

EMBRACING COMPLEXITY WHILE DECONSTRUCTING EUROCENTRIC  
IDEOLOGIES WITHIN CLASSROOM PRACTICES: REFLECTING ON  
CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE TEACHING

by

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## ABSTRACT

This research examines the complexities of teaching via culturally responsive practices in an Indigenous classroom in Saskatchewan. Through critical discourse analysis, I argue that culturally responsive teaching became more effective when I refuted my preconceptions that my pedagogy would be accepted by the Indigenous community. This research questions my practice as an educator and reveals how I reconciled with the community as I negotiated my identity as an educator and my perceptions about teaching in this context. Through critical reflective analysis, I explore the challenge of deconstructing hegemonic ideals and structures in the classroom. This study suggests the hoped-for transformation is possible. It occurred when students and I began to look inward through radical contemplative practices while relying on anti-oppressive theories. We learned to critically examine the oppressions of past generations to move forward. My research demonstrates that daily reflection allowed change and the creation of an anti-oppressive culture, although the process was complex.

*Keywords:* anti-oppressive, auto-pilot, culturally responsive teaching, contemplative pedagogy, embodied, Eurocentric, oppression, whiteness.

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**CURRICULUM VITAE**

## **SITUATING MYSELF**

### **Who Am I, What Am I, Where Am I and Why?**

My skin is brown and my ancestry East Indian. The people I grew up with may question my social racial construction: “brown and East Indian.” The label “brown and East Indian” suggests a fixed identity which denies the multiple identities I have adopted through learning how to be myself. Although my native country, Guyana, is in South America, my culture and heritage is from the Caribbean. The fusion of cultures including East Indian, African, Chinese, and Indigenous has shaped my identity. I can never see the world as singular, only as a multiplicity of ideologies and ways of being in the world.

As I reflect on my experiences, the places where I have lived, learned, taught, and visited, a sense of home, that Caribbean identity, becomes a longing. As time moves on and memories ebb, my sense of self and need to belong as an educator to any one place is becoming more diluted.

Reflecting on my journeys, I think about my experience teaching in Saskatchewan. When teaching in an Indigenous<sup>1</sup> setting in Saskatchewan I realized that my varied cultural identities did not prepare me for the contradictions I experienced.

As I struggle to comprehend why different experiences make the past seem more distant, my fluid state of being becomes complicated. While teaching in Saskatchewan had I touched on what seems to be beyond my reach? I had chosen to

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<sup>1</sup> For the purposes of this research and in keeping with the ethics board of UNB, Indigenous refers to the community group I taught in during my time in Saskatchewan.

teach in classrooms where students' experiences were beyond my capacity to understand. In moments of reflective solitude, I wrestled to understand my environment.

I often see the need to belong in the eyes of children I have taught. It echoes my need to connect to a place that propels me to re-enter these often-inhospitable pedagogical spaces. The stories and the lives of children sitting before me continue to draw me in. They beckon to things once different and familiar.

As I experience these fleeting encounters, I chase after them to understand the newness they bring. I expect to return to the dance on that Silk Road, backwards and forwards, two steps, three steps, on terrains I have been on before. It is the nature of travelling that allows me to muster the courage to tell the narratives of minority groups that have been left out of classroom practices and curriculum discourses.

## **CHAPTER 1**

### **1.0 RATIONAL FOR THE RESEARCH**

In this chapter, I explain the rational behind my reflective analysis. Next, I offer an overview and purpose of my research. After articulating my purpose, I summarize the seven chapters within this research. This chapter concludes with the research questions that ground my reflections throughout the study.

This study examines my teaching experiences in Saskatchewan over a two-year period. It describes the challenges I encountered teaching English Language Arts at high school X, a school serving Indigenous students. From the first week, I had to grapple with the reality that students' academic experiences before entering their grade 12 ELA classes at the high school level did not match the provincial curriculum expectations. Combined with the reality that students required previous knowledge did not match provincial curriculum goals and objectives; I also had to navigate my way through Indigenous students' resistance to include Indigenous perspectives in classroom discussions. Tuck and Yang (2014) cautioned that youth resist educational injustices in multiple, sometimes simultaneous and contradictory ways.

Educational injustices occur in part when provincial curriculum expectations are rooted in Eurocentric ideals. As such, I found there were underlying issues as to why students were not quite ready for high school goals and objectives. Often, local educators (Indigenous and/or settler) have lower expectations or hide behind blaming home life, parenting and student motivation. Standardized academic traditions may be vital components in facilitating teaching and learning activities but it must not be viewed as the only way. This research examines the traditional models of delivering education



embedded in settler<sup>2</sup>-constructed ideology, standardized curricula, testing, marks and grade levels and proposes transformative ways to deliver the ELA curriculum. Vassallo (2015), noted that:

A transformative curriculum therefore calls for a reform in the way school leadership is set to prepare teachers, parents and students to increase critical consciousness (e.g. Brown, 2004, 2006). It also calls for reflection and transformative actions on school leaders proposing such changes. (Freire, 1970, 2005; Kaak, 2011)

Considering the call for a transformative curriculum through culturally responsive practices this reflective study examines the idea of transformational change in students' academic success as dependant on, connectedness in the curriculum between students' lived experiences and the educators' ability to constantly reflect on self and combine curriculum content, classroom resources and students' experiences.

Although educational administrators and educators can argue that change and transformation occur without human connection, I suggest in this research that when change occurs in the absence of connection and the embodied lived experiences of students and ourselves, it lacks long-term effectiveness. Planning for and achieving culturally responsive teaching practices can be problematic, because:

teachers and students enter the classroom with a number of preconceptions, predispositions and biases into the teaching and learning processes so each and every member within the classroom must deliberately engage in an intrinsic effort

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<sup>2</sup> For the purposes of this research, settler refers to non-Indigenous Canadians with European ancestry.

to deconstruct his/ her prejudices and engage in a collective effort to construct new learning paradigms. (Vassallo, 2015, p. 114)

It is worth noting that these preconceptions, predispositions and biases are present within our consciousness even when the learning community share a similar social, cultural, and economic background, as was my experience in Saskatchewan.

It is difficult to deconstruct dominant ideologies in classroom practices and prepare educators and students to discern their role and purpose in an Indigenous classroom. The process involves asking educators and students to operate from a deeper place than the school culture can provide. Deconstructing dominant ideologies in classroom practices require going beyond mandated curriculum goals and objectives and not blaming one cultural group over another or students' lack of interest in the subject. Educators must shift their views on school culture and their reasons for teaching.

### **1.1 Overview of the Research**

By reflecting on my teaching experiences in Saskatchewan, I have become more aware that the public and Indigenous school systems often seem fixated on a traditional standardized model of delivering education through structured programming and building designs. These Eurocentric ideas “rooted of course in colonial structure” (White, 2002, p. 417) conflict with the embodied experiences of students whose histories have been marginalized and silenced.

In our school system the current lives of Indigenous students continue to be oppressed through an ongoing process of colonization. This disparaging analysis of difference among the colonized and the colonizer, as Mudimbe noted “sustains a whole

pattern of positive versus negative and dominant versus marginal associations. Although some of these associations are named as backward, primitive, savage informal developmental discourses, they still lurk there, unsaid. (as cited in White 2002, p. 417)

The complexities experienced in educational practices and institutions rooted in colonial habits provide a catalyst to discover the themes that run through my thesis. Further, the themes uncovered have helped to ascertain the problematic issues of culturally responsive practices where according to Gay (2010) is “using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of references, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant and effective for them” (p. 31).

As I reflect on my learning journey in Saskatchewan, I ask: How did I design a functional space where discussions about oppression and anti-oppression were possible? What were the essential contemplative practices that I relied on even though conversations about oppression and anti-oppression methodologies triggered moments of discomfort amidst the teaching staff, students, and myself? Thus, the literature review will highlight the confusion that comes with teaching for social justice. That is, teaching with the conscious intent to disrupt and work towards finding plausible practices to end the cycle of oppression while embracing the uncertainty caused by change (hooks, 1994; Lather, 2016; Pillow, 2003; Tuck, 2012).

Through this research I tried to move away from “years of positivist- inspired training [which] have taught [me] that impersonal, neutral detachment is an important criterion for good research” (England, 1994, p. 81). Before teaching in Saskatchewan, I thought that my life as an educator embraced constant change in the classroom. I thought

that my practice invited as Hondagneu-Sotelo, (1988) and Opie, (1992), noted, “the need for a broader, less rigid conception of the “appropriate” method that allowed the researcher the flexibility to be more open to the challenges of fieldwork, (as cited in England, 1994, p. 81). However, I had to learn to be “open to the culturally constructed nature of the social world, [the Indigenous community I taught in] peppered with contradictions and complexities,” (England, 1994, 81) throughout my time teaching in Saskatchewan and through reflecting and writing my thesis.

As I analyze the role I played in ideologically white teaching spaces and learned to expose the frustrations that arise out of an awareness of my own biases, I had to accept that “research is a process not just a project” (England, 1994, p. 82). Part of the process involves reflecting on and learning from the past. Through my research, I proposed some practical propositions and the need to engage with these propositions while teaching in the name of social justice through culturally responsive pedagogies, (Gay, 2010) and anti-oppressive theories, Berila, (2016).

### **1.1 Research Purpose**

The purpose of this research is to critically reflect on my efforts to teach in culturally responsive ways during my most recent teaching experience in Saskatchewan. I draw on anti-oppressive theories, Berila (2016), as an umbrella term that opposes and works against the damage caused by the dominant power inscribed within the language of the mandated Saskatchewan ELA curriculum. I also use radical contemplative pedagogies defined “as forms of introspection and reflection [that] allow students the opportunity to focus internally and find more of themselves in their courses,” (Barbeza

and Pingreet, 2012, p. 180). Through the frameworks of anti-oppressive theories and radical contemplative pedagogies I examine my efforts to decolonize and deconstruct texts such as Shakespeare's *Othello* and poetic language forms rooted in Eurocentric culture.

The intent of my research is to understand why my attempt to teach in culturally responsive ways in the classroom was so unsettling both for the students and me. Now that I am far away from Saskatchewan and have had some time to reconsider the tensions I experienced in the classroom and on my pedagogical beliefs, I am drawn to Battiste's (2013a) statement: "The keys in designing meaningful education in Canada must begin with confronting the hidden standards of racism, colonialism, and cultural and linguistic imperialism in modern curriculum and see the theoretical incoherence with the modern theory of society" (p. 28).

I believe that my eagerness to design meaningful education in the Indigenous community I was teaching in challenged the hidden, learned concepts of colonization in the resources used to support classroom practices. The awareness of the inconsistencies and my intentions to deconstruct hegemonic ideals embedded in the curriculum and the need to move away from mandated classroom guidelines triggered a damage-centered approach<sup>3</sup> in the classroom (Tuck, 2009).

It was in that moment of turning inward and naming "the hidden standards of racism, colonialism, and cultural and linguistic imperialism in modern curriculum"

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<sup>3</sup>"Damage-centered" research--that intends to document peoples' pain and brokenness to hold those in power accountable for their oppression. This kind of research operates with a flawed theory of change: it is often used to leverage reparations or resources for marginalized communities yet simultaneously reinforces and reinscribes a one-dimensional notion of these people as depleted, ruined, and hopeless. Tuck, E. (2009, fall). Suspending damage: A letter to communities. *Harvard Educational Review*, 79(3), 409-428.

(Battiste, 2013a, p. 28) that the students and I were “moved beyond a pedagogic stance” (McCann, 2007, p. 156). This shift in perspective pushed me to see students beyond the social norms of Eurocentric thought that socially constructs students as “powerless and voiceless, requiring liberation” (McCann, 2007, p.156). Consciously shifting my perceptive allowed me to engage in a sacred space with students’ where their voices contest and construct meaning through shared text, (See McCann, 2007, p.156). This sacred space, as Richardson, (1997) noted, is where minimally four things happen:

(1) people feel safe within it, safe to be and experiment with who they are and who they are becoming; (2) people feel “connected” perhaps to each other, or a community, or nature, or the world they are constructing on their word processors [their classrooms]; (3) people feel passionate about what they are doing, believing their activity [their classroom practice] makes a difference; and (4) people recognize, honour, and are grateful for safe communion. (p. 185)

As I reflect on my teaching experience in one Indigenous high school in Saskatchewan, this research reveals some of the frustrations in attempting to create that sacred space that Richardson (1997) described. A space that questions the difficulties, inconsistencies and contradictions that often come from teaching within a period where researchers such as Lather (2016), described as “post one thing or the other”. The idea of post one thing or another describes the disruptive process of unsettling the status quo within classroom practices. It is a period where there is a continually shifting paradigm of authentic engagements that embrace the inconsistencies and contradictions within the classroom.

In a landscape of continually shifting paradigms, the students and I often found

ourselves stuck in the cemented memories of colonization proceeding towards contradictories unknown. In my research, I re-interpret these fragile spaces of misinterpretations which Bhabha (1994) noted “are moments of encounter, dislocation, and negotiation,” as “pre-given ethnic or cultural traits set in the fixed tablet of tradition, are disrupted” (as cited in Kanu, 2011; Guiding Principles for Integrating Aboriginal Perspectives, para. 2). Through this research I re-visit the encounters, dislocations and negotiations attendant on my teaching practices in Saskatchewan.

I intended to teach in culturally responsive ways, (Gay 2010), through contemplative practices and anti-oppressive theories in classrooms, (Berila 2016), but my research often turned its lens and asked: How was I equipped to teach in a predominately Indigenous community? Whose responsibility was it to prepare me as an educator for my role within culturally different classrooms? How might I need to change my ideologies about my own teaching methodologies and practices?

Through a reflective approach, I discovered how dehumanizing it could sometimes be to engage in learning activities when classroom concepts and experiences do not reflect the students’ cultural identity stories. During my time teaching in Saskatchewan students and I were labouring quite vigorously to return to the embodied experiences of our varied cultures, rather than to succumb to the hegemonic Eurocentric objective models of thought that are so automatic in our knowing and being.

In my research study, I demonstrate how, over time, if conversations and negotiations about who we are as human beings belonging to somewhere other than the dominant culture get ignored, and the subtly of practised racism and colonialism are not confronted, then these practices can seep into our souls. Looking back at my teaching

experience in Saskatchewan, I can now see how students and I encountered these cognitive imperialist practices in our time together. Battiste, 1986, states that “Cognitive imperialism is a form of cognitive manipulation used to discredit other knowledge bases and values and seeks to validate one source of knowledge and empower it through public education” (as cited in Mentan, 2015, p. 58). This kind of cognitive imperialism pushed students and me to question our own identity, our present sense of self and our relationships with each other. My research demonstrates that when colonial imperialism is not named, the emotions enable a pedagogical approach of complacency.

The question that continually came to the forefront during my research was: Did I teach Indigenous students unconsciously how to value Eurocentric knowledge rather than reinforcing their self-identity? In this research, I discuss the many times I had to negotiate my tendency to return to a pedagogy of comfort because students and I often explicitly resisted the changes that were happening in the classroom and within our bodies due to the choices we were making as a class of learners.

According to Bhabha (1994) “In this very tender space between ambivalence and contradiction is where we are compelled to negotiate the difference, where an in-between space can be created and recreated” (p. 56). Creating that “in-between space” (Kumashiro, 2000) readies us to be aware of “a particular kind of labour necessary for anti-oppressive education” (p. 42).

The call “to labour” (Kumashiro, 2000, p. 42) leads us on an inward journey in search of the “inner teacher” (Palmer, 2007, p. 34). Educators being in positions of power “carry into the classroom their personal and cultural backgrounds that they need to reveal to themselves to do the labour of anti-oppressive education. They perceive students, all of



whom are cultural agents, with inevitable prejudice and preconceptions” (Gay, 2010, p. 9).

This subjective tendency to judge students based on our perceived worldview cannot be humanly separated or dismissed from the work we do as anti-oppressive educators. The need for a changed pedagogical approach which suits diversity in the classroom demands labour. Therefore, because change requires a kind of labour that can lead to overwork, burnout or a demand to compromise our goals, some educators may adopt a pedagogy of complacency. A pedagogy of complacency allows students and educators to be disengaged with the present situation while we seemly accept the status quo. Accepting the status quo enables us to ward off any trigger of hurt, pain, guilt, and anger that anti-oppressive teaching requires we confront.

Moreover, in embracing anti-oppressive education principles, “Indigenous principles offer new ways to think about teacher education-embracing alternative spaces, creating moments of stillness, creating dust storms to challenge complacency, generating common purpose, recognizing our responsible[lity] for each other’ learning in respect and balance, and employing watchful listening as we can,” (Sandford; Williams; Hopper and McGregor, 2012, p. 31). In creating safe spaces through a combination of anti-oppressive practices and Indigenous methodologies teaching and learning gradually becomes a practice that is purposeful and one that engages the whole student and educator despite our fears and our tendency to fall into habits of complacency.

### **1.3 Summary of the Chapters**

In Chapter 1, I position myself as a member of a socially constructed marginalized group in Canada. I describe reasons for my decision to remain in the teaching profession after many efforts to leave due to my experiences as a marginalized brown person navigating the halls of academia. In trying to find allies in the field of culturally responsive teaching, the introduction proposes a framework for my research which ascertains that there is often hypocrisy in what we write, say, and do as educators.

In Chapter 2, I examine the concepts that run through this research: Curriculum document and implementation, Eurocentric ideology, intersectionality, poststructuralist perspectives and deconstructive criticism and its supporting approaches, culturally responsive teaching, anti-oppressive theories, feminist methodologies and radical contemplative pedagogies. I provide an overview of selected research on the complexity of incorporating culturally responsive pedagogies in Indigenous classrooms. I ascertain why it is necessary to disrupt the need to find fixed answers to the complex problems we seek to solve in culturally diverse classrooms and classrooms that are culturally different from the dominant culture.

In this chapter, I frame how the change I seek within the Indigenous classrooms I taught in may involve accepting those parts of myself that often contradict my actions and choices in the school. The reality of my personal experiences with colonization and my acceptance to work at decolonizing my mind from the Eurocentric ideologies taught to me through my years of schooling often necessitates my questioning of my own assumptions, prejudices and preferences in the classroom. The ability to be aware of my own assumptions and prejudices and how these may control my choices in the classroom

creates room for questions such as “What does it mean to negotiate [inquiry] spaces more honestly, about who owns what, who cares about what, who is invested in what” (Lather, 2016).

In Chapter 3, I examine the research methodologies used in this research: critical discourse analysis and document analysis. I examine how power and language in the Saskatchewan ELA Curriculum can be used to dismantle the superficial discourses among educators. I also examine how the ELA curriculum can be used to include different worldviews if we change our perspectives and incorporate a broader approach to teaching and learning within English language classrooms.

In Chapter 4, I situate the Saskatchewan ELA curriculum in the context I taught in during my time in Saskatchewan. I begin by describing some of the complexities I encountered while delivering the Saskatchewan ELA curriculum from an Indigenous perspective. Next, I discuss the intention of education administrators and curriculum developers to give educators the freedom through the accreditation process to discern appropriate classroom practices to suit the cultural background of students. Further, I reflect on the pedagogical and socially engrained complications of delivering the ELA curriculum through students’ lived experiences.

