Teacher Candidates’ Perspectives on Teacher Education and Critical Multiculturalism

by

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Abstract

This research is grounded in my observation that we live in a society that is racist, sexist, classist, heterosexist, able-ist, and oppressive in other ways for a variety of groups and individuals outside of the dominant norm. Schools functions as sites of reproduction that work to maintain the status quo through the reproduction of racist, sexist, classist, and heterosexist language and discourse (among others) that maintain the normalcy of oppressive behaviour. However, in as much as schools may reproduce inequalities, they could equally well produce possibilities for equal and just relations in society. In many ways, schools are contradictory places where the dynamics of reproduction and production are simultaneously at work. The question becomes one of how to encourage and nurture the possibility of schools to become sites of struggle over oppressive relations in society. Critical multicultural theory has been proposed as one possible answer to this question.

While critical multicultural education understands schooling as a site of social reproduction, it is also believed that schools can work to challenge the inequality engendered by the process of social reproduction by educating students about the dynamics of oppression and privilege. Schools are, thus, understood as sites of possibility, where the normative and common sense understanding of society’s current oppressive relations are deconstructed and critiqued. In this work, I use critical multicultural theory to focus on the role of teacher education in the creation of new possibilities for schooling.

The purpose of this research is to examine new possibilities for teacher education by making problematic the normative discourse of a university teacher education program
and its implication for critical multicultural teaching. As such, this research will 
deconstruct the dominant discourse in a Faculty of Education at a mid-size Canadian 
university through an examination and analysis of the perspectives of current teacher 
candidates; examine how the discourses in teacher education work to constrain and limit 
the possibility of critical multicultural education; consider the pedagogical challenges of 
a critical approach to multicultural education; and provide new possibilities for teacher 
education and, in particular, critical multicultural teacher education.
Acknowledgements

I must begin by thanking the six teacher candidates who were so willing to give their time to be interviewed. Their experiences and perspectives are central to this work and have made this research a success. I hope that I have done justice to their words and that, in some way, this work will be used to address the many issues and frustrations with teacher education they expressed during our interviews.

I would not have been able to produce the work that I did if not for the direction and support of Magda Lewis. Her work is inspirational and, in particular, Without a Word was critical to my understanding of silence that helped me to redefine the notion of the ‘resistant teacher candidate’. As well, Magda’s course on Feminist Theory has had a profound influence on me both academically and personally. It provided me with the words and concepts to name my experiences and, in turn, shed light onto areas of my life that may have forever remained in darkness.

I must thank my partner, Derek, who read through numerous drafts of this work (even when he didn’t have the time) and gave helpful feedback. Beyond the role of an editor, Derek provided me with the emotional support needed to undertake and complete this work. I am also deeply indebted to my parents for all of their support throughout my education and for providing a foundation from which I would become an independent, confident woman.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Defining the Problem

…it if we are not men, if we are not white, if we are not economically advantaged, if we survive by the labor of our hands, if we are not heterosexual, and if we do not embody and display the valued assets of the privilege of Euro-American culture, schools are not the sites of possibility which the rhetoric of educational discourse wishes to portray.

(Lewis, 1993, p. 193, italics in original)

This research is grounded in my observation that we live in a society that is racist, sexist, classist, heterosexist, able-ist, and oppressive in other ways for a variety of groups and individuals outside of the dominant norm. The oppression that results from these dynamics does not operate primarily through ‘mean-spirited’ individuals, but rather though the normal process of everyday life perpetuated by social institutions such as the family, state, religion, media, and schooling. In the context of schools, education functions as site of reproduction as it works to maintain the status quo through the reproduction of racist, sexist, classist, and heterosexist language and discourse (among others) that maintain the normalcy of oppressive behaviour. As McLaren (1994) states, “curriculum introduces students to a particular form of life; it serves in part to prepare students for dominant or subordinate positions in the existing society” (p. 191).

However, in as much as schools may reproduce inequalities, they could equally well produce possibilities for equal and just relations in society. In many ways, schools are contradictory places where the dynamics of reproduction and production are simultaneously at work. The question becomes one of how to encourage and nurture the possibility of schools to become sites of struggle over the oppressive relations in society. Critical multicultural theory has been proposed as one possible answer to this question.
While critical multicultural education understands schooling as a site of social reproduction that keeps the status quo in place, it is believed that schools can work to challenge the inequality engendered by the process of social reproduction by educating students about the dynamics of oppression and privilege. Schools are, thus, understood as sites of possibility, where the normative and common sense understanding of society’s current oppressive relations are deconstructed and critiqued. In this work, I use critical multicultural theory to focus on the role of teacher education in the creation of new possibilities for schooling. The decision to focus on teacher education came largely from my own experiences as a student in a teacher education program.

**Background**

As a young, white, middle-class, monolingual female who grew up in an economically advantaged and predominately white suburb in Ottawa, I fit every category of the ‘resistant teacher candidate’ identified in much of the literature on multicultural awareness in teacher candidates (Brown, 2004; Chizhik & Chizhik, 2005; Garmon, 2004; Gay & Kirkland, 2003; Haberman, 1996; Haberman & Post, 1998; Sleeter, 2001; Weisman & Garza, 2002). According to the research, it might be expected that I would be a conservative teacher candidate who resisted critical teaching. But my memory of my teacher education experience is not one of resistance or anger over a ‘lack of practicality’ in my course of study. Instead, during my four-year Bachelor of Education program I often desired more theoretical and conceptual tools with which I could better understand my practice. Much of the work I did outside of my education courses helped me to redefine and re-conceptualize the way I saw the world and the meanings I gave to the
events around me, but I was struggling to apply this to my identity as a teacher and how I imagined I would teach.

While it is difficult to pinpoint an exact moment, class, or teacher that started my interest in what I can now describe as critical multiculturalism, I can remember a moment that started a chain reaction, which was critical to my rethinking of the world. This event is best described as a ‘fire-in-the-belly’ moment – a moment where something materializes deep in the gut, where one’s entire body feels excited, where one wants to mobilize and jump into action, and where there is no doubt that this is the path one is meant to take. I’ve had these moments periodically throughout my life, but this particular moment is especially vivid. The event happened in a required education course for all teacher candidates called Intercultural Education. While I can’t remember the context for showing the film, we watched *Manufacturing Consent*, a Canadian documentary based on Herman and Chomsky’s (1988) book by the same title. The film explored the work of Noam Chomsky and the ways in which media operates. A dominant idea presented in the film was that the media focuses on certain stories, but does not report on many others (particularly those stories that might be critical of current conventional ideologies) in order to manufacture the consent of the citizens to go along with the country’s political intentions. I remember how I felt when I watched the film. On the one hand, I was excited to be learning about the media in a whole new light, but, on the other hand, I felt angry. Why hadn’t anyone told me this before? How could we, as citizens, be so duped by the media? And why wasn’t anything being done about it?

My questions and anger led me to seek out new knowledge and new perspectives particularly in the area of the media and U.S. politics. Over the winter holiday that year, I
read three of Noam Chomsky’s books as a starting point. I felt that I had been denied this knowledge throughout my education.

As I began to question my previous perspective of the world, I began to see the possibilities in education to shape society in ways that could be more egalitarian. This belief was further strengthened when I took a course on Educational Philosophy. One of the philosophies we examined was Reconstructionism. The basic premise of reconstructionism in education is that “modern society is facing a grave crisis of survival, that the educator must become a social activist, and that the school occupies a strategic position in meeting the crisis and in providing a necessary foundation for action” (Ozmon & Craver, 1999, p. 189; see also Brameld, 1956; Counts, 1932; Stanley, 1992). Finally I had the language to describe how I understood education. My perspective had been validated and I now knew that I was not the only one who saw the possibilities for critique and social change through education. I knew there was a community out there who believed in the potential for education to further social justice, but I was on my own to find this community, as it was not something widely discussed or accessible during my teacher education program. It was during the first few months of my Master’s degree that I came across critical multicultural theory and decided that this was an accurate way to describe my vision of the possibility of education.

While it may seem as though my development of a critical multicultural perspective was a fairly neat and linear process, there is no doubt that I have been impacted by and through a variety of courses, people, and moments in my life that are not mentioned here and of which I may not even be fully aware. I agree with Sleeter (1995) when she writes:

As I reflect on my own life and learning processes, it is evident to me that no single course, experience, or individual transformed my own way of
understanding issues. Cumulatively, several experiences did jolt me out of the dominant perspective I had grown up taking for granted. I am still periodically painfully jolted.

My own experience in a teacher education program raised many questions that helped direct my research. Why was critical multiculturalism or other critical approaches to education by and large absent from teacher education? Why was the notion of the ‘resistant teacher candidate’ so common in the literature on multicultural education? Were there other explanations for the lack of success in critical multicultural teaching outside of the ‘resistant teacher candidate’? What role did the teacher education program play in the possibility of critical multicultural education for teacher candidates?

**Purpose**

The purpose of this research is to examine new possibilities for teacher education by making problematic the normative discourse of a university teacher education program and its implication for critical multicultural teaching. As such, this research will

1. deconstruct the dominant discourse in a Faculty of Education at a mid-size Canadian university through an examination and analysis of the perspectives of current teacher candidates
2. examine how the discourses in teacher education work to constrain and limit the possibility of critical multicultural education
3. consider the pedagogical challenges of a critical approach to multicultural education
4. provide new possibilities for teacher education and, in particular, critical multicultural teacher education.
Rationale

The rationale for this research stems from the limitations of the vast majority of research I have examined in the area of teacher education and teacher candidates’ multicultural awareness. While the research desires to understand how teacher candidates develop multicultural awareness in teacher education, it consistently fails to examine the larger discursive practices within which multicultural education and teacher education are located. This research attempts to bridge this gap by using the perspectives of teacher candidates to examine the social, cultural, and ideological context of a teacher education program as it relates to the possibility of critical multicultural education for teacher candidates.

Conclusion

This thesis is divided into three sections. The first section includes the introductory chapters – Introduction, Methodology, Literature Review, and Conceptual Framework. These chapters provide important information and context regarding the research. The second part of this thesis is made up of the analytic chapters. In these chapters, interview data is analyzed and common themes are revealed and discussed. The final section of this thesis is the Conclusion, which includes a discussion of the challenges of critical multicultural education and new possibilities for pedagogical practice in teacher education.
Chapter 2
Methodology

This chapter chronicles the complicated and messy research process of developing a purpose for the research, finding participants, conducting interviews, and interpreting the interview data. At the end of the chapter, I examine some of the problems and dilemmas I encountered throughout the research process.

Finding Direction

The direction and purpose of this study has changed at nearly every stage of the research process. I entered the Master of Education program with a desire to learn more about critical theory and democratic teaching. These initial interests led me to the area of multiculturalism, particularly, critical multiculturalism. Much of the literature on multicultural education seemed to be concerned with how teacher candidates develop multicultural awareness and, thus, my initial research question mirrored this aspect of the literature. I wanted to determine the factors that made teacher candidates receptive to critical multicultural teaching and how teacher education programs could prepare future teachers who would engage with critical issues in their classrooms.

A dominant aspect of the research in the area of teacher candidates’ multicultural awareness focused on teacher candidate resistance to critical multicultural teaching. However, my own experience of learning about oppression, privilege and inequality in society raised serious questions about what I found in research. I was not, as the literature describes it, resistant to critical teaching in these areas; in fact, I wanted more critical teaching throughout my teacher education. Certainly I was not ‘special’ or ‘unique’ in this regard. I was sure that there were other teacher candidates who felt the same and,
thus, decided that I would interview teacher candidates who, like myself, were interested and open to critical approaches to education, particularly with regard to issues of diversity and multiculturalism. I felt that these were the perspectives that were missing from the literature and that through an examination of these teacher candidates’ perspectives I could determine the factors that had contributed to their critical multicultural awareness. Once these factors were determined, they could be used to develop more effective multicultural education courses for teacher candidates. At this point in the research, I still believed that one could determine these factors and that these factors would provide an ‘answer’ to the ‘problem’ of resistance identified in the literature.

But as I continued my literature review, flaws in the research and my own thinking on the issues were revealed. Lewis (1993) and Lewis and Simon’s (1995) work on women and silence was critical to helping me raise important questions regarding the notion of resistance. The literature on multicultural education frequently defined teacher candidates resistance through acts of silence – not speaking in class, declining to talk about one’s own position in the dynamics of oppression, or the refusal to engage in dialogue with other members of the class. But why did the literature define silence as resistance? What were the more nuanced meanings of silence? What are the so-called ‘resistant teacher candidates’ perspectives and how did they understand their ‘resistant’ position? These questions raised doubt in the nice, neat research questions and subsequent answers I had developed as an initial proposal to the research. The literature had defined teacher candidate resistance in fairly simplistic terms; what else was the research simplifying?
It was the reading of Ellsworth’s (1997) *Teaching Positions* and Britzman’s (1991a) *Practice Makes Practice* that caused the dramatic shift in perspective that my research so desperately needed. Ellsworth (1997) and Britzman (1991a) were not seeking simple answers to their questions. Their work highlighted the complexity and messiness of what teaching and learning to teach is all about. Through the use of psychoanalytic theory, learning how to teach could be understood as contradictory process of learning. Ellsworth (1997) and Britzman’s (1991a) examination also moved beyond individual teacher candidates to the institution and the discursive practices in teacher education that made certain things possible and others not. Through reading their work, I began to see how the dominant discourse in teacher education worked to limit critical multicultural teaching and, in some cases, encouraged teacher candidate resistance. The problem did not lie in individual teacher candidates and, therefore, there could be no easy solutions for the implementation of critical multiculturalism into teacher education. I had a complicated research proposal that I could barely articulate in words let alone write on paper, but I knew that this was the direction I wanted my research to take.

**Theoretical Framework**

Three major components of critical feminist methodology, identified by Weiler (1988), guided my research. First, feminist researchers recognize the importance of grounding themselves in their own position and subjective oppression. As Stanley and Wise (1983) state:

> it is inevitable that the researcher’s own experiences and consciousness will be involved in the research process as much as they are in life, and... all research must be concerned with the experiences and consciousness of the researcher as an integral part of the research process.

(p. 48)
Throughout the writing of this thesis, I have tried to make evident my own position, understandings, and research choices.

Feminist research also emphasizes the importance of everyday, personal experience. Therefore, this study rejects a positivist view of social reality and views the personal experience of teacher candidates as providing important insight not only into their individual lives, but also into the greater social structure in which they operate (in this case, a Faculty of Education teacher education program). The notion of experience, however, has not been taken up uncritically in this research. Experience does not ‘speak for itself’; instead, the various ways experience can be understood and constructed by individuals is central to a greater understanding of the meaning we give to events in our lives. As Britzman (1991a) explains, “When practices become a text, they must be read not as guarantees of essential truths, or recipes for action, but as representations of particular discourses that implicate the voices of teachers and researchers in larger interests and investments” (p. 53, italics in original). Thus, this research is not an attempt to valorize the experiences of teacher candidates in an education program, but, rather, to use their experiences as a way to examine the larger discourses in which experience operates and is given meaning. In the analytic chapters that follow, I quote participants as a way to use their voice and language to provide insight into their understanding of themselves, as teacher candidates, and the teacher education program. But, like their experiences, the participants’ voices are not taken up uncritically. Rather, I re-present these voices and experiences as a way to examine, raise questions, or support the various interpretations I take throughout the research. It is my ‘critical voice’ that is present
throughout the research, not the ‘authentic’ voice of the teacher candidates. As Britzman (1991a) states:

> a critical voice attempts the delicate and discursive work of rearticulating the tensions between and within words and practices, or constraints and possibilities, as it questions the consequences of the taken-for-granted knowledge shaping responses to everyday life and the meanings fashioned from them.

(p. 12)

Finally, in upholding the belief that ‘the personal is political’, feminist research has a political commitment to eradicating sexism and to changing society. While I critique multicultural teaching and teacher education throughout this research, it is through this analysis that one can begin to work through the repressive and limiting discourses of teacher education in order to envision an alternative that could truly invoke radical change in schooling and society. I do not intend this research to provide any easy ‘answers’ or an ‘if you do it this way, then it will work’ formula for teacher education. In fact, it is my desire that this research show the complex process of learning to teach that can only come from a refusal to except easy answers to teacher education. Although no simple solutions are given in this research, I do want the research to provide its readers with a glimpse of what could be possible in teacher education.

**Approach**

My research takes the form of an intrinsic case study, which focuses “on teasing out what can be learned about [a] particular case” with the value lying “in facilitating appreciation of the uniqueness, complexity, and contextual embeddedness of individual events and phenomena” (Schram, 2006, p. 108). In this research, the case study is a teacher education program at a mid-size university in Ontario, Canada. This specific
teacher education program is examined through the individual perspectives of six teacher candidates while they were still students in the teacher education program.

While there are unique components to all teacher education programs, much of the literature reviewed for this research demonstrates that many of the practical and conceptual problems identified are common to various forms of teacher education (see Britzman, 1991a; Ellsworth, 1997; and Simon, 1992). Having experienced a different teacher education program myself, I also saw similarities in my experiences and feelings with those of my participants. As I present a unique example of a teacher education program, the reader is encouraged to make connections between the dilemmas presented in this study and the larger conceptual issues embedded in the education of teachers.

Selecting the participants.

The participants of this study are six teacher candidates enrolled, at the time of the study, in the teacher education program at a mid-sized university in Ontario, Canada. The teacher candidates interviewed were either enrolled in the Consecutive or Concurrent streams of the program. Consecutive teacher candidates apply to the program after the completion of an undergraduate degree; they include recent university graduates or professionals who have decided to make a career change. Consecutive teacher candidates must complete five education courses and teaching placements over the span of eight months (September to April). Unlike the Consecutive teacher candidates, the Concurrent stream of the program allows students to apply for the teacher education program before they begin their undergraduate work. Concurrent teacher candidates’ take two credits in teacher education courses and teaching placements while they complete their Bachelor degree in another field. Once Concurrent teacher candidates complete their undergraduate
degree, they enter the eight-month teacher education program to take five credits in education courses and teaching placements (with the Consecutive students). In total, Consecutive students complete five credits in the teacher education program while Concurrent students complete seven.

The participants for this study were purposefully selected based on their critical awareness of multicultural education in order to explore their understandings of critical multiculturalism, how it relates to the program, and how they believe they came to adopt this perspective.

During the fall semester of 2006, I was employed as a teaching assistant for a course that was divided into four modules. Each module was eight hours in length and was a required course for all Bachelor of Education students. The section of the course I worked on as a teaching assistant focused on issues of social justice education. As part of their range of assignments, B.Ed students were required to write a one-page summary of their understanding of a social justice issue they experienced while on their practice teaching placement. This assignment was completed before the course section began as a way for the instructors to gear the course towards the needs and issues raised by the teacher candidates. The final assignment required students to use digital media to explore a social justice issue.

There were three other teaching assistants for the course and each was responsible for evaluating the work of a group of the teacher candidates to which we were separately assigned. This included the reading, viewing and grading of the students’ coursework. As the teaching assistants read and viewed the students’ assignments, I asked them to keep record of any students who they felt were approaching the work in a ‘critical’ way. Of
course the word ‘critical’ has many meanings and it is possible that the other Teaching Assistants and myself were working from very different understandings of the word ‘critical’ or ‘critical multiculturalism’. However, throughout the course, the teaching assistants met to discuss the assignments and the common themes that were emerging from the teacher candidates’ responses. It was in the first of these meetings where I explained what I meant by the word ‘critical’ and ‘critical multiculturalism’ and what the teaching assistants should be looking for in the assignments for the purposes of my study. For example, I was interested in those students who raised theoretical issues, questioned the structures of society, or examined power and the construction of knowledge.

By the end of the course, only myself and one other teaching assistant had kept records of students whom we thought had taken a critical perspective in their work. Thus, the participants were selected from approximately half of the teacher candidate population (about 340 students in total). My selection of teacher candidates came solely from the secondary student cohort, exactly 170 students. The other teaching assistant had approximately 140 elementary teacher candidates and 33 secondary teacher candidates.

My fellow teaching assistant and I categorized potential participants based on their assignments. Three categories were created – teacher candidates who had a critical first assignment, teacher candidates who had a critical second assignment and teacher candidates who took a critical perspective in both assignments. My records consisted of eight students with a critical first assignment, twenty-one students with a critical second assignment, and six students with both. The other Teaching Assistant identified twelve students with a critical first assignment, twenty-one students with a critical second assignment and nine students with both. Since I wanted to interview six teacher
candidates, only those teacher candidates who took a critical perspective in both assignments were contacted via e-mail and asked for a one-hour interview. From these e-mails, I was able to arrange interviews with six teacher candidates, four from the elementary cohort and two from the secondary cohort.

Conducting the interviews.

Interviews were conducted at the end of January and beginning of February, right before the teacher candidates left campus for their final teaching placement. All interviews were approximately one-hour in length and took place in a library on campus. One participant, Isabelle\(^1\), asked to see the interview questions before the interview, but the other participants did not see the questions ahead of time. In retrospect, I believe it would have been helpful for all participants to have had the interview questions ahead of time. Many of the questions asked required participants to reflect on their lives and past learning experiences and having access to the interview questions may have helped the participants start this reflective process before the day of the interview.

The interviews were tape recorded and transcribed. Participants were e-mailed a copy of the transcript and asked to read it over and make any changes they felt were necessary. In two transcripts, I included additional questions for the participants (Kerry and Isabelle). Both participants answered these additional questions. I also continued a correspondence with Kerry that consisted of approximately six e-mails. Kerry had raised some interesting perspectives in her interview and expressed a willingness to continue the conversation so that I could get a clearer understanding of her perspectives on the topic.

I conducted my interviews while I was in the process of reading Ellsworth’s (1997) *Teaching Positions*, which was providing me with a new language with which to

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\(^1\) Pseudonyms are used for all participants in order to maintain their anonymity.
approach the research. As stated earlier, I felt as though something was lacking from my original research proposal; it felt too neat and tidy to actually be meaningful. Ellsworth’s work was pivotal in changing the direction of my research to the approach I eventually took. At the time of the interviews, however, I was still in the process of determining the direction and purpose of my research. Although the interview questions I had were prepared with my previous research proposal in mind, I decided to go ahead and use them. I still had no clear idea of where my research would take me and I had some doubts as to whether I would get anything useful given that my interview questions were written from a different research perspective. Still, I felt that the voices of teacher candidates were important and hoped that they may give me more than I expected – and they did.

The Participants

Although this study is not intended to provide an in-depth examination into the lives of these individual teacher candidates, I provide enough information on each participant to situate the experiences and responses of these teacher candidates as they appear throughout the study. The teacher candidates provided all biographical information during our interviews. I did not ask the participants to identify their gender, race, sexual orientation, or other markers of identity. I felt that the participants should make the decision to reveal and discuss aspects of their identity as they wished. As such, their decision to discuss their identity could indicate their importance to the topic we were discussing, specifically critical multiculturalism and the teacher education program. Thus, I have only indicated the age, gender, race, sexual orientation, or other characteristics of the participant if they provided this information in the interview.
A brief introduction to each participant follows below. I have tried to provide some biographical details along with their reasons for entering the teacher education program and overall feelings about the program.

**Kerry**

Kerry was a teacher candidate in the Concurrent program in the elementary cohort. She completed a Bachelor of Art degree in English before entering her final year at the mid-sized university that is the context of this study.

Kerry grew up in a large metropolitan centre and was in her early twenties at the time of the interview. She had planned on entering provincial politics before choosing a career in education. Kerry explained why her career plans changed:

…a lot of people dissuaded me from pursuing that [provincial politics] because, I guess because I’m a pretty honest person and they sort of, a lot of, like people who were close to me sort of felt that I would get really disheartened by the way politics works and everything.

(Kerry, Interview, p. 1-2)

Teaching was the next logical career choice, as Kerry stated, “I sort of found I could do a lot of the same, I could sort of pursue the same goals that I wanted to in provincial politics, but in teaching as well” (Kerry, Interview, p. 2). At the time of the interview, Kerry said that she was enjoying the education program, particularly her teaching placements – “I’ve liked it. My placements overall have been really good” (Kerry, Interview, p. 2).

**Nicole**

As a child, Nicole also lived in a large metropolitan centre. She is the daughter of an Irish father and a Jamaican mother and she described this biracial relationship as having an important impact on her awareness of issues of diversity. Nicole was enrolled in the
Concurrent program in the elementary cohort and completed her undergraduate degree in Sociology. She took a year off before her fifth year to work for a school board doing what she described as “the worst job ever”, collecting records of achievement and other paperwork (Nicole, Interview, p. 1).

Nicole expressed a lot of disappointment in the education program. As she explained, “I missed doing research and I missed being in academia … like there’s not so much of it, I find the B.Ed program, it’s more activities and it bothers me” (Nicole, Interview, p. 2). Because of her experience in the program, Nicole had decided that she no longer wanted to be a teacher. At the time of the interview, Nicole was in the process of applying for a Master of Science in Kinesiology.

Jessica

Jessica grew up outside of a metropolitan area and was in her mid twenties at the time of the interview. She completed her undergraduate degree at an Ontario university in Women’s Studies and Drama. After the completion of her degree, Jessica spent a year working as an education assistant in a large city. After this experience, she applied to the teacher education program. She was enrolled in the Consecutive stream in the elementary cohort. Jessica decided to become a teacher because she enjoyed working with children and saw the potential for exploring social justice issues in the classroom.

During our conversation, she mentioned that her identity as queer and Jewish played an important role in her awareness of issues of diversity and social justice. Jessica, however, expressed frustration with the education program, particularly in the area of social justice. As Jessica explained,

As far as the program goes, I’ve been actually really disappointed… because part of my interest in education has to do with teaching for social justice and has to do
with kind of recognizing and undoing power structures that are out there and, like, having a group of children, you know, sent out into the world who are going to be part of making society whole again… I’ve just been really disappointed around, just the lack of analysis around things.

