey toward transformation and growth at the beginning of the course and that is where she was headed. She had even begun to use some of the language of poststructuralism to inform her thinking as she introduced the notion of “unlearning” into our conversation.

Carrie

Carrie felt confident that she was “on the right path” and that there were a number of examples of inequity that she could use from her own life to help her understand oppression. For her, through the course, she had been feeling confident “knowing what I’m doing and it makes me, in a lot of ways, feel good about myself and what I’ve been doing. I’m on the right path.” However, at another time when I saw her in the hall, and in response to her explaining that she was on the right path, she had indicated that she still had a lot to learn in order to be an anti-oppressive educator. She was talking about being on an external “right path” as opposed to an inside-out journey of self-reflection that other participants described. At times, Carrie was confident, and then conflicted, about her confidence in herself as an anti-oppressive educator. Carrie was most discomforted by the material on white privilege. She said:

Yeah, that just disturbs me. I would like to paint myself and not be white. I really would. I said to somebody, I made a comment – “I would like to have a world where we’ve inbred so much and the races have mixed so much, we look the same.” And they said, “Well, there would still be difference!” Well I know that! But it would be – really, color and race are the biggest, the biggest – there’s always going to be poverty and there’s always going to be a gender thing for some people, but if we all looked exactly the same basically... I would like it, that we were one race. I would like to see what the world would be like if we were one race or there were no such thing as races, right? Because, we’re all pretty much the same. I would like to see, because I think I used to say I was color blind, and

then I understand what the theoretical term is and that's not really what I meant. I just meant I didn't discriminate based on color. I see someone's color, absolutely, but I also see “wow, that's really cool, I'd like to learn a little bit more about what you do different.” Because maybe I can do better.

The above statement appears to express the conflicted and perhaps contradictory thinking as she thought about her point of view regarding White privilege. Her self-reflection indicates that she was in the process of transforming her habits of mind by thinking about her point of view on the matter. She seems to, at one point, be saying that all people are “pretty much the same” yet she goes on to say that, when she encounters someone with a skin color different from her own, she assumes that they “do different.”

Carrie felt she could identify with the Other. She said, “I can relate to it all – when people are talking about racism, discrimination, the male.” And she could also reflect back to her childhood experiences as a student in school witnessing a little boy who was Aboriginal and from a single parent home being disadvantaged in school and wondering why. She could remember occasions with her family when she had witnessed, what she later knew to be racist thoughts. She wondered why those things happened and was still questioning how oppression operates. While Carrie would also acknowledge that she was seeing things differently, indicative of a perspective transformation, there were certain aspects, like White privilege, within anti-oppressive education that were still quite discomfoting for her. This speaks to the complicated way that the multiple intersections of difference affect our understanding, and while anti-oppressive education is about understanding oppression, it is first and foremost still about working through oppression through an examination of those distinct intersections of difference.

Crystal

Crystal's tension and discomfort may have been that she had come to realize that she had started the course with the desire to impose a dominant ideology on Hutterites, a group she perceived as minoritized. In her first interview she said, "I believe the Hutterites are minoritized. Just in the way people will treat them." She quickly realized that she might be unintentionally imposing her power and privilege on them. This tension and discomfort led to the critical reflection of her assumptions, as well as her underlying beliefs and values. In a conversation that Crystal had with a group of students in class, she reflected that during the conversation she had said, " 'All I really want to do is just help them to read and become like our society!' And somebody said to me 'you said that word [help]!' and I go 'Oh! I did!'" Crystal had said that this event was "very profound." She realized that she needed to step back and examine her own hegemonic interest in changing the Other. At that point she began focusing on challenging her own beliefs, values, and assumptions about the Other. At the conclusion of the study, she had questions about whether Hutterites would see themselves as minoritized and, if so, how she might be implicated in their oppression. Crystal indicated that she had an epochal change in how she understands those who were minoritized and how she wanted to go about working with those who self-identify as Hutterites, indicating a perspective transformation.

Darla

The need to work on oneself was echoed by Darla, who self-identified as Aboriginal. She reflected upon the impact of historical oppression on her upbringing and on herself as a parent:

My dad was a residential school survivor and he suffered a lot of troubles in his life. Because of that I'm just now exploring how that has affected me and how I'm

bringing up my family. I'm not only taking education for my work, I'm taking it also for my own benefit.

Tension and discomfort for Darla may have been introduced as a result of the discussion around white privilege. She critically reflected on her own privilege. Darla said:

That white privilege, which I fit into because I'm fair: I recognize now that I have been privileged despite my growing up and being in the middle. I'm recognizing why I may have had more success than say, my best friend who I grew up with and she ended up dying at a very young age. So I think I really have to realize that's what this class has caused me to look at.

At the conclusion of the study Darla was engaged in anti-oppressive education and ongoing self-reflection. Darla had a deeply emotional life-changing experience as a participant in this course that is indicative of a perspective transformation. Darla also sought to become engaged in critical social work that involves critique and activism.

Jarrold

Jarrold was identifying with a number of issues. He said, "Well, I develop my own world view of how I was approaching [anti-racist education]. It hasn't totally been challenged; it's been reaffirmed." Jarrold had recognized the historical oppression that people who lived on a reserve near him had encountered when he was growing up. Jarrold had become aware of his implication in this oppression. He had critically reflected upon his unearned power and privilege as well as his own ignorance to how privileged he was, despite having his father pass away while he was a child. Jarrold was still processing the emotional impact of AOETA in the fall and yet managed to be actively engaging his colleagues in discussions around anti-oppressive education. Jarrold had a deeply emotional experience in the course and in our conversations and he indicated his personal

growth as a participant in the course. This perspective transformation provided a new motivation where Jarrod, an administrator, was seeking to create systemic change.

Kalyn

Kalyn had left her previous school division feeling unsupported. There were a number of incidents where she felt the administration hadn't acted fairly. Kalyn was particularly vulnerable throughout the AOETA and actually ended up very sick for a couple of days near the beginning of the course. Kalyn's tension and discomfort may have occurred earlier that year, which was worked through during the course. She had trust issues resulting from being left in what she felt was an unsafe work setting. This resulted in her leaving that teaching position and struggling to trust her previous employers specifically, as well as the legitimacy of school-based authority figures in general. At the conclusion of the study, she expressed that her participation in the course had resolved much of the angst she had about trusting people. She felt she was being a positive member of, and advocate for anti-oppressive education within, the graduate student community. Kalyn was also continuing her work to better understand some of the troubling issues of race and gender raised during AOETA. Kalyn was also deeply affected throughout the course and indicated how the course had a life-changing affect on her, indicating a perspective transformation.

Kristin

For Kristin, tension and discomfort resulted in critical reflection around the notion of recognizing that multiculturalism, which she had valued and supported, may help to maintain the social construction of difference. She said:

Somebody in class said "I don't like ideas of things like Mosaic, that's just tokenism." And I thought to myself "Oh God! That's my whole life!" I've been involved with Mosaic so much and I've been on the Regina Multicultural Council

for a year and so it got me to thinking about – the only reason I'm thinking differently is because it's been such a big part of my life, should I look at the underlying? But today [the instructor] really explained that those things are good and we don't want to not have any kind of an idea about anything but we definitely need to go beyond, and I agree with that.

Reflecting upon her own statements, Kristin found her notion of multiculturalism “troubling.” She had realized that:

What really troubled me, that multicultural is just a bad word and I get the idea that it's maybe something that our government has imposed and it's almost like a little band-aid solution that they've imposed but at the same time, as somebody coming from a white privileged group, but has a perspective of having grown up with a culture, to just diminish that, it started to make me think like ‘why do I still have my culture? Three generations in Canada, I'm white, I fit in otherwise, what's the big deal with that?’ and then I started to think back about – and definitely not to the extent of the First Nations people but Ukrainians were definitely oppressed and I know that my family experienced some things and in the Ukraine they were even more oppressed and that's why they came to Canada. And so I think about – maybe there's that stubbornness that we – and we came here also so we could actually practice our religion and culture because it was being taken away in Ukraine and so that's probably why we've been so stubborn. And yet, there have been other Ukrainians who have just been ashamed of it and married English and there's that whole divide within our community.

The conversation had started with a discussion of multiculturalism but the underlying issue had been the unintended maintenance of power and privilege. Kristin had realized that she had a:

Ukrainian background growing up in this very white privileged society and not really having any communication or knowledge of different people growing up in [a small town in] Saskatchewan! And that bit of oppression which I don't really want to say because I'm not a minority at all, but that whole idea of “don't talk about it, you guys are fine, forget about it.” You know?

There was a double bind for Kristin who strongly identified with her Ukrainian origin, she felt she was both colonized and a colonizer. She said:

So it's almost like you don't want to acknowledge that because you don't want to be – what was one of the things that [the instructor] said, something about, “It's not my fault, it was them.” But I am part of colonization, I definitely am. And I don't want to diminish that at all, but at the same time, it's almost like I need to

feel some validation from my ancestors and what they went through.... but I have fit into society because I am white and I am privileged and I don't deny that and now I can move on.

An article that challenged her beliefs about the moral impunity of Christianity also discomforted Kristin to the point of feeling offended. She wrote the following in her journal:

I was a bit offended by [an article distributed in the afternoon class] as the author made me feel that I was a bad person for wearing a cross and being a Christian. I also believe that people should have a right to practice their religion and not feel oppressed, but that it's also unfair to change our entire society and traditions due to new people coming into the country. Sometimes Canada gives the sense that everyone has the right to change everything. Whereas, if I move to India, I would never expect the country to change their religion and traditions for me. But I would want to feel free to practice my own religion and celebrate my own traditions. I do, of course, agree that there shouldn't be oppression and violence towards those whose religion is a minority in this country.

Kristin evidently was deconstructing a number of layers of her beliefs and values. She seemed to be in the process of trying to make sense of her multiple implications in oppression as she was reflecting upon multiculturalism, her Ukrainian heritage as both colonizer and colonized, and her Christianity. Kristin had embraced using the language and concepts of poststructuralism, as she had embraced using the concepts developed in the course in her classroom in the fall. Kristin's acknowledgement of her personal growth as a result of what she had learned in the course, especially as it applies to multiculturalism, indicates that she had a perspective transformation and was working towards engaged activism in her classroom.

Lana

Lana critically reflected on the paradoxes she saw in her world. On many levels, she and her family were working to address oppression. However, in many other ways, Lana had to 'stand up' for those who were being oppressed, and even victimized, by her

friends and family. She was quite aware of the challenges experienced by the Other and was active in trying to create change within her current relationships. At this point, Lana said she saw herself as an advocate, albeit as a white knight, and as someone who would “speak up” in order to address the social construction of inequality.

Lana’s insight and her desire to engage in the dialogue regarding anti-oppressive education were important aspects that led to her perspective transformation. Given that some of Lana’s messages from friends and family also included perspectives that are destructive to those who are minoritized, Lana will need to find ways to stay engaged in a community of practice so that she can continue on her journey as an anti-oppressive educator.

While those who were new to anti-oppressive education tended to be focused on self-awareness and understanding their own implication in oppression, those more experienced were more actively engaging in the practice and were more conversant with the key concepts of anti-oppressive education, particularly a poststructural dimension. The more experienced participants expressed that they were more aware and accepting of the anti-oppressive educational processes that create personal discomfort and tension, and foster learning through crises. For those in this group who experienced frustration, it was due to their impatience with the seemingly slow change process of the newcomers.

More experienced with Anti-oppressive Education

Jackie

Jackie acknowledged that she had a life-changing experience where her:

Beliefs, values and assumptions were troubled and I've started to shift so that I'm not recognizing them as being troubled as much. I had a revelation about five years ago that made a big difference in the way that I see my teaching. There was an event that happened to me. And this may actually answer a question from before. I was part of a documentary; I was part of a study that was filmed as a

documentary for racism. I'm sure you've heard of Jane Elliott's Blue Eyes, Brown Eyes. I was in a workshop and became a changed person in that workshop and people who have seen it, have asked me about it and maybe perhaps don't understand the genuineness of those moments that I suffered through on camera and that they completely changed my life.... So I guess that was the beginning of my journey. Previous to that, when I really think about it and it seems like it's part of my history that I don't even realize is there anymore because there was such a shift that day – it was such a shift that I came out of that seminar and I felt like – it's hard to explain if you haven't had a life changing moment but it was much like when I had my first baby. The day I had my first baby when I was just like ‘wow! This world is incredible!’

During the course Jackie was able to quickly move towards strengthening her anti-oppressive teaching practices that she had already begun to put in place in her classroom and school. Her focus was pragmatic and she was less engaged in the poststructural discourses than the other participants who were more experienced. That being said, Jackie was very much invested in activism. She was doing in her classroom in ways that, she said, were always working to ensure those who could potentially be marginalized, were not. Jackie had used the time in the course to think deeply about her position as an anti-oppressive educator and to create an activism project that she could apply when she returned to the classroom in the fall, indicative of her work in the critical social perspective of transformative learning theory.

Cam

Although Cam was confident in his need to teach in anti-oppressive ways, he was challenged in two ways. First, Cam was working through understanding sexual orientation as a close friend had recently shared that she was bisexual. Second, following the course, he began teaching in a new and a significantly different school context. Of his previous school, Cam said, “part of my decision to leave my school was emotional burn out. I would come home for the first month, you know, tears, endless, not being able to

disconnect, losing sleep.” This emotional duress impacted his ability to teach in anti-oppressive ways. At his previous school, many learners were disenfranchised and disengaged youth. At the conclusion of the study, he was teaching at a school where the majority of the students were living in privileged homes. In his new context, he was concerned about what the parents might think [about using anti-oppressive education in the classroom]. Cam also found some discomfort in thinking about planning in the new context. However, he had keen insight into how he was positioned: “It’s a luxury to be [an anti-oppressive educator] and be able to be that as someone that is a straight, white male, it’s a luxury to be open minded and accepting of others.”

Cam was eagerly spending his time engaged in critique and activism that are evidence of the critical social perspective of transformative learning theory. Cam had insight and frustration about other classmates experiencing “discomforting knowledge.” Cam was also able to understand the poststructural concept of our partiality to knowledge. For Cam, part of the learning tension comes from:

Finding new meanings within... most of this oppression is invisible. So opening your eyes to it is a big piece. We can say “all people are equal,” we can make a lot of general judgment statements, and a lot of these individual articles maybe do open your eyes to forms of oppression that were previously invisible.

Noreen

Changing is a constant for Noreen. She explained:

I see [my beliefs, values, and assumptions] as always evolving, I think. Well, because there are things I think about now that I wouldn't have thought about six months ago, or that I'm thinking about more, or that I'm thinking through a different lens. For example, my last class that I took, we talked about indigenous knowledge and what knowledge is valued in society, and I had to think a lot about my own, looking at my parents and how I had really always aspired to be like my father and I admired and respected that form of knowledge and I always thought my dad was so smart, and maybe disrespecting my mom's knowledge which is this huge wealth of knowledge and understanding that I had not respected in the

same way because of my socialization to respect a particular type of education: This whole idea of “rational logic” and devaluing emotional and spiritual knowledge.

Growing up close to a First Nation community, Noreen became critically connected to her minoritized friends and community at an early age. Because of this proximity, she was keenly aware of the social challenges created by membership in a disenfranchised and marginalized group. For example, there was a triple homicide in her community when Noreen was seventeen. Noreen said:

My friend's stepbrother murdered my other friend's brother and cousin and a Sask. Tel. employee. So it was this big deal and it was on the news and there were all these crisis workers in our school and I think it opened a lot of doors for a lot of interesting conversations with my parents and I think at that age I had a lot of “this is really wrong, this can't continue, how many people have to die before other people start to care?”. I just saw the realities, the realities of violence in communities. Out of my friends that are Aboriginal that are women, three of my best friends are young Aboriginal women and two of them have been sexually assaulted. These are the realities of what it means to be an Aboriginal woman, the reality of what it means to be an Aboriginal youth.

Noreen was discomfited with the slow pace of people in society embracing anti-oppressive education. She responded in her journal about the frustration she had in being able to see the catastrophic failure of society to address inequity and how those who have power and privilege may still only be giving lip service to change. She wrote about our last focus group in her journal:

So today we had the final group interview with Chris. It was very hard to express what I was thinking because I did not want to be judged by the other people in the group. I tried to express what I was thinking and probably got judged for saying it anyways. I guess that is the way of things sometimes. I am really struggling with this whole idea of people's resistance to anti-oppressive and anti-racist work. How convenient that these people have the option of denying this or delaying this work. Oppressed and marginalized people are dying while white people with privilege sit in classrooms or offices and debate whether or not they are ready to give up some of their unearned privilege. While we are debating the social construction of our identity and debating our own struggle with this, people are literally dying from the effects our privilege blocks away. It sort of disgusts me to

be honest. I know that I am also a part of this, and that disgusts me in itself. So what are we to do? I am not sure if there is any way to go about this process...but it really sucks that it takes so bloody long.

Even before the course began, Noreen was using anti-oppressive education in her classroom and school. She was passionately working with the concepts of anti-oppressive education and continuing to challenge and trouble dominant discourses. Noreen was quite reflective of the fact that she was on a transformative journey, and, even though her activism project was not yet enacted, she was engaging in critique and activism within the critical social perspective of transformative learning theory.

Sarah

Sarah provided an overview of how her perceptions of marginalization have changed over the course of her teaching career:

I was teaching at [a school in Saskatoon], it was pretty obvious that Aboriginal kids were being marginalized. The institutional structures that were creating that were things like the impact of colonization and residential school and I think I still had the lens within the community, the effects on the community of these things rather than seeing the continual practices of racism that are happening right now for kids. That yes, there may be these ongoing effects but – and it is historical, like it's historically produced, but now I can look in a school and what used to be invisible to me, I can see it happening now, like the decisions that are being made and the way students are treated and the discourses that are happening. It's not just historically situated and it's not that “oh this poor dysfunctional community has had this horrible historic experience.” I think communities are often being classed and racialized and it's being produced right now as we speak.

Sarah has internalized the language of anti-oppressive education and now sees the school context very differently. She presently works as an educator teaching anti-oppressive education at the secondary and post-secondary level. She expressed compassion and understanding of the journeying of her classmates, and desired to deepen her understanding and practice of anti-oppressive education.

Sarah was passionate about anti-oppressive education and was all about critique and activism. She had little discomfort, great humility, and was easily able to navigate the language and concepts of anti-oppressive education, not for her benefit, but for the benefit of her students, family, and friends.

In conclusion, the personal stories of all participants in this study described their various processes as they experienced AOETA. All participants included statements of how they benefited from the course and were changed as a result of it. All of the participants were affected by the course in some way. Some participants identified areas where there were opportunities for further growth, while other participants did not.

What follows is a discussion of the personal change that was identified by participants, and of the emergent themes from the follow-up interviews. As well, information is provided about some of the considerations that fostered personal growth for the participants.

Personal Change

Distinct from the personal stories, this section presents the participants' perspectives on if, and how, they had changed following their participation in AOETA. In addition to sharing their stories of personal change, the participants also acknowledged the value of the course. Darla made a compelling affirmation about the value of anti-oppressive education for teachers, saying, "I don't care how many years experience you have, I think everybody should take anti-oppressive education." Lana also affirmed the value of the course by saying "I don't think you can leave after three weeks and not do something differently." She also said, that as a result of AOETA:

You realize all the little things that come up that are inappropriate in some form or another but you maybe didn't think about as much before.... You're caught,

because you can never look at it any other way, because you're beginning to re-conceive the world!

This belief in the strength of anti-oppressive education resonated throughout participants' comments. Candace reflected that this course has "given us the skill just to see things differently."

Not all students felt that AOETA had been beneficial in providing a new perspective and in inciting personal change. Carrie said, "The whole anti-oppressive stuff is where I have come from all of my life, so I really didn't learn anything new in that course other than to maybe see how other people viewed anti-oppression." She had implied that because she could personally identify with oppression, that the course didn't provide any new insights for her. Carrie said:

I have lived like that; I was a single Mom, I had all these oppressive things against me from the get go, and I just never; I mean people can get hung up on the language, right, that 'I don't see color' business, right, and then they all get hung up on the language 'Oh, you don't see color, that means' and they use that against you for not seeing color and valuing difference.

Carrie's views differed substantially from those of the other participants. During the course of my contact with her, she made a number of contradictory statements that focused on factors external to her. She did not seem to be engaged in self-reflection to the same degree as the other participants. That being said, virtually everyone did reflect positively on the way they were influenced by the course. In response to the question 'how are you living your life differently as a result of taking the course?', which was asked during the second interview in October, participants described their varying experiences of personal change. For example, Cam summarized his ongoing change process with the following statement: "It's thinking that you are something and then learning that isn't quite the truth."

Many of the changes participants identified were generally about seeing the social world differently. Cam said:

If [anti-oppressive education] is really internalized, action will feel natural. That's what I think. I think that if we really believe these things at our core, especially as educators, it's almost our responsibility to act and do things. And, I'm doing little things, but how far are you going to go?

Darla, who is new to anti-oppressive education, said:

I'm still uncomfortable. I need to start small. Like [the instructor says] says, just [asking the] question, "What do you mean by that?" "Is this the only way of knowing?" and stuff like that. I think I can start with little steps like that and then hopefully as I gain more experience in this route, be able to deal with various reactions from various people.

Candace said, "I notice the things that I do that are oppressive or racist" and "I definitely have become more aware of the things that I do that have just been, I think, ingrained in me." For Candace, she was "more aware of my white privilege or my – what I do that just makes judgments on people, because of what they're wearing, or how you see them, or things like that." In reference to living and thinking in anti-oppressive ways, Lana said, of her participation in the course:

Well, probably I would have done it even before, but now just thinking about all the things that she said, you just realize even more how wrong it is, and what we are doing to those people as a society, and so you just have more backing in your own mind that what you are doing is the right thing, even though some people might think that you should just keep your mouth closed— Like you just have that support in the back of your mind.

Jarrold had lost his father when he was young and had felt this loss as a youth and into his adult life. He recalled how many family friends had really worked to fill that void for Jarrold as he grew up, but that he still felt the loss of his father. After taking the course, Jarrold began to reflect back on his thinking as a youth living near a reserve. Jarrold reflected "but really, looking back, underprivileged is such a self-centred bloody

way of positioning myself in the world.” When we had first talked about the loss of his father, Jarrod had broken down into tears. For him, this reflection was a key aspect on his journey in the class. Jarrod had realized that there were a number of youth, about his age, who also were suffering not far from him on the reserve when he was growing up. They were suffering because they were also doing without, but for different reasons. Jarrod was able to “get up on the balcony” and look down on his past to realize that he had many privileges and that a number of people had “reached out for me, they didn’t do that for the kids who needed it more.” Jarrod had begun to question his long-term education goal “to work primarily with the disadvantaged First Nations kids.” He said:

Is it just to fuel my own ego? I get a little bit of a – I’ve felt that there’s maybe been some self-loathing in this class that – trying to look at this dialectically, maybe that’s what some of the hard learning that – you have to hate some of what we’ve been trained to become and that forces you to unlearn.

Jarrod had also said, “I’ve lost my voice a little bit in the last eight days.” What Jarrod was referring to was that he had become cognizant of his “white-male privilege.”

Jackie had taken a class previously with the instructor “that had given me reason to change.” Jackie had:

Read residential school literature and it was written by people who had residential school experiences and we read poetry and a couple of novels and discussed and we also had one of our assignments at the very beginning of the class was to research certain history. I remember my assignment was researching the Indian Act, so we did a bit of a history class at the beginning and that had a lot of impact on me. And that is what actually got me interested in more education about diversity.

Jackie was also in a workshop with Jane Elliot that became a documentary called *Indecently Exposed with Jane Elliot (2005)*. This was a similar experiment as *The Eye of the Storm: Blue Eyes, Brown Eyes*. Jackie recalled that she had broken down in tears during the workshop and recalled that when she was talking with her husband in their car

during lunchtime of the workshop, that everything had forever been changed. Jackie referred to her experience in that course as a “revelation ... that made a big difference in the way that I see my teaching.” She went on to say that:

There was such a shift that day – it was such a shift that I came out of that seminar and I felt like – it's hard to explain if you haven't had a life changing moment but it was much like when I had my first baby. The day I had my first baby when I was just like “wow! This world is incredible!”

A deep personal change for Kalyn was developing “the idea of disrupted learning and disrupting my learning. I was disturbed before, now I am disrupted. In terms of [the course], you can never go back to what you knew, and the person who walked in before July 5th.” Kalyn said, “I am more healthy and more whole as a teacher as a result of this class. I came into this class broken and damaged by my experiences, by feeling unsupported, by feeling like I was an odd duck and beaten down.” Kalyn left feeling strong and committed to doing anti-oppressive education. She said, “I think for me, I would be more willing to stand up to things with difficult administrators, no offence to the good administrators that sit in this room.” Kalyn said:

I think that I am just so much more aware now, more than anything, and not that I wasn't trying my best to treat all my kids fairly in the past but I am just more aware of things in general.... At the same time it makes you still realize how little you still know, even after all that, how much further there would be to go.

The spirit of oppression in Canada became very apparent for Lana, particularly in the treatment of First Nations culture. Lana said that as a result of learning historical aspects that she didn't learn about in school, her perspective changed as she developed “more empathy, not sympathy.”

For Noreen, who had already started on a process of becoming an activist and an anti-oppressive educator before the course had started, didn't feel that her views of

privilege and power, or identity were challenged. That had happened earlier. Noreen said, “It has been a long process. I saw the reality that this is what happens when power and privilege aren’t distributed on an equitable basis. This is how people suffer and this is how people die.” She saw firsthand many of the issues associated with oppression because of the Aboriginal community she grew up alongside and because of the friendships she developed there. She came into university saying, “Change needs to happen.” During her undergraduate degree, Noreen learned a number of concepts that would help her to work against oppression.

Noreen said that the topics developed in AOETA were concepts that she had already encountered and had already been working through. She said:

It was very difficult for me to be patient with other people and I was in that room of fifty people it seemed, that were all at different stages of understanding how power and privilege operate and in our world and in terms of our construction of ourselves and it was a really great learning experience for me in terms of watching people go through that process and learn to respect the process.

Even though Noreen stated that she had experienced substantive changes prior to participating in AOETA, she nonetheless stated, “I think it is hugely transformative.”

Noreen was also aware of how anti-oppressive education, as it relates to social justice work in general, can be a privileged position: “this has become the ‘in thing’, the trendy thing to do.” But Noreen indicated that she was motivated by her own need to challenge injustice in the hope that there would be a more equitable existence for all. She had chosen to pursue higher education in order to obtain a position of status where she could be heard. Noreen understood how marginalized people are often seen as “just standing on her soapbox or whatever.” But as a white woman I can talk about race, that is in that comfort zone still, so it is about utilizing those avenues too.”

