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# Exploring Teachers' Understanding of Equity and Inclusive Education and Their Pedagogical Choices

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Graduate Program in Education

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree in Master of Education

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(Thesis format: Monograph)

by

Kelley Porteous Jones

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Education

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## Abstract

This thesis investigates how teaching in a low-diversity school environment affects equity education. The theoretical frameworks as elaborated by Banks with regards to critical multiculturalism and Kumashiro's approach to anti-oppressive education underpin the analysis. Four Ontario elementary teachers participated in semi-structured interviews. The purpose was to examine their decisions when teaching about equity and how they arrived at those decisions. By drawing on their experiences and viewpoints, the perceptions and practices of these participants were analyzed. Consistent with teachers in high-diversity environments, these teachers in low-diversity classrooms taught about equity when they saw a student need. Since they did not encounter certain visible differences in their local communities, they were likely to miss teaching more broadly about diversity. The research findings point to a need for anti-racist/anti-oppressive and multicultural education for teachers in all learning environments, not just in urban schools where there tends to be a more diverse student population.

## Keywords

Anti-Oppressive Education; Anti-Racist Education; Diversity; Elementary Education; Equity; Equity Education; Inclusive Education; Low Diversity; Multicultural Education.

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## Chapter 1

### Topic, Research Question and Theoretical Framework

In this chapter I outline my personal experiences as both a student and teacher in a low-diversity setting as a basis for grounding my research focus on teachers' perceptions and understandings of equity education. I also provide a brief history of equity policy in Ontario and draw attention to the normative culture in Ontario to further contextualize my study. The theoretical frameworks on equity education as elaborated by Banks with regards to critical multiculturalism and Kumashiro's approach to anti-oppressive education are also explained.

### Overview of the Problem

The elementary school I attended from Kindergarten through Grade Six had approximately 150 students and a seemingly homogenous population. I remember when the first family of visible ethnic minorities moved to town. I was in Grade Three, and they were from Saudi Arabia. As far as I remember, the school culture did not overtly change: We still had a Christmas concert, said the Lord's Prayer together each morning, and no attempt was made to teach us about Islam, explain why the boys' mom wore a headscarf, or even find Saudi Arabia on a map. As a new teacher, my first elementary school site was similar in many ways: Still a Christmas concert, twenty years later; few non-whites among the student population and none on staff; and an 'if-it's-not-broke-don't-fix-it' approach to inclusion.

After graduating from a rural Ontario high school, I moved to downtown Toronto to attend university. To my dismay, I discovered that I felt vaguely uncomfortable around

non-whites. My parents consider themselves liberal, tolerant, not racist; I was raised to believe that everyone was equal - so, how could I feel this way? I became a Girl Guide leader in the city, and while holding hands in a circle at our initial meeting, realized that I was touching Black skin for the first time. I had no experience with real issues of equity, diversity, or inclusion. In most ways, I am a privileged member of the Canadian cultural majority. I am a white woman married to a man. I have a stable job and no longer worry about if I will be able to afford my next meal. I think that my elementary educational experiences could have better prepared me for the world outside our little conclave of homogeneity, and so have chosen to explore the perspectives of teachers who teach in areas similar to the one where I grew up.

Over time, public education has evolved far beyond the teaching of reading, writing, and math skills. In Ontario, Ministry of Education initiatives such as character education (2007) and equity and inclusive education (2009) have specifically placed explicit teaching of social issues into the hands of public school teachers. Since there are no explicit curriculum guidelines for addressing inclusion, teachers have a greater freedom to make personal pedagogical choices when teaching about equity and diversity than when teaching about Science, for example. Many factors, including years of teaching experience, time for instruction, school culture, and personal experience, could influence teachers' pedagogical choices.

## Research Questions and Purpose of the Research

The overarching question which informs this study is: How and why do teachers in low-diversity classrooms teach about equity? This question can be addressed in three parts. First, what does diversity mean to the teachers involved? That is, how do they define it

and what does it mean to them? Second, how do teachers teach about equity or include equity in classroom activities? What lessons, activities, or other choices do they make which address equity? Also, what are the challenges of addressing equity? Finally, when teachers make pedagogical choices about equity education, what influences those decisions? For this study, I am specifically concerned to explore how the diversity of their student populations affects these teachers' pedagogical choices. For example, how are pedagogical choices, as they relate to addressing equity issues in schools, affected by factors such as: a) school culture; b) parental expectations; c) teachers' preexisting beliefs; d) past experiences?

The purpose of this research is to understand how teaching in a low-diversity school environment affects equity education. By low diversity, I mean a school community that is predominantly white and where differences according to sexuality, ethnicity, social class and religious diversity are not so visible. In some areas or in certain schools in Ontario, equity education may not seem important to teachers because they do not see their student population as being diverse enough to need explicit teaching about inclusivity and equity. Similarly, certain types of diversity (e.g., race, religion, culture) might exert more influence over teachers' choices than other types of diversity (e.g., sexual orientation, language). By interviewing elementary classroom teachers, I have chosen to examine if, and how, perceived student diversity affects their explicit teaching choices about inclusive education.

## Rationale

### Current Ontario context

Equity education is a part of what George Dei (1996) calls the “deep curriculum” (p. 79) which encompasses the official curriculum as well as the hidden curriculum of school culture, power relations, personal experiences of teachers and students, to name a few facets. Without a set of standard curriculum expectations on the subject, teachers regularly make essentially all of the pedagogical choices about what, how, and how much or little to teach in the area of equity education. Many factors affect those decisions, and teachers may or may not be aware of the decisions they make or their underlying reasons. As global citizens, our students will be exposed to a wide diversity of people, ideas and information during their lifetime, so by making informed, reflective pedagogical choices teachers can help guide their students to respond to current and future interactions with compassion and respect.

Currently, with the 2009 publication of *Ontario’s Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy* document and its subsequent implementation, diversity and equity are at the forefront of educational policy and discourse in a way they have not been since Steven Lewis’ Report on Race Relations in Ontario in 1992 (Dotzert, 1998) and the following government support document: *Antiracism and Ethnocultural Equity in School Boards* (1993). However, how do teachers in *low diversity* schools feel about these policies? Do they 'buy in' to the idea of a need for explicit instruction in equity, or do they continue to see it as someone else’s problem? If so, why, and what might change about the way these policies are implemented to make them care?

### Diversity policies in the Ontario education system

In Ontario, as elsewhere in North America, the government discourse about diversity has shifted through the years. In the context of public education, diversity issues have not consistently been addressed, or even recognized. As Harper (1997) outlines, differences have been alternately suppressed, insisted upon, denied and invited, with negative results in each case. The forced relocation of Native children to residential schools, for example, was an active suppression of diversity by government-funded schools.

Currently, religious segregation exists by the fact of the publically-funded Catholic school system boards. Parents can choose whether to send their children to a Catholic or non-Catholic school, so it is not a forced segregation, like the racial segregation policies of the past. However, it does create a situation where differences are insisted upon among children - and teachers, as “a photocopy of your current Roman Catholic baptismal certificate or your Roman Catholic Sacrament of Confirmation certificate” was listed as a required item to apply to employment postings at a Catholic school board in Ontario (WCDSB, 2010, 1). Adults holding other beliefs need not apply.

In the last 20 years, boards have been required to craft policies designed to address some of these historic, systemic inequities without long-term accountability and support (Dotzert, 1998). While these efforts have been given differing levels of consideration under different provincial governments, the current implementation timelines and explicit step-by-step plan under the Equity and Inclusive Education policy document make it clear that the time for change in Ontario is now.

### Normative culture

The Ontario Ministry of Education is shifting the formal curriculum language by incorporating a summary of the Equity and Inclusive Education Policy in the opening section of updated curriculum documents (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010, p. 56-57). What affects children the most, however, is the hidden curriculum of teacher practice, that is, what is actually happening in classrooms day-to-day. Sleeter (2004) challenges us to ask what is represented in the curriculum; that is, what is the normative culture that does not have to be actively considered to be included. The normative culture is the set of “viewpoints that conserve an inequitable status quo because [they]

are seen as unproblematic” (Darling-Hammond, 2002, p. 2). Ladson-Billings (2001) talks about teacher preparation programs as getting new educators ready to teach in a “public school way back when” (p. 3) in a “middle-income, white, English-speaking school community” (p. 99). The impact of the normalization and privilege (Gérin-Lajoie, 2008) of particular characteristics results in many individuals, teachers and students alike, being positioned as outsiders (Kumashiro, 2000).

## Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

In this research, I draw on James Banks’ (1994) perspectives of the multicultural curriculum and Kevin Kumashiro's (2000) anti-oppression curriculum approaches. The first continuum - multicultural - is more finely divided, with clear examples at each stage as outlined below. I believe it will be useful to apply these particular stages to my data. Both theorists provide complementary perspectives that draw on critical insights into equity education and to how to best address it. They draw attention to how systemic issues related to race, ethnicity, social class, sexuality impact on schooling and education more broadly with the view to addressing inequality in education. Banks is concerned to provide a critical focus on multiculturalism, which draws attention to the need for anti-racist education, while Kumashiro focuses more on the question of ‘Othering’ and privileging as basis for thinking about equity education. Both theorists are committed to a transformative rather than a celebratory approach to addressing inclusion and diversity in education. Each framework acts as a focusing lens through which to view issues of equity and social justice education in schools, from different yet equally valuable angles, providing range and depth.

## Multicultural curriculum lens.

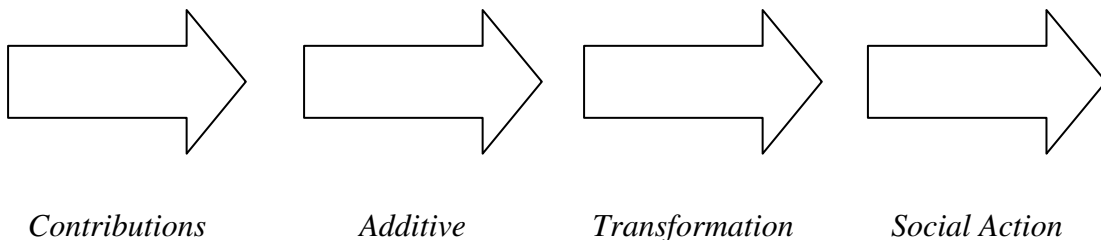
Teachers' pedagogical choices are grounded in the curriculum from which they teach.

For equity education, one can examine the Ontario curriculum through the lens of

Banks' continuum (1994). Created to describe multicultural education in the United

States, the categories - contributions, additive, transformation, and social action - show a movement from a rigidly traditional curriculum to one that has the potential to transform

society. I have asked my participants for specific examples of their pedagogical actions as they pertain to addressing equity education.



### *Contributions Approach.*

This continuum starts with the **Contributions Approach**. Here, lessons where students learn about some of the contributions made by individuals outside of the dominant culture are incorporated into the curriculum. These lessons may be chosen by an individual teacher, a school community or a district, or even be espoused by an entire nation, like Martin Luther King Jr. Day in the United States. Moving past the individual, aspects of entire cultures are included in the curriculum as an ethnic or cultural contribution. In this case, teachers and school communities acknowledge the holidays, foods, crafts or customs of one or more outsider cultures. Another example from the United States, which is also seen in Canada due to media influence, is Cinco de Mayo. One American teacher resource (Cox, 2006) suggests that students “explore and

celebrate the historic roots of Hispanic culture by: 1. Listening to Mariachi music; 2. Using your artistic abilities to make an authentic Mexican piñata; 3. Demonstrating your culinary skills by cooking delicious soft tacos to enjoy at our Cinco de Mayo "fiesta!" (webpage). Dropping in a day of typical - perhaps stereotypical - Mexican activities does not challenge the large curriculum to change or rather to reflect, for example, an increasingly bilingual America.

### *Additive Approach.*

Both the Contributions Approach and Banks' (1994) level two: the **Additive Approach** fall into Harper's (1997) category of 'inviting difference.' Banks (1994) describes the Additive Approach as one where "content, concepts, themes and perspectives are added to the curriculum without changing its structure" (p. 62). In Ontario elementary schools, for example, the study of modern cultures is an element of the Grade Two Social Studies curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2004), where teachers help their students to "examine the wide variety of cultures and traditions that coexist in Canada" (p. 23) and "contemporary global communities" (p. 37). This adds a multicultural flavour to their learning, without requiring teachers or students to explore anything deeper than "food, clothing, homes and games" (p. 38).

### *Transformational Approach.*

Level three on Banks' continuum is the **Transformational Approach**. For this approach, the curriculum itself is challenged and changed to include a multiplicity of perspectives. Although, as I mentioned previously, this continuum was created to dialogue around multicultural education, it can be expanded to include all forms of diversity. In Ontario, all revised curriculum documents contain an "Antidiscrimination



Education” section. The older documents, such as Social Studies which was last revised in 2004, have sections which are quite short – only two paragraphs – compared to more recent Arts document (2009) where the same section covers a page and a half.

### *Decision making and social action.*

The fourth level of Banks’ continuum is decision making and social action. At this level, I think his continuum stops being about multicultural education, and becomes about anti-racist education (Rezai-Rashti, 1995). There are many ways to characterize or frame this concept. Harper (1997) describes it as critiquing difference - "to describe how and when difference is produced and treated" (p. 201) - and places it last on her continuum about Ontario government discourse. Gérin-Lajoie (2008) considers it as a move away from just meeting the needs of a particular population to “student empowerment” (p. 26). Kumashiro provides an alternative, more critical perspective which I shall also use as a lens through which I can learn more about teachers’ specific pedagogical actions and challenges.

### **Anti-oppressive lens.**

Kumashiro (2002) discusses four modes of education, which I shall compare to Banks. 1) Education “For the Other,” 2) Education “About the Other,” 3) Education that is “Critical of Privileging and Othering,” and finally 4) Education that “Changes Students and Society” (p. 31). The way that Kumashiro (2000) defines the term ‘Other’ informs my use of the word. He uses the term to refer to "those groups that are traditionally marginalized in society" (p. 26). While Kumashiro focuses on a few specific groups, he acknowledges that this concept of ‘Other’ can apply to any group that has been

oppressed or marginalized. In a similar way, I also extend several theories developed for one particular oppressed group to include any group.

### *Education For and About the 'Other'.*

**Education For the 'Other'** involves simply providing spaces in schools for various minority groups so that their specific needs can be addressed. At the school level, Kumashiro (2000) describes some modern examples, like the creation of specific 'safe spaces' in schools that are labeled LGBTQ-friendly, or an ethnocultural-based club, say for Asian students. The examples he shares are all ones that I have seen or heard about taking place at the secondary school level, but not in elementary schools. I connect Kumashiro's conception of **Education About the 'Other'** with the contributions and additive approaches to curriculum, and have combined these sections in my analysis. This approach involves providing and adding specific knowledge about specific minority groups to the curriculum. Such an approach, however, as Kumashiro points out, maintains the 'Other'/norm dichotomy, but attempts to inform privileged students about the marginalized, while further reinforcing their own privileged status through a process of differentiation and repeated exposure to knowledge about the 'Other'. A downside to this strategy is the potential danger of solidifying stereotypes through a focus on the typical cases or single or limited perspectives.

### *Education that is Critical of Privileging and 'Othering' .*

Where Education About the 'Other' is similar to Harper's notion of inviting difference, **Education that is Critical of Privileging and 'Othering'** is akin to the last phase described by Harper about critiquing difference. Here, Kumashiro (2000) describes educating students to critically examine not just the 'Other', but also the processes and

outcomes of privileging the norm. Students and educators are called upon to claim their own identities - including those who are part of the privileged norm - and recognize how those identities are social constructs. In practice, this challenge requires educators and school systems to move against their historical past "complicity with oppression" (p. 36). I would expect this movement to be particularly difficult in a school where nearly the entire population is representative of at least one aspect of the privileged norm.

### *Education that Changes Students and Society.*

Kumashiro's final mode of **Education that Changes Students and Society** calls on teachers to disrupt the Self/'Other' dichotomy by accepting that some of our modes of thinking are themselves oppressive. Furthermore, educators need to be aware of the hidden curriculum that they present, and critically examine their own ideas and beliefs to uncover what is hidden even to them. Kumashiro (2000) does not prescribe a system or program to help teachers move away from "appreciating diversity" to working toward social justice (Derman-Sparks & Ramsey, 2006, p. 3), but instead challenges them to change, without necessarily knowing the end result. I wonder what might inspire educators who do not see daily pressure to accept diversity to do so. Recognizing only the diversity that is right in front of you is not social justice. I believe that education for change can happen even in places that seem homogenous and not that diverse, and I have looked in my data for evidence of education for change, or reasons why it is not yet happening.