(Jessica, Interview, p. 11)

At the time of the interview, Jessica was looking forward to the end of the program; she commented that there were only a few months left and then it would be over.

Jay

Jay was the oldest teacher candidate interviewed. He had worked for a number of years as a mechanical engineer in the auto industry before beginning the teacher education program. Jay immigrated to Canada from South America and identified this experience as key to his multicultural awareness. As Jay stated:

I wasn’t born in Canada. All of my education was done outside Canada so this is the first time I’m in a university in Canada, so yah. I feel I know what it means to be educated in a different culture and then having to keep up with the way things work here.

(Jay, Interview, p. 2)

Jay was in the Consecutive program in secondary education with Math and Physics as his two teachable subjects. As Jay explained, he decided to become a teacher “to do something different, professionally speaking, ah, give something back, basically. I was tired of working hard to make other people richer [laughing]” (Jay, Interview, p. 1).

Overall, Jay thought that the education program focused on theory that was not applicable to his classroom experiences. He wanted more “hands-on” teaching experiences in the program (Jay, Interview, p. 14).

Dan

Dan entered the Consecutive program in elementary education after much persistence. He had been applying to the program for the past five years and as he
described it, he “had to hoof the door down” (Dan, Interview, p. 1). Before entering the program, Dan worked as a teacher in Korea and in private schools in other Canadian cities. During this time, Dan taught English as a second language, Math, Geography, French, and Physical Education. He decided on teaching as a profession because of his enjoyment of working with younger children. As Dan described it, “I mean anytime that you spend with little kids and laugh about, you know, just everything that they’re doing and, and make a positive change is something that attracts me” (Dan, Interview, p. 1).

Dan grew up in a small town in Northern Ontario. He was raised by a single mom until the age of nine and described this experience as having an important influence on his desire to teach. As he explained, “I think young children are so impressionable and sometimes the experiences they are getting at home aren’t always nice impressions, so it’s good when you can have a positive, you know, especially male role model in primary [school]” (Dan, Interview, p. 2).

For Dan, the education program was a bit overwhelming in the amount of content it tried to teach in one academic year. As Dan stated, “there’s so much to learn and when you’re trying to jam-pack everything in you’re essentially not doing it justice, right?” (Dan, Interview, p. 14-15).

Isabelle

Isabelle grew up in a large urban centre and was enrolled in the Concurrent program. For Isabelle, the move from the large city to the smaller town, in which the university was located, had a huge impact on her identity. As Isabelle explained:

It’s just interesting because before I came here I didn’t really think of myself as East Asian at all. I’m just like okay I’m just a person, right… I never labeled myself as a minority, but when I came here it was a whole other story, like I was so aware of the fact that I was East Asian.
Isabelle completed a Bachelor’s degree in Biochemistry before beginning her fifth year in secondary education, with Math and Science as her two teachable subjects. Isabelle always wanted to be a teacher, but it was a high school teacher who helped Isabelle solidify teaching as her career choice. As Isabelle stated:

“I had a really inspirational teacher who taught me a lot of things, like he was pretty much my mentor. And so I saw the effect that he had on me… like it’s something where I, it’s cliché to say, but you know, where you can make a difference in someone’s life.”

(Isabelle, Interview, p. 2-3)

At the beginning of our interview, Isabelle expressed satisfaction with the education program – “it’s been going well, like the practice teaching experience has been awesome” (Isabelle, Interview, p. 3). But there were moments throughout the interview where Isabelle raised some conflicting feelings about the program regarding her placement experience and the pressure she felt to teach the way her associate teacher did. As Isabelle explained, “So whatever he or she [the associate teacher] says, you’re like ‘okay’; you think like that’s probably a better way of doing it because they’ve been doing it for so long” (Isabelle, Interview, p. 16).

**Issues in the Research Process**

The following section is an examination of aspects of the research that have raised questions and concerns. Here I also explain certain choices I have made throughout the research process and the impact they may, or may not, have on the research.

*No longer a teacher candidate; not quite a researcher.*

In *Practice Makes Practice*, Britzman (1991a) writes about the unique position of the student teacher (or teacher candidate). While they are not yet fully teachers, they are no
longer students, particularly when they are asked to assume a teaching role on their placement. Britzman (1991a) explained how this limbo between teacher and student creates a unique situation for student teachers. As teacher candidates negotiate the two worlds of student and teacher, their developing identity as a teacher can be challenged by their identification with their students. Since the student teacher is also treated as a student (in the university context) and is often not far removed from their own educational experience as a student, they tend to identify more with their students.

I believe that I am also in such a unique place in undertaking this type of research. I recently finished my own teacher education and therefore identify in many ways with the teacher candidates in the program and, particularly, with the teacher candidates I interviewed. My own teacher education experience is fresh in my memory, along with my feelings of frustration and anger with the type of teacher education I received. During the interviews, I felt comforted in hearing similar stories of frustration shared by the teacher candidates. I often took up the position of a teacher candidate to share in the anger and frustration with them. Of course, I am no longer a teacher candidate as I have spent the past two years examining research and considering multicultural education from the perspective of Faculties of Education. In writing a thesis, I have taken on the role of the ‘researcher’, yet, I feel as though I am ‘not quite a researcher’. This description is not meant to diminish my ability to conduct research, but rather, explains my unique position as someone who does not represent the ‘type’ of researcher who dominates the research in the area of multiculturalism. The majority of authors of the studies I examine in my literature review are professors in Faculties of Education who have taught multicultural education courses to teacher candidates. While my experience as a TA for an education
course that addressed critical issues in education provided some insight into the role of
the teacher educator, having never been a teacher educator, I cannot identify with this
position. I do not know what it is like to teach a multicultural education course, to
incorporate critical perspectives, or to face the challenges and resistances of students who
resent having their worldview examined and possibly disturbed. In fact, much of the
research in the area of multicultural education stems from the researchers’ own position
as a teacher educator and the problems they faced (for example, Chizhik, 2003; Finney &
Orr, 1995; Garmon, 2004; Sleeter, 1995). As a recent graduate of a teacher education
program, I am in the unique position to examine issues of multicultural education, not
from the perspective of a teacher educator, but from a perspective of a recent teacher
candidate.

*The trouble with memory.*

Memory has been a key factor in this research. It began with my own memories of
my teacher education program and my feelings of anger and frustration over what had
been missing. But memory is a funny thing. As Ellsworth (1997) explains:

> When we try to remember or reflect on our own experiences, what “comes back”
to us is not exactly what “actually” happened to us. Rather, what returns to mind
and body are ghostly traces of what we manage to ignore and to forget yet again
because of the very way we have structured the questions we ask about our
experiences.

(p. 65)

This raises interesting questions about my own memory and desire to do this research.
What “ghostly traces” of my teacher education was I ignoring?

As stated earlier, at the beginning of the research process I was interested in
determining what ‘made’ a critical teacher candidate. I set out to conduct research that
would determine the factors that contributed to teacher candidates’ critical multicultural
awareness. During this time, however, I did not reflect on my own experience of
development of critical awareness. The problem was that I could not answer for myself
the research questions I had set out to ask my research participants – what were the
factors that contributed to my critical multicultural awareness? I honestly did not know.
Of course, acknowledging the contradictions and complicatedness in my own
development as a teacher candidate would have revealed a fatal flaw in my research –
that one could not determine, fully or completely, the factors that led to teacher
candidates’ critical awareness. However, I conveniently ignored this realization and
rationalized that the teacher candidates I interviewed would give me the answers I was
looking for. In my interviews with teacher candidates, I was asking them to reflect on
their memories of multiculturalism and on the factors they saw as integral to the
development of their critical multicultural awareness. I was asking my participants to do
the memory work that I could not do for myself.

My interviews, however, revealed that memory did not work the way I had hoped it
would. The teacher candidates I interviewed did not know exactly what had influenced
their development of a critical multicultural awareness. While various participants
recalled specific events from the past, all admitted that they could not pinpoint a specific
time, place or situation that contributed to their current understandings of the world. This
forced me to question my own ideas about memory and the type of knowledge it could
provide. I could no longer understand memory as a process through which the ‘truth’
would be revealed. Instead, I had to accept memory as a dynamic force embedded with
past and present meaning. As Simon (1992) stated, “Remembrance is the practice in
which certain images and stories of a collective past are brought together with a person’s
feelings and comprehension of their embodied presence in time and space” (p. 149). In return, this raised important questions about the type of knowledge that was revealed through my interviews with teacher candidates. What was in my transcripts was not the ‘reality’ of teacher education or even the ‘reality’ of teacher candidates’ experiences. My interviews with each participant revealed a specific day, week and year where their feelings, perspectives and memories collided with my interview questions, demeanour and feedback to produce a unique moment where knowledge and memory was shared. Thus, these dynamics of memory emphasize the importance of recognizing that my participants’ responses are positioned within a particular moment in time and, therefore, will be ever changing.

Finding the language.

Throughout every stage of the research process, I have struggled to find the ‘right’ language to describe my research and approach to teacher education. I envisioned a teacher education program that emphasized critical thinking, reflection, and questioning. A program that would allow teacher candidates to imagine new possibilities for education, possibilities that would create equitable, just relations in the classroom and, in turn, challenge the inequality and oppression in society. I knew what I valued in teacher education; finding the words to describe this type of teacher education was the challenge.

I came across ‘anti-oppressive education’ as a possible term to describe my vision of a teacher education program. While the word itself described much of what I saw education working towards – ending oppressive practices that maintain oppressive relations in society – I had to consider the teacher candidates I would be interviewing. Would they be familiar with the term? Would they feel as though they could speak about
it? Since oppression is a word that tends to create a strong reaction, I worried that the term ‘anti-oppressive education’ may be a bit off-putting. I wanted to find a term that teacher candidates would feel comfortable speaking about. There were, however, two teacher candidates who mentioned “anti-oppressive work” (Kerry, Interview, p. 7) and “anti-oppression training” (Jessica, Interview, p. 5) in their interviews. I was surprised and happy to hear that this term was at least familiar to some teacher candidates. Perhaps it was my own experience of not being exposed to these terms during my teacher education that led to my assumption that teacher candidates would not have been exposed to the notion of ‘anti-oppressive education’ and, thus, caused my hesitation in using this term.

When other graduate students heard about my research, they often suggested ‘anti-racist education’ as an appropriate term. I, however, did not consider using this term for my research. While I see the value in an anti-racist education approach and support its use in school, I believed that the term would narrow the discussion to one about race and ethnicity. I wanted to be able to explore the multitude of inequalities and power relations in schools today, race being only one of them.

I first came across the term ‘critical multiculturalism’ in an article by Peter McLaren (1995). I felt that the term captured all aspects of the type of language I was looking for. Critical multiculturalism had its roots in critical theory, which I felt directed much of my research. As well, by using the word ‘multiculturalism’, I thought teacher candidates would be comfortable in discussing this term, especially given the Canadian context. Multiculturalism is a word many of us grew up hearing and continues to be used as a positive term to describe Canada and Canadians. Given its use in the Canadian context,
multiculturalism is also a powerful, ideologically laden word, with close ties to Canadian national identity. Multiculturalism is, in many ways, a buzzword used by various groups for a variety of reasons and interests, resulting in an array of conflicting and contradictory meanings. The co-option of the term multiculturalism may have been a good reason not to use the word at all. However, I felt the term ‘critical multiculturalism’ would be quite useful in my research because it would allow three things to happen. First, I would have to explore the various meanings of multiculturalism and the way they are manifested in education. I would be forced to clearly define the term and my understanding and use of the term in order to prevent any misinterpretation. Second, important work has been done in the area of multicultural education and critical multicultural education. There was a large body of literature that would provide me with solid background and research for analysis. Finally, given the history of multiculturalism in Canada, I also felt that by using the term critical multiculturalism I would be provided with an opportunity to unpack and deconstruct the meanings of multiculturalism in a Canadian context.

Throughout the writing of this thesis, the term social justice is often used in conjunction with critical multiculturalism. Social justice education can be defined as the “full and equal participation of all groups in a society that is mutually shaped to meet their needs” (Bell, 1997, p. 3). I believe that this goal of social justice education is also a goal of critical multicultural education and, therefore, use the term social justice in this research. Many of my participants also used the term social justice throughout their interviews. I believe that the teacher candidates used this term because of their familiarity with the word. The teacher education program in which these teacher candidates were enrolled did not offer any course that explicitly addressed critical multiculturalism, but
the program did require that all teacher candidates take a module on social justice education. The program also had an optional half credit course, which students took in both the Fall and Winter semesters, titled Teaching for Social Justice. For many of the research participants, the Letter of Information sent before the interview was the first time they had heard the term ‘critical multiculturalism’. Despite this, the participants were able to articulate an understanding of how critical multiculturalism could differ from more traditional definitions of multiculturalism.

As much as I struggled to find the ‘right’ language to use for this study, I can never ensure that the readers of this research understand the terms as I intend to present them. As one participant stated, “I think that’s one of the problems in our discussions a lot of the time around… equity issues and everything, a lot of the time we’re not speaking the same language, like we don’t really know what we mean by things” (Kerry, Interview, p. 7). While I do not believe it is possible for people to speak “the same language”, I can at least attempt to be as clear as possible regarding the meaning and purpose of the language I use. The following chapter will examine the various definitions of multiculturalism and the understanding of critical multiculturalism used throughout this research as well as a review of the literature on the multicultural awareness of teacher candidates.
Chapter 3

Literature Review

The purpose of this chapter is to situate my research in the literature on multiculturalism and teacher education. The first section of this chapter will examine the meanings of multiculturalism in a Canadian context, explain the various approaches to multicultural education and define my use of the term critical multiculturalism. The second section of this chapter will examine the past research on critical multicultural awareness in teacher candidates, providing context for this research study.

Multiculturalism in Canada

A brief history of multiculturalism and multicultural policy in Canada is key to understanding the terms, meanings and context of my research. Understanding multiculturalism in Canada is also important to understanding teacher candidates’ conceptions of multiculturalism. The meanings that teacher candidates give to multiculturalism and how they will teach in multicultural ways are inextricably linked to the meanings we give the word in a Canadian context.

Multiculturalism can be understood in a factual sense – diverse people living together. Although Canada is, and has been, a land of many diverse peoples, the existence of physical, cultural, linguistic, and religious differences has not always meant that Canada considered itself to be a multicultural country. This is because multiculturalism can also be understood as ideology – “a set of ideas, ideals, and assumptions about diversity and its status in society” (Fleras & Elliot, 1992, p. 53). When understood this way, the discourse of Canadian multiculturalism can be traced to a specific moment in
Canadian history, when on October 8, 1971 the Prime Minister, Pierre Trudeau, and the Liberal Party announced its Official Multicultural Policy:

For although there are two official languages, there is no official culture, nor does any ethnic group take precedence over any other. No citizen or group of citizens is other than Canadian, and all should be treated fairly… A policy of multiculturalism within a bilingual framework commends itself to the government as the most suitable means of assuring the cultural freedoms of Canadians… A vigorous policy of multiculturalism… can form the base of a society which is based on fair play for all. The government will support and encourage the various cultures and ethnic groups that give structure and vitality to our society. They will be encouraged to share their cultural expression and values with other Canadians and so contribute to a richer life for us all.

(Fleras & Elliot, 1992, p. 281-282)

The declaration of an Official Multicultural policy made it possible for Canadians to view Canada as a ‘multicultural country’ and, subsequently, construct a discourse of multiculturalism. Thus, multiculturalism in Canada is not and has never been a natural state of existence, instead it is an ‘ideological frame’. As Ng (1995) states, “multiculturalism is through and through an artifact produced by the administrative processes of a liberal democratic state in a particular historical conjuncture to re-conceptualize and reorganize changing social, political, and economic realities” (p. 35, italics in original). Thus a ‘multicultural’ Canada was created with specific intent and purpose. As Fleras (2002) explains:

The objective and logic of an official Multiculturalism is fundamentally about Canada-building: That is, to create a coherent and prosperous Canada by incorporating diversity as legitimate and integral without undermining the interconnectedness of the whole or distinctiveness of the parts in the process. The focus is on absorbing minority women and men into a cohesive national framework instead of bringing about transformative change.

(p. 10)

As such, multiculturalism in Canada has focused on integrating ‘other’ cultural groups, particularly new immigrants, and is seen as having little to do with the English or the
French (immigrants to the country at one time in history as well). For example, according to Jansen (2005), it was the change to remove the overtly racist discrimination in immigration laws in the 1960’s where the term ‘visible minority’ began to be used to refer to people who were not of European decent. As Jansen (2005) states, “One cannot consult a government publication on multiculturalism without seeing pictures of non-whites, often in their cultural dress, such as turbans and veils” (p. 26). Consequently, Canadian multiculturalism is not focused on challenging the status quo, but rather, on solving the problem of diversity. The arrival of ‘foreigners’ was seen as a threat to the apparent cohesiveness of Canada and, thus, the goal of the official multicultural policy was to maintain national ‘unity’ by addressing the social problems posed by immigrants (mostly ‘visible minority’ immigrants). These so-called problems are addressed through “culture-blind multiculturalism” (Fleras, 2002, p. 10). As Fleras (2002) explains:

Under a culture-blind Multiculturalism, minority women and men have the right to identify with (not necessarily practice) the cultural traditions of their choice, provided these affiliations do not violate the laws of the land, interfere with the rights of others, or pose a threat to core values and institutions.

(p. 10, italics in original)

Within the Official Multicultural policy, the differences that ‘foreigners’ or ‘visible minorities’ bring to an otherwise cohesive Canada would be tolerated, not accepted, and thus essentialized, homogenized and marginalized as much as possible (James, 2005).

Despite its history, multiculturalism in Canada is often viewed as the Canadian ‘way of life’. As Ng (1995) states, “For all intents and purposes, multiculturalism is a taken-for-granted social fact; that it was invented out of the bureaucratic and ruling relations of Canadian society has been eclipsed” (p.35). Thus, Canadian multiculturalism operates as ideology. Ng (1995) references Gramsci (1971) when she states, “Once an ideological
frame is in place, it renders the very work process that produced it invisible and the idea that it references as ‘common sense’” (p. 36). Like Gramsci’s arguments, Canada as a multicultural country is ‘common sense’; its construction is invisible. One of the ways a society can maintain the common sense belief in ideology is through forms of schooling. Therefore, education has played a fundamental role in the reproduction and acceptance of Official Multiculturalism in Canada.

**Multicultural Education**

Multicultural education is a common phrase found in Faculties of Education, schools, and education policy documents. It has a variety of meanings and connotations, depending on whom one asks. The concept of multicultural education, stemming from notions of multiculturalism, is seen as a direct response to the growing diversity in society. As Kincheloe and Steinberg (1997) state, “Used as a goal, a concept, an attitude, a strategy and a value, multiculturalism has emerged as the eye of a social storm swirling around the demographic changes that are occurring in Western societies” (p.1).

Determining what one means by the term ‘multicultural education’ is no easy task, but nonetheless, a necessary one. I shall attempt to provide a brief summary of multicultural education approaches in order to better explain my own understanding and use of the term ‘critical multicultural education’.

Below is a description of various approaches to multicultural education, started by McLaren (1995) and elaborated on by Kincheloe and Steinberg (1997). Five categories of multicultural education are identified and defined. I explain these categories here not to give the impression that they are stable, fixed or mutually exclusive. In fact, I would argue that most educators merely ‘do’ multicultural education without necessarily
identifying themselves as a multicultural teacher within one specific category. I am also sure that as teachers ‘do’ multiculturalism, there are moments when such teaching fluctuates between conservative approaches and more critical ones. Given my dismissal of stable categories of multicultural education, these forms of multicultural education are presented not as exclusive categories, but as concepts – complex concepts to help explore and understand the ideologies behind various approaches to multicultural education. The critiques of the first four approaches stem from a critical multiculturalist perspective, which will be defined at the end of this chapter.

**Conservative multiculturalism.**

Conservative multiculturalists (more accurately described as monoculturalists) view the growing diversity in society as a problem – a threat to ‘our’ current ‘way of life’. Kincheloe and Steinberg (1997) argue that conservative multiculturalism “is a form of neo-colonialism – a new embrace of the colonialist tradition of white male supremacy” (p. 3). Conservative multiculturalists promote the idea of a ‘common culture’, which requires marginalized groups to “adopt a consensual view of culture and to learn to accept the essentially Euro-American patriarchal norms of the ‘host’ country” (McLaren, 1995, p. 37-38). The conservative multiculturalists notion of common culture can be examined using Gramsci’s critique of the concept of ‘common sense’. For Gramsci (1988), common sense is “the conception of the world which is uncritically absorbed by the various social and cultural environments in which the moral individuality of the average man [sic] is developed” (p. 343). In a conservative multicultural approach, the belief in a ‘common culture’ that is normal, stable, and desirable is a taken-for-granted assumption – it is ‘just the way it is’. As such, conservative multiculturalists view
schooling as a way to address ‘deficits’ in immigrant children by requiring them to assimilate to the Canadian or American way of life; which, as mentioned earlier, is the white, middle-class, male standard.

**Liberal multiculturalism.**

Although liberal multiculturalists do not promote the idea of a common culture, the emphasis continues to be placed on the idea of ‘sameness’, the notion that there is only one race – the ‘human race’. This approach has led to a firm belief in colour blindness and a focus on commonalities that erase the differences between people. Critics have argued that despite all its rhetoric, liberal multiculturalists continue to promote the dominant culture as the standard (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997; McLaren, 1995). As Kincheloe and Steinberg (1997) state, “the unexamined sameness of liberal multiculturalism allows educators and cultural producers to speak the language of diversity but to normalize Eurocentric culture as the tacit norm everyone references” (p. 11). By glossing over the structural and material differences between groups of people and the different positions of power people occupy, liberal multiculturalists uphold the notions of white male as norm and deny the existence of privileges accrued by such a position.

In the context of education, liberal multiculturalists will bring multiculturalism into the classroom. The focus of these multicultural activities, however, are often on how ‘we are all the same’ despite what is considered to be ‘superficial' differences in skin colours, nationalities, genders, and classes, among others. Again, difference is ignored along with the power and privileges that sustain difference.
Pluralist multiculturalism.

A pluralist approach differs from liberal multiculturalism as it focuses on, rather than ignores, difference. However, pluralist approaches do not address white privilege or the Eurocentric norm. The way that difference is understood and approached by pluralist multiculturalists is also problematic. With such an approach “[d]iversity becomes intrinsically valuable and is pursued for its own sake to the point that difference is exoticized and fetishized” (Kincheloe and Steinberg, 1997, p. 15). While difference is valorized, no attempt is made to examine how difference works to position people and groups of people within a hierarchy of power.

Pluralist multicultural educators will often add this diversity to their curriculum. For example, student will read books written by women, people of colour, and others outside of the typical Western canon. Students may also study the ‘heroes’ from various cultures, those that beat all the odds to achieve success. Emphasis is placed on helping students feel proud of their cultural heritage and difference. But, as Kincheloe and Steinberg (1997) state, “[p]ride in one’s heritage… is not a panacea for the effects of years of oppression” (p. 16). Again, the underlying structural inequalities are left unexamined and unchallenged. As Mohanty (1989/1990) explains:

The central issue, then, is not one of merely acknowledging difference; rather, the more fundamental question concerns the kind of difference that is acknowledged and engaged. Difference seen as benign variation (diversity), for instance… bypasses power as well as history to suggest a harmonious empty pluralism.

(p. 181, italics in original)

Left-essentialist multiculturalism.

Essentialism is the belief that there are fixed sets of properties for all categories. When applied to multiculturalism, left-essentialists emphasize the fixed characteristics of
particular identities. As McLaren (1995) states, “there is a tendency to ignore difference as a social and historical construction that is constitutive of the power to represent meanings… [it] treats difference as an ‘essence’ that exists independently of history, culture, and power” (p.41). This approach can have the effect of privileging one identity as the ‘authentic’ identity of a group and ignores the complexity and intersectionality of identities. For example, the word ‘woman’ has been debated and rejected in feminist circles for what has been perceived as an essentializing of the word, which created a meaning of ‘woman’ that simplified and ignored the complex realities of people who identify or are identified by others as ‘woman’. In fact, the idea that such gender categories even exist has also been debated (Butler, 1999).

In educational practice, left-essentialist multiculturalists may reject the traditional curriculum “producing a dominant-culture-is-bad marginalised-culture-is-good inverse dualism” (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997, p. 21). Again, this approach can look similar to other ‘tourist’ approaches to multiculturalism where the main goal is studying the ‘Other’, in this case for the authentic identity of the ‘Other’. Single group studies (Sleeter & Grant, 1999), where one cultural ‘essence’ is explored in a unit or course, is another manifestation of left-essentialist multiculturalism in schools. But, since many of these units are merely ‘added on’ and ghettoized to the margins of the curriculum (for example, Black History Month in February), the ‘regular’ curriculum remains in tact. As Connell (1993) states, “Separate-and-different curricula have some attractions, but leave the currently hegemonic curriculum in place. Social justice requires… reconstructing the mainstream” (p. 44, italics in original).
Redefining Multicultural Education

All of the above approaches to multicultural education have a significant flaw. Despite the varying degrees to which they embrace or acknowledge difference, the simplistic goal of recognizing and affirming diversity ignores the structural and material basis of inequality. As Leistyna & Woodrum (1995) state:

Within such limited models that focus exclusively on the “Other,” the concept of “difference” is often not taken up in terms of recognizing and critically engaging the dominant referent group – the invisible norm of the White, middle-class, heterosexual male by which all others are measured.