Teacher Change: Thinking and doing

During the second interview in October, participants were asked, “How are you teaching differently as a result of taking the course?” Numerous responses were given that clustered around the idea of changes in the participants’ thinking and doing that affected their teaching practice. Some positive thoughts that teachers had were things like, as Cam said, “[anti-oppressive education] is just opening eyes to more sources of oppression; it’s seeing the ways that they play out and that’s important, that’s valuable.” Arlis indicated that being a practicing anti-oppressive educator was, in part, about “being more open-minded.” Arlis also recognized that he needed to do “self-analysis, you don’t even know that you have white privilege – so just that power has always been with me now.” Jarrod, the administrator, commented: “I like that I do have a few more tools in the toolbox now to start a conversation. . . . I [recently] had to argue the importance and the purpose of future leaders being trained with a social justice perspective.”

For Crystal, the biggest change in teaching was “the awareness that I am part of a white privileged group.” Candace made it clear that she is now aware of her white privilege and wants her students to be cognizant of it as well. She said:

I try and notice what my privilege is, and just knowing when I talk to my kids and things like that, just make sure I’m not passing any of those things on, so that they don’t wake up, when they’re 27 years old and realize, ‘Oh my gosh!’

In regards to teaching, Noreen said, “I don’t know if it is doing things differently or just a different level of consciousness.” One of the things that changed for Noreen as a result of AOETA was she had developed a greater capacity in her current teaching for “just being conscious of doing things and encouraging my students to do that in their own way too.” Carrie said, “one of the big things that I’m thinking about this year is how

absolutely everything can be read as text and how feelings can connect so easily with theory.”

Noreen spoke about her commitment to and love of activism. She said: “Activism is the tool that can give you that energy, because it is not just thinking about it, it is actually doing it.” This was echoed by Cam who recognized the partiality of activism. He said that it is important to recognize as “an activist-educator, you can’t necessarily be objective because, if you are saying that our world is based on power and privilege and you are looking at politics, then you are already positioning yourself.” This recognition of the partiality of knowledge and politics as positionality indicated a commitment to taking action in the world, as well as reaffirmed a high degree of understanding the complexity of anti-oppressive education.

Although the question was related to her teaching, Darla, who self-identified as Aboriginal, acknowledged that after taking the course, she had a generalized change in how she engaged in discussions with her family. “I think I have more patience and consider more things.” She was more able to see some of the challenges that her own children experience in life as a result of being minoritized. This perspective fits in well with what others made reference to in our conversations. The need to be conscious about oppression and willing to talk about it was also expressed by several participants. Cam said:

I think that that’s been a big thing and I have been talking a lot more with my students and just being conscious of the conversations. So I don’t think that I wasn’t having those conversations before because I definitely was, but now just being conscious of those conversations.

Candace very aptly summed up how the course impacted her teaching:

It's changed me as a teacher in how I want to make sure that everyone belongs in my classroom, and making sure that the level of understanding and all those sorts of things is there. ... From the course, the critical pedagogy, I remember that a lot, and just trying to be a teacher who reflects and challenges, and all those sorts of things, to make sure I'm doing my job the best I can.

Lana identified that a belief in equity can be found in the model of inclusion. This was a connection for her between the course and her teaching. She said that her students would get what they need, versus getting exactly the same thing, in order to be successful in class: "We all will get what we need and that is fair."

Several students mentioned how they changed their teaching towards inclusion because of the course. Jackie said she wanted to include students in the classroom "who would normally be put into a special ed. classroom." She said, "I have become more and more into differentiating instruction; as in to me it meant designing activities where students could work on a similar concept but at a simpler level."

Lana said that while she "probably felt that way before," that things needed to change in her school and her teaching strategies, "now I see that just probably even some ways that I teach or things that I provide to them are probably not the right thing." Lana said she would be looking at using "different teaching strategies or maybe examining materials with different eyes."

There were also a number of specific changes to teaching practices that participants identified as having made since attending AOETA. Arlis discussed that as a result of the course, he adapted his project evaluation scheme to provide more opportunities for students in his classes to have more choice in their assignments. He did this in an effort to individualize class projects in order for students to be able to represent their own identity. Candace was actively working to make Aboriginal perspectives come

alive in her classroom. She said, “I try and infuse the First Nations stuff in everything that we do!” Candace was also trying to “take the critical pedagogy perspective and then think about ‘Okay, well I teach grade two, how can I do that?’” Another comment was about working to create a more welcoming classroom environment for parents who may be minoritized. This was a goal for Kristin. She said, “I’ve tried to create it so that it’s not a formal interview... – I’m trying to create it so that these parents feel that this is their class too.”

Of her ability to take what she had learned during AOETA and apply it to teaching, Kristin said:

You are all “gung ho” [during AOETA] and when you get back into [teaching in your own classroom], it takes time and things aren’t as easy as you think they might be in class when you are actually in the reality of teaching.

Based upon what participants had learned in AOETA, they were working to do differently in their classrooms and in their lives. This was evidence of perspective transformation. Participants were also working to make subtle changes in their classrooms that were more congruent with how to teach in anti-oppressive ways. However, these changes were not as broad as expected and may explain, in part, the subversive nature of anti-oppressive education because of the presence of institutional barriers.

Personal Considerations and Challenges of Change

There were also several challenges that were identified by participants during the October interview. Because anti-oppressive education challenges harmful discourses and the knowledge that is taken-for-granted, Kristin said that there is a counter-productive view in education that “you are not supposed to look at the negative” in schools. Teachers

are supposed to be positive. As well, there is the challenge of putting the practice of anti-oppressive education into action with younger students. Kristin asked, “How can I adapt this to grade two?”

It was Kristin who spoke to the difficulty of teaching in anti-oppressive ways since she was now teaching at a different school than she had been before taking the course. She believed that she needed time to learn about the operation of the school and community in order to be comfortable enough to challenge the *status quo*. This speaks to how anti-oppressive education is seen to go “against the current”, potentially creating more stress for the teacher and more tension in the community. Kristin said, “When you are new in a school [and say] ‘people are racist’, they are not going to listen to you.” She indicated that it takes time to develop relationships and then work to create change. While one can see the validity of her concerns, Kristin’s statements may also be seen as the types of resistance that keeps oppression intact.

One of the effects that Cam had noted as an anti-oppressive educator was that when he was under stress, he reverted back to “traditional models” to control students and maintain order in the classroom. Cam said, about his work in his former school with disenfranchised youth, “I did what I could but I was very much scared to do more or always felt that when met with behavioural obstacles, I would retreat to traditional models and that's really, really common.” Cam said, “We retreat to what we know when met with crisis.... It’s hard when you're in crisis, it's hard to measure progress.” Because Cam is now in a new job, there was a concern about trying to do too much, too fast. Reaffirming the concern mentioned regarding resistance and maintaining the *status quo*, Cam said, “Okay, can I do this, and this, and this, in my new job” or “is it towing the line

for awhile?” Cam identified that one of most important elements of the course was for students to ask the deep and personal question:

“What do you really believe in?” Talk is cheap. And there are some real tough decisions and sacrifices to make if you're going to live within your beliefs. If I'm saying “our world is sick and we need environmental action” well, what am I doing? Like I have a house, I drive a car, if we're talking about my sister needing support because her kids have special needs, well, how much time do I spend –? There are all these big questions, re-evaluating your life while you do your actions, and it all relates back to this stuff.

In the second interview, Arlis mentioned the danger of rhetoric in anti-oppressive education. He queried the potential hypocrisy and disconnect between the affirming statements made during AOETA and subsequent actions of the participants:

It bugged me, if anything bugged me in that class, and I still think of it today, so it'll be interesting when you go around, is how people are hypocritical. During the [first focus group people spoke to] how their life was going to change, and they were going to do this and – I'm like, “I call bullshit on all of this!” Because I figured when they leave and they get their little pass that they're back to their routine. ...If you're going to help somebody, help them, but you don't have to brag about it. And to them, it was a lot of bragging. “I'm going to do this. This class is awesome. This is going to change my life. When I go home, I'm doing this!

Cam also talked about being caught between what needs to be done and his own capacity to take action. Cam acknowledged:

We all can't be martyrs, there's such a need for people in there doing good work. The need is huge and there are amazing people that are drawn to that work, and half of me wants to be there and knows that it needs to happen.

Noreen recognized and thought about her own implication in maintaining oppression. She understood that while anti-oppressive education is important, it could also work to maintain the very oppression it aims to undo if the focus remains on the dominant group working for change. Noreen said:

What is interesting but concerning at the same time because we talk about being anti-oppressive educators and as a white anti-oppressive educator, what's in it for

you? What benefits are there for you, and how does that implicate us? And I think that's an interesting question too, because even myself, I look at where I am going and where my critical thoughts are leading me and I've been very supported in that, I'm encouraged all the time, "you should do your Ph. D" and that's fantastic that I'm being supported but how is this anti-oppressive education benefiting people that already have white privilege and so I think that there are some implicationsThe systems of power and privilege are still completely being upheld and perpetuated, really.

Jarrold perceived that there were two groups of people at the first focus group and spoke to it in the October interview that were identifiable by their use of language:

There were some real tensions between people who considered themselves to be [more experienced with anti-oppressive education] and some people who referenced a tool kit.... There was the stigmatization about the language that was used. If somebody didn't use correct language, eyebrows were raised.

According to Jarrold, the "two camps" consisted of those who were new to anti-oppressive education and those who were more experienced with anti-oppressive education. Jarrold had felt that this had created tension in the group where those who were passionate about anti-oppressive education may have taken away the voice of those new to it.

In summary, the idea that those who were more experienced with anti-oppressive education used different language seemed to lead to the perception by those new to anti-oppressive education of the possibility of exclusion. There was a concern by some who were new to anti-oppressive education that it was the new dominant discourse and that some voices were in danger of being marginalized. This fear of being "Othered" had the potential to lead to frustration, emotional withdrawal, and less dialogue by participants who saw their perspective not being acknowledged because it was not valid, relevant, or meaningful. Given that the dominant discourse was one that these potentially marginalized participants could easily take up outside of the classroom at the end of the day and at the end of the course, it may have been inviting for some participants to say

little and bide their time until the course was over, knowing that their voice would be heard within the dominant discourse. This would certainly take away from the potential for transformative learning for some participants. That being said, those more experienced with anti-oppressive education embraced their role as leaders of change and did not act in exclusionary ways.

There were also a number of other challenges to which the participants spoke that related to the difficulty of working in schools as a change agent. These challenges affected the participants' efficacy as anti-oppressive educators, as well as their desire to do this difficult work. Once the supportive envelope of the institute had been removed, and other emotional demands and environmental challenges were on the participants, they were well aware that they might shift back to maintaining the status quo. In many ways, it was more comforting to go back to the status quo than to work on the changes they desired to make.

Emotions, Discomfort & Crisis

Students found AOETA to be an emotional process, but one that was important in their personal journey toward transformation and growth. For some, the emotional aspect led to greater political consciousness-raising and activism. Arlis stated that "the whole emotional link" was a valuable part of the learning.

I guess it's very personal, is what I like about this, because everybody gets something out of this class. The topic is what's keeping everybody there, but everybody has a link to what she says.

Some of the topics created discomfort for participants in the course. Darla has chosen to use the course as an opportunity to reflect. She said, "I think I've looked at myself basically. Maybe that did create some discomfort, because I start remembering

incidents and stuff.” Darla spoke to needing to take the discomfort of not speaking up against racism and turn it into activism. She said:

When it comes to myself, and I've always taken that attitude, like putting this on them. “Why are they like that? Don't they know that I know that they're treating me like this?” and stuff like that, I've always put it on somebody else, but I've realized I have to take this on myself and call it when I see it.

She also knew that she needed to address things within her own family. The emotional discomfort and subsequent personal growth had provided a space for Darla to advocate for those whose voices are often marginalized. The social construction of identity can maintain hegemony, for those who are minoritized as well as those of the dominant group. Darla said:

“Them” could be everybody, even my own family, I have to make sure that I'm calling [my family] to the attention of what that might mean and how maybe I've affected them, how I've affected their upbringing and the person they are by the way I have done things and seen things.

During the first interview, Darla acknowledged the emotional aspect connected to her personal growth. She shed tears as she remembered her upbringing. The conversation was about her dad being a residential school survivor. Darla said, “He suffered a lot of troubles in his life because of that, and so I'm just now exploring how that has affected me and how I'm bringing up my family.” Darla also shed tears during the second interview again as we discussed the racism that she was victim to and her new understanding of how oppression is socially constructed. This was similar to when Jarrod shed tears reflecting on his past. Jarrod had remembered how he had felt disadvantaged because his father had passed away when he was young and how, at the time, he had never even thought about how those on the reserve near him were also disadvantaged because of the way his community disregarded them.

Jarrold, with his typical humility, acknowledged that he was very much emotionally affected by the course. He mentioned being emotionally affected by the course in the first and second interview. He felt bombarded by the material. He said:

You're continuously bombarded and your head continues to snap back.... And so maybe that daily reinforcement of oppression has something very real, right? You probably tend to forget about it if you did it on Monday and then we met again the next Monday. You'd have to heat up the coals again and create discomfort.

Crystal felt guilty about:

How inhumane we've been to [Hutterites]! And that's the piece that discomforted me the most, is that particular area. Yes, I'm a little concerned about myself or my white privilege and putting those assumptions on my Hutterian situation, but that's something I feel I can work with.

Cam used the term bombardment to refer to being inundated with ideas that created discomfort. He said:

I'm bombarded, from all directions right now.... It's learning through crisis, that's what Kumashiro would say. I'm learning through crisis, thriving on crisis. As I said before, I am emotionally affected by the readings. And I've seen my own experiences lots in them and I've seen my – I really connect with my experience this year as a grade seven/eight teacher in the inner-city – and I know the readings that we're going to read, some of them that I've read from my last class and they connect a little more, because some of the readings later in the course are more linked to racism in First Nations youth.... So yeah, yes. The answer's yes. I have been affected. My mood has been affected and I think it's hard not to be.

Carrie recognized the need to reflect upon her emotions when examining her teaching practice because:

If we're talking about teaching, or your actions, looking at what you've been doing more with a hyper focus and without bias, which is sometimes hard, without bias, to see what the effects of what you've been doing are. I think, that's to me, what it is. And the “without bias” is hard, because it's very – and I think it's hard for all of us to admit that maybe we need to fix some things – and that's the discomfort.”

Carrie said the discomfort comes in “When you have to admit that you need to – sometimes it's like “oh my god, I can't believe I did that,” right? And then it's the whole

guilt, “I will never do that again.” The discomfort also seemed to lead to a greater humility amongst these participants, a quality that would likely support them as they learned to speak out as anti-oppressive educators.

Kalyn acknowledged during the first interview that she was “stressed” by the fact that she was starting a summer course and by the topic. Jackie talked about becoming all right with the discomfort. She had chosen to turn the discomfort into activism at every level, which she found comforting. Jackie really enjoyed reading about the history:

It's the history that points out to me how much my education has been lacking. Because – and I guess I enjoy the history part the most, for example, the reading that we read in today's readings, I think I enjoy it the most because that's how I like to teach about oppression to my kids. And maybe I teach about oppression through history because it has the most – it makes the most sense to teach it that way. But, when I'm reading things that have to do with history, there are always things that jump out at me as things that I have never been told before and that gets my back up. And in getting my back up, that's what makes me enjoy the class because it's all about making me uncomfortable, I like to feel uncomfortable, as in – how do I explain that? It makes me think that it's worthwhile because if I'm sitting there hearing things that I already knew, it can get boring... I don't mind dealing with that discomfort. I know that one's first response might be to feel guilt and I think I go through that phase every time I learn something new about what our society has done and that I'm a part of that society, but I tend to work through the guilt because there's no use having guilt unless you can do something about it and so I usually pass right through guilt and go “okay, what am I going to do?” And so, often when I'm in my readings, I'll find something that has been done and I'm thinking “okay, what can I do to make people aware of this?” So I'm lesson planning as I'm reading and I'm thinking over things to do and I'll jot some down or I'll flip to my page of ideas.

Jackie had turned her discomfort into a desire for action. Because Jackie had a perspective transformation some time ago, she was using what she was learning for political consciousness-raising and activism. She had worked through the emotional tensions a number of times and had turned to activism. Candace acknowledged the value of having an emotional reaction to the learning that was taking place in class and found it could lead to something productive that needs to be worked through in order to change:

Emotions are huge! The guilt that I feel, that's an emotion for sure, but then I think too, I think emotion is so important. And I have always thought that.... If you didn't allow yourself to feel what you're feelings, you'd just be like, "Oh I'm fine!" And I think that emotions are what rocks people to their core, right?

Candace said:

I felt very guilty. That was the big one that I felt, and then ashamed, and then, uncomfortable and then after, you go through – it's like, "Okay, I've dealt with my guilt and – ...My GAS. My guilt, anger, shame, I've dealt with that and now you can move forward, but I think if you just got lost in your emotions, you wouldn't be able to change your values and beliefs, but it's like the grieving process, right? You need to go through this, this, this, this, this, to get to this. I think this is similar, where you need to go through these emotions to change your values and beliefs.

Noreen felt that she had gone through a lot of work already:

In terms of discomfort, I think I'm pretty comfortable with it for the most part. In my own school, yeah, we talk about these kinds of things and it does get uncomfortable for a lot of my students. When we're talking about colonization and stuff, it can get uncomfortable for students that come from positions of privilege and I guess I'm comfortable with that because I'm like "that's good, that's part of that stage, that's part of that experience." My students have talked about feeling guilt or feeling shame and we talk about – I'm talking about my students that come from white settler families and we talked about how that's part of the process, we're all dealing with colonization and we're all dealing with industrialization and capitalism and globalism and if we're all going through a process of decolonization – the reality that we live in a colonial world, how can we decolonize ourselves?

One of the things that frustrated Noreen during the course was when students sidestepped the whole idea of their implication in oppression and instead wanted practical tools to take to work the next week. She implied that students in the class were avoiding the emotional discomfort necessary for the perspective transformation that could lead to greater personal growth and change, and the ability to become anti-oppressive educators. Noreen said, "First of all, the whole 'practical things,' I think that's such a – it drives me nuts when teachers say that.... You're not going to get a handbook on how to be an anti-

oppressive teacher.” She felt like it was “a lazy teacher response.” She was upset that some teachers say: “Well just give me the handout so I can photocopy it.”

Noreen felt strongly that teachers needed to see anti-oppressive education as a lens. She implied that a perspective transformation was necessary so that teachers would be able to do effective work as anti-oppressive educators:

Because each community is different and to just come up with this generic thing, it's never going to work because each community has a different history, different legacy, different people, different relationships at play, different power structures at play so I think looking at those and being able to say “okay, that's something similar I could use in my community, I could think of using something similar to that,” I think is a really powerful thing. But I don't like that people constantly are like “Oh, I want some practical use.” I feel like, and I do say to people “what do you mean by that? What do you want, really?”....I am completely seeing it as a cop out when people say that.

Sarah said of the discomfort of addressing issues that come up in class or with friends:

Do I ever feel uncomfortable talking about this? No.... I'll tell you when I do feel uncomfortable though, is if I'm with a class or with a group of people and somebody says something blatantly problematic and I sometimes get really tight knots in my stomach when I realize I would rather have fun right now, but I can't let that go.

This commitment to political consciousness-raising and activism seems to come once the perspective transformation has occurred. Self-doubt and the discomforting emotions, like GAS, related to the perspective transformation seem to dissipate as people engage in critique and activism. For example, Sarah sees her work as vitally important and working doing anti-oppressive education filling a valuable role in Saskatchewan:

I see it as creating learning communities within whatever space people might want to engage in this thought and in this dialogue. And what I found working with different people [where I work] is, they're hungry for this. There are individuals who are hungry for change and for being able to think about things in a new way. It's like [having had] a steady diet of sugar, versus having some vegetables and some meat.... The corporate world is that steady diet of sugar, and

my experience has been that they've been really excited when I give them something substantial to eat. They feel different.

Darla also reflected in her journal on what she saw as her new emotional state with her new role as an activist educator. She wrote, "I need to rest and regroup. Taking action is very basic and starts with me and I am overwhelmed right now." It appears that Darla needed to lay emotions connected to her perspective transformation to rest as she prepared for her work as an activist.

Language

One of the emergent themes was language, or in particular, the difficulties and benefits of using a poststructural lens and language when interacting in a modern world. Language emerged because a number of participants indicated that the dialogue was framed in the language of anti-oppressive education, which given the subject matter, was necessary. Learning through poststructural terminology forced participants to experience words and concepts they were unfamiliar with. Provided participants were open and committed to learning in this way, the language precipitated deeper learning and more discomfort, which increased the possibility of perspective transformation. Jarrod said, "to form the thoughts and concepts of a social justice, it's challenging because you have to immerse yourself in it." Kristin talked about not feeling comfortable with the language of anti-oppressive education. She said:

It is something you learn, it's like a whole other language and it is taking time and [the instructor's] got it, I don't.... I am still learning [the language used in anti-oppressive education], I guess and then I find myself fumbling a little bit. I think it takes practice.

What Kristin felt would be an advantage is to:

be practicing that talk. Like actually saying it and seeing examples of it modeled because that is probably what I need now and if eventually I keep at it and keep

looking back to my Kumashiro book or keep, you know, remembering things from the class or thinking about it before I do it, I'll get it.

Using the language of anti-oppressive education provides a way for teachers to talk about power and privilege with students. Jarrod gave an example of where a harmful discourse was being cited in a school setting, and through supplementation, he worked to change the discourse. Before Jarrod had taken the course, he said:

I would have felt that it was wrong to have a conversation with a student that they own their learning. And if they were learning about First Nations people they were on the right track. But now I see that it can be a reaffirmation of a harmful discourse.

Candace made a very clear connection to the language used in anti-oppressive education and her ability to take action in the world to make a difference. She said:

The reason people are neutral sometimes is because they don't have the knowledge, they don't know what to say, and that's part of like, knowledge is power and so now when someone says something, you could reply with knowledge and a better understanding.

Noreen affirms this connection to language and activism. She said:

I have just been a lot more aware of [the language used in anti-oppressive education], I guess a lot more conscious of it and then like I say in being conscious of it in having that language is really significant for me and then in turn for the students that I work with.... Language provides you with, like you can feel it, and you can experience it, but it is hard to really see it, if you don't have that language. Like even I did the Peggy McIntosh article [1988] with my grade twelve Indigenous Studies 30 class and we were talking about white privilege. You know it was really interesting because a lot of my students were saying, like the white students were like "God, I feel really guilty reading this." And I am like "That's good, let's talk about that." You know, and so being more comfortable with that discomfort. ... Like a pedagogy of discomfort, and so that is where a lot of learning occurs and then for my indigenous students reading that article "This is what I have been experiencing my whole life, and now I can put a name to it." And that is like hugely significant.

Cam had taken other graduate courses that focused on poststructuralism and anti-oppressive education. He had taken the time to use and apply the language he learned to his own classroom setting. He was teaching at a new school and said he was talking about

the ways that many of his students had privileged lives. He had conversations with his students where he was able to say, “you are privileged and what are the ways you are privileged? [It wasn’t] uncomfortable for us to have that conversation.” Cam said, “post-structuralism has been a source of many good conversations with students and with colleagues, but more with students.”

Darla, a person who self-identifies as Aboriginal, acknowledged that, in anti-oppressive education, “the language, I think, is really important.” She said:

Prior to that class I didn’t know why I was, why I would get angry at some of the things that occurred; some of the things that I witnessed; some of the things I heard and stuff like that and I think the language has allowed me to make sense of things.

Having the language has also given Darla the confidence and skills to speak out on her own behalf and on behalf of the Other. She said:

I think I am better equipped to be able to, with the tools also, with the tools to be able to say something now. I feel a little bit more confident about calling somebody, not in a threatening manner, but just calling somebody on exactly what they mean.

Darla said that the language of anti-oppressive education, “does give me a stronger voice, and maybe I can use it in a non-threatening manner instead of putting people’s back up, which I tended to do before because I think I was angry and I would just say things.” She said having the language has “better equipped me to have a voice.” For Darla, the language refers to “anti-oppressive terminology, like there was that great big board of terminology, like even something as simple as white privilege, I never really thought about that before.” Anti-oppressive education has also provided a new way of seeing things. Darla said:

Definitely, like I said, like I understand now [where] the non-native person is coming from. I don’t feel as angry about some things and so I think that has

changed my thinking a lot in that respect, and then also in regards to myself considering more about how I'm reflecting on others.

When talking about the importance of having the language to counter oppression, Darla started tearing up again. She said, "anti-oppressive education has really given me the tools to be able, and the language, to be able to stop someone when they say something that makes me feel uncomfortable." Before that, when someone says something that should have been addressed and wasn't because you didn't have the language to say it successfully, "you don't go home feeling really good about yourself when you do that." Darla also understands that because of her schooling and knowledge about anti-oppressive education, that she is "privileged, I consider myself now privileged because I got to take this education."

The language also gave participants a way to speak out in ways that supported anti-oppressive education. However, because of the specific nature of terms used in relation to certain concepts, several participants new to anti-oppressive education believed their message could be "lost in translation" when participants dialogued with those less familiar with anti-oppressive education.

Community

Developing and maintaining relationships was an important part of the Summer Institute and speaks to the heart of fostering transformative learning and sustaining anti-oppressive education. I suggest that without a group of like-minded people to dialogue with, there is less capacity to engage in critique and action connected to the critical social aspect of transformative learning. Noreen said of the Summer Institute, that it "was really valuable meeting a lot of different people who wanted to make change and....that sounds like such a superficial thing to say, but it is so true."

Darla wrote in her journal about the need to take action. However, she recognized that the work required allies. She wrote, “I do not want to become complacent, but I must find allies too, so that I am not perceived as a whiner and my concerns minimized. Belonging to a group of activists seems like a great idea.” Sarah also spoke to the value of “connections.” There is a great value in being able to

have those kinds of conversations with people on a daily basis where you are watching them and you are also learning from them. I am also learning from conversations with [instructors]; people who are teaching it. So it’s that multi-level approach of thinking and talking and reflecting about that I think was probably the most valuable to me.... And the connections I think for me were key because I continue to email and talk to people that were part of the course.