### **Teachers' cultural positioning.**

Banks (1995) presents a framework for understanding teachers' cultural status in relation to the culture in which they are teaching. He outlines a double dichotomy which

describes first a teacher's origins, then their current form of acceptance by the community. Their origins are delineated as Indigenous or External: that is, are they originally from that cultural group, or from outside of it, from a different cultural group. Their current status is similarly coded as Insider or Outsider; either they have been accepted as part of the community in which they teach, or are seen by the community as separate from it. This creates four categories of teacher: Indigenous-Insider, who is both from the culture and accepted as part of it; Indigenous-Outsider, who is from the culture but, perhaps because of his or her education is no longer accepted as a member; External-Insider, someone raised outside the culture, but is now considered a member; and External-Outsider, who is from another culture and remains outside of the culture in question. I wonder if the way a teacher views themselves in relation to the students they teach according to this insider-outsider continuum will inform their pedagogical decisions.

## Thesis Overview

This thesis examines the perceptions and practices of elementary school teachers with regards to addressing diversity, equity, and inclusive education in low-diversity settings. The purpose of this research is to uncover further insights about the influences on teachers' pedagogical choices in equity education, and to explore the intersection between the teachers' personal and professional experiences.

Chapter two summarizes the literature about equity education in both diverse communities and low-diversity areas. It also addresses other forms of diversity that are not based in ethnicity such as intellectual ability. Different philosophies of inclusive education are explored including the concept of 'colour-blindness' and the deficiency

orientation towards the non-normative. Finally, a summary of the theories around critical pedagogy is provided.

The methodological basis of the study is described in chapter three. The methods used to collect data, as well as the process of data analysis and sampling are discussed. Drawing on Patton (2002), and given the purpose of the study, I justify my use of semi-structured interviews used for data collection and the thematic approach to data analysis that is adopted.

The data analysis is divided across chapters four and five. Chapter four focuses on the perceptions of the four participants, their cultural positioning and background experiences, and their perspectives on issues of diversity, inclusion and equity. Chapter five presents an analysis of the participants' teaching practice from the illustrative stories they shared during their interviews. It also examines the influences on their pedagogical choices. The last chapter revisits the research questions and literature, and provides suggestions for future research as well as implications for changes in teacher practice.

## Conclusion

In this chapter I have described the problem of a perceived lack of equity education in low-diversity schools, and shared my personal impetus for this research, as well as another similar teacher's story from a different school board (Dotzert, 1998). I have placed current equity policy in Ontario in its historical context, and outlined the different levels on Banks' multicultural education continuum, and Kumashiro's anti-oppressive education continuum, which together form the basis of my theoretical framework and

inform my understanding of what it means to address equity education in low diversity school communities.

## Chapter 2

### Literature Review

This chapter provides a review of the significant literature relating to equity education, with a focus on incorporating inclusive pedagogical methods into schools and systems. This literature highlights a sense of societal pressure for educators to represent cultural diversity and issues of social justice for students in their teaching. Furthermore, it points to a need for teachers and systems to have honest, open conversations about challenging existing practices.

### Equity Education in Ontario: Focus on Diverse Communities

The current policy document *Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy* (2009) suggests that our students should “see themselves reflected in their curriculum” (p. 5). This message, broadcast widely throughout the research literature on equity pedagogy and particularly to new or preservice teachers, is echoed by Ladson-Billings (2001) when she says that we should “use student culture as a basis for learning” (p. 99). Dei (1996) suggests some ways that educators could achieve this goal in his book *Anti-Racism Education: Theory and Practice*: (i) invite parents and other community members to share their knowledge and expertise; (ii) actively recruit a staff who are a “representation of a range of ethnocultural differences” (p. 34); and (iii) support students’ cultures, through promoting their “events and interests” (p. 34) within the school, to specifically link their home life with school.

The rationale behind this approach is outlined in the Metropolitan Toronto School Board’s video and teachers’ guide *Reflections: Suggestions for an antiracist curriculum*

(1996), which was based on the previous Ministry of Education equity policy, and therefore offers a historical perspective. This resource makes the point that teachers are facing the reality of a “racially and culturally diverse society” (p. 9) where “students from both mainstream and minority groups” (p. 9) must learn to thrive with one another for the good of society as a whole. The resource implies that diversity is or can be a problem that must be addressed by specific initiatives that are committed to bringing diverse students together and to addressing their educational needs.

Despite such suggestions and resources, Solomon & Levine-Rasky (2003) note in *Teaching for Equity and Diversity* that even teachers who work in high-diversity environments rarely plan lessons that address inclusion, or explicitly and intentionally implement equity pedagogy. In that respect, then, “an observer of Canadian teachers’ classroom practices would discover a generally unsystematic, serendipitous implementation of equity education” (p. 52). Since these lessons are unplanned, there is greater disparity in the level and quality of equity education across regions and curriculum areas such as mathematics, for example. Instead of intentionally embedding equity education into regular programming, teachers tend to rely on instances where students raise the issue of equity or diversity, then capture that teachable moment to discuss student-generated content. Consequently, students in schools that are more homogenous in population, where there is a lower likelihood of blatant diversity-generated problems, would therefore end up with a lower focus of equity-specific education and instruction. Solomon and Levine-Rasky also describe the lack of systemic focus around policies and professional development for teachers who may not see the



need to teach for inclusion, or who may simply commit to a ‘Contributions’ or at most ‘Additive’ approach to equity and diversity education in Canada.

## Equity Education in Low-Diversity Areas

Derman-Sparks & Ramsey (2006) ask: *What if all the kids are white?*. In their book, they emphasize the importance of addressing issues around culture and bias in areas with low racial diversity, even with young primary-aged students. The main force of their argument is the imperative for teachers to prepare students to be successful in any future endeavor. In today’s society and in an age of increasing globalization, that will likely mean interacting with people beyond their community of origin, even at an early age. Explicit preparation in dealing with a wide variety of ethnocultural groups may be even more necessary, depending on the kind of community the children are living in. Gainé (2005) sorts low-diversity communities into categories based on their relative location to a high-diversity area. He mainly addresses diversity in terms of race particularly as it relates to dominant white communities, but his focus on equity education is equally applicable to other facets of diversity. These low-diversity communities can be described then as adjacent, peripheral or isolated. The locations of each kind of community have different implications for the students living there in terms of their experiences with diversity issues that teachers can draw on for discussion and elaboration.

In the United States “white students are the most racially isolated or most likely to attend schools that are overwhelmingly populated by members of their own racial group” (Sleeter & Grant, 2008, p. 27). Since this is the normative culture, there is an attitude or conception that nothing needs to be changed in those education systems or

that racism and cultural diversity do not need to be explicitly addressed. That mentality is echoed by Dotzert (1998), when she describes the state of equity policy in an Ontario board of education in the 1990s. She explains how the previous emphasis on equity from the Ministry of Education had faded with the shift in government in 1995. The incoming Harris government ignored the planned policy implementation deadline, and no longer supported the initiative with human or financial resources. In addition, there was not seen to be a pressing or immediate problem in the schools in that board as there were in other boards like Toronto, where there had been high-profile issues around racism. In Dotzert's rural board, creating a momentum for change around equity policy and practice was not seen as a priority for either administration or teachers.

Another example of equity issues not being seen as a priority was described by Lund (2003) through his work with self-described teacher-activists for social justice. He argued that many educators in Canada are working on an "assumed absence" (p. 4) of racism, which is negated by a more impartial look at actual system practices. In his interviews with secondary school teachers who position themselves as social justice activists, they shared that scholarly literature on equity education informs their practice, which is not the case for my non-activist participants.

## **Inclusion for Intellectual Ability**

While describing their philosophy of inclusive education for students with exceptionalities, Bunch and Finnegan (2009) state that: "we may all be different, but we are all more similar than different" (p. 181). Bicard and Heward (2010) hold the same position; the idea of disability, they argue, is a social construct. Consequently, teachers have a responsibility to all of their students, with or without disabilities, to treat them in

a nondiscriminatory way. Specifically when a teacher's concept of a 'normal student' is constructed from an 'Othering' perspective of normal which privileges white, Anglophone, middle-class children, then students with exceptionalities are compared with that privileged norm (see Kumashiro, 2000). Bicard and Heward argue as well that even the seemingly objective tests to quantitatively determine a learning disability are based in this same perspective.

Bicard and Heward specifically outline the physical, behavioral, and cognitive disabilities which require educational interventions in order for those students receive an education with equality of outcome. When they discuss the continuum of educational placements for students with disabilities, they emphasize that the level of intervention should always be the lowest possible; that is, with the least amount of disruption from the typical school routine. In this way, schools are able to keep the most number of students in the regular classroom as much as possible, in order to help them be a successful part of their larger school society and consequently after school in the larger society as well.

Hutchinson and Martin (2012) use the term inclusion in a different way from how I use it in my own research. They define inclusion in their glossary to mean "the social value and policy that persons with disabilities are entitled to full participation in all aspects of Canadian society, including education" (p. 213). The main way in which their definition differs from the one I am using is that they focus on student inclusion based on disability only, whereas, for the purpose of this research, I have chosen to embrace a wider definition, which refers to persons along any line of difference including race, ethnicity, social class and sexual orientation. That said, much of what Hutchinson and Martin say

about inclusion with their narrower focus on exceptional students can be drawn wider to encompass all types of diversity and inclusion in education more generally.

For example, Hutchinson and Martin explain how and why they think teachers should be agents of social change in regards to the inclusion of students with special needs. They state that one of a teacher's responsibilities is to "try to make your students comfortable with what disability is involved and minimize students' sense of disabilities as a foreign and exotic" (p. 186). Extending this concept to other facets of equity and inclusion, I conclude that it is a teacher's job to try to make students comfortable with whatever type of diversity is involved and to minimize the students' sense of difference as 'foreign' or 'exotic'; that is, to identify and expand on similarities. Hutchinson and Martin challenge teachers to inform their students about that exceptionality. Similarly, I believe that teachers should inform students about other differences. At the same time, Hutchinson and Martin believe that teachers need to support their exceptional students by treating them in a similar manner to the rest of the class. While recognizing that fairness does not mean exactly the same treatment, treating students in similar ways can increase their social status, or so Hutchinson and Martin argue.

Hutchinson and Martin also discussed the difficulties for teachers when they are trying to be an agent of change. They specifically mentioned the importance of school culture that encourages teachers to learn and try new ways of teaching together as a team, which they contend will help them become agents of change, without overwhelming feelings of stress.

## “Colour-Blindness”

Perhaps the reason that equity and inclusive education is not prioritized can be explained by a concept that was a common thread through much of the literature: ‘colour-blindness’. This phrase is used by teachers to mean that they treat all of their students equally, regardless of their skin colour. These teachers tend to strongly believe that they are doing the right thing by their students by being “colour-blind” (Gérin-Lajoie, 2008, p. 11; Rezai-Rashti, 1995, p. 12) and ignoring their race or ethnicity. This idea can be extended to include other forms of diversity as well, such as socio-economic status or sexual orientation. Both Sleeter (2004) and Hyland (2005) discuss the discomfort that some white teachers have when addressing issues of race. Reasons posited include the possibility of inciting guilt which results from being the dominant or normative culture, or as a result of being unaware, from not understanding what their students who have diverse ethnicities are experiencing. By ‘denying’ (Harper, 1997) the very apparent and obvious difference of skin colour, however, these well-intentioned teachers are denying a deep reality of their students’ lives.

Schofield (2010) also outlines the problems of teachers taking a colour-blind perspective. Doing so, she argues, negates students’ individual experiences and identities. However, Schofield goes on to say how continually pointing out the differences between students actually has the unintended effect of reinforcing in-group/out-group behaviour, as well as stereotyping. This happens because of the constant focus on the differences between individuals and groups. Schofield offers suggestions on how schools can both recognize the diversities of their students, yet still foster a sense of community. She suggests bringing students together through shared

experiences as members of the same school, town or city, or country. So, focusing on these shared experiences, as well as on what makes us the same, while still recognizing that lived experience of differences and diversity provides a balance to the colour-blind approach. In other words, while differences are honored, similarities are celebrated. I believe that this perspective can be applied to all the different facets of diversity, not just the ethnic diversity to which Schofield was referring.

## Deficiency Orientation

While 'colour-blind' teachers perceive diversity as irrelevant, other educators perceive it as either not a problem, or as a disadvantage. Raby (2004) describes school situations where racist actions are acknowledged, but with the negative implications of the racism either denied entirely, or written off as a joke. In this way, the racist behaviours are normalized, while the conflict is buried. 'Other' examples of silencing, or attempting to speak out through silence, are described by Stebbins (2008) in the area of sexual minority teachers and how they perceive their role within a school community; and by Upadhyay (2010) work in science education around how a teacher's own experiences of gender and culture can lead them to become teacher-activists who work to promote cultural inclusion for their students.

Sometimes the silence is the result of an underlying philosophy, either personal or institutional. Sleeter and Grant (2008) discuss the deficiency orientation, where having a non-normative ethnicity, sexuality, socio-economic status, home language, etc., is viewed as problematic. In this framework, teachers might erroneously apply statistical information about past populations at risk, for example, to negatively inform their perceptions, and by extension their expectations, of current students.

## Conceptions of the 'Other'

Wood (2007) goes farther by outlining eight dichotomous ways of conceptualizing the 'Other', using either a closed- or an open-mindset. Wood lists them in this order:

- 1) monolithic/diverse;
- 2) separate/interacting;
- 3) inferior/different;
- 4) enemy/partner;
- 5) manipulative/sincere;
- 6) criticisms of the self rejected/considered;
- 7) discrimination defended/criticized;
- 8) hostility toward the other seen as cultural/problematic (p. 19).

Taking Wood's first distinction, monolithic or diverse, when looked at with a closed mindset, the 'Other' is conceptualized as a single group which does not change. This view relies heavily on the stereotypical conceptions of the 'Other'. It is contrasted with a diverse view wherein the 'Other' is seen, as part of an homogenous group, with the same kind of internal variance in opinion and responses considered to be 'normal' and expected for that particular group.

The next conceptualization, separate/interacting, is a way of positioning the 'Other', and the following three dichotomies - inferior/different and enemy/partner and manipulative/sincere - as similar. In the closed view of each, the 'Other' is seen as solely negative or not to be trusted. The open views, however, recognize the differences of the

‘Other’, but see them as a partner that could be interacted with. It also values their beliefs as sincere, even when different.

The last three ways of seeing the ‘Other’ have to do with the way that treatment of ‘the Other’ is conceptualized by the in-group. The closed viewpoints maintain that hostility and discrimination towards the ‘Other’ are natural and ‘normal’. Criticisms made by the ‘Other’ are ignored out of hand. This contrasts with the open views, where critical reflection about the way the ‘Other’ is treated is discussed, not rejected. The viewpoints are debated, considered, and able to change.

In many ways, these eight open views of ‘the Other’ are themselves critical of ‘Othering’. They focus on the ways in which the in-group and the out-group are similar and hold common goals, yet still maintain the reality of difference.

## Critical pedagogy

In contrast, Dei (1996) challenges educators to reconceptualize “differences into a resource” (p. 33). He argues that, rather than institutionally eliminating or ignoring the negative affect of difference, we recognize and use diversity “for the benefit of all” (p. 33). Smyth (2010) suggests that we start by “confronting...how things came to be this way” (p. 205). Here, both Dei and Smyth, along with Kumashiro (all dates), Solomon (all dates) and Rezai-Rashti (1995, also Solomon & Rezai-Rashti, 2001) argue that teaching through critical pedagogy can create real, lasting change in the education system. Actions that teachers can take to effect this change include: confronting the norms and standards of the institutions we work in, identifying our underlying philosophies and personal metaphors, and continually asking challenging questions.