(p. 2, italics in original)

The failure to examine whiteness and white privilege limits the extent to which any of the above approaches might actually challenge the status quo, in fact, they may actually further entrench inequalities. As Fusco (1988) explains, “to ignore white ethnicity is to redouble its hegemony by naturalizing it. Without specifically addressing white ethnicity there can be no critical evaluation of the construction of the other” (p. 9).

The majority of these approaches also operate under the assumption that students do not know enough about marginalized groups. Therefore, “supplying students with ‘accurate’ and ‘authentic’ representations of particular cultures… will automatize tolerant attitudes” (Britzman, Santiago-Valles, Jimenez-Munoz, & Lamash, 1993, p. 188-189).

With these approaches, much of the emphasis is placed on activities that revolve around the festivities, food and fashion of the ‘Cultural Other’. They fail to recognize that it is what students do know (or think they know) about marginalized groups that often perpetuate systems of inequality. The issue is not the lack of knowledge about the Other, but the assumed normalcy of the dominant, the norm, against which all is measured.

Overall, these approaches to multicultural education tend to
fall into the trap of essentializing (e.g., perceiving all Blacks to be the same), objectifying (i.e., seeing people as objects of educational policies and practices, rather than as self-determining subjects with a say in their education), or even romanticizing the lives of those on the margins.

(Leistyna & Woodrum, 1995, p. 2)

Whether it is a celebration of sameness or difference, the above approaches to multicultural education “leave unexamined those practices and schooling forms which reinforce the *difference* that makes a difference” (Lewis, 1993, p. 187; italics in original).

Much of the literature has been critical of the more traditional approaches to multicultural education, noting how they are often a part of the dominant ideology that hides social inequalities and perpetuates a system of dominance (Britzman et al., 1993; Chalmers, 1997; Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997; Leistyna & Woodrum, 1995; Mujawamariya & Mahrouse, 2004; McCarthy, 1993; McCarthy, 1996; McLaren, 1995; Wallace, 1993). This criticism has caused many to be sceptical of any mention of the word ‘multiculturalism’ because dominant discourses have been “transmitted and reproduced through notions of multicultural education” (Mujawamariya & Mahrouse, 2004, p. 351). Clearly a redefinition of multicultural education, its purposes and practices, is needed in order to challenge dominant discourses and to educate for equity and justice.

*Critical multiculturalism.*

Critical multiculturalism, which has its roots in critical theory, not only attempts to address the limitations in other approaches to multicultural education, but also provides an understanding of difference, inequality and social relations that work to create a more just society.
In order to understand critical multiculturalism, one must clearly define what is meant by the word ‘culture’. Many traditional approaches to multicultural education understand the word ‘culture’ in multiculturalism as referring to one’s race or ethnicity. A more critical perspective of culture broadens this understanding. Keesing (1990) states that a critical conception of culture

would examine the way symbolic production is linked to power and interest (in terms of class, hierarchy, gender, etc.)… a critical conception of the cultural would begin with the assumption that in any “community” or “society” there will be multiple, subdominant and partially submerged cultural traditions (again, in relations to power, rank, class, gender, age, etc.), as well as the dominant tradition.

(p. 57)

Within this definition there is an understanding that culture is not limited to race and ethnicity, but, rather, is linked to larger social forces that shape all aspects of a person’s identity. Culture can be based on one’s gender, sexuality, social class, etc. As such, it is understood that there is a female culture, a male culture, a queer culture, a middle-class culture, and a deaf culture, among many others. It is also understood that one can occupy multiple positions in multiple cultures (for example, a queer, Black female). This complexity and intersectionality of identity is acknowledged and embraced.

The study of cultural politics has also provided more in-depth and critical understandings of culture and how it operates in society. Important questions are raised in culture politics; questions that critical multiculturalists also attempt to explore. These questions include those posed by Jordan and Weedon (1995):

Whose culture shall be the official one and whose shall be subordinated? What cultures shall be regarded as worthy of display and which shall be hidden? Whose history shall be remembered and whose forgotten? What images of social life shall be projected and which shall be marginalized? What voices shall be heard and which be silenced? Who is representing whom and on what basis?

(p. 4).
Rather than viewing ‘culture’ as a neutral, natural state of existence, cultural politics recognizes the power of culture and its function in society. It is understood that “[s]ocial inequality is legitimated through culture. It is through intersubjective modes of thinking and acting that the relative domination of one group over another is made to appear logical, acceptable, ‘natural’, perhaps even prescribed by God” (Jordan & Weedon, 1995, p. 5; italics in original). Similarly, from a critical multicultural perspective representations of race, class, and gender are understood as the result of larger social struggles over signs and meanings and in this way emphasize not simply textual play or metaphorical displacement as a form of resistance… but stress the central task of transforming the social, cultural, and institutional relations in which meanings are generated.

(McLaren, 1995, p. 42)

From this standpoint, differences in race, class, and gender (among others) are historically and culturally constructed.

In the context of education, critical multiculturalists examine social inequalities based on race, social class, gender, sexual orientation, and ability (among others) and students are given opportunities to question power relations and reflect on their own privilege and role in systematic oppression. For the educator, schools and classrooms are viewed as “active sites of public intervention and social struggle” (Giroux & McLaren, 1986, p. 221) with the goal of transforming society in such a way as to “revise existing hegemonic arrangements” and “intervene in those power relations that organize difference” (McLaren, 1995, p. 49). This approach moves beyond ‘tourist’ approaches to learning about the Cultural Other to understanding and critically examining the ways in which ‘Otherness’ is constructed and the normalcy of the dominant group maintained.

In order to understand the construction of the ‘Other’, one must examine how knowledge is derived and how that has shaped the way people understand themselves and
the world. This has been one of the major failings of a traditional approach to multicultural education, where ignorance has been “understood as an ordinary state, not as an effect of the knowledge one holds” (Britzman, et al., 1993, p. 195). Students need to understand how their values, beliefs, behaviours, and ignorances have been shaped by their social positions before they can begin to understand the values, beliefs, and behaviours of others. As Montecinos (1995) states, “Learning about the Cultural Other is learning about oneself as one’s own life is, in a sense, shaped by the life of the Cultural Other” (pp. 296-297). Critical multicultural education, therefore, sets out to examine the dominant in order to deconstruct the ways in which oppression has and continues to operate in society. The hope is that such knowledge can challenge the current oppressive systems in society.

The next section will explore the research on multicultural education and critical multicultural education with a focus on the development of multicultural awareness in teacher candidates.

**Research on Multicultural Education**

There is significant literature on the issues of multiculturalism and multicultural education. This literature can be divided into three categories – the multicultural awareness of teacher candidates, best practices for teaching multicultural education, and the theoretical and philosophical underpinnings of multicultural education. Given the purpose of this research, I tried to focus on those studies that set out to examine teacher candidates’ awareness and perspectives of multicultural education.

The majority of the studies analyzed in this chapter were written from the perspectives of U.S. researchers and teacher educators. While, in many ways, the findings
of Canadian and U.S. studies were similar, the history and development of multiculturalism and multicultural education are quite different in each country. Although this study is not intended to explore these differences, it is important for the reader to be aware of the sources of the literature and to consider the differences that this might imply.

**The Language of the Literature**

Given my interest in critical multiculturalism and critical teaching in teacher education programs, I focused on research that addressed multicultural education from a critical perspective. While I found texts that discussed the theory of critical multiculturalism (Akkari, 2001; Fleras, 2002; Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997; McLaren, 1995), I did not come across any studies on teacher candidates’ multicultural awareness that described their approach as ‘critical multiculturalism’. Researchers used a variety of other terms to describe their approach; these included a social reconstructionist view of multiculturalism (Goodwin, 1994; Levine-Rasky, 2001; McCall, 1995), antiracist education (Mujawamariya & Mahrouse, 2004; Young & Buchanan, 1996), culturally responsive teaching (Gay & Kirkland, 2003), ethnocultural equity education (Lund, 1998), and an emphasis on social justice (Chizhik, 2003; Chizhik & Chizhik, 2002; Greenman & Dieckmann, 2004; Wallace, 2000). Other researchers described their approach in ways that emphasized the critical examination of inequalities in society without actually providing a name for such an approach (for example, Finney & Orr, 1995; Jennings & Smith, 2002; Schick, 2002; Weisman & Garza, 2002). Here I will provide a brief description of some of these approaches.

A social reconstructionist view of multicultural education is commonly attributed to Sleeter and Grant (1999) who define it in the following way:
Education That Is Multicultural and Social Reconstructionist deals more directly... with oppression and social structural inequality based on race, social class, gender, and disability... the approach prepares future citizens to reconstruct society so that it better serves the interests of all groups of people especially those who are of color, poor, female, gay, lesbian, transexual [sic], disabled, or any combination of these. This approach is visionary.

(p. 188-189)

By choosing to name their approach as “Education That Is Multicultural and Social Reconstructionist”, Sleeter and Grant ground this approach in the Reconstructionist philosophy of education. Like critical multiculturalism, this approach is rooted in critical theory and emphasizes notions such as democracy and social justice.

Young and Buchanan (1996) mention antiracist education as their approach to multicultural education; however, they do not provide a clear definition of what is meant by ‘antiracist education’. Mujawamariya and Mahrouse (2004) describe their goal of “social justice and equity” (p. 340) and use the terms ‘multicultural education’ and ‘anti-racist education’ in their work, but, again, the differences between these two terms is not clear. Mujawamariya and Mahrouse (2004) also mention that anti-racism in Canada is described as critical multiculturalism in the United States, but as the previous chapter explained, critical multiculturalism is not limited to explorations of race and ethnicity, as is implied by the term ‘anti-racist education’. Critical multiculturalists make clear that their definition of culture includes gender, sexuality, social class, ability, and other identities. Thus, the term anti-racism does not adequately capture the other ‘isms’ that critical multiculturalists are working to end, such as sexism, classism, and heterosexism, among others. Although critical multiculturalism is considered by some to be an American term (see Lund, 1998), there are a number of Canadians who have opted to use this term as well. For example, Fleras (2002) argued for a critical multicultural approach
as an alternative to Canada’s current official multicultural policy. Given the definition I provided for critical multiculturalism in the previous chapter, I do not consider it to be a term equivalent to anti-racist education or one that is only applicable in an American context.

Finally, ethnocultural equity education was defined by Lund (1998) as a loose grouping of anti-racist and multicultural education that “allows for the critical examination of inequalities in curricular content, teaching practices, hiring procedure, and policies” (p. 270).

The variety of terms highlights the vast differences in, and lack of consensus on, language used to describe a seemingly similar approach to multicultural education. It also points to a more fundamental discord surrounding the underlying meanings of multiculturalism. As Grant and Sachs (1995) state, “in the literature and in everyday discourse… the term ‘multicultural education’ takes on numerous meanings, leading to conceptual confusion and ambiguity” (p. 93).

Although clear definitions of the above terms were often not provided in the literature, I considered these studies to be moving towards a more critical approach to multicultural education as they often addressed the structural nature of inequalities, the dominant European norm, and white privilege. While their language may be disparate, these studies are tied together by several major themes around critical multiculturalism and teacher education. These themes will be explored throughout this chapter as I aim to make problematic many of the typical assumptions about teacher candidates, critical multiculturalism, and teacher education.
The Problem of Diversity

For the majority of the studies I examined, the rationale for multicultural education focuses on the ‘problem’ of diversity. A number of authors comment that the majority of teachers being educated by Faculties of Education are white females, while the student body in elementary and secondary schools is becoming increasingly diverse, particularly with an increase in non-white students (for example, Brown, 2004; Chizhik, 2003; Chizhik & Chizhik, 2005; Garmon, 2004; Johnson, 2002; McCall, 1995; Milner, Flowers, Moore Jr., Moore III, & Flowers, 2003; Sleeter, 2001). As Garmon (2004) states, “A major goal of the multicultural focus of many teacher education programs is to better prepare a mostly White and female teaching force to work effectively with students from racial / cultural backgrounds different than their own” (p. 201). This rationale for multicultural teacher education believes that white, female teachers are not adequately prepared to teach diverse students; therefore, the focus of the multicultural education course is to prepare white female teachers to ‘effectively’ educate the Cultural Other. An emphasis is placed on the challenges created by a diverse society and the needs of diverse students (Barry & Lechner, 1995; Goodwin, 1994; Levine-Rasky, 2001; McCall, 1995; Mujawariya & Mahrouse, 2004, Weisman & Garza, 2002). Again, with this focus, the issue seems to be one of educating teachers on how to ‘deal with’ diversity and meet the special needs of the Cultural Other. As Haberman (1996) states, these studies:

operationally define poverty, urbanness, or cultural diversity as special conditions and prepare teachers for teaching it in the same conceptual way they prepare teachers for teaching other individuals with handicapping conditions (by adding a course in urban or multicultural education).

(p. 759)
This rationale for multicultural education reinforces a belief that multiculturalism is about the race, ethnicity or national heritage of an individual and that the goal of multicultural education should be to ‘fix’ the problem of female, white teachers not being adequately prepared to teach their non-white students.

Despite their claim to more critical approaches to multicultural education, the literature continues to define culture solely in terms of a racialized, Cultural Other. And diversity, whether defined solely in terms of race or a variety of identities, is constructed as a problem to be solved. In this view, social problems exist due to the differences in bodies rather than stemming from the structural and institutional embeddedness of oppression in society. Again, the ‘problem’ is understood as the inadequate education of non-white students that must be remedied through a more sufficient preparation of white, female teachers.

While preparing teachers for the cultural diversity of the classroom is an important part of teacher education and multicultural education, it is only one small aspect of it. Certainly it is troubling that the research finds that teacher candidates do not seem to be aware of or sensitive to the cultural difference of their students, including cultural and religious holidays, celebrations, and ethnic traditions. But what is more troubling is the lack of awareness of issues of oppression and inequality. Critical multiculturalism makes problematic the education of all students, not just the education of non-white students. The current education of most students in schools, public or private, is seen as supporting a dominant, Eurocentric view of society, a view that continues the perpetuation of racism, sexism, classism, heterosexism, ableism, and other social inequalities.
The focus on bodies of white, female teachers and non-white students reinforces a simplistic notion of multicultural education evident in liberal, pluralist, and left-essentialist approaches. As discussed earlier, these approaches fail to consider and examine the dominant. According to this rationale, the solution to the ‘problem’ of diversity is simple – add a multicultural course to the teacher education program.

**Teacher Candidate Resistance**

All of the literature in the area of teacher candidates’ multicultural awareness seemed to agree that multicultural education should be a part of teacher education programs (although there is no consensus on how this would look). As such, the research has taken to examining how well multicultural courses are preparing future teachers. What the research claims to find is that teacher candidates are not prepared to teach in diverse settings even when critical approaches to multicultural education are being taught in Faculties of Education. This continued lack of preparedness is explained through teacher candidates’ resistance to critical approaches to multicultural education.

A number of researchers do advocate that teacher candidates needed to “develop critical understandings of systematic issues of power, bias, and privilege in order to work effectively in diverse settings” (Weisman & Garza, 2002, p. 33). However, researchers have also found that teacher candidates are resistant to this type of multicultural education (Brown, 2004; Chizhik, 2003; Chizhik & Chizhik, 2005; Cooney & Akintunde, 1999; Finney & Orr, 1995; Gay & Kirkland, 2003; Greenman & Dieckmann, 2004; Levine-Rasky, 2001; Lund, 1998; Maher & Treteault, 1997; McCall, 1995; Mujawamariya & Mahrouse, 2004; Rodriguez, 2002; Schick, 2002; Sleeter, 2001; Weisman & Garza, 2002). Rodriguez (2002) categorizes resistance in multicultural
education courses as either resistance to pedagogical change or resistance to ideological change. Pedagogical resistance is opposition to student-centered, inquiry-based, social constructivist teaching strategies. Teacher candidates may view these approaches as unrealistic or risky and, therefore, revert to strategies that afford them more control. Ideological resistance is opposition to the idea of using education as a means of creating social justice, “to use knowledge for self-empowerment and transformative action” (Rodriguez, 2002, p.1018). These teacher candidates see their job as teaching the prescribed content of the curriculum, which they believe to be neutral and unbiased, unlike the ‘agenda’ of a critical approach.

The research also documents the various ways teacher candidate resistance is demonstrated. A major form of resistance is a lack of preparation for class or a refusal to engage in class discussions or activities (Brown, 2004; Chizhik & Chizhik, 2005; Gay & Kirkland, 2003). As Gay and Kirkland (2003) explain, a “common maneuver [sic] that preservice teachers use to avoid analyzing their thoughts, beliefs, biases and behaviours about racial and culture diversity in education is silence” (p. 183).

Denial of deeply entrenched inequality is documented as another form of resistance. Teacher education students may attempt to build alliances with other students in the class “who will defend and protect their shared values” (Brown, 2004, p. 326) while avoiding contact with groups who hold different views. Even when teacher candidates have realized that there is no denying the inequality in society, they may continue to deny their connection to it (Tatum, 1992). In this context, teacher education students resist exploring how their attitudes, values, and behaviours are influenced by the legacy of racism, sexism, and classism (among others). Such denial results in silence.
Researchers also note that critical multicultural education courses can leave a class feeling paralyzed. The paralyzed class develops when courses promote the belief that inequality is “external, entrenched, and outside of human agency” (Davis, 1992, p. 235). Teacher education students begin to feel hopeless and give up; they no longer want to talk about the issues because change feels impossible. In Tatum’s (1992) experience, a form of paralysis can also result from the feelings of guilt that students, particularly White students, experience when learning about the ways that they have been privileged through the oppression of others. Similar to the other forms of resistance, paralysis also leads to silence.

Finally, researchers document the anger and rage that can develop in critical multicultural education courses, which acts as another barrier to knowledge. Courses that address issues of inequality often deal with emotionally charged topics, such as racial harassment and sexual violence, which can enrage students. Often student anger is not focused on the problem, but gets directed towards a classmate who is a member of the dominant group (Davis, 1992). This type of rage can be “debilitating and immobilizing” and can result in “reductionist thinking: everything wrong with the world is attributable to patriarchy or white racism or capitalist hegemony” (Davis, 1992, p. 236). The resulting classroom environment can be one of intolerance, where teacher candidates feel too threatened to share their ideas. As Davis (1992) explains, “The angry class becomes the divided class, students who do not speak to each other” (p. 236). Once again, there is silence.

There are three key points I would like to discuss regarding teacher candidate resistance – the notion of silence as resistance, the view that resistance is an individual
problem, and the selection of the ‘ideal’ teacher candidate as a solution to teacher candidate resistance.

_Silence as resistance._

The main issue with teacher candidate resistance, whether it is a lack of participation, denial, paralysis, or rage, is the resulting silence. This silence, on the part of teacher candidates, is seen as a deliberate attempt to avoid learning more critical approaches to multicultural education. But, an act of silence can occur for a variety of reasons that go beyond simplistic notions of silence as resistance. Silence is quite complex and is linked to the wider discourse in which it is located. As Foucault (1980) states:

> Silence itself – the things one declines to say, or is forbidden to name, the discretion that is required between different speakers – is less the absolute limit of discourse, the other side from which it is separated by a strict boundary, than an element that functions alongside the things said, with them and in relation to them within over-all strategies. There is no binary division to be made between what one says and what one does not say; we must try to determine the different ways of not saying such things, how those who can and those who cannot speak of them are distributed, which type of discourse is authorized, or which form of discretion is required in either case. There is not one but many silences, and they are an integral part of the strategies that underlie and permeate discourses.

(p. 27).

Work in feminist theory has helped to explore and reveal the complexities of silence in the classroom (for example, Britzman, 1991a; Ellsworth, 1989; Lewis, 1993; Lewis & Simon, 1995). As Britzman (1991a) states, “Silences express power struggles” (p. 17). The students in a classroom can silence each other, treat each other as invisible, and privilege certain voices over others. In Ellsworth’s (1989) experience, students in her class had remained silent because of

> fear of being misunderstood and/or disclosing too much and becoming too vulnerable; memories of bad experiences in other contexts of speaking out… confusions about levels of trust and commitment surrounding those who were allies to another group’s struggles; resentment by some students of color for
feeling that they were expected to disclose “more” and once again take the burden for doing the pedagogic work of educating White students/professor about the consequences of White middle-class privilege; and resentment by White students for feeling that they had to prove they were not the enemy.

(p. 316)

The power dynamics of a classroom and the people in it cannot be overlooked when assessing student behaviour and the reasons for it in the classroom.

Lewis and Simon’s (1995) examination of the dominant discourse in a graduate course also highlights how certain groups can be silenced or choose to remain silent. In this case, the women in the course were silent as the men dominated the classroom discussion and directed it by constructing frameworks and requiring content to be taken up and discussed within these frameworks. Lewis described this classroom climate:

the men were allowed to speak at length – and did. Their speaking was seldom if ever interrupted. When a woman and a man began speaking at the same time, the woman always deferred to the man. Women’s speaking was often reinterpreted by the men through phrases such as “what she really means…” More than just a few times the actual talk of women was attributed in a later discussion by a man to a man. Women’s ideas – sometimes reworded, sometimes not – were appropriated by men and then passed off as their own. Whenever a woman was able to cut through the oppressive discourse, the final attempt at silencing took the form of aggressive yelling.

(Lewis & Simon, 1995, p. 258-259, italics in original)

Given this classroom environment, many of the women in the course chose to remain silent and withdrew from participating in the class, not as an act of resistance to critical ideas presented in the course, but, rather, due to the oppressive conditions under which they would have been required to speak.

Often silence is described in the literature as a passive act on the part of teacher candidates to avoid engaging in critical discussions. As Chizhik and Chizhik (2005) state, “students passively resisted multicultural discourse by refusing to participate in class discussions” (p. 118). But rather than students ‘passively’ resisting, an act of silence can
be viewed as an active, deliberate position taken as a challenge to the existing inequality and power relations that exist in the classroom. As Lewis (1993) states, “Silence in this case is a political practice that challenges how social meaning is made… it opens the possibility for drawing competing meanings and competing discourses out of social relations” (p. 49). Similarly, in critical theory resistance has been redefined “as a legitimate response to domination, used to help individuals or groups deal with oppression… part of a larger political project that is working towards change” (Leistyna, Woodrum, & Sherblom, 1995, p. 343).

The meaning of silence is complex and deeply embedded in social and historical contexts, not merely the individual’s lack of open-mindedness. Thus, it is highly problematic to view silence as a sign of resistance to the content of a given course, in this case a critical multicultural education course. To make such a simple, sweeping claim, is to ignore the underlying power and social relations that divide a classroom and the students in it. It makes invisible the dominant discourses, which allow certain things to be said and others to not be said. It disregards the structure and construction of classroom dynamics – who sets the agenda, who dominates, who interrupts, who controls? Ultimately, it hides the bigger issues around knowledge, how it is constructed, how it is transmitted, and how it is given legitimacy.

Teacher candidates are silent for a variety of reasons that may have more to do with the structure of the classroom, specific approaches to critical multiculturalism and the larger discourses in teacher education. It is these discourses around teaching and learning in Faculties of Education that are ignored by the majority of research on multicultural
education and teacher candidates. According to the research, teacher candidate resistance is not located within these larger discourses, but rather, in the individual.

Resistance and the individual.

A common theme throughout the literature is the emphasis that is placed on the individual, that student resistance is an issue of close-mindedness. A number of explanations are provided for teacher candidates’ lack of open-mindedness. First, teacher candidates enter multicultural courses with their own preconceived notions about the inequality in society (Chizhik & Chizhik, 2005). Many teacher candidates believe that North America is an equal and just society, “a meritocracy where individual efforts are fairly rewarded” (Tatum, 1992, p. 6). Therefore, examples of racism, sexism, and other forms of discrimination are viewed as an individual phenomenon. Finney and Orr’s (1995) research revealed that it was difficult for teacher candidates to move beyond this simplistic, liberal/individualistic approach in order to see the systemic ways groups of people have been oppressed. While this may be true for a number of teacher candidates, little explanation is provided as to why this may be happening and how Faculties of Education may contribute to this problem. Instead, researchers continue to focus on the individual teacher candidate. For example, when discussing a teacher candidate who resisted the notion that racism still existed in the United States, Gay and Kirkland (2004) write, “Individuals like this are incredibly naive… these preservice teachers do not interrogate the sources of their standards of universality” (p.184). Again, little explanation was provided as to why this resistance is taking place outside of the “naive” individual.
This view of the closed-minded individual has also been attributed to the entire teacher candidate population. As Kincheloe (1993) states, “teacher education students tend not to be seekers of alternative ways of seeing; they often are not especially interested in finding new lenses through which to conceptualize knowledge and pedagogy” (p. 14). The view of teacher candidates as conservative and resistant to change continues to place all responsibility for resistance, and the solution to resistance, on the individual. Without a deeper examination of the structural influences and discourses in education, the only possible cause for resistance is that there is something ‘wrong’ with teacher candidates. As Ellsworth (1997) states:

> when educational researchers don’t politicize student resistance to school knowledge in terms of class, gender, or race interests, they usually see it as a clinical problem… it’s usually seen as some dysfunction or noise in cognition or attention which can and should be remedied to make full understanding possible. (p. 77)

Ellsworth goes on to add that:

> the notion of “student resistance” as it circulates in sociologies of education could be seen as challenge to fully reflective understanding. But resistance isn’t usually discussed in terms of the impossibility of full and reflective understanding itself. Usually, it is seen to be more about social and cultural contexts that lead students to refuse to go along with official school knowledge after an understanding of its political and economic interests is already achieved. (p. 77)

According to Ellsworth (1997), ‘resistance’ or a student not ‘getting it’ tells us more about the impossibility of teaching than is does about the inadequacies of individual teacher candidates. Perhaps what is required in order to understand this issue of resistance is a shift in perspectives, from considering the teacher candidate as resistant to examining the Faculty of Education’s “assumption that ‘their problem’ was not buying into ‘our’ version of reality” (Lather, 1991, p. 142). This would require an examination of the
discourses of teaching and learning in Faculties of Education and what can be said and cannot be said in the classroom. But, as mentioned earlier, few of the researchers in this area have attempted to examine the larger structures in which teacher candidate resistance is located.