Noreen articulated the need for community by using the term ‘networking’. She said:

It is so important to have that network of people because sometimes it is just exhausting to be in a world that wants to perpetuate this numbness. It’s nice to encounter people that are like: “Hey, let’s demand change, this isn’t right.”

Noreen said, “it is a support system in just having been in [the Summer Institute] where you feel supported and you feel like you can take that risk of being an activist in whatever format that means, that is really valuable.” While the participants were unanimous in their beliefs about the importance of community to support continued reflection and putting their learning into practice, no formal mechanism for future contact was established.

One of the most direct benefits for participants in the Summer Institute was, as Sarah said, it “created more confidence to know that I have a community I can connect with beyond just, a few people here; I’ve got this larger community.” Kalyn said, “The sense of community ... is vital to my health as an educator.... I changed because I had the opportunity to discuss, and to dissect, and to question, and to delve in, and to be real,

with incredible people.” In fact, while I was doing interviews in the fall, a number of participants were preparing to present at a conference on anti-racism held by the Student Teachers Anti-Racism Society (STARS) held at a university in Saskatchewan. Students were connected via their involvement in AOETA and were choosing to reunite and engage in discussions about anti-oppressive education as presenters and as conference delegates. For Sarah, the Summer Institute provided opportunities for “creating community and creating strong relationships, like connecting with other people is the way you create change, there is no other way.” It is through creating a sense of commitment within a community that will make anti-oppressive education a movement that will go forward and change the world. Sarah said:

Relationships are key in anti-racist or anti-oppressive education but that's because that's how people learn... We think we're learning in isolation, but even if we're alone, we're learning maybe with texts, like different texts, it could be media, it could be written word it could be – and those texts are shaped by other people and created by other people and so there is a story or a narrative that's being shared with us. So we think that we can learn in isolation, but really we never are.

For Sarah, her work as an anti-oppressive educator is happening in secondary and post-secondary education. She was a driving force behind the STARS conference that drew her classmates in AOETA to present at the conference. For Sarah, it is about:

Creating learning communities within whatever space people might want to engage in this thought and in this dialogue. And what I found working with different people in [my community] is that they're hungry for this. There are individuals who are hungry for change and for being able to think about things in a new way.

Activism for Sarah is about creating a new space for people to come together and work on changing the status quo. Sarah said, “I don't ever think that we're learning in isolation. I think we're always, it's always relational.” The idea that learning is relational fits very well with the notion of building community.

Chapter 4 provided a detailed examination of the findings through a thematic analysis that used the constant comparative method as articulated by Merriam (2009). The first part of the chapter described participants and discussed the findings regarding course content and process. The second part of the chapter presented the findings concerning the dimensions of anti-oppressive education through inclusive, critical, and poststructural dimensions. The chapter concluded by presenting the findings about participants' connections to personal change as it related to AOETA. Chapter 5 provides a discussion of the findings based upon the research question and involves a synthesis of chapter 4 as it connects to anti-oppressive education and transformative learning theory.

Chapter 5: Discussion

In July of 2010, I conducted a case study examining the experiences of students in a course focused on anti-oppressive education and teacher activism (AOETA). This study provided an opportunity to learn about the experiences of students to see if and how AOETA was a transformative experience. A transformative experience in this dissertation is defined as being a significant change that occurs in a person's thinking and doing brought about following critical reflection (Brookfield, 2005). *Shifting Our Focus: Teacher Transformation through Anti-oppressive Education* is a case study about graduate students, who are also teachers, learning anti-oppressive education. Anti-oppressive education is a promising approach for educators to use to teach about inequity and how to counter it (Kumashiro, 2000b, 2009) as it addresses the multiple intersections of differences that stem from ossified systems of dominance in society (Schick, 2010a). Anti-oppressive education provides a means to see inequity as a social and historical construction that may be understood and challenged. A major aim of AOETA, as well as the Summer Institute, was to foster activism. Activism leads students to think and do differently, and engage others in the struggle for social justice.

Anti-oppressive education is not about blaming the teacher (Kumashiro, 2012; Montgomery, 2013). Rather, it is about understanding how inequity is maintained through the actions and inactions of individuals, as well as through classroom, school and societal socialization processes (Kumashiro, 2009). This study sought to understand how experiencing anti-oppressive education might lead graduate students, who are also educators, to have a transformative learning experience. Participants thus provided their perspective about how they experienced AOETA and how they took up being educator

activists after the completion of the course. Based on the broad research question “What are students’ experiences of transformation in a classroom focused on anti-oppressive education?” this case study was designed to explore the following:

- a. What experiences and instructional aspects of the anti-oppressive education course did participants find significant in relation to their sense of transformation?
- b. How did the participants understand the different anti-oppressive educational theories and practices as affecting change in themselves or others?
- c. To what extent did what I have termed Inclusive Dimension, Critical Dimension, and Poststructural dimension discomfort the participants emotionally?
- d. How did participants make sense of the social construction of identity and understand their own identities, or those around them, to have changed?
- e. Did participants enact teacher activism that would be evidence of transformation?
- f. What were the personal changes evident amongst participants as a result of participating in the course?

A case study design as articulated by Merriam (2009) was used for this study. I chose to examine those participants who were taking AOETA. This was the bounded case. In all, 13 participants were involved as units of analysis in this study and a 14th participant, who was outside of the bounded case, provided important contextual information about how AOETA had the potential to be transformative. She also provided a means to learn about the Summer Institute more generally. The 14th participant, who

had taken AOETA twice before, was outside of the bounded case because she did not continue in the course. However, she did continue taking a class at the Summer Institute class in the afternoon and provided a historical perspective that greatly enriched the findings. The 13 participants who were the units of analysis had not taken AOETA before, although some who entered the course were more experienced with anti-oppressive education than others. Many had not had any explicit instruction in anti-oppressive education, although some students had taken a course or two prior to this course and had some preliminary exposure to anti-oppressive education.

Data was collected through entry and exit focus groups, two individual interviews (one during the course and one three months after the course), student journals, and participant observation during the course. The dataset of the bounded case contained 577 single spaced pages of information. The constant comparative method articulated by Merriam (2009) was used, creating 29 themes.

This chapter provides a discussion of these findings and relates them to the research questions and literature. Each research question is taken up in the order they were generated in the dissertation. The analysis moves from an examination of the interesting pedagogical aspects of anti-oppressive education, to examining specific questions related to the theoretical implications of anti-oppressive education, and then to whether or not anti-oppressive education provided opportunities for transformative learning. The first question relates to pedagogy.

What experiences and instructional aspects of the anti-oppressive education course did participants find significant in relation to their sense of transformation?

There were a number of instructional aspects of anti-oppressive education that were significant for participants and were valuable for the potential for transformative learning. The importance of the classroom atmosphere and instructor competency emerged from participant interviews. However, I had not fully anticipated the importance of these concepts prior to conducting the research. The critical approach of this course, and a desire to create activism aligned well with anti-oppressive pedagogy literature (Kumashiro, 2000b, 2001, 2002b, 2006, 2009) and modeled, to a large degree, ideal conditions for transformative learning (Brookfield, 2005; Mezirow, 2000; Taylor, 2009, 2012). The classroom atmosphere was established in such a way that there was no question that the intent of the course was for students to take action against oppression. This was done through the kind and quality of assignments, as well as through the instructor's dialogue with students throughout the course. For example, there was a poster at the back of the classroom stating "ANTI-OPPRESSIVE EDUCATION & TEACHER ACTIVISM: HOW FAR WILL YOU GO." The intention of the course was thus, among other things, to prompt the students to learn about anti-oppressive education and engage in activism.

All of the participants indicated that they valued the varied activities and instructional interaction provided throughout the course. One participant summed up the general consensus of the course saying, "it wasn't just a class for me, and so we were on this intense journey for three weeks; but it was just a snapshot in time of where I needed

to be, where I needed to grow.” Bringing in experts helped students connect what they were learning to a bigger global network and made the learning “truly real.” One of the important features of the course was the number of opportunities provided for the students to dialogue with each other, a vital element for transformative learning (Mezirow, 1991, 2000; Taylor, 2009).

There were opportunities to dialogue in pairs, in small groups, and as a whole class. As in the case of Mountford (2005), participants found group and class discussions valuable and important for their critical reflection on assumptions. As well, there were numerous different learning modalities, thus facilitating learning of students with a variety of learning styles. For example, the opportunities for students to talk to each other resonated with students who “learn from other people’s comments and perceptions.” Students were expected to journal for the course. Journaling is also a positive and supportive activity for transformative learning (Taylor, 2009). One participant said, “journaling is huge! ... it's so important to look at where you've been and where you're going....It's the examining of yourself and being able to look through your own actions, your own existence, your own experience and analyze that.” While the majority of participants found journaling helpful for personal reflection, several did not. Involving students in the doing, such as creating activism footprints, was also important because it kept the course focus on engaging in change. Providing students with voice and working collectively to co-construct knowledge was an important factor in participant experiences and is a significant aspect of the poststructural feminist approach set in anti-oppressive education (Kumashiro, 2001, 2006; Welch, 2006). For example, on the first day of class the instructor said, “this course and class is a safe space and place to critique what is

going on in this class and in society.” The instructor encouraged students to “indulge yourself; indulge your intellect; and indulge your emotions. It is a graduate course that will make you think, the application of what we are doing may come later.”

This supportive teaching approach fostered the potential for transformative learning (Taylor, 2009). As one participant said, “I feel safe here to explore [anti-oppressive education].” The instructor had created a safe space and place to work through tension and emotional discomfort that is a significant aspect of anti-oppressive education.

The instructor had made it clear that “being critical is a part of a being a good citizen,” thus, encouraging students to grow as anti-oppressive educators. Participants’ also troubled knowledge that many people take for granted as truth (Youdell, 2006; Kumashiro, 2000b, 2009). For example, the instructor took the students through a process that challenged what it means to be a “good teacher,” a concept articulated in a thesis completed at the University of Regina by Gebhard (2008). The conversation that being a “good teacher” doesn’t always mean you have to be nice opened the doors for students to see their own “comfort zone” (Scholl, 2001) and to see how they understood their role as educators to be socially constructed, and to see how being a “good teacher” is a factor in the maintenance of socially and historically mediated social inequity.

Critiquing the “good teacher,” through the paradoxical interpretation of a teacher’s socially constructed identity (Kumashiro, 2000b, 2004, 2009), created tension and discomfort with the idea of what it means to be a good teacher and encouraged students to critique their identities as socially constructed to maintain *status quo* inequities. One of the most important concepts in anti-oppressive education is to have teachers critically reflect on their own practices and implication in oppression

(Kumashiro, 2009). Discomfort for participants came when they recognized their role in maintaining unearned power and privilege. Understanding the need to deconstruct what students understood to be natural and common sense knowledge was a substantial part of the course. From an instructional perspective, this speaks to how knowledge is seen as in flux, potentially exclusive, partial, ambiguous, and worthy of interrogation from the perspective of anti-oppressive education (Kumashiro, 2000b, 2009). Looking at knowledge in a different and paradoxical way was disorienting for some participants and appeared to provide a catalyst for their perspective transformations.

The participants found the material being presented and discussed by the instructor quite challenging. Her provision of an ethic of care was an important aspect of students taking risks, valuing the learning, and having a perspective transformation. The need to provide an ethic of care

is not in the forefront of the contemporary discourse on learning to teach for social justice” ...[but] the song that promotes love and caring for one another needs to be heard and acted upon in order to unify and motivate teacher educators, teachers, and students to combat the forces of oppression that, in all likelihood, they truly detest.” (Spalding et al., 2010, p. 193)

As well, students listened to the perspectives of a variety of speakers in different contexts, all of whom had a message regarding anti-oppressive education. For example, there was one presentation made by a lawyer who promoted Anti-oppressive education as acceptable in public schools and encouraged an anti-oppressive educational approach in education. The students did not question this speaker’s content and perspective, even though the instructor had asked them to think critically about the position of authority held by the speaker. However, a number of participants criticized another speaker for his comments about how society has different standards for same gender sexual abuse

allegations. By saying, “It takes two to tango” in reference to the abuse of adolescent hockey players by their adult coach, the presenter troubled the thinking of a number of participants beyond their comfort zone, creating anger and frustration in some participants. While this incident will be discussed in relation to the critical dimension later on, the incident provides an opportunity to discuss, from a pedagogical perspective, through the lens of anti-oppressive education, the role that the speaker plays in anti-oppressive education classrooms (Kumashiro, 2000b).

How the students took up the challenging information the presenter gave could have largely been based upon the content alone. It may also have been because the students had no time to develop the type of authentic teaching relationship that Tisdell (1998) and Welch (2006) suggest. An authentic relationship was necessary because this person had positioned himself in opposition to the dominant discourse about same sex gender abuse and was also in a position of authority. His lack of an authentic relationship with the participants may account for why several participants felt compelled to heed to the formal authority that this person had at the university, and not challenge him during or after his presentation. The positional difference between the speaker and the participants may have created a feeling of coercion for participants that could also have accounted for several participants rejecting the message and resenting the messenger (Mezirow, 2000). Montgomery (2013) reminds anti-oppressive educators of the need to press students to be discomforted, but to also teach humbly and to recognize their own and others need for unlearning. Understanding one’s position in relation to participants through this context is important. Because of the speaker’s position of authority, and the lack of time to deal with this difference in positionality, a number of participants felt that

they were not engaged in the dialogue; they didn't have voice. The students responded very differently to his message, than to the message delivered by the instructor regarding other challenging topics.

The importance of attending to the emotional needs of participants is critical to providing a holistic learning environment (Welch, 2006) and for transformative learning (Cranton, 2006; Taylor, 2009) and is understudied in social justice research (Spalding et al., 2010, p. 193). According to all of the participants in this study, the instructor created a safe and respectful space for students to take risks. Students felt “the class is awesome” and that the instructor worked hard to create personal connections. For example, one participant said “ I think it starts with [the instructor] because she's passionate about [creating equity], so it snowballs.”

The instructor paid particular attention to her role as an authority figure in the class. She made it clear that her knowledge was “partial”, meaning she was biased towards certain knowledge and ways of knowing, and that her knowledge was incomplete. The instructor creating a safe and respectful classroom environment, where students felt safe to take risks, underscores the importance of creating authentic relationships (Taylor, 2009; Johnson-Bailey & Alfred, 2006). Cranton (2006) described authentic relationships in teaching justice-oriented material to be, quite simply, “establishing meaningful, genuine relationships with students” (p. 5). The role that authentic relationships play in transformative learning is substantial (Taylor, 2001; Clark & Dirkx, 2008).

The classroom layout and process was conducive to establishing and maintaining relationships throughout the course that is fundamental to anti-oppressive education

(Kumashiro, 2001, 2002, 2006). Participants spoke to and appreciated how the instructor valued and worked to create relationships between her and the students, and amongst students. For example, one participant noted that “we had our little cohort in amongst the whole class and so that there was a consistency of coming to the table ... it was very comforting for all of us.” Another participant said, “There is nothing better than learning from other people who are learning and excited about their learning.” Participants saw working and talking together as an important aspect of the course. As well, developing relationships with other participants in the course was an important part of being able to have critical dialogue, which is important for transformative learning to take place (Taylor, 2009).

Taylor (2009) recognizes the importance of taking into consideration “the personal and professional situation of the learners at the time” (p.11). During the three weeks the course ran, participants were better able to speak positively about anti-oppressive action in their personal lives, when friends and family were conversant with anti-oppressive education and were justice-oriented. The personal context, as well as their current and historical proximity to minoritized people, was an important factor in participants being able to relate to marginalized groups. When working through what they were learning in the course, a number of participants’ retrieved episodic memories from their childhood to provide examples of oppression they had witnessed and had felt guilty about. For example, one participant shed tears discussing how he hadn’t thought about the poor treatment of Aboriginal people in his small rural town when he was growing up. These life experiences (Taylor, 2009) were an important aspect for

participants' capacity to reflect on their assumptions and to move toward seeing the world differently.

Burr (2003) contends that, as socially constructed beings, maintaining relationships is vital for our personal learning journey and for living harmoniously with others in this world. One of the desires of participants was to continue their connection with one another after the course ended. In fact, a number of participants continued to work as allies and presented at a fall conference held in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan that was hosted by a participant in this research. Once the course was over, there was the recognition that participants needed to find and maintain alliances with those conversant in anti-oppressive action so that they could feel supported, and continue to talk about and take action toward alleviating oppression. One of the values of having a community of allies is that it can provide a source of support. One participant said that having a community of support was vital to her "health as an educator."

An emergent finding that came from this research was the importance of community in maintaining strength and solidarity as anti-oppressive educators, a point highlighted in feminist pedagogy (Welch, 2006). One participant said that the Summer Institute provided a place for individuals to come together and discuss the challenges of initiating social change "in a world that wants to perpetuate this numbness." A number of participants echoed this point. The Summer Institute provided opportunities for students to discuss what they were learning in an informal setting, sometimes with food. Commensality, the idea of coming together in friendship to eat, serves a very positive social function that was used advantageously in this class. Several participants also appreciated and commented about going to the art gallery to explore the historical and

social context of anti-oppressive education in an art collection. This was done as a community outing and participants appreciated the experience.

There were other aspects of participants' experiences in AOETA that emerged through the thematic analysis as important considerations for participants and are worth touching upon in the discussion. One element of the course all students felt was important was the ability of the instructor to communicate effectively with the students. The instructor was able to express the complicated and challenging information in a straightforward manner so that students were able to understand the material. Participants spoke to the excellent oratory style of the instructor and enjoyed, among other things, her analogies and subtle humour. A student said, "She is an excellent speaker." As well, a number of participants recognized the support that two educational assistants provided to assist with instruction to help students make sense of the content they were unpacking in the course. As is the case for Mountford (2005), the significant attention paid to providing quality learning experiences by providing additional learning support in the class meant that more time could be paid to providing opportunities for critical engagement with students. Providing quality instruction and additional classroom support was a helpful factor to facilitate transformative learning.

The compressed schedule was also a positive factor because students were able to focus intensely on the material during the three-week duration of the Summer Institute. The highly compressed format of the Summer Institute did create additional stress on participants. For example, one participant noted that he felt like he was "on a treadmill." The compressed schedule may also have been a productive element in participants' potential for transformative learning in that it heightened their emotional discomfort and

perhaps sped up the onset of disorienting dilemmas (Mezirow, 2012). One participant noted this fact and said:

[The Summer Institute] is just set up so cleverly too. The whole two courses in three weeks is very inviting to people; they want to take it. So I see people there that would normally avoid things like that, that are taken into this, and once they get there, they are like, Whoa.

Another factor was the pass/fail assessment structure of the course. Several students were initially concerned about how a pass/fail course would affect their grade point average, but all participants who commented on this topic said it was a positive factor of the course. One participant said, “I am very happy that this course is pass/fail. It takes the stress off and allows students to focus on learning, without the pressure of a number at the end.” Another student said, “the pass/ fail allows you to absorb the material better.” The pass/fail assessment removed the competitive and normative aspects of traditional university assessment and created an environment where participants could focus on working together to learn and not compete for marks. As well, having the course be pass/fail gave students an opportunity to relax and focus on the work before them without the added stress of having to provide answers that reflected what someone wanted to hear them say.

As explained in chapter 2, transformative learning is facilitated by the following factors: opportunities for dialogue, holistic learning environments, awareness of context, valuing of life experiences, and fostering authentic relationships (Taylor, 2009). Various perspectives were infused into the dialogue through diverse guest speakers and through providing voice to each of the participants. Participants described the overall classroom atmosphere of AOETA as safe, supportive of emotional needs, and respectful. The instructor took the time to position herself and her knowledge as partial, and to

communicate the importance of the participants' experiences. The instructor provided different learning modalities, including the strategic use of literature and engaged activism, to help the students understand how they were situated in relation to oppression and to create tension and discomfort for the participants. The latter was done within a context where life experiences were valued and authentic relationships were fostered in such a way that students reported that there was an ethic of care and that a community of solidarity had developed. In the next section, an analysis of the participants' understanding of the theoretical underpinnings of the AOETA will be discussed.

How did the participants understand the different anti-oppressive educational theories and practices as affecting change in themselves or others?

Inclusive, critical, and poststructural dimensions were identifiable in the conversations that made up the transcripts in this analysis. As well, different theories and practices had varying impacts on participants and thus each dimension is discussed separately. However, it is worth acknowledging that it was very difficult to separate the different dimensions from one another because, in applying them *in situ*, they flow together.

Inclusive Dimension

The inclusive dimension is drawn from Kumashiro's (2000b) "Education for the Other" and "Education about the Other." The inclusive dimension involves the identification of socially and historically constructed difference in an effort to provide education for and about the Other that is supportive and lessens the potential for oppression. Teachers were well versed in these approaches and types of thinking, as they

constitute much of what they have learned to do, as inclusive educators, to support minoritized students.

Those new to anti-oppressive education began to struggle with the Othering that these familiar practices can engender. Those more experienced with anti-oppressive education had a deeper understanding of how Othering could be damaging by reducing social phenomena to categories and social groups to fixed types (van Manen, 1997). Thus, inclusive components of anti-oppressive education can be both positive and problematic. They can foster understanding the Other and the creation of safe places and spaces, but the inclusive dimension can also lead to maintaining dominant discourses and the image of the Other as deficient (Kumashiro, 2000b; 2009). The inclusive dimension was evident, in varying degrees, in the thinking of participants and was an important element in the conversations and journal reflections of participants.

Understanding the concept of Othering proved a very important aspect of the course for a number of participants, particularly those new to anti-oppressive education. Because of class conversations on Othering, a number of participants were able to recognize when they were stereotyping and marginalizing. Several participants found it very challenging to not clump the Other into a group with a fixed identity.

One participant, who is minoritized, accepted being placed in the stereotypical role as an Aboriginal person who was expected to speak on behalf of Aboriginal people in different contexts. The participant, who self-identifies as Aboriginal, felt comfortable assisting colleagues to understand “the Aboriginal perspective” and was comfortable as a spokesperson. Having a “spokesperson” that is to represent a marginalized group as an expert is problematic in anti-oppressive education because their voice is being seen as

representing all of the group and thus doesn't acknowledge the multiplicity and fluidity of identities and perspectives (Kumashiro, 2000b).

In some instances, the inclusive dimension may have led to the further entrenchment of differences by neglecting to reflect upon hegemonic assumptions concerning power and privilege (Schick, 2010b; Neito & Bode, 2012). For example, in several discussions a participant talked about different ethnic groups as 'them' and as being naturally different. The Inclusive dimension, without a concomitant critical reflection of assumptions, did not disturb the underlying power and privilege of the participants and lead to transformative learning.

As discussed in the literature (Schick, 2010b; Pedersen, Walker, & Wise, 2005; Neito, 2000; Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1995), there is a challenge, and paradox, in providing Aboriginal perspectives intended to create greater equity for people who are identified as Aboriginal because many pedagogical practices are currently based on an essentialist framework that focuses on teaching about differences rather than critiquing the current inequity that exists. One participant, who self-identifies as white, troubled her own discomfort teaching Aboriginal perspectives and realized that her reluctance to do so was related to the lack of value she placed on Aboriginal perspectives. As a function of the course where she learned different approaches, some of which had an inclusive dimension, she recognized her place of privilege and was able to reflect on what her resistance to including Aboriginal perspectives meant for her.

Connecting whites to white privilege is difficult. It is easy to convince those who have white privilege to take up the fight against racism; it is much more difficult for those who have white privilege to understand that the fight is against their own internalized,

negative racial beliefs, values, and ideas (Obidah, 2008). This may, in part, be because people are willing to examine Other's difference as a way to not examine their own because "racial categories and hierarchies are deeply etched in almost all of us from birth" (Berlak, 2008, p. 19). As well, people are less able to critique their own power and privilege because it is largely self-obscured through unconscious processes (Berlak, 2008). This same participant acknowledged: "First Nations content is something that is super valid in Saskatchewan and Regina, so that's something that's important." Although she had been struggling to teach this content area, she now realized the importance of providing education about the Other in order to make those who are a part of the dominant group more aware of the history of Aboriginal people in Canada, including how they have been oppressed by Canadian society. Through subjective reframing, she was also able to critique the inclusive dimension of anti-oppressive education. As a function of AOETA, the above participant sought to teach differently so her own students could understand and do differently (Pollock, 2008; Smith, 1999; Spivak, 1999).

One participant attributed her personal growth to her learning about stereotypes and to changing how she wanted to work with Hutterites, who are a minoritized group. The participant had said, "How do I take the understanding that I will gain and build and apply it to my teaching on the colony?" She wanted to work as an ally with the Hutterite community instead of making them the object of inspection, one of the downfalls Kumashiro (2000b) identified and referred to as Othering. In this instance, when the inclusive dimension was identified and discussed openly through a critique of power and privilege, it created discomfort and a disorienting dilemma where the participant could

work through her own desire to know and provide for the Other through her position of dominance.

Another example of stereotyping, or what Trepagnier (2006) refers to as silent racism, came from an interview from the beginning of the institute where a participant expressed her desire to be ‘color-blind’, meaning she did not discriminate based on the color of someone’s skin. She said, “this child is First Nations, this child is Caucasian, this child is Chinese, I just don’t really think like that.” It is worth pointing out that by the end of the course, the participant had recognized the hidden racism involved in her thinking. She realized that being racially color-blind might maintain white privilege without appearing racist. She was no longer able to obscure the structural nature of white privilege or close off conversations about race (Vaught & Castagno, 2008, p. 100).

As well, another student had realized the challenges of providing education about the Other inherent in her school, as they celebrated diversity week. This student had troubled the school’s desire to focus exclusively on the surface aspects of culture versus an examination of the deep culture and the relational aspects of living together in a context of diversity (Derman-Sparks & Olsen Edwards, 2010). Although the school was working to support those who were minoritized, they were still using a stereotypical approach that did not address the lack of power and privilege some groups have in schools.

Participants new to anti-oppressive education appreciated and felt comfortable that an aspect of AOETA focused on learning tools and techniques that would directly make things better for the Other in their classroom. They seemed to desire the comfort of the inclusive dimension because it provided familiar pedagogical discourses that didn’t

trouble their own social and historical construction of difference. Nonetheless, participants were able to recognize the importance and limitations of providing education for and about the Other. Generally speaking, the inclusive dimension of the learners' experiences may have raised an awareness of difference and inequity and how to be supportive of the Other in the school and classroom. However, because the inclusive dimension does not critique the dominant practices of the majority, it did not create discomfort for participants that could lead to the critical reflections that could be transformative.