In Chapter 5, I revisit my teaching experience in Saskatchewan. I recount my experiences with practical pieces from media posts to letters, lesson plans and journal entries as I relive and critically reflect on some of the complexities and contradictions of teaching and learning in a predominately Indigenous context.

In Chapter 6, I invite conversations with other researchers exploring common themes in my research, make propositions and indulge in questions as I reflect upon my

experience teaching in an Indigenous context in Saskatchewan. I interrogate the performance of whiteness in the teaching and learning spaces which students and I had inhabited in Saskatchewan. Drawing upon the works of anti-oppressive theorists such as hooks (1994) and cultural theorists such as (Bhabha 1994), I navigate the different philosophical underpinnings that block us from achieving a clear and practical approach towards realizing the notion of being culturally responsive in our classrooms.

Chapter 7 concludes my work as I revise the initial themes and questions which framed my research in the earlier chapters. I discuss the potential my reflection has in changing the way educators teach in an increasingly culturally diverse milieu. I further propose the need to revisit the internalized oppression of educators and students through their life experiences. Through these examinations and critical reflections, I propose a pedagogy of continued engagement so as to find culturally diverse ways of exploring the ELA high school curriculum in Saskatchewan and teaching.

#### **1.4 Research Questions**

While I wrestle to comprehend the inconsistencies between mandated policies and the curriculum implementation of culturally responsive practice, the following five interconnected questions guide my inquiry:

- In which ways was I ready to be flexible, dynamic, and critical about my pedagogical choices in the classroom? How did I teach via students' worldviews and community experiences?

- What role did I, as an educator, play in an Indigenous high school to heighten students' anxiety about the oppressions their communities have endured through colonization?
- How did students and I work collaboratively to deconstruct dominant Eurocentric patterns in curriculum documents and their implementation to build bridges and include different cultures?
- In what ways did I encourage contemplation and facilitate discussions about the inherent powers and discourses that shape knowledge within mandated resources in the Saskatchewan ELA Curriculum?
- How did I support the inclusion of Indigenous ontological and epistemological perspectives in my classroom to enable other classroom discourses missing from the mandated ELA curriculum?

The questions above will guide my analysis as I reflect on students' reaction to my attempts to teach in culturally responsive ways within the classroom and my colleagues' evaluation of my practice while teaching in Saskatchewan.

## **Chapter 2**

### **2.0 CONCEPTS AND SUPPORTING APPROACHES**

In this chapter, I examine related bodies of knowledge which frame my inquiry: (a) culturally responsive teaching, (b) anti-oppressive theories and perspectives, (c) radical contemplative pedagogy, and (d) Eurocentric ideology. I begin with an investigation of these bodies of knowledge before examining related supporting concepts that ground my research. The knowledge and supporting concepts are woven together illustrating the slippery journey that teaching and learning must travel through in hopes of change.

#### **2.1 Concepts**

##### **2.1.1 Curriculum documents and implementation.**

The content and resources that make their way into curriculum documents have often been founded in Eurocentric thought with a history that dates back to colonization. Pop's (2008) interpretation of Eurocentrism is "the practice, conscious or otherwise, of placing emphasis on European (generally, Western) concerns, culture, and values at the expense of those of other cultures," (p.1). Kumashiro (2002) noted, "By focusing on certain stories and perspectives, such curricula normalize privilege in certain groups in society while marginalizing others" (p. 70). Most educators fall into professionally expected habits of wanting to meet mandated curriculum objectives and outcomes, adhering to mandated curriculum content and standardized resources because of the fear of education authorities. These education authority figures, who are seldom on the front

lines, hold many of us accountable for perpetrating varying forms of rigidity, compliance, and adherence, thus limiting educators' capacity to be responsive to the interests and needs of students.

Although the fear of subverting the curriculum was real while teaching in Saskatchewan, I suggest that the mandated curriculum may not be the only limitation to culturally responsive practices in the classroom. The way the prescribed curriculum becomes implemented is also essential. Implementing the prescribed curriculum using culturally responsive pedagogies disturbs the normative methodological processes, making room for other resources to interact with mandated curriculum and curriculum resources. Some teachers suffer fears and self-doubt, often because of not knowing how to teach in ways to meet the needs of students of varying cultural backgrounds. I will argue that in questioning our capabilities, we adapt to the cultural differences in our classrooms, remembering that the curriculum should be an intersected retelling of all our stories and histories. These experiences change from day to day, leading us to a feeling of peace. Even though we may never achieve "best practice" we can continue to use emerging and engaging practices. Hence, the curriculum must first be an embodied process, showing our students and often ourselves, as Drader (2009) noted, that "educators and students must labour in the flesh: teaching and learning must be anchored in a material understanding of our human existence, as a starting place for classroom praxis and our struggle to reinvent the world" (p. 219). Further, as we labour in the flesh, "teaching and learning can invoke a multitude of sensations and responses, including excitement, pain, joy, anger, and frustration" (p. 218). Thus, the initial fears and self

doubt become a process of powerful contemplation, moulding culturally responsive educators and advocates for social justice.

### **2.1.2 Eurocentric Ideology.**

Pop's (2008) interpretation of Eurocentrism is the practice, conscious or otherwise, of placing emphasis on European (generally, Western) concerns, culture, and values at the expense of those of other cultures. Eurocentrism often claimed cultures that were not white or European as being such or denying their existence at all (p. 1). My research study holds three distinct yet intersected meanings of Eurocentrism, as follows:

1. Structured denial: "The practice, conscious or otherwise" (Pop, 2008, p. 1), where many educators are caught up thinking through white thought patterns often without being aware that they are doing so.
2. Hierarchical positioning: "Placing emphasis on European (and, generally, Western) concerns, culture and values at the expense of those of other cultures, where mandated curriculum resources and structures are rooted in European ideologies" (Pop, 2008, p. 1).
3. "Eurocentrism often involves claiming cultures that were not white or European as being such or denying their [other cultures'] existence at all" (Pop, 2008, p. 1).

In this study, I will take Pop's (2008) definition that Eurocentrism or whiteness is a socially constructed idea: "It is more than a race; the word whiteness is about a dominant culture, class, and group in society" (Carroll, 2014, p.1). Moreover, because Eurocentrism is dependent on socially constructed ideas, the language we use to talk



about its existence can be complicated. It can morph into different ideas depending on the social and cultural context of the discussion. While I was in Saskatchewan students and I deconstructed Shakespeare's *Othello* (one of the few mandated texts by the Saskatchewan ELA resource guide) to bare witness to the process of colonization experienced by Indigenous people in Canada. Another example of how educators can use language to deconstruct Eurocentric thought is through the character Caliban in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, as a representation of the colonized. Although we may intentionally work towards disrupting the Eurocentric ideologies in mandated texts as educators, we must remember not to get comfortable or fall into the habit of thinking that "the party is over" (Frank, 2017, keynote lecture, UNB). Instead it is our responsibility to continue to question our pedagogical choices, but is this enough? Moreover, was my methodology suitable when working with students to read a Shakespearian text differently and critically?

"This unconscious act of thinking 'white,' of placing Eurocentric thought or teaching materials above all other worldviews, or for that matter denying that 'other worldviews exist' renders Eurocentrism as a 'practice of judging all who are different as inferior . . . and it divides the world between 'us' the civilized and 'them—the 'others' (Tyson, 1999, p. 366).

As Eurocentrism seems to plot against and separate other worldviews as it anchors itself as the dominant way to think through curriculum content, the work of culturally responsive educators is to resist and question this dominance. Classrooms should be a place to practice and negotiate a path that will not exclude Eurocentrism but

rather include multiple worldviews to facilitate learning practices which embrace a holistic pattern of delivering education.

As these theoretical concepts ground my research, many complexities arise. Often these complexities are more vivid when educators like myself make culturally responsive pedagogies a priority in diverse classroom settings. I will identify these complexities in my efforts to teach in culturally responsive ways. I will explain how anti-oppressive practices and theories, along with deconstructing hegemonic ideas and practices through contemplation, helped me with the emotional turmoil of facing the embodied pent-up oppressive experiences of the students and me. Deleuze and Guattari, (1987) describes this process as “always detachable, connectable, reversible, modifiable, and has multiple entrance-ways and exits and its own lines of flight” (as cited Ketchabaw, 2010, p. 50). This unstable process of always being in flight and of not knowing taught me a very valuable lesson while teaching in Saskatchewan. For it is in the uncertainty of embracing and including multiple worldviews that sit the authenticity of our practice and our faithfulness to disrupt the status quo.

### **2.1.3 Intersectionality.**

Crenshaw coined the term “intersectionality” in 1989. It describes the way oppressive social issues such as racism, sexism, capitalism, and homophobia intertwine and influence each other. Crenshaw described intersectionality as “[a way] to deal with the fact that many of our social justice problems like racism and sexism are often overlapping, creating multiple levels of social injustice” (retrieved October 2016). How does Crenshaw’s definition of intersectionality fit into a diverse classroom setting?

As described in this research, some educators may lack the ability to view students from their socio-economic position, their ethnic self-identity, and their worldview. The reason is they view anything other than the social construction of the dominant group from a set of prescribed dominant ideologies. Crenshaw (1991), commented that:

An intersectional-type framework starts from the premise that distinctive systems of oppression such as racism, patriarchy, and heteronormativity need each other in order to function; they are co-produced and productive of unequal material realities. Further, individuals and groups can simultaneously experience privilege and disadvantage because of how forces of power intersect and interact, (as cited in Dhamoon, 2015, p. 10)

Crenshaw (2016), and Collins and Chepp (2013) as cited in Dhamoon, (2015) declared that the way most educators were taught to view difference may not stem from a form of oppression. Instead, the way we view difference may be caused by our learned attitudes that connote privilege derived from an educational system rooted in varying forms of oppression.

As I interrogate these dominant Eurocentric patterns which often complicate the way we desire to teach students, I will examine how an intersectional approach to teaching and learning (when used as a tool in high school ELA classes) helps us achieve the goal of including all students in our classroom practices. Further, through an intersectional approach, our efforts to facilitate learning from an anti-oppressive framework becomes a more realistic undertaking. Reflecting on my teaching experience,

I often question how an intersectional approach influences the multistory approach which students and I were using to include all the narratives we had brought to the classroom.

#### **2.1.4 Poststructuralist perspectives.**

The complexity brought about by pursuing changes in education policies requires an approach that includes multiple ways in which to talk about oppression. The nature of these conversations should be focused on place- and human-based meaning in which context, setting, and human interactions can influence interpretations about issues that seem unfixed as situations change and paradigms shift. Thus, St. Pierre and Pillow (2000) suggest:

Post-structuralism . . . does not assume that humanism is an error that must be replaced, i.e., humanism is evil because it has gotten us into this fix; post-structuralism is good since it will save us. It does not offer an alternative, successor regime of truth, it does not claim to have “gotten it right,” nor does it believe that such an emancipatory outcome is possible or even desirable. Rather, it offers critiques and methods for examining the functions and effects of any structure or grid of regularity that we put into place, including that post-structuralism itself might create. (p. 6)

Hence, post-structuralism indicates the complexities we may encounter as we work to deconstruct objective knowledge. Post-structuralism gives us a language in which we can acknowledge the fluidity of issues in society. While we work towards embracing differences and reframe our perspectives, “this [post-structuralism] framework [also] highlights the centrality of issues related to power, knowledge, difference, and

subjectivity [and while post-structuralism] does not seek to offer a new set of ‘isms’, [it] suggests a range of possibilities about how knowledge is produced and used”

(Featherstone and Fawcett, 1995, p. 25).

In this research, I will keep in mind a post-structuralist perspective in seeking out reasons why culturally responsive practices may be challenging. Working from a post-structuralist lens may allow understanding of these challenges and strategies and provide a way to work within the parameters of dominance. In Saskatchewan the Indigenous classroom I was facilitating learning in provides a place for me to witness first how post-structural perspectives can be a way to unsettle the status quo. Through deconstruction work resting in a post- structural concept student and I discover that knowledge is limited yet vast and fluid yet grounding.

### **2.1.5 Deconstructive criticism.**

In this research, I will use “a theory of language based on the belief that language is much more slippery and ambiguous than we realize,” (Tyson, 1999, p. 242). This study applies anti-oppressive theories such as post-structural perspectives and adopts a feminist approach to analyze its findings in the hope of revealing that deconstruction has a good deal to offer us. It can improve our ability to think critically and see more readily the ways in which our experiences are determined by ideologies of which we are unaware because they are “built into” our language (p. 241). Derrida, (1967), supported the idea of language being: “(a) open to more than one interruption, (b) contextual, (c) dependent on setting and tone, and (d) not the reliable tool of communication we believe it to be, but

rather it is a fluid, ambiguous domain of complex experiences in which ideologies program us without our being aware” (as cited in Tyson, 1999, pp. 241-242).

My reflective analysis demonstrates the confusion in deconstructing mandated curriculum content and resources, and how the contextual interpretations can conflict with an educator’s intentions because of histories of oppression. As I retell my experiences teaching ELA in an Indigenous community in Saskatchewan and explore the underlying themes of this research (oppression, whiteness, hegemony, etc.) it may become evident that the complexities involved in uprooting deeply embedded ideologies are often extreme because “we are unaware that they are ‘built into’ our language” (Tyson, 1999, p. 241) and the way we understand the world.

## **2.2 Supporting Approaches**

### **2.2.1 Culturally responsive teaching.**

According to Gay (2010), culturally responsive teaching is “using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of references, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant and effective for them” (p. 31). In accepting that students’ previous knowledge and ways of understanding the world is relevant to classroom practices, there are five key principles to support culturally responsive practices:

1. Eradication of deficit-based ideologies;
2. Disruption of Eurocentric middle-class forms of discourse as being normative;
3. Commitment to challenge injustice and oppressive practices;
4. Authentic, culturally informed caring for students of colour; and

5. Recognition of the complexity of culture and incorporation [of] students' personal cultures. (as cited in Marks, 2014, p.17)

Authentically recognising students embodied diverse histories and life experiences in our classrooms call us through culturally responsive teaching to view education as holistic, a combination of many different ideas, attitudes and belief systems. According to Miller (1997), "Holistic education is based on the premise that each person finds an identity, meaning, and purpose in life through connections to the community, to the natural world, and to spiritual values such as compassion and peace" (as cited in Berila, 2016, p. 6).

Hence, culturally responsive teaching requires that we find a cure for any existing illusions we may have that students are culturally deficient in some way or the other because they do not belong to the dominant group in society. In this research, I endeavour to dismantle the colonial notion that the dominant knowledge or culture can rescue the students in our classrooms. In my time teaching in an Indigenous context in Saskatchewan, my efforts gradually evolved into finding ways in the present system to create an inclusive yet pluralistic setting where students and I could find respectful ways of working together despite our cultural differences.

### **2.2.2 Anti-oppressive theories and perspectives.**

Since there is no one way in which to dismantle the many oppressions that exist in society such as racism, classism, ageism, and sexism; anti-oppressive theories give us the breadth to highlight how varying forms of oppression enact and intersect so as to position some bodies for privileges and other bodies for oppression, (see Stewart, Cappello and

Carter, 2014). St. Denis, (2007) drawing on the work of Brayboy (2000) and King (2003), noted that, Indigenous students “are in part living out a long-established, politically charged script of who belongs and what it means to belong in an [Indigenous] community” (p.1069).

This research uses anti-oppressive theories as an umbrella term that opposes and works against the damage caused by the dominant power inscribed within the language of the mandated Saskatchewan ELA curriculum. Further anti-oppressive work can be used as a medium to dislocate and negotiate the actions of the privileged group within the education system. As my experiences in Saskatchewan have shown, “creating a more just society requires institutional and collective change, but it also requires the individual work of unlearning the messages of internalized pain in an oppressive society and relearning more compassionate ways of being with ourselves and others” (Berila, 2016, p. 22).

This type of anti-oppressive work and research by marginalized groups calls for dismantling the idea that knowledge is out there to be discovered. Rather, through this type of deconstruction and inclusion work, “knowledge is projected through the interactions of people and all people are socially and politically located (in their class and identities), with biases, privileges, and differing entitlements” (Strega and Brown, 2015, p. 19).

The knowledge produced through anti-oppressive work and research can further serve as a marker for students and educators. Educators and students who come to classrooms often unaware of their privileges (differing entitlements) have unconsciously inherited oppression too. McIntosh (1988) identifies and helps educators understand the



unspoken privileges that come with whiteness. Both the understanding of the privileges that whiteness embraces and our complicit, silence as educators about our understandings raise causes for concern. In the act of being complicit, we allow the concept of white privilege to continue to be dominant in curriculum discourses and classroom practices.

An anti-oppressive approach goes beyond awareness. The anti-oppressive approach that I am calling for in this research destabilizes and critically interrogates Eurocentric ideologies within our classrooms and our self identity. “Anti-oppressive pedagogy is the humanistic task-to regain humanity for all- to liberate the oppressed and the oppressors – to create a new way of knowing” (Freire, 1970, p. 26).

The knowledge produced both by marginalized groups and majority groups can be used to bridge varying cultural perspectives towards the goal of intersection and inclusivity. By examining my own experiences in Saskatchewan and reading the work of theorists such as Berila, (2016) and Freire (1970 and 2005) I found anti-oppressive theories or pedagogies can expose the invisibility of privilege. These new concepts push us further to re-imagine and reinvent ways of challenging the strongholds among varying types of oppression that keep us linked to the norms and language of Eurocentrism.

### **2.2.3 Feminist pedagogies.**

My research is guided by feminist pedagogies because culturally inclusive practices “[demand] that students and teachers become co-creators of knowledge and the classroom space as a site of knowledge production” (Berila, 2016, p. 4). “Feminist pedagogy builds on this definition [our students’ experiences matter and educators’ lived experiences matter, these two interact and create meaning to create new knowledge] to

inform teaching practices that educate the whole student” (p. 4). During my time teaching in Saskatchewan students and I over time experienced a greater sense of learning success when our experiences intersected. Further, a sense of community was able to begin to bloom when we gave ourselves permission to move beyond the planned curriculum.

Further, feminist pedagogies inform us “that knowledge is not something that exists outside of us but, rather, something that we participate in producing” (Berila, 2016, p. 38). A feminist approach to teaching and learning that honours experiential knowledge, self-reflection, and activism encourages an awareness that all lives matter, stories matter and the improved performance of all our students relies on the collective good we (students and educators) bring to the classroom.

Situating the educator’s lived experiences through a reflexive landscape as part of the knowledge making process can be problematic. Moss (1995) notes that “the researcher, the educator [my role in Saskatchewan] begin part of the inside process of knowledge creation is an impossible position because she is not the same as her [students].” Through Eurocentric values the relationship between educators and students is understood and marked by divisions of power. My positionality while teaching in Saskatchewan was understood by students as one imbued with power that triggers the assumption that I am the gatekeeper of knowledge. Hence to propose to students that my intentions were to include them in creating knowledge through collaboration rather than a hierarchical approach was new for them.