Some of these challenging questions are about the distribution of power in the education system. Sekayi (2007) describes a power imbalance in an American mid-western high school. A group of African-American male students provided feedback on what they felt to be “culturally irrelevant curriculum” (p. 165). These students, described as “underachieving but capable” (p. 166), were powerless to choose the content of their curriculum. This powerlessness resulted in a disengagement with the material and, consequently, with education. Maclaren (2007) warns, however, to attend to how power is transferred. Educators who teach for ‘diversity’ and ‘inclusion’ might not be handing power to those traditionally without it. Instead, the idea of ‘inclusion’ might be realized as holding “hidden assumptions of assimilation” (p. 268). Here inclusion means being brought into and included as part of the existing mainstream culture, subsuming the power of minority groups, not the mainstream culture changing to incorporate a new power structure.

Similarly, May and Sleeter (2010) critique what they call “liberal multiculturalism” where the overall focus is on “getting along better” (p. 4), wherein marginalized communities more easily coexist beside higher status and higher powered communities. Indeed, if these types of communities do get along better in this fashion, it might slow down real progress in terms of power transfer. Instead, May and Sleeter argue for critical multiculturalism, which challenges unequal power structures and lived experiences. Dei, James-Wilson, and Zine (2001) call the same two camps the “variety perspective” set against the “critical perspective (p. 7). The former asks questions such as: Isn’t this nice that we are all different yet all the same? While the latter asks: Who has the power, whose voices are missing, why should we add them and how can we achieve change?

## Conclusion

This chapter has presented an overview of relevant literature about equity education. In particular, it has shown that equity education takes different forms and holds different priorities depending on the community. The vast majority of the literature focuses on high-diversity school populations and strategies for being culturally responsive, as well as strategies for inclusion of students with intellectual disabilities. In contrast, an impetus for equity education in low-diversity communities is usually lacking, with white educators tending to describe themselves as ‘colour-blind’, except in the case of teacher-activists. Overall, this review draws attention to a need for further research on the impact of equity education for students who live in low-diversity areas.

## Chapter 3

### Methodology

Diversity and equity can be sensitive topics, with an individual's opinions, biases and practices embedded in their personal experiences. I chose to conduct a qualitative study about teacher choices in equity education because I wanted my research participants to willingly share their ideas and insights about how their beliefs, background experiences and perceptions shape their pedagogical choices around equity education. A qualitative methodology is appropriate for this research because of my focus on building meaning from the experiences of a small number of people (Patton, 2002).

### Overview

In order to deeply examine the teachers' understandings and perceptions, I have chosen to use semi-structured open-ended interviews for my data collection method. As Patton (2002) explains: "the purpose of qualitative interviewing is to capture how those being interviewed view their world, to learn their terminology and judgments, and to capture the complexities of their individual perceptions and experiences" (p. 348). Since I am working from a constructivist perspective, I see my participants as "meaning makers" (Warren, 2001, p. 83). Depth is more important to me than breadth - I hope that they felt comfortable engaging deeply with the topic at hand, and felt welcome to share other issues around equity in their school environments that I did not specifically asked about. By trying to prompt for specificity and detail in participants' answers, I hoped to capture the richness of their lived experience, with a focus on generating meaning through description.

When choosing the methodology, I considered whether a single case study format would be more appropriate for this topic. Instead, I chose to use semi-structured interviews for several reasons. First, I chose to pursue a more exploratory research project which called for the flexibility to include multiple perspectives of individual teachers from a range of different schools. In order to compare and contrast participants responses, I have chosen not to conduct a case study dealing with only one school or system. Furthermore, although during my search for participants, I inquired about a particular teacher or system in Ontario that would provide a case of an excellent job of high-equity awareness in low-diversity setting, I am not aware of one. Additionally, since I expect to find challenges that could be addressed by future programs or resources, I chose to survey several teachers in an in-depth way in order to potentially capture a wider range of emergent themes, trends, and possibilities to explore in the future. I believe these desired results were best achieved by qualitative interviews.

## Participant Selection

Because I was looking for teacher participants who perceived the diversity of their student population to be low, I knew that random sampling would not be appropriate. Consequently, I chose to use a different sampling procedure. Using purposeful sampling as outlined by Patton (2002), I started with a "typical case" model (as cited in Seidman, 2006, p. 52), targeting teachers in mainly rural Ontario elementary schools, in Southwestern Ontario. I began by asking my professional network for suggestions of people who had recently taught or were currently teaching in schools which they perceived to fit my profile. After some of these initial contacts expressed interest in my work, I used the snowball technique (Patton, 2002) to increase my field of potential

participants by encouraging these teachers to suggest other teachers who might be interested as well as different elementary schools for me to contact that might fit the criteria, or for them to directly pass my information along themselves to others in their professional networks.

I understand that relying on my network to target potential participants meant that there was the potential of an extra layer of perceived diversity: that of the people in the network. However, for the purposes of this research, the perception of my network generally matched the perception of the teachers. As well, the worst case scenario was that someone was recommended that did not agree that their student population had low diversity, in which case the potential participant simply excused themselves from the study. Since a large, random sample was not required or appropriate for this methodology (Patton, 2002), I do not believe that this potential bias harmed the plausibility of the research.

When I was given the contact information for a potential participant, I contacted them directly by email using their professional account where possible, providing them with my letter of information. Despite being given multiple ways to contact most of these participants, I chose to use their professional email account to underline the fact that I wanted their opinions as professional educators rather than general members of society. Throughout the process from initial contact right through to the follow-up interviews, I continued to position these interviews as an inquiry into teachers' specialized viewpoints about diversity, equity and inclusion, and tried to be clear about that focus with my participants so they fully understood the scope and purpose of what they had agreed to be involved in (Patton, 2002).

Informed consent is crucial to the qualitative research process (Patton, 2002). To inform participants of potential concerns and their role in the study they each received clear information explaining the scope and aims of the study in the participant's letter (Appendix 3). I initially had over a dozen teachers express interest and eleven agree to be interviewed. When I tried to schedule a particular time for their actual interviews, however, I was surprised and frustrated by the fact that all but one of this first group of volunteers backed out. When explaining their reasons for withdrawing, three separate teachers stated that they didn't know what they would talk about because equity and diversity didn't really apply to them. I widened my search to include low-diversity schools that were not necessarily the type I had initially considered (i.e., mostly white and rural, like the school I myself had attended), including those run by Native band councils, as well as to include interested non-classroom teachers. Eventually, I interviewed four Ontario teachers who were currently teaching in schools that they perceived to have low levels of diversity.

To protect the identity of the participants, they were invited to select pseudonyms for themselves, as well as for any colleagues they mentioned, which were transcribed into the raw data. I gave the participants the option to select their own pseudonym rather than assigning one because I recognize that self-identity plays a role in issues of equity and diversity (Kumashiro, 2002; Stebbins, 2008). In the cases where the participants chose not to select a pseudonym, I chose one which I felt was reflective of their generation and place of birth, in order to help my readers maintain a sense of reality when reviewing the analysis.

## Data Collection

Using a semi-structured interview format, I interviewed four teachers for approximately one hour each (For a list of interview questions, please see Appendix 1.). The questions were intentionally structured to move from more basic to more complex, as well as from more general to more personal. I hoped that, as the interview progressed, the participants would feel more comfortable with me and with the interview itself, and that their heightened comfort level would then result in greater openness and depth. As Patton (2002) explains, open-ended questions allow the respondents to express their thoughts and ideas in their own words and phrasing, which in turn provides the researcher with a more accurate picture of the participants' views and experiences. Accordingly, I chose to use semi-structured rather than fixed-response interviews to allow for greater freedom for the participants to answer as they saw fit. Because the themes and trends of my analysis would emerge from the interviews, I wanted to ensure that I did not miss something of importance simply because I did not think to ask that particular question. Similarly, I hoped that the participants would be more open discussing this potentially challenging topic if the interview was more conversational and less rigid and formal. I was concerned that a fixed-response interview style may come across as an inquisition or judgment on their teaching practice, which would likely stifle an open dialogue.

In order to give control and a sense of comfort to the participants, they chose the interview location; I interviewed three while they were at home, and one at her school site. With the participants' permission, the interviews were audio-recorded using an iPod with a microphone attachment, then later transcribed, which freed my attention during the interview to carefully consider unscripted follow-up questions and to observe and

note participant behaviours such as body language and vocal tone (Patton, 2002).

Additional post-interview questions were completed by phone, in person, and by email, at the participants' preference. Following Patton (2002), the research participants had access to the transcribed data before, during and after the analysis process, to help minimize any misconceptions or misunderstandings I might have had from their interviews, although they did not express many concerns or ask for many revisions.

To address ethical concerns around the data collection, all electronic data was stored on two of the researcher's private computers which are both password protected with separate passwords. Furthermore, the participants' identifying data, used for contact purposes, was stored on one computer while the research containing the pseudonyms was stored separately. If identifying data was accidentally recorded, I removed all details which may cause the teachers to be recognizable within my study during transcriptions. All paper copies of the transcribed interviews are kept in a locked filing cabinet in the researcher's house and will be destroyed after two years.

## Data Analysis

After the interviews were transcribed, I went through my interview notes and added from-the-moment details such as body language, length of pauses, and vocal tone (Seidman, 2006). I next analyzed the transcripts for trends, common threads and connections to the literature. Using coding procedures based on those outlines by Seidman (2006), Bogden & Biklen (2007) and Ayres (2008), I labeled each interview passage with its theme or themes, with the goal of making thematic connections among participants and to the research literature. Emergent trends across participants, as well as key points that the teachers themselves emphasized within their own interviews, were



noted. At times, either further research into the existing literature or follow-up questions were necessary to expand the meaning and gain a deeper understanding into the participant's intent.

As well as focusing on these emergent themes, I also followed my theoretical and conceptual framework, by coding the interviews using both Banks' multicultural education continuum and Kumashiro's anti-oppression continuum to identify what kind of lessons were being taught and what kinds of other interactions were occurring. Similarly, I looked for evidence of teachers' cultural positioning in relation to their student population using Banks' criteria.

## Limitations

This study is limited in geographic scope: Southern Ontario. It represents the personal lived experiences of just four elementary teachers in a particular place and time, and as such is not generalizable across a wider population or location. Furthermore, since the participants were willing to give their time for these interviews, their viewpoints may not be reflective of other teachers in their school or in similar schools, as being willing to participate in such an interview process may be indicative of an atypical personal interest in the area of equity and diversity.

However, as generalizability was not a goal of this research, the story and analysis of these particular teachers' lived experiences is informative in and of itself.

Another limitation comes from the data collection method. While I believe qualitative interviews were a good choice for this study, a completely open interview about equity may have created a different data set by allowing the participants the freedom to fully

express their own conceptions about equity, diversity and inclusion. However, semi-structured interviews will also allow me to access “comparable data across subjects” (Bogden & Biklen, 2007, p. 97). As a new researcher, having a similar starting point with each participant facilitated the coding and analysis of the data. I was able to better “establish common patterns or themes” (Warren, 2001, 85) across the different participants than if I were conducting completely open-ended interviews. I believe, as do Bogden & Biklen (2007), that this analytical advantage balances the loss of access to the way the participants structure their own ideas about equity.

## Conclusion

In this chapter I have provided a justification for choosing to undertake a qualitative research study involving the use of semi-structured interviews. It relates to my specific interest to people-oriented inquiry (Patton, 2002), and is consistent with my concern to provide more depth and thick description of how individual teachers are making sense of equity and social just education as it relates to their own pedagogical practices in low diversity classrooms.

The following two chapters provide a deep exploration of the participants' interviews. First, the participants are introduced separately. In Chapter Four, their perspectives and perceptions are presented, while Chapter Five focuses more on their philosophies and pedagogical practices. In both chapters, the data is organized thematically, with emergent trends presented alongside relevant themes from the literature. The participants' views and experiences are compared and contrasted, with commonalities and divergences highlighted.

## Chapter 4

### Data Analysis – Teacher Perceptions

The following two chapters will focus on the analysis of interview data. A brief description of each participant will be provided. In chapter four, Participants' perspectives and perceptions are presented. Chapter five is centred on their philosophies and pedagogical practices. The data is organized thematically and will be analyzed in relation to relevant literature. Where they highlighted personally important experiences related to equity and diversity, those are shared below as well. I have attempted to include their voices by incorporating direct quotations from our initial and follow-up interviews where appropriate throughout this data analysis, allowing them to share their views using their own words and phrasings (Patton, 2002).

#### Participant Profiles

##### Jennifer

Jennifer is an Anglophone white woman in her thirties who originally comes from the Western United States. She immigrated to Canada as an adult, and chose teaching when she decided she wanted a career change. Jennifer attended a Faculty of Education in Ontario, achieving qualifications in Primary and Junior. Two years after graduating, she became qualified to teach in the Intermediate division as well. She has been teaching for six years, including one year teaching in her home state, and has been at her current school site for two years. Her current assignment comprises an assortment of planning time coverage including Kindergarten, as well as Media Literacy, Science, the Arts, and

Health in Grades ranging from One to Five. The school where she teaches is located in a small town of about 2 000 people, in a rural township known for its farming community.

Jennifer is open and reflective about her past experiences growing up in a diverse community. For example, just under half of the students at the high school she attended she described as being "limited English speakers," and many of her friends were Vietnamese immigrants. For Jennifer, ethnocultural diversity is her norm, and the perceived homogeneity of her current teaching location was striking to her. She expressed concern for her students, that they were somehow missing out or growing up disconnected from the larger, more diverse population that other children are just naturally exposed to by virtue of where they live.

### Jody

Jody, an Anishnabe woman in her early thirties, has been teaching for four years at a federally-operated school run by a band council on a Native reserve, which has a total population of about 300 people. She graduated from an Ontario Faculty of Education six years ago, and first spent half a year teaching in Poland, followed by a year teaching in a fly-in community in Northern Ontario before starting at her current school site. Her school is small, holding only 17 students, most of which are in her class, which spans the grades from Grades Two to Five. Some of the students that were in Grade Two in her first year are now ready to graduate from Grade Five and move away from the school site. While there are some specialist teachers who come in on a rotating basis, the core staff is small: just the principal, Jody, and the Kindergarten/Grade One teacher, who has five students in her class.

Jody's early school experiences inform the way she frames her current teaching practice. Her family lived near, but not on, the reserve, and she attended public schools. She did not feel culturally included or represented in the curriculum that she taught. She shared:

There were other Native kids in the school, but we were basically a minority, and there was nothing taught to us in the regular classroom, that I can recall, that ever taught me about my culture. It was all just very 'Canadian.'

Jody majored in Native Studies during her undergraduate degree, and came away with a what she described as "a different way of looking at history and what has happened in this country." She consciously brings that perspective to her teaching practice.

### Deborah

Deborah achieved her teaching certification in the Junior and Intermediate divisions at an Ontario Faculty of Education, and has been working as a public school teacher in Ontario for the last twenty-five years. Prior to teaching at her current school site, where she has been teaching in the Junior grades for the past 11 years, Deborah taught at another rural Ontario school in a small community about 30 minutes away from where she currently teaches. With a population of just 1500 people, that village, however, was not as diverse as the slightly larger town of about 5 000 people where she currently teaches. Although the two communities share the same low level of ethnocultural diversity, Deborah reports that her current school site has a higher proportion of students who come from families with a low socio-economic status than most other schools, as well as a great number of behaviourally challenging and intellectually challenged students. Her current assignment is as a Grade Five and Six split class teacher, and she has spent almost all of her career teaching in the Junior grades. Deborah is a white, English-speaking woman who was born and raised in Southern Ontario. She now lives

in a rural area just under sixty minutes North of her school site. Deborah did not share any past experiences which she felt informed her equity teaching.

## Tina

For Tina, teaching is a second career. She is an English-speaking, white woman in her 40s with two teenaged children. After completing her undergraduate degree part time, Tina attended one of the New York State border colleges, and received a Master of Science in Education. She was initially certified in the Primary and Junior divisions, and has since earned qualifications in Primary, Junior, and Intermediate Mathematics. Tina has been teaching for five years, all at the same school site, and has not done any occasional teaching work. Her current teaching assignment is Junior and Intermediate Core French and Grade One Media. Tina lives about 45 minutes South of her workplace, which is located in a small town with a population of about 5 000 people. Tina fondly mentioned one particular field trip experience she went on when a student herself that informed her teaching; this experience left such an impact on her that she recently repeated this special experience with a group of her own students. It will be discussed in the Multicultural Education section about the Contributions Approach.