*Selecting the ‘ideal’ teacher candidate as a solution to resistance.*

Building on the notion that resistance is an individual problem, researchers argue that it can, therefore, be ‘fixed’ based on the types of individuals chosen for teacher education programs. Haberman (1996) and Haberman and Post (1998) outline several criteria that would help Faculties of Education identify “star teachers” (Haberman & Post, 1998, p. 104). As Haberman (1996) argues “a primary means for gaining more culturally sensitive teachers is to recruit and select from populations who have themselves had successful experiences in urban high schools” (p.52). Although Haberman (1996) looked at the ideal teacher candidates for urban school settings, the criteria or predispositions he identified have been taken up by other researchers as a model to follow in order to recruit culturally sensitive teacher candidates (for example, Garmon, 2004; Johnson, 2002; Levine-Rasky, 2001; Sleeter, 2001). The belief is that further research can be used to develop a definitive set of markers or “signposts” (Levine-Rasky, 2001) in order to accurately identify teacher candidates who will be receptive to critical approaches to multicultural education.

The research by Haberman (1996) and Haberman and Post (1998) provides a clear picture of who the ‘ideal’ teacher candidate would be. As Haberman (1996) states, “the best and the brightest teachers are not 25-year-old white females from small towns or
suburbs with high GPAs who ‘always wanted to teach’” (p. 755). Instead, the “best and brightest teachers” will meet the following criteria (only a few are provided here):

- Did not decide to teach until after graduation from college.
- Tried (and succeeded) at several jobs or careers.
- Is between 30 and 50 years of age
- Attended an urban high school…
- Has had personal and continuing experiences with violence and with living “normally” in a violent community and city…
- Is not likely to be of Euro-American background…

(Haberman, 1996, p. 755)

According to Haberman (1996), these teacher candidates are also likely to have some experiences with the following:

- Violence at home, either abuse from a spouse or child abuse
- Bankruptcy…
- Inability to secure affordable home or car insurance…
- Chemical or drug dependency…

(p. 755)

Harberman’s (1996) criteria for the “best and brightest teachers” describe a very specific type of teacher candidate. But what does it mean to try to identify specific criteria for ‘ideal’ teacher candidates?

In trying to determine the characteristics of the ideal teacher candidate, there is an assumption that marginalized people are more open and progressive and that the knowledge they possess is critical. But this is not always the case. As Mujawamariya and Mahrouse (2004) state, “one cannot take for granted that minority teachers will necessarily be more critical or have more developed understandings of multicultural issues” (p. 345). Identity is not stable or exclusive, but rather, intersects with other identities creating multiple perspectives within, what one may try to define as, a specific culture group. As Montecinos (1995) explains, “Individuals, as well as groups, can
recognize and articulate a range of voices because they simultaneously belong to multiple social groups whose boundaries are constantly shifting” (p. 297).

A question is also raised as to whether or not Haberman’s (1996) criteria actually indicate the type of teacher candidate who is receptive to critical approaches to multiculturalism. The teacher candidates I interviewed came from a wide range of backgrounds and experiences. Many would not meet Haberman’s (1996) criteria, yet all seemed quite interested in and open to a critical approach to multicultural education. Reflecting on this group of teacher candidates, I would find it quite difficult to determine a common set of characteristics. In fact, the only common trait I can identify is that they were all enrolled in the same teacher education program. Not one teacher candidate, however, attributed their multicultural awareness to the program. And, although they seemed confident that their education program did not contribute to their awareness, they all had great difficulty in identifying the so-called ‘factors’ that did. The teacher candidates seemed to feel as though there were multiple and intersecting influences. For example, Dan felt that his mother had an impact on his thinking and awareness, but, as he stated, “that’s a piece of it, but I don’t think it’s all of it. I don’t quite know where I sort of picked it up” (Interview, p. 3). The difficulty these teacher candidates had in trying to identify their own process of learning and development raises questions about how an outside researcher would achieve this task. Can such criteria actually be determined? And should Faculties of Education be concerned with identifying ‘ideal’ teacher candidates?

While the identification of an ‘ideal’ teacher candidate may not be possible, one cannot deny that teacher education programs already select teacher candidates based on a certain set of criteria, a point also made by Haberman (1996). This selection is often
based on grades, answers to question on the application, and volunteer experience with children or previous experience in teaching (like teaching swimming lessons). While I do not think a more selective process is necessary (or even possible), I do think it is important to consider the ways in which the current selection process limits and prevents certain people from entering the teacher education program. For example, an emphasis on volunteer experience with children limits applicants to those who have a certain amount of economic privilege and who, therefore, have enough time and money to volunteer. This excludes potential teacher candidates who had to work for paid employment through high school, in order to support themselves or their families, and could not participate in volunteer opportunities. Rather than looking for ways to narrow down the selection of teacher candidates, a more open and fair selection process should be implemented, allowing potential teacher candidates from a variety of backgrounds to bring their perspectives to a teacher education program.

In the end, the desire to identify the criteria of the ideal teacher candidate assumes that being able to do so would ‘fix the problem’ of resistance. But resistance to critical teaching is not an individual problem; it is rooted in the discourses around what it means to learn to teach in a Faculty of Education. It is this discourse that makes certain things possible and others not, including the possibility or impossibility of a critical approach to multicultural education. In order to examine the project of critical multicultural education, one must first understand the dominant discourse in the teacher education program within which critical multiculturalism is required to operate.

In the following chapter, key discourses in teacher education will be identified through the work of Britzman (1986, 1991a), Simon (1992), Ellsworth (1997), and
Felman (1982). These concepts will then be used in the second part of this thesis to analyze the interview data and to situate the comments of teacher candidates within a larger discourse of what it means to learn how to teach in a Faculty of Education. What will make this analysis unique, however, is the focus on critical multicultural education and how it, too, is situated within these discourses.
Chapter 4

Conceptual Framework

This chapter will explain key theoretical concepts from the work of Britzman (1986, 1991a), Simon (1992), Felman (1982), and Ellsworth (1997). These concepts will be used in the data analysis chapters to examine and interpret the interview data.

“Discourses of the Real in Teacher Education”

The title of this section is borrowed from a chapter in Deborah Britzman’s (1991a) book, *Practice Makes Practice*. Britzman uses this chapter to identify the “discourses of the real” that constructed the perspectives of her participants. Through interviews with cooperative (associate) teachers, school administrators and teacher educators, Britzman (1991a) demonstrated the ways in which the ‘official’ perspective of teacher education is understood and practiced by those within teacher education. “[B]ased on a combination of common sense, lived experience, authoritative and internally persuasive discourses, and the practical knowledge built from the subjective in their teaching lives” (Britzman, 1991a, p. 176), these various actors in teacher education provide insight into their understanding of the ‘reality’ of teacher education and, in turn, how their practices are influenced by this understanding of the real. In this section, Britzman’s (1991a) concept of the discourses of the real will be used to outline common beliefs about teaching and learning that dominate in teacher education programs.

Any approach to multiculturalism, including critical multiculturalism, is subject to the constraints and possibilities afforded by the dominant discourse of the institution. Critical multicultural teaching is occurring within a specific discourse around what it means to learn how to teach. This plays a significant role in shaping how multicultural education is
taught to teacher candidates and how teacher candidates perceive it. The key question is how aspects of a teacher education program work to construct a discourse of the real that makes certain understandings of what it means to learn to teach possible and others not and how a critical multicultural approach is situated within this discourse.

Using the work of Foucault, Jordan and Weedon (1995) state that discourse “signifies forms of knowledge, ways of constituting meaning of the world, which take a material form, have an institutional location and play a key role in the constitution of individuals as subjects” (p. 14). Like Britzman (1991a), I am concerned with how the discourse of the real in the teacher education program (what is understood as ‘reality’ in teacher education) constructs and defines knowledge and meaning, how it is implicated in the structure and design of the program, and how it constructs teacher candidates as subjects. In other words, it is an examination of the sense of the real within the program that legitimates the program’s design, purpose, and actions with regard to teacher education, allowing certain ideas about what it means to learn to teach to become common sense. As Smith and Zantirotis (1989) explain, “An important effect of discourse about the real is the differentiation between appropriate and inappropriate conceptions of teaching that seems obvious on the basis of an appeal to the ‘truth’ and the credibility of practicality” (p. 112).

How does one learn to teach? Within any Faculty of Education, this question has a variety of answers that are often in conflict with each other. One side of this debate is the understanding that one learns to teach through an examination of the theory and philosophies of teaching. This can take the form of theoretically based courses offered by a Faculty of Education. The other side emphasizes that one learns how to teach through
experience. This is often manifested through the ‘practice teaching’ or ‘placement’ aspect of teacher education programs where teacher candidates are placed in schools with associate teachers. Courses can also reinforce the ‘practical’ aspects of teaching by providing teacher candidates with ‘teaching tools’, such as lesson plans, strategies and classroom management techniques as opposed to theoretical concepts. Most teacher educators probably fall somewhere between the two extremes, with varying emphasis on theory and practice and the relations between them. The result is little consensus as to what makes a teacher. As Britzman (1991a) states, “There has never been a common agreement as to how one becomes a teacher. Teaching and learning have never been stabilized by a unitary meaning” (p. 175). Teacher educators, therefore, answer the question – ‘how does one learn to teach?’ – from a variety of different standpoints, but teacher educators’ perspectives are not the only viewpoints that influence the answer to this question. Associate teachers (the teachers with whom teacher candidates are placed with in schools) and the teacher candidates, themselves, have their own understanding of what it means to become a teacher.

The perspectives of associate teachers often come into conflict with the perspectives of the teacher education program (Britzman, 1991a). Associate teachers obviously hold a variety of ideas concerning what it means to learn to teach. These may include an emphasis on the natural ability of teachers, the belief that teaching is about doing and that theory is a ‘waste of time’ and not applicable to practice, and that Faculties of Education are out of touch with the ‘reality’ of classroom life. A more common perspective (and certainly one that is not limited to associate teachers) is the belief in the value of the teaching placement experience. As Britzman (1991a) states, “For many of these
professionals, experience is viewed as already possessing a dynamic power; it is approached as if it was the source of knowledge and pedagogy, and as if it was delineated space” (p. 214). Thus, learning to teach is largely a function of the teaching placement or, as Britzman (1991a) would say, the practice of practice teaching.

The definition of how one learns to teach is also influenced by the vast amount of time teacher candidates have spent in the education system. From kindergarten though university, teacher candidates enter a teacher education program having spent a large number of years as students observing teachers. According to Britzman (1991a), “The mass experience of public education has made teaching one of the most familiar professions in this culture” (p. 3). Teacher candidates have their own ideas about how they were taught, how they learned best, and memories of their favourite and least favourite teachers. Certainly teacher candidates’ biographies as students in the education system have had a significant impact on their understanding of what it means to teach.

The various actors in teacher education along with various definitions of teaching and learning result in a plethora of contradictory meanings of how one becomes a teacher. These competing discourses swirl around inside the walls of Faculties of Education, but not all are given equal footing when it comes to the design and implementation of teacher education programs. Certain perspectives and meanings of what it means to learn to teach take dominance and work to create a discourse of the real within the Faculty. This discourse of the ‘reality’ of learning to teach justifies the actions and practices of a teacher education program and, in turn, make it difficult for new practices to emerge (such as critical multicultural education). What follows is an examination of some of the specific discourses in teacher education.
Britzman, in her 1986 article and in *Practice Makes Practice* (1991a), identifies three cultural myths that influence how one understands what it means to be a teacher. As Britzman (1986) explains, these cultural myths “provide a set of ideal images, definitions, justifications and measures for thought and activity, and sustain a naturalized view of the reality it seeks to encode” (p. 448). It is through these myths that teacher candidates understand and negotiate what it means to learn how to teach. Britzman’s (1986, 1991a) three cultural myths – everything depends on the teacher, the teacher as expert, and teachers are self-made – are outlined below.

*Everything depends on the teacher.*

The first myth identified Britzman (1986) sees the teacher as the individual in the classroom upon which everything depends. As Britzman (1991a) explains, “Everything – student learning, the presentation of curriculum, and social control – is held to be within the teacher’s domain, while the teacher’s isolated classroom existence is accepted as the norm” (p. 223). The expectation is that a teacher is not only one who can teach their subject, but also deal with the social and cultural situations that might arise in the classroom. And, since a teacher’s success is based on their ability to do it all, emphasis is placed on maintaining classroom control as a way to achieve this goal. In this context, when the unexpected arises, the teacher should be prepared to contain and control it. The unexpected threatens control, control that is necessary to maintain an environment where the linear process of learning can take place. The perception is, as Britzman (1991a) states, “unless the teacher establishes control, there will be no learning; and, if the teacher does not control the students, the students will control the teacher” (p. 223). Teaching,
thus, becomes a power struggle over control in the classroom with the ‘good’ teacher being defined as the one who can establish and maintain control in the classroom and over the students. Teacher education, therefore, must emphasize the need for teacher candidates to establish classroom control (also referred to as ‘classroom management’), not only in their future classrooms, but also while on their teaching placements.

*The teacher as expert.*

The discourse of the expert teacher places an emphasis on “knowing how to teach and knowing everything there is to know about the material” (Britzman, 1991a, p. 227). But the belief that being prepared to teach means taking on the role of an expert can create a lot of anxiety in teacher candidates. Britzman (1991a) argued that the myth of the expert teacher drives teacher candidates to seek ‘tricks of the trade’ and ‘quick fix’ teaching strategies. In this context, there is no time to spend contemplating theory. Lesson plans, activities, techniques, and subject material is what the focus should be on. The teacher as expert also produces the belief that the teacher should be knowledgeable in their subject areas, but being knowledgeable is often understood as having all the answers (Britzman, 1991a). The pressure to have all the answers, thus, reduces knowledge to a specific set of facts and skills. Rather than examining the construction of knowledge, “knowledge is understood as unencumbered by values, interests, and ideology, and is handled as it if were transcendent” (Britzman, 1991a, p. 229).

*Teachers are self-made.*

According to Brtizman (1986, 1991a), this myth presents the idea that teachers are ‘born’; they have natural talent and skills that prepare them for the profession. How one determines whether or not they have ‘what it takes’ is through the practice teaching
experience. It is a sink or swim mentality – either you will succeed or you won’t and only the ‘real’ teachers will survive the teaching experience. Basically the idea is that you cannot teach someone how to teach. This is ironic, of course, for a profession that is based on the education others. As Britzman (1991a) states:

> More than any other myth, the dominant belief that teachers “make” themselves functions to devalue any meaningful attempt to make relevant teacher education, educational theory, and the social process of acknowledging the values and interests one brings to and constructs because of the educational encounter.  

(p. 230)

**Experience in Teacher Education – Simon’s Teaching Against the Grain**

As explained above, the teaching experience is an integral part to many teacher education programs. A large part of teacher education is the teaching placement, the time where teacher candidates practice teaching in classrooms under the guidance of experienced teachers. But what is meant by experience? How is the teaching placement experience understood in Faculties of Education? The work of Simon (1992) highlights four ways of understanding experience that will be used throughout this study to provide insight into the meaning of experience in teacher education.

*Experience is the ‘real world’.*

The first version of experience identified by Simon (1992) is experience as “information and techniques one acquires by participating in new and different situations” (p. 124). From this perspective, the teaching placement gives teacher candidates an experience with the ‘real world’ of teaching. It is through experiencing the ‘real world’ that teacher candidates will acquire appropriate skills and knowledge for the teaching profession.
Experience is a commodity.

A second definition of experience is the “personal characteristic that one has as a result of participating in real work” (Simon, 1992, p. 125). According to this description, experience is a positive event that will benefit the individual through “the acquisition and possession of valued personal contacts, work habits, attitudes, and skills that can be used informally, put on a résumé, or reported in a job interview” (Simon, 1992, p. 125-126). In the context of teacher education, the teaching placement experience will provide teacher candidates with valued practical experience that will increase their chances of employment. Experience, then, is an important commodity for those who want success in the job market.

Experience is a test of character.

According to Simon (1992), experience can also be viewed as “a challenging situation that is to be endured or undergone” (p. 127). Here, experience is understood as a test of one’s abilities and virtues. In the context of teacher education, the teaching placement is often viewed as the true test of teacher candidates to see who can make it in the world of teaching. As Simon (1992) explains, this version of experience “is based on the assumption that a person who has undergone the “ordeal” becomes different or better” (p. 127).

Experience is constructed.

Finally, experience can be defined as “the knowledge and understanding one accomplishes or develops in the way in which one makes sense of a situation or set of events” (Simon, 1992, p. 128). From this perspective, experience is not taken up uncritically; rather all experience is understood as the way one makes meaning out of a
particular event. This meaning is derived from the specific concepts and way one makes sense of the world. Thus, there is recognition that when new concepts are introduced one may understand their experience differently. This definition for experience is probably best demonstrated through an example.

When I was in grade seven, my gym teacher organized the class into pairs of two for 100-meter races. Girls were paired with girls and boys were paired with boys. But, there were an odd number of girls and boys in the class, so I was paired with a boy. Each person raced their partner in the 100-meter sprint as the rest of the class watched. I was paired against one of the more athletic boys in the class; therefore it came as a great shock to me when I beat the boy in the 100-meter sprint. I remember all the girls in the class cheering as the boys stood with stunned looks on their faces. For some reason, our gym teacher asked the boy and I to race again, even though all of the other pairs had only raced once. We raced again, only this time I fell. I felt my upper body get too far ahead of my lower body and eventually my legs just gave way. I was not hurt from the fall, only a slight scrap on the knee. But, my fall did not warrant another race. The race was over and the boy had won.

For many years I understood this experience as an unfortunate, embarrassing moment, like one of the many moments you experience as a teenager. It was only when I began to read about patriarchy that I understood this experience differently. Now this ‘racing event’ is not a memory of an embarrassing moment, but a shining example of sexism. I believe that my male gym teacher had us race again because it is unacceptable, in a patriarchal world, for a girl to beat a boy, especially at a physical task. Men are understood to be stronger and more athletic than women; therefore, my winning of the initial race had challenged and upset this ‘natural’ order of things. According to the gym teacher, my winning must have been a fluke event, thus, it was necessary for the boy and I to race again. When I fell during the second race, everything was set right again – women were once again weak and unable to compete against men.
Events are understood as experience only though the meanings we give them and these meanings can change. It was only through the acquisition of feminist concepts that I was able to redefine this ‘racing event’ as a sexist experience. Thus, this version of experience does not believe that ‘experience speaks for itself’. Instead, experience is understood as a construction based on “a particular interpretation of a specific engagement with material and people over time” (Simon, 1992, p. 128).

*The Possibility of Teaching – Ellsworth, Felman, and Psychoanalytic Theory*

The overwhelming theme of the discourse of the real in teacher education is the possibility of a neat, simple, linear process of teaching. As Ellsworth (1997) states, “education, whether critical or traditional, is inundated by discourses and practices that assume the possibility (and desirability) of a dual, reflective relation between student and teacher” (p. 78). This section will look at the work of educational theorists, such as Felman (1982) and Ellsworth (1997), who use psychoanalytic theory to critique educational discourse and provide new understandings to the notions of resistance and possibility for teaching and learning.

As explained earlier, resistance to critical multicultural education is often understood as the result of ‘close-minded’ individuals. Psychoanalytic theory, however, examines resistance through the unconscious mind, which reveals many complexities. When dealing with courses, like critical multicultural education, which require students to self-reflect and examining their own position in society, resistance is expected. This is because psychoanalytic theory sees resistance as an important part of the learning process. As Britzman (1998) explains:

> Psychoanalytic thought centres the resistance to self knowledge by rethinking many commonplace assumptions about learning, the problem of not learning, and
According to psychoanalytic theory, resistance is not the passive refusal of information by an ignorant individual, but a part of the human mind that exists in all of us. It is how the conscious and unconscious mind negotiates meaning and knowledge. Felman (1982) quotes Lacan in order to explain that the unconscious is “knowledge which can’t tolerate one’s knowing that one knows” (p.28). It is the resistance to knowledge of the self and, therefore, it cannot be remedied through more information. As Felman (1982) states, “it is not a simple lack of information but the incapacity – or refusal – to acknowledge one’s own implication in the information” (p. 30, italics in original). Here, resistance is an active state of refusing knowledge as a sort of defence mechanism. Similarly, Lather (1991) quotes Foucault’s warning of “the violence of a position that sides against those who are happy in their ignorance, against the effective illusions by which humanity protects itself” (p. 141). Of course, much of this resistance is taking place in a person’s unconscious, which makes it difficult for individuals to recognize their own resistances to knowledge. Thus, resistance to learning in teacher education can be thought of as a defence mechanism. Teacher candidates may hold onto their own versions of what it means to teach and learn, which they developed during their many years of schooling, “as a defence against accepting ideas that consider the complexities and uncertainties of teaching and learning” (Britzman, 1998, pp. 3-4). The need for a defence can be especially pertinent when learning about critical multiculturalism, which sets out to challenge dominant perceptions of equality, fairness, and opportunity in society. Understanding privilege, through an examination of the dominant, is an integral part of a
critical multicultural approach. Acknowledging one’s privilege, however, is a process of self-examination that may be difficult for teacher candidates to undertake. In fact, teacher candidates may not even be aware of their own resistance to self-knowledge or the reasons behind it. As Ellsworth (1997) states, “the ‘inner resistances’ that call an ignorance into being are stubbornly capable of maintaining it, even against the conscious intentions or desires of one who otherwise wants to learn” (p. 57).

Interestingly, if this resistance and ignorance is true for the student (or the teacher candidate) it is also true for the teacher (or the teacher educator). If the student is ignorant, the teacher is “doubly ignorant” (Felman, 1982, p. 32). As Ellsworth (1997) explains:

First, like the student, the teacher is ignorant of her own unconscious, her own ‘suspended’ knowledge – which is unavailable to her and which she can’t use pedagogically. And second, the teacher is ignorant of the very knowledge she would need in order to successfully teach (in the traditional sense) her student – that is, knowledge of the student’s resistances to learning, to knowing and remembering.

(p. 62)

What does this mean for education? It requires a shift in our perspective of the teacher-learner relationship. The teacher is no longer an all-knowing expert, but rather in a position of ignorance. What this means, in turn, is that our traditional view of teaching, moving a person from ignorance to knowledge, is actually impossible. As Felman (1982) states:

Proceeding not through linear progression, but through breakthroughs, leaps, discontinuities, regressions, and deferred action, the analytic learning-process puts indeed in question the traditional pedagogical belief in intellectual perfectibility, the progressive view of learning as a simple one-way road from ignorance to knowledge.

(p. 27)
Psychoanalytic theory argues that our belief in teaching as a linear process of passing on knowledge is, in fact, impossible. Given the unconscious desire to resist certain knowledges and the teachers’ double ignorance, it is impossible to teach exactly what the teacher would like students to learn and it is impossible for the students to learn exactly what the teacher teaches. Full understanding is not possible. Both parties are unaware of the unconscious desire to resist, which disrupts what would seem to be a simple process of teaching and learning. Therefore, we cannot perfect the process of teaching and we cannot guarantee that what we think we teach is what is learned. As Ellsworth (1997) explains:

We’ve arrived at the impossibility of perfect fits between what a teacher or curriculum intends and what a student gets; what an educational institution desires and what a student body delivers; what a teacher “knows” and what she teaches; what dialogue invites and what arrives unbidden.

(p. 52)

Ellsworth further adds:

…teaching is impossible because the unconscious constantly derails the best intentions of pedagogies. And addressing students as if this weren’t happening – addressing them as if mutual and full understanding are indeed achievable when they’re not – sets up an impossible situation between teachers and students.

(p. 55)

Ellsworth (1997) uses the concept of ‘mode of address’ to explain this impossibility in the teacher-learner relationship.

Mode of address is an analytic concept from film studies that addresses the question – “who does this film think you are?” (Ellsworth, 1997, p. 22). In the same way, mode of address, in the context of education, is about who the teacher thinks their students are and, therefore, how the teacher presents information and knowledge to those students. As Ellsworth (1997) explains, “Mode of address… is one of those intimate relations of social
and cultural power that shapes and misshapes who teachers think students are, and who
students come to think themselves to be” (Ellsworth, 1997, p. 6). The problem is,
however, that “I never ‘am’ the ‘who’ that a pedagogical address thinks I am. But then
again, I never am the who that I think I am either” (Ellsworth, 1997, p. 8, italics in
original). So the intended mode of address, or the intended message is never the one that
is actually received by the intended audience. In the case of education, the teacher can
never ‘know’ their students. As such, a teacher can never address students exactly how
they would like to address students and they cannot ensure that the students will
understand the address as the teacher means for it to be understood. This is true even for
critical multicultural pedagogy. Again, the issue is not what is being taught. One cannot
assume that having a new mode of address, such as critical pedagogy, will solve the
problem. The point is that there is no problem to be solved. It is not that the current way
we teach does not reach our students in the ways we hope and that, therefore, we should
‘fix’ this. As Ellsworth (1997) states, “The point is that all modes of address misfire one
way or another” (p. 8, italics in original). Despite the failure of all modes of address,
people do learn. It is not learning that is impossible, but rather the discourse around
teaching – that full understanding can be achieved – that creates the impossibility of
teaching.