I argue through this research that teaching in culturally diverse classrooms demand that we move away from the entrenched systematic power dynamics in our classroom. Educators must develop the tools to function effectively through the

intersections of contradictions, complexities and dislocations. Further there is a necessity that at these times of contradictions, complexities and dislocations are when we should negotiate towards other culturally inclusive possibilities within our classroom, “since the point of situating knowledges is precisely to forge critical, situated understandings by thinking through differences and similarity” (as cited Rose, 1997, p. 313).

Although contradictions, complexities and dislocations may raise other questions, the methodologies educators use to situate themselves in the in-betweens of their practices in order to confront the dominate ideologies within curriculum content and implementation are vital. Knowing that often there are no answers and knowing that the questions are “so presumptuous” (Rose, 1997 p. 311), destabilizes and decentres our tendency to gravitate to definite answers. A feminist anti-oppressive framework through a practice of radical contemplation offers us a guide to analyze our pedagogies, our intentions and consciously holds us accountable to ourselves and the students we engage with from a lens of equity and social justice.

Embracing curriculum writing, discourses and implementation as a process of becoming puts ‘the authority of academic knowledge ... into question not by self-conscious position [wielding power over the other] but by gaps that give space to and are affected by, other knowledge’ (Rose, 1997, p. 315). Through the act of becoming, of creating and recreating, it will be less likely for educators and systems to “systematically fail to construct a meaningful educational practice out of students’ languages, cultures, community-based identities, or real-world experiences” (Valenzuela, 2016, p. 4), because the quest to know depends on an authentic search to understand self, others and the context of our present environment.

### **2.1.2 Radical contemplative pedagogy.**

Radical contemplative pedagogy sometimes referred to as mindfulness theory by professionals in fields such as medicine, social work, and psychology, recommends the process of deep reflection about one's thoughts and actions. For the purposes of this study "Contemplative pedagogy uses forms of introspection and reflection allowing students the opportunity to focus internally and find more of themselves in their courses" (Barbeza and Pingree, 2012, p. 180). Hence, in this study, I take contemplative pedagogy out of those psychological spaces used for therapeutic purposes and place it in an area of deep philosophical pondering about questions such as: Who am I? What am I? What is my purpose as it relates to the position I find myself in at this present moment in my classroom?

The answers to these questions might position educators to teach and learn from a place of greater self-awareness. When educators are capable of teaching with calm and resilience in moments of great complexity and sometimes adversity, students experience a frame of reference to build their own capacity. They are likely "to cultivate emotional intelligence, learn to sit with difficult emotions, recognize deeply entrenched narratives they use to interpret the world, cultivate compassion for other people, and become more intentional about how they respond in any given moment" (Berila, 2016, p. 15).

The acknowledgment and incorporation of contemplative practices within the classroom hold true and reinforce Indigenous ways of knowing. Kovach, drawing on the work of Sandford, Williams, Hopper and McGregor, (2012), writes, that in spaces of teaching and learning, "Indigenous knowledge systems recognize stillness and quietness" (2015, p. 53). Moreover, radical contemplative pedagogy encourages the journey of self-

reflection to communicate with our inner selves so that we can be open to changes and other possibilities. Berila, (2016) noted that this kind of purposeful engagement with ourselves leads us to be more intentional in our dealings with others. hooks (1994), called for an “engaged pedagogy”, which she suggested goes further than either critical or feminist pedagogies because it emphasizes well-being and calls for radical openness, discernment, and care of the soul” (as cited in Berila, 2016, p.7).

This “radical openness” leads us into collective work which is necessary to operate in an anti-oppressive framework because “neither anti-oppression pedagogy nor contemplative education is enough on their own, but their integration can provide a powerful recipe for enabling social transformation through the learning—and unlearning—process” (Berila, 2016, 28).

In this study, I argued that placing one set of ideologies as supreme over the other would be replacing one set of dominant ideologies with another. Educators who are often adamant about making changes in their respective classrooms by incorporating culturally responsive methodologies should also be adamant about “unlearning oppression in the college [in secondary school] classroom” (Berila, 2016, p. 28). Berila (2016) adds that “unlearning oppression can lead to some intense discussions, and I believe that teachers have an ethical responsibility to prepare students [and themselves] for the rawness that can emerge through this kind of pedagogy and to provide [students and themselves] with tools to handle it” (p. 28).

The process of contemplative practices which include reflection, sitting still, and journaling can be used to manage the kind of “rawness” to which Berila, (2016) referred

to. It can mean the guilt, pain, and anger that comes to the surface when we confront the root of internalized oppression planted by the intention and goal of colonization.

I argue that radical contemplative undertakings intertwined with effective pedagogical and theoretical practices move the conversations in most classrooms from dominance to exploring multiple perspectives. It moves the conversations and ways of understanding to a practice that embraces, shared characteristics of Indigenous knowledge systems “that include a way of knowing that is fluid (Little Bear 2000 and Hart 2009) and experiential” (Strega & Brown, p. 54). This kind of intersectional approach also works well in achieving the goals of culturally responsive teaching. The philosophical underpinnings of being well-intentioned, reflective, and compassionate must be part of our daily classroom activities. It is necessary to analyze textual references and how to use language to move from a position of judgment to a more embodied understanding of the common traits that make us human and, in turn, make society viable where “each has its place, and each is incomplete” (Berila, 2016, p. 18), on their own.

## CHAPTER 3

### 3.0 METHODOLOGIES

In this chapter, I lay out the plan for my research documenting my critical reflections on my teaching experiences within a particular Indigenous community in Saskatchewan, where my assignment was to teach ELA to high school students. As part of my analysis I also engage with curriculum documents and supporting curriculum documents mandated by the Saskatchewan Ministry of Education. Through the use of two research methodologies: (a) critical discourse analysis, and (b) document analysis in the context of qualitative research as a reflective process.

I explore how one's embodied experiences can be used as a repertoire of ideas (Shapiro, 1999) and a site for creating new knowledge that is different from the dominant ideologies represented in curriculum documents, curriculum implementation and classroom practices. Further, I expand on the use of the body as "a vehicle for understanding oppression, resistance, and liberation" (Berila, 2016, p. 38). I describe how past oppressive experiences take "root in our memory against our will" (hooks, 1994, p. 167). Over time, these past ordeals develop into notions of power, blocking us from the internal capacity "to free ourselves from normalizing boundaries and categories" (Lather, 1991, p. 116) within colonized classrooms.

It was evident during my time teaching in Saskatchewan that memories of colonialization and students' ongoing experiences with oppression created great difficulty for students and myself. Engaging in anti-oppressive practices to avoid reliving these memories reached a point where students and I had to continually participate in the act of forgiving the experiences of the past ordeals so that we could grow and build

relationships with each other. I demonstrate in my reflective analysis how, in trying to learn and build relationships, these painful memories can lead to misinterpretations of each other's intent, making it difficult to move past emotions of hurt.

In the need to transition from one emotion to another and one experience to another, we are reminded that teaching is “contextual, situational, a complex and personal process, and a never-ending journey” (Gay, 2010, p. 22). As I reflect on my experiences teaching within an Indigenous context in Saskatchewan, my struggle to understand why the knowledge of anti-oppressive theories and intentions often do not translate into action remains constant. By narrating my teaching experiences in Saskatchewan, I hope to show that when culturally responsive teaching is reflective and effective, emotions such as fear, and suspicion arise among marginalized groups. These emotions sometimes get entangled with a sort of power dynamics both groups want to avoid.

### **3.1 Curriculum as deconstructed text.**

The curriculum as deconstructed text may seem like a utopian ideal, too far-fetched for educators, myself included, to shift the entrenched expectations that education systems have sold to us. As Carrol, (2014) noted “whiteness is the dominant ideology in Canadian schools (Indigenous Schools are part of Canadian Schools) today, but it can be deconstructed with the help of teachers, administrators, the government, students and parents” (p. 102). The very notion that curriculum needs to be deconstructed pushes me to question the separation between [educators] and curriculum [which] has created a static, cold, compartmentalized curriculum...” (Sameshima, 2007, p. 28) presently in place and was in place during my time teaching in Saskatchewan. For this research, I



incorporate the research methods of document analysis and critical discourse analysis to initiate the process of interrogating the mandated curriculum so as “to recreate the entire curriculum so that it presents our entire Canadian population, not just the whiteness in it” (Carrol, 2014, p. 100). Through the process of analyzing and deconstructing the static curriculum, I discovered that implementing research methodology such as document analysis helped students and me to identify oppressive discourses in curriculum documents and curriculum support documents.

In my experience teaching in Saskatchewan, I witnessed many possibilities for creating new knowledge, not only by implementing the present dominant knowledge within the ELA curriculum, but also by “moving beyond a pedagogic stance of seeing (Indigenous students) as powerless and voiceless, requiring liberation, to a post-critical stance of engaging with their voices contesting and constructing meaning through shared texts, entering new pedagogic and research spaces” (McCann, 2007, p. 156).

There is a great awakening after we name the stories left out of curriculum narratives and those which are included. These spaces are not innocent but as Richardson (1997) noted: “are sacred spaces” (p. 184), requiring that we enter it bringing our whole self. In my thesis, I demonstrate by using lessons plans and students’ responses that these spaces leave great potential for change within marginalized groups. On the other hand, stories that are included “represent structural powers and principalities—humanly constructed social institutions that seem to take on a life of their own and appear to be “natural” in the hegemonic influence they wield” (Fernandez, 2014, p. 54). Thus, curriculum making, and curriculum implementation invite confusion because of the emotional burden entailed in deconstruction work.

The attempt to reorganize the curriculum might lapse into deliberate Eurocentric ideologies and hegemonic organizing, because:

[Whoever] enters [this space] . . . [this messy and contradictory . . . space] must be well aware that its epistemological assumptions—the epistemological perspectives, ideologies, and the insistence on “educational excellence”—are already situated and serve the needs of a privileged group. (Fernandez, 2014, p. 56)

Curriculum making, and curriculum implementation mandate that educators enter this sacred space juxtaposed by the intersections of power ready to discern the spirits of truth that arise. In doing so, “one must always approach with intentionality” (Fernandez, 2014, p. 54), as a storyteller and as a story maker, where the telling, the troubling, and the deconstructing has no end.

In these curriculum spaces of the in-between (see Bhabba, 1994), knowledge-making flows from our lived experiences that draw upon feminist post-structuralist theories leading us beyond static understandings of how we know, to more fluid and complicated knowledge that reveals exclusions and objectifications at work in educational settings (see Cary, 2006). The exclusions and objections that Cary described in her work cause us to consider that no story can be the only story.

Through the lived experiences and diverse histories, the human story is embraced by multiple worldviews encapsulated in varying cultures. The struggle to create a welcoming space within curriculum discourse embraces cultural diversity. At the same time, celebrating our common humanity in the act of teaching in culturally responsive ways must include multiple and contradictory stories that live in our shared humanity.

Although I was teaching predominantly Indigenous students, it was vital for me to remember that the ELA Saskatchewan curriculum content and concepts that I was expected to deliver was marinated in Eurocentric ideologies. Its content and prescribed supporting resources were already situated and serve the needs of a privileged group.

Hence, while deconstruction manoeuvres towards (a) uncovering and including the various embodied knowledges that are left out of the curriculum, and (b) interrogating what knowledge and concepts are already engrained in the texts supporting curriculum goals, objectives, and indicators, it is important to remember that many cultural integration-oriented approaches developed in places that embrace Eurocentric ideologies might have cultural blind spots. For example, they might be framed individualistically and so reflect the cultural ethos of the dominant culture, thus making it more challenging for those who come from different cultures. How might an inclusive cultural learning approach be acted upon if it took seriously the diverse backgrounds of students reflected in intercultural and multiracial settings?

I recalled the complexities the students and I experienced as we set out on a journey to make Shakespeare's *Othello* relevant to the community's history. My attempt to encourage and work with students to Indigenize Shakespeare's *Othello* served as an agent to expose, as Battiste (2013a) noted, "the predicament education theory has to confront . . . [between choosing to deconstruct the ideologies in Eurocentric text and] the "isms" which exist in society" (p. 29). Mulcahy, (2015) noted that "from a pedagogical perspective, critical literacy is a philosophy that recognizes the connections between power, knowledge, language, and ideology, and recognizes the inequalities and injustices

surrounding us to move toward transformative action and social justice” (as cited in Wallowitz, 2008, p. 16).

The debate about the many facets of educational systems “of whose knowledge is offered, who decides what is offered, what outcomes are rewarded, and who benefits and, more importantly, how those are achieved in an ethically appropriate process” (Battiste, 2013a, p. 28), may be among the many reasons “why the school curriculum is seen as a battleground for competing ideologies and why the debates over what schools should do are so vociferous” (Kanu, 2011, p. 523-525).

In the contested field of curriculum design and curriculum implementation, “the separation between [educator] and curriculum... has created the disembodied [educator whose position is to transmit knowledge] as [a] mindless conduit of transference” (Sameshima, 2007, p.29). Returning to my teaching experience in Saskatchewan, perhaps it was my own desire to bridge the gap between theory and practice of what is mandated in the Saskatchewan ELA curriculum and the community’s history and students’ cultural experiences that caused so much disturbance. Maybe it was my deep concern to acknowledge the responsibility of honouring the bodies in my classroom and what they represent, that invited so many challenges within the context I was positioned in.

Even though I had found a way with my students to Indigenize Shakespeare’s *Othello* by encouraging discussions about racism and class, was that enough? Even though I had consulted elders about Indigenous protocols and invited them into my classroom to tell stories as we worked together to debunk Eurocentric norms, was that enough? As I rationalize my own perceived inadequacies to embrace a somewhat imbalanced system, mostly reliant on the technical aspects of the classroom, where

students are “. . . progressively educate[d] [from the] waist up” (Robinson, 2007), I wonder how my courage to do education differently had impacted the community. On second thoughts, I will counter Robinson’s statement to state that we often “progressively educate” students from the shoulders up, because to go from the waist up would mean including the heart where feelings and emotions metaphorically reside.

Educators who take on the role of being culturally responsive in classrooms must choose to facilitate learning experiences that often expose the oppressions endured by Indigenous and other minority groups. Additionally, “in confronting our biases and prejudices, educators need to be encouraged into different analytical perspectives, such as multicultural, post-structural, feminist, and anti-colonial perspectives” (Kanu, 2011, p. 523-525) to make curriculum work possible. These critical perspectives (if used to deconstruct mandated curriculum), Kanu noted (2011) while researching First Nations education in Manitoba, will help “educators shift their focus from merely technical questions to dealing with how to organize, teach, and evaluate curriculum efficiently, to substantive questions that interrogate and contest the curriculum” (p. 523-525).

Implementing the Saskatchewan ELA curriculum is bound with contradictions and inconsistencies. How much freedom does an educator have? Are the expectations and freedoms of pedagogical allowances the same in predominantly Indigenous communities as for their counterparts in provincially funded high schools? Educators’ choice is further complicated by the risk of jeopardizing student success at the provincial departmental exams to earn their ELA grade 12 credits.

In a conscious effort to interrogate the scripted curriculum in place in Saskatchewan, I found myself able, through my status as an accredited ELA educator, to

create situations where it was possible to deconstruct the embedded Eurocentric ideologies crystallized in the Saskatchewan ELA curriculum. Using narrative texts and poetry recommended by curriculum experts in the Ministry of Education in Saskatchewan, students and I were able to include the lived experiences of the complicated, diverse, and messy narratives of a culturally diverse society. Even though the embodied experiences of students were often absent from the texts we were reading (Cary, 2006) we had the freedom to choose how we would meet curriculum goals because as I was an accredited ELA educator meaning students were not mandated to write the provincial ELA departmental exams.

What happened in my classroom in Saskatchewan illustrates that by using narrative texts and poetry, I was encouraging a shift in the normative pedagogical practices expected in ELA classrooms. The students and I worked towards seeking a collective human approach in our classroom practice while respecting different worldviews. In this way, my classroom practices became relevant because we were operating from spaces of in-between (see Bhabha, 1994).

Understanding curriculum as deconstructed text acknowledges the content as pre-eminently historical. Here, history is not understood as ideologically constructed, but as a series of interconnected narratives. To understand curriculum as deconstructed (and deconstructing) text is to tell stories that never end, stories in which the listener, the “narratee,” may become a character or indeed the narrator, in which all structures as Pinar, Reynolds and Slattery, (1995) commented are “provisional, momentary, a collection of twinkling stars in a firmament of flux.” (as cited, in Sameshima, 2007, p. 31)

### 3.2 Curriculum Discourses: The Functional Space

My experience in Saskatchewan taught me that curriculum and curriculum implementation is more than just facts to be noted on a page, memorized, and then regurgitated through standardized testing and information management. From my experiences over the years in the field of teaching and curriculum theorizing (particularly the Language Arts curriculum) has been shifting from a linear to dialogical implementation structure.

Hence, educators working towards culturally responsive practices in ELA classrooms must do more with the curriculum than just teaching as usual. English (2005), referenced “Postcolonial writers (e.g. Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffins, 1995 and Spivak, 1999) [who] have challenged the dominant views by resisting coding, rigidity, and colonialism. They have attended to issues of power, essentialism, and inequality, and probed questions that linger unasked within the third space” (as cited in Karanja, 2010, p. 2).

Leonard Cohen, a Canadian singer, songwriter, and poet comes to mind when I think about curriculum as deconstructed text, as a third-space experience. Questioning the state of democracy in the United States, through the song *Anthem*, (1992) Cohen wrote, “there is crack, a crack in everything, that’s how the light gets in.” Cohen’s lyrics can be used as a metaphor to describe the human suffering and pain endured within classrooms where students’ cultural histories and day to day community experiences are not illustrated. Further, Cohen’s lyrics with the use of imagination offer a speck of reality about the possibilities that exist when educators choose to be culturally responsive to students’ experiences (that’s how the light gets in). Cohen’s lyrics help me to reflect on

the cultural narratives left out of the Saskatchewan ELA curriculum. His lyrics help me to intentionally reflect on the importance of searching for other ways of implementing the curriculum rather than holding on to a process of fixed ends as the only measures of success.

By interrogating the fixed hegemonic ideologies nested in instructions regarding resource selections, objectives, rationales and summative assessment tools, get authentically revealed offering a crack of light, exposing the patterns of exclusion and inclusion inscribed in the dominant structure of curriculum work. As we question the oppressive concepts within mandated curriculum documents, matters of exclusion and inclusion are brought to bare. It leads us toward a crack, a hybrid space, or a third space (see Bhabba, 1994) towards a functional space (see Kadir, 2011).

I encountered hostility in my ELA classroom in Saskatchewan. However, as our reading and deconstruction work of *Othello* demonstrates, after some time students perceived concepts and texts not as a given, but as materials to be questioned and critiqued to create metanarratives of the dominant narratives which can reinterpreted to include Indigenous perspectives. Our work together as a class of learners was an indication that the curriculum, texts, and students were gradually moving away from the scripted curriculum to having authentic conversations with each other. The curriculum, texts, students and I were moving to a post-structural view (St. Pierre and Pillow, 2000) of how the dominant narratives have worked overtime to keep oppression intact. My critical reflection resonates with the fact that students were beginning to have classroom experiences that mirrored the contradictions they face in the world “where knowledge and truth are contested, constructed, tentative, and emerging” (Slattery, 2013, p. 128).