## Cultural Positioning

Since this research seeks to better understand teachers' perceptions of the diversity of the students with which they work, I thought it would be valuable to examine how each participant perceives herself culturally, in relation to the culture of the students whom she teaches. Following Banks' (1995) conceptualization of Indigenous/External-Insider/Outsider, each of my four participants positions themselves differently along this

double continuum. These connections and dissonances inform their teaching philosophies.

Of the four teachers, only Jody would consider herself to be an Indigenous-Insider to her small school's student population. First, she shares the same ethnocultural heritage as all of her students: She identifies as Anishanbe. In addition, although she was not raised specifically in the community where she teaches, she was raised nearby. The city where she lived and attended elementary and high school is only about half an hour away from her current school site, and is an important shopping and employment destination. Jody shared that, during her time as an elementary school student in that city, she felt like an outsider in that school's culture.

Her feelings of isolation came from being the sole Native student in her class for almost all of her elementary career. Jody reported feeling like her ethnocultural heritage and traditions "wasn't really something that [she] had access to" with one exception: Each day, an elder came to teach an optional Native language class. Those thirty minutes a day of language and other traditions became a highlight for Jody, the only space where a Native perspective was recognized within what she called a "very 'Canadian'" education.

As an adult, Jody has made the conscious choice to teach at her current school site, and explicitly refers to being an insider in this culture, in her indigenous culture. By being able to teach students who share her background - her people, as she describes it - she is able to proudly wear what she refers to as her "Anishnabe teacher culture hat." When student teaching in the public school system, as well as when teaching overseas, Jody felt like an outsider in those situations. She contrasted the way she felt when teaching in

a public school to teaching at her current school by using the hat metaphor. In her student teaching situation, she felt forced to take on a "Canadian general sort of teacher hat," not teaching from what she knew to be her cultural perspective. Now, she is working hard to ensure that her students are immersed in this cultural perspective in all subject areas. Jody is able to accomplish this in part because of her shared cultural heritage.

Jennifer, on the other hand, sits at the other end of both dichotomies. Her background experiences are markedly different from her students', making her External to their lived experience, and she currently positions herself as an Outsider looking in, observing and commenting on her students' lives. Through several vivid anecdotes, Jennifer repeatedly contrasted her childhood with those of her students, most of whom were born in the community where they currently live. Jennifer described that community as "homogenous" and "very religious," by which she meant Christian. Growing up in a very diverse part of a diverse state in the United States, Jennifer shared:

My high school was 45% limited English speaking. We had... many immigrants from all over the world. I didn't really think about it. You know, that's just how it was. ... I feel like having people from all over the place is what is normal.

Speaking from this perspective, she finds it difficult to imagine what it is like for her students to grow up in what she considers to be such an isolated way. She regrets that they will not experience the same kind of diversity of peoples that she did, and implies that having access to a diversity of people is a benefit which her students, by virtue of where they live, are "sadly" lacking. Although Jennifer shares some ethnocultural markers with her students, such as being white and English-speaking for example, she positions herself as External to their small-town experience.



Furthermore, Jennifer does not live directly in the community where she works. Although she does not have a long commute to her school's site, she is an outsider compared with the majority of the teaching staff, who she described as generally working, living, and being active participants in the small town where the school is located, or the surrounding rural district. Jennifer, on the other hand, has a one-way drive of about fifteen or twenty minutes from a larger, more diverse city, where she lives downtown near the city centre. Not only does she feel an outsider when comparing herself with the students, this seemingly small distance is just one more reason why she also expressed feelings of being isolated from the other staff members. At times while she talked, she used exclusionary, third-person language which seems to distance herself from the school, positioning herself as an outside observer.

Both Deborah and Tina fall somewhere in the middle of this continuum between Jody and Jennifer, where they do not sit at either extreme - neither specifically indigenous to that particular community nor entirely from an external location, neither an outsider nor completely accepted as an insider. Although neither of them had been raised in the town where they work, they were raised in the same province, and consequently have similar background experiences as many of their colleagues and students. In addition, both of these teachers share the same ethnocultural heritage as the majority of the students with whom they work. For example, celebrating Christian holidays is the norm for both of them, as they perceive it to be for their students, and this shows in their normalization of that practice. So, while they would not consider themselves to be strictly Indigenous to their students' community, both Deborah and Tina bring a background of more cultural similarities than differences to their students.

When comparing themselves to their own current school populations, Deborah positions herself as more of an insider than Tina, using 'we' and 'our' as opposed to 'they' and 'them' about three times as often as Tina. Deborah has taught at her current school site for a much longer period of time: just over twice as long as Tina has taught at hers; this difference in duration may account for the seemingly deeper connection. In addition, although as mentioned Deborah does not live in the community where she teaches, and has an hour-long commute to work, she does live in a rural community which is fairly similar in composition to her school's small town. Tina's commute is slightly shorter at 45 minutes, but, in contrast, she lives in a large town just fifteen minutes from a major urban centre. Tina tends to use language that seems to be more critical of the rest of her staff, the parents, and the students. She is also able to discuss these different stakeholders' involvement in the students' learning with an outsider's viewpoint, though not as explicitly as Jennifer.

## Where the Diversity is Located

South-Central Ontario is densely populated compared to most of our country. It is therefore hard to teach in a community that Gaine (2005) would describe as truly 'isolated,' but many small towns could easily be placed in the category of 'peripheral.' The notion of 'adjacent' is more applicable to different sections or neighbourhoods within the same city, which is not the case for any of the participants. Three of the four teachers teach in communities in Southern Ontario; only Jody teaches in Central Ontario. When describing each community, they were all characterized by being a distance that was only drivable, not walkable, from a community where the teachers perceived a greater diversity to be.

Within the southern Ontario schools, Jennifer, Deborah, and Tina all compared the diversity of their school population to diversity found in other parts of their respective school boards. In particular, they each pointed out that there were obviously greater diversity in these nearby urban centers than in the towns where they taught. When talking about ethnic diversity in particular, it was interesting to note that each of the teachers compared their home community to Toronto, which in all four cases is a drive lasting several hours away from their schools. As a reference to these midsized and large cities, a trend among the teachers was to either imagine they were teaching in one of those communities, or to reflect on what it had been like during a time in the past when they were teaching or student teaching in that place. They each commented on how they would definitely be teaching differently if they were in one of those more diverse school communities instead of their current school site.

The teachers did not compare their student populations to an imaginary, prototypical city. Instead, each teacher compared the diversity in their school to a particular city located either in their school board or very close by. Not all of the cities mentioned were the geographically closest, but each had relevance to the student population, either by being their normal shopping hub or as part of the school board. Jody, for example, referenced the nearest city, which is about a thirty-minute drive away. This city is where she attended elementary school, and is the only nearby city. Jennifer compared her school population to her previous school site, located in a city about a half-hour drive away from her current school as well, where she had perceived the community to be much more diverse. She also described two other schools in a similar-sized city, a further twenty minutes away, but explained that their populations were more diverse, yet

different from one another because of the make-up of the neighbourhoods in which they were situated. She said, while her school had some ethnocultural diversity, it wasn't necessarily visible, and that, "I think at most of the schools in this area when there's diversity it tends to be more visible."

Deborah and Tina, who teach in the same school board, both compared their school sites to the elementary schools in general located in the largest urban centre in their board. This city is about one hour away from each of their current school sites. It is interesting to note that there are several other similar- or larger-sized cities that are also about an hour away from these schools, but they both chose the same city. It was a natural fit for the conversation, perhaps, since they were speaking as teachers, and this city is in their school board, where the other similar cities are not. Perhaps this city came to their minds because as professionals they have already had the experience of comparing their school to other schools in their board. Deborah went so far as to reference a specific community in that city where she perceived the ethnic diversity to be particularly high. The reason she gave for assuming these high levels of diversity in this community was because she knew it was adjacent to the university campus. So, here, she was making an assumption about the kinds of people that a university attracts, and subtly contrasting that with the kinds of people who choose to live in a small, more isolated community.

In contrast to the other three teachers who referred to Toronto as a city with a very different degree of diversity than their school populations, Deborah pointed out what she perceived to be a similarity between her school and some schools in Toronto. Jennifer and Deborah both expressed compassion for the few immigrant children they had, who had ended up being isolated in such a small town with low diversity, unlike most

immigrants who, Jennifer felt, "most of them come to Toronto, and then they might filter out to Mississauga and the neighbourhoods around it." Jody, who completed her undergraduate degree at a Toronto university, spoke with surprise when asked to compare the diversity in her school with other areas of the province: "Well, it's homogeneous I would say, compared to, you know, a Toronto school that has a very diverse population."

Deborah, while acknowledging that Toronto schools were more ethnically diverse than her own, felt that some of the needs in her school building were similar to needs that could be found in areas of Toronto that had high poverty levels. In terms of the number of students with special needs related to childhood trauma and other mental health issues, for example, she believed that her school population, although located in a small rural community, had similar levels of mental health needs and socioeconomic status diversity issues as low-income areas of Toronto or other major urban centers. In this way, she combated the stereotypical image of a pleasant rural school filled with compliant children. Instead she presented her small rural schools' population as one with high needs similar to the needs facing inner-city Toronto students, saying:

Probably within a larger city, like Metro Toronto, we'd easily fit in...  
 Within the board, with bigger cities, we're much the same. Compared  
 to other little towns, no, we're not the same.

Although she felt her school was lacking in ethnic diversity, the levels of other kinds of diversity were high.

The location of the diversity relative to their school sites would, according to Gaine (2005), be considered 'peripheral,' even Jennifer's, whose school site is physically closest to a large city. Part of this classification has to do with the way the inhabitants position

themselves in relation to the more diverse communities around them. For example, a small town that is a bedroom community to a large city might feel a greater connection to and therefore impact from the diversity there, whereas a town or village a similar distance away from a different city might have little or no connection with it, particularly if it were in another county or township. Although in this research we are getting the residents' perspectives second-hand through the participants, it is a reasonable assumption. As a peripheral community, then, diversity is seen as 'someone else's problem,' which is reflected in the way the teachers described the impact of the community: there was no mention of parental or community pressure to address diversity issues.

## Initial Perceptions of Diversity, Inclusion, and Equity

A commonality across all participants was their initial perceptions of the term "diversity." After the introductory questions about themselves and how long they had taught at their school site, each participant was asked what the term 'diversity' meant to them. Initially, they each conceptualized it as ethnocultural diversity, and throughout the interview each of them identified the label of ethnocultural diversity in their schools as low. After sharing their own definitions, the teachers were presented with a written copy of the Ministry of Education definition for diversity, which reads:

Diversity: The presence of a wide range of human qualities and attributes within a group, organization, or society. The dimensions of diversity include, but are not limited to, ancestry, culture, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, language, physical and intellectual ability, race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, and socio-economic status.

At this point, the participants tended to move their discussion focus to special education diversity, or to intellectual diversity in general, including learning styles. Each teacher

believed that the intellectual diversity of their student population was higher than the ethnocultural diversity.

Of the four teachers, Tina was the only one who included other aspects of diversity in her initial definition. In addition to "backgrounds," by which she meant ethnic and religious backgrounds, Tina also initially conceptualized student diversity in terms of socio-economic status, or income levels of the students' families of origin, as well as "different learning styles," or intellectual diversity. Throughout her interview, Tina emphasized her students' socio-economic challenges. She mentioned socio-economic hardship or diversity ten separate times during her interview, twice as much as her next most commonly mentioned kind, intellectual diversity. She believes that the socio-economic status of her students has a wide-reaching impact on her teaching practice, and consequently had included it in her understanding of student diversity.

Jody's personal definition of diversity focused on culture, and was explicitly grounded in her First Nations identity. She shared: "Diversity. From a First Nation perspective, teaching in a First Nation, diversity to me is teaching students not only about themselves, but about the larger culture and world that they live in right now." Jody went on to elaborate about the need she felt to firmly ground her students in their "distinct culture... own culture, own language and experiences" before introducing them to other cultures. When speaking about issues of culture, ethnicity and diversity, Jody took her time. She was both thoughtful and confident, and had obviously thought deeply about this subject before. After I shared the Ministry of Education definition of diversity with her (See the interview questions in Appendix One) and shared her thinking about the other aspects of diversity that were not related to ethnicity and culture, Jody

commented: "I was wondering, when you were talking about diversity, if that was going to be something I could even really talk about, in that [ethnocultural] sense of the word, anyway."

At the end of Jennifer's interview, she echoed Jody's sentiment. As a result of hearing the Ministry of Education definitions and articulating her thinking through our discussion on all the different aspects of diversity, Jennifer's perspective about diversity, equity, and inclusive education had changed. At the end of her two-hour long interview, when asked if there was anything else she would like to add about her experiences with equity education, Jennifer shared: "This is actually really interesting, because I was thinking: "Oh, what are we going to talk about for an hour. We don't have any diversity at my school!" In the course of her interview, she had moved away from an understanding of diversity as tied directly to ethnicity, saying: "Generally it means to me students from a whole bunch of places all over the world of different ethnic backgrounds." She left the interview with a wider, more open view of what diversity could mean.

Deborah's view of diversity changed even before the interview began. As we were setting up, she volunteered:

I didn't think I'd have much to say, because I didn't think about these students as being diverse at all, but I've been thinking about it some more, and they really are a diverse bunch in a lot of ways I'd never really considered.

When asked to elaborate, she explained that she had been just considering the backgrounds of her students, by which she meant their ancestral, ethnocultural backgrounds, and their visible diversity in terms of race. As she taught in a school where



the students are predominantly white, she had felt that they didn't have a lot of diversity in her community. When the interview began, Deborah was asked to share her thoughts on student diversity, and she said: "Lots of angles. To me it would be their learning styles; it would be their learning levels; it would be the backgrounds they come from culturally and economically. All of the above." Similar to Tina, she included intellectual diversity and socio-economic diversity alongside with ethnocultural diversity.

I think it is important to highlight that, in order to be eligible to participate in these interviews, these teachers had to reflect on the diversity of their student population. Since the call for participants asked for teachers who taught in schools that were "perceived to have less diversity" (See Letter of Information, Appendix 3), then these teachers essentially self-identified as teaching in schools with low diversity when they agreed to do the interviews. They all stated that the ethnocultural diversity in their schools was low, and as well, each included ethnocultural diversity in their initial definitions of diversity. Combined, these points show that ethnocultural diversity was the most salient type of diversity for these teachers. Perhaps these similar responses are a function of the visible nature of ethnic diversity: skin colour. Another possible explanation might be the history of the current Equity and Inclusive Education policies in Ontario, which arose from the *Antiracism and Ethnocultural Equity in School Boards* (1993) document. That genesis, coupled with the vast literature on multicultural education as well as media influences, might serve to make ethnicity a topic more prevalent than other equity issues in the minds of these teachers.

## Normative Culture and Deficiency Orientation

When considering the concept of 'normative culture' for the purposes of this study, I am assuming the Canadian normative culture, as I mentioned before, to be white, English-speaking, Christian, straight, able-bodied and -minded, financially stable, and male (Ladson-Billings, 2001). I've restated these perceived norms here because I wish to specifically outline which were addressed by the participants and which were not. I do wonder, however, if some of the perceived "Othering'" is a product of the participants' expectations of the conversation. That is to say, I wonder if the context of talking about diversity and equity issues cause them to position some of their statements more firmly in the Canadian normative landscape than they might have otherwise, allowing them to effectively pick out or highlight the rare examples of diversity in their student populations by contrasting them against their experienced Canadian norm of their school communities, or, in Jody's case, of her childhood's school communities.

## Gender, Gender Identity, and Sexual Orientation

To start, issues of gender were mentioned only briefly, if at all, by the participants. Tina dismissed it, saying of gender issues at her school: "Gender, well, that's the same anywhere," presenting a normative stance. Deborah, who was referring to her copy of the Ministry of Education definition of diversity, and discussing each facet of diversity in the order listed, skipped directly from 'ethnicity' to 'gender identity,' passing over gender altogether before declaring 'gender identity' as something the students will deal with during high school, not in Grade Five and Six. In this way, Deborah is positioning people with a non-normative gender identity as separate from students of the age she teaches; she implies that there is no potential for students with a non-normative gender

identity to be a member of the class or community (Wood, 2007). As well, Jody did not mention gender at all in her interview. Jennifer stated that at her school: "We have sexually perceived boys and girls," meaning that, as far as she was aware, they had no transgendered children in her school building. 'Other' than when directly using the Ministry of Education definition of diversity to describe the diversity of their student population, gender was not addressed. There was also no mention of issues stemming from male-female power struggles, gender learning differences, and any other gender-related matters. To me, this seems like an extension of the 'colour blindness' idea, but applied to gender and gender identity instead of race. By the participants passing over the issue so quickly and seemingly without reflection, I was reminded of Schofield (2010) describing how teachers who present a 'colour-blind' attitude are inadvertently negating the individual lived experience which stems from that reality. I believe their students' genders do in fact impact on these teachers' pedagogical choices, though they may not have thought critically about the effect of gender on their practice as a diversity issue.