The inclusive dimension, which ignores the connection between dominance and Othering (Kumashiro, 2000b), can serve to maintain the façade that education for and about the Other creates equity. However, inclusive approaches can be helpful to support and provide a safer school environment for the Other. As well, the inclusive dimension can be productive because it lays the foundation for critique by identifying difference. However, it can also be problematic because, without the critique, stereotypes may become more entrenched (Morrison, Robbins, & Rose, 2008). Thus the inclusive dimension may work to make inequity more comfortable for members of the dominant and subordinate groups. Therefore, as indicated in the literature (Ladson-Billings & Donnor, 2008; Smith, 1999), the inclusive dimension is a necessary, but problematic, aspect of anti-oppressive education. By the end of the course, the participants understood the inclusive dimension as a supportive and problematic aspect of anti-oppressive education.

Critical Dimension

Examining inequity through the critical dimension challenged participants to examine power and privilege, and to critique the social and historical reproduction of inequity. This critical reflection of assumptions, both through reflection and self-reflection, could be transformative (Mezirow, 2000). The critical dimension was discussed as a function of AOETA and involved learning to critique unearned power and privilege. Critical reflection motivated participants to strive for social justice and activism. Critical reflection also brought into awareness the issue of hegemony and teacher agency, and created opportunities for reframing one's perspective. The critical exploration of oppression was a personal journey for participants as they examined oppression through the critical reflection of assumptions that leads to objective reframing, or the critical self-reflection of assumptions that leads to subjective reframing.

Critical reflection of assumptions that lead to objective reframing provided several participants with a way to reflect on the external world of oppression. This reflection was less powerful in creating discomfort for participants. Examples of objective reframing were about trying to understand why others would stereotype, or not knowing how to use a type of curriculum designed to teach about First Nations. These reflections were important, but did not produce the same emotional discomfort as subjective reframing.

Subjective reframing is often an intensely emotional journey through self-discovery (Mezirow, 2000) as it relates to understanding oppression and our implication in its functioning. The critical self-reflection of assumptions was a powerful and emotional experience for participants new to anti-oppressive education. For example, one

participant who self-reflected on assumptions about her own internalized racism said, “It’s like I slammed into a cement wall and it's just below the surface realizing I'm so not where I want to be and I'm so not who I want to be and I have so much more to do.”

Transformative learning may occur through such subjective reframing as participants were immersed in conversations that enabled them to think about their “own psychological and cultural assumptions or premises that limit one's experiences” (Kreber, 2012, p. 329).

Critical pedagogy is foundational to AOETA (Schick, 2010a) and anti-oppressive education works through the critical dimension to raise critical consciousness (Kumashiro, 2001). Critique is understood to be the basis for transformative learning through the critical social perspective (Brookfield, 2005; Mezirow, 2000). Critical reflection involves bringing into awareness our own hegemonic assumptions concerning power and privilege and challenging them (Brookfield, 2005).

One participant eloquently summed up the challenge of an inclusive perspective and the value of a critical perspective. He said:

Education about the Other and Education for the Other operate under the faulty assumption that by including alternative perspectives and teaching about other cultures and traditions we will somehow create equality. They also assume that there is nothing inherently wrong with the dominant culture. Critical pedagogy forces us to recognize privilege and challenge normative beliefs and systems that are at the roots of these inequalities.

Participants said they were very much engaged in trying to critique their own taken-for-granted knowledge throughout the course. Several participants new to anti-oppressive education talked about wanting to include opportunities for critique in their own teaching but were not sure how to do so. Those who had more experience with anti-oppressive education were already encouraging critical reflection in their classrooms and

were conversant and engaged in these conversations already. Those more experienced with anti-oppressive education had become engaged in the critical social perspective of transformative learning theory as they actively sought social change. One such participant recognized the importance of examining power relations, as discussed by Foucault (1980), when doing a critique with students. Foucault speaks to power being external to the individual and an inherent part of social interactions. Making relations of power visible is vital to undoing inequity. Participants learned about ossified systems of dominance that maintain inequity and how to examine the social practices that constitute and construct inequity. Participants learned to examine multiple elements that may be present in verbal and written discourses to identify “who has influence in social interactions and who doesn’t”, and to begin to challenge this often hidden aspect of communication.

Realizing the importance of critique was integral to the changes in thinking articulated by participants. Participants spoke about the value of critical self-reflection that led to personal change. Participants were not discomforted by the concept of being critical thinkers and felt challenged and empowered to critically reflect. Encouraging students to challenge the *status quo* and to think about their own implication in oppression and privilege created tension and discomfort. The discomfort came from realizing that something within them needed “fixing.” This discomfort is what students referred to as having GAS (Guilt, Anger, Shame). Kumashiro refers to this aspect of teaching anti-oppressive education as teaching through crisis and discomfort (2000a; 2009), whereas Mezirow (2009) refers to this phase in his model of transformative learning as self-examination with feelings of guilt or shame. This tension and discomfort

was present for participants, although those more experienced identified that they had experienced the tension and discomfort at an earlier point in time. Most participants indicated that while the readings and class lectures problematized those things that hold inequity in place, they were not overly discomforting for participants to the point where they were upset at the content. One participant, who is a member of a dominant social group, emphasized how challenging it was for her to accept her own implication in oppression and her desire to resist change.

Being implicated in oppression was something discussed as a function of the social construction of identity (Burr, 2003), a poststructural concept that participants found helpful in reformulating their conception of oppression. The most significant disorienting dilemma for participants was recognizing privilege, usually white privilege. Lopez asserts that “administer[ing] the desired privilege-ectomy to the white subject is to show how its position within the colonial society is neither uniformly dominant nor stable, but contingent upon a performance of white power” (Lopez, 2005, p. 13).

Critically examining whiteness is an emergent and critical discipline and a significant aspect and challenge within anti-oppressive education for Canadians, because understanding whiteness and its privilege helps to explain the social and historical causes of current inequities. Lopez (2005) wrote, “The crisis of whiteness begins at precisely the point at which the colonized subject of color can see through it” (p. 21). For many participants in anti-oppressive education who are white, it is interesting and difficult to be the ‘Other’ upon which to direct their ‘gaze’. During the individual interviews, participants said that they had reflected on the concept of white privilege during the course. According to Kumashiro (2000b), it is important that reflections extend beyond

the dominant group's examination of itself since arresting the reflection at this point keeps the focus on the dominant group.

Several participants had not heard of the concept of white privilege before and had not realized that because of their own racialized identity they had unearned power and privilege. The participants new to anti-oppressive education had become aware of "how it is that white is a color that need not name itself" (Willinsky, 1998, p. 8).

Understanding whiteness is about understanding the legacy of privilege connected to colonialism, and how this has been hidden in plain sight. Understanding how whiteness is "no longer able to portray itself as either benign or "normal" (in the sense of constituting a norm), whiteness must now reckon with its own history of aggression and hegemony" (Lopez, 2005, p. 14). For example, a participant new to anti-oppressive education wrote in her journal, "Racism isn't just individual acts, and that being a white privileged person I am unknowingly oppressing others. This bothers me and forces me to reflect on my life." Another participant recalled how she lamented with her husband about whether they were racist:

So I said, 'I'm going to talk to you about your white racism'. And he goes 'I'm not racist'. I said, 'yes, you are'. 'No, I'm not, I dated –he dated a Métis woman for like, twenty years about, he was with her. ...so he says 'no, I'm not racist.'... He's very much aware of white privilege but he doesn't consider himself racist...."

This speaks to a problematic aspect of using concepts like labeling people as racist because "a racist is invariably constructed in essentialist terms as someone who discriminates on the basis of 'race' or skin color" (Aveling, 2007, p. 70). Understanding racism is about understanding how it is a slippery and complicated concept that is often enacted by those who would not consider themselves racist or to hold racist views, and often occurs in societies where overt racist acts are abhorred. It was both a crisis and a

discomfort for participants to recognize that the fight against oppression is one that needs to take place from the inside out and that the location of this fight is often obscured by and within us (Obinah, 2008; Berlak, 2008).

Of the privilege afforded to her of where she grew up, a participant recalled:

I've reflected a lot on this, but driving down the core of Regina, before I even get there, I lock my doors or if I'm driving downtown and I see someone who looks a little rough, most likely, they're not white, I will lock my doors. And I just think the power in that, I'm just making assumptions and I'm being racist in those sorts of moments...

She had become aware of how “many of the privileges that flow to whites are invisible, unearned and not consciously acknowledged” (Picower, 2009, p. 198). Although this participant had indicated that her “values and beliefs” were “rocked” as a result of the course and that she is actively reflecting on her own beliefs and behaviours, her latter statement still seems to contain a number of assumptions and stereotypical beliefs about the Other. For example, she seems to position herself above the “poor First Nations families” and assumes that they would find big words intimidating during parent-teacher conferences. This reinforces the need to always be vigilant to how we position ourselves in relation to difference, particularly racial difference (Delpit, 2006).

One participant, who self-identified as Aboriginal, found it helpful to learn about white privilege because it helped inform her understanding about her own encounters with racism. Whiteness, as an identification of dominance, can only exist so long as it remains transparent to the Other (Lopez, 2005). Once this participant understood how white privilege operates, it lost some of its power over her. She was able to direct her gaze upon whiteness as just another Other. As well, because she could “pass” as white, she realized that her own experiences with racism were different than other members of

her family who could not. Insight into the shades of whiteness helped the participant to understand how she generally felt more privileged within the dominant society than many of her family and friends and how her experiences “passing as white” marginalized her within her already minoritized community. Understanding the multiple intersections of difference is an important aspect of anti-oppressive education (Schick, 2010a) and was a significant new learning for this participant that facilitated her perspective transformation through the critical self-reflection of assumptions.

Another crisis and point of discomfort for many participants ensued following a discussion of homophobia. A guest speaker challenged a number of participant’s beliefs, values and assumptions about how crimes that involve gay sex are magnified, demonized and distorted by the public. The speaker provided examples of highly publicized male-to-male sexual assault cases that were familiar to participants. The topic was emotionally charged for a number of participants and resulted in crisis and discomfort for a number of participants. The fallout from the presentation exemplified what Kumashiro (2004) identified as “the difficulty of challenging oppression, especially heterosexism/homophobia, in a curriculum that is already too full and a political climate that is often silent, if not hostile, toward any mention of sexual orientation” (p. 111).

Some students appreciated the need for to be pushed beyond their comfort zone whereas others found the content too shocking and responded emotionally with frustration and anger, dismissing the underlying content of the lecture, instead of focusing on their personal feelings regarding the issue. For several participants, the discomforting emotions became a site of resistance for learning about oppression (Kumashiro, 2000a). For other participants, the lecture motivated further discussion about the issue that

included disagreement and agreement with particular aspects of the speaker's message. Nonetheless, a number of participants reported that they were unable to focus on the remainder of the lecture due to their emotional discomfort regarding the speaker's initial remarks. Other participants recognized the need to look within themselves to examine how what the speaker said was troubling for them. Overall, some students were able to critique, while others were blocked by their emotional response. Kumashiro (2004) asks teachers to engage with learning using poststructuralism and posed the following questions to move the dialogue toward contesting knowledge:

What assumptions did I make about who the students are, what they feel, and what they are open to discussing? How did different groups of students feel forced to respond (e.g., by masking their feelings, by silencing their views, by participating as they think good students are supposed to participate)? Whom did this discussion privilege, and how? What issues did this discussion ignore, and what hidden messages did those gaps convey? Were the discussion framed differently, what different contributions, debates, feelings, and insights might have resulted, and how might those have enabled very different movements toward anti-oppressive education? My point, here, is that teaching about the gaps in the lesson (i.e., teaching about the ways that the lesson cannot help but be partial and political) can be exactly what prevents the lesson from reinforcing oppressive relations in education. (pp. 114-5)

As Kumashiro (2004) suggests, this presentation may have opened up more possibilities if there had been time to examine with the speaker, the idea that knowledge is partial, political and contested.

Poststructural Dimension

Kumashiro (2000b) refers to the poststructural dimension as anti-oppressive education that changes students and society. This dimension makes inequity more transparent, and labors to change dominant discourses by identifying how power is socially constructed, knowledge is partial, and identities are fluid and contextualized (Schick, 2010b). While a poststructural approach was used to frame questions and

conversations, poststructural philosophy was not explicitly taught because it was not necessary or possible, given the purposes and time constraints of the course (Schick, personal communication, 2013). Poststructural ideas and concepts were introduced through class discussions and were embedded in a number of the course readings. The participants learned about the social construction of identity, power relations, contested knowledge, and how to deconstruct and contest dominant discourses. Participants discussed their understanding of poststructural ideas and concepts during the interview with varying degrees of ability. Participants were able to understand how to use these ideas and concepts even though they were not taught the names of the theories. Based on what participants said, learning poststructural ideas and concepts was helpful in that it provided a way to see and explain inequity. However, participants did find the poststructural language challenging to understand.

One participant new to anti-oppressive education said learning about poststructural concepts such as essentialism helped her understand that there are multiple truths, an important concept developed in anti-oppressive education (Kumashiro, 2009). Learning about deconstruction helped participants to challenge what is taken for granted as truth, paying particular attention to Eurocentrism, and to appreciate who has influence in, and is influenced by, conversations as a function of socially constructed knowledge, identity, and power relations. For example, one participant new to anti-oppressive education used the concept of “unlearning” to explain what she had to do on her journey as an anti-oppressive educator.

One participant explained that, as a result of learning about poststructural concepts and ideas, she now understood the “intangible” elements of oppression she had

encountered as a minoritized person. Much of her oppression had been ineffable and she was thankful that she could now articulate to others the previously invisible characteristics of her oppression. Another participant said that poststructuralism was “really powerful.” However, participants new to anti-oppressive education could only talk about the poststructural aspects of the course in a basic way. Participants were able to discuss the critical dimension with confidence, but this wasn’t the case for the poststructural dimension. No participant new to anti-oppressive education discussed the concepts of discourse and citation, or paradoxical teaching (Kumashiro, 2000b, 2004), although they encountered them and used the concepts in their learning in AOETA. Two participants more experienced with anti-oppressive education spoke about a poststructural dimension used in anti-oppressive education, perhaps because they were actively using them in their classroom already.

Two participants, including the participant who self-identified as Aboriginal, said that poststructuralism resonated well with them because it helped them deconstruct dominant Western paradigms. However, several participants more experienced with anti-oppressive education indicated that there could be other ways to foster transformative learning including using an Aboriginal perspective or an Eastern philosophy such as Buddhism.

Anti-oppressive education is not about pathologizing students, but rather it is about teaching students to recognize and work against “hegemonic meaning-making and socialization processes” that oppress (Montgomery, 2013, p. 15), which is accomplished by including a poststructural dimension (Kumashiro, 2000b, 2009; Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005; Parkes, Gore, & Ellsworth, 2010). Not pathologizing participants was an

important aspect of the poststructural dimension that was catalytic to the transformative learning of participants. From this perspective, they were more willing to self-reflect on assumptions about their beliefs, values and assumptions.

In summary, inclusive, critical, and poststructural dimensions flowed together and were difficult to separate from one another during the thematic analysis. Learning about the inclusive dimension appeared comforting for those new to anti-oppressive education but “not enough” for those who were more experienced. Those more experienced wanted to be “troubled” by the content. Participants understood the problematic nature of the inclusive dimension and found the topic of essentialism learned during AOETA to be helpful in explaining the tension within the inclusive dimension. Participants were able to speak about critiquing power and privilege with ease and stated that this was a significant part of the learning in the course. When participants engaged in critique that involved subjective reframing, the experience was emotionally discomforting. Objective reframing was not as emotional. All but one participant believed that the critical dimension, with its critical self-reflection of assumptions was instrumental to deep personal changes that occurred within themselves. Those new to anti-oppressive education, and one person more experienced with anti-oppressive education, struggled to explain poststructuralism. Three of those more experienced with anti-oppressive education saw poststructuralism as an important aspect of anti-oppressive education. Learning about the social construction of identity, power and knowledge was helpful for participants because these concepts gave them a new lens through which to see inequity in a way that did not construct those learning about anti-oppressive education as flawed or bad. Using a poststructural

approach acted as a catalyst for those new to anti-oppression to critically self-reflect on their assumptions and to have a perspective transformation.

To what extent did what I have termed Inclusive Dimension, Critical Dimension, and Poststructural dimension discomfort the participants emotionally?

One participant indicated that discomfort came from realizing through the critical self-reflection of assumptions that something from within needed fixing. When participants were introspective, they could easily become emotional as they were continually “bombarded” with material. It was the realization of their own implication in oppression and the recognition that they needed to do differently, which most often precipitated an emotional reaction. This is consistent with the critical self-reflection of assumptions component of subjective reframing that leads to a perspective transformation (Mezirow, 1997, 2000; Taylor, 1998, 2009).

One participant, more experienced with anti-oppressive education, acknowledged that he was “learning through crisis and thriving on it.” However, several participants new to anti-oppressive education felt overwhelmed by the discomfort at certain times during the course. There was an important emotional dimension to the critical dimension. Emotions were a substantive element in the perspective transformation of participants. This is in keeping with a shift in transformative learning theory away from the “analyze-think-change” model toward the “see-feel-change” model to explain the role that emotions play in personal change (Taylor, 2009; Mälkki; 2010). Kumashiro (2000a, 2000b) also emphasizes the emotional aspects of learning anti-oppressive ways. Participants identified the emotions of guilt, anger and shame (GAS) as constituent parts

of their perspective transformation, but felt that these negative emotions were unproductive to them, in the long run, as anti-oppressive educators. This is in keeping with Mezirow's (2009) current conception of the phases of transformative learning that recognize the phase where individuals self-examine their assumptions and encounter feelings of guilt or shame. Focusing on taking action seemed to help participants overcome the negative emotions attached to their critical reflection of assumptions of unearned power and privilege.

One participant indicated that activism was the key to alleviating GAS. This supports Curry-Stevens (2007) position. Curry-Stevens developed a pedagogical model by which to understand the transformative learning for privileged learners. She would place making a declaration to act as an ally and activist as the final stage in transforming a learner to be an anti-oppressive educator. Participants felt positively about discussing their GAS as a stage they needed to go through in order to move forward and resolve the tension in their thinking. Three of the 13 participants shed tears during the interviews, while they were involved in critical self-reflection of assumptions, and were reflecting upon their own past implications in oppression. This is similar to Berlak and Moyenda's (2001), and Curry-Stevens (2007) recognition that participants go through an emotional journey as they learn about and begin to engage in anti-oppressive education. Another participant, more experienced with anti-oppressive education, indicated that working through the tension and discomfort was similar to the twelve-step program of alcoholics anonymous and that the first step is to recognize that one has a problem and that there is a culture of denial and fear to hide oppression.

Those who had more experience with anti-oppressive education understood the emotional element and had generally worked through a lot of the discomfort already. Because the students in AOETA had read Kumashiro's (2009) book *Against common sense: Teaching and learning toward social justice* that specifically addresses the emotional discomfort that is a part of the learning process, they were prepared for what they were experiencing.

According to participants new to anti-oppressive education, both emotional and rational responses appeared to be a prerequisite for a subsequent perspective transformation. One participant described how she moved through the emotions and chose to think and act differently. Regarding learning about white privilege, she said:

My personal opinion is that you can't just overcome yourself with guilt for what happened in the past. All you can do is improve the future. ... It's done, and it's terrible, but the only thing we can do is make the future better and that's your part and if you don't do that, then you should feel guilty, but if you're doing your part, well then you shouldn't be stuck in that spot where you still feel terrible about what happened a hundred years ago. I don't think you can move forward if that's where you are.

As mentioned earlier, some participants' crises (disorienting dilemmas) were more discomfoting than others. If the crisis-provoking conversation was too provocative and too emotionally laden, it seemed to create resistance that prevented the participant moving toward critical reflection. Participants who had emotional reactions of denial and anger did not appear able to critically reflect on their assumptions because of their resistance to examining the information rationally. This fits well with Kumashiro's (2000a) perspective that "crisis can lead in one of many directions--such as toward liberating change, or toward more entrenched resistance" (para. 5).

For one participant more experienced with anti-oppressive education, there was frustration about having to watch people who have privilege work so slowly through the process of recognizing their implication in oppression. She was distressed at the convenience people who have privilege have in taking their time going through a process of realizing their own privilege, while the inequity that is currently in place is “literally killing others.” For most participants, working through the basic realization that, in order to lessen oppression, we all need to work on ourselves rather than to continue to work on the Other, was a powerful insight. This insight came through making explicit the social construction of difference and identity through the use of paradoxical teaching, such as by teaching about the myth of meritocracy.

How did participants make sense of the social construction of identity and understand their own identities, or those around them, to have changed?

The concept of social constructionism is similar to the educational concept of constructivism common to many practicing teachers (Schwandt, 2000). In education, the concept of constructivism comes to us primarily through Vygotsky’s work (Woolfolk, Winne & Perry, 2006) and connotes similarities between constructivism and social constructionism, by emphasizing discourse, beyond what is inferred through a simple hermeneutical interpretation. Social constructionism recognizes that “each person perceives the world differently and actively creates their own meanings from events” (Burr, 2003, p. 19). As well, understanding that social interaction is focused on dialogue and social practices, and includes the recognition that knowledge is only ever partial (Burr, 2003; Schwandt, 2000). Modern notions of identity are at odds with the fragmented and always ‘becoming’ postmodern individual where the learner is

understood to be “‘decentred’ and ‘emergent’.... The postmodern learner is always becoming, always in process, always situated in a context that also is always becoming” (Kilgore, 2004, p. 47). Understanding the social construction of identity means seeing beyond the constraining humanist, modernist conceptions of individuals as unitary, autonomous and striving towards ideals established during the time of the enlightenment. These ideals are understood by social constructionists to be ways to pathologize hegemonic difference as abnormal (Venn, 1984).

Participants’ understanding of how identity is socially constructed were consistent with Gergen’s (2003) explanation of the social influences on construction of knowledge:

Our ideas about what is real and true are generated, sustained or altered by our relations with others. From a constructionist viewpoint, we must be prepared to embrace multiple truths, realities, and values without unequivocally deciding which is the best amongst them. We can thus appreciate our traditions without being obliged to replicate them. (Gergen, 2003, p. 119, as cited in Carlson Berg, 2010, p. 295)

Participants recognized the important role that the social context plays in constructing identity. Several participants spoke about how their identities change all of the time, depending on amongst other things, the people around them and the prevailing discourse. Several participants mentioned the role that “nature” plays in the construction of our identity. These participants discussed identity construction through the modern binary of the influence of nature over nurture. Others emphasized how identity construction is a “social thing.” A participant who self-identifies as Aboriginal, mentioned that, had she been aware of the social construction of racism, she “may have been able to handle situations better.”

Several participants who had more experience with anti-oppressive education spoke about the significant role that language plays in the social construction of identity.

All participants seemed to be at ease with a constructionist approach to identity. This may have been in part because of the relationship between social constructionism and the constructivism that is a part of learning and is foundational to educational psychology today (Woolfolk, Winne & Perry, 2006). Students were more aware of the role teachers have in constructing what is considered normal and abnormal in the classroom, and how teaching is an act of social construction where teachers may be complicit in maintaining socially and historically constructed inequity. One participant wrote in her journal “our identities are confirmed by the people around us.”

An element that came out of learning about the social construction of identity in AOETA was that participants new to anti-oppressive education realized that they were also a part of constructing the identity of the Other. This was a substantial aspect of understanding and deconstructing “hegemonic meaning-making and socialization processes” (Montgomery, 2013, p. 15). One participant said that unpacking their own socialization process through the social construction of identity could also be transformative “because you start to see things, and view things, and think things in a completely different way.” As well, because participants understood themselves to also be socially constructed, they could work to think differently about their meaning-making and not pathologize participants’ unearned power and privilege.

Did participants enact teacher activism that would be evidence of transformation?

One of the central features of AOETA was a commitment to activism that is connected to transformative learning theory through the critical social perspective (Taylor, 2009). This call to action through activism is a central theme in anti-oppressive

education (Kumashiro, 2002b) and extends beyond just thinking differently. From the critical social perspective of transformative learning theory, activism denotes a transformative learning outcome when it has been preceded by critically reflecting on hegemonic assumptions and leads the person to take action (Brookfield, 2005).

Transformative learning from this perspective is about social transformation and personal transformation. It is not sufficient to only think differently, but transformation occurs when people “take action in the world” as a result of their critical reflection (p. 49).

Being encouraged to engage in activism was a substantive aspect of the course. Students in AOETA were required to complete two tasks directly linked to activism. One task required students to record examples of their own activism and display them around the classroom to inspire others. The second task required students to develop a plan for critical social activism and prepare it as an academic poster presentation. The final interview with the participants revealed that all but one participant had engaged in some way or planned to engage with their activism project within the school year.

The participant who did not plan to follow through with her activism project in any way was also the participant who may not have engaged in the critical self-reflection of assumptions. With this exception, participants were “interested” in doing the activism project and were also working through the critical self-reflection of assumptions around their projects. Participants understood that by completing and enacting their activism project they were also recognizing the need to change themselves. Encouraging participants to pursue relevant and meaningful activism projects seemed important in ensuring that their activism projects were enacted after the course was over. As well, the one participant who choose a topic that was not important or meaningful to her, to some

degree, points to the subtle ways that we resist enacting the change that anti-oppressive education encourages.

Participants chose to enact activist projects to address issues they raised as important and challenging areas in society. For example, one activism project focused on a method she developed to teach differently in her classroom. Another participant developed a strategy to make students aware of “Othering.” Although participants seemed engaged in thinking about their activism projects, a number of participants had not begun to do differently, and had either wanted more information in order to do their projects or were waiting to enact their projects at a later date. It was difficult to know whether these were legitimate reasons for not moving forward or subtle forms of resistance to not engage in activism.

One participant new to anti-oppressive education had followed through with her entire activism project when I met with her during the fall interview. This participant, who also self-identifies as a minoritized person, went through an important perspective transformation throughout the course that became enacted by living out her activism project. Several other participants worked to implement their activism projects, but within the changing context they found themselves in when they went back to work in the fall. For example, one participant who was also a principal had changed how he was going to “pitch” his anti-oppressive idea too because of a change in senior administration.

One option for students was to do an activism project as a function of developing a research proposal. Connecting the activism so closely to academic work in the form of a research project, although practical and desirable for students, proved problematic because several of these participants seemed focused on the research aspect of the

activism project, rather than on the underlying intention of engaged activism. As well, not having the knowledge to move forward because participants needed more “education” on the subject matter may suggest another form of resistance. Here, the doing part of anti-oppressive education could be considered more difficult to enact than acknowledged by participants.