I admit it took me a while to think about curriculum as a living thing (Aoki, 1993) but through constant reflection on my practice, and students' disengagement with curriculum content and concepts as planned, I have learned as an educator that if the curriculum is to have any meaning it must be as Vasquez, 2004, noted "on what matters to them [students]" (as cited in Vasquez, and Felderman, 2013, p. 27).

Thus, through the narrative experiences of students, the curriculum enters constant moments of becoming. While students' experiences change, their hermeneutic analysis of their experiences change, expanding the notion of curriculum, from the planned to the lived curriculum (Aoki, 1993). Shifting our understanding of curriculum from one that was cold, impersonal and static to one that is constantly becoming, the students and I created for ourselves a "functional space" (Kadir, 2011) using the mandated curriculum as a site for our conversation. The mandated curriculum and text became "a conservative locus, a point of conjunction, to them a crossroads, a middle of the road, though the road be crooked and long" (Kadir, 2011, p. 20). Kadir's concept of "the functional space" opens a door where it is possible "to open up hearts, minds and souls through language" (Sims and Lea, 2008, p. 68). Through the complex epistemological and ontological investigations of the status quo created in intersections of torment, memory, and storytelling, the functional space becomes active by "[de]stabilizing and disrupting essentialist assumptions . . . [bringing] possibilities for other ways of knowing (Cary, 2006, p. 7) to the forefront. Therefore, curriculum as an entry point invites educator to view the process of implementation from a system that works against the containment of varying cultures to an inclusive cultural translation of differences in our classrooms.

### **3.3 Reflective research methodology.**

The educator as researcher does not inhabit a new role in education research practices. Over many decades, the use of educators' reflections as professional testimony to enact educational reform has been embraced by the research community in education, the humanities, and the social sciences. The practice of reflection has its roots in the work of theorists such as Dewey (1938) who believed reflection has a "moral base where professional actions would be treated as experimental, and the individual would reflect both on their actions and their consequences" (p. 105). Lyle, (2017), in her work on autoethnography notes that:

[a]t reflectivity most basic [definition], ... refers to the researcher's consciousness of her role in and effect on various stages of inquiry. Pulling at these threads reveals how reflexivity also involves the researcher's intimate connectedness to both the act of doing research and its eventual findings. Further, it has deep implications for "the political and social constructions that inform the research process" (p. 12).

This conceptualization of reflexivity reaches beyond "a narcissistic self-check for bias conducted during the research process" (McCabe and Holmes, 2009, p. 1519) and extends reflexivity from the personal to the epistemological" (p. 2).

In classrooms filled with students of different capacities, ethno cultures, languages and experiences, the nature of teaching has become even more complex—a mix of trial and errors. "A reflective approach not only reports the findings of the research but at the same time questions and explains how those findings are constructed" (Mortari, 2015, p. 2). Considering the complexities that have shaped my experiences

while teaching in Saskatchewan as well as my reflections on those experiences, offer a way to question and reform my past actions and choices. It provides a way to challenge my assumptions and ruminate on my biases. “In the frame of the postmodern paradigm, [where] reflective analysis [as a] heuristic experience is assumed, whatever the subject matter of inquiry, is essential for the validity of the research” (Mortari, 2015, p. 2).

Holland (1999) stated, “The processes of reflexivity, therefore, underlies various attempts to understand and intervene in human relationships and [as such it] is fundamentally a human quality” (as cited in Lambert, Jomeen, & McSherry, 2010). This statement is useful in understanding why we make the necessary choices we make as we work towards a collaborative and holistic anti-biased educational practice.

Retelling and retracing specific encounters of teaching in high school X helps me to find ways to be a critical pedagogue in spaces of oppression through anti-oppressive theories and practices. I hope that many educators who strive to disrupt dominant Eurocentric ideologies understand that we risk much of ourselves and our ways of being and teaching in these conflicted environments.

### **3.4 Critical discourse and document analysis.**

There are many ways to unravel the entanglements resulting from the intersection of varying power dynamics. In my research, I use Van. D. (1998) definition of critical discourse analysis (CDA) which is used to analyze written and spoken texts to explore the discursive sources of power, dominance, inequality, and bias. CDA analysis evaluates how these discursive sources are maintained and reproduced within a social, political, and historical context.

Using Van D. (1998) definition, I reflect on my experiences teaching in Saskatchewan by interrogating curriculum documents such as the Saskatchewan ELA 30 curriculum and the Classroom Curriculum Connections handbook, which offer teachers opportunities for personal and professional growth experiences. I also reflect on a letter written by Ms. Jane about my classroom practices forwarded to the Education Band Council. Coupled with CDA, I will use the method of document analysis, “a method used in investigating and categorizing physical sources, most commonly written documents, whether in the private or public domain” (Ahmed, 2012, p. 2), “to give voice and meaning around” the rooted epistemological and ontological discourses embedded in these documents (Bowen, 2009).

My research is not designed via interviews or statistical data but rather through a qualitative method resting on the process of reflection aided by specific documents. In my findings, document analysis is used as a reminder that documents are not disembodied pieces of paper. Instead, documents “must be studied as socially situated products” (Scott, 1990, p. 34).

I draw on various curriculum documents such as (a) the Grade 12 English Language Arts Saskatchewan curriculum, (b) Curriculum Support Documents, and (c) specific lessons created with the guidance of these curriculum documents in which a wealth of textual evidence can be found. I used these documents to demonstrate how students’ cultural experiences and histories are marginalized or often are parallel to students lived experiences. Although many researchers in scientific academic circles may challenge qualitative research done through document analysis, Ahmed (2012), reminded

us that document analysis is “just as good as and sometimes even more cost-effective than the social surveys, in-depth interviews, or participant observation” (p. 2).

Therefore, as educators who also find ourselves as ethnographic researchers, we have the responsibility to bring the body into the analysis process. If the embodied experiences of the research participants and the researcher are left out of the research process, then our work will only complement the status quo which will then deem the authenticity and fluidity that make up the human condition as a flaw.

Through these curriculum documents, I will endeavour to ascertain and deconstruct how power and language are replicated and sometimes theoretically debunked. Moreover, for the purposes of my research I will use CDA to discern my engagement with students, educators, and the ELA curriculum in Saskatchewan to reveal the way in which power relationships, presumed truths, and contradictions (MacNaughton, 2005), reinforce privilege and sustain oppression.

In a conscious effort to (a) rupture the rooted oppressive discourses in the framework of curriculum documents, and (b) bridge diverse cultural narratives through classroom practices, Tuck and Yang (2014) noted that educators taking the role of researchers must always learn how to navigate these documents without “serving up pain stories on a silver platter for the settler colonial academy, which hungers so ravenously for them” (p. 812). Bringing Tuck and Yang’s caution to researchers into focus, this research will propose how anti-oppressive theories and radical contemplative practices anchored in Indigenous ways of knowing can mediate the dilemmas between dominant ideologies and other worldviews.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **4.0 CONTEXT OF THE RESEARCH**

In this chapter I situate the Saskatchewan ELA curriculum in the context I taught in, in Saskatchewan. I also discuss the intention(s) of education administrators and curriculum developers to give educators the freedom through the accreditation process to discern appropriate classroom practices to suit the cultural backgrounds of students.

#### **4.1 Situating the Saskatchewan ELA Curriculum**

The Saskatchewan ELA Curriculum was updated in 2013 and is now on hold, (communication received from ELA Curriculum expert for the Ministry of Education, Saskatchewan in 2014) meaning that “officially” no new content will be added to its structure. If we agree that what defines knowledge is dependent on culture and culture is not static or singular but “dynamic, complex, interactive, and changing” (Gay, 2010, p. 11), then the Saskatchewan high school ELA curriculum being on hold proves problematic in terms of culturally responsive teaching. In 2016 teachers and members of Saskatchewan Teacher’s Federation called for curriculum renewal. One participant voiced their concerns through the 2016 meeting for curriculum renewal by mentioning that:

The focus on prepackaged materials in the English language arts curriculum (i.e., the Collections series of basal readers listed as a Core Resource) doesn’t honour the importance of local themes the way the very best selections of children’s literature can.

If we keep Collections as Core, we should absolutely include updated children's literature suggestions and other digital resources as a second option, so that teachers have a supported choice away from prepackaged materials that are expensive and not necessarily best practice. – (Participant, University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon meeting)

While, I was told in 2014 that the ELA curriculum renewal process is on hold and while teachers in October 2016 called for curriculum renewal to be ongoing, Saskatchewan's own official curriculum support document, Classroom Curriculum Connections: A Teacher's Handbook for Personal Professional Growth (2001) may refute the claim that the pause in curriculum development may be a troubling phenomenon for culturally responsive teaching in the province. The curriculum handbook noted, "that one of the professional responsibilities in relation to curriculum renewal is [educators'] participation in the process of renewal" (p.11).

The document invites educators to contextualize curriculum to reflect the cultural diversity of students in their classes indicating that educators' participation in core curriculum renewal activities might include:

- Changing, adapting, improving, or expanding aspects of curricula that have been implemented to reflect individual classroom contexts;
- Participating in local, regional and/or provincial curriculum change; and
- Examining the directions, philosophy, or implications of core curriculum or aspects of individuals' curricula from a base informed by the refinement stage.

(p. 11)

This apparently obscure, dated, but still current guideline offers educators, through listed suggested processes (sample listed above), the freedom to adapt culturally responsive pedagogy in their classroom by “changing, adapting, improving, or expanding aspects of curricula that have been implemented to reflect individual classroom contexts” (Classroom Curriculum Connections: A Teacher’s Handbook for Personal Professional Growth, 2001, p. 11). This supporting curriculum document also indicates some of the difficulties educators may have in implementing the curriculum even though official freedom is given to educators to make changes and adapt curricula to suit their classroom. Some of these barriers include but are not limited to: “complexity and magnitude of change, conflicting philosophies, fear of failure, accountability, anxiety, challenges to classroom management and non-supportive leadership, and [the need for] more time for full implementation” (Classroom Curriculum Connections: A Teacher’s Handbook for Personal Professional Growth, (2001, p. 16).

The freedom to unofficially renew the curriculum as the cultural dynamics of any classroom changes may at first glance appear to acknowledge the curriculum as a cultural document. Acknowledging that curriculum implementation recognizes “cultural diversity is one of the glories of human existence” (Robinson, 2007, p. 89) yet it is not free of chaotic complexity. The Saskatchewan support document acknowledges the contradiction of offering educators the freedom to make changes to the curriculum, by listing the barriers. However, is listing the barriers enough? Is documenting issues that may impede some educators’ ability to use their freedom effectively enough? Educators should first acknowledge that their “desire to use classroom practice as a place to disrupt the



hierarchical systems of knowledge creation involves recognizing that curriculum is “permeable [and] difficult to achieve in a printed format” (Rose & Whitty, 2010, p. 262).

In an Indigenous context, the desire to use First Nations and Métis resources to achieve the goals, objectives, and indicators of the standardized curriculum can be difficult because many grade 12 educators are not accredited meaning they do not have the freedom to adapt the curriculum as per the Indigenous context in which they facilitate learning.

#### **4.2 The Complexity of Delivering the Saskatchewan ELA Curriculum in an Indigenous Setting**

The freedom to include First Nations and Métis resources and worldview in the ELA-mandated curriculum increased the complexity for some educators, myself included, because there were no set guidelines as to how much or how little First Nations and Métis content should steer my practice. LeBlanc (2017) stated:

Unlike many of their American counterparts, high school English teachers in Saskatchewan are free to make a range of curricular decisions about what goes on in their classrooms, including what texts to use, what literature to teach, and how to assess students’ performance. (p. 1)

Although the students and I benefitted from choosing which texts to use, LeBlanc (2017) failed to mention that this freedom requires educators to be accredited by the Saskatchewan Ministry of Education. The requirement for accreditation (followed by the process of achieving accreditation status set by the Saskatchewan Ministry of Education)

leaves many Indigenous students, whose teachers are not accredited, to use only the text mandated in the curriculum in ways that cater for the summative departmental exams.

### **4.3 The Accreditation Process in Saskatchewan and the Complexities of Job**

#### **Security in Indigenous High Schools**

If an educator chooses to achieve accreditation in Saskatchewan, they must have two years of high school teaching experience, putting novice educators at a disadvantage. Added to two years' classroom experience, educators must undergo a secondary school equivalent training in their teacher education program. If educators have not opted to be trained especially for secondary schools in their teacher education program, they are required to pursue a course titled *Curriculum and Instruction for Saskatchewan Secondary Schools*, either at the University of Regina or the University of Saskatchewan.

It is worth noting that my process of gaining accreditation was different. Educators like myself, who are internationally trained, have a Saskatchewan Professional A certificate and have taught at the secondary school level for several years must also pursue this curriculum course.

In grade 12 classrooms where educators are not accredited, students must write the standardized departmental exams to satisfy the requirements of a Saskatchewan high school diploma. The pressure to make students test-ready puts educators in a precarious situation in which teaching to a test guides their practice. In classrooms where the sole purpose is to prepare students for standardized testing at the end of a semester, the freedom to facilitate learning for growth quickly gets replaced by the need to meet test deadlines. Hence, the use of prototype exam models and worksheets (see LeBlanc,

November 2017) becomes an essential teaching tool in classroom practices rather than encouraging contemplative practices and developing the intercultural capacity to include students' experiences to curriculum content and resources. In these complex scenarios of bureaucratic requirements, spaces of teaching and learning become less a place to engage in an open critical discourse approach to their pedagogy leaving some "teachers . . . confused and conflicted about whether to teach anything that is not tested" (Gay, 2010; p. xxix)

The barrier experienced by some educators teaching in Indigenous communities of having to participate in the accreditation process and the push to prep students for standardized tests makes the call for renewal in curriculum implementation, as prescribed by the, *Classroom Curriculum Connections: A Teacher's Handbook for Personal Professional Growth*, (2001), problematic. Moreover, the contradiction between the liberty to make changes to the curriculum while maintaining the mandated test requirements makes the work of anti-oppressive educators difficult and unsustainable.

The work of disrupting Eurocentric norms and practices such as standardization demands a kind of tenacity that inspires educators who are tired and tells them that their souls are not drained. Indigenous high schools are a fitting place to engage with classroom practices that go beyond mandated resources because "aboriginal culture [stresses] holism—meaning the inter-relationships and connections between and among all things as fundamental to sense-making, and the holistic nature of knowledge and learning as comprising the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual dimensions" (Kanu, 2011, *Integration at the Level of Student Learning*, para 1) of the whole student. Doige (2003) stated:

Strategies such as journal writing add an element of spirituality to aboriginal student learning as students actually get the chance to work through curriculum content spiritually from the inside out, transforming the given [the external and the curriculum] into new meanings and new forms of life. (as cited in Kanu, 2011, Culturally Compatible Teaching and Assessment Methods, para. 9)

Although research may suffice to work through oppression and oppressive ideologies via aboriginal worldviews, it is not an easy task. Educators and students alike should be aware that practices which become moments of contemplation and deconstruction can lead us into raw emotional moments, (see Berila, 2016). At that point, our bodies often awaken to the dominant power at work in curriculum narratives and the robust ways in which these narratives are implemented in educational spaces reveal themselves in full display. The pressure to comply to mandated curriculum outcomes while teaching in this Indigenous community often tempted me to fall back into traditional models of classroom practices. These traditional models fall squarely into the realm of classroom experiences that show a cult of rigidity, adherence, and compliance. A classroom culture fixated on static indoctrination rather than renewal leaves little room for holistic growth among the bodies that dwell in these spaces of alleged learning, hence starving the creative function of the human soul, (see Robinson, 2007).

What might this renewal look like now in high school X since I left? Has renewal happened? In fact, was there ever change when I was looking for spaces of renewal? During my time teaching in the province, the request made by curriculum experts within the Ministry of Education contradicts the expectations of Educational Administrators for educators in the classroom. Looking back at the broad areas of learning in the

Saskatchewan ELA curriculum such as “preparing students to become lifelong learners, to have a sense of self, community, and place and to be engaged citizens” demands that “other” educational practices such as Indigenous worldviews should be purposeful and meaningful rather than a rush to meet test deadlines.

Pedagogies that cater to standardized testing obviate achieving the ELA curriculum broad areas of learning because as Reynolds (2003) noted:

This type of technically controlled pedagogue can never hope to initiate any form of emancipatory education. Whether this education brings the student [or educator] to an awareness of class and conflict or a type of authentic individualism, it can never flourish as long as educators are deskilled labourers using pre-packaged kits for a competency-based education. (p. 1)

An education system working against its own professed mandate leads me to question what structures are at play. Was my education experience in Saskatchewan a pretentious mix of culturally inclusive educational platitudes? Was the perceived masquerade of adding First Nations and Métis resources only to cover the hegemonic notions ingrained in the soul of the institution? Was I pretending to teach in culturally respectful ways?

Although the students and I had the freedom to explore the ELA curriculum in ways that embrace Indigenous learning styles, my daily encounters with students were complicated by their expectations of my socially constructed unfamiliar brown Guyanese East Indian identity. To add to the complexity, I was expected by the Ministry’s officials, Indigenous Education administrators, and to some extent community members to deliver the mandated curriculum without any disruption. Although officials and community

members demanded that I adhere to the mandated curriculum, they also wanted me to reflect the local, regional, and provincial change through culturally responsive pedagogy. This contradiction between what was mandated and what was expected has been (and still is) my greatest challenge as an educator.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **5.0 REFLECTIONS AND FINDINGS**

This chapter is a critical reflective summation of my teaching experiences in Saskatchewan. I begin by describing some of the complexities I encountered while delivering the Saskatchewan ELA curriculum from an Indigenous perspective. Further, I reflect on the pedagogical and socially engrained complications of delivering the ELA curriculum through students' lived experiences. I end this chapter by exploring the contradictions arising out of my intention to teach in culturally responsive ways and the expectations of Ministry officials, Education Band Councillors and Senior Indigenous Teachers to maintain the status quo.

#### **5.1 Classroom Practice and Curriculum Implementation**

On my first day in the classroom at high school X, I was determined to get to know the students and to deliver content through inquiry-based learning and formative assessments. For me this meant “using practices that are consistent with norms in aboriginal communities, that provide space for students to assess their own progress, and that allow students alternative ways of demonstrating knowledge and skill” (Kanu, 2011, *Integrating at the Level of Assessment Methods/Strategies*, para. 5).

To facilitate a practice that was culturally responsive to students in the classroom and to include themes in the mandated curriculum, I invited students to join in planning the daily classroom activities. Students were guided to choose resources from a wide selection of First Nations and Euro-Western curriculum resources in this instance because our goal was to use the themes and unit topics in the grade 12 curriculum. I encouraged

students to share methods we could use to incorporate Indigenous knowledge and cultural traditions which they had brought into the classroom through their lived experiences. Asking students for their opinions and allowing them opportunities to “focus internally and find more of themselves their [grade 12 ELA class]” (Barbezat and Pingree, 2012, p. 180) affords students a personal connection to their learning experiences. For “when aboriginal students have the opportunity to seek out the philosophical underpinnings through aboriginal perspectives . . . [it] is no longer seen as an occasional add-on activity in the classroom; instead, it becomes an integral part of daily curriculum implementation (Kanu, 2011, *The Context of Integration*, para. 7).