The following chapters will present and analyze the interview data using the
and Ellsworth (1997) that were explained above. Each chapter will explore one particular
discourse is teacher education – how one becomes a teacher, the meaning of experience,
and the notion of resistance in teacher education – and the implication these have for critical multicultural education.
Chapter 5

Becoming a Teacher – Applying Britzman

This chapter will analyze the interview data using the three cultural myths in the making of a teacher identified by Britzman (1986, 1991a) – everything depends on the teacher, the teacher as expert, and teachers are self made. The goal is to explore how the teacher candidates interviewed understood their emerging identities as teachers. How the teacher candidates understood what it means to be a teacher also has an important effect on the possibility of critical multicultural education for teacher candidates; therefore, the meanings the participants gave to teaching will be examined within the context of critical multicultural education.

The teacher candidates I spoke with seemed to be struggling with issues around the cultural myths and their identities as teachers. While, in some cases, their comments seemed to reflect a belief in the cultural myths, the teacher candidates also expressed frustration and criticism of certain ideas about the role of teachers. This chapter will explore both aspects of these teacher candidates’ identities and the contradictory ways they understood themselves as teachers.

Self-Made Teachers?

The teacher candidates I interviewed seemed to be struggling with the notion of the self-made teacher. Because of the nature of my study, I interviewed a pool of teacher candidates who were interested in critical multicultural education. And, while all of the teacher candidates expressed support for more courses and class time on critical education, there were moments when they questioned whether or not this was the type of content that should be taught in teacher education. The belief that a teacher is self-made
came into direct conflict with the teacher candidates’ support of critical multicultural
teaching in education program. As Nicole’s comments demonstrated:

“I sound so bitter about them not teaching it [critical multiculturalism] to me, but I
guess it’s up to me too, also. I don’t get taught how to deal with ADHD, like those
are some things you have to go out and learn on your own, so maybe this falls
under the same category.”

(Nicole, Interview, p. 11)

Earlier in our interview, however, Nicole expressed her desire for the program to provide
more direction and teaching on critical multiculturalism. As she stated:

“I only know now what I think is wrong and what I would not do, but as far as
concrete, how to put it [multiculturalism] into the classroom… like no idea… I
guess as a preservice teacher you would hope that the institution would give you
some kind of cues along those lines, but it doesn’t seem to be a priority.”

(Nicole, Interview, p. 7)

On the one hand, Nicole expressed a belief that critical multiculturalism is something that
teachers should teach themselves; that it is a part of the knowledge teachers learn as they
teach. On the other hand, Nicole has been struggling with her own desire to teach in
critical ways, but not knowing how to do so. Nicole seems to be expressing a recognition
that there is only so far one can go on their own. Nicole desires to teach in critical
multicultural ways, but has not been able to ‘discover’ or learn for herself how to do so
because she is still operating within her current understandings of knowledge and
possibility in education. Without new concepts and perspectives being provided, Nicole
realizes that it will be difficult for her to move beyond her current understanding of the
topic.

Building on the notion of the self-made teacher, another teacher candidate, Kerry,
expressed a belief that the teacher education program should not be expected to do so
much.
Kerry: People expect a lot from the B.Ed Program, like way too much. They think that, you know, once you finish here you’ll be able to handle everything and deal with every situation; you’ll be this incredible, insightful, multi-talented, and wise person. And you’re like, “well, it’s been a wonderful eight months”. Like, you know, I don’t expect this program to do that… I have to do that for myself.

Amber: Right, what do you think it is that will help you do that for yourself, I mean along the way?

Kerry: I think pursuing different educational opportunities for myself, through workshops and courses. I really like academic settings, so I think that’s been good. I think I’ve learned a lot just from socializing and volunteering and meeting people. Like life experience is so important in developing your ideas, you know, I want to travel more to learn about some parts of the world because I haven’t done that that much. So I guess a lot of my beliefs are sort of theoretical about other parts of the world, like things I haven’t seen and people I haven’t met. So that’s something that I’d really like to do to pursue my understanding of social justice.

(Kerry, Interview, p. 11-12)

Like Nicole, Kerry expressed a belief that she had to do it for herself, that the B.Ed program could not teach her what she needed to know. It is certainly important that Kerry believes that her learning as a teacher is a life long process that will require a variety of learning opportunities outside of her teacher education. At the same time, however, the beginning of this excerpt shows the low expectation Kerry has for her teacher education program. But it is hard to say whether Kerry’s comments reflect the dominant belief that teachers are self-made, that you cannot teach someone how to teach, or if Kerry is just being realistic about what is possible in an eight-month teacher education program.

The teacher education program at this particular university runs from September to April. With such little time spent on the education of teachers compared to other professional programs (for example, medicine or law) the very structure of the program reinforces the myth that teachers are self-made. The irony, of course, is that the structure of this education program reinforces a discourse that makes the goal of the program – the
education of teacher candidates – impossible to achieve. The myth of the self-made teacher makes teacher education redundant. As Britzman (1991a) explains:

More than any other myth, the dominant belief that teachers “make” themselves functions to devalue any meaningful attempt to make relevant teacher education, educational theory, and the social process of acknowledging the values and interests one brings to and constructs because of the educational encounter.

(p. 230)

While teacher candidates, like Kerry, may recognize the importance of life-long learning and consider future opportunities for their learning and growth as a teacher, their teacher education program seems to hold little educational value or merit. Instead it was more of a formality, a hoop to jump through in order to get a teaching certificate, rather than a real learning opportunity. Jay expressed this sentiment during our interview:

Jay: It’s a consensus. I’ve never found anyone who says, “oh, I love the program; I’ve been learning a lot” [laughing].

Amber: So it seems like they’re not really, like it’s just, I guess, a waste of time then?

Jay: Yah, some people are saying that they’re just coming here just to get their certificate. Some people are saying that when they first came here, they were very motivated, but now they, they can’t stand coming here anymore. They just want to get their certificate and that’s it.

(Jay, Interview, p. 14-15)

What is interesting is that Jay comments that “some people” were excited about the program when they began, but shortly after beginning the program these same students just wanted to finish the program as soon as possible. What caused the change in these teacher candidates’ perception of their education?

Based on my interviews with teacher candidates, there is reason to believe that this change in perspective may stem from a desire to learn about critical issues, but feeling frustrated that the program does not address these issues or deals with them only
superficially. For example, when asked if she had found support or resources in order to
teach for critical multiculturalism, Jessica felt that she was on her own to find the
resources and the time to learn about it. As she explained:

Jessica: I haven’t found any real direct support that I haven’t already been
inspired to seek out. So there’s nothing really encouraging in that way.

Amber: So it’s been you, on your own, doing this work?

Jessica: Yah and I’m not feeling like I have a whole lot of space to do it. Like the
reading that I did independently while doing lesson plans, you know, I didn’t feel
like there was a space made for that. It was just kind of like whatever I would
squeeze in because I was interested in it and that would keep me interested in
being in this program [laughing]. I can’t leave this room thinking that I can’t do
this kind of stuff, so I’ve been seeking out the research and the things for myself,
for what I want to be doing… but I didn’t feel like there were any real structures
in place to kind of help me with that or to encourage that at all.

(Jessica, Interview, p. 14)

Here Jessica comments that she had to do her own reading and seek out the educational
knowledge she desired. Certainly teacher education programs cannot meet the specific
interests and desires of all the teacher candidates it educates; therefore, teacher candidates
should have to do their own independent reading and research on the educational
knowledge they are concerned with. But, Jessica’s frustration with the lack of space for
critical teaching in the program stemmed from the way she felt the program
misrepresented itself. As Jessica explained:

… if you look at the things to get you to apply here to begin with, it talks a lot
about social justice. So it’s kind of this weird thing where, to people who have
read it and have applied because they’re interested, then it [the program] is not
really performing to what it’s saying it will.

(Jessica, Interview, p. 21)

In fact, the program not only advertises social justice, inclusivity and critical thinking as
important aspects of teacher education, it also requires applicants to write a Statement of
Experience that specifically addresses these topics. As the instructions for the Statement of Experience state:

On the second page, in paragraph form, describe how your experiences have prepared you to be an educator who is:

· critically reflective
· collaborative
· concerned with social justice
· caring and inclusive


Through this one page of required writing, a clear message is sent to potential teacher candidates that critical thinking, collaboration, social justice, and inclusivity are desired qualities of teacher candidates in this university’s education program. But, according to Jessica, these issues were not represented in the program; instead it has just been words, not real education on these issues. As Jessica explained:

… it’s just been a lot of, for the most part, a lot of buzzwords, so that people will know what to say at the interview, but I don’t feel like the education here is really what’s going to prepare me for being an anti-oppressive teacher. I think that that’s the stuff that I’m trying really hard to hold onto despite the education I’m getting here…

(Jessica, p. 12, emphasis added)

Dan also felt that the program was lacking in this area:

I don’t, I don’t think that many of us are adequately prepared, thinking of it as if I was just coming out of university and not having had a lot of different experiences with culture or transgendered or, you know, other populations… I don’t think that I would be prepared if that were the case.

(Dan, Interview, p. 18)

When asked if the program prepared teacher candidates to address issues like diversity, social inequality and social justice, one participant stated, “the multicultural aspects or any social justice aspects, you could totally dodge it” (Kerry, Interview, p. 12). Another teacher candidate, Nicole, described the type of multiculturalism taught in the program as
“crafty multiculturalism” (Nicole, Interview, p. 12). She had been taught how to make a Japanese abacus and a quilt from the Underground Railroad, but not anything she considered to be critical multicultural knowledge. As Nicole explained, “I paid $5000 and I have a lot of crafts [laughing]. It’s true, I just have so many I don’t even have room anymore and I just, like want to read an article [laughing], that’s all I want” (Nicole. Interview, p. 21-22). A closer examination of how issues of diversity, inclusivity and social justice are taught in the teacher education program will provide more insight into these teacher candidates’ comments.

In a teacher education program, there are two ways in which certain ideas about teaching can be taught; they can be integrated throughout the entire program and included in all courses or they can be limited to specific courses on the topic. The teacher candidates who were enrolled in the elementary cohort of the program did mention that their professors raised issues of diversity and inclusivity in many of their Curriculum courses (courses that are designed to teach about specific subjects found in the curriculum). But even when professors integrated issues of diversity, inclusivity and social justice into their teaching, how they are taken up and discussed was an issue of concern identified by the teacher candidates. It is not just that teacher educators are not using the ‘right’ language or discussing issues of diversity or social justice, it is how the language is used that adds to the complexity of the issue. As my discussion with Jessica revealed:

Amber: I guess you’ve kind of already addressed this a bit, but do you feel like you’re being prepared to teaching in diverse settings? Or not even necessarily... I mean to teach about these issues, do you know what I mean, issues of oppression, privilege, inequality, and the need for social justice...
Jessica: Yah, um, I don’t know, I kind of want to say no, but at the same time I feel like I’m being taught a way to, I don’t consider it deal with it or address it, but I feel like I’ve been taught a certain way of being in it, which I believe will just reproduce power structures and issues that are there. I don’t feel like I’ve been taught ways of actually being in diverse settings or being in any setting and being able to address these issues in a way that I feel will make substantial change and will do the kind of good that I want to be doing.

Amber: Yah, no that’s actually really interesting. So there’s a sense, I guess in some way, where they are kind of addressing it, but like you’re saying, not in a way that actually would change anything.

Jessica: Yah, like no teacher would say “don’t be inclusive” but there hasn’t been, I don’t know… there hasn’t been what I wanted I guess. It’s very, I’ve noticed a lot of double talk, but I don’t even think it’s intentional, like I think people maybe might not have acknowledged or recognized their own biases around it.

While teacher educators seem to be talking about diversity, inclusivity and social justice, from this teacher candidate’s perspective, they are discussed in a way that will work to maintain the status quo. As Jessica explained, she felt that she was being taught a “certain way of being in it”, a way of understanding oppression and inequality that does not require one to take action to work against injustice. Jessica expressed an understanding that the way these issues are being presented will not result in a real challenge to or change in the conditions of oppression.

Unfortunately, the problem is not only how teacher educators address the topics of multiculturalism or social justice, but also access to the few courses that set out to address these issues. Based solely on the course titles, there are three courses offered by the program, outside of the required Social Justice module, that seem to address the topics of diversity, inclusivity and social justice – *Culture, Language and Education* [Foundational Studies course], *Seminar in Social Class, Gender and Race* [Foundational Studies course] and *Teaching for Social Justice* [Program Focus course]. However, the structure of the
program and the number of courses teacher candidates are required to take limits who has access to these courses. For example, one of the participants I interviewed, Dan, was enrolled in the Outdoor Experiential Education Program. Being in this division of the teacher education program meant that he could not choose a Focus course, as both of his Focus courses had to be taken in Outdoor Education. As a result, Dan could not take the Focus course on Teaching for Social Justice (one that he expressed interest in taking). The consecutive program for elementary teacher candidates is also structured so that there is only one elective that can be chosen from Educational Studies, Foundational Studies or Program Focus courses. That is one course out of a choice of thirty-four courses (three of which are the courses I identified as potentially addressing diversity, inclusivity or social justice). The concurrent elementary teacher candidates have two electives, one from Educational Studies or Foundational Studies and the other from the Program Focus. Both consecutive and concurrent teacher candidates in the secondary cohort choose one elective from Educational Studies or Foundational Studies (a total of eighteen courses to choose from) and another elective from the Program Focus (a total of fifteen courses to choose from). Thus, teacher candidates generally have only one or two openings in their schedule to select a course they are interested in. In addition, this selection must come from a large list of courses that all run simultaneously, requiring teacher candidates to sacrifice taking one course over another. On top of this, the course enrolment is generally limited to forty students per class meaning that even if all students wanted to take a course, like Teaching for Social Justice, caps on course enrolment preclude it. While the language of the program may be one of diversity, inclusivity and social justice, it is clear that the opportunities for teacher candidates to actually learn and
explore these topics is limited by the program’s design. Therefore, much of the frustration with the program did not stem from the myth of the self-made teacher. Rather, many of the teacher candidates I interviewed wanted to learn and knew that they still had a lot to learn, particularly about issues related to critical multiculturalism. These teacher candidates’ frustration and desire to finish the program as quickly as possible came from their feeling that the program was not providing them with opportunities to learn this critical knowledge.

**Teach the Curriculum**

Picture a teacher. She or he is probably standing in front of a chalkboard with a piece of chalk in one hand and a book in the other. Perhaps there are math equations scribbled on the chalkboard or important dates from an historical event. Maybe the book they are holding is *Science 101* or *Romeo and Juliet*. No matter what the particular image of this teacher may be, they are probably teaching a subject like Math, Science, History, or Literature. Certainly teachers do teach the content of academic subjects, but this image of the teacher often stems from a belief that subject knowledge is *all* that a teacher teaches. The belief that the job of a teacher is to teach content, specifically the content of the mandated curriculum, reinforces the notion that teacher education is largely about learning how to teach the curriculum. The belief is connected to Britzman’s (1986, 1991a) cultural myth of the teacher as expert. The idea is that a teacher must master subject knowledge and, therefore, teacher education should help teacher candidates become experts in this type of knowledge.

The teacher candidates interviewed discussed the issue of curriculum content and the belief that this is what teaching and teacher education was all about. This topic was
raised, however, not because the teacher candidates interviewed agreed with this notion, but because it was an area of the program that they felt dissatisfied with. The teacher candidates expressed concern over the emphasis placed on subject knowledge and the specific methods that were often presented as the way to teach content to students. This section will examine how curriculum content was taught to these teacher candidates as well as their perspectives on what it means to stress this type of knowledge in a teacher education program.

Curriculum content is emphasized through the types of courses offered by the program. In this particular teacher education program, appropriate methods for teaching subjects are provided to teacher candidates through what is known as Curriculum courses. Curriculum courses are generally named after a subject in the elementary or secondary curriculum and emphasize appropriate teaching approaches and curriculum guidelines for the subject. As the Science and Technology (for elementary teacher candidates) course description states:

Learning to teach elementary science and technology and developing a positive attitude toward these subject areas are explored through a variety of approaches including student-centred learning, problem-based learning, hands-on activities, and integrated learning experiences. Teacher candidates begin to become familiar with the science and technology curriculum mandated by the Ontario Ministry of Education through the exploration of content, skills and strategies for effective teaching, and through reflective practice.

(Faculty of Education Calendar, Retrieved April 30, 2007 from http://www.queensu.ca/calendars/education)

The emphasis on subject-based courses is evident in the number of credits teacher candidates are required to take in Curriculum courses. For example, Consecutive teacher candidates in the elementary cohort take half of their total number of credits in Curriculum courses. A program that is weighted toward curriculum courses can reinforce
the belief that teaching is about imparting knowledge of subject content (whether it is History, Math or Science). One teacher candidate interviewed, Kerry, summarized the dominant ideas emphasized in many of her elementary Curriculum courses:

“Science has to be hands-on to be effective.” “More emphasis needs to be put on teaching mental math skills through games and reducing math anxiety.” And the language course has a serious emphasis on encoding and decoding text. With three weeks left we have yet to discuss deconstructing text for levels of meaning or any of the artistic qualities of literature.

(Kerry, Personal e-mail, March 23, 2007)

Based on Kerry’s comments, there is a sense that it is not just subject content that is emphasized, but also a particular approach to the subject content. As Kerry explained, her language course focused on the more technical aspects of learning how to read rather than the meaning and enjoyment that comes from literature. The notion that subject content must be taught using certain teaching techniques is also linked to a belief that only certain subjects are really important. As Jessica explained:

There are so many things that can be problematic around power imbalances and just in the way that schools are running and in the things that are valued as education and as knowledge. I don’t feel like that’s been really looked at. It’s just been like, “you will need to, you know, be obsessed with literacy [laughing] and it is going to look like this” and “this is what you need to say in your interview because, you know, now literacy and math is the whole wide world and you will not need to [little laugh] do very much with the arts or, you know social sciences”. It’s just been very, it’s been really frustrating.

(Jessica, Interview, p. 12)

Jessica added:

I’m taking drama and music and I’ve really enjoyed those courses, but I feel like I’d want to engage in more, like why, why are we not valuing the arts? Why are we not valuing social studies? Why, why are we pushing people to learn a certain way, what’s the reason for that?

(Jessica, Interview, p. 12)

Jessica’s comments raise the important question of what type of knowledge (in this case, subject knowledge) is valued over other types of knowledge. She is expressing a desire
for her teacher education program to examine not just what is taught in schools and in the curriculum, but why it is taught and what it means to teach it. I believe the frustration Jessica articulates comes from her understanding of the world of teaching as full of contradictory perspectives and vested interests. As Jessica’s statement – “There are so many things that can be problematic… in the things that are valued as education and as knowledge” – demonstrates. But, according to Jessica, the teacher education program presents the world of teaching as simplistic and linear, as ‘this is what you need to know and this is how you need to do it’. Similarly, Britzman (1991a) explains that subject knowledge is often presented “as unencumbered by values, interests, and ideology, and is handled as if it were transcendent” (p. 229). This is why there is no examination of the larger battles over the construction of knowledge and presentation of knowledge in schools or any questioning of why certain subject knowledge is valued more than others. Knowledge, from this perspective, is neutral, objective fact. But Jessica expresses a belief in knowledge as constructed, as embedded with values and interests. It is not ‘obvious’ to her that Math is more important than Drama, as it may be to many in the profession. Jessica understands that the decision to teach certain subjects (or provide certain subject teachers with more funding and resources) is a political decision based on a value that placed on specific types of knowledge.

Jessica also had a problem with the view of the teacher as expert. As Jessica explained:

I think that’s a really good point around the idea, you know, the teacher as knowing everything and imparting a certain bit of information… then it’s like that person has all the control around altering it and having their own biases go through it, then it’s just… getting kids to kind of memorize somebody else’s version of education.

(Jessica, Interview, p. 19)
For Jessica, the view of the teacher as expert creates a situation where the teacher becomes the controller of all knowledge. Jessica expresses a perspective similar to Freire’s (2005) critique of the “banking” approach to education where teachers are seen as the makers and givers of knowledge. Students, conversely, are the passive recipients of information that then gets stored as knowledge in their minds. As Freire (2005) explains, “In the banking concept of education, knowledge is a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider to know nothing” (p. 72). Not only does this conception of teaching and knowledge work to have students “memorize somebody else’s version of education”, as Jessica described it, this version of education also maintains oppressive dynamics in society. According to Freire (2005):

The more students work at storing the deposits entrusted to them, the less they develop the critical consciousness which would result from their intervention in the world as transformers of that world. The more completely they accept the passive role imposed on them, the more they tend simply to adapt to the world as it is and to the fragmented view of reality deposited to them. The capability of banking education to minimize or annul the students’ creative power and to stimulate their credulity serves the interests of the oppressors, who care neither to have the world revealed nor to see it transformed. (p. 73)

The teacher candidates interviewed raised some important concerns about subject knowledge in schools and questioned the view of the teacher as expert. With the focus on teaching to the curriculum, the teacher candidates did not feel that the program provided many opportunities to explore the reasons why subject knowledge is valued or why particular subject knowledge is valued more than others. They were not given the critical concepts needed in order to understand the construction and dissemination of knowledge in schools.
Constructing Subjects – A Discussion with Nicole

My interview with Nicole provided useful insight into how one teacher candidate’s identity as a teacher was constructed within the cultural myths of teachers. It is important to note, however, that I do not intend that this section be interpreted as Nicole’s ‘experience’ in teacher education. Given the limited amount of time I spent talking with Nicole, this section is my reading and understanding of Nicole’s position as a teacher candidates in relation to the discourse of the real in the teacher education program. I have used what she told me in our interview as the basis for these claims, but again, it is my voice and my interpretation, as the researcher, through which this portrait of Nicole is offered. I believe that Nicole’s experience in the program demonstrates how the cultural myths impacted her understanding of education and worked to position her identity as a teacher or, in the case of Nicole, as someone who decided she was not a teacher.

“I realized that teaching, it’s not so much for me” (Nicole, Interview, p. 1). We were not a minute into the interview when Nicole made this statement. It was clear from the beginning that Nicole questioned her identity as a ‘teacher’. Her experience in the teacher education program had been one characterized largely by frustration. Nicole felt that the program lacked intellectual, academic work and, in turn, had many misgivings about the teaching profession. During many points in our interview, Nicole expressed the frustration she felt with teaching:

Amber: So you’ve had, I mean, a few placements and time in the classroom, so can you, I don’t know if you have done things already in your classroom that you think have implemented a multicultural approach or maybe you can imagine what you would do. I know you’re not considering even being a teacher, but...

Nicole: That’s okay.
Amber: …maybe you could, you know, maybe think about, again this is getting to the question, which is really difficult, right? Because what do you do?

Nicole: I’m just ashamed to say no I haven’t done anything and even being at the school at the critical time of Christmas [pause]. No. It’s just so hard to get through the practicum itself and… maybe that’s part of the hopelessness I feel as a teacher. All your energy is just focused on getting through the lesson, the day and there’s little time to implement class, good classroom management strategies, much less focus on other things. Like I recognize the importance and I see it, but it just seems conflicted, to do both at the same time. So maybe that’s why, maybe that’s one of the reasons I don’t want to teach…

(Nicole, Interview, p. 15)

Because of the expectation that teachers should know everything and be prepared to teach it all, Nicole felt a sense of shame for not being able to live up to the expectation of what she ‘should’ have done as a teacher. At the same time, however, critical multicultural teaching is often not considered to be one of the necessary things that teachers should teach. Despite this, Nicole believed it was important. Nicole’s frustration with teaching seems to stem from these contradictions.

As a teacher, many of the things you are expected to do and teach come into conflict with one another. And, the expectation that as a teacher you are the expert who can ‘do it all’ does not fit the reality of the pressures of classroom life. Certainly the perspective of a critical multicultural approach to education does not seem to fit with the expectation that the teacher control the classroom (“good classroom management strategies”, as Nicole described it). Nicole is right to say that “it just seems conflicted, to do both at the same time”. To implement a critical multicultural approach in the classroom would come into direct conflict with the conventional expectations of how a teacher should act in the classroom. Therefore, a critical multicultural approach could not be implemented without consideration of, reflection on, and change in the historical role of the teacher,
specifically the notion of the expert teacher who is in control and, above all, in control of the construction and dissemination of knowledge.

While Nicole sees this contradiction between critical multiculturalism and the expectations of teachers (and the impossibility of it all), she has not been provided with the conceptual tools to understand how these conflicts are situated within the larger discursive practices of teaching. The contradiction Nicole recognized is the result of two different views of what it means to teach and learn. But without the concepts that would allow Nicole to examine and question the dominant practices in schooling, she cannot understand her conflicting feelings about teaching and teaching critical multiculturalism. Nicole is left with a sense of hopelessness:

Amber: What do you think it means to be a teacher, then, who wants to, you know, support that kind of [critical] multicultural teaching? What do you think a teacher like that would do?

Nicole: Okay. Again, I feel a bit torn and kind of helpless because I don’t know some of the strategies. Although maybe I’m being pessimistic because I feel like the curriculum itself is so value-laden that you can challenge and you can, of course, find room to insert things that you want to insert. But I just feel like you’re doing it on the sly or you have to leave out other things that you’re supposed to teach to do that.

(Nicole, Interview, p. 10)

Nicole needs concepts to explain how the discourse in education makes certain practices possible and others not, which would explain why a teacher might feel as though they are teaching some things “on the sly”. But, as Nicole was becoming aware of these complexities of teaching, she was located within a teacher education program that acted as though these complexities did not exist. The discourse of the program insisted that teaching was a simple linear process from ignorance to knowledge; that teachers impart subject content, divided by the areas of the curriculum, onto their students; and that
teachers are self-made and, therefore, a failure to teach is a personal flaw. Because Nicole has not been given the opportunity to examine or explore the competing and contradictory discourses in education, when contradictions are revealed she is left feeling frustrated and helpless. As a result, Nicole concluded that teaching was not for her, when it may have only been the dominant image of the ‘teacher’, promoted through the cultural myths of teachers, that was not for her. Unfortunately, Nicole had no alternatives to the dominant perspective of teaching in which she could construct an image of herself as a teacher.