The axiom that “change takes time” appears to be true. Even though participants new to anti-oppressive education had indicated a perspective transformation as a result of AOETA, it was difficult to enact change that would challenge the status quo, even with a well thought out activism project to support implementing some type of anti-oppressive education. This challenge in execution was based on some very logical reasons. It is interesting to note that all but one participant new to anti-oppressive education explained how they were doing differently in their classrooms as a result of the course and that most of what they were doing was connected to their activism projects. For example, participants were interacting with students differently and posing questions to friends, family, students and staff that would challenge the status quo.

From the critical social perspective, transformative learning occurs when it leads the person to take action (Brookfield, 2005). All but one participant new to anti-oppressive education had decided to take action and do differently, as is evidenced by what they were doing in their classrooms and in their lives. The participant who indicated that they were not doing differently was also the participant who said that her journal reflections “won’t even be the truth” and identified as being oppressed.

Activism was connected, in some cases tangentially, to their activism projects. More directly, all participants new to anti-oppressive education indicated they had

acquired knowledge about activism from AOETA and all but one participant indicated their desire to become an activist. I would suggest that participants new to anti-oppressive education, with the possibility of one exception, were emerging as activists.

All of those who had more experience with anti-oppressive education spoke of a perspective transformation prior to their arrival in class. While it is difficult to know, based on one activism project, whether they were engaging in activism that denotes a transformative learning experience as articulated by Brookfield (2005), all of the participants more knowledgeable in anti-oppressive education could give examples of what they were doing differently to make a difference. One participant more experienced in anti-oppressive education had completely enacted her activism project. However, in another example, it is difficult to really know if the reasons why a participant was not working on her activism project were for legitimate reasons.

This participant, who was more knowledgeable about anti-oppressive education, had mentioned some very legitimate concerns about the emotional safety of her students as a barrier to enacting her project with students, and I believe she had not started her project for the welfare of her students. The participant's activism project involved teaching her students, many of whom are Aboriginal, about residential schools as sites of genocide. She wanted to wait until she had a way to work through the trauma that these students might have when they learn about Canada's history of genocide towards Aboriginal people. Waiting because of these reasons seems both compassionate and reasonable. However, she could have sought out the assistance and expertise of others. These reasons to wait, couched in "the best interests of the student," could also be discourses of resistance.

The other two participants more experienced with anti-oppressive education had connected their projects to research and were enacting them.

I would conclude that over time, people can and do engage in anti-oppressive work that extends well beyond an activism project, as is evidenced by the different degree of activism engaged by those more experienced in anti-oppressive education compared to those new to anti-oppressive education. Overall though, the participants desire to “trouble normal” furthered their transformative learning potential because they engaged in planning to be an activist. With one exception, participants valued the process and saw the direct impact of planning to be an activist.

What were the personal changes as a result of participating in the course?

All but one person new to anti-oppressive education indicated that the course had changed them. This person had said that they were already on the right path, “I really didn’t learn anything new in that course other than to maybe see how other people viewed anti-oppression.” This linear approach to knowing a “right path” is potentially problematic. Being on the “right path” versus acknowledging diversity in terms valuing multiple ways of being doing, does not recognize oppression as contextualized and ever-evolving. However, even this participant acknowledged that she was thinking differently and moving forward “on the right track.” She had also felt “guilt” during the course and had benefited from the realization of how important self-awareness, critical reflection and giving voice was.

Some students felt comfortable with their new perspective; others said that they were still “uncomfortable.” All four participants who were more experienced with anti-oppressive education felt they had gained a new perspective prior to AOETA. However,

they also indicated that the course had been meaningful and relevant and had pushed them further towards more engaged activism.

Changes were specific to the individual. For some, it was the realization that they were different than they thought they were. One participant said, “It’s thinking that you are something and then learning that isn’t quite the truth.” For a number of participants it was the new awareness that was significant for them. One participant summed up what a number of participants commented on, “I don’t think you can leave after three weeks and not do something differently.” She also said that as a result of the course, “you can never look at it any other way, because you’re beginning to re-conceive the world!”

Kumashiro (2000b) acknowledges the danger inherent in the inclusive dimension where people desire to “know” the Other. This desire to know the Other can lead to the belief that one has acquired all they needed to know about the Other and thus further learning is unnecessary. As an aspect of the poststructural dimension, anti-oppressive education embraces the belief in multiple ways of looking at things, as well as the understanding that some ideas are taken for granted as more valid than others, not because they are “the truth”, but because they are of the dominant ideology and more accepted in society.

The process and outcomes of anti-oppressive education were very personal. The change in thinking of participants was generally around recognizing their privilege through subjective reframing. They felt confident that the change in their thinking towards being aware of inequity would make a difference in their lives and in their role as educators. Participants also reinforced the idea that anti-oppressive education was about personal change that would have an effect beyond their role as educators.

All participants discussed their commitment to ensuring that every student would feel they belonged in their own classroom. Furthermore, they expressed a commitment toward equitable treatment of minoritized students in their classrooms and school. Several participants were engaged in making some practical changes to their teaching and to how students were being evaluated. However, a number of participants discussed that teaching in anti-oppressive ways was difficult because of the stress of teaching to a pre-determined, constraining curriculum, as well as a social context within schools that does not value challenging the *status quo*. Schick and St. Denis (2005) remind us “curriculum is one of the significant discourses through which white privilege and ‘difference’ are normalized” (p. 298). This is a perspective shared by Kumashiro (2010) and it appears that this discourse is hard to change.

One participant more experienced with anti-oppressive education and one participant new to anti-oppressive education discussed how educators, when under stress, revert from teaching in anti-oppressive ways to traditional approaches focused on managing behaviour that are entrenched in modern education. Several participants discussed how, as anti-oppressive educators, they need to pay constant attention to the shifting quality of power relations, and to their own desires, or what one participant referred to as the “what’s in it for me” factor. Several participants new to anti-oppressive education were feeling challenged by their new awareness about the partiality of knowledge as they are often expected to be the holders and transmitters of knowledge.

Does anti-oppressive education have the potential to be a transformative learning experience for participants?

As mentioned earlier, there are two major perspectives within transformative learning theory. The first is the constructivist and humanist perspective that focuses on a personal journey toward transformation and growth and has the individual as the unit of analysis (Mezirow, 1996; Taylor, 2012). The second is the critical social perspective and emphasizes personal transformation and social change (Brookfield, 2000, 2005; Freire, 1970; Taylor, 2012).

AOETA provided the potential for transformative learning that was discussed and analyzed according to the constructivist and humanist perspective through Mezirow's (2012) conception of transformative learning. Based on my analysis of the participants' statements, all participants new to anti-oppressive education experienced a perspective transformation as a result of taking the course.

That is, these participants had significant changes in their beliefs, values and assumptions as a result of AOETA. These changes were primarily connected to the content and process used in AOETA, which included both the pedagogy and the theory of anti-oppressive education (Mezirow, 2000; Taylor, 2009). Those more experienced with anti-oppressive education had experienced a perspective transformation as well, but the change had occurred during previous anti-oppressive education coursework or workshops. All participants stated that learning about anti-oppressive education brought them to see the socially constructed world through a new lens, including the participant who said "I didn't really learn anything new in that course," as she also said that she was "on the right track" as an anti-oppressive educator. The perspective transformation that

participants described is consistent with what Mezirow (2012) would call a transformative learning experience.

Participants were engaged in subjective and objective reframing as they critically reflected on assumptions. Mezirow (1997) states that objective reframing is about the critical “reflective of assumptions when reading a book, hearing a point of view, engaging in task-oriented problem solving” and subjective reframing occurs when “self-reflectively assessing our own ideas and beliefs” (p.7). Mezirow (1997) also points out that self-reflection can lead to significant personal transformations. As Mezirow’s (1997) research indicates, the subjective reframing by participants, that had them self-reflecting on their own beliefs, values and assumptions, was often quite emotional and led them toward meaningful personal transformations. For example, one participant worked through her own biases regarding the need to provide Aboriginal perspectives in class and to provide this instruction to critique unearned power and privilege. She worked through her underlying beliefs that had prevented her from teaching this way. Another participant reflected on the assumption that he was oppressed in relation to the Other. He began to realize that his self-perception of being oppressed was preventing him from being engaged in anti-oppressive education. There was also one participant who did not self-reflect on her assumptions. She believed that she was as oppressed as those groups discussed in class and was not able to self-reflect on those assumptions. Thus she could not change this habit of mind.

All participants new to anti-oppressive education did recognize that they were seeing the world differently—the “rose-colored glasses” through which they had once seen the world, had been removed. All participants new to anti-oppressive education

indicated that it was this perspective transformation of having a new lens through which to see the world that was most valuable for them. This perspective shift was a significant aspect of a number of students experience and is consistent with transformative learning.

Here are some examples of how they described changes in their thinking:

- “I think that that's a really transformative thing in itself, just being able to flip that lens that we've been so socialized into.”
- “What we've been talking about though is, the flipping of the lens and using a teachable moments so that you can make people aware. You know like me, growing up, I had no idea how privileged I was and then, you know, all the sudden being exposed into a world that didn't, you know, I didn't realize those things existed.
- “I don’t think you could have listened to her and not changed”
- “It is uncomfortable at times, because you don’t know where you are going to be because you are open more, you are more open.”
- “I notice those things now which I don't think I would have noticed before.”
- “I am aware now, I listen differently to people’s conversations.”
- “I think [AOETA] has changed my thinking a lot in that respect and then also in regards to myself considering more about how I’m reflecting on others.”
- “It’s like a whole other language.”

Those who had more experience with anti-oppressive education also valued anti-oppressive education because it provided a lens to see oppression differently. They had been using this lens for a longer time and wanted those new to anti-oppressive education to understand anti-oppressive education in this way. They stated that having a new lens was important to the process, not the possession of new tools within an old paradigm. As one participant said, “It's a lens...but a tool is not what I see it as.” This same participant had said in the first focus group,

I think that as you internalize these ideas it begins to come naturally that you will act. You don't compartmentalize it as "I'm taking time to do this," but you are simply responding as a human being because that's who you've become. And that's a pretty transformative piece, but I think that's the hope as educators, as activists, that that's what will happen and it won't become more work.

Those more experienced with anti-oppressive education were looking at the transformative potential of anti-oppressive education. For example, one experienced participant said, "as you internalize these ideas it begins to come naturally that you will act." He had recognized and valued this change as "a pretty transformative piece." This participant and the others more experienced with anti-oppressive education were aware of their perspective transformation and recognized its value for those new to anti-oppressive education.

Brookfield's (2005) description of transformative learning, connected to the critical social perspective, not only includes a perspective change but also engaged activism. In this study I chose to interview the participants three months following their participation in AOETA to explore with them how any potential changes they may have experienced were manifesting themselves in their personal and professional lives. During the second interviews it appeared that the participants were seeing the world through a different lens that was impacting on their interactions with others.

From the critical social perspective, it is not possible to be certain whether participants' became activists "authentically grounded in critical reflection" (Brookfield, 2005, p. 49) However, the students were becoming engaged in doing differently and all but one participant was involved, in varying degrees, with their activism projects. Of greater interest was that all but one participant new to anti-oppressive education was engaging differently with their friends, family, colleagues, and students in ways that were

anti-oppressive. Even the participant who did not do anything with her activism project indicated that she was “on the right track” to becoming an anti-oppressive educator.

All four participants who were more experienced with anti-oppressive education indicated that their thinking had been significantly affected by personal experiences and anti-oppressive education that had occurred earlier. These changes had given them a new way of seeing oppression and a strong desire to become active in creating social change. For these participants, critical reflection was about “ideological critique” and provided them with a sense of agency, “to transform society and their own reality” (Taylor, 2009, p. 5).

The inclusive dimension worked as a familiar place for participants to think about how to provide education for and about the other, but without critique the concepts were not disorienting. However, a poststructural dimension was a catalyst for their transformative learning. A poststructural dimension provided new opportunities for students to encounter disorienting dilemmas, as they learned about the social construction of identity, power and knowledge. Such ideas lay the foundation for disorienting dilemmas and the critical reflection that followed. The poststructural dimension also moved the conversation about inequity beyond social structures to locate inequity within the socially constructed individual in a way that did not pathologize them. It is such critical self-reflection that was the impetus for their transformative learning (Kreber, 2012; Mezirow, 2000; Taylor, 2009).

The language and ideas used in anti-oppressive education serve the purpose of providing students a way of seeing social construction in a new way that is potentially disorienting and productive for transformative learning. However, the language and the

desire of those more familiar to anti-oppressive education may have created “two camps” – those familiar and those new to anti-oppressive education, with the conceptual differences found in anti-oppressive creating the separation. However, those with more experience were interested in assisting those new to anti-oppressive education and engaged in conversations to promote dialogue and authentic relationships. Kincheloe (2008) reminds anti-oppressive educators to use language that is accessible so as not to alienate those who might otherwise become involved in anti-oppressive education.

The poststructural dimension provides an alternate view of how oppression continues to be maintained in society. However, because the concepts are quite different from the participants’ previous learning, it is important to remember that students may find it challenging to convey poststructural concepts without additional education and a community of practice. The four participants who were more experienced actively sought further opportunities in higher education to “trouble normal.”

Not having a formal mechanism to stay connected to anti-oppressive education beyond the course means that participants are not around a community of practice. It also means that there aren’t opportunities to dialogue with others who have similar training. This may cause students to return to the *status quo* when they return to their schools and lives. There is a lot of pressure on participants to be “normal” and traditionally “good” teachers upon their return to schools. This makes it difficult to sustain anti-oppressive work without a community of like-minded individuals who are also “troubling normal,” not to mention those who may have found complex forms of resistance to enacting change. For example, several participants cited coming into a new or potentially unreceptive teaching environment as reasons not to enact anti-oppressive education.

Another participant indicated that it would be difficult to lead his teaching staff because his staff had not participated in a course about anti-oppressive education. As well, there is still the possibility that participants were still engaged in, or working through, discourses of resistance, of which they were unaware.

One participant commented that it would be virtually impossible to use the same language with peers at work to mobilize them to change. The language is too different and uncommon. Another participant spoke to the challenges in using the language. She wanted to be able to use the language as a teacher in class but was not confident enough. This also speaks to the value of having a community of practice. The community of practice could help develop voice, and be a place for participants to continue to critically reflect back on their statements through dialogue.

Kumashiro (2000b) reminds us that learning is not a linear process with a fixed destination in mind, and that teachers need to give up the notion that they can determine what students will learn. All of the students in the course valued what they had learned, either about anti-oppressive education directly, or about the process of being a part of the class. Parkes, Gore, Ellsworth (2010) remind us that a poststructural dimension is to seek practices that lead to freedom, including our own. One student summed up this position as an anti-oppressive educator at the end of her journal:

Am I feeling weighted? Absolutely not! I am feeling invigorated and activated. I am only starting my journey but I know I am not alone. I have no preconceived notion of where I'm going, only hoping to understand myself deeper and find my place as an ally.

Chapter 5 provided a discussion of the findings by examining the research questions in detail and relating the findings to current discourses in this area. Chapter 6

makes recommendations for research, theory and practice. Chapter 6 finishes with a final reflection about being an ally and activist.

Chapter 6: Recommendations

The final chapter of *Shifting Our Focus: Teacher Transformation through Anti-oppressive Education* summarizes the findings that emerged in this study and reflects on the research methods used. As a participant observer in AOETA, the chapter begins with my personal reflection on anti-oppressive education. This chapter then discusses the implications of this study for theory and practice. As well, research questions that could be explored further are presented. Chapter 6 concludes with a final reflection about being an ally and activist.

The study in retrospect

Repositioning Myself

I have learned so much by studying anti-oppressive education. One of the basic realizations I have made is that there is a need to redistribute wealth and power. The disparity between the rich and poor continues to grow. Destabilizing the status quo is an enormous and ongoing challenge. That said it is in this regard that I believe I can make a difference by naming inequities and listening to those who are marginalized. I can do this as an activist in my work as a teacher-educator in a university setting, as well as in the community in which I live.

Many of us take for granted how we have come to know our beliefs, values and assumptions about the world in which we live and interact. As well, some individuals seem more strongly attached to their beliefs, values and assumptions than others. But for the most part we do not automatically inspect and challenge our own beliefs, values and assumptions without prompting. Our beliefs, values and assumptions make (common) sense to us and, for the most part, we accept them as true. Doing so usually does not lead

us to difficulties but indeed reinforces our socially constructed role in our socially constructed world.

However, our basic assumptions about knowledge, and the way that we privilege our way of thinking over Others' ways of thinking, impact the value we give to various identities. As well, because oppression is complicated and situated, people can identify as privileged and oppressed within different situations and contexts, which affects whether they will even see themselves or the Other as disadvantaged or oppressed. Again, we often do not trouble this privileging of certain ways of being as we navigate our way through life, unless we find ourselves marginalized and thus become very aware of oppression. We need to teach students to examine deeply held beliefs, values and assumptions so that they can move beyond the repetition of certain ideas and conversations that maintain certain ways of being (identities) as privileged. Not examining our own beliefs, values and assumptions leads to thinking that oppression is natural, normal and, to some degree, deserved. We need to understand that oppression is socially constructed and historically situated and some groups have been, and continue to be, oppressed.

Over time, certain groups have created and benefited from a system whereby some groups dominate over other groups. These are the "ossified systems of dominance" that Foucault (1980) describes. Often, those new to anti-oppressive education take this entrenched privileging of certain kinds of difference in our institutional practices as natural, normal and even deserved, which keeps oppression intact in society. Those new to anti-oppressive education may also believe that "the system is the problem," and it isn't until people realize that we are the system, and that in order to change the system we

need to change ourselves, that things can begin to happen. However, thinking differently does not necessarily lead to change. It's when people begin to dialogue and take action that real change can happen.

Personal thoughts about research and process

One of the most difficult challenges I found conducting the present research was to find a way to encapsulate anti-oppressive education in what is a large, diverse and contested research area. Each scholar seems to have a distinct perspective, and reconciling these perspectives into a cohesive literature review was not easy. However, I chose to focus this broad literature in order to develop a conceptual and analytic framework. I chose to use Kumashiro's interpretation of anti-oppressive education because it brought together the many disparate elements of anti-oppressive education and the approaches articulated by Kumashiro (2000b) connect to the process of transformative learning.

Although this study is about understanding the transformative learning experiences of those engaged in learning about anti-oppressive education, I also wanted to explore in more depth the way Kumashiro represented anti-oppressive education. I strongly relied on Kumashiro's interpretation of anti-oppressive education for this dissertation because he sought to work "toward a theory of anti-oppressive education." I could find no other writer who connected the disparate approaches of anti-oppressive education together as well as he had. Kumashiro identified four approaches to anti-oppressive education. I wanted to see if these approaches could form a way to speak about what the participants experienced, as well as whether the participants had a transformative learning experience.

Reflections on the Research Questions

There was one fundamental research question in this study: “What are students’ experiences of transformation in a classroom focused on anti-oppressive education?” The question was examined by talking to participants about their experiences in the course and the ideas they were learning. I wanted to know how participants made sense of it all. The second aspect was about understanding if, and how, the course was changing the participants’ thinking and doing. This second aspect of the research was developed using transformative learning theory.

The two major perspectives within transformative learning theory are the constructivist and humanist perspective that focuses on personal growth that is transformative, and the critical social perspective that focuses on individual *and* social transformation. The first perspective emphasizes Mezirow’s work and has the individual as the unit of analysis and the second perspective emphasizes Freirian pedagogy and focuses on critical reflection and ideology critique (Brookfield, 2000, 2005; Taylor, 2009). There is an integration of these two perspectives within this dissertation, which is becoming more popular in the transformative learning literature (Tisdell, 2012). These two perspectives were woven together in the analysis of the interviews.

The inclusive, critical, and poststructural dimensions that I described in the literature review informed the thematic analysis. Inclusive and poststructural dimensions were difficult to discuss for different reasons. The most difficult to apply and discuss was poststructuralism as it is framed in a very different way to the humanistic psychology that has been my common sense foundation for understanding identity. The inclusive

approach was also difficult to express because of its reliance on naming and understanding difference in modern terms.

Part of this research was about understanding if, and how, the three theoretical dimensions of anti-oppressive education that I deemed crucial to anti-oppressive education (Inclusive, Critical and Poststructural dimensions) worked to change the participants thinking. The participants' disorienting dilemmas and critical self-reflection of assumptions were the impetus for perspective change, whereas the poststructural dimension provided a lens to see and understand inequity anew. The participants' growing awareness of socially constructed inequity, and recognizing their implication in maintaining inequity, created emotional crises and disorienting dilemmas as a function of their subjective reframing. The inclusive dimension was comfortable and gave the students a starting place to talk about inequity. However, without critical reflection, there wouldn't be a perspective transformation. Critique led participants to their own critical self-reflection of assumptions and to perspective transformation. Learning about the social construction of identity, power and knowledge was an important aspect of participants experience in AOETA, as it provided a way for students to understand their implication in maintaining inequity and provided the impetus for participants to choose to become activists.

Anti-oppressive education is largely a classroom-based approach that focuses on illuminating inequity that moves pedagogues to action. The learner experiences crisis and discomfort that is productive for transformative learning that leads to a perspective transformation (Brookfield, 2005; Mezirow, 2000; Taylor, 2009). This research supports Kumashiro's (2000a) assertion that "education (especially the process of learning

something that tells us that the very ways in which we think and do things is not only wrong but also harmful) can be a very discomfoting process” (para. 5). The findings of this study also concur with Kumashiro’s assertion that when content is too controversial or too troubling of the norm the result may not be disruption, but disengagement and resistance. The learning may be blocked through the emotional processes of denial and anger. As Kumashiro (2000a) notes, what students need at this point is

a therapeutic activity in which they could work through their crisis. Leading such an activity required that I not be detached, impersonal, objective. Like my students, I needed to put myself into the lesson, to be attached, to listen to them, to share my own stories, and to address their needs. (para. 7)

One emergent and unanticipated factor was the importance of a holistic learning environment (Taylor, 2009), which is based on a high quality of instruction and an ethic of care to assist students to feel safe. A high quality of instruction ensured that students were engaged in the learning and were invested in understanding the concepts, and were not frustrated by the complex and varied theories that contribute to anti-oppressive education. Providing an ethic of care was a substantive aspect of AOETA that was as critical to the perspective transformations of the participants as was the content and theory.

The constructivist and humanist perspective together with the critical social perspective, found within transformative learning theory, guided the examination of the participants’ discussion about their experiences to determine whether and how they were transformative. All participants new to anti-oppressive education indicated that they had a new perspective as a result of learning about anti-oppressive education and were beginning to see themselves as activists. According to the participants in this study, it was the critical self-reflection of assumptions that had the greatest impact to creating

perspective transformations. This subjective reframing created humility, which was significant for participants. Thus, it was understood by them to be an important part of their journey to become anti-oppressive educators. A participant, who self identifies as Aboriginal, gained a new perspective and appreciated the new understanding through subjective reframing, as well as by learning about the social constructions of oppression.

Those who were more experienced with anti-oppressive education had changed their perspective prior to the course, but were eager to learn more and provided peer support for participants new to anti-oppressive education. These participants were not particularly troubled during AOETA, as they had largely worked through their tension and discomfort in previous anti-oppressive education and workshops. These participants were engaged as activists beyond their course-required activism projects and were a support to students who were new to anti-oppressive education. However, there were some frustrations with wanting those new to anti-oppressive education to get going with their journey, recognizing that “people are literally dying” because those who have power are afforded the luxury of time for change. All participants discussed how they had learned new concepts that would support them in their role as educators, and all participants valued the course. Several participants with more knowledge about anti-oppressive education spoke to the value of having conversations in groups with colleagues with varying degrees of knowledge about anti-oppressive education due to the nature of reciprocity in this constructivist context.

The modern institution of education, in addition to participants’ desires to be a “good teacher” and not disruptive of the status quo, were factors that made it more difficult to engage in anti-oppressive activism once participants returned to their schools.

The role that community plays in sustaining anti-oppressive education is a substantive aspect of maintaining anti-oppressive education outside of the academy. A sense of community appeared to be important for students to connect with others who have a common understanding of anti-oppressive education and a commitment to social action. As well, the complex language and paradigmatic difference of the poststructural dimension present in AOETA, compared to the pervasive and “common sense” reality of the modern and essentialist perspectives found in schools, seems to necessitate providing a community of practice to sustain the action of anti-oppressive education. Given the dominant discourses and systems of power surrounding the participants as they returned to their educational work settings, a community of support would be helpful to provide a place and space to provide dialogue and reflection in order to produce action.

Reflections on the Research Methods

The methodology applied to this case provided a lot of useful information and was an excellent means and starting point to explore anti-oppressive education *in situ*. Stake (1995) reminds us that qualitative research, because it is situated and often focused on small populations, is not intended to support broad generalizations. This is important to keep in mind when one considers the findings of the present study. Overall, the methodology strongly supported the undertaking of this study. However, in hindsight, there were several aspects of the methodology that are important to reflect upon at the conclusion of the study.

One potential methodological problem during the research process was to include, in the second focus group, a participant who had attended class at the beginning of the course but was not currently taking the course. However, she had been a student in the

course on two previous occasions and was in the Summer Institute taking another class in the afternoon. She provided a historical context for me but there was a risk that her participation in the second focus group could bias the contributions of the other participants.

Another factor was my role as participant observer in the class. There are ethical implications of being a participant observer. On one hand, I attempted to work alongside the students as a member of the class. On the other hand, I kept notes about the class and observations that seemed relevant to my research. I occupied a different space than the other students and I never spoke out in class. I thus occupied an in-between space where I wasn't a faculty member but students saw me as different from them. For example, I was asked on at least five occasions to help answer questions about using citations in APA style. Also, several students who were seeking advice and guidance for their activism projects solicited my input. So the participant observer role proved a very difficult one to navigate and I needed to continually reflect, not only on the content of AOETA, but also upon my role in it. I tried to be compassionate and understanding of the participants in this research, but also cognizant of where I was (during the course) and on my own journey with anti-oppressive education. I also needed to be cautious not to be so steeped in what the participants were saying and living that I was still able to critically analyze the data. While it is difficult to discern whether these two factors had a substantive impact on the results of the study, I believe they both need to be declared and discussed.

One of the problems that arose during the analysis was regarding determining with confidence whether transformative learning experiences had taken place. It must be noted that it can only be suggested that transformative learning took place from the

constructivist and humanist perspective, as I could only interpret through the interviews the degree to which the participants thinking had changed. As well, using the activism project as a substantial means to detect engaged activism proved both helpful and problematic. The activism project was an easy aspect to discuss and follow but, because there were a number of other ways to engage in activism, participants could be engaged in social transformation that would extend beyond the projects they conceived during class.

