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**Challenging Pedagogy:
An exploratory study of the work of community
educators who seek to challenge oppressive relations**

by

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A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of Master of Social Work

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores how community educators who challenge oppressive relations speak about working for social change. While much has been written on the use of pedagogy in the school system, the work of educators who practice outside of more formal institutions remains under-addressed (Curry-Stevens, 2007). Therefore, the challenges, tensions, and possibilities of anti-oppressive community education remains an important area of inquiry. I define community educators as people who work for local organizations or for themselves, outside of formal institutions and I interviewed community educators who challenged different oppressive relations such as racism, homophobia, and sexism. Using a critical post-structural framework (Fook 2002; Rossiter 1996), I analyzed the way that these educators spoke about different aspects of their practice. The main argument of this thesis is that anti-oppressive community educators work in complex and challenging conditions and that critical reflection can open up possibilities for negotiating these social relations.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 1:	
Thinking About Community Education as an Anti-Oppressive Tool	1
Conceptual Framework	3
Theoretical Framework	7
Literature Review	12
Methods	16
Design of Research	16
Recruitment Procedures	17
Data Collection	18
Data Analysis	19
Conclusion	20
Chapter 2:	
Locating Oppressive Relations	22
Naming Forms of Oppression	22
Locating the Problem of Oppression	27
Positioning Anti-Oppressive Community Education Work	32
Conclusion	34
Chapter 3:	
Negotiating the Context of Setting Up Community Education Practice	35
Who Are They Working For and Why	36
Negotiating with Limited Resources	40
Negotiating, Planning and Compromising	44
Conclusion	52
Chapter 4:	
Negotiating Diversity and dis(Comfort)	54
Conceptualizing Diversity in Workshops	54
Comfort, Discomfort, and Different Social Locations	58
Working Through Emotions	65
Conclusion	68
Chapter 5:	
Pedagogical Strategies and Tensions	70
The Facilitator as a Tool	70
Presenting Alternative Information	76
Promoting Dialogue	80
Activities and Games	83
Conclusion	88

Chapter 6:	
Positioning and Self-Reflection	90
Connections to Background	91
Perception of the Community Educator's Role	98
Construction of the Knowledgeable Self	101
Conclusion	109
Chapter 7:	
Conclusion	111
References	124
Appendix A: Interview Guide	133
Appendix B: Information Letter	136

CHAPTER 1: THINKING ABOUT COMMUNITY EDUCATION AS AN ANTI-OPPRESSIVE TOOL

“It’s like suddenly she was the catalyst for change, just as Martin Luther King was...this great woman was going to make change for us” (Srivastava, 2005:55).

The above quote is from a worker whose organization was bringing in an anti-racism trainer to work with them. In her statement, she conveys how the educator was framed by workers as the organization’s salvation for “solving” all the problems of racism in their workplace. As a Muslim woman of colour, I have also been guilty of seeing anti-oppressive education in the community as somewhat of an all-encompassing cure for the painful racism and Islamophobia that I have encountered. In the face of the discomfort and pain that these relations have caused me and others, the vision of one day “fixing” this problem through anti-oppressive education has always appeared seductive to me. Education has often been described as an important tool for challenging oppressive relations and bringing about social change. For instance, bell hooks (2003) argues that we need broad political movements that call on citizens to uphold democracy and the rights of everyone to be educated and to strive towards ending domination in all forms. An important piece of this goal, she argues, is “changing our educational system so that schooling is not the site where students are indoctrinated to support imperialist white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy...but rather where they learn to open their minds...and to think critically” (hooks, 2003:xiii). Paulo Freire (2003), whose ‘pedagogy of the oppressed’ I will discuss later in this chapter, argues that education could be an important tool for ‘liberating’ those who are marginalized because it can help them see that they and their oppressors are part of unfair dehumanization processes.

Central to this concept of challenging oppression through education, is the idea that education is a political process that can be used in both oppressive and empowering ways. This suggests that there will always be tensions in how education is used. While several scholars have explored some of these tensions and paradoxes around 'educating for social change' in the formal school systems (Boler, 1999; Ellsworth, 1997; Kumashiro, 2002), less of these dynamics have been studied in more informal community education settings (Curry-Stevens, 2005). However, as the opening quote in this chapter indicates, it is often community educators working to challenge power relations who face extraordinary pressure to effect social change. In this thesis, I seek to unpack some of the tensions that these educators face by exploring how they speak about their work. In the literature, very few works compare and contrast the work of progressive community educators in a single study. Some of the specific issues that I explore in this thesis are: how do community educators define the social problems they are addressing, how do they position their work in relation to structural inequalities, how do they position themselves in relation to their work and social justice goals, what are the challenges of carrying out their work, how do they negotiate power relations in their workshops, and what pedagogical strategies do they use to challenge oppressive relations?