Further, if I want to make learning a transformative experience for students I [would] have to let them be a part of the planning and executing of the curriculum (see Kanu, 2011,). Students’ facial expressions told me that this kind of “engaged pedagogy” (hooks, 1994) was new to them. But, collectively, we were making progress and slowly they were building the confidence to speak to an audience and share their stories and histories. At the same time, they were becoming curious about my history and the stories I brought to the classroom. Through an ethical reciprocal space of sharing we found how much we had in common, and how different we were in some parts of our culture such as our traditional foods, which we later agreed we would share during my time with them. I am aware that sharing food may be a superficial undertaking, but our intentions in sharing went much deeper. We were continually building and strengthening our relationship through a kind of trust that is needed in anti-biased educational practices. It was also necessary if we were going to include other ways of viewing the world in the classroom.



In breaking through the tensions in the relationships we were trying to build and the assumptions we had about each other, beautiful trouble was smouldering under the progress we were making as a class. I recall vividly during my early months of the academic year 2014 as an introduction to poetry in Unit One of the ELA 30 curriculum, “Canadian Perspectives,” we decided to discuss Joe’s (1988) poem, *I Lost My Talk*.

Learning expands and is purposeful when students make personal connections with the intended lesson. I anticipated that such a poem with rich descriptions would enable us to ease into engaging with a difficult time in Canadian settler and Indigenous histories. Further engaging with the poem might allow students to connect with themes such as stolen identity and lost culture in Canada’s history. I anticipated that while students encountered and reencountered their own legacy, they could lead themselves out of the myth that “poetry is hard” and become curious.

Research in curriculum planning and lesson implementation suggests that students become more involved in a lesson and face the challenges of learning new concepts if their “cultural heritages, social contexts, and background experiences, along with individual attributes count in critical ways for both teaching and learning” (Gay, 2010, p. 42). Students willing participation to discuss the themes in Joe’s poems signaled the beginning of our learning explorations together. Students participation and curiosity also gave me hope that if students lived experiences are included in lesson planning and implementation then there is a possibility that through student engagement they can succeed academically and discern feelings of compassion and empathy one for another.

## 5.2 Exhibit A: Excerpts from Lessons Plans and Classroom Work Samples

Below is a description of a poetry lesson students and I explored during our months together in September 2014.

*I Lost My Talk* by Rita Joe (1988)

I lost my talk

The talk you took away.

When I was a little girl

At Shubenacadie school.

You snatched it away:

I speak like you

I think like you

I create like you

Two ways I talk

Both ways I say,

Your way is more powerful.

So gently I offer my hand and ask,

Let me find my talk

So I can teach you about me.

After reading the poem, we discussed identity and loss using the curriculum questions in Unit One, Canadian Perspectives, as a guide.

### **Guided Curriculum Questions**

- Why is it important for Canadians to recognize, historically and currently, both the glorious and the scandalous aspects of Canadian life?
- What does it mean to be Canadian and what is our Canadian identity?
- Is being Canadian an individual or a community enterprise? What is the relationship between the individual and the community in Canada? How do individuals shape a community and the country, and how do the community and the country shape their citizens? (Saskatchewan ELA 30 A Curriculum, p. 15)

While the guided curriculum questions focus on Canadian perspectives, as a class of learners we were able to use the questions above and create extensions of these questions to analyze Joe's poem from an Indigenous perspective. Students made connections with Joe's poem and their mushum's (grandfather) and kokum's (grandmother) experiences at residential schools by using the guided curriculum questions such as: Why is it important for Canadians to recognize, historically and currently, both the glorious and the scandalous aspects of Canadian life? From an Indigenous perspective, students responded to this question by recalling stories relatives told about being put in isolation for speaking their aboriginal language with their friends, brothers, and sisters. They were willing to bring firsthand information to class for future learning explorations.

In turn, I described my encounters with colonization. I reminisced with students about my high school experience, where for some six years I attended a school in what was once a slave master's house. As a reference point, I shared with students a poem, Colonial Girls' School, by Olive Senior (see excerpt p.61-62) with similar themes of lost identity and the quest to find our cultural voices which I had to analyse as part of my high school language class.

### **Memories from my High School Language class**

*Colonial Girls School-* by Olive Senior (1985)

Borrowed images  
willed our skins pale  
muffled our laughter  
lowered our voices  
let out our hems  
dekinked our hair  
denied our sex in gym tunics and bloomers  
harnessed our voices to madrigals  
and genteel airs  
yoked our minds to declensions in Latin  
and the language of Shakespeare  
Told us nothing about our selves  
There was nothing at all

How those pale northern eyes and  
aristocratic whispers once erased us  
How our loudness, our laughter  
Steppes of Russia  
Wheat fields of Canada  
There was nothing of our landscape there  
Nothing about us at all ...

In the process of sharing some of the fundamental aspects of our experiences with oppression, I acknowledged that “telling our personal stories plays a prominent part in our conversations as we struggle to capture the essence of culturally responsive educational ideas, theories, principles, and practices” (Gay, 2010, p. 233).

When I reflect on what was happening in the classroom, I ponder the origin of curriculum—*currere*. In Sameshima’s work, (2007) “the word curriculum is generally used to refer to a prescribed list of outcomes, objectives and content; it is derived from the Latin word, *currere*, which means to run. Curriculum is static, while *currere* is dynamic” (Sameshima, 2007, p. 30).

As I digested the meaning of *currere* in terms of culturally responsive practices, I linked my reading of Sameshima’s research to the events of that day in my classroom.

On that Saskatchewan morning in September 2014, while the crisp air was blowing through my classroom, the students and I entered a moment when curriculum was not static. We were reliving the moments of pain and difficulty imposed upon our ancestors through colonization by the conversations we were having even though we had

lived on different continents. We had found a way to use the mandated curriculum as “a living process of inquiry” (Sameshima, 2007, p. 31).

Teaching practices should create spaces for reflection that bring engaged participants “to acknowledge the legitimacy of the cultural heritage of different ethnic groups, both as legacies that affect students’ dispositions, attitudes, and approaches to learning” (Gay, 2010, p. 31). Through sharing, the students and I gradually became aware of my experiences as a high school student and then as an educator in a country that was once a colony of Britain. It was a country where slavery and indentureship are very much part of the history. Similarly, students were processing their ancestors’ experiences with colonization and their own experiences of oppression. It is worth noting that in my reflection, these oppressive colonial ideologies imposed by European settlers on Canada and in my birth, country have not disappeared from students nor from my everyday lived experiences.

The units and themes such as Canadian perspectives and Canadian landscapes within the Saskatchewan mandated ELA curriculum was enabling students and I to crack open (reference to Cohen) parts within the hidden curriculum that lurked around the edges of our classroom and confront it within a framework of anti-oppressive methodologies (Berila 2016). Here I would define the hidden curriculum “often understood to represent the conscious and unconscious socialization of students through the “norms, values, and belief systems embedded in the curriculum, the school, and classroom life, imparted to students through daily routines, curricular content, and social relationships” (Margolis, 2001, p. 6). Therefore, in discussing the hidden standards of

racism and colonial imperialism implicitly rooted in the planned curriculum, students and I were creating an ethical space for engagement within the classroom.

Shomar (2013) noted that “During the era of colonialism, colonial educational institutions were used to augment the perceived legitimacy and propriety of colonial rule and to help maintain its power (p.265). Today, (Mulenga, 2008) noted that ‘post-colonial’ contexts still largely entail such ideologies” (as cited in Shomar, 2013, p, 265). Hence presumably, “post-colonial educational institutions are still marked by Western modernism and still work within the Eurocentric [ideologies]” (Shomar, 2013, p. 265). The educational system that the students and I were a part of (even though it had Indigenous administrators) was still entrenched in colonial structures and ideals. Battiste (2013b), Indigenous scholar and activist reiterated:

The [deep] need for constitutional reconciliation from the Eurocentric institutions that have marginalized Indigenous knowledge systems. All Indigenous communities are in recovery today from a deep colonizing culture of superiority and racism, and while there are new emergent forms of that coming back, Indigenous peoples are now reconciling with what was denied us, our knowledges and languages that lead us to the deep truths about ourselves and our connections with all things. (p. 2)

The lesson I was learning through our discussions about Joe’s poem, *I Lost my Talk*, was the inculcating of culturally responsive pedagogies in the ELA curriculum is a strategy that is needed within Indigenous classrooms so that Indigenous peoples can “reconcile [...] with what was denied [them], [their] knowledges and languages that leads

[them] to the deep truths about [themselves] and our connections with all things.  
(Battiste, 2013b).

By unravelling personal connections in Joe's poem, and paying attention to the reference of Senior's poem, *Colonial Girls School*, (1985) the students and I concluded that, as a class, we needed to engage in classroom practices that go beyond the status quo, meaning thinking and discussing ideas that go beyond the literal understandings of what is on the page. If we were to cover the units and address some of the hard questions in the mandated curriculum, being accredited was vital. The freedom that accreditation gives is time to work through the emotional disturbance entering our discussions. Further, the role of accreditation in Saskatchewan gives freedom to the educator to design their own timelines for the completion of a piece of work. On the other hand, teaching students for a departmental examination means that students must finish the units in the curriculum before the deadlines of the external exam.

### **5.3 Student(s) Resistance and Resilience**

The day after our poetry lesson, to my surprise, I was called to the principal's office. The discussion about my classroom practice(s) began the minute I stepped into the office. Apparently, the principal had been notified about the discussions the students and I had the day before through a Facebook post together with a note he had received the morning after the poetry lesson. We discussed at length my lesson plans and my intentions for the class. The principal reported that a community member was upset because I was teaching about residential schools. He gave me a copy of the letter and the Facebook comment he had received from the community member. In the letter, the



community member questioned my competence to discuss the issue of residential schools in class. Initially I was shocked, but I extended an invitation for the community member to visit our class. My intention was that the community member could observe and contribute to our discussions about residential schools as raised by Joe's poem.

The community member asked in her comments, "Who is this Anna K [and] how did she become an educator in the school if she [was] not educated herself of [sic] Canada's biggest secret, Indian Residential Schools" (2014). After conversations with the principal, an oral request came through my principal purportedly from the band councillor responsible for the Department of Education requesting that I provided a letter to the band that explained what I was doing in the classroom on the day the poetry lesson was taught.

The reaction of the community member towards students' exploration of the settler and Indigenous histories calls in question the whole purpose of education. Educational practices should allow students a way of becoming aware of their past. Education should serve as a liberator, calling into question the powers that have served to oppress Indigenous groups across Canada for centuries. Moreover, pedagogy and content used in schools, including Indigenous schools, should "encourage a transformative approach to learning which embraces Indigenous knowledge, experience, and knowing, while respecting mainstream knowledge and experience, and including both a formal and informal approach for learning program that reached all students" (Battiste, 2013a, p. 176).

As I reflect on the consequences of choosing to incorporate anti-oppressive methodologies and aboriginal histories in my practice with a class of Indigenous students,

I ponder on the disparity of teaching for transformation in colonized classrooms. The fact that students' history was used to facilitate engagement in our classroom through Joe's poem, a choice supported by Indigenous scholars such as Battiste (2013a/b), was interpreted as me being ignorant of Canada's history of residential schooling, a history of colonization which reflects the complexity of choosing to teach in culturally responsive ways especially when the educator is non-Indigenous.

I admit that while I was teaching in Saskatchewan, I knew very little about Indigenous history and cultures in Canada. It seemed that my efforts to reach out to Indigenous organizations or to attend any form of training to learn about Indigenous ways of learning and their worldviews were not valued or considered to be genuine. On the other hand, was my commitment to include Indigenous worldviews as a non-Indigenous body triggering, according to Tuck (2009), "a history that still offends [Indigenous people's] deepest sense of our humanity?" (as cited in Smith, 1999, p.1)

As questions spun in my head, I reflected on Joe's poem. Maybe in hindsight I was searching for some vague understanding of why the poem had caused so much commotion in class. Why had it prompted one community leader to voice her opinion and raise the hurt and the process of healing on behalf of her community? Coates (2015) wrote, "poetry is the processing of [one's] thoughts until the slag of justification falls away and [what's] left [is] the cold steel truths of life" (p. 51-52). If this is so, Joe's intent to evoke feelings about restitution by the dominant group and to reiterate in language her nation's sense of lost identity and their struggle to regain a sense of self was achieved, in part, that day in our class. Through her poetry, Joe had brought the students, the community, and myself to those "cold steel truths of life" (Coates, 2015, p. 51-52).

I recalled my experiences in Saskatchewan as an educator belonging to a minority group in Canada, a Canada that was asking me to reconcile with Indigenous communities. The education system required that I include in the classroom Indigenous concepts so that students could see themselves reflected in their school experiences. As I was channelling students and the Indigenous community responses to my role as a classroom teacher, I was invited to enter a space, a third space according to Bhabha (1994) of “negotiation.” At that moment of confusion and indecisiveness, my brain and I wanted to run. I did not want to dwell in that third space. I wanted to retreat into pedagogies that were comfortable, linked to Eurocentric traditions that would be less disruptive to the educational institution and community in which I was serving.

My first reaction was not to labour in the kind of anti-oppressive work that Kumashiro (2000) discussed in Chapter 3. I did not run; rather, I chose to continue facilitating learning that exposes the humanness in all of us, which thrives on chaos and discomfort. Like Coates (2015), in that moment I had to learn and “begin to see discord, argument, chaos, perhaps even fear, as a kind of power” (p. 52). I chose to work towards challenging oppression(s) and setting students on a path of social and personal transformation.

After the events of explaining, apologizing, negotiating and reflecting not only on the misinterpretation of my intentions and language but the often-neglected use of poetry and other forms of storytelling, I recognized the complexities before me as an educator aiming to be culturally responsive in my grade 12 ELA class. To get through each day then (and even now) as I continue my journey as an educator, I must be mindful of “the

struggle [which] requires pedagogical competence, personal and professional confidence, and moral and ethical conviction” (Gay, 2010, p. 246).

At high school X in 2014, my experience of teaching in culturally responsive ways had shaken my sense of self and my professional capacity to teach. I had to rely on the courage to teach in this complicated environment where pathologies of pain linger deep and where the political environment constantly negated its embedded Eurocentric structure of delivering education as well as that of its Indigenous culture.

The day after my meeting with the principal, I met with the student who had concerns about our poetry lesson. Johnny shared his experience about the pedagogical choices to which he and his other classmates had agreed to when the poetry lesson was explored. He said he was upset that someone who did not belong to their nation was discussing the oppression Indigenous people experienced at residential school. Johnny’s concern was valid, and he had a right to question my right to teach the subject. I am not Indigenous! Although I acknowledge that not being Indigenous can be problematic, I was committed to find allies within the community. As I continued teaching at high school X, I did find elders who were willing to sit in my classroom as I teach or sometimes share with teaching topics such as the Indigenous justice system.

When I reflect on that day with Johnny sitting beside me in the principal’s office I realize, according to Nakata (2002), that what had happened that day in class was a necessary place of negotiation where “the intersection of Western and Indigenous domains . . . [meet to converse]” (as cited in Kanu, 2011, p. 285). Perhaps the students and I had met at that “intersection of Western and Indigenous domains” and our

adventure had only just begun to unravel. Johnny and I found ourselves that day in the principal's office:

At a meeting place, a place to re-examine what had happened to us in these spaces of misinterpretations, . . . [which] implies recognition of the complexities and tensions at the cross-cultural interfaces and the need for negotiation between Indigenous knowledge perspectives and Western knowledge systems so that meanings are reframed and reinterpreted. (Kanu, 2011, p. 285)

The student who had been most shocked to see me behind the desk as the new educator now found himself sitting beside me to explain how confused he was about the conversations we had two days before discussing Joe's poem. He said that no teacher had ever asked them for their opinion about the residential school experiences of their family members and ancestors. They never had to discuss the issue in depth in other English classes where residential school experiences had surfaced. The most they had to do prior to their present grade 12 ELA class was to answer a few comprehension questions. The lesson I was learning from Johnny is from Marx's well-trodden commodity fetishists: "That is, the (textual) commodity itself—papers and worksheets and packaged instructional outlines—come to be understood [by Indigenous educators] as having capacity in and of itself, capable of transforming classrooms and alleviating educational woes" (LeBlanc 2017, p. 7), cannot act alone do the job of anti-oppressive work in the classroom. Many educators refuse to present curriculum as contested and political. The act of forgetting to consider how students might be affected by Joe's poem did more harm than good that day in class. The learning I found for me in the situation that day in

the principal's office reaffirms one of my philosophies in teaching that is, educators must constantly re-visit and reflect on their pedagogy and the content they are delivering.

Perhaps my desire to offer students a safe place in which to talk about their ancestors' history of colonization and oppression had fallen into an approach that invited students to resist my intentions. Tuck (2009) cautioned researchers to be aware of good intentions that invite oppressed peoples to speak "only from that space in the margin that is a sign of deprivation, a wound, an unfulfilled longing" (hooks, 1994, p. 152).

Johnny's response to the discussions in class that day should not have come as a surprise to me because "the dissonance that arises from learning about oppression is more than a cognitive one. It is also an emotional and psychological one, because the ideas we are challenging are often embedded in the students' very sense of selves" (Berila, 2016, p. 122). Tuck (2009) reminds us that while:

common sense tells us this is a good thing to offer students a room to talk about the challenges of the oppression they face as Indigenous students or while it is important to talk about historical exploitation, domination, and colonization to explain contemporary brokenness, such as poverty, poor health, and low literacy, the danger in damage-centered research is that it is a pathologizing approach in which the oppression singularly defines a community. (p. 413)

Johnny's reaction to the pedagogical choices I made that day attest to the fact that he and the rest of his community wanted time to test the authenticity of my good intentions. They wanted to be sure that I was not only there to document their pain or loss as a community. Moreover, the relationship had to be organic and evolve with time which demonstrated that "cultural responsiveness in teaching is always in the process of

becoming, rather than a fixed destination or a set of finished skills” (Gay, 2010, p. 236). Hence, the varied interpretations of intentions, the complexity that language embraces, the emotional overturns of plot lines were only beginning for students and me in this context and maybe our adventures of sharing would have more slips along the way.

#### **5.4 Exhibit B- An Attempt to Deconstruct *Othello* from an Indigenous Perspective - A site for Anti- oppressive Pedagogy**

In June 2015, I entered on a journey to seek ways to facilitate learning through an Indigenous perspective. I remembered how different my sharing time with students was compared to the months after our experience with Joe’s poem. Students welcomed the exploration of deconstruction more freely, often plunging into the process. What was the difference? Looking back, I realized my relationship with students had time to grow.

Shakespeare’s *Othello* has been used numerous times as a site for anti- oppressive work in education. In a November 15<sup>th</sup>, 2016 blog post, Kay noted that, “[f]or people of colour growing up in a predominantly white nation with a deeply Eurocentric curriculum, non-white characters like *Othello* are significant because they affirm our existence in literature and help us articulate our struggles with internalized racism and white supremacy”.