**Conclusion**

The cultural myths in the making of a teacher, identified by Britzman (1991a), provided an important conceptual tool through which I could examine and analyze the discussions I had with teacher candidates. Overall, I believe that these discussions reveal that the cultural myths about teachers continue to persist in Faculties of Education. At the same time, however, the teacher candidates interviewed often had complicated and contradictory responses to these myths. There were moments when the teacher candidates expressed beliefs about teaching that mirrored the cultural myths, but there were other moments of frustration and critique of the myths. It seems as though the teacher candidates were struggling with various contradictory understandings of what it means to teach (some contradictions of which they may not have even be aware). The problem, however, is not that there are multiple meanings of teaching, but rather, that the teacher candidates had not been given the conceptual tools to understand and make sense of these conflicting meanings. As Britzman (1991a) explains:

> When it comes to learning to teach, there is no single-minded conception of success, of competence, of conduct, or of survival. There are no common
agreements as to the desirable teacher’s stance, the constitution of good pedagogy, or the relationship between theory and practice. This instability is not the problem. It becomes so only when multiplicity is denied and the pretense is that it does not exist. When multiplicity is suppressed, so too is the struggle of student teachers to deal with, articulate, and transform their circumstances – and all the vulnerabilities this entails – into meaningful learning.

(p. 213, italics in original)

This denial of multiplicity can result in certain beliefs about teaching being accepted as fact or ‘the way it is’. The next chapter will build on this issue through an examination of the meaning of experience in teacher education.
Chapter 6

The Meaning of Experience – Applying Simon

According to Simon (1992), experience can be defined in four distinct ways – experience as ‘real world’ knowledge, experiences as commodity, experience as a test of character, and experience as constructed. Simon’s versions of experience were written in the context of work placement programs in schools and, therefore, are not specific to practice teaching placements. His definitions of experience, however, provide important insight into how experience is defined in teacher education. The work of Britzman (1991a) and others will also be used in conjunction with Simon (1992) in order to speak specifically to the teaching placement experience in teacher education.

The Structure of Experience in a Teacher Education Program

The teacher education program all participants were enrolled in was designed in such a way that teacher candidates spent more time on placement in schools than on campus taking courses. For the 2006-2007 year, teacher candidates spent approximately seventy-four days on campus; although not all of these days would be spent in classes or doing course work. By contrast, teacher candidates spent roughly eighty days on placement in schools (calculations based on the Faculty of Education Calendar, Sessional Dates for 2006-2007). By requiring teacher candidates to spend most of their time in the education program on teaching placements, the implication is that this is how and where teacher candidates will learn how to teach. This understanding of the teaching placement fits Simon’s (1992) first definition of experience as the “information and techniques one acquires by participating in new and different situations” (p. 124). In this context, the
teaching placement is understood as an experience that provides teacher candidates with knowledge, knowledge about the world of teaching.

The teacher candidates interviewed seemed to enjoy the practice teaching aspect of the program, particularly the number of teaching placements the program provided. The question – “are you enjoying the program?” – was often answered with a positive comment about the teaching placements:

Amber: And how is it going so far? Are you enjoying the program and you’re enjoying teaching, I guess?

Kerry: Yah, I like the program. Yah, I’m actually a Concurrent student so I’ve had a few placements and, yah, I’ve really enjoyed the program so far.

Amber: Great

Kerry: I’ve liked it. My placements overall have been really good.

(Kerry, Interview, p. 2)

Kerry’s response to my question about whether or not she is enjoying the program and is happy with the teaching profession is quite interesting. The focus of her response is her teaching placements. For this teacher candidate, learning to teach was directly related to the teaching placement experience and, therefore, Kerry’s satisfaction with the program stemmed from the number of and quality of teaching placements she had. As Britzman (1986) explains:

Real school life, then, is taken for granted as the measure of a teacher education program, and, as such, the student teaching semester is implicitly valued as the training ground which will fill the void left by theoretical course work.

(p. 446)

The teaching placement experience not only provides teacher candidates with important knowledge and skills, it is seen as the “authentic moment” where one learns how to teach. As Britzman (1991a) states, “The myth that experience makes the teacher, and hence that
experience is telling in and of itself, valorizes student teaching as the authentic moment in teacher education and the real ground of knowledge production” (p. 7).

Despite the overall feeling that the teaching placement is a positive aspect of the teacher education program, all teacher candidates interviewed described problematic aspects and negative experiences associated with the teaching placement. In many ways, their comments were contradictory, as they seemed to think that the idea of the teaching placement was good, but when they described their experience on placement serious problems were revealed. As my interview with Jay demonstrated:

Amber: So I think we’ve actually gone over all of my questions. So I don’t know if you have anything else you feel like you have to add…

Jay: I will. Well, one of the things I like about the program is the number of practicums [teaching placements] we have…

Amber: Oh, okay.

Jay: …especially at [the university] we have, how many weeks? We have nine, thirteen, sixteen weeks of practicum. So that’s very good because we learn a lot when we are out in experience.

Amber: So you’ve been, I mean that has been really positive?

Jay: Yah, that’s positive.

Amber: And you’ve taken a lot from that, from doing that?

Jay: Yah, although I’m going to be careful because it depends on also, it will depend on your associate teacher. If you end up with an associate teacher who’s not willing to help or who doesn’t care, I saw some people going with associate teachers that don’t care about the students. They just think of the student teacher as someone to replace them and they maybe can take their naps or whatever [laughing]. They don’t have to plan any more lessons and that’s it. Those student teachers, they don’t learn much.

(Jay, Interview, p. 15-16)

At the beginning of this excerpt, Jay explains the teaching placement as an experience where learning takes place – “we learn a lot when we are out in experience”. Later in the
conversation, however, Jay qualifies this statement. He states that the quality of the teaching experience will depend on the associate teacher. On the one hand the teaching experience is where one learns how to teach, but, on the other hand, some teacher candidates claim that they did not learn while on placement. How is this possible? According to Jay, this is explained through individual associate teachers – some are good, some are bad. But Jay’s comments reveal a deeper conflict associated with the notion of experience in the teacher education program. The rest of this chapter will explore the dominant discourse of the teaching placement experience as it collides with the experiences described by the teacher candidates interviewed.

*The Teaching Placement is a Positive Learning Experience*

For many of the actors in the teaching profession (teacher candidates, associate teachers, teacher education professors), the teaching placement experience is considered to be the authentic moment of learning how to teach and, thus, is the highlight of the teacher education program. It is understood as a positive experience where teacher candidates gain ‘real world’ knowledge about the teaching profession and boost their chances of employment through gaining on the job experience, which is linked to Simon’s (1992) version of experience as commodity. But for some of the teacher candidates interviewed, their teaching placement was not a positive, ‘authentic’ moment of learning, but an experience full of frustration and contradictory messages about what it means to teach, specifically what it means to teach for critical multiculturalism. For example, when Jessica attempted to have a conversation with her associate teacher about the various ways to ensure equity in the classroom, a puzzled look came over her associate’s face. As Jessica described it:
… then I started pulling out buzzwords and being like “okay, so how do you make this an inclusive space”. And she was like, “oh, well this is kindergarten, you don’t really need to do that”. You don’t need to do that! Of course you need to do that. So… where do I even go from there? Like am I supposed to be learning from that?

(Jessica, Interview, p. 13)

Nicole, another teacher candidate, described the way her associate teacher reinforced a negative view of multicultural education:

Even the teachers that are in the field will say horrible things about multicultural education. I was in a grade one placement and he [the associate teacher] doesn’t touch on any special occasions or ethnic holidays, which could be good or could be bad. But the reason he was not was not that it was tokenist, it was that it was covered in the grade two curriculum. So that’s where they learn about different cultures and that’s where they end.

(Nicole, Interview, p. 6)

For these teacher candidates, their teaching placement was not a positive experience of learning how to teach, but rather an experience that contradicted the things they valued in teaching, like critical multicultural education. Unfortunately, when teacher candidates have, what they feel are, negative experiences on their placements, little space is provided to discuss and examine those experiences and little support is given to teacher candidates who are struggling on their placement. For example, Jay experienced problems with his first associate teacher, which he explained in our interview:

Jay: I had problems with my first associate teacher.

Amber: Oh, okay.

Jay: Yah, she was being really hard on me and since the first day and I was getting really frustrated. I wanted to change [associate teachers] so she’s not the teacher for my second practicum. It was not easy. I had to go through several channels and fight a lot…

Amber: So you got a different associate?

Jay: Yah, well I was supposed to go back to the same associate teacher for another five weeks and I said, “I’m not going back. I’m going to quit the program and I’m not going back”.
Later in the interview, Jay added, “what my associate teacher was doing to me was opposed to everything that I’ve been learning here [in the program]... so what am I here for, because you guys [sic] tell me one thing and she does everything the other way” (Jay, Interview, p. 18). Jay wanted a different associate teacher for his second placement, but as he explained, he “had to go through several channels and fight a lot” just to get someone to believe that he had a legitimate complaint. As Jay stated, “you have to prove that you’re telling the truth and that you’re actually having an issue ‘cause I guess the first time they think that you’re just whining and it’s hard...” (Jay, Interview, p. 18). The lack of support Jay felt drove him to the point of nearly leaving the program.

Simon’s (1992) definition of experience as a ‘test of character’ can help explain the events Jay described above. The view of experience, in this context, “focuses on the idea of testing or proving oneself” (Simon, 1992, p. 127). This notion of experience takes on special meaning in the context of teacher education. As Britzman (1991a) explains, “The circumstance of student teaching is thus viewed as a tortuous moment that tests the inner strength of the novice” (p. 230). The belief that the teaching placement experience is a test of the teacher candidates’ ability to teach may have been what made it so difficult for Jay to get support from the Faculty in finding a new associate teacher. The teaching placement is supposed to ‘weed out’ those teacher candidates who are not cut out for teaching. As such, when Jay complained about his associate teacher, he was seen as someone who was “just whining”, someone who could not handle being a teacher. Only after much persistence, was Jay able to convince those in charge that he had a legitimate complaint and that this experience was not a sign of his inability to teach.
Another interesting element of Jay’s experience is the lack of support and direction needed to work through and make meaning from this experience. There was no context to understand a so-called ‘bad’ placement experience outside of the teacher candidates’ own failure or the failure of the associate teacher. For Jay, this placement experience is explained through a ‘bad’ associate teacher rather than an understanding of the conditions that construct the position of the associate teacher. Simon (1992) explains that this is a common problem when students are on work placements. “Many students… tend to locate explanations for events in terms of personalities instead of situations” (Simon, 1992, p. 131). But what is the context in which associate teachers work and teach? What are the pressures of the associate teacher? What are the challenges of having a teacher candidate and a classroom of thirty students (or possibly more in high school)? What are the expectations of the teaching education program that the associate must meet? As Simon (1992) explains, “the issue is… that such qualities [bad teacher, good teacher] are contextual and are continually organized, produced, and regulated within relationships” (p. 131). The conditions under which the associate teacher is required to act are not provided to the teacher candidates as a way to understand the events that take place during their teaching placement. These are important questions for teacher candidates to explore before their teaching placement in order to give more context to the placement experience and insight into the world of teaching. But, the idea that the teaching placement is the authentic moment of learning how to teach and that this experience ‘speaks for itself’ suggests that there is no need to reflect on or analyze it.

The refusal to acknowledge what teacher candidates believe are negative experiences on their teaching placements also controls for the messiness, contradictions and
complications that come with learning how to teach and trying to define oneself as a teacher. By refusing to acknowledge and help teacher candidates understand and work through their negative experiences on placement, the contradictions of learning to teach are ignored and the belief that learning is a one-way linear process from ignorance to knowledge, and that knowledge comes from experience, is maintained. The result is the de-contextualization of the teaching placement as it is removed from any examination of its historically and socially embedded context. Rather than seeing teaching placements “as sites where the questions of how experience is produced, legitimated, and accomplished becomes an object of study for teachers and students alike” (Giroux & McLaren, 1986, p. 235), the placement experience is valorized and seen as valuable in and of itself.

**Experience Speaks for Itself**

Not only is the teaching placement seen as a positive experience that provides the “authentic moment” of learning for future teachers (Britzman, 1991a, p. 7), these experiences require no analysis – the experience speaks for itself. Based on my interviews with teacher candidates, the program does not seem to provide teacher candidates with opportunities to reflect on their experience in ways that can give new meaning and knowledge. For example, during my interview with Nicole, she brought up an event that had happened during her placement that troubled her:

*Amber: I think especially being a student teacher, you know, it’s not your school, it’s not your classroom, so you’re also very restricted in all those ways…*

*Nicole: Yah, that too. It’s just, oh sorry…*

*Amber: No, go ahead.*
Nicole: We just, I’m just thinking now, [on placement] we took our kids swimming and we had a Muslim girl in the class. They were grade five. But she couldn’t go swimming because…

Amber: Right.

Nicole: So there’s this poor one little girl who is back at the school and everyone else went swimming. And I just thought, “hmmm, maybe we should have”. I don’t know. Would you cancel the whole grade five field trip because one girl can’t go on it? Maybe you should. Maybe you should go skating or curling or, I don’t know. Yah, but I was definitely aware of the issues while I was there [on placement] but [laughing] I did nothing to change them.

Amber: But I think a big step, like a big part of it is actually just being able to notice, do you know what I mean?

Nicole: Yah

Amber: Because I think that’s where a lot of people don’t even notice it, so then where are we at?

Nicole: Right, but it’s just that, like did anyone else question it? There were three grade five teachers planning this… it didn’t occur or it didn’t come up as an important enough issue to, ah, I don’t know, talk through more?

(Nicole, Interview, p. 16)

As we discussed the event, Nicole commented that this was the first time she had really thought about her placement experience from a critical perspective – “This is good ‘c ause I never really thought about the experience critically, like some of the things I’m just realizing now, like ‘why did they do that?’ So this is good” (Nicole, Interview, p. 17). It seems that the program never asked Nicole to do this critical reflection on her placement. Perhaps she was told to ‘reflect’ (using one of the buzzwords of the program), but was not provided with the space or time to do it or, more importantly, a context in which she could understand what it means to reflect. If Nicole had been provided with concepts and background to further understand her experience, she may be able to give new meaning as to why events, like the one she described above, continue to happen in schools. Again,
this gives evidence to the overwhelming discourse in the program that experience ‘speaks for itself’ and the normalizing of this belief by refusing to explore, with teacher candidates, their own experiences and the way experience is given meaning and can, therefore, be given new meaning. As Simon (1992) explains:

As important for making sense of their experiences as are the knowledge and understandings that students “bring to” their workplaces, so are the knowledge and understandings that they don’t bring and have not yet had the occasion to develop. These “gaps” can be the source of serious misunderstanding when experience is left to “speak for itself”

(p. 132)

**Teach as I Teach**

What do teacher candidates learn on their placements? What kind of practice does the teaching placement provide? According to some of the teacher candidates I interviewed, their teaching placement did not provide them with the learning opportunity they had hoped for. Rather than providing the freedom to experiment with various teaching styles and approaches, these teacher candidates felt limited by the very nature of the ‘practical’ experience. On placement, teacher candidates enter a classroom under the supervision of an associate teacher (the teacher of the classroom they are entering). The culture of the classroom is established and maintained by the associate teacher – the ‘real’ teacher in this context – creating a situation of unequal power and authority between the associate teacher and the teacher candidate. As one teacher candidate explained:

… I find that there’s not very much done to minimize that kind of power dynamic and the pressure to be like someone else and have someone else’s teaching style. I feel like there hasn’t been as much room as I would have wanted to have developed my own teaching style and my own philosophies around education…

(Jessica, Interview, p. 13)

During my interview with Isabelle, she also described the pressure to conform to her associate’s way of teaching. As Isabelle stated:
My own associate will be like ‘do this’ and I’m like ‘okay’ [laughing]... your associate is supposed to be your mentor, right? So whatever he or she says, you’re like ‘okay’, you think like that’s probably a better way of doing it because they’ve been doing it for so long.

(Isabelle, Interview, p. 16)

These teacher candidates’ perspectives challenge the belief that the teaching experience is a neutral zone where future teachers can experiment with various teaching techniques and develop their own unique teaching style. Instead, these teacher candidates felt the pressure to conform and mimic their associate teachers’ approach to teaching. As Britzman (1991a) states:

>The vocational model of teacher education poses the process of becoming a teacher as no more than an adaptation to the expectations and directives of others and the acquisition of predetermined skills – both of which are largely accomplished through imitation, recitation, and assimilation.

(p. 29)

As stated earlier, a common belief is that the teaching placement is the place where one learns how to teach. Given these teacher candidates’ perspectives, however, it would be more accurate to describe the teaching placement as the place where one learns how to teach like someone else.

*The Theory-Practice Dichotomy*

A few of my interviews with teacher candidates revealed a dichotomy between what is thought of as theory and what is thought of as practice. The understanding of the teaching experience as ‘real world’ knowledge seems to contribute to a belief in a separation between theory and practice. Theory, in teacher education, often refers to the theoretical, intellectual ideas that are used to explain specific educational events or practices. The goal is for teacher candidates to apply the theory learned in education courses to their teaching practice. However, the view of the ‘theoretical’ world of the
university and the ‘practical’ world of the school classroom is a division that continues to persist. Rather than viewing practice as informed by theory and theory as informed by practice, the two worlds are seen as mutually exclusive.

One of the teacher candidates interviewed, Jay, explained this division in terms of the lack of “hands-on” learning in the program:

Jay: So there is something wrong with the program, with the [secondary] program. So what is it? I think the [elementary] people, the students, they have more hands-on, I mean they, whatever they’ve taken from university are things they can actually use in the classroom. In our case, we [secondary teacher candidates] learn lots of activities that work well with adults who are here willing to learn, but if you take these activities and bring them to a classroom full of high school students that maybe don’t care about what they’re learning, it’s not going to work, so yah.

Amber: Right. So is that what you think is missing from the program then?

Jay: Yah, there is lots of theory here, but we can’t apply that to the classrooms. That’s my feeling.

(Jay, Interview, p. 14)

Jay expresses a clear distinction between practical, “hands-on” knowledge and theory. As Jay described it, practical knowledge can be used in the classroom, while theory cannot. Practical knowledge has clear value over theory.

Part of what may be behind Jay’s desire for “hands-on” knowledge is the cultural myth of the expert teacher. Britzman (1991a) argues that the belief of the teacher as the expert drives teacher candidates to seek teaching strategies and ‘tricks of the trade’. In this context, there is no time to spend contemplating theory, as the focus appears to be on lesson plans, activities, techniques, and subject material. From Jay’s perspective, who has time to talk about theory when one will be entering the teaching force in a short eight-months? Lesson plans and activity sheets give the illusion of preparedness that eases teacher candidates’ anxiety over thinking they do not know enough to teach.
But the push for ‘practical’ knowledge that can be ‘applied’ in the classroom denies the space to raise questions. A focus on providing teacher candidates with lesson plans, activities, and teaching techniques can easily overlook the larger questions around the purpose, meaning and ideology behind such teaching methods. One teacher candidate I interviewed described it this way:

I’ve felt like I’ve been taught a lot about what it is that happens and what we will teach or what we will do or what a school will look like, but not been given very much space to really articulate or question why – who’s benefiting from the way we are doing things and who’s not benefiting from the way we do things and how all of these structures work together to maintain this power struggle and the power structure that exists right now…

(Jessica, Interview, p. 11-12)

The belief that theory and practice are separate and, therefore, there is no theory in practice, creates a situation in teacher education where teaching techniques and methods can be presented as ‘the way it is’. As Jessica explains above, the expectation has been that teacher candidates need to learn certain practices because this is how they will have to teach without any consideration of the theory, interests, power, or ideology behind such practices. Without such reflection, lesson plans and teaching methods are removed from theory and become ideologically neutral ‘tricks of the trade’ that ‘good’ teachers use.

“The Real World” – A Discussion with Isabelle

My interview with Isabelle revealed some important contradictions about the teaching placement experience. As stated earlier, at one point in our interview Isabelle discussed the pressure she felt to conform to her associate teacher’s style of teaching. As Isabelle stated, “My own associate will be like ‘do this’ and I’m like ‘okay’…that’s probably a better way of doing it because they’ve been doing it for so long” (Isabelle, Interview, p.
In a later e-mail, however, Isabelle seemed to change her perspective. I had asked her a follow-up question regarding what she thought she was learning from the program and got this response:

I’ve learned theories on how to educate students in the ideal world. However, I’ve found that most of the theories taught are extremely difficult to practice in the real world because it is too idealistic. I feel that most of my learning came from my placement experiences because it gave me first hand experience on what teaching was all about in the real world. It enabled me to experiment with different teaching strategies. I received continuous feedback from my associate and I was able to formulate my own teaching style.

(Isabelle, Personal e-mail, April 2, 2007)

I was quite surprised by this written response given my interpretation of Isabelle’s answers in our interview. I sent an e-mail to Isabelle to ask for some clarification on how she felt about her placements and why her perspective had seemed to change, but I did not receive a response back. Thus, I am left to my own interpretations to explain these seemingly contradictory responses.

I know that Isabelle had a different associate teacher on her last placement and wonder if this may have affected her feelings about the placement. Perhaps this new associate teacher had provided Isabelle with the space she needed to experiment and practice her own teaching style (as her last response seemed to indicate). What I find most interesting about Isabelle’s response, however, is her use of the terms “ideal world” to describe the theory she learned in the program and “real world” to describe her placement experience. Again, the belief in the teaching placement as the method through which one learns how to teach creates a dichotomy between the ‘real’ world teaching experience and what happens in Faculties of Education. Since the teaching experience is the only site of teacher learning, what happens in the academic program can only be described as the ‘ideal’ world of unrealistic theory of teaching that is removed from the
‘real’ world of the placement experience. Because of the opposition between these two sites of learning, only one site can be the ‘authentic’ site of learning. According to Isabelle, this authentic site is the teaching placement experience. Isabelle’s notion of her teaching placement as the ‘real world’ and her teacher education as the ‘ideal world’ is common among teacher candidates. As Britzman (1986) states, “Education course work which does not immediately address ‘know-how’ or how to ‘make do’ with the way things are, appears impractical and idealistic” (p. 446). But the reason Isabelle describes her understanding of her teaching placement this way is not a result of her individual failure to think more ‘critically’ or ‘reflectively’; rather, it appears to be the result of a discourse about experience that dominants in teacher education programs.

Isabelle’s understanding of her teaching placement constructs experience as a process through which one moves from ignorance to knowledge. Experience is knowledge in and of itself. That her placement is understood as the ‘real world’ and where the majority of her learning has taken place may be because of the limited concepts she has to make new meanings out of this experience. With new concepts available to her and with an exploration of the history and current context of theory and practice in teacher education, Isabelle may have been able to understand her teaching experience in a different way. As Simon (1992) explains:

Such an approach would offer concepts and a language that would help students interpret work-related situations and relations. It would provide an opportunity for students to engage with new ideas and frameworks that challenge their taken-for-granted ways of thinking about working.

(p. 129)
Conclusion

The teaching placement experience is seen as an essential component of teacher education. How experience is given meaning in teacher education programs plays an important role in how teacher candidates will learn from and define their experiences in teacher education. Simon’s (1992) four versions of experience provided a useful conceptual tool through which experience in teacher education was examined. Understanding how experience can be constructed through various meanings revealed the interesting ways the teaching placement experience is understood in Faculties of Education. Similarly, my interviews with teacher candidates revealed the complicated and often contradictory ways the teaching placement experience is defined and understood. For many teacher candidates, the teaching placement did not live up to its expectation as the “authentic moment” of learning. Instead, the teaching placement revealed new tensions and conflicts within teacher education and the teaching profession, conflicts that could only be understood through new definitions and concepts of teaching and learning. But since the experience was supposed to ‘speak for itself’, teacher candidates had great difficulty making sense of their experiences.

The first two analytic chapters have brought to light many of the challenges of learning how to teach. The next chapter will focus on the challenges of learning and teaching, particularly when it comes to critical issues like critical multiculturalism.
Chapter 7

Resistance in Teacher Education – Applying Ellsworth and Felman

As evident in the literature review, much of the research in the area of critical multicultural education focuses on teacher candidate’s resistance to this type of teaching. The research, however, rarely provides teacher candidates’ perspectives on this issue. How do teacher candidates define resistance? Why do they think resistance happens? What new understandings of teacher candidate resistance can come from the teacher candidates, themselves? Given these questions, I decided that I would ask the teacher candidates I interviewed about this issue of resistance. This chapter will explore the concepts and issues that came from these conversations with teacher candidates. The work of Ellsworth (1997) and Felman (1982) will be used to analyze this data and to situate it within a larger discussion on teacher education.

Questioning Resistance

To begin the discussion on resistance, I asked teacher candidates if they had felt resistant to critical issues or if they had seen fellow teacher candidates resist. All of the teacher candidates interviewed felt that they had observed resistance in teacher candidates. The teacher candidates interviewed often commented on their surprise to see this, particularly with regard to resistance to critical issues. As Kerry explained:

Kerry: What always shocks me is the way I hear my fellow teacher candidates talk about it [the Social Justice Module] after. Like you know, “that was a waste of time” or “what difference does it make” or “this really isn’t a problem anymore, so why are we doing this?” That’s always been a kind of odd aspect of the experience in the Con Ed. [Concurrent Education] and in Teacher’s College, yah [laughing].