Similarly, sexual orientation, was not mentioned by Deborah, Tina, or Jody in any way. Jennifer discussed it in two contexts: First, during her description of the diversity of her student population, and second, while telling about a Grade Seven and Eight Health class lesson she had taught. While describing the diversity of her student population, she suddenly shifted from talking about her students to talking about the rest of the staff, saying: "We don't, to my knowledge, have anyone out on staff, we don't have anyone with a different sexual orientation or anything like that." She then immediately returned to discussing students again, implying that issues of sexual orientation were an adult

issue. Also, I note her use of the word 'different,' meaning non-heterosexual, showing her sharing the normative, heterocentrist stance. This apparent attitude contrasts with the way Jennifer framed her view on LGTBQ issues later in her interview.

When she was talking about the Intermediate Health lesson she'd taught which addressed sexual orientation, Jennifer showed an open mindset, as described by Wood (2007) in the dichotomy of "discrimination defended/criticized" (p. 19). Jennifer is both criticizing and actively challenging the discriminatory attitudes she had observed in her students towards homosexuality. Jennifer explicitly stated that her students had held a normative view, and that she had tried to teach them about homosexuality: "that's not a negative thing, just a difference." In doing so, Jennifer felt she was combatting some of the students' family-learned biases as well as media portrayals, of which she said: "it's getting better, but they [homosexuals] were always portrayed as different, not normal." Jennifer seems to use the word 'different' in this context in conflicting ways, but, despite this language use, does not express homosexuality as a deficiency as defined by Sleeter and Grant (2008) when talking with her students. So, although issues of gender, gender identity, and sexual orientation were not mentioned often by the participants, each time they were brought up, it was also either stated or implied that these were issues more appropriate to address with older students.

## Language and Ethnocultural Background

According to each of the participants, all or nearly all of their students spoke English as their first language. For Jody, who had no immigrant students in her room, this norm was problematic. She believes that their traditional language, Anishnabe, was "something that's very lacking in the community. The language is a really difficult thing

for them [the students] to want to use right now, or even to appreciate or understand." Consequently, she tried to incorporate language into natural contexts in her lessons, and encouraged her students by bringing in guests and by going to traditional ceremonies where they could see the value in learning and speaking their traditional language. In this way, Jody was trying to normalize a non-English language, raising its cultural position with her students, to work against a history of outsidership (Gerin-Lajoie, 2008) and the wider cultural norm of English regularly presented to her students outside of school.

For Tina and Deborah, all of their students who were learning English as a second or third language were immigrants who were born outside of Canada. Tina casually mentioned that "there's a few ESL kids" in her school, then never returned to the topic. As a second-language teacher herself, whose main assignment is teaching Junior and Intermediate Core French, a lack of proficiency in English does not hamper the success of students in her classes; perhaps that explains her disregard for this topic. Deborah shared that when she'd first started teaching at her school site, ten years previously, there were fewer students learning English, but that this year she had three in her room. Saying that aloud seemed to surprise her, and she admitted that "I guess I always compare it to the city, and I don't see it that way," meaning that, when she compares her class to classes in the main city in her board, she feels like she has low numbers of English language learners. While Lund (2003) pointed to an institutional attitude in Canadian schools that racism didn't exist, here Deborah was working through an position that student ethnocultural diversity didn't exist. It was not that she didn't see her students exactly, but rather that in comparing the lower levels of diversity in her school

with higher ones in the peripheral community nearby, she was downplaying the diversity that was present (Gaine, 2005).

Regardless of having only a few English language learners, Deborah did not present a lack of English skills as a deficit, and neither did her Canadian students. She herself was surprised that her three ELL students - one who had only lived in Canada for three months - were not made fun of, but were instead helped and supported by the rest of their classmates. She shared a possible explanation: The immigrant students had such a different life experience from the rest of her class that her white Canadian students simply could not conceptualize the vastness of the cultural differences, and consequently accepted them. This acceptance and inclusion of these few individuals, however, did not necessarily translate into a wider acceptance of 'Others,' as evidenced in their class discussions. Using Wood's (2007) dichotomy of the 'Other' as inferior/different, the immigrant students were recognized to be different but essentially the same by the Canadian students, whereas people with the same ethnicity and poor spoken English skills but whom the students didn't know were considered to be inferior.

Jennifer noticed a similar trend of acceptance in her school. A family of four children - the first immigrants in the school - had moved from Portugal at the beginning of the school year knowing absolutely no English. Jennifer thought that one reason they were all doing so well was because of the other students' attitudes. She shared: "They didn't think of them [the Portuguese students] not speaking English as something that was wrong with them. They took it like: 'Oh, we can be helpful here!'" In a way, it seemed as though Jennifer was expecting her sheltered students to view these immigrant students with a deficiency orientation as described by Sleeter and Grant (2008), as she brought it

up later as well, saying: "[not knowing English] wasn't a sign of weakness or anything like that to the kids, which was very heartwarming to see." Instead, she was pleasantly surprised by their inclusive welcome. Jennifer shared that she would have expected that attitude, and for the Portuguese students to be more comfortable, if they had immigrated to a place in Canada unlike her small-town school community, a larger city like Toronto "where it's not very unusual to not speak English and be from somewhere else." This surprise is just one example of how Jennifer pointed out throughout the course of our discussion the ways in which she felt her students were rooted in the normative culture. I wonder if she notices because she positions herself as an outsider.

Since the vast majority of their English language learners were new immigrants to Canada, Deborah, Jennifer, and Tina naturally connected immigration with ethnocultural difference. As a second-language teacher, Tina regularly creates themed hallway bulletin boards which are labeled with relevant vocabulary words. Tina, who did not elaborate on the English language learners in her school, explicitly and emphatically stated that, since there "isn't any diversity that way," she had no need to teach about any holidays that were not Christian, such as Christmas and Easter, or secularly Canadian, like Hallowe'en. This portion of the conversation came after I asked Tina to imagine what she would change about her teaching practice if she found herself working at a more diverse school in future. She explained that, what she would change was her practice about recognizing holidays.

"If the [increased diversity] was for race or religion, probably around certain holiday times, making the kids feel comfortable sharing about their beliefs and such. So those kids wouldn't feel like they're different per se, but that people would want to know about their culture or lifestyles and things like that."

By using words and phrases like 'those kids' and 'their beliefs, 'their culture' and so on, Tina is here positioning herself as normal and people with different beliefs - in this case non-Christian beliefs - as 'Other.' So, although Tina does not currently use any of Banks' (1994) or Kumashiro's (2002) modes of multicultural or anti-oppressive education, she could imagine herself working with an Contributions or Additive approach if she saw a need. This needs-based approach to equity education follows what Solomon & Levine-Rasky (2003) said was the main method of diversity education in Canada. Similarly, Deborah remarked that, while her school had called it a "Holiday Hoedown," it was still a Christmas concert in all but name, and that her school still "did Christmas." While we spoke, she laughed nervously and seemed mildly embarrassed that her school was not doing more to be inclusive.

To a greater extent than any other of the participants, Jennifer has more background experience in both living in and teaching in communities with larger amounts of ethnocultural diversity among the student population. She refers to these experiences as reasons why she has a more open, balanced viewpoint about diversity than her students or her colleagues, which she feels differs from the normative Canadian perspective. One experience in particular changed the way she thought about her own beliefs. When she was working in an alternative practicum at an outdoor centre during her Bachelor of Education year, a group of Mexican students was slated to arrive while she was there. In the preparations for their arrival, Jennifer had a certain mental set based on her previous experiences growing up in an area where Mexicans were largely migrant laborers who were seen as in a negative light, living in poverty and taking jobs because they'll work for less than the locals will. Jennifer did not discuss these expectations, and it wasn't



until the Mexican students arrived, that she even realized how her thoughts ran contrary to her voiced beliefs about equality. She described the students in this way: "They were from Mexico City, and they were really wealthy, and I was like: 'Oh, wow.' I didn't realize how much bias was in my head about that." In a stereotypical way, she had 'Othered' Mexicans, unconsciously holding a set of explicit, deficiency-oriented beliefs. This realization challenged her sense of herself as a person who believes that "it's not that there's better people or worse people." Jennifer has been open about sharing this experience of her own inadvertent 'Othering' with her students as well as others, attempting to engage both her students and her colleagues in a conversation that, like Kumashiro (2000) describes, is Critical of Privileging and 'Othering', so that they could be aware of their own potential for 'Othering'.

Being located on a First Nations reserve, Jody's small class has no ethnocultural diversity. That said, their culture lies outside of the Canadian cultural norm. Jody, having had the experience of being 'Othered' herself at school both as a student and as a student teacher, works hard to present her own culture as normative for her class, challenging what is represented in the Ontario curriculum, what is unquestioned by many Ontario teachers (Sleeter, 2004). Instead, Jody embeds Anishnabe culture in all aspects of the curriculum: arts, math, language. She said: "They learn about themselves. They learn about their traditions and their culture at the same time that they're learning about everything else." Jody tries to present the world to her class from that perspective, so that they can be "grounded in their own culture before they can really understand others."

## Socio-Economic Status

In terms of socio-economic status, each participant addressed issues of low or unstable financial situations. Jodi mentioned that there were not many opportunities for work on the reserve, and so consequently her community was quite transient, with many people moving to Toronto and other cities to find work. Jennifer's situation was quite different. The closest city to her school site, where she herself lives, is wealthier than other adjacent cities, and she described most of the schools in that area as "socioeconomically they're very homogenous." In this statement, she was speaking from the Canadian normative view (Ladson-Billings, 2001), as she meant that the populations in those schools were well-off. Jennifer continued to share about a demographic shift she was noticing in her school population: a new less-expensive subdivision had been built in her school's catchment area. She had heard several parents make comments with a deficiency orientation as described by Sleeter and Grant (2008) about students from that neighbourhood: "Implying that they don't have as much money and that the kids aren't well-behaved because they're from the subdivision." When asked if she had noticed anything different about the children from that subdivision, Jennifer gave an embarrassed laugh before saying, "Yes. And that's why I feel like 'oh, but you can't [make those sorts of assumptions].' None of them are horrible kids, but they stand out in the population because of the population that's there." Here, Jennifer admits that she herself holds a deficiency orientation for the students who come from a lower socio-economic background; however, she felt uncomfortable and slightly ashamed for holding that belief. Jennifer went on to give several reasons why she thought these students from that less-expensive neighbourhood were not as easily accepted as the

immigrant students, including clothing, lunches, and household discipline, implying that the students were not up to the standards of her school in those three areas.

Tina herself held a mixed message about the socio-economic status of her student population. She sometimes described her school as mixed income, saying that the students were "coming from different levels of income in the home," but sometimes as high-poverty, saying that the school "would relate to some of the poorer areas of Toronto, or maybe far up North." I wonder if she conceptualizes the socio-economic status of her student population as diverse, or rather non-normative, and therefore different. From a deficiency perspective, Tina also connects her students' low-income status to low levels of parental support, and consequently diminished social skills and poorer attitudes towards school in general. When she was describing what would be different about her teaching if she taught in a school that was less diverse, she said, "I'm thinking there might be more parental support, and then more interest from the students in their own work, better grades all round, because they're [the students] are going to care," and that she wouldn't have to spend as much time on community-building activities, since they would have those kinds of social skills from their home backgrounds. Tina conceptualizes the other using a closed mindset, as described by Wood (2008), along the dichotomy of "inferior/different" (p. 19), making assumptions about students and families with a comparatively lower socio-economic status that imply their inferiority on other metrics that do not directly correlate with their finances.

Deborah's perspective on the socio-economic status in her school is similar to the mixed perspective of Tina. Deborah reflected:

I often think we're on the lower end of the totem pole, economically, and yet we have some very well-to-do families, so we run the gamut. But I think our majority are definitely low.

Again like Tina, Deborah declares that the majority of her students come from low income households, yet sees this 'majority' as 'diversity,' which I believe is a function of the non-normative status of low income. Furthermore, the order in which Deborah positioned her responses on the topics of family income and student behaviour implied that she in some measure connected her students' poor social and behaviour skills to their low socioeconomic status, a deficiency orientation.

## Diversity of Physical and Intellectual Ability

None of the participants' schools had any visible diversity of physical abilities, as far as they knew, so this aspect was passed over quickly. In contrast, all four participants spent the bulk of their time during the interviews discussing what they perceived to be the variety of intellectual abilities of their students. The participants tended not to use the language of 'intellectual' abilities, but instead favoured phrases like 'learning styles,' 'learning needs,' and 'mental health needs.' Hutchinson and Martin (2012) caution teachers against slipping into the easy use of deficit language when discussing the learning needs of their students. Although this shorthand way of speaking is part of the common teaching vernacular, none of the four participants presented a deficiency orientation when talking about their students with exceptionalities. For example, when Jody was discussing her class's intellectual diversity, she stayed away from deficit language by putting the student first and the need second, using phrases like: "Student has a central auditory processing disorder" instead of naming the disorder first or referring to the student directly by their disorder. Jennifer used similar phrasing when

talking about a kindergarten student with several challenging special needs; she also emphasized how good it was for the rest of the class to have experience with him, so they can "recognize that you communicate in a lot of other ways other than verbally to people." I think it is telling that Jody has earned all three parts of the three-part specialist Special Education additional qualification, and Jennifer and Tina both have Part One of the same qualification. Deborah is the only participant who does not have recent, formal training in Special Education; however, she does have almost five times the amount of teaching experience of any of the other three, and has recently participated in co-training in Special Education assistive technology along with one of her students. Perhaps this combination of experience and training has increased the sensitivity of all four of these teachers in this particular area.

### 'Colour-Blindness'

The participants tended not to see ethnicity as being problematized at their school, as it is in larger district school boards like Toronto (TDSB, 1996). Therefore they did not feel the need to explicitly address issues of ethnicity with their students, a position shared by many Canadian teachers according to Solomon & Levine-Rasky (2003). At the same time, three of the four did not use language that suggested they took on an active position of 'colour blindness,' Jennifer made one comment which hinted at her holding a colour-blind attitude, saying that she had taught a lesson with the specific goal of helping her students to "recognize that they're all people, that they're all the same." This comment might be seen as an example of the 'variety perspective' described by Dei, James-Wilson, and Zine (2001), where differences are recognized, but sanitized in a context of similarity. This lesson, however, was designed around the issue of socio-

economic status, not ethnicity. As well, Jennifer had felt this idea of 'haves' and 'have-nots' was one her students needed to spend time discussing, in the context of removing an existing deficit orientation that she had observed in her students regarding family income levels.

Two participants, Jennifer and Deborah, seemed surprised by their students' attitudes about ethnicity. From the teacher's perspective, the students seemed to be colour blind. When Jennifer was sharing about the more-diverse school she'd taught in previously, she explained that "Ethnicity didn't appear to be an issue with the students." Her tone showed that she'd found the lack of racial tension in their interactions surprising, and gave the example that when the students picked on each other it never seemed to be along racial lines. Instead, some students "would almost joke about their ethnicity, and be like 'Well, I'm like that because I'm Philipino,'" positioning their difference as a mild benefit. Jennifer also included the other teachers on the staff in this discussion. She talked about their weekly Intermediate team meetings, and how she'd expected racial issues to surface. Instead, she shared:

More often than not the students brought up to 'keep an eye on' were white kids who were just part of the diverse population, but it wasn't that they were being picked on because of their ethnicity. It was just whoever or whatever the situation was with that particular student.

Using Wood's (2007) language to describe her school culture, hostility toward the other was seen as neither cultural nor problematic, but rather nonexistent.