Through *Othello* students had opportunities to create counter-stories, voice their interpretations using story- telling, poetry and music about their own experiences with racism and discrimination by expanding the themes in *Othello*, such as race, classism and manipulation from an Indigenous perspective. In understanding how themes such as race, classism and manipulation play out in *Othello*, students and I had discussions about:

Othello's positionality as a Black man, surrounded by white people who perceive him as innately less human, that brings about his tragedy; the unyielding, insidious, nature of white supremacy claws its way into his heart and fills him with doubt. He is brought to ruin by Iago because it is far too easy for him to believe that no one, not even his beloved wife Desdemona, can truly respect or love him. (Kay, 2016)

*These discussions helped us to design an assignment guide for the oral presentations (see pg. (75-80) used as part of the formative assessment for students final EAL grade., June 2015.*

As students shared varying ideas and created different activities to speak and write back to power and dominance in Shakespeare's *Othello*, they were engaged in anti-oppressive work that was twofold. On one hand they were using anti-oppressive methodologies as a "...mechanism to perform truth-telling- to speak back to colonization and oppression," (Haynes, Writer, 2002b, also see Brayboy, 2005; Hermes, 1999; Rains, 2003 and Williams, 1997). On the other hand, they were beginning to conceptualize how literature can be used to critically discern how race and privilege can be read in cultural, historical and political ways and connect with their own lived experiences.



***Othello* as deconstructed text.**

The following sample assignment outline was designed as a learning aid to facilitate inspire students' oral presentations and writing activities about their understanding of Shakespeare's *Othello* from a First Nations' perspective.

Students were involved in the planning of this outline.

Section One: Oral	Curriculum Units <sup>4</sup> Connections	Relation to Self	Tips for Presentation
<p>Referencing Othello, the Moor, how does the fear of the other help shape our own sense of self and Canadian society, since the signing of treaties.</p>	<p>Do we see ourselves the same way as others see us?</p> <p>How does being a member of a group affect our identity and sense of self?</p> <p>Ought human beings to behave the same in all cultures? In all communities?</p> <p>Does happiness mean different things to different people?</p> <p>How might we achieve happiness in life? How might we find personal fulfillment?</p> <p>What special challenges do doubts, and fears bring to an individual? What are ways of</p>	<p>First Nations history before contact with the Europeans:</p> <p>Who was Othello before he contacted Desdemona and the Duke before he met Iago and all the others.</p> <p>What attracted the Europeans to Canada and its first people?</p> <p>What attracted the Duke and others to this man who looked different from them?</p> <p>How does this (Othello and Desdemona) relationship change the people involved?</p> <p>Were identities shifted? How</p>	<p>Define the “Other.” Look at how life was before European contact.</p> <p>Refer to Othello.</p> <p>Talk about the changes that occur in First Nations communities after contact.</p> <p>Reference points of confusion, anger, jealousy, corruption in Othello.</p> <p>Talk about the lingering effects of the fusion.</p> <p>Refer to contemporary issues in education federal</p>

<sup>4</sup>Saskatchewan ELA 30 B Curriculum (2013, p. 17)

Section One: Oral	Curriculum Units <sup>4</sup> Connections	Relation to Self	Tips for Presentation
	<p>overcoming doubts and fears? How can having doubts and fears be an advantage?</p>	<p>did their behaviour towards themselves and others change after Othello entered their world?</p>	<p>funding. Both the positive and the taking away.</p>
<p><u>Question Two:</u> storytelling and language can bring us to the core of selves. Othello's use of language and this account of his cultural background attracted Desdemona and started their love story. How important is culture and language to a person's sense of fulfillment, happiness and the idea of finding oneself? In your response refer to Othello and Desdemona's relationship.</p>	<p>Fear, doubt, happiness, fulfillment.</p>	<p>The contact with Europeans and beginning acculturation. What attracted the first to the Europeans and vice versa? Mutual exploration benefit and enrichment through positive partnership.</p>	<p>Language building relationships. Language has the power to make us happy and fulfilled. When language and cultures are different from our own it can stimulate curiosity and desire for learning or fear, doubt, confusion, anxiety and hatred. When our ancestors signed the treaty, it can be assumed that their expectations were that it would introduce</p>

Section One: Oral	Curriculum Units <sup>4</sup> Connections	Relation to Self	Tips for Presentation
			<p>them and generations after them to something new. Since they would have to share the land with new people, the treaty would be helpful to maintain a happy fulfilled life. They have established a covenant since being exposed to what is new. The covenant would help them relate to their neighbour. However, the relationship with the new people might cause confusion and betrayal. Refer to what happens to Othello's marriage and what is happening in contemporary societies.</p>

Textual connections to the poem:

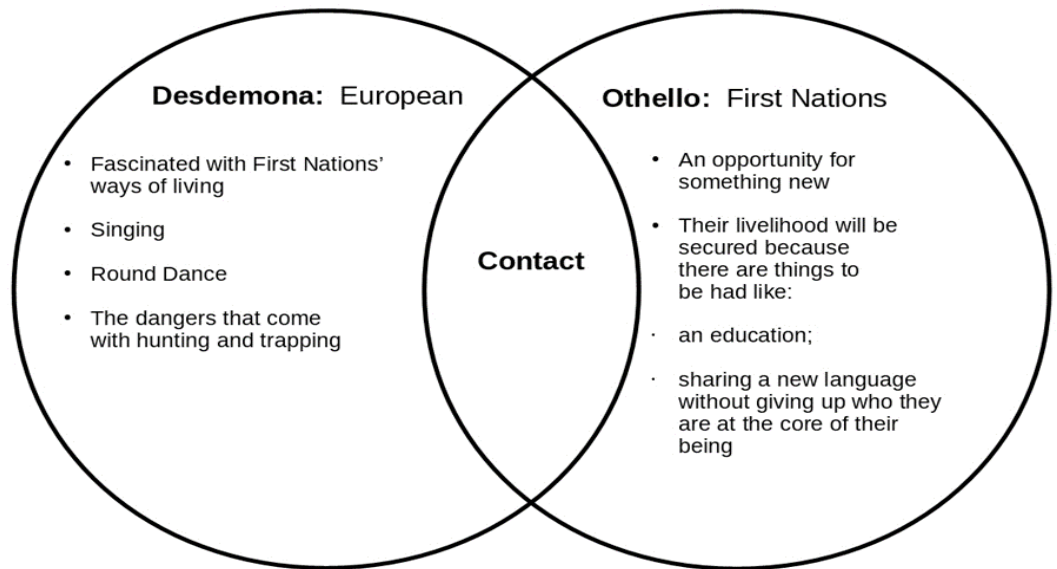
Textual Connections	Reference to Poem	First Nations Perspectives
<p><u>Act 1:3</u> Othello describes the fascination Desdemona had for him as the strange stranger, “She gave me for my pains a world of sighs” (lines 157-158)</p>	<p>Whatever was said to my ancestors a while ago, maybe a hundred years ago. Something had to be said, that language. And so, our together story began. We became naked to what was foreign, we like it, promises, promises</p>	<p>The act of entering a scared covenant, the treaties because of conversation.</p>
<p><u>Act 1:3-248</u> Desdemona: That I did love the more to live with him</p>	<p>A fair exchange! That was what my ancestors believe, a stirring inside of their minds, Your mind. Now many moons after we share, share this land.</p>	<p>The assumption of learning a new way seems all good in the beginning.</p>
<p><u>Act 3:3-312-316</u> Emilia: What handkerchief! Why, that the Moor first gave to Desdemona; That which so often you did bid me steal. Iago: Hast stole it from Emilia no faith she let it drop by negligence, and to the advantage, I am being here, took it up. Look, here it is.</p>	<p>Like a marriage that hungers for a breaking, so it can be free. Like Shakespeare searching for words to give to Iago So, he may use it and be silent. My ancestors the love story turn sour. Language new and fresh is a confused curse, While we swim in misfortunes, poverty,</p>	<p>Many generations after the covenant was the treaty signed we have? generations of First Nations people still searching for that fulfillment that newness that was supposed to come with the promise</p>

Textual Connections	Reference to Poem	First Nations Perspectives
		Language was used at first to bring hope and expectations, now there is a stirring.
Conclusion	Iago's use of language to provoke Othello to self-destruction. Arguable represent how generations of First Nations have become self-destructive in part due to deceit, broken promises and betrayal of the treaties.	Language is used conveniently to take one away from what is essential to their core sense of themselves, their identities, leaving people displaced and always searching for identity, a sense of belonging in a seemingly strange and foreign place.

## Recollections and Assignment Overview

### Othello and First Nations Connections

#### First Nations' Connections



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The Venn diagram above depicts the discussions and analyses that students and I ascertained as we tried to document the perceptions of the colonizer about the colonized, and vice versa.

In retrospect, as imagined by students and me from an Indigenous context, the fascination that Desdemona had for Othello's culture is based on a limited interpretation of cultural differences not only in Shakespeare's work, but in the way the dominant culture views the experiences of groups that are marginalized. Through our analyses, even though grounded in anti-oppressive methodologies, we became part of a critical movement complicit in engaging in the very actions we were trying to deconstruct and critically discern. We were complicit because we could not resist the lure of using the assigned collective presentations for the purposes of test taking and evaluation.

That day in our classroom "culture [became] a checkbox that need[ed] to be completed as a S.M.A.R.T (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Results-Focused, and Time Bound) goal for an administrator's evaluation, while it [became] a completely devalued form of culture that is stripped from its meaning" (Janson & Silva, 2017, p. 6). However, as we pressed beyond the mundane autopilot habits of grades and assignments exhibited through our exotification of Othello the blackamoor, we all, maybe without being aware, became foreign bodies trapped in a space cradled with Eurocentric ideologies.

The underlying message that students and I had come to experience and explore through Joe's poem, *I Lost my Talk* and the play, *Othello* is that "black and Indigenous communities of struggle are deeply connected through our experiences with colonialism, oppression, and white supremacy," (Simpson, 2014, p.1). During the time I spent with students in this Indigenous community in Saskatchewan, I realise that even though our experiences with colonization were different, there was a sense of shared pain and a desire to move towards more contemplative and compassionate practices within the



classroom. Students experiences were more tangible and current by way of the residential school ordeal of their families and ancestors who continue to share stories of their oppressors. On the other hand, my experience with colonization was more subtle. My ancestors did not share stories of their slave or indentured masters, most of my learning about colonization was through theories and history books and my interaction as an adult with the world. However, despite our different experiences students and I share the same struggles to process the rooted oppressive pathologies that had become part of our bodies.

### **5.5 Indigenous Teacher's Responses**

My third document for the CDA is a letter written by a senior teacher at the request of the Education Band councillor to ascertain information about my classroom practices at high school X. In April 2015, Ms. Jane, an Indigenous teacher serving in the community, visited my classroom. I was excited by her visit, hoping I could find an ally in the journey of disturbing the norms in the inherited Eurocentric education system. I wanted so much to share with someone my intentions of moving away from traditional methods of imparting knowledge to developing students' ability to take responsibility and guide their own learning paths. I showed Ms. Jane course outlines and plans which students had co-created with me. Absorbed in the generosity of sharing, I thought she would support my efforts.

It was this burning hope of collaboration that brought me to engage with Ms. Jane. She was as concerned about students' performance in their ELA class as I was. I remember explaining to her that my approach to grading was ongoing, in that students did their assessments, followed by feedback through written comments and oral

conference hours, until the student and I came to some form of agreement (within a timeline) that a level of growth had been achieved. I explained to Ms. Jane that my classroom principles were grounded in research which uses Kanu's (2011) work:

to understand assessment for this [moving students from a structured Eurocentric pattern of educational practice to] transformation to the context of aboriginal education is not to allow test-driven accountability to blind us to authentic indicators of learning for aboriginal peoples. This means using practices that are consistent with norms in aboriginal communities, that provide space for students to assess their own progress, and that allow students alternative ways of demonstrating knowledge and skill. (Integration at the Level of Assessment Methods/Strategies, para. 5)

Ms. Jane listened intently as I told her about the difficulties the students and I were experiencing in interpreting information, thinking through texts and content and developing the confidence to incorporate First Nations cultures and traditions in our teaching and learning experiences. As Kanu (2011) noted, "Silencing, in which students are denied the opportunity to discuss and examine their concerns and interests, has been a powerful form of school control that often leads to marginalization and disengagement" (Integration at the Level of Assessment Methods/Strategies, para. 1).

I did not want to silence students. Moreover, I did not want to rush them through texts, poetry, and dramatic works and then award them grades in some form of a conventional test-taking model. In my analysis, rushing students and silencing them meant indulging in a kind of injustice against their own self-identity through the teaching and learning process.

To my surprise, Ms. Jane's fixation on high marks rather than students' growth in the subject area was manifest a few days after her visit. A letter (which Ms. Jane labelled an observation letter) appeared in my inbox substantiated my feelings of contradiction about aboriginal learning principles, the research done on aboriginal students' success and the reasons for Ms. Jane's interpretation of my classroom practice.

The beliefs and principles of reflection I drew upon, took students' cultural experiences as an entry point to talk about and deconstruct the single dominant Eurocentric stories in prescribed curriculum resources. Engaging students, not disengaging them from their learning, is vital for students in attaining academic success and the confidence that builds character. An act of "giving students ample opportunity to voice their opinions, discuss issues of interest to them, and examine their experiences" (Kanu, 2011, Integration at the Level of Assessment Methods/ Strategies, para. 1) was acknowledged in Ms. Jane's observation letter as a learning style she appreciates:

I was very impressed as to the exceptional effort which she (Miss Kadir) puts into planning, gathering, and integrating FN's materials and culture. Her plans clearly show a conscious effort to teach as she expressed, I believe that I must begin teaching with what students know and then build on that knowledge. (Ms. Jane)

Although Ms. Jane supported my efforts to teach in culturally responsive ways, her comments about offering feedback to students about their work would suggest otherwise. It was understood between Ms. Jane and me that constant feedback is provided with the intent that the students will take the opportunity to redo assignments and that I will continue to give more feedback until the student is satisfied and feels successful with the learning that is intended for the assignment. However, through Ms. Jane's observation

letter to education administrators in the band council, she was not willing to express her intended appreciation.

Ms. Jane's fixation on grades and high marks were demonstrated in the following comment: "From my very brief observation, I would estimate that her marks on average should be raised approximately 15-20%," which undermined her appreciation of the pedagogical efforts I was making in the classroom and demonstrated that maybe she herself was caught up in the colonial demands of the mandated curriculum. This bizarre twist of complicated contradictions undermines the teaching philosophy Ms. Jane espouses. Moreover, Ms. Jane's comments put into context the difficulty that exists between an educator's inner desire to address students' learning needs and the need to fulfil the bureaucratic intentions of the education system in which they are embedded.

Another conflicting statement in Ms. Jane's observation letter was contrary to research in culturally responsive teaching strategies. These strategies encourage educators to use anecdotal reference to support the theory of conveying high expectations for students which help them to push harder towards achieving high academic success (Gay, 2010, p. 230).

Ms. Jane wrote:

After seeing the amount of preparation and effort that Ms. Kadir puts into teaching and after our discussion about her teaching beliefs, teaching style, and assessing students I have a strong feeling that Ms. Kadir has exceptionally high standards. Her standards are not familiar to our students.

In Ms. Jane's observation letter, the contradiction between research practice and

theory is evident. It can be interpreted that Ms. Jane understands the need for feedback and the kind of slow relational learning that is needed from an Indigenous perspective.

Also, in the letter, Ms. Jane seemingly understood and valued the time I was giving students to complete tasks through the provision of feedback and the time prior to grading. She further commented about the care I took to build relationships with students, mentioning the homely feeling in my classroom in another statement in which she wrote:

Ms. Kadir expressed to me that she stayed after school the previous evening (until 5:00 p.m.) to help students to complete and better their assignments as well as to prepare them for the second writing of the mid-term exam. She provides nourishment to students in her classroom and I also observed a seating environment which was more informal and relaxed as opposed to formal desks and rows.

In Ms. Jane's comments I found myself questioning my attempts to teach from a First Nations perspective and to teach students from their own cultural perspective. These questions and doubts came up quite frequently in moments of contemplation about my classroom practices. After teaching in this context for two years, however, I sensed there is a disconnect between our desire to teach in culturally diverse settings and what we actually do. In one breath, Ms. Jane appreciated the time and effort I put into my teaching practice, stating that I am very hard working and up-to-date with my knowledge and teaching strategies, stating that [Ms. Kadir] takes direction and suggestions very seriously and applies them to her betterment. To add to her appreciation, she further suggested that I am an asset and could be a mentor to other staff members who have a desire to better

their pedagogy. On the other hand, she advised me to lower my expectations and to have a more realistic grading standard.

Thus, while she was aware that students were given time to grow into becoming better academically, she denied that awareness, mentioning in her observations that I am thinking the students have done their best, but they may not have been acknowledged for that effort when the grade was determined. “The assignments I viewed showed some ability and stamina in effort which I think would be worth higher grades than what Ms. Kadir feels are deserving” (Miss Jane).

How can I have misjudged evidence of learning? How can I, according to Ms. Jane’s observation, be hardworking, committed to learning about students’ histories, about the oppressions they face daily as a marginalized group and yet not honour where they come from? How can I give students opportunities to improve their assignments through feedback and offer them time until they feel successful? How can I give of my time and have high expectations for students and yet not consider their efforts worthy?

Given the contradictions in Ms. Jane’s written observation to the administration, it appears that her mission on 29 April 2015 in observing my class was not to offer herself as an ally nor to offer students ways of understanding their uncomfortableness or fears of failure in their grade 12 ELA class. She mentioned that she was asked (presumably by the band administrator) to assist me in identifying the cause of students’ failure in their Grade 12 ELA class. But Ms. Jane was in my classroom for much more than identifying the causes of students’ failure in their ELA class. There was only one follow-up after her observation, which I initiated. In that follow-up meeting, she offered no pedagogical suggestions, although I had a lot of questions for her such as what would

she suggest I do differently? To which she replied, “I don’t know, you are doing everything possible.” I recalled Ms. Jane mentioning that she was only in my classroom to gather information.

In Ms. Jane’s observation letter, it is evident that “attending to these cross-cultural negotiations and the pedagogical practices they imply are profoundly challenging for Indigenous and non-Indigenous educators alike” (Kanu, 2011; Chap. Guiding Principles for Integrating Aboriginal Perspectives, para. 6) because old embedded Eurocentric ideologies and the hegemonic structure of education are hard to uproot. The emphasis on students’ grades and their connection to academic success taken as the only measure of excelling in the classroom is one of the fundamental ways in which education is separated from the whole student.