The central question of this research project is: how does a small group of community educators who seek to challenge oppressive relations speak about how they see social change processes operating through their work? I employed a post-structural analysis to examine the narratives that educators used to make sense of their practice. This analysis also made visible some of the tensions around power that are endemic in community education. I argue that although many of these power relations are out of the control of

community educators, workers can inadvertently reproduce oppression if they are overlooked. Ultimately, I argue that a more critically reflective approach, though also fraught with tensions, may offer some possibilities for negotiating these challenges.

Conceptual Framework

For this research project, I interviewed community educators who do some form of anti-oppressive education in the community. I defined community educators as educators who were not employed by the formal education system and who work with adults (although in this study I found that these educators tended to work with diverse populations and often worked with both adults and youth). Often this education took place in community organizations and workplaces. However, it is important to note that most community educators did not work strictly outside of the more formal education system. There was a lot of crossover between education that happened within institutions such as schools, universities, and colleges, and education in the community and in workplaces. In addition, I only interviewed people who worked for local community organizations in three mid-sized Canadian cities. I define local community organizations as non-profit, social service-based agencies that work with a regional area as opposed to provincial or national organizations.

One of the criteria for choosing the educators I interviewed was that their work had to be aimed at challenging some form of oppression. Oppression can be understood in general as “the domination of subordinate groups in society by a powerful group” (Mullaly, 2002:20). Therefore, I broadly defined anti-oppressive education as education that seeks to challenge the oppression of different marginalized groups in society such as women, visible minorities, members of the GLBTTQ (gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender,

two-spirited, queer) community, and the homeless. It is important to unpack some of the tensions around anti-oppressive education and practice as it is a concept that has been debated in the literature.

Anti-oppressive practice is a relatively new term in social work that “is rooted in historical antecedents and social movements” (Campbell, 2003:122) such as radical, feminist, anti-racist, progressive, and structural approaches to practice (Barnoff and Moffatt, 2007). There are a number of emerging definitions in the literature around anti-oppressive practice, all including the centrality of social justice. For instance, Dominelli (1996) defines anti-oppressive practice as “a person-centered philosophy; an egalitarian value system concerned with reducing the deleterious effects of structural inequalities on people’s lives” (171). Barnoff and Moffatt (2007) view it as an approach where there is an emphasis on eradicating multiple forms of oppression and ensuring equity for all social groups. For Baines (2007), anti-oppressive practice is a constantly emerging construct with no single method of translating theory into practice.

As a relatively new approach, anti-oppression faces a number of criticisms. One is that taking this approach tends to homogenize oppressive relations, overlooking their unique challenges. For instance, Tester (2003) argues that addressing racism requires different analytical tools and that it is dangerous to simply categorize it as another form of oppression. Williams (1999) elaborates on this concern, arguing that a danger of anti-oppressive practice is that “it may represent a politically convenient umbrella that effectively contributes to a dilution of minority struggles and opens the way to avoid talking about ‘race’” (221). This danger is heightened by the fact that anti-oppression is moving towards becoming the dominant model of social work (Wilson and Beresford,

2001). At the same time, another criticism of anti-oppressive practice comes from some post-modernists and post-structuralists who argue that it “dilutes components of their critiques by moving quickly to concrete, collective programs and practices” (Baines, 2007:19). A final critique of anti-oppressive practice is that it is too theoretical. Some of these criticisms are related to the idea that service users, who are often some of the most disempowered people in society, have not been included in the theory’s development (Wilson and Beresford, 2000). As well there is a lack of writing on how social service organizations can incorporate anti-oppressive practice into their daily operations (Barnoff and Moffatt, 2007).

Given these criticism, I make cautious use of the anti-oppressive practice approach in this thesis. I do not see anti-oppressive practice as the “one truth” (Campbell 2003:123), however I do see its usefulness in this study for exploring the way educators challenge different forms of multiple and intersecting oppressions. As Kumashiro (2000) argues:

Whether working from feminist, critical, multicultural, queer, or other perspectives, [educators] seem to agree that oppression is a situation or dynamic in which certain ways of being are privileged in society while others are marginalized (25).

Similarly, I felt that this was a sentiment that tied together the participants in this study. While not all of the participants had originally defined themselves as an ‘anti-oppressive’ educator, they all agreed that they were working to challenge forms of oppression that served to marginalize certain groups in society.