Implications for Theory

From the constructivist and humanist perspective of transformative learning theory, the results of the present study suggest that anti-oppressive education provided a means for perspective transformation for those participants new to anti-oppressive education, primarily through the critical self-reflection of assumptions. This course shifted the focus of participants by making them more aware of inequity and investing them in activism.

From the critical social perspective, there was support to conclude that all but one participant new to anti-oppressive education was beginning to engage in activism. As well, all those with more experience in anti-oppressive education were engaging in activism beyond their activism project. However, it was not really possible to know whether participants' had become activists that were "authentically grounded in critical reflection" (Brookfield, 2005, p. 49). Several participants had followed through with their activism projects to completion. Other participants had either needed more information or needed to enact them at a later date, or had changed their project focus substantially. It is worth suggesting that AOETA did lay the seed of activism for participants new to anti-

oppressive education and that activism was growing at different rates and in different ways for participants new to anti-oppressive education. Activism was fostered in those more knowledgeable about anti-oppressive education in AOETA.

Transformative learning theory provided a framework for this research and proved a successful means by which to understand the personal change of participants through the constructivist and humanist perspective. However, it was difficult to operationalize the critical social perspective because it was not really possible to be certain whether the participants desire was to take action toward social change that was authentically grounded in critical reflection (Brookfield, 2005). Transformative learning theory as articulated by Mezirow was quite beneficial because it is based on adult learning theory and connects well to adult learning in a classroom setting. Although anchored in humanism, transformative learning theory did provide a means by which to speak about all aspects of this research. However, from an epistemological standpoint, it is still somewhat disingenuous to report about the poststructural dimension of anti-oppressive education through transformative learning theory. This tension serves as notice that the modern theory of transformative learning theory needs to be “troubled.” Given that poststructuralism is linked to pedagogy aimed toward the practice of freedom (Parkes, Gore, Ellsworth, 2010), I suggest that there is also a place within transformative learning theory to learn from a poststructural epistemology.

The participants reported that the holistic learning environment and opportunities for the development of authentic relationships, that also provided an ethic of care, created a safe space for students to experience tension and discomfort that were integral to the participants’ perspective transformation. As well, the importance of having a high quality

of instruction was emphasized by the participants as affecting their confidence in the process and products of learning, as well as their desire to trouble their taken-for-granted knowledge. Participants were able to grasp the concept of the social construction of identity, power and knowledge. This may be because, as educators, they came to AOETA with an understanding of constructivism, a concept that is taught in detail in most teacher education programs (Woolfolk, Winne & Perry, 2006). For participants, understanding the social construction of identity played a significant role in how they positioned themselves in relation to oppression in such a way that they were not constructed as flawed or bad (Montgomery, 2013). Without the poststructural dimension, participants may not have been willing to open themselves up to the freedom that is a part of unlearning and being aware of how one is being inscribed (Parkes, Gore, Ellsworth, 2010).

Those more experienced with anti-oppressive education had the capacity to speak through the theory of anti-oppressive education in greater detail and with more confidence. Because of the considerable personal change they were experiencing, those new to anti-oppressive education were engaged in subjective reframing and were less engaged in learning how to teach in anti-oppressive ways. This is congruent with Curry-Stevens (2007) two-stage process of becoming an anti-oppressive educator. The participants new to anti-oppressive education were primarily involved in the confidence-shaking process as they were involved in subjective reframing that would lead to their perspective transformation. Although participants learned confidence-building skills during the course, those new to anti-oppressive education were at different locations in their journey to become anti-oppressive educators during the course. However, by the end

of the course, there was much energy and positivity toward the confidence-building phase.

Participants acknowledged the challenge and discomfort they felt introducing what they had learned upon their return to their homeschools. This tension may stem from the participants' re-immersion in modern educational approaches that are both dominant and ossified in the educational systems they returned to. There was epistemic tension between teaching using the inclusive dimension, and the critical and poststructural dimensions. When teachers returned to their home schools they were aware that much of what we do for the Other lies in the inclusive dimension, but in order to change the status quo, we need to educate using the critical and poststructural dimensions. Not only were participants becoming aware of the ways in which the schools were unsupportive of the Other, they were now a part of a potentially marginalizing discourse. As Kumashiro (2012) reminds us, these teachers, because they are challenging the status quo and are teaching in subversive ways, run the risk of being labeled as "bad teachers." Therefore, educational psychology for pre-service teachers and graduate students needs to include discussions about the inclusive, critical, and poststructural dimensions in order to reframe the dialogue and create a new dominant discourse that is more supportive to teachers in the field and more amenable to equity.

Implications for Practice

There is no question that this course, even though it was emotionally discomfiting and challenging, was enjoyed and valued by participants, and led to the perspective transformation of participants new to anti-oppressive education. This research endorses the practices used in this course as they proved to be transformative for

participants. For those participants more knowledgeable about anti-oppressive education, this course validated their commitment and desire to be activists and gave them a community of practice. Participants more knowledgeable about anti-oppressive education, with one exception, were able to recognize and use poststructural terminology in such a way that it created the freedom to embrace change and anti-oppressive education. It is important to recognize the progressive dimensions and effects of this course on participants, while also acknowledging that the subtle complex ways in which oppression works necessarily means that participants come away from the course as complicit in perpetuation of oppression (despite whatever transformation they experienced). Therefore, one of the conclusions is that more courses such as this are needed to create opportunities for students to examine their on-going hegemonic meaning-making and socialization processes, but also to teach them how to engage in anti-oppressive education at a deeper level as part of their ongoing practice as educators.

Personal support for participants

Several participants spoke to the need to provide a psychological and therapeutic aspect to anti-oppressive education because of how anti-oppressive education works to make visible our personal implication in oppression. Some newcomers to anti-oppressive education were considerably distressed and overwhelmed by their newfound insights and may have benefited from talking to a trained counsellor. Thus, one of the recommendations of this study is that counselling support be made directly available to participants to support their learning. Personal counselling is a compulsory aspect of a number of university programs oriented towards self-work and is often made available to students to help them learn to be self-reflective and to process their issues and

disorienting dilemmas (Seligman & Reichenberg, 2010). It would seem appropriate to advance this ethic of care in anti-oppressive education. This would recognize the personal discomfort students' encounter when they understand their own implication in oppression and work to address it. As well, part of the counselling could support students as they take action in the world (Seligman & Reichenberg, 2010).

Course within a course

Participants expressed that it was very beneficial to their learning and facilitated perspective transformation to do group work with colleagues of varying degrees of familiarity with key course concepts. However, participants explained that group work required patience on the part of those more experienced and courage of those new to anti-oppressive education. The different levels of knowledge available within the class helped provide all students with a broad range of perspectives. For those students who had more experience with anti-oppressive education, time with students less experienced helped develop their ability to communicate in plain language about the tenets of anti-oppressive education. Participants also expressed the need to continue to challenge the *status quo* in the classroom. Having students involved in mixed ability groupings was beneficial because those who had different degrees of knowledge about anti-oppressive education were able to dialogue together. This dialogue assisted those who were less familiar with the concepts of anti-oppressive education because they were able to question and to discuss, which helped them make sense of what they were experiencing and learning.

One potentially problematic aspect of their learning process and perspective transformation was that the course was primarily focused on the application of anti-oppressive education. What this means is that students new to anti-oppressive education

were so invested in their own process of subjective reframing that they were not able to readily connect with the complexity of how to put anti-oppressive education into practice. Based on the experiences of the participants in this study, it would appear that becoming an anti-oppressive educator is a two-stage process as articulated by Curry-Stevens (2007). As previously discussed, Curry-Stevens (2007) contends there is a confidence-shaking process that is followed by a confidence-building process. In the former, the individuals develop an awareness of oppression, located themselves within it, and identify their own place of privilege. In the latter, individuals learn to intervene, plan for future action, and find a sustaining community of support. In addition to the perspective transformation of the participants, this two-stage process was evidenced in the experiences of the participants in the present study. Those participants less experienced in anti-oppressive education were experiencing the confidence-shaking process while those more experienced in anti-oppressive education expressed a desire to intervene and plan for future actions. Thus, a person first needs to identify their implication in oppression through the critical self-reflection of assumptions, work through the subsequent tension and discomfort, and experience a perspective transformation, or what one participant referred to as “flipping the lens.” Then, when in the confidence-building stage, they are in a space where they can more readily learn how to intervene and plan as anti-oppressive educators.

Participants who had more experience with anti-oppressive education benefited from the experience of being in the class and learning the process of teaching anti-oppressive education more deeply. These participants were not only aware of the content of the material the instructor was asking them to engage with, but also the anti-oppressive

education processes she was modeling. Those new to anti-oppressive education benefited from contact with those more experienced with anti-oppressive education. Therefore, it may be advantageous to have a concurrent course that provides a mentorship process to newcomers to anti-oppressive education that is specifically intended to promote the instructional practices and theoretical components of teaching anti-oppressive education. This second course could emphasize the confidence-building stage and involve a more in depth examination of the processes and the poststructural dimension of anti-oppressive education.

In the second course opportunities could be provided for the students to learn the deeper concepts associated with anti-oppressive education so that they can better engage in praxis and be mentors to the newcomer students. One of the most fundamental challenges in anti-oppressive education appears to be the tension between the predominantly inclusive dimension found in many school systems and the need for critical and poststructural dimensions to fully engage in anti-oppressive education. This tension could be an important topic of discussion for the mentor-mentee pairs.

Extensions

- In order for more substantive change to occur, there could be a centre, at an institutional level, that provides a place and space for those who identify as anti-oppressive educators to maintain a sense of community. This could be a virtual community that has a professor or graduate student facilitator to guide discussions and orient collaborative support amongst participants.

- Although no participant in this research discussed social networking, the Ning, a social network web tool, would be an example of a point for nurturing a community of practice network established at the institute. This tool was used during the institute and could provide an informal means for students to connect and interact with those engaged in anti-oppressive education. It could also be used to facilitate developing a community of practice for knowledge mobilization extending to participant learning after the course.
- Participants spoke of the challenges they anticipated introducing language and concepts that are not a part of the dominant ideology in many schools. Such language and concepts may be foreign to their colleagues and may have varied meanings for them. In some instances, this means that without being able to speak about why something is oppressive in a language that can be understood by one's school colleagues, graduates of AOETA may be silent and not challenge the dominant ideology when they return to their home school setting. In fact, this is what several participants indicated during the second interview that occurred once they were back in their schools. There seems to be a disconnect between what teachers and administrators are learning in higher education about how to teach in anti-oppressive ways and their capacity to engage in those practices once they enter the field. Therefore, I suggest that if this is not already the case, it is necessary to foster greater collaboration between faculties of education and school divisions/First Nations within Saskatchewan in order

to build capacity to do anti-oppressive education. Fostering such an initiative will provide support to those who are involved in anti-oppressive education and, more importantly, lessen the achievement gap for those students who endure inequity in schools.

- Becoming an Anti-oppressive educator is a process that requires significant and sustained time, reflection, and personal change that is unlikely to occur in a brief workshop. In AOETA there was time for the instructor to establish authentic relationships with students within a holistic environment. This facilitated willingness in the students to be discomforted, take risks, and explore their own beliefs, values and assumptions. School boards seeking to engage in anti-oppressive education would thus need to ensure that the necessary time and environment was provided.
- It may be of value to develop a graduate degree in Anti-oppressive education that could explore the intersections of difference as well as the challenging nuances of anti-oppressive education over time and explore a variety of educational applications (e.g. curricular, school administration).

Implications for Further Research

I propose three extensions of this research. The first is to continue this study and gather longitudinal information about the participants to ascertain the representativeness of the present findings. The second proposed extension would be similar in form to the present study but the analysis would be conducted using discourse analysis in order to better understand the power relations and individual resistance at work amongst

participants engaged in learning anti-oppressive education. A third study would examine, through the theoretical lens of white privilege, the thoughts and feelings expressed by participants as they learn anti-oppressive education.

Longitudinal Study

One of the elements missing in this research, except that which was gained from one participant, is longitudinal information. Another study could extend what has been gained from this study by following up with participants of this course over a number of years to learn if and how they are continuing to think about and be engaged in anti-oppressive education. Specifically, the proposed new study would explore if and how those who were new to anti-oppressive education in the present research have taken up the critical social perspective of transformative learning theory and are working as activists for social transformation. As well, it would be of interest to learn about the potential challenges and successes such new anti-oppressive educators experience on their journey.

Future study could also examine how anti-oppressive educators engage in an anti-oppressive education in the field, given the substantive challenges of doing anti-oppressive education in a predominantly modern neoliberal society. For example, research could be done in a school where the administrator had taken AOETA and had made a decision to foster anti-oppressive education within their school. As a component of this research, it would be valuable to learn about how anti-oppressive educators maintain their psychological health, make sense of the perspectives of anti-oppressive education, and maintain a connection to a community of practice interested in social justice work.

Another aspect for further investigation would be to examine how senior administrators, teachers and parents, may negatively perceive anti-oppressive education, with its focus on the minoritized, because it disrupts the familiar *status quo*. In the present study, a concern articulated by participants was that they may be perceived as ‘going against the grain’ when they returned to teaching and attempted to put into practice what they had learned in AOETA. Is there a safe space in our current educational system for teachers to be subversive, and to not always be the traditionally defined “good teacher,” but instead to contest knowledge within our current neoliberal education environment?

Discourse Analysis

Another possible way of interacting with the data collected in the present study would be discourse analysis. Such analysis may be more congruent with poststructural aspects of anti-oppressive education. Poststructural deconstructive approaches seek to understand relations of power in communication that constitute and construct identity. In order to examine how teachers are changing from a transformative learning perspective, I conducted a thematic analysis. However, the data from the present study could also be analyzed in future using the text as the object of analysis instead of as proxy for experience as was done in the present study. Future research could involve a discourse analysis along the lines of exploring the multiple intersections of difference. Discourse analysis would be an interesting approach to examine implementing anti-oppressive education in a school setting.

White Privilege as Theoretical Framework

While I did analyze the participants' reactions to concepts of white privilege introduced in AOETA, this was a very modest introduction to this literature because examining white privilege was not the overall intent of the study. However, the current transcripts could be re-analyzed, through the growing body of literature that informs white privilege, to examine ways participants perform whiteness in a course focused on troubling, among other things, this "essence." It would be particularly interesting to examine how whiteness operates below the participants' level of consciousness and how white privilege works to maintain the *status quo* of white dominance.

Final Reflection

My focus has also shifted as a result of AOETA. I have found myself constantly thinking about and wanting to be more of an activist. I have been emotionally entwined in trying to understand my own implication in oppression as a result of my learning and have found that the only way to feel better about this is to take action in the world. I also find myself more cognizant of my own previously hidden beliefs, values and assumptions towards those who I identify as Other. Unlearning is a challenging and lifelong process. It is no surprise that I have been searching for a community of anti-oppressive educators close to home where I can find support.

I have realized how difficult it is to be an activist as this is seen to be dissident to the established norms of society, and how one can seem like a heretic, when the message is seen to be counter to prevalent common sense and established power. That being said, I have found myself exploring safe places and spaces in which to speak about anti-oppressive education. In my teaching, I stress the importance of teaching critically and

continuing to engage in critical self-reflection. As well, I continue to educate pre-service teachers about anti-oppressive education through introductory workshops in our faculty of education. My focus has shifted away from the inclusive dimension toward critical and poststructural dimensions. Like the participants in the study, I am engaged in an ongoing process of self-development as I move towards being an effective anti-oppressive educator.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Invitation Letter for Participants



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Mr. Chris Brown
#207 Education Building
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Brandon, MB R7A 6A9

June 1, 2010

Dear registered student in *EC&I 822 Anti-Oppressive Education and Teacher Activism*,

I am very pleased to write today to invite you to participate in a study titled ***Teacher Transformation through Anti-Oppressive Education***. The purpose of this study is to learn about the experiences of teachers who are enrolled in anti-oppressive education during the Summer Institute in general and during *EC&I 822 Anti-Oppressive Education and Teacher Activism* in particular.

Your participation in this project is completely voluntary and is in no way linked to your courses or marks. Your participation in this study will not be disclosed to any of your instructors at any time. As well as providing a better understanding for future anti-oppressive education, benefits of participating in this study will lead to a more focused opportunity to dialogue and discuss your perspectives and growth in this area. Participating in this study should also assist you in being able to engage in further and more detailed discussions about social justice and activism.

Please read the enclosed consent form to learn about the study in more detail. If you are willing to participate, sign both copies, and keep one copy for your records. The other copy is to indicate your willingness to participate in the study, and is for my records. I have enclosed a return envelope that is addressed and stamped for your convenience. You can either send the signed letter in the pre-addressed and stamped envelope, or you may bring the consent form with you to the first class. If you plan to bring the signed consent form to class, I would ask that you please let me know by e-mailing me at BrownC@BrandonU.ca so that I can plan for your participation.

I am sincerely grateful for your willingness to participate. As a student myself, I realize the significance of your commitment of time and effort during your very busy summer schedule. I thank you in advance and I look forward to meeting with you on July 5, 2010 to discuss the study in more detail.

Sincerely,

Chris Brown, Ph.D. Cand.

cc. Dr. Carlson Berg (Advisor)

Appendix B: Consent form for Participants



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Consent Form

Title: Teacher Transformation through Anti-Oppressive Education

Introduction: As a function of my doctoral studies at the University of Regina and acting as the principal researcher, I would like to study how teachers' thinking is being changed as a result of what they are learning about anti-oppressive education during the Summer Institute in general and during *EC&I 822 Anti-Oppressive Education and Teacher Activism* in particular. I would like to use this research for my doctoral work and publish the aggregated data in my dissertation. The study in which I am asking you to participate is aimed at studying the process of teacher change as teachers are exposed to formal education that examines the critical nature of the teaching and learning environment in which they teach.

Procedure: I'm asking you to participate in a study I am conducting for my doctorate. Your participation would be greatly appreciated. I am asking that you participate in the following aspects of the research:

- Participate in two focus group sessions with other participants who have agreed to participate in the study, one at the beginning and one at the end of the Summer Institute (2010). The focus group sessions will be up to 1 hour in length and will be recorded and transcribed. In the groups we will discuss your assumptions about the course before it begins and at its conclusion. **Lunch will be provided for everyone on the first day of class (July 5, 2010) to discuss this research opportunity and to conduct the first focus group for those who have indicated their willingness to participate.**
- A self-assessment journal is a part of the course expectations for EC&I 822. The self-assessment journal is a space for you to record your thoughts and reflections about the course. I would like your permission to view your self-assessment journal at the conclusion of the course. You may wish to share the entire journal or photocopy only certain parts of it. A third option is for you to keep a separate running log of your personal reflections throughout the three weeks of the course (15 minutes per day).
- Participate in a personal interview at some point throughout the three-week duration of the course AND in October (30-60 minutes).
- As well, I will also be attending the course as a participant-observer in order to collect information about the interactions taking place in the course and to record your plans for critical activism.

Risks and Benefits: There are no known risks involved in the study. The only cost to you will be the time commitment. The benefit of this research is that it will help us understand how educators are impacted by anti-oppressive education. A secondary benefit is that it will provide feedback so that graduate courses, such as this one, can be provided in a way which optimally affects those in attendance. Therefore, there is a

benefit to teachers in the field who will, in the future, be taking courses focused upon anti-oppressive education.

Research Personnel: Any information derived from your participation in the study will be kept confidential by the researcher and we request that the participants do the same. Pseudonyms will be used during focus groups and any identifying information given by participants will be altered or deleted in order to ensure confidentiality and anonymity. The recordings and transcribed focus group sessions and interviews, and personal reflections will be stored anonymously and confidentially. Only group results or anonymous codes will be presented in my dissertation and in any subsequent publications.

Voluntary Participation: Participation in this project is completely voluntary. As a voluntary participant, you may decline participation or withdraw at any time without your choice affecting your current or future academic situation at the University. This research is in no way linked to your courses or marks. Whether you are participating or not participating in this research will not be disclosed to any of your instructors at any time.

Ethics approval: This project was approved by the Research Ethics Board, University Regina and Brandon University. If you have any questions or concerns about your rights or treatment as a research participant, you may contact the Chair of the University Research Ethics Board at the University of Regina at 306.585.4775 or by e-mail at Research.ethics@uregina.ca, or the Coordinator of Research Services at Brandon University at 204.727.7445 or by e-mail at MurkinK@brandonu.ca. You may also contact my Doctoral Supervisor, Dr. Laurie Carlson Berg, at 1.306.585.4524 or Laurie.Carlson.Berg@uregina.ca. If you have any questions for me (Chris Brown) about the research, I may be reached at 204.727.9614 or by e-mail at BrownC@BrandonU.ca.

Consent Statement

Having read the above, I agree to participate in this study and to consent to the above. Moreover, I agree not to disclose any information (discussed in the groups) that could be linked to any specific individual. I will also not disclose any identifying information about other members of the group. Finally, I acknowledge that I have received a copy of this form.

Signature of participant

Signature of investigator

Date

Your participation in this study is sincerely appreciated.

Appendix C: Consent form For Faculty Instructor

July 4, 2010

[ED249, Education Building
University of Regina
Regina, SK S4S 0A2

Dear Dr. xxxxx xxxxxx

As you know, you and other faculty from the Centre for Social Justice & Anti-Oppressive Education are holding the bi-annual Summer Institute for graduate students in July of 2010 at the University of Regina. The Summer Institute is fundamentally for teachers who seek to challenge the issue of inequality in schools. This institute provides a wonderful venue by which to understand how anti-oppressive teaching transforms teachers. Therefore, I am writing for permission to conduct a study with students in your Anti-Oppressive Education class this summer. I am also asking your permission to take field notes in your class for the purpose of studying the pedagogy and praxis of providing anti-oppressive education to the post-secondary students enrolled in your class. Participation in this project is completely voluntary. As a voluntary participant, you may decline participation or withdraw at any time without your choice affecting your current or future academic situation or employment at the University.

As a function of my doctoral studies at the University of Regina and acting as the principal researcher, I would like to study how teachers' thinking is being changed as a result of what they are learning about anti-oppressive education. I would like to use this research for my doctoral work and publish the aggregated data in my dissertation. For the purpose of this study, no individuals will be identified. However, because of the unique nature of the program, it may be possible to deduce who the research participants were. Any information derived from your participation in the study will be kept confidential by the researcher and we request that the participants do the same. There'll be no identifying information given during focus groups. The recordings and transcribed focus group sessions and interviews will be stored anonymously and confidentially. Only group results or anonymous codes will be presented.

The research design for this study is interpretive. I plan to use a case study methodology to examine the teacher change process. There are two exciting aspects to this research. First, I wish to examine how teachers are experiencing anti-oppressive education. In this phenomenological inquiry, I seek to understand the teachers' lived experiences as they relate to the learning acquired during the anti-oppressive education provided in your class. I would also like to understand how teachers are making sense of their experience. Second, I wish to examine if and/ or how the process of providing anti-oppressive curriculum and learning opportunities is resulting in new perspectives and transformative learning for the teachers.

As well, I would like to extend an invitation to all teachers in your course to participate in this study. However, because of the significant time commitments students will already have during the course, and because of the significant time commitment for my research, I suspect a number of teachers may decline the invitation to participate in the study. However, for those who do commit, I will plan around the schedule you have made for the teachers in your course and I

will make arrangements to meet with teachers individually at their convenience. I plan to provide teachers with flexible options in how they can support this research.

I propose the following methods be used for triangulation:

1. An entry and exit focus group
2. Participant observations
3. Student reflections
4. An interview at some point throughout the course and in October
5. (Field notes)

The findings of this study will form the greater part of my dissertation and would be available to all the partners involved in the study. I believe that this research will be valuable to the teachers who participated in the study because it may provide a different lens through which they may view their educational journey. As well, faculty from the Centre for Social Justice & Anti-Oppressive Education may also find this research provides a rich framework through which they may understand the teacher change process.

This project was approved by the Research Ethics Board, University Regina and Brandon University. If you have any questions or concerns about your rights or treatment as a research participant, you may contact the Chair of the University Research Ethics Board at 306.585.4775 or by e-mail at Research.ethics@uregina.ca, or the Chair of the Brandon University Research Ethics Committee Coordinator at 204.727.7445 or by e-mail at MurkinK@brandonu.ca. If you have any questions for me (Chris Brown) about the research, I may be reached at 204.xxx.xxxx or by e-mail at BrownC@BrandonU.ca.

I thank you in advance for your valuable time in considering this request.

Sincerely,

Mr. Chris Brown

Consent Statement

Having read the above, I agree to participate in this study and to consent to the above. Moreover, I agree not to disclose any information that could be linked to any specific individual. I will also not disclose any identifying information about other members of the group. Finally, I acknowledge that I have received a copy of this consent form.

Signature of participant

Signature of investigator

Date

Appendix D: University of Regina Research Ethics Certificate



UNIVERSITY OF
REGINA

OFFICE OF RESEARCH SERVICES

M E M O R A N D U M

DATE: April 6, 2010

TO: Chris Brown
Brandon University
Education Building
270 – 18th Street
Brandon, MB R7A 6A9

FROM: Dr. Bruce Plouffe
Chair, Research Ethics Board

Re: **Teacher Transformation Through Anti-Oppressive Education (File # 76S0910)**

Please be advised that the University of Regina Research Ethics Board has reviewed your proposal and found it to be:

1. APPROVED AS SUBMITTED. Only applicants with this designation have ethical approval to proceed with their research as described in their applications. For research lasting more than one year (Section 1F). **ETHICAL APPROVAL MUST BE RENEWED BY SUBMITTING A BRIEF STATUS REPORT EVERY TWELVE MONTHS.** Approval will be revoked unless a satisfactory status report is received. Any substantive changes in methodology or instrumentation must also be approved prior to their implementation.
2. ACCEPTABLE SUBJECT TO MINOR CHANGES AND PRECAUTIONS (SEE ATTACHED). Changes must be submitted to the REB and approved prior to beginning research. Please submit a supplementary memo addressing the concerns to the Chair of the REB.** Do not submit a new application. Once changes are deemed acceptable, ethical approval will be granted.
3. ACCEPTABLE SUBJECT TO CHANGES AND PRECAUTIONS (SEE ATTACHED). Changes must be submitted to the REB and approved prior to beginning research. Please submit a supplementary memo addressing the concerns to the Chair of the REB.** Do not submit a new application. Once changes are deemed acceptable, ethical approval will be granted.
4. UNACCEPTABLE AS SUBMITTED. The proposal requires substantial additions or redesign. Please contact the Chair of the REB for advice on how the project proposal might be revised.