Despite our efforts to textualize and affirm curriculum-making as an ongoing and changing encounter among people, environments, materials, and relationships, we are continually reminded how difficult it is to disrupt curriculum as directive in the context of officially mandated processes and products. (Rose and Whitty, 2010, p. 6)

An education experience divorced from the intent and practice of learning skills, concepts, and critical creative ways of understanding the world robs students of the freedom to map their own journey in the world. This defective model of delivering education defies the purpose of education which is to draw out rather than force in. It limits students’ ability to map their own journeys in the world that is inextricably linked to a deficit model of theorizing the abilities and capabilities of Indigenous students. Tuck, (2009) labelled this kind of research, [work] as a damage-centred approach. Educators,

both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, see it as the Indian problem linked to children and families. Tuck (2009) continued in her article, *Suspending Damage; A letter to Communities*, by using Grande's (2004) earlier description which stated: "The 'Indian Problem' is not a problem of children and families but rather, first and foremost, a problem that has been consciously and historically produced by and through the systems of colonization: a multidimensional force underwritten by Western Christianity, defined by White supremacy, and fueled by global capitalism" (p. 19). Further, if students' embodied experiences are not reflected in the curriculum and their academic success is dependent solely on socially accepted grades, then acquiring a meaningful education for aboriginal students becomes an ongoing struggle.

Ms. Jane's mention of high marks is the least of the system's problems. High grades, "test scores, grade point averages, course enrollments, and other indicators of the school achievement of many students of colour are the symptoms, not causes, of the problems" (Gay, 2010, p, xxiv).

The need to award marks to a project that a student is successful in a subject does not demonstrate that the student has acquired the necessary skills to think critically about the concepts taught. In a recent study conducted by the University of Regina titled, *Seeking Their Voices*, (2014), it stated, that "If Indigenous students are to be effectively served, the research needs to expand to include a focus on culturally responsive pedagogy" (2014, p. 39). The study mentions Demmert and Towner's (2003), six elements of a culturally based program namely:

- Recognition and use of native languages;



- Pedagogy that stresses traditional cultural characteristics and adult child interactions;
- Teaching strategies that are congruent with traditional culture and contemporary ways of knowing and learning (opportunities to observe, practice, and demonstrate skills);
- curriculum based on traditional culture that recognizes the importance of native spirituality and uses visual arts, legends, oral histories of the community
- Strong Native community participation, including parents, elders and others in the planning and operation of the school; and
- Knowledge and use of the social and political mores of the community. (as cited in *Seeking their voices*, p. 39)

From my limited experience teaching in Saskatchewan in a band-operated school, I have observed fixed models of delivering education in places “where education has been undermined by [educators] and students alike who seek to use it as a platform for opportunistic concerns rather than as a place to learn” (hooks, 1994, p. 13). It is alarming that Ms. Jane, a senior First Nations educator in the system, was sent to ascertain information about a learning process that Indigenous philosophy embraces as if it were impeding students’ progress. This type of monitoring signals that the education system in this First Nations community depends heavily on traditional Eurocentric ideologies rather than First Nation’s ways of understanding the world.

A pedagogical approach in a high school ELA class that includes Indigenous traditions and history, and questions Eurocentric themes in texts, poetry, and dramatic

performance (such as Shakespeare's *Othello*) in search of Indigenous perspectives is vital for students in school and beyond the classroom. As Berila (2016) stated:

Content and concepts built on students' cultural identity and anti-oppressive theories offers rich opportunities to model self-reflection in the moment of deep disequilibrium, which then helps students develop critical skills for unlearning oppression that will serve them long after the "content" of the class is completed.  
(p. 123)

These concepts afford students the opportunity to leave behind the bondage of negative assimilation practices which once enslaved their families and ancestors and still do in neo-colonial ways.

## **5.6 The Pull Between Status Quo and Culturally Responsive Pedagogy in an Indigenous Context in Saskatchewan**

At first glance, it seemed that culturally responsive teaching should come quite easily in high school X because the school population, in large part, belonged to the same ethnic background, sharing a common history and present experiences. I discovered quite the opposite. Over time I discerned why a different approach to teaching and learning was met at first with complex resentment from students, band education councillors, community members and educators.

What I had learned was that the hurt and mistrust stemming from years of colonial oppression ran deep in the psyche of students and community members whom I had met during my two years of teaching in this Indigenous setting. Reflecting on my years teaching at high school X, I have learned that people who have experienced oppression in

multiple ways often have fears, suspicions, and doubt about practices that go against the grain of the hegemonic practices they are trying to work against.

### **5.6 A Retreat to Contemplative Practices**

For an educator to be culturally responsive in moments of disturbance and mindful dissonance, they should tackle difficult subject matters calmly. To enter that state of calmness, they must learn to sit and self-reflect. They need to constantly remind themselves not to be too quick to dismiss students' and colleagues' emotions as wilful play or avoidance - a way to be excused from tasks, exercises or conversations. Rather, an educator who is responding to the cultural dynamics in the classroom will allow students and colleagues' the freedom to dance upon that "raw, real, and uncharted terrain" (Berila, 2016, p. 124), guiding and helping them explore a myriad of ways to live with their embodied experiences in relationship with each other.

## CHAPTER 6

### 6.0 DECONSTRUCTING EUROCENTRIC IDEOLOGIES —

#### PROPOSITIONS AND POSSIBILITIES

In this chapter, I explore the journeys I had to travel while I was teaching in an Indigenous context in Saskatchewan. By critically analyzing the performance of whiteness, I can embrace the difficulties in learned oppressive environments. Guiding my analysis were the following tenets: (a) the capacity to contemplate, teach and transgress within the unexamined structure of whiteness (Picower, 2009); and (b) Eurocentric ideologies in Indigenous spaces of teaching and learning.

I propose to examine language and the role of power in the structure of whiteness not as the colour of one's skin, but as a dominant ideology and learned behaviour. I investigate how we often get stuck in between moments of cynical and recurring systems of oppression.

Drawing upon the works of anti-oppressive theorists such as hooks (1994) and cultural theorists such as Bhabha (1994), I navigate the philosophical underpinnings that blocked me from achieving a clear and practical approach towards realizing the notion of being culturally responsive in the classroom.

#### 6.1 The Capacity to Contemplate, Teach, and Transgress

Through the act of deconstructing Eurocentric ideologies in the Saskatchewan ELA curriculum document, its supporting mandated resources, curriculum implementation and the letter from Ms. Jane, I had to first address whiteness. I examined whiteness not with a standard, fixed, objective lens but from a feminist anti-oppressive

post-structural perspective that opens room for negotiation, (Bhabha 1994). Negotiation that leads to the inclusion of other cultural ways of understanding and viewing the world.

When Eurocentric knowledge is disrupted through the application of a feminist anti-oppressive post-structural perspective, whiteness cannot be a concept or an idea that is fixed and unchangeable or an abstract ideology separated from the body. Further, knowledge cannot be ascertained as universal and objective nor can curriculum content present the body “as an object that can be measured, coded and recorded” (Springgay, 2008, p. 3).

Whiteness is complicated because it is not readily seen and felt by educators operating in the framework of its structure. During my time teaching ELA in Saskatchewan with the conscious intent to deconstruct the Eurocentrism engrained in prescribed texts, I learned very quickly that I must simultaneously work to disrupt the performance of whiteness. The performance of whiteness was embedded in my pedagogical choices, in daily classroom practices and my relationship with my colleagues. hooks (1994) wrote:

Let’s face it: most of us were taught in classrooms where styles of teaching reflected the notion of a single norm of thought and experience, which we were encouraged to believe was universal. This has been just as true for non-white teachers as for white teachers. Most of us have learned to teach emulating this model. (p. 35)

Educators working at the grassroots level must choose to uproot the inscribed standardized education strongholds embedded in Eurocentric ideologies that have shaped curriculum and its implementation. Thus, for classroom methodologies to begin to reflect

culturally responsive practices, the system and educators' perspectives about teaching and learning must shift from an education model that is codified and measured in universal terms to a more fluid pedagogy that respects and includes students' and educators' experiences outside the classroom. We need to envision students as having potential and valuing the cultural knowledge they bring into the school.

As I reflect on my teaching experience in Saskatchewan I think about my many encounters with whiteness as performance. Sims and Lea (2008) states, "Whiteness [as] complex, hegemonic, and dynamic . . . ways of thinking, feeling, believing and acting [cultural scripts] functions to obscure the power, privilege, and practices of the dominant social elite" (p. 68). As I think about students and the colleagues I have met on my sojourn in a place in Canada where the roots of colonization are deeply imbedded within the fabric of the community, and "where diversity [and] decolonization work is about changing perceptions of whiteness rather than changing the whiteness of organizations." (Ahmed, 2012, p. 341) I wonder what continues to hold these organizations together while there is still so much pain of past and present injustices.

I wonder now, as I did then, whether the disbelief on the faces that confronted my teaching practice was an indication that what was happening in the classroom was forcing some of my colleagues and students to rethink the school system of which we are a part. Perhaps what was happening in the classroom was demonstrating that whiteness was not only a common occurrence but a concept to question in mandated curriculum resources and as a habit built in our souls.

The choices I was striving to provide students about choosing their reading materials and methodologies were spilling over and gushing out of the classroom through

conversations and keen observation by onlookers. My choices to be culturally responsive to students and deconstruct the mandated Saskatchewan ELA curriculum resources to align with students' lived experiences were encouraging Indigenous educators to include Indigenous resources and content in the curriculum and classroom practices. Hence, Indigenous educators at high school X were split between twin personas: (a) one that is constantly negotiating and re-negotiating "the diverse set of racist practices that hold in place the hegemony of whiteness, and (b) another completely unaware of them at an implicit automatic level" (Berlak, 2008, p. 51).

Although teaching bodies moved in and out of classrooms, in the hallways and lunchrooms, the different pedagogical choices I was encouraging in the classroom were teaching students to take responsibility for their learning in a setting that honours who they are as individuals (see Cole, 2011). The transformative learning experiences in our classroom were "requiring educators to develop a level of comfort with contradictions so that [we] no longer view inconsistencies as problems that need solutions, but rather opportunities to critically challenge the way education is done" (Cole, 2011, p. 11). Through my time teaching at high school X, I had to be mindful of my actions in the classroom because of the human tendency to shy away from discomfort and fall into the trap of complacency.

Further, by confronting the inconsistencies between theory and practice in our daily teaching and learning encounters, we can develop ways of acknowledging other possibilities, hence enabling a culturally responsive practice in our classrooms that is reflective and dialectic.

In the highly charged emotional spaces of teaching and learning such as in high school X, where feelings of oppression are harboured deep within the knitted, conflicted structure of people and the institution, “educators must take responsibility and challenge both themselves and their teaching practice to confront ideologies and systems that hinder genuine, individual expression” (Cole, 2011, p. 11) in the classroom. Fannon’s text, *Black Skin White Mask* (1986) brings out this contradictory awakening of the self in conversation with itself. In the forward, Sardar indirectly refers to classroom practice, or ideologies embedded in the curriculum in discussing that “the anger that is felt by the marginalized . . . is an anger of all those cultures, knowledge systems and ways of being that are ridiculed, demonized, declared inferior and irrational and in some cases eliminated” (p. 7). This expression, this thingness that we sometimes get in our stomach, this feeling of anger that Sardar described in the forward of Fanon’s text also explains Indigenous educators’ responses to the culturally responsive practices I was inculcating in my classroom. Eurocentric ideologies remain dominant in curriculum documents and discourses because few educators have found the courage to facilitate learning (curriculum implementation) in ways that disturb and question the dominant ideologies embedded in classroom practices.

In a recent CBC news report, Professor Stack, in the Department of Educational Studies at the University of British Columbia, remarked, “Everyone has a role to play when combating racism, but teaching lends a significant opportunity to question subtle, institutional forms of racism and racist thinking” (August 19, 2017). Professor Stack further stated, “Even when I’m reading books to my children the main characters are white, the superheroes are white,” she said. “We have to ask how are people of colour



represented? How are black people represented? How are Indigenous people represented?” Professor Stack’s remarks are appropriate in conversations about the relevance of Shakespeare in the classroom. Educators should not take lightly the impact of the classics and literature which help students to think and discern critically their role as cultural bridge-builders. “When children are noticing differences, it’s not to make them afraid of that, but talking about it and not putting judgment and looking down on themselves” (Professor Stack, August 19, 2017).

Educators bring a unique perspective to the conversation about cultural differences in the classroom when discussing texts or explaining and guiding students to new concepts and ideas. Acknowledging that students’ cultures and ways of being in the world are not represented in the curriculum may cause some discomfort for educators and the students as this work shows. The first step for most educators caught in the turmoil of discerning how to make things right without guidance from curriculum specialists or education administrators is to seek a balance between narratives from the dominant culture and cultures left out of the curriculum. It is vital to bridge gaps in curriculum narratives to achieve cultural equity in classrooms. I confess that I have in the past tried to make things right to find that balance for culturally responsive practices to have any effect. It is equally vital to reflect through contemplative practices the rooted ideology/ies in the school’s framework.

Reflection would aid educators to reframe and design meaningful classroom practices where students can share their own lived experiences while seeing their experiences reflected in those of other cultures. If teaching and learning are about creating knowledge and building a just society, then working through differences seems

like a plausible approach. In turn, plausible approaches might produce changes most educators desire in their pedagogy. “There is a growing need for scholars and their students to engage in post-disciplinary ventures to study much of today’s phenomena, all of which require consideration of the complexity inherent in the fluid dynamism of everyday life...” (Amoo-Adare, 2017, p. 2).

Taking such a radical and all-embracing approach to research, teaching and learning practices necessitates a form of teaching to transgress, which includes a reflexive praxis of nurturing within oneself and others an ability to cross epistemological and ontological borders.

## **6.2 Eurocentric ideologies in Indigenous spaces of teaching and learning.**

As I ponder how to write about whiteness in an Indigenous context, I feel moments of confusion. When I was teaching at high school X there were only Indigenous students in the classroom. How could I experience any difficulty with whiteness whether in performance, identity, or scripted ideologies? My experience proved that whiteness has less to do with identity or the colour of one’s skin.

From my teaching experiences, Indigenous bodies are implicitly caught up in the hierarchal structure of education embodied in learned Eurocentric ideological practices parading in Indigenous educational institutions. Researchers such as Kanu (2011) and Battiste (2013a/b) continue to seek out ways of decolonizing education or teaching from different intercultural perspectives. It is worth noting that adding snippets of Indigenous resources and perspectives

or other marginalized cultures does not solve the problem. It is essential for educators who labour in the framework of culturally responsive pedagogy to be aware that the “add-and-stir model of bringing aboriginal education into curricula, environment, and teaching practices has not achieved the needed change (RCAP, 1996) but rather continues to sustain the superiority of Eurocentric knowledge and process” (Battiste, 2013a, p. 28).

Indigenous schools are trapped in rigid structures such as the Indian Act that often debate patterns of exclusion and inclusion so non-Indigenous educators who find themselves in this hierarchal bureaucratic system also feel contained, trapped, and regimented in the bureaucratic structure nested in the culture of their teaching practice.

### **6.3 The Educator’s Body and the Performance of Whiteness**

Many researchers have stressed the importance of understanding how the body is affected by the constant rhetoric of the grand narratives, stories created by the dominant culture about its right of existence and that of other cultures whom the dominant culture seeks to control (Giroux, 1992; hooks, 1994).

As I reflect on my experience teaching in Saskatchewan, I now observe that in spaces of teaching and learning very little has been discussed about how whiteness affects the educators’ body and the spaces they inhabit. The ability to teach and transgress the ideologies of Eurocentrism is centrally linked with the educators’ presumed inability to understand how dominant ideologies have inflected their spirits and minds, how they “hold within our bodies feelings of defiance [not expressed but kept within our souls] that tell another kind of history (Shapiro, 1999, p. 67).

A website titled Calgary Anti-Racist Education, Understanding Whiteness, (2018)

stated that whiteness is “multidimensional, complex, systemic and systematic.” The website goes on to state that:

[Whiteness] is socially and politically constructed, and therefore a learned behaviour. It does not just refer to skin colour, but an ideology based on beliefs, values, behaviours, habits, and attitudes, which result in the unequal distribution of power and privilege based on skin colour. (Frye, 1983; Kevel, 1996)

Therefore, whiteness is relational. “White” exists only in relation (or opposition) to other categories and locations in the racial hierarchy produced by whiteness. In defining “others,” whiteness defines itself. Hence if whiteness is a social behaviour, and if schooling is an entity used to transfer these behaviours, it is worth examining how the educator’s body gets trapped in this conflicting web that showcases the paradox of their personhood even though their bodies are not white, as in the case of my Saskatchewan experience.

Macaulay, (1835) in the mission of promoting English as “better and worth knowing” explained in *Macaulay's minute on education*, that , “We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern, -- a class of persons Indian in blood and color, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect” (p.8). The body trap happens, in my view, because white cultural norms and practices go unnamed and unquestioned (see Frankenberg, 1993) forming a particular type of consciousness (see Macaulay’s discourse,1835).

I will argue that most people, regardless of their skin colour, if their beliefs and ideologies are shaped within a structure of white ideologies, assume a position of structural advantage. (see Frankenberg, 1993)

Drawing on Frankenberg's research, (1993), the questions we should be asking are:

- What is race?
- What is the white person's burden?
- What does my brown body have to do with whiteness?

These essential questions can be understood and answered only in relation to other questions such as:

- Who am I, an educator yes! But more intrinsically who am I?
- Can I separate this educator self from who I am?

In Nixon's, (1997) autobiography, *The Quest for Nothing*, he said that while teaching at Crowsnest Consolidated High School that his "pedagogy had changed from a quest for meaning to a conquest for control. This time my own experience was to be firmly exiled and my time was sold in its entirety to a system" (p. 16). Reflecting on what is mandated to educators to teach in the form of curriculum and curriculum responses some of us can relate to Nixon's feelings. Like Nixon, each time I felt within the deepest parts of myself that I was buying into the system of hegemonic dealings. "I wondered again just what I was doing in the classroom, in this system, in this world of unconscious ritual where I now worked to maintain order and teach what I was told" (p. 16).

As decolonizing and indigenizing education policies call for ways to do education differently, whiteness in education calls for a sort of decolonization of the mind regardless of the socially constructed ideologies we attach to skin colour. For us to even begin to change perspectives there is an urgency to recognize that as the privileged or the colonizer works through guilt, the colonized must work to uproot oppression that tugs at the core of our being.

The complexities I endured teaching in Saskatchewan had little to do with my skin colour, pedagogy, or intentions. Indigenous people have a history in which they view and experience schools, the administrators, and educators as “instruments of the dominant culture” (see Marks, 2014) due to the structure of the residential school system. Although many educators who live in white bodies may not want to be racist or enact what Hegel (1977) described as the master and slave dialectic, the mere fact that one’s skin colour is white or one’s features are different means that Indigenous people assume the person comes with some form of unspoken privilege to yet again disturb their Indigenous ways of life (Sekerci, 2017).

What do educators do with the burden of whiteness? How do I as part of a minority group in Canada work through the complexities of whiteness while my colleagues and students label and fix me in an ethnic category with which I do not identify? What was I supposed to do with the burden of whiteness?

Rethinking the socially constructed hegemonic position I represented in the Indigenous classroom, it did not matter if I was coloured, if my ethnicity was marginalized, if my ancestors were indentured servants or even slaves. It did not matter that I, like my students, face the after-effects of colonization every day, living as an outcast within a sea of whiteness. Whatever I represented in the Indigenous community I was teaching and living in, my identity was foreign and in some strange way familiar to a system whose hands were (and continue to be) stained with the guilt of inflicting oppression on minority bodies. I represented the socially constructed identity and ideology that disrespects Indigenous cultures and their land and tore their families apart through ways that contributed to learning and education.