There were a variety of oppressive relations that the community educators in this study sought to challenge through their work. The first, racism, can be defined as a “system of advantage based on race” (Tatum, 1997:7). As Tatum (1997) argues, this

definition is useful because it situates racism, like other forms of oppression, as “not only a personal ideology based on racial prejudice, but a system involving cultural messages and institutional policies and practices” (7). Therefore, anti-racism can be defined as a practice that “emphasizes the importance of focusing on the structural aspects of inequality rather than seeing the problem as simply cultural prejudice or ignorance” (Yee, 2005). Other work that is done to address discrimination based on race does not have such a systemic approach. For instance, ‘race relations exercises’ refer to strategies that concentrate on the cultural contacts and relations of people of different “races”. It focuses more on promoting positive interrelationships between people of different cultural backgrounds as opposed to the systemic change that is advocated by anti-racism. Diversity is another term that I use mainly in relation to ethno-cultural diversity. Although the term originated in collective demands of social movements of feminism, anti-racism, and multiculturalism in the 1970s and 1980s, its connotations are no longer as radical and have been largely appropriated by the neo-liberal agenda (Blackmore, 2006).

I also explored other oppressive relations including heterosexism and homophobia. Heterosexism emphasizes the systemic marginalization of queer people in society. The term can be defined as a social process that seeks “to systematically privilege heterosexuality relative to homosexuality, based on the assumption that heterosexuality, as well as heterosexual power and privilege are the norm and the ideal” (Chesir-Teran, 2003:267). The term, “homophobia”, on the other hand, operates at the level of the individual. It refers to personal hatred and/or anxiety towards persons who identify as queer (Chesir-Teran, 2003).

Another area of oppression participants worked against was the stigmatization of victims of abuse. One of these practices was ritual abuse. Ritual abuse can be defined as the brutal maltreatment of children, adolescents and adults through rituals that involve physical, sexual, and psychological abuse (Scott, 1998). Other participants examined rape and sexual assault which can be defined as any kind of non-consensual sexual contact (Klaw *et al.*, 2005). These crimes can be seen “as arising from and sanctioned by, patriarchal structures of gender domination and power” (McDonald, 2005:277) making sexual assault an act that is about the abuse of power as opposed to an act that is about sex.

Educators in this study sought to challenge the oppressive relations described above through their pedagogy. Pedagogical methods are the methods and strategies that educators use in their practices. Often they reflect the ideology and/or theoretical framework with which the educator approaches their work (Freire, 2003). From this perspective, pedagogy is never neutral. It either reflects dominant norms and expectations and/or seeks to challenge them. In this paper I argue that progressive pedagogies usually do both.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework that I am using for this study incorporates both the tenets of critical pedagogy and post-structuralism. Critical pedagogy is a structural theory of education that draws upon the teachings of Freire (2003) that were originally published in 1971 as *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. According to Ellsworth (1989), “the literature on critical pedagogy represents attempts by educational researchers to theorize and operationalize pedagogical challenges to oppressive social formations” (298). Goals such

as a revitalized democracy, social justice, and social change are all important to this pedagogical perspective (Ellsworth, 1989). Dialogue is considered a central component of this approach. According to Freire (2003), while oppressive forms of education resist dialogue, liberatory education sees it as “essential” (88). Critical pedagogy also places emphasis on developing critical thinking skills. Drawing on the work of Freire, Giroux and McLaren (1992) outline a discourse of critical pedagogy and critical literacy where students “learn how to read...as a dialectical process of understanding, criticizing, and transforming” (19). Similarly, hooks (2003) argues, that it is better to equip students with tools for inquiry rather than compel them to learn solid theories and concepts.

In recent years, critical pedagogy has come under criticism from post-structuralists. Post-structuralism is a theoretical orientation that emerged out of post-modernism. Post-modernism refers to the changes around the way culture was organized that began to occur in the latter half of the twentieth century (Lemert, 1997). It is not so much a set of arguments that have emerged from undisputed facts. Rather, it is representative of a way of seeing the world (Lemert, 1997). Post-modernism rejects the idea of essentialism that pervades modernism and instead asserts that the world is constituted through multiple realities. When applied to anti-oppressive education, post-structuralism, which is a post-modern theory, provides a way to address “the multiplicity and situatedness of oppression and the complexities of teaching and learning” (Kumashiro, 2000:25). Post-structural theory focuses on the way individuals are constructed through social processes. Those who follow it argue that critical pedagogy does not take into account the complexities of challenging oppression through pedagogy. For instance, while dialogue is a central part of critical pedagogy, it involves a wide

range of methods, and thus depending on how it's done, it can be emancipatory or reactionary (Ellsworth, 1989). Those who take a post-structural perspective argue that what is said in the dialoguing process and the voices that are heard can reflect existing power relations in society (Boler, 2004b; hooks, 2003; Tisdell, 1998; Ellsworth, 1989). Therefore, a challenge for educators looking to question relations of oppression is how to facilitate dialogue without reproducing existing structures of oppression. Scholars have presented different strategies for negotiating these challenges. Boler (2004b), for instance, presents a case for "democratic dialogue" which is similar to an affirmative action policy where minority voices are privileged. Ellsworth (1989) uses a coalition framework to recognize the plurality of voices and points of view while still maintaining a social justice goal. While these approaches are not mutually exclusive, they represent different ways that community educators' address this dialogic dilemma.