Dr. Bruce Plouffe

cc: Dr. Laurie Carlson Berg – Faculty of Education

** supplementary memo should be forwarded to the Chair of the Research Ethics Board at the Office of Research Services (Research and Innovation Centre, Room 109) or by e-mail to research.ethics@uregina.ca

Phone: (306) 585-4775

Appendix E: Brandon University Research Ethics Certificate

BRANDON UNIVERSITY RESEARCH ETHICS CERTIFICATE

All research projects involving human subjects/participants that are carried out by persons connected with Brandon University must be reviewed and approved by the Brandon University Research Ethics Committee (BUREC) before being undertaken or submitted to an internal or external funding source (BURC, SSHRC, etc.)

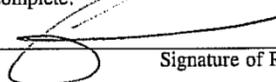
Instructions: Please review the statements below and sign and submit two hard copies of this form to the Research Office. You will receive a signed copy of this certificate when your project has been approved by BUREC.

Name of Researcher(s): Mr. Chris Brown
Department(s): Department of Teacher Education, Faculty of Education
Name of Supervisor (if applicable):

Title of Project:
Teacher Transformation through Anti-Oppressive Education

By signing this certificate, I agree: (1) to conduct my project in accordance with the principles for research involving human subjects as outlined in the Brandon University Research Ethics Committee Guidelines for Research Involving Humans and the Tri-Council Policy Statement, Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans; (2) to report any changes to the procedure and/or protocol of this research project to BUREC and, if appropriate, (3) to undergo subsequent review; (4) to submit annual progress reports to BUREC; and, (5) to notify BUREC in writing when the project is complete.

Dec. 18 / 2009
Date

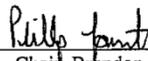

Signature of Researcher

If Researcher is a Student, please have Supervisor sign below.
I have read and approved this Ethics Application.

NOTE: This portion of the certificate is completed by BUREC.

This certifies that the Brandon University University Research Ethics Committee has examined the above research proposal and has concluded that in all respects the proposed research meets the appropriate standards for research involving humans.

January 26, 2010
Date


Chair, Brandon University Research Ethics Committee

Your first annual progress report is due:

January 26, 2011

Appendix F: Interview Guide

Reflective Journal Process

I am asking that you keep a journal about what you are learning in this class. It would be best to commit between 10-15 minutes per day for writing in the journal. Journal writing is usually a helpful process to support your classroom learning, so although there is an extra burden, this extra effort should benefit you in class. Please feel from to discuss how your thoughts and feelings are affecting your learning. Also, please feel free to connect what you are learning to your prior experiences. It would be most helpful if you could bring in your prior thinking about problematic issues identified in class.

Focus Group (entry)

Introductions: Who are you? Where have you have been working? What student population have you been working with?

What are you hoping to learn in this course?

How do you think what you will learn will change how you teach?

Tell me about your decision to take this course. Probe:

What motivated your choice?

Why do you want to take this course?

What expectations, if any, do you have for what you will think or do or say differently as a consequence of your participation in this course? Probe:

How are you hoping this course will support your learning?

How do you think you will be teaching differently as a result of this course?

What is anti-oppressive education and how do you plan on doing it?

Focus Group (exit)

Summarize what you learned in this course.

How will what you have learned, change how you will live your life? Probe:

In a perfect world, how would you be teaching differently as a result of your experiences during this course?

What particular experiences in the course challenged your assumptions and beliefs about teaching? About students?

How do you plan on using what you have learned during this course in your teaching and in your life?

Primary Interview (July)

Background information? Probe:

Age, education, Ethnicity, years as a teacher (in education), family constellation, current family information, teaching experience, life experiences, Proximity to minoritized persons

Scaling question: How far along are you on the journey to becoming an anti-oppressive educator? 1-10 (10 is high)?

What are you enjoying most about the course and topics? Least?

Dialogue, Content, New ideas, etc.

In your own words, Can you tell me about what you have been learning about and experiencing so far in class? Probe:

How are particular topics, ideas or teaching methods challenging you or making you feel uncomfortable?

How are your beliefs, values, and assumptions about who is marginalized and how to teach marginalized students being challenged?

Are the topics and methods affecting your mood? Explain.

How are you conceiving your beliefs, values, and assumptions in a new way?

Have you been able to do your journaling? How should I collect it?

Brief Follow-up Interview (October)

Do you have any questions, comments, additions, deletions to the transcript you received?

How are you living your life differently as a result of taking a course in anti-oppressive education? Probes:

What key aspects of the course, Anti-oppressive Education and Teacher Activism remain most important learnings for you?

Would you say that you had some significant changes in your beliefs or values or assumptions during the course? Can you tell me about that?

What did you value the most from the course, Anti-oppressive Education and Teacher Activism?

How are you teaching differently as a result of what you experienced this summer?

Can you tell me about your activism project?

Appendix G: Course Syllabus

FACULTY OF EDUCATION UNIVERSITY OF REGINA

EC&I 822 Anti-Oppressive Education and Teacher Activism:
How Far Will You Go?

2010 020

July 5 to 26 8:30 to 11:20 a.m.
ED 228 Teaching Preparation Center

Course Description

This is the common course for all students registered in the Summer Institute 2010. In this course and throughout the Institute, students examine what is meant by critical education for teachers, community leaders, and all those interested in addressing issues of inequality, especially through schooling.

The course begins with the acknowledgement that all knowledge is “interested” and that school knowledge represents the points of view of particular times and peoples. Learning to examine the taken-for-grantedness of knowledge is the oft-stated goal of active learning in schools. Such an examination is more difficult, however, when the knowledge operates as common sense norms that support hierarchies of dominance and subordination. The destructiveness of these hierarchies is much in evidence in the differing educational, economic and social outcomes stratified by race, class, language, religion and other bases of difference. At the same time, teachers and community representatives strive to challenge, interrupt and refuse practices of exclusion and marginalization. There is a history of activism in schools and communities that ranges from mild words of non-cooperation to solidarity movements and political organizing.

This course examines the politics of protest and activism that include and go beyond theories of justice for social change. Those who seek active change will have the opportunity to examine their own levels of interest, knowledge and commitment and to organize with similarly-oriented strategists. This course makes use of personal experience of organizers and activists as practitioners for change. It makes connections with formal knowledge offerings of the university and puts them into plans for action.

The Summer Institute

Participants are registered in two closely co-ordinated courses over a three-week period; they have the opportunity to earn six credit hours toward their graduate degrees. The Summer Institute will be a dedicated time of engaged teaching and learning. Instruction will consist of guest instructors including community and teacher activists, core readings, and social activities. Considering the limited time, care has been taken to monitor course demands so that requirements can reasonably be achieved. However, as the time will be intense, participants are encouraged not to plan for other major commitments for the duration of the Institute.

The Summer Institute is sponsored by the Centre for Social Justice and Anti-Oppressive Education, the Center for Continuing Education, the Faculty of Education and the Research and Graduate Programs of the Faculty of Education.

Purposes of the course

- be introduced to the notion that all knowledge is “interested” and that school knowledge is productive of particular interests
- examine social justice issues and interlocking oppressions that include racism, classism, sexism, sexual orientation.
- develop theoretical tools for social analysis: the nature of subject positions, power, hierarchies of oppression, dominance and subordination, myth of meritocracy, interlocking oppressions, critical pedagogies, anti-oppressive education
- investigate the constitutive nature of human rights protections, social justice action and teacher activism
- participate in activities for learning with each other and with guest speakers; connect student learning across disciplinary lines
- describe plans for social justice action as it applies to the workplace or community

Required Texts

Package of readings and in-class handouts

Kumashiro, K. (2009). *Against common sense: teaching and learning toward social justice*. New York: RoutledgeFalmer.

Pollock, M. (Ed.). (2008). *Everyday anti-racism: Getting real about race in school*. New York: The New Press.

Evaluation of the course

The course is assessed on the basis of pass / fail. If an assignment is considered not acceptable, a student will have an opportunity to complete it again within the time of the course. All assignments must be considered acceptable in order to receive a pass for the course.

There is a very strong emphasis in this course on keeping up with required readings and informed discussion. Students not in a position to devote time throughout the course (as

opposed to a large chunk of time at the end) should take this design feature of the course into consideration. Students are required to attend class, read the materials, complete assignments on time and participate in class discussions based on what they have read.

The numbers attached to the assignments below reflect only the relative value of each assignment in relation to other assignments out of a total of 20 points. In keeping with a pass/fail system, assignments will not be given a numerical assessment or percentage, but instead, will be judged as acceptable or unacceptable for a student in a graduate program.

Assignments

1. Critical reflections

Each student will produce two critical reflection papers on some aspects of the day's assigned reading. A designated reading is the one listed first for each day; a designated reading is assigned only to one person as indicated by the single initial (either b or r or y) that follows the reading. Each critical reflection paper is due on the day the reading is discussed in class. A more complete description follows.

Relative value for **2 papers @ 3 points**

6 points out of 20

2. Shared learning

The purpose of this activity is to share the knowledge you have found in chapters of Pollock (selected from a list) to inform yourself and other students about ways of becoming critical, activist educators. Each person will prepare one chapter for presentation to a group of approximately ten people on **July 21**.

After a short summary of the chapter, convey what you consider to be the chapter's most useful point. Use any of these questions to focus your response: What does the piece help you to 1) think about or understand, 2) plan or do, and 3) speak about or say to others? See also the questions at the end of each piece that may help you focus your point. Alternately, you may wish to describe how the piece disrupts, disturbs or challenges you or your understanding of equity and justice. Elaborate on what you consider to be the most useful point, preferably one that will support and encourage you and others to become knowledgeable, activist educators. Try not to read your summary but to convey the content of the piece in an effective way, taking 5-8 minutes.

Provide a 2-page handout of the chapter to each group member and to the professor. The list of selected chapters will be chosen on July 14 for presentation on **July 21**.

Relative value for **presentation and paper**

3 points out of 20

3. Self-assessment journal

Take part in active learning by maintaining a journal in which you record your thoughts or responses to the events of the course. The purpose of the journal is to provide a dedicated space for engaging in and responding to readings, lectures, comments of other students and your own ideas. The journal will be a private document for writing and reflection, and you are encouraged to record whatever you wish. You are strongly encouraged to record quotations from each day's reading assignment that seem especially meaningful to you. Occasionally you will also be asked to respond in your journal to particular questions as a way of preparing thoughtful answers to discuss at a later date in the class.

Relative value of **self-assessment journal**

2 points out of 20

4. Activist Footprints

Record examples of activism that have encouraged or inspired you. An example of activism may be a conversation, an action, a quotation, or a good idea. It may be something you have done or heard about or observed. Write each of 5 responses in approximately 100 words each on one of the footprint pages provided in class. Put your name on the back of the footprint. Activist footprints can be handed in at any time and checked off in your folder by your group.

Relative value for 5 footprints

1 point out of 20

5. Academic poster session

Prepare a poster that lays out a plan of critical activism as informed by the course. Complete a plan for a project that, if completed, would promote a particular aspect of anti-oppressive action and /or learning. The project should clearly emphasize only one of the following, depending on the afternoon course in which you are enrolled:

a research plan **OR** curriculum development **OR** instruction: theory and/or practice

Plan a project that you find compelling or that has particular salience to you. It should be a project that you hope to pursue or are already pursuing in your graduate studies or in your work as an education professional.

The assignment should include

- context of your plan
- a purpose statement
- significance or contributions of the project (to the author and to the wider society / school)
- theoretical support and references
- description of activities or method
- desired outcomes
- implications for the changing role of the education professional
- justification that this project is critical activism
- overall presentation (oral and visual)

In keeping with the practice of poster sessions at academic conferences, all posters will be on display for all classmates and invited guests to read and examine. Being present to showcase your poster is a requirement of the course.

The poster session will be held on July 26, 2010 from 8:30 to 11:20am. Students should be available during the session to talk about their posters and to elaborate on their plans. The session will be open to Faculty of Education professors, instructors and guests.

This project will fulfill the major requirement in both the morning course (EC&I 822 *Anti-Oppressive Education and Teacher Activism: How Far Will You Go?*) and the particular afternoon course in which you are enrolled. You should submit a single poster that will be marked twice, in accordance with the emphasis of each course. Leave your poster in Room 228 on July 26.

Relative value of the poster session in EC&I 822

8 points out of 20

Evaluation Information

A **critical reflection** paper is a three (3) page response (do not exceed three pages) of one or two ideas that you encounter in the day's reading. No outside materials are required. While the assignment may include the briefest summary of the ideas at hand, it is **not** primarily a summary paper. Rather, the reflection paper should show evidence of critical engagement with the topic. You do not necessarily have to arrive at conclusions; sometimes the most useful work that one can do in a critical reflection is to raise important questions. As you write, imagine your audience to be the instructor, the class members and perhaps the author of the work to which you are responding. Include at least one quotation for the article that you find salient.

Papers should consist of three components:

- a brief summary (1 or 2 paragraphs)
- the main arguments and theoretical perspectives made by the author. This should be in your own words where possible or properly attributed quotations (1-1 1/2 pages).
- an account of your own response to the article (at least 1 page), including how ideas or concepts may be connected to other readings and/or how the author's argument enlarges or challenges your previously held beliefs, ideas and positions.

Students are asked to bring copies of their reflection papers for each member of their group and one copy to hand in on the day the readings are scheduled.

Form

All writing should be clear, direct and grammatically correct. Papers should be typed double-spaced. Always include page numbers for citations or quotes from the assigned readings. For any additional citations, please use a conventional academic referencing format such as APA, MLA, etc. Don't hesitate to use the resources (courses, writing labs, etc.) offered by the university to improve your writing skills. Your ideas will enjoy a better reception if they are expressed with clarity and elegance.

In written assignments, marks are awarded for demonstration of the following:

- Critical and creative engagement with the themes of the course
- Attention to the nature of the assignment
- Effective use of references
- Clear and effective essay-style writing
- A properly formatted bibliography

It is expected that each student will prepare for each class by completing daily readings and come prepared to participate in the discussion in an informed manner. Preparation may include evaluating each reading for argument and evidence, and thinking of questions or observations that might generate class discussion. Consider how the readings compare with each other and with those from previous days.

Co-operative Learning Practices

Co-operative learning is the instructional use of small groups so that students work together to maximize their own and each other's learning. Considerable research demonstrates that co-operative learning produces higher achievement, more positive relationships among students, and healthier psychological adjustment than do competitive or individualist experiences. Even though co-operative learning involves group processes, it is more than simply sitting side-by-side talking about an assignment. It is also more than a group assignment in which one student does the work and others put their names on it as well. Co-operation is much more than being physically near other students, discussing material with them, helping them, or sharing material among students, although each is important in co-operative learning.

5 Basic Elements of Co-operative Learning

- positive interdependence—of goals, roles, resources, and rewards
- face-to-face promotive interaction—teaching, learning, making connections
- individual accountability
- social skills—including conflict management
- group processing

Some reasons for using a co-operative learning approach

- Students promote each other's learning and achievement.
- Energy to complete tasks is increased through collective and individual insight.
- Everyone benefits from the efforts of co-operators.
- Co-operation produces less anxiety and increases effective coping strategies.
- Peer relationships are reinforced.
- Higher quality learning occurs through group processing.
- Students improve social skills in positive interaction.
- None of us is as smart as all of us.

Please note:

For this course, students will work co-operatively in groups of three (identified as R or B or Y) to support each other through interdependent teaching and learning. The main requirement is each student's preparation of the daily assigned reading and, for one student, a critical reflection to be shared with two others in the group. See the syllabus to identify the critical reflection for the day. It will be the first on listed. Students should bring copies of their written assignment for other members of their group and one copy to be handed in.

At the beginning of each class, groups should pick up their folders from the front of the class and record their attendance. At the end of the class, the group should hand in the folder containing the critical reflection as required for the day. There are no assignments that require groups to meet together outside of class. Group members should inform each other if they will be absent.

Key to locating the readings:

- (1) Look for this chapter in your coil-bound Course Package.
 - (2) Find this piece on NING website where it will be in the form of a PDF.
 - (3) This item was handed out in class and first appeared in your group folder.
- Pollock refers to the assigned text edited by M. Pollock.
Kumashiro refers to the assigned text by K. Kumashiro.

Appendix H: Course Outline

Course Outline

Introduction	
<p>Monday July 5</p> <p>Day 1</p>	<p>Outline of course, greetings, introductions Potential for afternoon change Designation of groups Journal entry #1 Syllabus and materials</p> <p>Noble, D. & Graves, J. (2007). Giving up the grade/Response to "Giving up the grade". <i>Our Schools/Our Selves: A Magazine for Canadian Education Activists</i>, 16(3), 29-31. <u>R,Y,B</u> (2)</p> <p>See the bottom of page 7 for the key to locating the readings.</p> <p>Coffee party (please bring your own cups hereafter; you may leave them in the coffee room to be washed daily).</p> <p><u>Lunch in Room 228 is provided by Dr. Lori Carlson-Berg and Chris Brown.</u></p>
<p>Tuesday July 6</p> <p>Day 2</p>	<p>Poverty and Disability</p> <p>Swanson, J. (2001). Introduction and Chapter 1. What poor people say about <u>poor-bashing</u>. In <i>Poor-bashing: the politics of exclusion</i> (pp. 1-28). Toronto: <u>Between the Lines</u>. R (1) (3)</p> <p><u>Ferri</u>, B. A. (2009). Reimagining special education from a disability studies perspective. In B. Ayers, T. Quinn, & D. Stovall, (Eds.), In <i>Handbook of social justice in education</i> (pp. 417-429). New York: <u>Routledge</u>. <u>B,Y</u> (1)</p> <p>Compton-Lilly, C. (2004). Assumptions about families. In <i>Confronting racism, poverty, and power: classroom strategies to change the world</i>, pp. 5-16. Portsmouth: Heinemann. <u>B,Y</u> (1)</p> <p>Pollock, #15</p>

<p>Wednesday July 7</p>	<p>Normalizing Oppression</p>
<p>Day 3</p>	<p>Goodman, D. (2001). About privileged groups. In <i>Promoting diversity and social justice: educating people from privileged groups</i>, (pp. 13-36). London: Sage. Y (1)</p> <p>McNamee, S. J. & Miller, R. K. (2004). The meritocracy myth. <i>Sociation Today</i>, 2(1), 1-14. B,R (2)</p> <p>Blumenfeld, W. (2006). Christian privilege and the promotion of "secular" and not-so "secular" mainline Christianity in public schooling and in the larger society. <i>Equity & Excellence in Education</i>, 39(3), 195-210. R,B (2)</p> <p><u>video Tough Guise (VHS)</u></p> <p>Kumashiro, K. (2009). <i>Against common sense: teaching and learning toward social justice</i>. New York: <u>RoutledgeFalmer</u>. pages xxi-xli and 1-3. R,B,Y</p>
<p>Thursday July 8</p>	<p>Racism, whiteness, Aboriginal issues</p>
<p>Day 4</p>	<p>Marx, S. (2004). Exploring and challenging whiteness and white racism with white preservice teachers. In V. Lea & J. Helfand (Eds.), <i>Identifying race and transforming whiteness in the classroom</i> (pp. 132-152). New York: Peter Lang. R Y B (all read, B writes) (1)</p> <p>Larocque, Emma. (1991). Racism runs through Canadian society. In O. McKague (Ed.), <i>Racism in Canada</i>, pp. 73-76. Saskatoon: Fifth House Publishers. Y,R,B (1)</p> <p><i>A major study of the professional knowledge and experience of Aboriginal teachers in Canadian public schools</i>. Prepared by Dr. Verna St. Denis for the Canadian Teachers' Federation. (March, 2010). See especially pp. 7-10, 41-62. B,R,Y (2)</p> <p>Press Release (3)</p> <p>Pollock, #43 YR</p>

<p>Monday July 12</p> <p>Day 5</p>	<p>Sexism and Sexual Orientation</p> <p>There is no written response required today.</p> <p>Davison, K. (2000). Masculinities, sexualities and the student body: "sorting" gender identities in school (chapter 2). In C. E. James (Ed.), <i>Experiencing difference</i> (pp. 44-52). Halifax: Fernwood Publishing. <u>R,B,Y</u> (1)</p> <p>Walton, G. (2005). The notion of bullying through the lens of Foucault and critical theory. <i>Journal of Educational Thought</i>, 39(1) 55-73. <u>R,B,Y</u> (2)</p> <p>Filax, G., Shogan, D. (2004). Gender ambiguity and heteronormativity: the case of two Alberta youth. In J. McNinch and M. Cronin (Eds.), <i>"I could not speak my heart": education and social justice for gay and lesbian youth</i> (pp. 81-92). Regina: Canadian Plains Research Centre. <u>R,B,Y</u> (1)</p> <p>Participant handout <u>R,B,Y</u> (3)</p> <p><u>Kumashiro, K.</u> (2009). <i>Against common sense: teaching and learning toward social justice</i>. New York: <u>RoutledgeFalmer</u>. pp. 5-56. <u>R,B,Y</u></p> <p>Guest: Dean of Education, Dr. James <u>McNinch</u></p> <p>Video: <i>Invisible Son</i> (VHS)</p>
<p>Tuesday July 13</p> <p>Day 6</p>	<p>Canadian history and racial formation</p> <p>Mackey, E. (2002). Settling differences: managing and representing people and land in the Canadian national project. In <i>The house of difference: cultural politics and national identity in Canada</i> (pp. 23-49). Toronto: University of Toronto Press. <u>R</u> (1)</p> <p>Francis, D. (1992). Introduction and Chapter 8: Marketing the imaginary Indian. In <i>The imaginary Indian: the image of the Indian in Canadian culture</i>, pp. 1-9, 173-190. Vancouver: Pulp. <u>YB</u> (3)</p> <p><u>Willinsky, John.</u> (1998). Where is here? In <i>Learning to divide the world: education at empire's end</i> (pp. 1-20). Minneapolis: UM Press. <u>YB</u> (1)</p> <p>Pollock, #41. Prepare to answer questions on p. 225. <u>YBR</u></p> <p>1:00pm Field trip to Mackenzie Art Gallery, T.C. Douglas Building, 3475 Albert Street</p> <p>4-6pm Social event</p>

<p>Wednesday July 14</p>	<p>What constitutes activism?</p> <p><u>Vibert, A. B., & Shields, C.</u> (2003). Approaches to student engagement: does ideology matter? <i>McGill Journal of Education</i>, 38(2), 221-239. <u>Y</u> (2)</p>
<p>Day 7</p>	<p><u>Bergsma, D.</u> (2004). Reflections on activism. <i>WISE Journal</i>, 1(1), 4-5. <u>R,B</u> (3)</p> <p><u>Lund, D. E.</u> (2003). Facing the Challenges: student antiracist activists counter backlash and stereotyping. <i>Teaching Education</i>, 14(4), 265-278. <u>R,B</u> (2)</p> <p><u>Olsson, J.</u> (1997). For white anti-racists: avoiding the detours in the journey toward justice. <i>Women's Education des femmes</i>, 12(4), 16-20. <u>RB Y</u> (3)</p> <p><u>Kumashiro, K.</u> (2009). <i>Against common sense: teaching and learning toward social justice</i>. New York: <u>RoutledgeFalmer</u>. pages 57-91. <u>R,B,Y</u></p> <p>Pollock, #41 <u>R,B,Y</u></p> <p>Guest: Geraldine Knudsen from the Saskatchewan School Boards Association speaking on legal aspects of teacher activism</p> <p>Choices from Pollock for July 21: 3, 9, 10, 12, 14, 15, 18, 19, 21, 22</p>
<p>Thursday July 15</p>	<p>Teacher activism</p> <p>There is no written response required today.</p>
<p>Day 8</p>	<p><u>hooks, bell</u> (1994). Paulo <u>Friere</u>. In <i>Teaching to transgress: Education as the practice of freedom</i>, pp. 45-58. New York: <u>Routledge</u>. <u>R,Y</u> (1)</p> <p><u>Lawrence, S. M., & Tatum, B. D.</u> (1997). White educators as allies: moving from awareness to action. In <u>M. Fine, L. Weis, L. C. Powell & L. M. Wong</u> (Eds.), <i>Off white: readings on race, power, and society</i> (pp. 333-342). New York: <u>Routledge</u>. <u>B,Y</u> (1)</p> <p><u>Kumashiro, K.</u> (2009). <i>Against common sense: teaching and learning toward social justice</i>. New York: <u>RoutledgeFalmer</u>. pages 91-123. <u>R,B,Y</u></p> <p>Pollock, #17, #25 Prepare to discuss. <u>R,B</u></p>

<p>Monday July 19</p> <p>Day 9</p>	<p>Action and Allies</p> <p>Bishop, A. (1994). Step 5: Becoming an ally. In <i>Becoming an ally: breaking the cycle of oppression</i>, 93-104. Halifax: Fernwood. <u>R,B,Y</u> (3)</p> <p><u>10:00am Interview with Kevin Kumashiro</u></p> <p>Pollock, #29 and #32</p>
<p>Tuesday July 20</p> <p>Day 10</p>	<p>Activism in Education</p> <p>Guest panel of education activists</p> <p>Lunch at the Riddell Centre Food Court (by the windows)</p> <p>Pollock, #4 and #5</p>
<p>Wednesday July 21</p> <p>Day 11</p>	<p>Action and Allies</p> <p>Shared learning and mutual teaching with chapters from Pollock (see page 4 in this syllabus)</p> <p>Poster plans</p>

<p>Thursday July 22</p> <p>Day 12</p>	<p>Practice Talking Back</p> <p>Weis, L., & Fine, M. (2004). Extraordinary conversations in public schools. In <i>Working method: research and social justice</i> (pp. 121-151). New York: <u>Routledge</u>. B (3)</p> <p>Moon, D. (1999). White enculturation and bourgeois ideology: the discursive production of "good (white) girls". In T. K. Nakayama & J. N. Martin (Eds.), <i>Whiteness: the communication of social identity</i> (pp. 177-197). London: Sage Publications. <u>R, B, Y</u> (1)</p> <p>McMahon, B. (2007). Educational administrators' conceptions of whiteness, anti-racism and social justice. <i>Journal of Educational Administration</i>, 45(6), 684-696. <u>R, Y</u> (2)</p> <p>OR</p> <p><u>Aveling</u>, N. (2007). Anti-racism in schools: A question of leadership? <i>Discourse: Studies in the cultural politics of education</i>, 28(1) 69-85. <u>R, Y</u> (2)</p>
<p>Monday July 26</p> <p>Day 13</p>	<p>Academic Poster Session</p> <p>Oral and visual presentation of posters</p> <p>Barbecue for lunch at the Riddell Centre Food Court</p> <p>Hand-in poster to Room 228</p>

Appendix I: Course Themes

In order to provide some context for the analysis this course, AOETA, an elaboration on the ten themes developed in the course, as well as some context on the guest speakers and events follows.