Through the inconsistencies and varied misunderstandings of each other's intentions and purpose in learning and through labelling and fixing each other in ethnic categories, one concerted action was happening—we were all working hard to radically uproot the dominant ideologies and habitual behaviours rooted in the education system at high school X. The complications that my brown body brought to the margins of pathology, formed in our memories through oppression and suppression, were real. I was a constant reminder of the colonizing ideologies that hold students and the community I was serving in hostage to the dominate culture.

Concerns about the need for (and lack of) an ethnically diverse teaching workforce in Canada to teach a diverse student population are real. Whiteness is meaningless as a category for race “except it has been (and continues to be) constructed to maintain and present hierarchical, unjust power relations,” (Gillespie, D., Ashbaugh, L., & Defiore, J, 2002, p. 238)

Even though educators represent the dominant culture it does not mean they cannot teach an ethnically diverse student population. Any pre-service educator who has been trained and taught a philosophy that embodies stories of whiteness falls prey to cultivating a teaching practice subjected to a set of privileged white ideologies. Therefore, an educator does not necessarily have to be white to facilitate ideas that fit the model of whiteness. Often as educators cultured in a system of Eurocentric ideologies we are not aware of how these white ideologies impact our daily classroom practices. The stories we are told, and the ones we tell, become embedded in our memories and serve as a language bank to describe how we view the world. Thus, our teaching practice becomes a task of text book instructions and restricted pedagogy. Over time, these stories told over

and over become habitual. With a practice based on autopilot, educators are less reflective and more reliant on a “set of tools of whiteness, designed to protect and maintain dominant and stereotypical understandings of race-tools that were emotional, ideological, and performative” (Picower, 2009, p. 197).

Teaching through an anti-oppressive lens asks educators to rely on these narratives as methodological transgression by first re-examining how they have been shown to practice their role as educators and then to commit to altering those parts of the story that do not sit well with our intentions. There may be many debates as to how educators, myself included, should teach and what the limitations of our profession asks us to do. Palmer (2007) suggested the concept of the inner teacher. To debunk racial elements in our practice, “the inner [educator should] stand guard at the gate of selfhood, warding off whatever insults our integrity and welcoming whatever affirms it” (p. 32). In the same vein as the concept of the “inner teacher,” Fernandez (2014) noted:

It is my contention, that as long as our educational system continues to privilege a dominant worldview of racism and kyriarchy, it will produce people with degrees, yes, but not personas educates. How might the teacher’s “marked” body affect racial and racist knowledge in the classroom? How does race shape the teacher’s interactions with students, colleagues, and institutions? What does this mean for one’s teaching? (p. 9)

In this research, I have embraced the complexity that comes with working through embedded ideologies of the single story. It is often necessary for us to engage in a practice of contemplation to reach inward to that part of us that “stands guard at the gate



of selfhood” (Palmer, 2007, p. 32) to urge the imagination to create other possibilities in our practice.

To address whiteness in the classroom, therefore, requires us not only to be passionate and articulate in the subjects we teach but also to view the process of teaching within a holistic framework where the self is not absent or separate from our practice. Within a holistic framework, educators should endeavour to travel that slippery road of accrediting the differences between cultures, and to examine what torments our inner self and what projects outward towards our ability to become effective educators.

## **CHAPTER 7**

### **7.0 CONCLUSION**

In this final chapter, I revisit the initial questions which framed my research. In the context of my reflection about teaching in Saskatchewan and in conversation with the literature, I reviewed the intersecting concepts that run through each question that has guided my research. After responding to my research questions, I explore the limitations of this study. Next, I summarize my reflective analysis through re-entering the theme of labour, (Kumashiro, 2000) hence encouraging a practice of looking inward as we work towards including diverse worldviews in the classroom. Finally, I invite us on a continued journey where the seemingly fulfillment of achieving our goals of including students' cultural histories into classroom practices only mark the beginning of our commitment to teaching in culturally responsive ways.

#### **7.1 Responding to the research questions**

In answering my research questions, I will offer four concepts to consider in relation to culturally responsive teaching: intentionality, meaning, self, and community. These concepts hold true as I tried during my time teaching in Saskatchewan to condition my mind to interface with what is personal and what is systemic.

## **Answers to the research Questions**

*1. In which ways was I ready to be flexible, dynamic, and critical about my pedagogical choices in the classroom? How did I teach via students' worldviews and community experiences?*

Before entering my ELA classroom in this particular Indigenous community, I had researched Indigenous peoples in Canada. I went over my notes from my days at York University in Toronto about the Oka Crisis, the residential school system, and the Sixty's Scope. The summer months before I started my assignment at high school X, I participated in training, through the Office of the Treaty commissioner in Saskatoon, that taught me about treaty knowledge in the classroom. Also, during those summer months of 2014, I spent time acquiring the necessary accreditation status to equip me to teach without the worry of having to prepare students for the departmental exams.

However, what I did not realize is that while I had increasing technical knowledge, teaching at high school X was a different context that required me to rely on my past experiences from a different perspective. While my experiences with oppression and indoctrination into the ideologies of Eurocentrism had required me to be critical about my classroom pedagogies, teaching at high school X needed me to see differently. As my reflection demonstrated, I had not completed the practical self-work within this Indigenous context to unlearn these dominant ideological practices. In the beginning months of teaching at high school X, I had not made room for other forms of knowledge within my body even though I thought I did. Further my intention to be culturally responsive had not had time to materialize itself in the classroom nor in my relationship with students. It was in that moment of reflecting on my intentions, of turning inward and

naming “the hidden standards of racism, colonialism, and cultural and linguistic imperialism in modern curriculum” (Battiste, 2013a, p. 28) that students and I began to engage with curriculum documents critically. Therefore, as I began to self reflect on my daily engagement with students in the context of their histories and immediate experiences students and I were able to “move beyond a pedagogic stance” (McCann, 2007, p. 156). The aim to transgress traditional teaching and learning practices equipped students and I to continually ready ourselves to be adaptable to both the ideological and pathological changes that were happening in and around us.

*2. What role did I, as an educator, play in an Indigenous high school to heighten students’ anxiety about the oppression their communities have endured through colonization?*

As I learned to ready myself to be flexible, dynamic, and critical about my pedagogical choices in the classroom, students’ reaction to my efforts to teach in culturally responsive ways were signalling that they needed time to welcome me into their space. For students, they see me as a symbol of power in the classroom. They were aware that my skin colour does not negate the fact that my practices are cradled in Eurocentric values and norms. Students’ awareness of my position within the classroom triggered an awakening for renewed meaning within my spirit for my positionality in the classroom. This need for renewed meaning opened room for questions such as who am I, what am I and where am I in this present moment? These questions brought me to a deeper level of understanding of myself and students. At that moment as Bhabha (1994) noted, “... between ambivalence and contradiction is where we are compelled to negotiate the difference, where an in-between space can be created and recreated” (p. 56).

It was in moments of creating and recreating lesson plans and classroom activities with students that I repeatedly began to challenge the hidden, learned concepts (Battiste, 2013a) of colonization in the resources used to support classroom practices, and within the core of my being. Further, through challenging my own biases built within my learned perceptions of the other, I was able to recognize how my eagerness to do education differently had heightened students' anxiety within the classroom.

Over time, students were able to see and test my sincerity. After Johnny shared his concerns with the principal and questioned my presence in the classroom, my research demonstrated that as an educator, I had to negotiate with myself what my role was in this teaching environment. I would have decided to quit, but then that would have made me a hypocrite, complicit in the very actions I was trying to debunk. I stayed because I had triggered Indigenous students to talk about their pain; now I needed to encourage practices of community reliance, self-resilience and meaning among our intentions for being together.

*3. How did students and I work collaboratively to deconstruct dominant Eurocentric patterns in curriculum documents and their implementation to build bridges and include different cultures?*

In the earlier months of my time with students, they resisted the idea of deconstructing any piece of work. It seemed at first that the students' only focus was to acquire the necessary credits so that they could obtain their high school diploma. However, through the work of deconstructing Shakespeare's *Othello*, students accepted the idea to Indigenize *Othello* through creating counter-stories. In creating an anti-oppressive atmosphere within the classroom where students were given the necessary

tools to explore and add themselves into the activities they were able to speak and write back to power and dominance in Shakespeare's *Othello* by using Indigenous knowledge systems to transform Shakespeare's work.

My research demonstrated that “[t]his deconstructive work means identifying dominant, normalizing and resisting discourses and discursive practices in different and historically situated contexts, [it] also identif[ies] paradigmatic shifts in discourses and practices in the history of [... education],” (Taguchi, 2007, p. 280). Through deconstructing the curriculum, students and I had move past curriculum and mandated text as a given. From collaborating, we had reached a stage within the given semester where we were engaging in deconstruction work which opened a third space. (Bhabha, 1994). A third space where we were able to encounter and negotiate stories left out of the mandated curriculum discourses, where we could use literature to change the narratives told to us about who we are from faces that do not reflect our histories or lived experiences.

*4. In what ways did I encourage contemplation and facilitate discussions about the inherent powers and discourses that shape knowledge within mandated resources in the Saskatchewan ELA Curriculum?*

Lyle (2016) noted that:

[a]t the heart of integrity in learning is a commitment to honesty, fairness and respect. Teachers and students are learners at heart, approaching scholarship with unique experiences and knowledge that can enrich each other and augment learning. I acknowledge the power inherent in my role as a teacher, but I remain mindful that it does not overshadow the opportunity to learn with my students. (p.13)

At high school X, after we had discussed the purposes and goals for our time together, students and I entered into a relationship where conversations about the inherent power within the Eurocentric system became part of our daily interactions. As an educator whose self identity is cradled in a fusion of cultures, I had to relearn how to listen well. I also had to be consciously aware of whose place I had inhabited. As my research demonstrated through reflecting and relearning, my self identity in this Indigenous community provided students and I a template for a practice of authentic engagement. Through a practice of being present with each other students were invited to engage with their experiences from a deeper level than just their heads.

*5. How did I support the inclusion of Indigenous ontological and epistemological perspectives in my classroom to enable other classroom discourses missing from the mandated ELA curriculum?*

As my research demonstrated, the students in my classroom were not empty. As a witness to my practice in Saskatchewan, it was when students were encouraged to implement anti-oppressive strategies in the classroom that they then began to question what was taught in the classroom. It was when a community of respect, safety, and trust was established and tested that students were willing to walk alongside me in the challenging journey of deconstruction work.

Through engaging in deconstructing Eurocentric ideologies students were then beginning to critically engage with texts and in the process, became aware of the narratives left out of curriculum and mandated text. Students within the classroom brought with them their cultural histories and immediate community experiences. Through a willingness to engage with each other while conditioning our minds to

interface with what is personal and what is systemic, we were able to move our practice from divisions of power to collaboration, and from exclusion to inclusion from a level of our shared humanity.

## **7.2 Limitations - The question of credibility through my Reflective Analysis**

The intent to embark on this journey of reflection was to put my experiences to teach in culturally responsive ways in conversation with other literature. Further as Jay and Johnson, (2002) commented, I wanted to “help keep [my] biases in check, problem-solve, and question the structures that may support or hold back students” (as cited in Wells, McCaie, Barker and Herie, 2018, p. xiv). Dewey’s (1933) description in *How We Think*, defined reflection as the “active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in light of the grounds that may support it and further conclusions to which it tends” (p.9). The act of constantly reflecting on my pedagogical choices, (being persistent, Dewey, 1933) brings my whole self into my practice, thus guiding me often out of my head and leading me to teach from the heart, where all effective teaching must begin.

One may argue that the qualitative model of doing research, where the researcher is not independent from that being researched, as a limitation that renders my work problematic. From the problematic limitations ensued by subjectivity, one may further argue that from a critical reflective approach to my study I may gain some therapeutic advantage which allows me to make sense of the contradictions and inconsistencies during my time in Saskatchewan.



Freire (1970) held that “only as they [the oppressed] discover themselves to be 'hosts' of the oppressor can they contribute to the midwifery of their liberating pedagogy” (p. 33). Reflexivity work beckons us to question. How can we discover [ourselves] to be 'hosts' of the oppressor and in what ways are we complicit in the very practices we are trying to work against? Therefore, the openness, and ambiguity that the “culturally constructed nature of the social world, peppered with contradictions and complexities, needs to be embraced not dismissed, (England, 1994, p. 81). Hence given the fluidity, the contradictions and inconsistencies that thrive within the human condition, and the partial knowledge gained from the text used within this study, my research demonstrated that there is no cookie cutter way that I can convince anyone to read this body of work and consider it credible. In retrospect, to have one’s work examined and doubted is the risk reflective researchers, who are also educators using reflexive approaches, must take in hope to disrupt the dominate ideologies that flourishes within our practice.

### **7.3 Reflective Summary**

If I led you to believe that my intent to teach in culturally responsive ways is achieved simply by preparing curriculum documents, curriculum support documents and a desire to practice what is discussed in board rooms and staff meetings, then I have failed to demonstrate that culturally responsive teaching is more complex and requires us to bring our whole selves into the learning environment.

On the other hand, if I have triggered you to start thinking that mostly what we do as educators is endure our roles through the “add-and-stir model of bringing aboriginal education into curricula, environment, and teaching” (Battiste, 2013a, p. 28) then there is

hope. It is hope for a paradigm shift to critically examine and augment the intricate ways colonization has shaped the very life of educational intuitions, classroom practices, and our self identity as educators.

My goal in this research was to open discussions that would lead to authentic classroom practices which embody the true yet complicated notion of culturally responsive practices in Indigenous classrooms. Culturally responsive practices should use “the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of references, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant and effective for them” (Gay, 2010; p. 31).

Retracing my journey as an educator in Saskatchewan and reflecting on conversations with colleagues has taught me that I may not have all the answers about how to design and facilitate learning that embodies a practice of responding to the varying cultures in the classroom. However, what is equally if not more important as we aim to teach in culturally responsive ways is to continually reflect on our social position of privilege and how this kind of cognitive imperialism (Battiste, 2013a) creeps into our souls. Eurocentric ideologies have remained intact because as educators, the labour that Kumashiro (2000) explained earlier in this paper demands more of ourselves, and more than just a transactional approach to our practice as educators. Drader (2009) explained that we must labour in the flesh. Therefore, if we detach ourselves from our practice, then our practice becomes an agent of the habits that we are trying to work against; they become habits that shelter “the hidden standards of racism, colonialism, and cultural and linguistic imperialism” (Batiste, 2013a, p. 28.) in the classroom. We may not know how

to unlearn oppression because it may not have been addressed in our schooling, teacher preparation courses, or in our lives.

My research study acknowledges that the act of teaching and learning has much to gain rather than lose when it involves an inclusive approach to European/Western and Indigenous ideologies. The commitment to planning education differently involves a concerted effort, not only as educators, but also where students' narratives and differing worldviews find a place alongside European/Western ideologies and pedagogy.

During my two years teaching in Saskatchewan, I felt alone while I strove to achieve culturally reformative practices in the classroom for the Indigenous students I taught. It was in these solitary moments that I felt the weight of not being what the Indigenous community saw me as:

To my own self . . . I was [not] white [and I felt this, I was] made . . . into a stranger, the one [who was] . . . recognized as “out of place,” the one who does not belong, whose proximity is registered as a crime or a threat. (Ahmed, 2012, p. 2)

Although I continue to wrestle with a feeling of aloneness, I am convinced my passion for teaching will not sustain me through the highs and lows of the profession. I must therefore rely on a type of radical resilience and constant contemplation to take me through the frustrating times. I must endeavour to understand teaching as, Tremmel, (1993), noted as “a long journey that does not have any readily identifiable destination. It is a journey that I believe must include a backward step into the self and it is a journey that is its own destination” (as cited in Leitch and Day, 2000, p. 179-180).

My memories of Saskatchewan help to put my efforts to teach in culturally responsive ways into perspective. While in Saskatchewan I was desperately trying to find a balance between my ambitions for the institution and working with students to develop the necessary critical skills so that they could chart their course in a rapidly changing society. Gay (2010) noted, “The intricate matrix of [interaction] that occurs in a complex social environment reflects the way people live and how they come to interact with and get along in their world” (p. 78-79).

Culturally responsive practices have excited educators and researchers for some years, but it is still a relatively new concept in the broader world of education. My experience in Saskatchewan revealed that although intentions to approach the curriculum design and curriculum implementation from students’ perspectives were embraced in conversations with community members and the Education Band Council, the details had not yet been explored to the extent that curriculum change could be implemented in classroom practices and methodologies.

As I near the end of my reflective study, I see the need to become aware of the questions such as: Who should take up the responsibility of culturally responsive teaching? If students embraced their Indigenous worldviews from the start of their school experiences, would I have experienced fewer complexities? What if my ethnic self-identity were Indigenous, like the students? Would the challenges of working towards cultural inclusivity be removed or even non-existent?

#### **7.4 Moments of Arrival and Departure- Journeys in future research**

My contribution to this area of research invites a critical approach to the inconsistencies in a culturally responsive approach to teaching and learning. The difficulties appear in the messy work that concepts such as intersectionality and approaches such as anti-oppressive perspectives entail and the growing need to bridge the European/Western culture with other worldviews. The call to include our varying worldviews shows an authentic need to respect the differences among our cultures. Bridging our worldviews asks us to include the narratives that are left out of curriculum design and classroom practices without placing one culture above the other.

Some years have passed since I lived in Saskatchewan. The memories of trying to propose the notion that testing, marks, grade levels, and mandated principles cannot act alone to provide students with a holistic and culturally responsive education experience are still fresh in my mind.

My research shows that culturally responsive teaching will not be achieved through quick fixes. Instead, culturally responsive practices acknowledge that there is no finite end, only moments of discernment and engagement among teaching staff, students and curriculum documents.

It is with the practice of always being on one journey, only to be thrown into another, that the students and I developed a path forward during our time together. On our path, there were moments of arrival signalling a breakthrough. Then there were moments where we stumbled or moments where we had to depart. These endpoints were when we learned to travel onward. During these adventures, we were transported to stories waiting to be embraced and narratives waiting to be discovered.

In the uncertainty of not knowing where the paths of learning explorations may take us lives the art of responding to a culturally diverse classroom. As educators, building capacity by anchoring ourselves in contemplative models of reflection should help us to teach through the fear of not knowing. In choosing to teach in culturally responsive ways through the intersections of a feminist, anti-oppressive, post-structural perspective supported by radical contemplative practices; may we have the tenacity to traverse on paths less travelled and that are unknown. May we continually find the energy to:

“Push it. Examine all things intensely and relentlessly. Probe and search [...]; do not leave it, do not coarse over it, as if it were understood, but instead follow it down until you see it in the mystery of its own specificity and strength.”— (Annie Dillard, 1989).

Finding and often regaining our foundation firmly rooted in the seeds of courage and resilience will then equip us to unsettle and challenge the status quo of hegemonic ideologies and practices.

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