Deborah described a similar situation at her low-diversity school site. The students don't use ethnocultural differences as ammunition when disagreeing. She explained it by saying: "They can fight amongst each other, but it's not because of what colour they are

or what their religion is." Deborah's tone expressed surprise, verging almost on disbelief, that even her students who were, in her opinion, socio-behaviourally immature and challenging, did not use the seemingly obvious differences between themselves and the English language learners as fodder for teasing or bullying. At Jennifer's current less-diverse school site, she reported that same trend of student colour-blindness. When an immigrant family moved to the school, "they were embraced by the student population" and, despite not speaking English, quickly made friends which have lasted the entire school year.

Deborah attempted to explain her students' behaviour, by suggesting that the immigrant students were seen by her white students as "so different that [her Canadian students] can't relate." Consequently, it was somehow easier for the white students to ignore the differences rather than point them out. I noticed that Deborah used this language of having great 'differences' between the different ethnocultural groups that she does teach, and yet she didn't directly address those differences with her class. In fact, part of her surprise at how easily these two Korean immigrant students were accepted by her class was because she had not needed to have a discussion about their "accents, culture, where they came from, how to make them feel welcome - no." In short, she had expected her students to require teacher guidance and direction about how to accept and include these new students, because they were so different, and yet they hadn't. Again referring to Wood's dichotomies (2007), the Canadian students did not see the others as inferior, but as merely different. Because the students weren't having any problems and hadn't needed a discussion in order to behave kindly, Deborah therefore didn't have the discussion

about their differences at all, which is a typical course of action for Canadian teachers, according to Solomon and Levine-Rasky (2003).

While Jody did not have the opportunity to address ethnocultural differences within her class, since her students all share the same ethnocultural background, she had the explicit goal of helping her students learn to navigate the differences between cultures. She shared that much of her teaching about equity focused around lessons that left her students "better able to understand the differences between them and other people, but to also learn to appreciate other cultures as well." Once again, Jody was using Wood's dichotomy of inferior/different, working to help her students see the 'Other' outside of their small community as something different to be appreciated.

## Conclusions

To the teachers involved in this research, the word 'diversity' held multiple meanings. Prior to participating in this research project, their main conceptualization of the term 'diversity' was to mean 'ethnocultural diversity,' specifically covering ethnicity, traditions, and religion. During the course of their interviews, they were given both the time and the need to consider the Ministry of Education's multi-faceted definition of diversity. This experience caused them to then use the word diversity in a wider sense, and apply it to a form of diversity they were already, as teachers, more familiar with: diversity of intellectual ability. If the teachers had not been working from this narrower definition of diversity to begin with, they may not have even seen themselves as eligible to volunteer for this study, since each of them, upon reflection, decided that they worked with a more diverse group of children than they had previously believed.



## Chapter 5

### Data Analysis – Teacher Practice

Teachers make a series of pedagogical choices each day, ranging from explicitly planned lessons, book and media text selection, and impromptu 'teachable moment' opportunities. This chapter focuses on an analysis of teachers' reflections and discussion of some of the specific pedagogical actions they have taken to address issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion in their classes.

#### Applying Banks' Analytic Framework

Following Banks' (1995) continuum of multicultural education, in this section I seek to identify examples of the participants' teaching practices which represent a particular pedagogical approach to multicultural education. I first deal with examples from participants that are representative of a 'Contributions' approach'. This analysis of participants' reflection on their pedagogies is followed by subsequent sections which focus on 'Additive' and 'Transformational' approaches.

#### Contributions Approach

The participants indicated that they were drawing on the contributions of individuals and cultures outside of the normative culture, in an attempt to challenge the ethnocultural norm.

All of the teachers identified examples of their teaching practices which involved a focus on non-normative ethnic or cultural contributions to society. Although the deeper intention of the lessons may or may not have been to increase student understanding or

awareness of equity, the participants still made pedagogical choices that they had considered to be motivated by an equity focus.

As a Core French as a Second Language teacher, it seemed natural for Tina to have shared a particular pedagogical choice that focused on French cultural contributions to society. Although she shared several in-school examples of ways that she highlighted Canadian and international French culture, including student-directed research projects, and teaching plays from cultures around the world, while embedding mini-lessons which gave details about those cultures during those units, one out-of-school field trip example stood out from the rest. Tina selected forty-five students from across her Junior and Intermediate classes that had demonstrated both an interest in the French language and the aptitude necessary for the field trip's challenge. Students spent the day out interacting solely in French. The students took a bus to a small city about an hour away from the school site, and watched a special screening of a movie in French at the local movie theatre, followed by lunch at a French restaurant. They had to order in French, and were expected to converse in French as well. Tina is not Francophone herself, and learned French as her students do: through the public school system. She shared that, as a high school French student, she had taken a similar trip, which had made quite an impact on her. She hoped that this trip that she had organized would be as memorable for her students as her own trip as a student had been for her.

When talking about some examples of influences on her pedagogical choices, Deborah discussed the way she touched on different ethnocultural celebrations throughout the year. She said: "We can talk about those, when the calendar comes up. And the principal's really cute: He'll say 'Happy Hanukkah' [on the morning announcements] or

whatever. We can talk about it those little ways." By using the phrase 'little ways,' Deborah seemed to be acknowledging that focusing nearly exclusively on the surface level of multicultural celebrations, without touching on the deeper significance of the holiday, diminishes the status of 'Othered' cultures in her school. Furthermore, as Banks (1994) explains, this sort of pedagogy does nothing to challenge the larger curriculum choices to reflect an integration of diverse perspectives throughout the curriculum.

Continuing on this subject, Deborah expressed regret about how the lack of ethnocultural diversity in her classroom, coupled with her students' generally impoverished understanding or awareness of non-normative cultures, meant that their classroom discussions on topics like this were unfortunately narrow and shallow. She rhetorically asked: "Where's my Jewish kid? Let's talk Hanukkah!" From this quotation I infer that Deborah was wishing that she had a need, and in some ways the ability, within her class to address a greater diversity in a way that could feel real and relevant for her students. For her and her class, the 'Other' was something separate and apart from them rather than a part of their everyday lived experiences in this predominantly white school community (Wood, 2007). However, she wished that she had the student resources – students from diverse ethnic and racial backgrounds – so that she could use their diversity, as Dei (1996) challenges, as a pedagogical resource to more immediately and meaningfully address the issue of diversity.

## Additive Approach

Jody, the teacher who identified as Anishnabe, adopted more of 'Additive' rather than 'Contributions' Approach (Banks, 1994). As a multigrade teacher, teaching Grades Two through Five in one classroom, she indicated that she had to be selective about how

much time she spends on the different portions of the Ontario curriculum. Because of her strong feelings about diversity and equity instruction, she had taken the Heritage and Citizenship strand of the Grade Two Social Studies curriculum: Traditions and Celebrations, and broken it into chunks so it could be taught in pieces over time. These lessons are part of the prescribed curriculum, but Jody had chosen to emphasize this sort of cultural study over other topics. For example, she had explicitly chosen to integrate contributions from different cultures, not only throughout the year, but also for every year that they remained in her classroom. Since she had been teaching at her current school for four years at the time of the interview, she had three students that were in Grade Two when she began, and who were then in Grade Five and ready to move to a different school building for Grade Six. Over this time, Jody had been adopting a multicultural approach to addressing cultural diversity.

Jody explained how much her class enjoyed celebrating the holidays of other cultures. For example, she structured one of her lessons around the celebration of Chinese New Year. She reasoned, "They like the celebrations, so you can understand why different people celebrate different things." I noticed that she did not describe any activities that addressed larger social issues, such as sweatshops or politics in China, for example. Instead their learning focused exclusively on cultural traditions and celebrations. There was also no mention of the history behind the cultural traditions, but rather a superficial exploration of the images, foods, crafts, and other cultural productions related to celebrating the holiday. Perhaps this was a function of the young grade level she was targeting her lessons towards. Jody did consciously steer her lessons away from the stereotypical, however, combatting the conceptualization of the 'Other' as static and

monolithic, and attempting to present culture, instead, as diverse (Wood, 2007). Jody explained:

I got a whole bunch of Chinese foods, different things, not just stir-fry. We tried lychees, and we tried some dragonfruit. We just tried different stuff that they had never been exposed to, basically.

By saying "not just stir-fry," Jody shows her awareness of what 'Chinese food' likely means to her students, and made the pedagogical choice to show them a variety of traditional food options, not just Westernized ones. However, as Banks indicates this additive approach to addressing multiculturalism is limited in its capacity to address social inequities and racial inequalities.

Jody commented that she specifically chose several different kinds of fruit because she has some "fruit fiends" in her class. By choosing to focus on things she knew they liked, she helped them connect to the culture and people but not to really understand the significance of race beyond a simple notion of celebrating diversity. Another choice she made which also helped her students connect their lives to those of people living in China, adding in the Canada and World Connections strand of Grade Two Social Studies: Features of Communities to their study of celebrations, was focusing on wild life. Most of her students had the experience of going fishing, so she showed them a video of Chinese wild life, which included a demonstration of a traditional Chinese fishing method using cormorants. She said, "My students really grasped on to [the wild life connection]. They really liked that." Jody was attempting to build a space where the differences between cultures could be acknowledged, while simultaneously emphasizing the similarities (Schofield, 2010). However, it is important that simply learning about

the 'Other', as Kumashiro (2000) highlights, is not enough to address broader structural and systemic inequalities that affect racial minorities.

## Transformational Approach

As described by Banks (1994), the Transformational Approach focuses on changing the larger scope of the curriculum itself. In Ontario, the entire province follows the same Ministry-written documents. When I was first reading through the literature around multicultural education, I was myself not familiar with the introduction and program planning sections of the Ontario curriculum documents, which come before the content-specific expectations. I was a relatively new teacher, and my teaching assignment had changed about ten times in three years - that was a lot of curriculum to learn. Excuses aside, I am surprised that - even in my compulsory course on equity at the Queen's Faculty of Education - no one had directed me to the importance of that first section, which underlies the curriculum, providing the philosophy through which it is to be delivered. For this discussion, the pertinent feature of the front matter is the section titled "Antidiscrimination Education." Teachers are challenged by this section to thoughtfully change their curriculum to include multiple perspectives. None of my participants were aware of this portion of the introductory sections.

Despite not being aware of the call to "enable students to become more sensitive to the experiences and perceptions of others" (Ontario Social Studies Curriculum Document, 2004, p. 17), Jennifer still created a learning experience for her Grade Seven and Eight Geography students that did just that. Through reflection and group discussion after a complex trading game, where the resources were distributed inequitably, Jennifer encouraged her students to recognize the complex interactions between have and have-

not nations and families. She also addressed the issue of hidden bias with her students.

She reflected that, after the game:

They looked at [economic diversity] differently, too. I don't think they would have necessarily said 'Oh, are you biased against poor people?' but they weren't willing to give up what they had [in the game] to help the student family that didn't have. We ended up talking about that.

By working through this task with her students, Jennifer gave them the opportunity to experience those multiple perspectives for themselves that might very well 'transform' their viewpoints regarding economic inequality (Banks, 1994). She also presented the task in such a way that her students themselves came to the realization that their conscious viewpoint was not always supported by their actions. In terms of critical pedagogy, Jennifer was able to help her students both form and accept criticisms of their actions (Wood, 2007). In this way, Jennifer's teaching philosophy aligned with that of the Ministry of Education. She insisted: "It's part of our job as a teacher to have these students be accepting of [people with a] different economic status."

## Decision Making and Social Action Approach

This approach moves out of realm of multicultural education and into anti-racist education or the broader-encompassing anti-discrimination education. I will therefore be combining this level of analysis with the next section of Kumashiro's (2000) anti-discrimination education continuum. Once again, I provide examples from teacher interviews which reflect each of the dimensions of Kumashiro's anti-oppression education framework.

## Education for the 'Other'

There were no examples of overt cultural assimilation shared by any participants; that is, none of the participants gave examples of times when their students from non-normative populations were forced to participate in a normative cultural experience. A small side comment was made by Deborah when she was talking about her immigrant students. She said that the "[ESL EA] is still here, and she's quite busy. There's three [English language learners] in this class, and she's got more in Grade Eight." In this situation, the English as a Second Language Educational Assistant works in an itinerant position, covering a certain set of schools in the board, rotating through them on a set schedule, which is determined at the school board level based upon the number of English language learners in the school. The ESL EAs run a pull-out program meant to support students with both their regular classwork and also with English vocabulary building and grammar nuances. This program is viewed as a support for students to help them be successful in school first and in Canadian society second, but I also recognize how it could be considered assimilatory depending on the context of the family. For example, if the student is told that they should put aside their first language use at home in order to improve their English, or if they are led to feel that their first language experience is devalued, the family might feel their child is being pulled away from their culture. Similarly the pull-out Native language class that Jody participated in as a student, while a positive experience for her, might also be conceptualized as an example of Education for the 'Other' (2000), as it involved targeting and separating out Native students to address their particular learning needs.



## Education about the 'Other'

I consider 'Education about the 'Other'' as equivalent to the combined sections of the Contributions Approach and the Additive Approach of the Multicultural Education section above, which included teaching examples from and perspectives of from Tina, Deborah, and Jody.

## Critical of Privileging and 'Othering'

Over the course of several months, Jennifer worked to transform her students' thinking around the subject of sexual orientation in the context of a Grade Seven and Eight Guidance class. About her students' attitudes towards homosexuality, she said: "that's something that in [grades] Seven and Eight there isn't a lot of acceptance for from the students." Jennifer consciously approached this topic using a variety of instructional strategies. For example, she shared: "We did a lot of role-playing. We did a lot of breaking into groups and getting different scenarios that they would act out." The role-playing was supplemented by watching prepared educational videos as well as selected media clips to foster discussion around stereotypes and bias. Through our conversation, it became clear that Jennifer's students were living in a subculture where discrimination against homosexuality was defended rather than criticized (Wood, 2007).

Instead, Jennifer wanted her students to be critical thinkers, to move them away from the closed-mindset view described by Wood (2007) where hostility towards homosexuals or perceived homosexuals was normalized by comments like 'That's so gay!' She hoped their exposure to the topic in her class would problematize that hostility, in order to help "to get them away from always thinking the things that are very stereotypical about

people who are homosexual or transsexual that they see on TV and in the media." They also had a lot of whole-class and guided small-group discussion, but with a thoughtfully considered instructional flow: "we did the other things at the beginning and that led into the discussion as they felt more comfortable talking about it." Jennifer had chosen to attend a workshop on teaching about LGBTQ issues offered through her board earlier in the year, and this helped her feel supported as she framed her discussions and teaching strategies. Sleeter & Grant (2008) discussed the impact of institutional philosophy on teacher practice. In this example, Jennifer's school board promoted an institutional culture and philosophy around LGBTQ pedagogy that gave her the confidence to address this issue even in at a school site where this kind of teaching was not the norm.

## Changing Students and Society

Education that 'changes students and society' is comparable in some respects to the Decision Making and Social Action approach from Bank's multicultural education continuum. In Deborah's school, for example, she led a staff movement to encourage student social action several years ago. Instead of giving their teacher a gift for Christmas, as about thirty or forty percent of the students school-wide traditionally did, they were encouraged to give a donation to a charity in their teacher's name. The staff pooled the donations, and then Deborah's students used an international charity's donation catalogue to decide how many pigs, goats, packs of pencils, and other practical items to purchase for a village in a developing country. This experience was framed by the teacher as student decision making and social action, but it was definitely separate from the rest of their curriculum. When the teacher described it as student empowerment, it called to mind Gerin-Lajoie's conception of this fourth stage (2008);

however, I still place it in this category with reservations. I am not sure that the process the students went through for this project was critical of privileging and 'Othering', which I believe would be necessary for inclusion in this higher level on the Anti-Oppressive Education continuum. Consequently, I wonder if it is indeed better suited as an example of 'Education about the 'Other',' but I chose to include it here to reflect the way this project and its goals were framed by the teacher.

## Special Education

Although the participants' initial personal definitions of diversity were focused around ethnicity and culture, over half of each of the interviews ended up being spent talking about Special Education. Their previously mentioned qualifications and experiences teaching Special Education may partially explain why each of the four participants, when talking about inclusion and diversity, focused on the diversity of learning needs, learning styles, and learning disabilities in their classes. They seemed to latch on to the mention of 'intellectual ability' in the Ministry of Education definition of diversity and expanded upon it, although they did not use that specific phrase when talking about the needs of their students.