Amber: So you have any theories, I guess, as to why that happens?
Kerry: I don’t know, it’s kind of surprising to me because the people who say things like that, you know, they’re young people. They’re also twenty-three, they’ve grown up in the same world I’ve grown up in and I don’t, it’s hard to see why they don’t see that. Maybe they’ve been in, like a more isolated environment growing up, but I don’t see how they can finish their undergraduate degree without coming into contact with these issues. It’s kind of surprising to me, so I don’t know.

(Kerry, Interview, p. 9)

The teacher candidates interviewed were selected based on their critical multicultural awareness and interest in critical issues; therefore, it is not surprising that they felt shocked to see fellow teacher candidates resisting knowledge about issues that they felt strongly about.

When initially asked why they thought teacher candidates were resistant, the participants interviewed often had difficulty explaining why this could be happening. As my interview with Nicole demonstrated:

*Amber: Where do you think this resistance that you’re seeing, as far as teacher candidates, do you have any theories, any ideas as to where it might be coming from or why?*

Nicole: [Pause] I don’t know, other than ignorance, or not, I don’t know. I don’t know why people don’t see it the same way I do. Like I can’t help just thinking that their ideas are wrong and my ideas are right, of course [little laugh]. But I don’t know. Maybe there’s a lack of modeling in the schools, as well, so that the teacher candidates can’t observe. I don’t know. And even when they do, when they seem gung-ho, like they’re on the multicultural bandwagon, it is only in that storybook fashion or the “let’s get our students to stand up and tell us about India” or something ridiculous. Okay, so I don’t know. Maybe they don’t realize that those are maybe inherently racist practices, I don’t know.

(Nicole, Interview, p. 6)

Overall, the teacher candidates initially seemed quite surprised and confused as to why fellow teacher candidates resist critical multicultural or social justice education; however, as our interviews progressed, a deeper and more complex understanding of resistance was
revealed. For example, Kerry raised an important point about one’s identity and social position and how this can influence their openness and interest to critical issues:

*Amber:* *What do you think makes people, as a student teacher, what makes people open to it [critical multiculturalism]?*

*Kerry:* Being non-white, being non-straight. I think that members of marginalized communities, a lot of the people that I’ve met here who are members of minority communities have had experiences in their lives that maybe lead to an interest in that. Maybe it’s just past exposure, I guess. I guess being twenty-three might be too old to start dealing with issues like this, it’s not part of your consciousness yet. Maybe it’s too hard to sort of stretch your mind in that direction or maybe that’s part of the answer, I think. It sounds really bad, but sometimes it’s kind of an urban-rural divide. And I’ve seen exceptions to this, but when I talk to other people from big cities they tend to share a lot of points of view that I have… I’ve met a lot of people who are exceptions to that, though, so its’ not so cut and dry.

(Kerry, Interview, p. 11)

Like in much of the literature, there is an assumption in Kerry’s statement that those who experience oppression are more interested in critical issues. While I agree that this aspect of one’s identity and lived experience can have an important impact, it is not the whole story. Kerry also seems to acknowledge the simplicity in her statement when she concluded, “it’s not so cut and dry” (Kerry, Interview, p. 11).

The teacher candidates interviewed certainly had more questions about resistance than answers. Some of the most interesting discussions and questioning of resistance came when I raised the issue of silence being understood as resistance. The teacher candidates interviewed understood silence as having alternative meanings. As my interview with Nicole showed:

*Amber:* *[In my research] I’m going to question even the idea of resistance and how the literature labels it because it’s often that they don’t participate in class, people are quiet, they don’t talk, things like that… Have you thought about that?*

*Nicole:* Well that doesn’t mean resistance. Yah, I mean sometimes you just get a bad mix of students in your class who are all maybe introverted or the space has
been created so that people don’t feel comfortable talking, the instructors not approachable, like where do you want to start? [Laughing].

(Nicole, Interview, p. 19)

Nicole’s comments are similar to the issues raised in the discussion of *Silence as Resistance* presented in Chapter 3. Perhaps given her current position as a student, Nicole understood how her own silence and the silence of others could be the result of factors outside of individual ‘ignorance’. Isabelle also situated the question of silence as resistance within her own experience. In this case, it was Isabelle’s experience of presenting critical ideas about racism to her fellow classmates that caused her own silence:

*Amber:* I mean, to say that these teacher candidates aren’t getting the critical ideas because they are resisting… there’s always other issues that we haven’t addressed in classrooms, all these different power dynamics that are going on.

Isabelle: You know it’s interesting that you brought that up because I was doing a presentation… for my math class [a Curriculum course] about social issues and I was bringing up race and I was like, “okay, so do you think minorities and non-minorities are still paid the same if they are given the same jobs?” And… I don’t think they [the other teacher candidates in the class] thought of it as racist, but a lot of the things they were saying were racist. I was like… should I tell them my point of view, like a critical way of thinking of things and then I was like, you know they’re not going to understand, they’re going to resist so is there even a point in my saying this, right?

*Amber:* Yah, yah.

Isabelle: … is there even a point [little laugh] of talking about this because no one is going to listen. I’m just wasting my breath… you have to start from the beginning, right?

(Isabelle, Interview, p. 28)

Here Isabelle’s silence can be understood as a refusal to “once again take the burden of doing the pedagogic work of educating White students/professor about the consequences of White middle-class privilege” (Ellsworth, 1989, p. 316). Her silence did not stem from her resistance or lack of interest in critical issues; rather, it came from a recognition of the
resistances of others and the difficult position in which Isabelle would find herself if she had decided to explain her critical position to the class. In educating her classmates about racism, Isabelle would be opening herself up to a potentially difficult and symbolically violent experience if her classmates refused her position and continued with their claims that racism did not exist. Her own experiences have taught Isabelle that an attempt to educate her classmates could be met with resistance and, therefore, her attempt would just be a “waste of breath”. Isabelle’s example demonstrates why a person who is open to and interested in critical issues may choose to be silent and, therefore, how the act of silence is not necessarily an act of resistance to critical issues.

**Understanding Resistance**

As the interviews progressed, the questioning of resistance often led to important insights on the part of teacher candidates as to why resistance may be taking place. Even without explicitly using the terms, the teacher candidates interviewed expressed an understanding of resistance that was situated within power, interest and the unconscious. The teacher candidates interviewed seemed to recognize the difficult process of exploring an issue like critical multiculturalism, which requires an examination of one’s privilege. As one teacher candidate explained:

…you’re essentially opening yourself up to figuring out that… as a white person… the road that’s sort of led you to where you are has been paved with some nasty stuff, which is a hard realization to come to especially when you are expected to get up in front of a potentially multicultural class and then explain how everybody’s equal. And they’re like, “well, you know, kind of easy for you to say”…

(Dan, Interview, p. 8)

Here Dan understands that self-reflection is a challenge. Resistance, in this case, is not understood as a failure of individuals, but in terms of psychoanalytic theory, which
acknowledges that one might resist the process of self-examination because it can bring to light troubling knowledge about oneself. Dan acknowledges that it is difficult for a white person to admit to and come to terms with the “nasty stuff” that has led to their position of privilege in society. Again, placing this within the context of psychoanalytic theory, resistance becomes a defence mechanism that protects the mind from difficult knowledge about the self.

Dan’s comment also raises the issue of how teachers are expected to address their students, particularly in the context of critical multicultural education. For Dan, the challenge seems to come when he is required, as a white teacher, to stand in front of a multicultural class and talk about equality. But serious problems can also arise when trying to ‘teach’ about inequality and oppression. Certain educational theorists have argued that it is the teachers job to “link knowledge to power by bringing to light and teaching the subjugated histories, experiences, stories, and accounts of those who suffer and struggle” (Giroux & McLaren, 1986, p. 227). But can a white teacher stand in front of a group of students and ‘teach’ them about oppressive dynamics when the teacher is also situated within those dynamics as a member of society? This has serious implications for the assumption that teacher educators can “bring to light” the “subjugated histories” of the oppressed. As Ellsworth (1989) discovered in her own work as an educator, “I cannot unproblematically bring subjugated knowledges to light when I am not free of my own learned racism, fat oppression, classism, ableism, or sexism” (p.307-308). Teachers, too, are the products of an unequal society and this creates complex relations in the classroom, particularly when examining issues of privilege and oppression. Like Ellsworth (1989), Dan’s comments seem to indicate that he is struggling
with his identity as a teacher who teaches for equity, but who is, at the same time, a white man privileged by his position.

Like Dan, Jessica also commented on the difficult process of self-examination and the acknowledgement of a person’s privilege:

People don’t want to refuse their own privilege and people don’t want to learn about it… often times people have a hard time learning. It’s not fair to say people don’t want to learn because a lot of people really do and actively seek out ways to. But I think that there’s definitely some kind of like, well not crisis, but some kind of thing that happens emotionally when you realize that things are not how you initially perceived them…

(Jessica, Interview, p. 16)

It is interesting that Jessica does not describe resistance as a result of ‘closed-minded’ individuals. Instead she articulates the emotionally (perhaps unconscious) process that happens when one is going through a difficult process of self-examination. She acknowledges the situation that may be created when one’s world is turned upside down, “when you realize that things are not how you initially perceived them”.

Kerry also expressed a similar understanding of the difficult process of self-examination:

…dealing with the concepts of privilege and oppression are very challenging in a personal way. There is very difficult self-criticism that is a part of the process. Examining your personal and social life like that is something that you need to be ready for.

(Kerry, Personal e-mail, March 23, 2007)

Kerry’s comment that one needs “to be ready for” the difficult process of self-examination raises the question of what it would mean to be prepared for this type of process. In fact, psychoanalytic theory questions whether one can ever be ready for this process since the unconscious resists knowing what is difficult for it to know, despite the conscious desires of the individual. This creates an interesting dilemma for education. As
Felman (1992), cited by Britzman and Dippo (2000), explains, “education is always in crisis because learning requires something of the learner before he or she is ready” (p. 32). Kerry’s comments, however, may also indicate the importance of time in the process of self-reflection, an issue raised during many interviews.

For some of the teacher candidates interviewed, the length of the program created challenges for learning, particularly when it came to issues like critical multiculturalism or social justice. For example, in his interview, Dan explained his own trouble with learning in such a short amount of time – “If you get a lot of information thrown at you a lot of, I know certainly in some cases I’ve… taken my hands and sort of put them up and been like, ‘wow, how am I going to digest all this’” (Dan, Interview, p. 15). Isabelle also discussed the problems in trying to teach about critical issues in a short amount of time:

> When people first hear about [critical] issues they’re going to resist them. And if you only give six hours [short pause] people aren’t going to listen. Like I remember… reading the social justice book and I was talking to some teacher candidates and they were like, “oh this, all this stuff about oppression, whatever, like it doesn’t happen” and they were really opposed to the ideas. I feel like you need to give more time for people to digest them and really think about them. (Isabelle, Interview, p. 17)

For Dan and Isabelle, time is an important factor in considering how teacher candidates will come to learn about and understand critical multiculturalism. Even if teacher candidates resist critical issues in the beginning, a longer amount of time spent learning in this area could lead to acceptance.

For Kerry, the issue of teacher candidate resistance is not only about the time spent on critical issues, but also the various backgrounds of teacher candidates. As Kerry explained:

> People are coming in with various, particular attitudes. It’s not going to change in eight months. It would, I forget what they said, but if it takes eighteen years of
building up prejudice, it can take eighteen years to counteract it… it would take a lot of time and a lot of work and if people aren’t willing to do that then it’s not going to happen. Does that sound really pessimistic? I just don’t think the B.Ed program is going to be able to achieve that.

(Kerry, Interview, p. 13)

While Kerry questions what is possible to teach in and eight-month program, she also raises the point that time, alone, is not the only factor. The possibility of teaching critical multicultural education is not based on a timeline. Even if a program lasted for years, the time would not guarantee that full understanding of critical multicultural awareness would be achieved in the same way for all teacher candidates. Kerry raises this point when she comments that changing of attitudes, particularly when it comes to prejudices, depends on the willingness of teacher candidates to undertake the difficult work of self-examination.

During our discussions on resistance in teacher education, the teacher candidates struggled with the notion of critical multiculturalism as a subject that could be taught. Given the complexity of resistance and the very personal nature of a topic like critical multiculturalism, the teacher candidates raised a number of interesting issues around critical multicultural education. These issues will be explored in the next section.

*The Challenges of Teacher Education – A Discussion With Kerry*

With the complexity of resistance and the implication of the unconscious in this process, teacher educators face interesting dilemmas and challenges in trying to teach about critical multicultural education. Despite the dominant discourse in the teacher education program that a neat, linear process of teaching is possible, the teacher candidates I interviewed seemed to recognize the impossibilities of teaching, especially when considering critical multicultural awareness. In particular, it was my interview with
Kerry, and our subsequent e-mail exchanges, that revealed an interesting discussion on the challenges of teacher education and the possibility of critical multicultural education. Kerry frequently questioned if critical multicultural education could be taught. As Kerry explained:

I think it’s really true though… the teacher-learner relationship and how, like it’s never going to happen in a course like this, that the social justice teacher is going to deliver the knowledge and then, you know, it’s way too complicated for that; it’s way too personal for that.

(Kerry, Interview, p. 18)

Kerry expresses an understanding that the traditional view of teaching, where the teacher passes knowledge onto the student, is not possible. Her use of the words “complicated” and “personal” indicate that Kerry is aware that the process of developing critical multicultural awareness is somehow distinct and unique from learning about other topics. Later, in an e-mail, Kerry expanded on this point by describing social justice and critical multiculturalism as a worldview and, therefore, questioned whether it could “be ‘taught’ like other subjects” (Personal e-mail, March 23, 2007). Kerry questioned the belief that teacher educators can create critical multicultural awareness in teacher candidates. The process of developing such awareness is thought to be too personal, which makes it impossible to ‘teach’. As Kerry explained:

To me, social justice is a question of morality. It cannot be imposed or instructed. It is a gift that the learner gives to herself. It requires more of a flexibility of mind and heart than any other course. It combines philosophy with emotional knowledge/intelligence. It requires observation, self-criticism, and pain, and political inquiry. You can’t even compare social justice to other topics in other courses.

(Kerry, Personal e-mail, March 23, 2007)

Overall, Kerry felt as though critical multicultural learning cannot be guaranteed and that it would be futile for Faculties of Education to think that they can instil this type of
knowledge in teacher candidates. Kerry used the expression, “you can lead a horse to water, but you can’t make it drink” as a metaphor for her understanding of this issue (Kerry, Personal e-mail, March 23, 2007). Kerry seemed to acknowledge a complex aspect of teaching, that teachers can never guarantee that what they teach is what students will learn – full understanding is not possible. Although Kerry acknowledged and understood this reality of teaching, she still felt that it was important for teacher candidates to be exposed to knowledge like critical multiculturalism. As she explained, “I believe that the Program has a responsibility to provide opportunities for learning in the areas of critical multiculturalism and social justice” (Kerry, Personal e-mail, March 23, 2007).

If what a teacher education program teaches is not necessarily what is learned, how should the education of teacher candidates be approached? The next section will explore this question through an examination of psychoanalytic theory and what it can offer teacher educators.

Learning How We Learn Through Psychoanalytic Theory

The impossibility of full understanding creates a dilemma in teacher education – if teaching is impossible, what is teacher education trying to do? Ellsworth’s (1997) description of a teacher education program provides important insight into the possibility of teacher education:

Picture a teacher education program. Student teachers spend a great deal of time cultivating a curiosity about and analyzing their own conscious and unconscious processes of learning. They attend to those moments when they themselves learn, to what happens to and in their bodies at a moment of learning, to when learning resists, to how they think and know inside the structures of their own and their culture’s ignore-ances. They make notice of when boredom sets in, when and how boredom shifts to absorption, when in what terms they remember and forget… (p. 71)
This passage by Ellsworth (1997) is calling for a radical shift in teacher education from an understanding that one cannot learn to teach, since teaching is impossible, to a focus on learning how one learns. As a teacher, it is the ability to have insight into your own learning processes before the assumed ability to make others learn. Britzman (1998) explains this as a “shift, from the question of ‘How do I teach’ to the question of ‘How do I learn’” in order “to face the interesting dilemmas of teaching” (p. 9).

During our interview, Jessica raised the issue of teacher candidates not being aware of their own learning and thought processes. She spoke about her desire to experience a teacher education program that provided more opportunity for internal analysis and self-examination:

[If] education students were pushed more to really acknowledge where they’re coming from and their own biases, but I didn’t feel there was any of that kind of introspective, introspection that was being asked of me as a student. Like I guess formally some process, which I think is really important and would be really useful for teachers to do the formal process.

(Jessica, Interview, p.15-16)

Jessica also talked about the importance of recognizing the process of learning, including how learning can be difficult:

…when you start seeing things differently, sometimes that will take you out of your comfort zone and it’s okay to be moved out of your comfort zone… I think it would be useful to have some kind of an acknowledgement for what the process might be and kind of an honouring of that too, that we don’t need to just be really scared of anything that makes us in any way uncomfortable.

(Jessica, Interview, p. 17-18)

Jessica desired a teacher education program that would require teacher candidates to self-examine, reflect, and come to know themselves. But how can we do this in education? How can teacher educators help teacher candidates reflect on themselves, but at the same
time ensure that this reflection is not merely a reflection of the same? The analytic process used in psychoanalysis can provide some insight into this issue.

Felman (1982) explains how the psychoanalytic process works and could, in turn, be applied to teaching. While her example is described in terms of one-on-one therapy, which differs greatly from a classroom with one teacher and many students, Felman does provide key concepts that teachers can apply to education.

In the case of psychoanalysis, there is the client who is ignorant of their unconsciousness and has come to the psychoanalyst for help in this matter. But the psychoanalyst, like a teacher, is “doubly ignorant” (Felman, 1982, p. 32) since they cannot know their client’s unconscious and they do not know their own unconscious. So how does knowledge emerge from this situation?

Rather than assuming an understanding of their own and their client’s unconscious, the psychoanalyst recognizes that such knowledge, that full understanding, is impossible. As Ellsworth (1997) explains, “unlike educators, psychoanalysts have been largely prohibited from entertaining the fancy of understanding. They aren’t supposed to forget the presence of their own unconscious in their relationship with their clients” (p.66). This recognition of the unconscious is an acknowledgement of its position as the third participant in the conversation. Psychoanalysis, therefore, reads the interaction between the third participant – the unconscious of the client and the unconscious of the analyst – as it “disrupts the ‘communicative’ dialogue between analyst/client” (Ellsworth, 1997, p.66). The communication between client and analyst becomes analytic dialogue, which is intended “to produce and learn from discontinuity, ruptures, breaks, refusals, failures” (Ellsworth, 1997, p. 90, italics in original). Analytic dialogue returns a difference and this
is how one can begin to challenge and shift their perspectives. As Ellsworth (1997) describes:

> Learning happens when the very question we asked in order to seek a learning has been displaced by the return of a difference, a surprising, unexpected, interfering encounter with the ignore-ances of one’s “very point of observation”, of one’s very point of asking.

(p. 147)

In this approach, the ignorance of the student and the double ignorance of the teacher is recognized and seen as the point from which to explore the silences and ignorances of each other (Simon, 1992).

There is, however, one important difference that separates the process of psychoanalysis from what happens in a classroom. In the case of psychoanalysis, the client has most likely chosen to go to therapy and is presumably willing to undertake the kind of reflective work that may be required of them. But, in the case of teacher education, all teacher candidates do not enter the program expecting or wanting self-reflection and examination. In fact, given the cultural myths about teachers and teacher candidates’ own histories and experiences in school, many teacher candidates may enter teacher education only expecting training on how to create lesson plans and manage a classroom. Because of this expectation, many teacher candidates may not be willing to take part in the reflective process. The lack of willingness on the part of some teacher candidates to self-reflect does not, however, indicate that self-reflection will not work. Rather it demonstrates the importance of unpacking the biographies of teacher candidates, deconstructing the cultural myths about teachers, examining the various meanings that are given to experience, and exploring the processes of self-examination, resistance, and the unconscious in order to redefine teacher education. This redefinition
of teacher education acknowledges that teacher candidates’ full understanding is not possible and, therefore, focuses on the conceptual tools needed for deconstruction and meaning making rather than specific knowledge outcomes. As Lather (1991) explains:

…pedagogy becomes a site not for working through more effective transmission strategies but for helping us learn to analyze the discourses available to us, which ones we are invested in, how we are inscribed by the dominant, how we are outside of, other than the dominant, consciously/unconsciously, always partially, contradictorily.

(p. 143, italics in original)

**Conclusion**

The work of Ellsworth (1997) and Felman (1982) helps to demonstrate how the teacher candidates’ responses often mirrored an understanding of education provided by psychoanalytic theory. My interviews with teacher candidates revealed important insights into resistance to critical ideas in teacher education. The teacher candidates’ understanding of resistance moved beyond the blaming of the ‘ignorant’ individual, to an examination of the difficult process of self-reflection. With this, came a recognition of the complicated nature of teaching, particularly when teaching a topic like critical multiculturalism. For many of the teacher candidates interviewed, a simplistic understanding of the teacher-learner relationship (where one passes knowledge onto the other) was no longer an accurate description of how teaching and learning happens. Instead, critical multicultural education was understood as a complicated and challenging process. These challenges will be explored in the following chapter along with suggestions on how teacher education programs can begin to understand and address these challenges.
Chapter 8

Theoretical Discussion and Conclusion

This chapter will discuss the theoretical and pedagogical challenges for multicultural education based on some of the issues and questions raised by the teacher candidates interviewed. Once these challenges have been discussed, suggestions on how to address these challenges will be provided. The final section of this chapter will conclude this research.

The Challenges of Critical Multicultural Education

As discussed in the last analytic chapter, the teacher candidates I interviewed often described critical multicultural education as a unique subject area that differed from other topics in teacher education. Critical multicultural education was described as a worldview and, therefore, teacher candidates questioned whether or not it could be taught like other courses. These teacher candidates seemed to be aware that critical multicultural education had its own unique challenges. This section will explore a few of these challenges for critical multicultural education by examining some of the common practices advocated by critical multicultural education theorists.

As stated in a previous chapter, critical multiculturalism has its roots in critical theory and critical pedagogy, which “proposes that education is a form of political intervention in the world that is capable of creating the possibilities for social transformation” (Giroux, 2004, p. 34). Given its roots in critical theory, many of the pedagogical practices advocated in a critical multicultural approach are similar to those advocated in critical pedagogy (dialogue, for example). While some of the other pedagogical approaches I examine below may not be considered critical multicultural pedagogy, they are frequently
cited in the literature as successful and appropriate approaches to bring about critical multicultural awareness in teacher candidates. These approaches include dialogue, providing experiences of the ‘Cultural Other’, and an emphasis on overcoming differences.

*Dialogue.*

For critical educators, dialogue is an important pedagogical tool. As Giroux (2004) states, “it is crucial to stress the importance of democratic classroom relations that encourage dialogue, deliberation, and the power of students to raise questions” (p. 43). Dialogue has also been identified as a critical component to a multicultural education course (see Akkari, 2001; Cochran-Smith, 1995; Montecinos, 1995; Sleeter, 1995; Tatum, 1992). As Montecinos (1995) explains, “The construction of multicultural knowledge in the classroom does not involve teachers giving knowledge to students; instead, it involves people sharing and challenging each other’s views” (p. 301). Through dialogue, individuals can discuss and debate issues in an environment where participants are heard and where all participants are seen as equals. It is believed that dialogue provides a space where new understandings and knowledge of the individual, the Other and the world can be constructed.

The work of Ellsworth (1989, 1997) provides insightful critique of the notion of dialogue. Her important work will be used to provide an alternate conceptual frame from which to understand the practice of dialogue.

The practice of dialogue assumes that a space can be created where previous social and historical inequalities are somehow erased and, therefore, individuals from differing background and identities can come together and communicate as equals. It is believed
that through dialogue issues of difference and oppression can be discussed with the hope of constructing new possibilities for the future. But what advocates of dialogue often fail to address is that “[d]ialogue… is itself a socially constructed and politically interested relationship” (Ellsworth, 1997, p. 48, italics in original). In denying that dialogue has vested interests, it has taken on extraordinary qualities. As Ellsworth (1997) states, “Dialogue is assumed to be capable of everything from constructing knowledge, to solving problems, to ensuring democracy, to constituting collaboration, to securing understanding, to building moral virtues, to alleviating racism or sexism, to fulfilling desires for communication and connection” (p. 49). Because of the belief in its transcendental qualities, the embedded interests and power relations that can work to inhibit and silence certain peoples’ voices goes unnoticed. As Butler (1999) explains, “The very notion of ‘dialogue’ is culturally specific and historically bound, and while one speaker may feel secure that conversation is happening, another may be sure it is not” (p. 20). Rather than recognizing its cultural embeddedness, dialogue insists that as long as the classroom is a ‘safe place’ all people will feel comfortable sharing their thoughts and engaging in dialogue. Classrooms, however, are not safe places for everyone. Racism, sexism, classism, ableism, and other forms of oppression persist not only outside of schools, but inside classrooms as well. No matter how much a teacher desires to create an ‘oppression-free’ classroom, the oppressive dynamics structured in society work through all people, including the teacher (even if this is at the unconscious level). Silence, or the refusal to participate in dialogue, can be seen as a sign that these oppressive dynamics continue to operate in classrooms (as discussed in Chapter 3).
But in order for ‘true’ dialogue to take place, all members must participate with a spirit of sharing their experiences and understandings with others. This belief fails to acknowledge the histories of various groups and their interaction with each other. A ‘democratic’ classroom cannot erase the history of oppression and the violence it has caused. Therefore, not all students can participate in dialogue as members who are ‘happy to share their experiences with others’, nor should they be required to do so. In this case, silence is an act of defiance (Lewis, 1993). As Ellsworth (1989) explains, “the speech of oppositional groups is a ‘talking back,’ a ‘defiant speech’ that is constructed within communities of resistance and is a condition of survival” (p. 310). ‘Defiant speech’ can serve as an important challenge to the perspectives of students and teachers (Ellsworth, 1989). Instead, dialogue treats defiant speech as a threat to the continuity it tries so hard to maintain.