Power and Disability

This theme pertained to the subject of discourses and power relations. The question was “Who do you think you are?” The focus here was to understand the social construction of knowledge and the social construction of identity. The instructor said, “Identity is organized for you, by you, and around you. It is how we learn to be who we say we are.” Students were encouraged to deconstruct that which they currently taken-for-granted, including power, and especially social power. Social power is related to social positioning and it is about the culture of power (Kivel, 2002, 2004)². Social positioning is not just about an individual effort or merit. It is also about how you are positioned socially. A person who is socially well positioned will likely also have powerful knowledge.

A key element of this class was to understand that knowledge itself is socially constructed; it does not exist in some ethereal realm outside society. Particular social processes, by particular people with particular points of view, created the organization of knowledge that we are familiar with in school curricula. School knowledge is already based upon a particular (political) point of view. To assume innocence is not valid.

² Delpit (1988) also discusses how the culture of power operates within a classroom in *The Silenced Dialogue: Power and Pedagogy in Educating Other People's Children*.

People need to always consider whose point of view is served with the knowledge that is provided.

Everyone learns his or her socially constructed identity from a very early period of time. Students learned that the opposite of social constructionism is biological determinism, also referred to as essentialism. Biological determinism says that people are the way they are because of their biology. “It is just how they are.”

The myth of meritocracy is an example of how we believe our place in society is earned, “You get what you work for. If you get ahead, it’s because of hard work. If you haven’t made it, it’s your own fault.” But we know that some peoples’ work is rewarded more than others. To critique meritocracy would be to recognize that some peoples’ work is more rewarded than others.

For example, if we examine who is powerful in our current social environment, we would see that it is politicians, religious leaders, and business people. We could ask the questions: Are they the hardest working people we know? Are they the brightest people we know? Are they the best we can do? These examples demonstrate that it is more than just hard work and talent that makes people successful. What do we do with people who are powerful? We pay them a lot. People who are powerful are more likely to have fame and political influence. People learn how to be powerful. This is the culture of power and it is a part of our social construction of identity. People have also learned that they are not powerful. Social construction is about the interaction between ourselves, our social context, (including institutions), and ideologies. We are socially constructed through the interaction of these three elements of our lived experience (figure 7).

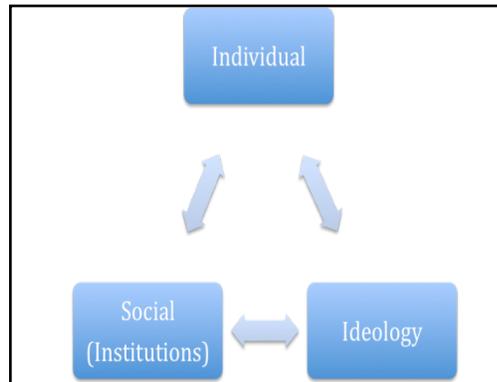


Figure 7: Socially constructing identity

Normalizing Oppression

This theme was about how, from a dominant perspective, we normalize oppression and see it as just common sense. As people and educators, we are taught to normalize oppression and we are most often unaware of doing so. Because teachers are agents in this normalization, there is a need for anti-oppressive educators to take action. However, there is an underlying belief that good teachers are not political. But this is a false belief. Teaching is an entirely political enterprise. From a study of what it means to be a good teacher, what was absent was recognizing social justice as a key aspect of quality instruction. How are we as good teachers disciplined into not taking up social justice? It is in the social construction of the good teacher. There are certain ways of talking about a teacher who is too loud, too political, or sometimes does not conform to what it means to be a good teacher. Being a good teacher also can mean taking a critical stance and to action in the world for the betterment of all people.

When understanding how we can counter the normalization of oppression, the first thing we need to do is to look at ourselves and how we are socially constructed. We are all agents of oppression. Oppression is not “out there,” it is socially constructed within us. In doing anti-oppressive work, we need to “dawn our own oxygen mask first,

before we help others put theirs on.” An example of our own social construction of identity and our normalizing of oppression was found in the video *Tough Guise* in class. This movie, written by Jackson Katz, graphically guided students through the social construction of masculinity, as it graphically depicts the crisis of hyper-masculinity in popular culture. Teachers need to challenge what is taken-for-granted as normal and natural, as not pathological, but socially constructed and worthy of interrogation.

Racialized Identities and Racism

The theme focused upon the concept of racialized identities and racism and how this needs to be challenged. Understanding white privilege was a major aspect of this theme. It is important that we take up the task of understanding white privilege because the majority of teachers and graduate students in educational fields in Canada are white. Therefore, it is important to understand the social construction of whiteness. What we do as whites has been well learned. Often we don't speak about race as whites because that is learned also. In many ways, reframing multiculturalism is another way that whites can maintain power. Being able to name, know, and discuss white privilege is only a starting point for creating equity for all. However, talking about racism can be deadly as a conversation piece.

As a white person we can stand and be accountable for our unearned white privilege. White privilege is like living off the avails of racism. White privilege and white supremacy are quite synonymous terms. White privilege is a passive term and white supremacy is acted out. Both rely on a social order that benefits whites and disadvantages others. White privilege calls into question the order that makes the system seem normal. One thing that can make a difference in anti-racist education is to use the words that

address the issues of unearned privilege. This is a form of activism. It is important to 'change the discourse'.

Race is being socially constructed around us all the time. We know that race is not a biological fact. Race has been socially constructed, so from the perspective of it being constructed, it is not fantasy but real. However, we need to challenge this common sense knowledge to understand who benefits from the social construction of this knowledge. We still find references to race that are actually in reference to culture, which is the shared way people live. There is the false belief that people, who look the same, live the same. This substitution of race for culture is understood as biologically determined, and essentializes and maintains difference. Race and racism are a huge factor in post-colonial issues. Systemic racism is also referred to as common sense racism. It happens so often in our society that it becomes something that we do without even thinking about it. It is like having a low-grade fever; we don't even know that it is going on. These things are justified by the inferiorization and marginalization of people. Whiteness is a social, economic, and historic relation based on hierarchies of racial identity, and the intersection of other identities including gender, class, sexuality, dress, religion, ethnicity, nationality and so forth. Whiteness is the performance of these acts.

There are also 'Shades of whiteness'. An example is that the Irish were not considered white because the English had colonized them. In order to treat them differently, they had to be constructed as not white. What you got with whiteness was legitimacy and respectability. Whiteness could be understood to be a currency; it is money in the bank. How was the middle class to show that they were separate from the

Other? The legitimate citizen is the one who gets to decide through asserting the prominence of the binary.

There are a number of binary's used to construct whiteness, some include:

White	not-white
Clean	dirty
Healthy	diseased
Able bodied	disabled
Middle-class	poor
Moral	degenerate
Unwaged women	women's paid work
Civilized	uncivilized
Light skin	dark skin
Sexually proper	sexually loose
Mannered	boorish
English	not-English
Cerebral, of the mind	carnal, of the body
Christian	heathen
Reasonable	Emotional, superstitious

Whites are taught to think of their lives as morally neutral, normative, and average, and also ideal, so that when whites work to benefit others, this is seen as work that will allow the 'Other' to be more like 'us'. We are frequently complicit with racism, even when we are absolutely sure we are not. Some of the techniques we use to deal with whiteness include avoidance, anger, denial, claims of innocence, defaulting to the individual, and guilt.

Avoidance... the 'I don't see color, I am color-blind' position. We just treat everyone equally. Except that we are still racist in the mean time. People still do get treated differently because of their color.

Anger... they are just as racist toward us. It can't exist because of who holds the power. The social system always defaults to the dominant. The bully has already aggregated the power.

Denial... All of that happened a long time ago. But things continue today.

Claims of innocence... I couldn't possibly be racist. My best friend is...

Defaulting to the individual... pretending that there is no such thing as race and racism. Instead, this is about pretending that success is up to the individual through our own individual autonomy.

Guilt... I feel terrible, how do we make things right? What happens if you stay feeling guilty is that you are not much use to anybody else.

Whiteness is a way of passing through this issue so that we can talk about other things. We are not about trying to fix others, but looking at where the problem lies. We need to recognize that helping others is about helping to understand ourselves. In fact, whites talking about our whiteness is still about us. If we only continue to talk about whiteness we just continue to centre ourselves in the middle of the conversation. We need to focus on our role in maintaining inequity and do something about it.

Sexism and Sexual Orientation

Sexual variance is another way of describing sexual orientation. It is not about arguing religious beliefs or other beliefs. Understanding sexual orientation is a matter of human rights. It is a legal requirement. It used to be that gender was thought of as a social

construction and sex was thought of as a biological fact. However, our identities, including our sexual orientation are in flux. They are not innate (essential), but are socially constructed. It is societies notion of what a man is, or a woman is, that compels them to complete a sex-change operation. Other ways to appreciate the social construction of sexual variance is to move away from the binary of male/female. It isn't that simple; it is not black and white as has been socially constructed. However, we cling to straight privilege as if it is natural and normal and right. One example of straight privilege is to imagine that everyone is straight or even to think we need to know who is and who isn't straight. In a country where gay marriage is legal, why do we still need to talk about sexual preference?

One of the biggest issues for sexual minority students is name-calling, also called gay-bashing. As long as those who have straight privilege are using these names to harm and to shame the Other (through the citing of harmful discourse), there is oppression. If we can understand that sexual variance is as normal as ones handedness preference, then we will be moving towards ending our straight privilege. We need to remember that sometimes homosexuality is seen as deviance and conflated with pedophilia or other perversities. This is not the case.

Teachers need to support students who are Lesbian, Gay, Bi, Transgender, Transexual, queer, questioning, inquiring (LGBTQQI) and to ensure their dignity. One way that we socially construct the normal for sexual variance is to out ourselves as straight people. We talk about what our family did, our partners, etc. We talk about our straight sexuality. Flaunting for same-sex partners is typically the mildest form of maintaining the binary. These 'sexploits' are common and normal for same-sex, but not

accepted for same-sex partners. Sexual variance is seen as deviance. However, if identities are not so binary like, there is a lot more potential for overlap. What keeps these poles apart is hegemony. In order to maintain the superior position, there needs to be the lesser part to the binary- the lesser than position to which the dominant binary connects and defines itself through that which it is not.

Racial Formation in Canadian History

We need to disrupt, interrupt, disturb, disengage, refuse, and disarm the knowledge that is taken-for-granted as truth regarding racial formation and aspects of Canadian history. These are the things we need to do to be anti-oppressive activists. It is about disrupting taken-for-granted knowledge and interrupting someone (What did you mean by that?) when their discourse upholds inequity. Anti-oppressive educators need to disturb the status quo and challenge it. Anti-oppressive educators need to disengage from taking up the common sense discourse that upholds a particular “truth” about racial formation in Canadian history. This is about refusing to participate in inequitable discourses and actions in order to disarm the powerful language and the performance of inequity by those who constitute the dominant group.

Choosing to actively work against oppression is very important as we look at the problem of racializing groups. The problem of racializing the Other isn't so much with the resultant stereotyping, but that it stops thinking beyond the stereotype. Two common types of stereotypes for Aboriginal people in Canada are the negative stereotype and the noble savage stereotype. The noble savage stereotype can be disrupted when we look at the binary that holds the myth in place. The idea of the Noble Savage puts the colonizer as the civilized, rational person and the Aboriginal person as the noble savage in need of

our moral intrusion. The idea is that Aboriginal people were innocent and didn't know any better and that Aboriginal people got to be sophisticated through colonization. From within this binary is a paternalism that creates and maintains a position of dominance over the Other.

This myth holds in place the notion that our current historical and social position is the rightful place for the colonizer and it makes what happened seem moral and necessary. Within this historification is the need for Canada to be perceived as a legitimate and respectful nation. Those who constitute the new nationalism went to great efforts to show themselves as respectful and rightful owners of our nation. There was a great deal of effort to subjugate Aboriginal people in a certain way. What was accomplished by the insistence of the stereotypes that were created? What purpose does nationalism serve as a function of constituting racial minorities? How does the continued myth of settlement continue to shape nationalism?

When thinking about the treaty box curriculum, a collection of mandated lesson guides that are a part of the required curriculum in Saskatchewan, we need to remember the hidden curriculum. We tell our own mythology because it is dominant and well entrenched as a part of our own socially constructed history. The other part of treaty education that is often not included is how whiteness and racism is taken up in the classroom and in society.

Teachers need to talk about white privilege and racism. We come to talk about history from a white settler perspective and think we are neutral in the conversation. The history that is told makes white people look and think that their success is 'natural'. To not openly discuss the oppression of Aboriginal people in the past and today is to

continue to side with the powerful. The history that is told maintains the myth of superiority and white supremacy. That notion gets reinforced by not looking at the Others' story. Another part of white privilege is that we can ignore the Others' story as a function of white privilege.

What Constitutes Activism

Education for the Other- Other being people outside the norm. Oppression arises from the action and inaction of people. The Other lacks something- access, equal treatment and is based upon perceived needs. Examples would be Culturally relevant pedagogy, developing cultural competency and Language training. This perspective recognizes that the needs of the Other needs to be met in a less exclusionary way. Who the Other is, is not always known to us and the outsiders point of view is privileged here- this is a problem. The outsiders "know what is good for you." The outsiders know that something is lacking or broken and attempt to provide it or fix it. This type of assistance also targets certain groups and works from an essential perspective. Focusing on what people don't have creates a needy perspective as well as the believe that the Other is deficient. It positions the other as a problem to be solved. It can create a problem with the teacher if they really resent the work. If we are looking at what the other doesn't have and there is resentment in the teacher, then the problem is in the teacher. This multicultural approach can be exhausting and frustrating. Education about the Other can be like being in the role of a cultural tour guide. We know that it is never enough. We can never do enough adapting.

Education about the Other is done to increase the knowledge of and empathy towards marginalized students. This includes talking to all white schools about the

colonizers role in colonialism. The focus is on developing models of what other people should know. Examples could be doing cultural sensitivity work and Empathy building. The strength is that we hope to increase knowledge and empathy. The assumption is that prejudice can be eradicated if we know more about the Other. It is a necessary but insufficient step because knowledge does not necessarily create the action necessary to change the inequity.

Learning about particular people can give the impression that knowing about the other is ‘the experience of the Other’. For example, learning about pictures from an art gallery where Aboriginal portraits include the ‘stoic Indian’ can give the impression that Aboriginal people never smiled. Learning about the other can reinforce stereotypes, reinforce the binary of them and us; it can reinforce difference by acknowledging that we are not like them. This perspective ignores particular discourses, particularly those that examine inequity in a critical fashion and does not recognize the multiplicity of identity construction. It suggests that there is a body of knowledge to be learned. This approach can also create “Prejudice management” – where people learn what not to say and what not to do.

The hidden curriculum comes into play here because discourse with students is more than just communicating the curriculum. We also pass on our beliefs, values and assumptions to our class. So, for example, discussing First Nations issues in order to teach the curriculum can be done in a way that it is still disrespecting First Nations at the same time. The internal, hidden messages have been thoroughly received by the students. As well, students will see that whiteness is an asset for long-term success in school or that being gay or lesbian is something to be ashamed of because of its controversy and

our hesitation in discussing it. That is part of what we are talking about here. We need to educate people that the hidden curriculum is going around all the time and that oppressive circumstances are continuing. The oppressor /victim binary stays intact and is ongoing in our subject positions in the classroom. Both education for and about the other are flawed. It assumes that what is not the Other- the norm- is just fine. It is about trying to get the other to be more like us and that the dominant group should be emulated. Is that really what we want Others to be like? Is the norm good enough?

Cultural difference is understood as both the source of the problem and the solution. The students wouldn't be failing if they knew more about their culture or that their culture is the problem. This approach puts the problem on blaming culture. If culture is the problem, where do we go. We need to have more tools in our toolbox. Color blind approaches to dealing with inequity are not sufficient either. Treating everyone the same disadvantages certain people. The social structure does not treat everyone the same. Not all people are oppressed in the same way. Racism is experienced in different ways. If you immigrate to Canada with wealth, you experience racism differently. Gay men also have masculine privilege. Education for and about the other are problematic, but can also be helpful because they begin to name difference. Without naming it, you cannot examine inequity.

Education is the jewel; it can mitigate oppression. Emancipatory education is the goal of anti-oppressive education. It isn't simply that knowledge is the answer- emotions are also involved. We need to examine how we are all implicated in inequity in different ways and at different times in different places. This is the key to critical work.

Education that is critical of privileging and Othering is about questioning what is normal, and directly naming inequalities. It is about using words like racism. We don't do very well at it because we don't practice it. We don't think of ourselves as the big elephant in the room. We examine what we think as normal and how our identities are constructed in the first place. We looked at nationalism, and the social and historical implications of racism in Canada, not to belittle our nation, but to have a more grown up view. We know now that our parents are flawed. They have their flaws and are not perfect people. Understanding that our country also has its flaws. Our history needs to be told because one of our flaws is that our history isn't told.

Critical pedagogy isn't the same as critical thinking. Critical pedagogy is about addressing issues of oppression through examining issues of power and privilege. It is about looking at the treaty box and asking what else hasn't been taught and making space to teach it. It is also about listening to what people have to say and think that is different and allowing us to be disturbed. It is possible to bring in the treaty box and not change anything that happens in a classroom. It is not just about adding Aboriginal content and stir. It is about looking at the oppression that lies hidden in plain sight.

Discussion of the good teacher- students responding to us reinforces us. We must also account for social constructionism in the dialogue about our implication in inequity as well. These processes occur largely at an unconscious level. And we are really likely not aware of how we behave for students if there is no discord between the messenger and the message. We don't need to be experts in Aboriginal issues to dismantle some of our Eurocentric perspectives. Whiteness, because of the social position that comes with it, can be useful place to be an advocate and an ally. White people get to talk about

racism more than people who experience it because we are not assumed to be self-interested. Talking about whiteness does not always have to be taken as a bad thing. Education about the other: We should look for the day when all cultures can be celebrated. There is a cost to becoming a critical teacher: A great deal of disciplining goes on by teachers on teachers.

Teachers say that while there are particular students that need help and support- all of our students need help and support. It is a fear of singling out Aboriginal students. This allows them to not get the supports they need. Or the charity model, which maintains power for those who have it, and creates an us/them binary. “People don’t ask for charity when they really deserve justice.” Difference of the other is not an explanation for inequality.

Teacher Activism

Much of what we do in our classrooms is outcomes based education where teaching is about being a technician. We are taught to provide an education that teaches students the ‘how to’ do something instead of examining ‘who’ and ‘where’ the ‘how to’ comes from and ‘why’ they are doing it. A critical approach is really necessary to move people toward liberation and emancipation. In a Freirian sense, we want to teach students to read the word and the world. There are complex theories, like Critical Race Theory, that can help you and students understand power and privilege and how it plays out in school and in people’s lives. Why do we not adopt a critical approach?

There are a number of reasons we don’t teach using critical theory. For example, time, reporting out of assessments, inadequate training and the constraints placed on educators based on current practices and policies can all work to prevent critical learning.

As well, we can't forget "the baggage that our whiteness brings with us that weighs us down." Critical pedagogy is a messy business. It really is about learning in a social context. There is always some tension between the messy practice of teaching critical pedagogy because it may lead to emotional learning that can be troubling for all involved. We assume that students can't understand these complex issues. However, sometimes it is the teacher who is uncomfortable. It takes a significant leap of faith to examine our own power and privilege. We may sidestep teaching in a critical way because of ignorance or fear. We may be afraid that people will think that we are not good teachers. Or, it may be our own unwillingness to give up power and privilege. In the end, we need to think of action that you will take forward into your schools that will change things in a way that is less oppressive.

What does critical work make possible and impossible. You don't just take it in and swallow it. Teaching in a critical way makes it possible, but complicated, to be who we want to be in our classroom. It certainly makes us challenge the socially constructed relationships we have with students, as well as our socially reinforced positions of authority in the classroom and in society. So, just as "some of us are getting a hold of who we are and who we want to be" teaching in a critical way can challenge our own identity construction.

Action and Allies

"We will know the barriers have been overcome when the achievements of marginalized peoples are no longer minimized and resented by the dominant culture."

Kumashiro uses his own language when he talks about the poststructural quality of anti-oppressive education. Within this perspective, there is the recognition of the

unknowability and partiality of knowledge. It is always worth remembering that teachers are not neutral; we have been serving to conserve in our schools for a long time. From a poststructural perspective, it is important to remember to deconstruct, learn to live with ambiguity, look for gaps as places for exploration, learn through crisis, work to get 'unstuck', ask 'how' you know, trouble common sense, look to learn what is made possible and made impossible by what we do, and change the discourse.

There are a lot of questions yet to be answered before we have solved inequity. Who is anti-oppressive behavior for? What am I afraid to know? What has been made possible by teaching in this way? What has been made impossible through teaching in this way? How is a particular reading of a character marginalized or privileged? How are cultural issues of race, gender, class or religion produced by different readings of texts? What is our investment in insisting on reading the world only in certain ways? How have they come to learn this way of reading the world (about working-class people, gay and lesbians, first Nations peoples)? We must remember that we are already teaching the political. The notion of constant progress is a modern notion that we has been constructed and we need to unlearn this.

Oppression does not seem logical. Therefore, some of the things that we do in anti-oppressive work seem contradictory. The way you approach a student and situation requires a great deal of individual thinking and professional interpretation on the part of the teacher. It is not easy or answerable in a cookie-cutter way. So it is really important to know who the student is and what they value. Cultural sensitivity can be problematic and should be taught from the critical dimension recognizing the partiality of knowing.

Action in Education

How does someone become an ally? There are a number of very important points to remember here. One is that guilt is not a productive emotion, nor is anger or shame. We don't want to be GASy (Have excessive guilt, anger, and shame). It is worth noting that the way people argue against what we are learning in anti-oppressive education are common to each other and are the discourses you find in self and society. One could see him or herself as a "recovering racist" who is "Living off the avails of racism." One of the common issues is our resistance to bringing racism to people's attention because it challenges their sense of entitlement and makes us feel very uncomfortable. Not feeling uncomfortable when discussing racism is a point of white privilege. Becoming an ally is like the grief model loop of denial, anger, resistance (bargaining), depression and then acceptance.

Talking Back

Oppressive discourse is not usually overt. In many ways, the language of oppression is hidden in the subtext and the harmful discourse can be communicated in ways that can be taken up differently depending on the context. There are lots of different kinds of talking back we can use in these situations in order to dismantle the oppressive talk or action that is occurring. Taking action in the form of talking back can be a very difficult and an emotionally challenging thing to do. Common forms of talking back can use passive, aggressive or assertive speech. Passive speech is an overly apologetic way of speaking, while aggressive speech can be disturbing and can be seen as a form of violence in itself. Being aggressive is being hostile, blaming, threatening, demanding, or sarcastic. Being aggressive is typically not a healthy approach for anyone. The value of

assertive speech is that it communicates what you want to say in a clear way using I messages. Or it can simply be asking the person “what they meant by what they said.” Fundamentally, it is about standing up for yourself and the rights of others.

Using discourse is a tool that we have at our disposal. If oppressive remarks or actions are not countered, then some may conclude that these things are tolerated. Taking action may lead to ridicule, but it can also create newfound self-respect. The resistance that we get as allies is small compared to those on the receiving end. We must be conscious that we only get a very small taste of the constant tension that minoritized people endure everyday. It is better to do something imperfectly than nothing perfectly. We all need to practice saying things that we should have said and that we might have said but didn't. Being good almost always is about being silent. Talking back is about speaking out about what it means to be who you are.

When we choose to talk back, it is important to stay engaged with the conversation, and to be prepared for discomfort. Accept that maybe we can become different people through the process. We need to accept and respect non-closure. Inequality won't be over either. We collude with silence, laughter, aggression, leaving, or commission. We can choose to be minimally disruptive, “could you say more about that?,” for example. Or we can say “What do you mean by... playing the race card?” or, “I don't understand the point you just made” or, “Would you say it again because I can't believe that you just said that.”

These discourses are hundreds of years old and are not going to be overturned in a heartbeat, so be persistent but patient. You need to keep in relationship with those you want to talk to. So you need to be careful.

Guest Speakers

There were several guest speakers and a panel discussion brought to the class. All of the presentations included time for the class to talk to the speakers to ask questions and to extend the conversations. One guest speaker spoke about sexual orientation. His presentation discussed how homosexuality has been demonized. He also troubled the social construction of sexual identity by providing a number of sophisticated and controversial examples of how heteronormativity is held in place in society. Another guest speaker was a Lawyer for the Saskatchewan School Board Association. She spoke to the class about the legal aspects of being an anti-oppressive educator and how, because schools need to take active steps to deal with harassment, it is prudent to teach in anti-oppressive ways in your classroom. Lana had noted in her journal that

I found [the speaker], speaking from the perspective of a lawyer with the Saskatchewan School Boards Association very interesting. Some of the things we do, or don't do, as teachers is because you're not sure of the positive/negative consequences.

Kevin Kumashiro, writer of one of the course texts and a leader in the field of Anti-oppressive education, was brought to the class via videoconference. He stated that he is "obsessed with Common sense" and how policy makers frame the issues using their own common sense. He said that the goal of anti-oppressive education "isn't to get me to see how you are like me, but to see how you are different than me."

There was also a Panel Discussion lead by anti-oppressive activists about how to take Anti-oppressive Education Activism up in the community. The panel consisted of

people who are currently engaged in anti-oppressive work as educators. The panel brought to life how to engage in anti-oppressive work in one's life.

Events

All of the students at the Summer Institute went to the Art Gallery in the afternoon to see an exhibit focusing on Aboriginal pictures taken by white photographers in the late 1800's.

As well, the students also went out to a Faculty member's house for an afternoon social event. It was a relaxed meet and greet where people were encouraged to bring their children and engage in pleasant conversation.

There were three lunches for the students during their thirteen days at the institute. In addition to having a place for students to get coffee in the education faculty lounge, there were also two coffee receptions that included dainties that were hosted by the Summer Institute staff. All in all, there was a lot of opportunity for coming together and sharing in an extremely positive environment.

The last day was set aside for the student academic poster presentations. The poster presentations were conducted very much like they would be at a conference. The students presented their poster and then had time to walk around and engage with the other students who were also presenting.