The participants all mentioned the importance of building a safe learning environment where students with special learning needs could feel welcome. Tina shared several examples of how she promoted equity in her classroom. First, she focused on building personal relationships with her students, as well as fostering an atmosphere of risk-taking and equal opportunities. Because she has taught many her students over the course of four or five years, she had the opportunity to get to know their strengths and weaknesses, and learn how to encourage those students who wouldn't normally speak

up. Tina said: "I give everyone a fair chance for speaking and asking questions, so it's not just the higher level kids doing all the speaking and talking." This practice echoes Hutchinson and Martin's (2012) belief that treating students with exceptionalities in a seemingly similar way to the treatment that the rest of the class receives increases those students' social standing.

At the same time, Hutchinson and Martin (2012) argue that inclusive education is largely about equity of outcome, and so teachers need to provide students with exceptionalities with the learning opportunities and supports they need to be academically successful as well. Tina also explained the ways in which she differentiates their class work based on learning styles as well as learning needs. Since she wants to build their French oral language skills, the students are encouraged to talk - in French - as they complete their class work. She regularly uses strategic partnering, seating her students in mixed-ability groupings, so those with reading or writing challenges can be supported by her stronger students. When students do culminating tasks, they have lots of product choices: set their work to music, write booklets, make movies, posters, or puppet plays, for example. Although Tina did not explicitly point out these pedagogical choices to her students or explain why she was making those choices, she was trying to be inclusive of students of varying intellectual abilities, especially those whom she felt were already marginalized.

Deborah used several similar strategies to the ones Tina employed, but mentioned a frustration that occasionally arose when trying to implement those types of accommodations. She said:

I think the greatest challenge is when those who you're trying to include don't always see how hard you're working to include them, and how you are making it a better situation for them. Sometimes they want to revolt because they want to be the same as everyone, but that's not always the best thing for them.

Deborah tried to find the balance between providing her students with the learning environment they needed to be successful, while at the same time helping them to feel included. Hutchinson and Martin (2012) argue that teachers need to model and explicitly teach the students without exceptionalities that students with disabilities are not themselves strange or unusual, but that they do have some different learning requirements. It seems that Deborah also felt the need to convey this message to the students with exceptionalities themselves, so they could become comfortable with their differences, and become advocates for themselves rather than trying to hide or feel ashamed.

Deborah and Jody both spoke strongly about their need to focus on inclusion for their students with exceptionalities. Deborah described her school population as having a high proportion of students with special learning needs compared to other schools in the board and in the province, intellectually as well as in the area of mental health, which tended to be expressed at school in the form of behavioural challenges. In fact, Deborah decided that the ministry definition of diversity was missing one facet. When trying to describe the diversity of her students, we circled around the idea of intellectual ability. However, while she acknowledged that her students had different learning needs, the most pressing equity issue for her was their behaviour. This behaviour - ranging from loud, violent outbursts to students that "could sit there and could play in their little desk with their pencil for six hours a day" - stopped them from being able to be successful

academically as well as being a disruption to other students, and was often a function of their mental health needs. In particular, Deborah regularly faced students who had grown up in traumatic situations leaving them with post-traumatic stress disorder as well as other anxiety and self-regulation challenges. Consequently, during our discussion we reframed the concept of intellectual ability to include mental health ability which she felt was the main issue facing her teaching that she needed to address on a daily basis. In order for the rest of her class to have a safe, effective learning environment, she needed to help her challenging students both feel and be included. At times, Deborah and her administrator had to make the difficult decision to remove those students from the regular classroom setting at times, but they tried to keep them in the classroom as much as was considered to be safe for the other students. Bicard and Heward (2010) believe that the default level of intervention should always be the lowest possible which still supports equality of outcome. For Deborah and the rest of her school support team, this philosophy showed in the choices they made around supporting the inclusion of these challenging students.

In contrast, Jody felt her learning diversity needs were largely a function of teaching a multi-age classroom encompassing Grades Two to Five. When asked about the diversity of intellectual ability in her classroom, she laughed while she reminded me that she had four grades in one room, implying a huge, if natural spread of academic capability. Upon reflection, however, Jody commented that it was not just the age differences that led to the diversity, but that "even among students in the same grade there is a lot of different learning styles and abilities." Despite her small class size, Jody still had several students who had been diagnosed with learning disorders particularly in the area of

communication; she felt they needed special care to feel like they belonged and could be successful. She shows a non-deficit mentality in that she feels that these students with exceptionalities can still belong and be successful, and should not be discarded or ignored. In this way, Jody conceptualized these students, according to Wood (2007) as different, not inferior.

Both Jody and Deborah talked about the special education diversity in their classroom in an open way. They addressed this equity issue directly with their students and did not consider learning diversity issues to be taboo or something that needed to be kept hidden or secret. Jody references her Special Education training, and how she applied that learning to her classroom. She said: "[In my Special Education Part Three course] they talked a lot about inclusion, so when you were giving the definitions, that word stuck out a lot for me." Hutchinson and Martin (2012) use the term inclusion to refer to the philosophy that students with disabilities deserve to participate fully in education, and it is this definition that Jody was familiar with from her courses.

One way that Jody brought her open philosophy about inclusion into her teaching practice was through her weekly sharing circle. She had created a special time where the students could be open about what was happening at school or in their personal lives. Jody explained: "Students know that they're safe when they're talking because everybody knows that what gets shared there doesn't go anywhere. We don't talk about it after it's over." As the teacher, Jody uses this sharing time to explicitly teach her students that the differences between people are just that - differences. This teaching philosophy seems to me to be the intellectual ability equivalent of refusing to be 'colour-blind,' refusing to treat all the students the same, regardless of ability. Jody believes that it is

crucial for her students to understand that "they're not all the same. Different people have different abilities" she shared. Bunch and Finnegan (2009) would agree that students are all different, but have more in common with one another than they have dissimilarities. Jody shows that she teaches through a similar belief, as she treats her students with exceptionalities from a non-deficit stance, and works to include them in her classroom while simultaneously acknowledging their lived reality of difference.

Similarly, Deborah openly addressed the issue of fairness in her room on a regular basis in every subject, and furthermore felt that the rest of the staff at her school did so as well. She said:

I think we're pretty open in our classrooms when we talk about kids, or situations - not specific kids. And because we have that diversity in our classrooms, and the kids have basically grown up with them, throughout. If in the early grades the understanding is there that Johnny learns a different way and Johnny needs the extra break, or else, you know, it's not going to work out for the rest of us.

Just one of the eight specific examples Deborah gave that showed her openness regarding this topic centered on one student's use of special technology equipment. She brought her student's learning needs into her classroom. She specifically talked about what he did with the rest of the class when he was withdrawn with the itinerant technology resource teacher.

Hutchinson and Martin (2012) describe the impact that the classroom teacher's actions have on the status of a student with exceptionalities. Deborah also elevated this student's status in the class by positioning him as the technology expert, and by having him co-teach the class some of the skills he was learning on his computer. She explained how being open with the rest of the class about what this student was doing helped to



alleviate some of the other students' feelings of unfairness: If that one student gets special equipment and gets to leave class, why don't I? Knowing what, and to a certain extent why, helped Deborah's students be more empathetic and understanding. Just withdrawing this student from the regular classroom for these special services would be potentially isolating for him, and would be an example of Education for the 'Other'. Combining this necessary withdrawal time with actions that speak for Education About the 'Other', such as informing the class about his educational needs, as well as Education that Changes Students and Society, such as repositioning him as an expert and valuable member of the class, changes the way the rest of the class experiences his disabilities. Ultimately, Deborah hopes to help to make all the students comfortable with difference (Hutchinson and Martin, 2012, p. 186).

In contrast to the explicit discussions that Jody and Deborah both had in their classrooms around their students' special education learning needs, Jennifer described the way that special education diversity was treated in her building as something that "no one even notices." Jennifer's opinion was that it was important to act in this way:

As a teacher never pointing that [the student needs special help] out. Always acting as is everyone is capable of doing it, and then more discreetly trying to give the kids extra help, help, or changing an assignment a little bit, so it is easier for their learning style, things like that.

Hutchinson and Martin (2012) discussed the impact of school culture on teachers' pedagogical decisions for students with exceptionalities. In Jennifer's school, the regular and expected practice is that when students leave the mainstream classroom to go to work with a resource teacher, reading tutor, or parent volunteer, it happens seamlessly and is not brought to the attention of the other students. Interestingly, Jody actually used

a similar hypothetical situation to support an opposing viewpoint. When she was explaining why she did not believe in dealing with students with exceptionalities in this way, she said:

I think in a lot of places, other schools I've been in, they just kind of say, 'Oh, this kid goes out, and it's all hush-hush and never mind' when they go to the resource teacher or whatever. But I think when you try to open kids up and just teach them that other people are different, it just doesn't make it taboo [to talk about how to get help].

One possible explanation for this discrepancy in practice is the perceived diversity of the different student populations. Jennifer made it clear, for example, that there were not a lot of difficult learning needs in her school, that the intellectual ability diversity was low. On the other hand, Deborah and Jody both talked about how the intellectual ability needs of their class were high, though for different reasons. Also the perceived socio-economic status of Jody's and Deborah's two student populations was similar; compared to Jennifer's school, Deborah and Jody's schools had a wider variety of socioeconomic diversity, whereas Jennifer's population was both more homogenous and more middle-class. These factors together show a similar pattern in the teachers' response to perceived diversity in intellectual ability levels as was seen in their response to the perceived levels of ethnocultural diversity. Jennifer perceived her student population to have a low intellectual diversity level, and so did not regard the issue as a student need that needed to be addressed. Jody and Deborah perceived their student diversity to be high in the area of intellectual and learning differences, and so responded to this perceived student need by directly addressing the issue with their students in an open way. This possible explanation connects to Solomon and Levine-Rasky's (2003) point that Canadian teachers generally only explicitly teach about or for equity when they see a need.

## Pedagogical Modes

The methods that the four participants used when they taught about diversity, equity and inclusion are also in line with Solomon and Levine-Rasky's (2003) observations of Canadian teachers' general practices around equity education. Discussions and modeling were the two most common pedagogical modes that the participants reported using when consciously teaching about these topics. When Jennifer was sharing about teaching equity as an Intermediate Guidance teacher, she emphasized with her tone and with repetition just how crucial discussion was as a teaching method - "It was a lot, a lot, a lot of discussion!" - yet similarly included an example of discussing the needs of classmates at a Kindergarten level. Jody considered discussion around challenging issues including equity and inclusion to be so important that she implemented the weekly sharing circle mentioned earlier. She spoke with quiet pride as she described it as "something that's opened students up;" however, it took a lot of work to raise the level of discussion to that point, a concerted effort over several years. When asked how she tended to teach about inclusion and equity issues, Deborah replied:

With the kids? Discussions, small-group discussions. We're good at that. When situations don't go well, [we discuss] how we can, as a group, work together, within the class or within the school.

I think it is important to note that these at times challenging or potentially awkward discussions about diversity, equity, and inclusion were not just happening in Junior and Intermediate classes. They were happening in early Primary as well with students as young as four and five. There is not a right age to have these conversations, according to these teachers.

For Tina, equity and inclusion were embedded in her practice, and not taught directly, and modeling was a feature of the other participants' teaching as well. While Jennifer tended to address some equity issues more openly, she also wanted her students to interpret and follow her behaviour as an example of how to treat others. "I hope in my teaching that comes across as something, not always as explicitly, but implied in the way I teach and the way I treat the students. [My actions] are examples for what I would expect from them, also." In this way, Jennifer showed her awareness of the hidden or deep curriculum (Dei, 1996) that her words and actions presented to her students. Similarly, Jody shared: "I think modeling has a lot to do with it," particularly around the idea of communication as a key to understanding others. She worked to model respectful listening and sharing, as a pathway to support her students in being empathetic about different students' learning needs. Deborah talked about the importance of first modeling, then helping the students practice specific inclusion skills, such as not overreacting when a student with a behaviour challenge cheats at a game during Physical Education class. When speaking about being an example to her students, she took things one step further, saying: "I also try to give them example from an adult perspective, without being a lecturer, because it's important to see that it applies to me, as well as them."

## Influences on Teacher's Pedagogical Choices

### Ministry of Education.

The initiatives taken by the Ministry of Education to promote equity education have not consciously changed or informed the teaching practice of any of my participants. As mentioned previously, none of the four participants were familiar with the Anti-

Discrimination Education section found in the front matter of the Ontario curriculum documents. Similarly, although the participant interviews were conducted in the Spring of 2011 - the second year of the implementation schedule for of the Ministry of Education's PPM No. 119: Developing and Implementing Equity and Inclusive Education Policies in Ontario Schools - the participants were not familiar with the document, its aims, or its definitions of diversity, equity, and inclusion. When asking what or who influenced their pedagogical choices around equity, I suggested the Ministry of Education as part of a longer list of potential influences. Deborah replied:

I guess the Ministry can tell me what to teach; they always do. But it's not the Ministry when we're talking about equity. What's the Ministry ever given us that would help us do that? C'mon! Really? Anyway, nothing I've seen lately.

None of the other participants chose to speak to the Ministry of Education as an influence on their teaching. I infer that the messages about equity and anti-discrimination education have not been seen as a priority by the rest of the teaching and administrative staff at their school sites as well, because otherwise I believe they would have been aware of the policies at the very least. This lack of priority and consequently of attention is consistent with Dotzert's (1998) experiences in a similarly sized and located school board in Southern Ontario.

### School and community culture.

George Dei (1996) refers to school culture as one aspect of the deep or hidden curriculum which is taught to students, though teachers may themselves be unaware of it, or not in the habit of reflecting upon it. When invited to reflect on how school culture impacted their thinking about equity issues, each teacher participant had insights to share. Jennifer mentioned how different the school cultures have been at the various

school sites where she has taught; this has been my experience as well, and holds true when comparing the responses of the four participants when asked how their school and community culture affected their pedagogical choices about equity education. Tina felt she had little support, Jody had a free rein, Deborah said her school and community pulled together, while Jennifer wished for more discussion.

Tina reported a negative parental and school-wide attitude toward her teaching subject of French. As a consequence, she found it difficult to get support for interesting or challenging project ideas, many of which had an equity or diversity focus. For example, she wanted to host a cafe night for parents to showcase her students' research project on francophone countries and cultures around the world. The idea was rejected by her administration because they thought that they wouldn't get enough parental attendance for it to be worthwhile.

Jody had a great sense of autonomy in her pedagogical choices. While she did not mention any parental influence on her teaching, she shared that her supportive administrator gave her "a lot of freedom" to teach the way she chose in her classroom. This support included giving her the leeway to have the hands-on celebrations for Social Studies, as well as classroom guests, and special programs, like 'Roots of Empathy' which involves bringing a baby into the classroom on a regular basis to build understanding of the needs of others. When speaking about inclusion, Jody described how the current staff had been trying to create a school environment where all the students felt welcome. She shared: "We've been working for the past four years to change and reform the school from how it was running previously. It had quite a different atmosphere." Programs like 'Roots of Empathy' and their weekly classroom

conflict resolution circle are two ways that Jody is carrying out her schools' goals for inclusion.

Deborah works with a staff almost ten times the size of Jody's, but the two schools have a similar focus: creating a place where "all students feel respected and welcomed" (Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy, 2009, p. 8). Deborah spoke with a mix of pride and resignation, while describing all the inclusion programs they run in their building. The pride came from being a member of a hard-working staff member devoted to improving student success, and the resignation from the repetition of having to deal with the challenging social behaviours that caused the need, in her mind, for the inclusion activities in the first place. The school ran a widely-used daily snack and breakfast program. While some schools make the choice to have students attend their food programs by invitation only, at Deborah's school "any child can come for breakfast any day of the week, doesn't matter who you are." This inclusive practice came out of concerns raised during a staff discussion. One, the concern was that invited students might lose face with their peers or feel embarrassed about being labeled as 'poor', and so remove themselves from a program that could help them; Two, that as a staff they could not know all the details of a students' home life, and therefore miss students who did not appear stereotypically poor, but could really use the extra food. As a companion to the food program, the staff had also turned a storage room into a 'Free Clothing Store', where donated clothing was organized by size and gender, and always available. Deborah remarked several times, with a tone of surprise "I must admit how much it truly is used."