Ellsworth (1997) explains continuity in terms of an editing technique used in film production. As Ellsworth (1997) states, “The purpose of continuity editing as a series of conventions is to bridge spaces of difference-between” (p. 86). Continuity editing ensures that the film maintains a particular ‘reality’ for the viewer and that the viewer continues to believe in the complete and real world of the film. Dialogue also demands continuity. Before disagreement is allowed in dialogue, both parties must express their “common ground of comprehension” (Ellsworth, 1997, p. 93). This approach assumes that such common ground can and should be achieved. As Ellsworth (1997) states, “Even if we subsequently disagree, we are already the same in the sense that we have shown ourselves to be rational interlocutors capable of an initial, unbiased reading” (p. 93, italics in original). The belief is that I must first express that I understand what you have said to
me, even if I do not agree with it. This maintains the continuity that is necessary for rational debate, which is understood as a method through which all disagreements can be discussed and resolved. However, this view understands rationalism as an ideologically neutral tool for dialogue rather than a socially constructed concept. As Ellsworth (1989) explains, “Rational argument has operated in ways that set up as its opposite an irrational Other, which has been understood, historically, as the province of women and other exotic Others” (p. 301). In order for something to be rational, there must be an irrational opposite – the Cultural Other. Rational debate, therefore, requires students to use “the logics of rationalism and scientism which have been predicated on and made possible through the exclusion of socially constructed irrational Others” (Ellsworth, 1989, p. 305).

How, then, can rational dialogue claim to have the ability to provide new possibilities for understanding and addressing oppression (as it is often presented in the context of critical multicultural education) when it uses the tools of the oppressor? And what happens when one refuses to participate in ‘rational’ debate? What happens when one refuses “to agree to an initial, neutral, innocent understanding”(Ellsworth, 1997, p. 93)?

Without an acknowledgement that all positions are fused with interest and power, that there is no neutral understanding or objective truth, the only way we can understand the person who refuses to engage in dialogue is through the degradation of the individual. As Ellsworth (1997) explains:

> the only way we can read someone’s unwillingness to stay in dialogue is that they have not sufficiently developed the moral virtues necessary to keep their minds “open”, their emotions in check. The only way we can read their failure or refusal or limits to understanding is as a failure of their rational capacities or as a mean-spirited, separatist, antagonistic and dangerous-to-everyone-who-loves-democracy refusal to honor another human being’s attempt to “connect” through communication.

(p.102)
By placing the blame on the individual, dialogue can maintain the belief in its possibility; it does not have to recognize its limitations, breaks, or ruptures. “What is guarded against is the interruption of the unconscious, the unmeant, the unknowable, the excessive, the irrational, the unspeakable, the unhearable, the forgotten, the ignored, the despised” (Ellsworth, 1997, p. 95).

While critical multiculturalism claims to challenge the oppressive dynamics of society, the unproblematic use of dialogue can work against these goals. By ignoring power and interest and demanding a common ground of understanding, the practice of dialogue erases difference and maintains oppressive relations. However, it is through an examination of the limitations of dialogue, that one can imagine new possibilities for communication in teacher education. As Gur-Ze’ev (1998) states, “The possibilities of understanding the limits of dialogue and the real horizons in which obligatory power rules are of vital educational potential, even for the ideal of dialogue and the struggle over its conditions and possible realization” (pp. 483-484).

*Experiencing the ‘Cultural Other’.*

A number of researchers examining multicultural awareness discussed the importance of providing teacher candidates with experiences of the ‘Cultural Other’ in order to further their sensitivity to issues of diversity (see Cochran-Smith, 1995; Finney & Orr, 1995; Gay & Kirkland, 2003; Sleeter, 2001; Sleeter, 1995; Weisman & Garza, 2002). Used as a pedagogical tool, experiences of the ‘Cultural Other’ are seen as a catalyst for change that can further teacher candidates’ multicultural awareness and understanding of diverse groups of people. As Montecinos (1995) states:

If all knowledge is assumed to be partial to an individual’s social location, it is through conversation that people can learn to see things from someone else’s
perspective. Through our efforts at finding points of connection with the Other, we can enlarge our horizons, and, eventually… fuse our horizon with that of the Cultural Other.

(p. 300)

The belief that experiencing the Cultural Other will increase teacher candidates’ critical multicultural awareness reveals how the discourse around experience in teacher education influences multicultural pedagogical approaches. Just as the teaching placement is valorized as the “authentic moment” of learning how to teach, experiencing the Other is seen as a site of critical and reflective learning. It is assumed that through the experience teacher candidates will automatically become more accepting of the Cultural Other and more reflective of their beliefs about the Cultural Other. The assumption is that this ‘experience’ will act as a pivotal moment in the lives of teacher candidates, which will result in transformation through self-reflection. But self-reflection does not guarantee a new perspective. Ellsworth (1997) used the work of Felman (1987) to make the point that “self-reflection is always in danger of becoming just that – a reflection of the prior, same self” (p. 94). When looking in the mirror, for example, what one sees is a reflection of the same self; there is no new information, nothing that could give a different perspective. Because experience is understood and given meaning through the concepts and frameworks of the individual, a ‘new’ experience does not necessarily bring new meaning. The ‘new’ experience will be understood through the pre-existing concepts and frameworks of the individual, making the ‘new’ experience similar to past experiences as it is given similar meaning. It is not an experience of the ‘Other’, alone, that provides teacher candidates with new knowledge and new understandings of themselves; it is a different conceptual framework that can give experience, whether past or present, new meaning and, in turn, provide new understanding and knowledge to the individual.
Overcoming difference.

Critical multicultural theory is clear that difference should not be exoticized or ignored, but that difference does, in fact, make a difference. However, the notion of difference seems to pose a serious dilemma for critical multiculturalists. On the one hand, difference must be recognized and acknowledged. What gets defined as ‘different’ (meaning different from the norm) works to position individuals and groups in a hierarchy of power and privilege (or lack of power and lack of privilege depending on where one is in this hierarchy). On the other hand, a focus on difference is understood as an impossible position from which one can work with others. The belief is that differences need to be overcome in order to create more equitable and just relations in society. As Marable (1992) states:

As long as we bicker over perceived grievances, maximizing our claims against each other, refusing to see the economic, political, cultural and social common ground which can unite us, we will be victimized by capitalism, sexism, racism, national oppression, homophobia, and other systems of domination… No single group has all of the answers… But together, the collective path to human liberation, self-determination and sovereignty will become clear.

(p. 255)

The assumption is that a “common ground” of human liberation will unite people, despite their differences, and that this common ground is necessary for change. As Butler (1999) states, “The insistence in advance on coalitional ‘unity’ as a goal assumes that solidarity, whatever the price, is a prerequisite for political action” (p. 20).

But what does it mean to desire a common ground and the unification of voices? While perhaps not explicitly stating so, the discussion of the need for common ground reveals a desire for sameness and a belief in a power in sameness – if we all see things the same way and find common ground, then we can work together to end oppression.
The problem, however, is that this perspective fails to acknowledge the impossibility of sameness, the impossibility of common ground. Second, this perspective ignores the potential and power that difference brings. It is through an understanding of difference and “the ground of our difference” (M. Lewis, personal communication, August 15, 2007), that the goals of critical multiculturalism can be reached.

The desire to find common ground despite differences is a desire to maintain continuity, described in the section on dialogue. It is through this continuity, through finding our commonalities, that the current rhetoric of critical multiculturalism can maintain the illusion of its possibility. But what if all voices and differences cannot be unified? What if two different stories, realities, worldviews cannot coexist? For example, the story of Christopher Columbus ‘discovering’ the new world, defeating the ‘savages’ and establishing the beginnings of the civilized, free world cannot exist alongside the story of the indigenous population of North America who lived for thousands of years on their land until the arrival of the ‘white men’ who killed them, enslaved them and took away their land. One story has persisted, the other silenced, because the two cannot coexist. As Ellsworth (1997) states:

…some narratives of the world cannot coexist. For an educator, it’s a hard point to get, because nearly everything about the institution and field of education, including the practice of communicative dialogue, tells me that the job of a teacher who teaches about and across social and cultural difference is to make diverse narratives of the world coexist.

(p. 113)

The desire to find common ground despite difference is an attempt to make diverse experiences and understandings of the world coexist. The attempt to overcome difference reveals the need to control for and minimize the messiness and complications that would result from the recognition that sameness is not possible. It allows us to hold onto the
humanist belief that we are all really the same underneath it all and that through our commonness we will find the simple solution to what ails us. But what if sameness achieves nothing? What if learning can only come through difference?

Ellsworth (1997) states that “Teaching about and across social and culture difference is not about bridging our differences and joining us together in understanding, it’s about engaging in the ongoing production of culture in a way that returns yet another difference” (p. 139). It is a return of a difference that is critical for creative possibilities. When sameness returns to us, there is no challenge, no movement; it is static. Difference is what gives new potential. Ellsworth (1997) explains, “The return of a difference makes it possible to change my initial point of observation into a question – a question that, in the very process of its construction and articulation, changes my theorizing and practice already” (p. 189). Differences surprise, disrupt and challenge – all things critical multiculturalism would like to achieve. Rather than attempting to learn through finding sameness and minimizing difference, it is an understanding of difference that should be sought.

This discussion of the challenges and limits of the pedagogical approaches of dialogue, experiencing the ‘Cultural Other’, and overcoming difference is not meant to give the impression that critical multiculturalism is fatally flawed and, therefore, not a desirable educational approach. Rather, this critique is presented as a way to explore new approaches that would allow critical multiculturalism to engage with and question its own pedagogical challenges and the dominant discourses in teacher education.
New Possibilities for Teacher Education

The critique of the “breakdowns, blind spots, and vulnerabilities” (Britzman, 2000, p. 202) of critical multicultural education is a starting point from which to begin to examine new possibilities for teacher education. This section will explore new ways of thinking and approaching teacher education based on the work of Ellsworth (1997), Britzman (1991a) and my discussions with teacher candidates. While I have not necessarily had the opportunity to experience these approaches to teacher education or see them in action, they are new possibilities that excite me. As a recent teacher candidate, I feel I would have benefited from such approaches and can only imagine what my teacher education would have looked like had these alternative approaches been implemented. The approaches discussed here will include an alternative to dialogue, a rethinking of the meaning of practice and the teaching placement, the ability to imagine alternatives, understanding one’s educational biography, and helping teacher candidates transition into the world of teaching.

A dialogic approach to communication.

The critique of dialogue, presented earlier, demonstrated the ways in which a traditional view of dialogue has constructed language as neutral and has ignored the context, interests and power embedded in the language we use and the way we use it. Such a perspective has given dialogue transcendental qualities while making its ideological roots invisible. Rather than understanding language as neutral, a process is needed where language can be examined for its historical, cultural, and social situatedness. Such an approach has been described as dialogic.
A dialogic approach understands language as mediated through social context, history, difference, ideology, and power. As Bakhtin (1981) states:

We are taking language not as a system of abstract grammatical categories, but rather language conceived as ideologically saturated, language as a world view, even as a concrete opinion, insuring a *maximum* of mutual understanding in all spheres of ideological life.

(p. 271, italics in original)

Language is not an objective tool used to describe the things around us. All words come from somewhere and carry with them the history of their construction and use. This situated-ness of language is described by Bakhtin (1981) as the “taste” of words:

All words have the “taste” of a profession, a genre, a tendency, a party, a particular work, a particular person, a generation, an age group, the day and hour. Each word tastes of the context and contexts in which it has lived its socially charged life; all words and forms are populated by intentions.

(p. 293)

Language, therefore, is embedded with meaning, which is dependent on the individual and the context in which the language is being used. With this understanding of language, dialogue is not possible because it requires an initial acknowledgement of a common ground of understanding. In a dialogic understanding, all language is infused with specific meaning, power and interest. There cannot be an initial common ground of understanding because there is no common ground in language. A new form of communication that recognizes the ideological production of language is necessary and a dialogic approach does just that. As Britzman (1991a) explains:

A concern with the dialogic… allows us to move beyond the conversation itself to attend to the conditions of its production: the words we choose, the way we reinflect them with past and personal meanings, the style used to position meanings, and the mix of intentions that are inevitable when speakers interact. And when we can consider what it is that conditions conversations, we can move away from the normative view that language is merely neutral and descriptive to the dialogical view of language as ideological and conscriptive. This
understanding can help us begin to identify the kinds of discourse that are made available, and decide whether a discourse can provide the practices we desire.

(p. 238)

Here the importance is not what was said in the conversation, but the various negotiated meanings of what we say and how we say it. As a result, what is analyzed is “the route of a reading” (Ellsworth, 1997, p. 125). The route of a reading is how one comes to an understanding of a text (a text can be spoken word, written word or some other form of visual media). The idea is that there are multiple possible readings of a text and that reading a text is different every time because of the specific and changing context.

However, this does not create a situation where all readings are relative and have equal value and, therefore, cannot be criticized or rejected. Rather, consideration is given to what the reading is for, what a particular reading does in the world. As Ellsworth (1997) explains, our readings “are always made for something. They are always made to do something. And that making and doing will always have material consequences for ourselves and others” (p. 135, italics in original).

A dialogical approach is particularly important for critical multicultural education, not only because it moves beyond dialogue, but because it can help critical multiculturalism achieve some of its goals. Critical multiculturalism clearly expresses an interest not only in the Other, but also with the dominant, the obvious and the common sense. What gets defined as normal is based on the interests of the dominant (in order to maintain power). How the dominant is normalized and understood as common sense is achieved through language and the way it is used. For example, people with white skin rarely describe themselves in terms of their race – they are just ‘people’. As Tatum (1997) explains, “There is a lot of silence about race in White communities, and as a
consequence Whites tend to think of racial identity as something that other people have” (p. 94). This “silence about race” and the failure to describe one’s race through the use of language, such as ‘white’ or Caucasian’, creates a discourse where whiteness is the norm and only the Other is coloured. It is through language that the common sense belief of ‘White as the norm’ is maintained. But, it is through a dialogic understanding of conversation that one can move beyond the common sense to the critical. As Britzman (1991b) explains, “To undermine the obvious requires pedagogical practices that address how the obvious is historically constructed and how it is sustained through discursive practices” (p. 78). A dialogic approach provides the context through which the historical construction of language is examined along with the discourse it produces, for whom, for what, and with what consequences. And this ability to consider language from a dialogical perspective creates new possibilities for how we can imagine education and the world around us. As Britzman (1991a) states:

The image of teaching advocated here is dialogic: teaching must be situated in relationship to one’s biography, present circumstances, deep commitments, affective investments, social context, and conflicting discourses about what it means to learn to become a teacher. With this dialogic understanding, teaching can be reconceptualized as a struggle for voice and discursive practices amid a cacophony of past and present voices, lived experiences, and available practices. (p. 8)

Acknowledging and understanding biography.

In her article (1986) and in her book (1991a) Britzman raises the issue of biography and the role it plays in teacher candidates’ understandings of teaching and learning. As explained earlier, teacher candidates enter their teacher education program having experienced years of schooling as students. “[T]his contributes to well-worn and commonsensical images of the teacher’s work and serves as the frame of reference for
prospective teachers’ self-images” (Britzman, 1986, p. 443). But teacher education programs often address teacher candidates as though they were blank slates, as though previous knowledge and ideas about teaching and learning do not exist. As Britzman (1986) states, “the dominant model of teacher education as vocational training does not address the hidden significance of biography in the making of a teacher” (p. 443). A teacher education program that set out to provide critical multicultural education would have to address teacher candidates biographies and, in particular, how these biographies form their ideas about teaching and learning and what impact this may have on critical multicultural education.

Critical multicultural education stresses the importance of critical self-reflection, which moves beyond merely asking teacher candidates to ‘reflect’. Instead, a context is provided in which teacher candidates can begin to understand what it means to reflect critically. Equally important, new concepts and frameworks are provided from which teacher candidates can re-examine past events and construct new meanings from these events. In the context of critical multiculturalism, critical reflection is used to understand and address the complex issues of privilege and oppression. When applied to teacher education, it seems logical that critical self-reflection also include an examination of the histories and experiences of schooling for teacher candidates. This reflection on biography is particularly important if teacher candidates are to become critical multicultural educators as it can help them redefine themselves as teachers. As Britzman (1986) explains, “uncovering biographies can empower student teachers through a greater participation in their own process of becoming a teacher and move them beyond the sway of cultural authority” (p. 452).
An examination of teacher candidates’ biographies can begin with a consideration of their many years of compulsory education and how their experiences as students have shaped their beliefs about what it means to teach and learn. Once teacher candidates have identified their own beliefs about teaching, learning and education, teacher educators can assist them in deconstructing and unpacking the origins of these beliefs. This begins a process where teacher candidates recognize the construction of their own ideas about education as well as how and why certain practices in teaching continue to persist.

The various ways that teacher candidates’ biographies shape and influence their identities as teachers and the impact this has on teacher education is an area that would benefit from further educational research.

*Imagining alternatives.*

The ability to imagine alternatives to the current approaches and structures of schooling and education was a point raised by one of the teacher candidates I interviewed. As Jessica stated:

… just being able to engage more with ideas about, about imagining different possibilities for schools. Not just learning what it is, as though it’s some kind of utopic thing that’s working to prepare wonderful people [laughing] for the world… I would have wanted alternative ways to set up and exist within classrooms and create classroom communities that are actually inclusive…

*(Jessica, Interview, p. 15)*

Jessica wanted her teacher education program to expose her to different forms and ways of thinking about schooling, along with opportunities to engage in the creative construction of alternatives. Building on the notion of teacher candidate biography, the act of imagining alternatives could provide teacher candidates with new ways of envisioning possibilities for education rather than reproducing the forms and practices of schooling they were exposed to as students.
But the act of imagining alternatives to current forms of teaching and learning does not mean that everyone will imagine the same alternative. In fact, teacher candidates will probably envision a wide range of alternative forms of education from the need for zero tolerance schools with metal detectors to schools where class takes place outside under a tree. But this lack of consensus does not pose a problem; in fact it is the desire for consensus that creates a problem. As Britzman (1991a) explains, “[t]he problem is that any movement toward single-minded definitions of learning and teaching works against recognition of the dialogic relations that constitute them” (p. 175). Rather than striving to achieve a consensus on an alternative to the current form of education, the focus should be on exploring the multiple relations that work to define the alternatives that one sees as desirable. While this does not provide agreement on an alternative approach to education, it does further an understanding of the various competing discourses in teacher education and how the teacher candidates, themselves, negotiate these meanings.

Although the act of imagining alternatives does not mean that everyone must agree on one alternative, it does require a discussion about how teaching and learning could differ from its current form. Future teachers may not be getting a single message about how education ought to be, but that is not important (or possible). What they would be receiving is the idea that education could be different. The act of imagining alternative, itself, calls into question the current way things are done and sends a strong message that things do not have to be the way they are now.

Providing teacher candidates with alternative visions of education, however, cannot be successful without a recognition of the current expectations and conditions under which they will be required to work as teachers in schools. As Giroux (1988) states:
Unless teachers have the authority and power to organize and shape the conditions of their work so that they can teach collectively, produce alternative curricula, and engage in a form of emancipatory politics, any talk of developing and implementing progressive pedagogy ignores the reality of what goes on in the daily lives of teachers and is nonsensical.

(p. 102)

Teacher candidates need to understand how the current discursive practices in schools work to prohibit and contain any attempts at critical and alternative pedagogy. With this knowledge, teacher candidates can also begin to imagine steps that they could take in order to disrupt these discursive practices in ways that would make their desired pedagogical approaches possible.

**Guidance from teacher candidate to teacher.**

Ultimately, the hope is that as teacher candidates develop a critical approach to multicultural education they will use this knowledge to teach in critical ways in their classroom. But does the knowledge of critical multicultural education necessarily translate into critical multicultural practice when one becomes a teacher? What are the obstacles that teacher candidates face once they enter the teaching profession? These are important questions that any teacher education program that is attempting to teach in critical ways must address.

My interviews with teacher candidates did show a lack of understanding of the challenges critical educators face once they enter the teaching profession. My e-mail correspondence with Kerry demonstrated her thinking about her future as a critical educator:

*Amber: As a person who wants to be a teacher who teaches for social justice, critical thinking, and a more critical approach to multiculturalism... do you foresee any challenges that you might face when you enter the public education system (i.e. when you try to teach in these ways in the public system)? How do you*
Kerry: I’m worried about feeling isolated by my beliefs. Hopefully, I’ll have a chance to join a good staff, but if not, I’m concerned that I’ll have problems having friendships with people that I can’t see eye to eye with. I’ve never had a problem developing or maintaining respectful and professional relationships, but obviously it would be preferable to have actual friends on staff. I just have trouble being friends with people whose values I don’t respect.

I guess that I could have problems with parents, but I’m not willing to compromise my values. Besides, everything that I believe in aligns with human rights law and school board policies, so I’m not worried about losing any major battles or my career being in jeopardy or anything like that. Actually, I hadn’t really thought about that issue until you asked.

(Kerry, Personal E-mail, March 24, 2007)

Kerry speaks about the challenges she will face as a critical educator only in terms of personal relationships with other teachers. She does not believe that she will face any other challenges as she is teaching according to school policies and human rights law. Kerry does not seem to consider or understand how certain language, like social justice and multiculturalism, can make its way into school documents, but, at the same time, does not necessarily get translated into practice (or a type of practice that is considered critical). For example, Chapter 3 described the various ways multicultural education can be interpreted and practiced, from conservative multiculturalism to critical multiculturalism. Importantly, Kerry’s comments demonstrate a lack of opportunity to examine the realities of the teaching profession and the challenges teachers in the field might face, particularly those teachers who teach for critical multiculturalism. Kerry’s comment that she had not considered this issue until I asked her is evidence of this.

The school environment and policies, as well as the practices and attitudes of fellow teachers can have a significant impact on new teachers entering the field, particularly when it comes to issues of critical multicultural education. Even if multiculturalism is
being fostered in teacher education programs, it will not necessarily translate into classroom practice; work needs to be done to bridge this gap between universities and schools. As Cochran-Smith (1995) explains:

what we need are generative ways for prospective teachers, experienced teachers, and teacher educators alike to work together in communities of learners – to explore and reconsider their own assumptions, understand the values and practices of families and cultures that are different from their own, and construct pedagogy that takes these into account in locally appropriate and culturally sensitive ways.

(p. 495)

Teacher education programs need to assist teacher candidates in making the transition into the teaching profession by providing conceptual tools to understand and deconstruct the practice of teaching along with resources teachers can turn to once they are in the field (for example, various teacher organizations designed to provide support for critical educators).

The transition from teacher candidate to teacher and the impact this has on critical multicultural teaching is an area in need of further research. An examination of the challenges critical multicultural educators face in schools, an understanding of the perspectives of new teachers who enter the teaching profession with the expectation of teaching for critical multiculturalism, and an exploration of the practices of successful critical multicultural teachers is needed in order to inform the practice and implementation of critical multiculturalism in teacher education programs.

The above discussion on new possibilities for teacher education – a dialogic approach to communication, an examination of biography, imaging alternatives, and guidance through the transition from teacher candidate to teacher – is not intended to prescribe a new set of practices for critical multiculturalism. It should not be read as ‘this is how you
do critical multiculturalism and if you do it this way, it will work’. Rather I am trying to
open up new possibilities for understanding teacher education, particularly critical
multicultural education, without dictating what those possibilities should be. These
suggestions for new possibilities in teacher education are intended as a contribution to the
discussion started by important educational theorists like Britzman, Simon, and
Ellsworth. It is my hope that this discussion continues and that alternative approaches to
teacher education are implemented.

Conclusion

The purpose of this research has been to examine, from the perspectives of teacher
candidates, discourses in teacher education and their impact on critical multicultural
education. My interviews with teacher candidates and the important work of Britzman,
Simon, Ellsworth, and Felman have come together to create a piece of research which I
hope provides a new perspective and understanding on teacher education and the
possibility of critical multiculturalism. In adhering to a feminist approach to my research,
I wish for this research to inform the current practices of Faculties of Education in order
to move towards a kind of teacher education that can address the larger inequities in
society.

At the same time I realize that this vision of teacher education is contingent upon
greater changes in the wider society, namely the recognition of and desire to change
sexist, racist, classist, heterosexist, able-ist, and other oppressive dynamics. But I also
recognize that change in the way we conceptualize teacher education, however small, can
produce the larger changes we desire for society. As Stanley and Wise (1983) state,
“there is no other way for social change to occur other than through personal change
multiplied many times” (p. 64). Thus, in the end, it is the small, but personal effect this research has had on myself, and potentially my participants, that may be its greatest and most lasting impact.

For myself, the undertaking of this research has brought with it a number of personal challenges and changes. Research is a transformative process; it is impossible for it not to be. As one gathers new information in the search for meaning, they cannot help but learn about the manner in which they themselves view the world. My research has caused me to look back on my own education to investigate how I have been inscribed by the dominant discourses in teacher education. I am left to wonder what my teacher education could have looked like and how the new possibilities in action might have changed the teacher I see myself as today and the teacher I will become. In the end, this process of researching teacher education and critical multiculturalism has provided me with a new perspective and understanding of myself as an educator and has inspired me to seek out the knowledge I felt my teacher education program lacked. With the conclusion of this research comes the completion of one small step on my journey to becoming a critical educator. I look forward to the many steps to come.
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