In addition to the regular school sports teams - basketball, volleyball, soccer - the staff at Deborah's school also hosted a wide variety of special-interest clubs like fishing, knitting, and reading. The students are also organized into cross-grade groupings called 'Colour Houses.' They stay in these same teams throughout their years at the school, meeting periodically for stories, games, crafts, and other activities. One example Deborah shared was on the topic of fairness:

We had different games that we played to show fairness. The kids really enjoyed them, but I think they also saw the importance of working with the smaller children. They got a different way to do that activity, and yet it was the same activity.

For example, for an egg-and-spoon relay race some student groups decided that it would be fair if the younger students ran a shorter distance, while others allowed them to hold the egg on their spoon with their hands. In this way, the students had the opportunity to live the phrase 'fairness is not sameness'. These more relaxed types of activities allow them to get to know children they might not otherwise get to meet, which hopefully helps them appreciate each other's differences, find similarities, and build a sense of belonging.

In contrast, at Jennifer's school, where she said the students seem to have a homogeneously high socio-economic status, she reported that "students generally listen and want to perform and want to behave." While the staff there did run school teams and clubs, they did not feel the need, as the staff did at Deborah's school site, to purposefully build a sense of inclusion and belonging. In addition to the samples of negative parental attitude mentioned before, about some new students with a perceived lower socio-economic status, the parents influence the school in other ways. When Jennifer was teaching about LGBTQ issues, she had five families pull their children out for the entire



unit on sexual education. She was surprised by how many were pulled, but explained it to herself because, as she saw things: "it's a very religious community." While she appeared to be sensitive to parents' views, Jennifer remained strong in her beliefs: "It makes me aware, in my teaching, of their opinions, but I don't think I would change what I was going to teach because of that." When contrasting school cultures at other schools where she had taught or supply taught, she considered this one to be more normative, more "traditional.". She expressed her concerns about the school's culture in this way:

Not talking about the differences of the greater world that's out there is also part of the school culture. That just doesn't get discussed. I don't even think [equity] is anything that's ever even been discussed at a staff meeting.

### Student need.

The most prevalent influence on these teachers' pedagogical choices was their students. The perceived needs of their classes drove the participants' decisions about what to teach, how much time to spend on a particular area, or whether an issue would be addressed at all.

Tina, for example, discussed how she only needed to address Christmas and Easter, because she had no students that celebrated other holidays – she clearly answered that she did not “need” to teach about non-Christian or Canadian secular holidays simply because they were not relevant to her students' lives. Similarly, Jody chose to focus on teaching her students about their own culture, not the normative Canadian one, so that they could compare and contrast other cultures with a better understanding of their own heritage, traditions, and history. Jennifer described a Kindergarten example, where there were two boys with severe communication disorders, who were non-verbal. The rest of

the class was being taught strategies by their teachers and the educational assistants for how to deal with the needs and sometimes unusual behaviours of these two children.

Finally, Deborah had shared her surprise - pleasant surprise, but surprise nonetheless - that the students in her class who were not white were not teased or excluded because of their race. When I asked her what she would do differently if they were, she responded: "Well, I don't know if I'd isolate it, unless it were a really huge issue: 'a Korean boy in our class?!' We would just go over how to make people feel welcome." If it became an issue, Deborah said she would address it in small-group discussions with the individuals involved.

Solomon & Levine-Rasky (2003) noted that in schools with high levels of diversity the teachers talked about equity and diversity on a needs basis, and my participants also shared how they used teachable moments to address issues of equity. Jennifer, who had taught in schools with both high and low levels of ethnocultural diversity, recognized this tendency in her own teaching, saying, "it [equity] is something that you often teach situationally in what's going on, so [here] it doesn't happen." As a consequence, these teachers ended up teaching about the kinds of diversity that were present in their student populations in greater proportions and more often. For example, when ethnocultural diversity was not seen as a pressing student need the teachers taught it superficially, using the Contributions or Additive Approaches, as a form of an 'Education about the 'Other'.' On the other hand, the diversity of intellectual ability - which was seen as a huge need by all teachers - seemed to be driving their instructional decisions. It was a topic that they were more aware of, and more confident with addressing, even though most of them had not conceptualized it as a diversity issue prior to their meeting with

me. At times, the teachers indicated through tone or statement that they felt overwhelmed by the level of learning diversity in their classes, and, as mentioned before, this topic took up over half of each participant's interview. This prominence contrasts with the fact that none of them considered ethnocultural diversity as an issue or problem in their buildings.

Equity education was seen by the teachers as something that emerged from student needs. Consequently, areas of perceived low diversity were not seen as issues that the teachers felt they needed to address. There was a prevailing feeling that there are so many initiatives piled on top of the many parts of the curriculum that they had to cover that addressing issues such as cultural or racial diversity in a predominant white community was assigned a low priority. However, when Jennifer was talking about how some parents chose to pull their children out for the discussions about sexual orientation, she explained how she felt it was part of her job to provide her students with a more open perspective on the diversity outside of their small-town-focused lives: "It probably makes it more important to emphasize acceptance and inclusion because I don't always feel like that's out there in the rest of their [the students'] world." Similarly, Deborah, as discussed previously, expressed a wish for a greater ethnocultural diversity in her class, so they could better understand it. However, the expressed levels of each type of diversity in a school generally seem to correlate with the amount of time and complexity of ways that those different kinds of diversity were addressed by the teachers in that building.

## Conclusion

The four teachers in this research described the ways in which they consciously taught for equity and inclusion; they most often used activity-based learning, such as hosting a celebration, which was based on a contributions approach or a form of education about and/or for the “Other”. ‘Other’ teaching modes included discussion and on-going modeling of appropriate behaviour; however, the discussions and teacher modeling were less likely to be consciously planned or explicitly performed, and more likely arise from the needs of the moment. One challenge of addressing equity issues in these schools was the very lack of diversity itself. The teachers reported teaching about equity mainly when an appropriate time presented itself, but in the course of their daily teaching, they rarely had those natural opportunities, with the exception of Special Education issues. Another one of the challenges Jennifer faced was her school culture. While she was interested in teaching more deeply about equity, it wasn't a priority to the rest of the staff, including administration, nor was any pressure coming from the parent community. She felt hampered by the traditions and unspoken expectations of a very normative Canadian school setting. I wonder if those hidden expectations were present in Deborah's and Tina's schools, and they were just less aware of them because they were more of an Insider to their school's culture.

While the school and community culture had a small effect on the teachers' pedagogical choices, by far the largest influence was the perceived needs of their students. The word 'perceived' is of great importance here. Under what conditions do teachers perceive broad diversity, equity, and inclusion issues to be based on a student need? Jennifer and Jody both felt that it was part of their role as teachers to explicitly address equity with

their students, no matter where they were living, but why? Their preexisting beliefs, which were formed by foundational past experiences, informed what they saw as a need for their students and what they did not. Jennifer, who felt she had an advantage in the wider world because she was comfortable with diversity, wanted that same advantage for her students; therefore, she believed that their education on matters of equity was something that was her responsibility. Consequently, she sought out times when she could explicitly teach about it. Even so, she didn't feel that she was doing enough.

Deborah and Tina, however, who did not have such foundational past experiences, were less likely to see a lack of diversity as a teaching need, but rather as an unproblematized reality of their job site.

## Chapter 6

### Conclusion

#### Research Questions Revisited

The focus of this research was on the perspectives, experiences, and pedagogical choices of four elementary school teachers who work in low-diversity settings. When conceptualizing this project, I subdivided my main question into three parts. How and why do teachers in low-diversity classrooms teach about equity? : the participant's definitions of diversity; their pedagogical choices about equity education; and the influences on those choices. The goal was to examine what decisions these teachers made when teaching about equity as well as how they made those decisions. By drawing on their own words, experiences, and viewpoints through analysis of semi-structured interviews, the perceptions and practices of these four participants were brought to the forefront. In the process of being involved in this research, the teachers themselves acknowledged that they had changed some of their views and attitudes about the level of and variety of diversity in their schools.

Though the literature on multicultural education and diversity issues in education was mainly about teaching in areas with high levels of diversity, it was surprisingly relevant to my research. From the literature, it seemed that teachers in high-diversity schools problematized issues of diversity and equity, where teachers in low-diversity schools did not. This research also touched on inclusive education for students with intellectual exceptionalities. I also included a brief history of diversity issues in Ontario, from forced assimilation programs to the new Equity and Inclusive Education document. Drawing on

both Banks' continuum of multicultural education and Kumashiro's continuum of anti-oppressive education allowed my research to be informed by a sound theoretical base.

## Implications for Practice

This research highlights the lack of an explicit strategy on the part of practicing teachers to incorporate equity and inclusive education into Ontario schools. While the Ministry of Education has developed a specific policy to support diversity and equity issues, the impact of this policy did not appear to be manifested in widespread changes in practice in the schools where my participants were teaching

From my research findings, I have several recommendations about how to be more strategic about equity education in schools with a low perceived level of diversity.

- 1) Teachers need to be familiarized with a broader definition of diversity and to be provided with frameworks that address a more critical approach to multicultural education and anti-oppressive education such as those elaborated by Kumashiro and Banks. I would hope that when they see that they already have expertise in dealing with one area - intellectual ability via special education - they may be able to consciously extend that expertise to other forms of diversity that create a degree of discomfort.
- 2) Administrators and teacher leaders could work to change the normative school culture mindset of 'if it ain't broke, don't fix it.' Although a lack of experience with different aspects of diversity is not an urgent problem, requiring in-the-moment solutions, it is an important one. I wonder how to help teachers who do not have either the personal experience or the philosophical outlook to see that

learning about broader equity and diversity issues is a need for everyone.

Perhaps the answer would be different for each teacher.

## Limitations

The location of the schools covered a narrow geographic area: South Central Ontario, and all the participants taught in rural schools. Also, since the teachers were volunteers who were willing to give up at least an hour of their time, it may have resulted in teachers participants who already had an interest in equity issues. However, these limitations do not detract significantly from the meaning derived from the participants' experiences and insights that are provided into the pedagogical implications of addressing equity education in predominantly white communities

## Implications for Further Study

Some further avenues for future research along this line of thought might be to more deeply examine the reasons why elementary teachers do or do not prioritize teaching for equity and inclusion and the specific role that teacher education and professional development might play in addressing this matter. Interviewing a wide range of teachers who do actively teach for equity and inclusion, then looking for commonalities between the teachers may better answer just how much of a role is played by past, personal experience, and what other factors might contribute to a more informed approach to equity education in schools. A similar study of teachers who are teaching for inclusion in Special Education settings, as well as those who are not, might give insight into the barriers teachers face in addressing equity and inclusion, since it seemed to be more



straightforward for teachers to address the diversity of intellectual abilities in their daily practice.

## Final Thoughts

Consistent with the findings of Solomon and Levine-Rasky (2003), these teachers in low-diversity classrooms taught about equity when they saw a need in their student population. Since they teach in the moment as the needs arise, they are likely to miss out on teaching more broadly about various kinds of diversity, since they are simply not encountering certain forms of visible difference in their local communities. In contrast, if the teachers see a lack of diversity in their local environment as a problem for the students who will one day be interacting with a multiplicity of people, then the need to teach for equity and inclusion will be seen as ever-present need. With that viewpoint, the teachers become more likely to plan in advance for explicit instruction about equity issues, as well as consciously embed diverse material in their curriculum. In the end, their students will have a similar educational experience to students in more diverse schools, and be better prepared to live in our pluralistic society.

I entered into this project wondering why most of the staff at my rural, low-diversity school did not share my same passion for equity education. I see now that like two of my participants, Jennifer and Jody, I also had a pivotal experience that led me to prioritize equity and inclusive education in my teaching philosophy. For me, it was recognizing that my lack of exposure to people of other cultures had resulted in an unintentional awkwardness around them. Uncomfortable as it may be, addressing and problematizing the dominant white Canadian normative worldview in a rural school community is necessary in order to bring about positive change in our teaching practices that will

resonate through the lives of the students we teach who have yet to be exposed to the diversity they will some day meet.

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## Appendix 1: Semi-Structured Interview Questions

1. How long have you been teaching?
2. How many years have you taught at your school site?
3. What is your current teaching assignment?
4. Please consider the idea of student diversity. What does it mean to you?
5. The Ministry of Education defines ‘diversity’ as “The presence of a wide range of human qualities and attributes within a group, organization, or society. The dimensions of diversity include, but are not limited to, ancestry, culture, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, language, physical and intellectual ability, race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, and socio-economic status.” [Provide participants with a copy of this definition].
  - a. Using this definition as well as your own, how would you describe the diversity of the student population you work with?
  - b. How would you compare the diversity of your student population with diversity in other parts of your board? Of Ontario?
6. The Ministry of Education defines ‘equity’ as “A condition or state of fair, inclusive, and respectful treatment of all people. Equity does not mean treating people the same without regard for individual differences.” [Provide participants with a copy of this definition]
  - a. How do you teach about equity in your classroom?
  - b. Please give some examples of recent lessons or activities that explicitly addressed equity education.
7. The Ministry of Education defines ‘inclusive education’ as “Education that is based on the principles of acceptance and inclusion of all students. Students see themselves reflected in their curriculum, their physical surroundings, and the

broader environment, in which diversity is honoured and all individuals are respected.” [Provide participants with a copy of this definition]

- a. Please share any other ways you address issues of equity and inclusive education in your teaching practice.
  - b. What do you find challenging when you teach about equity and inclusive education?
8. How does the make up of your class affect your teaching decisions about equity?
- a. If you taught, or have taught, at a school that was more diverse, what, if anything, might/did change about the way you address equity in your teaching? Please provide examples.
  - b. If you taught, or have taught, at a school that was less diverse, what, if anything, might/did change about the way you address equity in your teaching? Please provide examples.
9. When considering the decisions you make about equity education, who or what influences them, and how? For example, parents, other teachers, administration, Ontario curriculum documents, school and community culture, past experiences.
10. Is there anything else you would like to share about equity and education? Please provide examples.

## Appendix 2: Letter of Information

### Exploring Teachers' Understanding of Equity and Inclusive Education and Their Pedagogical Choices

#### LETTER OF INFORMATION

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

My name is Kelley Jones and I am a graduate student at the Faculty of Education at the University of Western Ontario. I am conducting research about equity education, particularly teachers' pedagogical choices. I would like to invite you to participate in this study.

The aim of this study is to identify if and how the perceived level of student diversity in a school or class affects elementary teachers' choices about what and how they teach about equity. I am particularly interested in schools that are perceived to have less diversity.

If you agree to participate in this study you will be interviewed about your pedagogical choices around equity education, as well as your perceptions about your student diversity, and how diversity and equity are addressed at your school site. The interview will last approximately one hour and the audio will be recorded. The location of the interview is your choice.

After I have transcribed the interview, you have the option to meet with me again to review the interview content for accuracy and clarity of your viewpoint. Together we can change or omit any sections of the interview, at your discretion.

The information collected will be used for research purposes only, and neither your name nor information which could identify you will be used in any publication or presentation of the study results. All information collected for the study will be kept confidential. I will store the recorded interview in a locked cabinet in my house for two

years after the research is conducted and then I will delete the information and shred the documents. I will use the transcribed interview for my research.

There are no known risks to participating in this study.

Participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate, refuse to answer any questions or withdraw from the study at any time. Please keep this letter for your reference.

If you have any questions about the conduct of this study or your rights as a research participant you may contact the Director, Office of Research Ethics, The University of Western Ontario at 519-661-3036 or [ethics@uwo.ca](mailto:ethics@uwo.ca). If you have any questions about this study, please contact my supervisors Dr. Goli Rezai-Rashti and Dr. Wayne Martino at

[Signature]

Kelley Porteous Jones

## Curriculum Vitae

**Name:** Kelley Porteous Jones

**Post-secondary Education and Degrees:** University of Toronto  
Toronto, Ontario, Canada  
1999-2003 B.A. (Hons)

Queen's University  
Kingston, Ontario, Canada  
2004-2005 B.Ed., Primary/Junior

**Additional Qualifications:** York University  
Intermediate Mathematics  
2013

**Related Work Experience** Teacher-Researcher  
Student Work Study Initiative  
Ontario Ministry of Education & Upper Grand DSB  
2011-present

Elementary Teacher  
Grade 4/5, Grade 1, K-8 various subjects  
Upper Grand DSB  
2005-2011