Critical pedagogy has also come under criticism from some post-structural scholars for not being forthcoming about its political goals. For instance, Holford (1995) criticizes critical pedagogy for not examining its own "regimes of truth" that it perpetuates. Similarly, Ellsworth (1989) argues that researchers who advocate critical pedagogy often fail to provide a clear statement of their political agenda. Critical pedagogy has also come under increasing criticism for the way it de-emphasizes the role of the educators and the impact that they have on the education process. Post-structuralists have argued that the critical pedagogy literature has not made enough of an attempt to problematize the process through which the educator brings their own interests into the learning process (Ellsworth, 1989). Educators who come from a post-structural feminist perspective argue that the "positionality" of an instructor is an important concept

to consider in the education (Tisdell, 1998). My study is in a unique position to unpack this concept of positionality because through my questions, I ask community educators to reflect on their role in anti-oppressive practice.

Some proponents of critical pedagogy also criticize post-structuralist approaches to education. For instance, Giroux and McLaren (1992) criticize post-structuralism for using discourses of skepticism to deny the viability of working for political change. They argue that by emphasizing deconstruction and subjectivity, post-structuralists seek to undo the social justice focus of critical pedagogy (Giroux and McLaren, 1992).

However, many scholars do not see critical pedagogy and post-structuralism as being completely independent of each other. For instance, some post-structuralists have responded to criticisms of moral relativity, arguing that adopting a post-structural perspective does not necessarily mean adopting an apolitical stance. Post-structurally informed analyses can set the context for critiques that are politically engaged (Davies, 1999). Because post-structuralism does not lock subjects into false certainties, and requires that they have openness to understanding the effects of their own language and activities, the possibilities for social movement and transformation become more visible (Davies, 1999). At the same time, some proponents of critical pedagogy have revisited Freire's earlier work and have explored it with a post-structuralist lens (McLaren and da Silva, 1993; Freire and Macedo, 1993). Some have found that "post-structuralist readings can both complement and extend Freire's position" (McLaren and da Silva, 1993:55) because they look at the way his teachings change when they are applied to settings outside of the poor communities he worked with in Brazil (Giroux, 1993). Such a rethinking of Freire's pedagogy allows one to see the complexities involved when using

his pedagogy in different situations. Thus, although there is much debate between post-structuralism and critical pedagogy in the literature, they also can be complimentary.

It is this kind of post-structural framework that informs my study; one that strives towards structural equality but that uses discourse analysis to take into account the complexities involved in striving towards justice. This use of post-structural analysis has been articulated by scholars such as Fook (2002) and Rossiter (1996) in their post-structural revisionings of critical social work. Fook (2002) argues that one of the central post-modern dilemmas is “how to value diversity and at the same time present a united political front in order to achieve critical aims” (159). She argues that it is possible to combine structural and post-modern approaches into a single perspective where structural theory provides moral direction and post-modern thinking provides complexity of analysis (Fook, 2003). Similarly, Rossiter (1996) offers a revisioning of critical, structural social work perspectives that incorporate post-structural analysis. She argues that this post-structural analysis is beneficial to social work because it takes into account people’s social reality through discourse analysis as well as it provides an important analysis into the way power functions in social work (Rossiter, 1996). Therefore, I draw on Fook and Rossiter’s post-structural revisioning of critical social work as a theoretical framework for this study. Post-structuralism is particularly useful for examining the way that power relations are embedded in the work of educators. In my study of community educators’ reflections on their practice and their role, I have attempted to unpack the complexities, contradictions, and challenges of working for social change through this analysis.

Literature Review

For this thesis, I define community education as education that takes place in the community, outside of more formal education systems. Rothman (1996) outlines three models of community interventions that he first developed in 1968: locality development, social planning/policy, and social action. Within these models, education can play an important role, although the form that community education takes can be quite different depending on the model. For instance, education that occurs under the social action model may challenge the dominant ideologies in society more forcefully than education that takes place under the locality development model. Popple (1996) reworks Rothman's models and defines community education as a distinct model of community work. However, even within this model he distinguishes between two kinds of community education. He argues that depending on the ideological approach adopted by different community educators, community education can either fall into the category of being a more traditional pluralist model where community workers play less of a role in challenging the system, or a more radical one that works to challenge the dominant ideologies in society. Popple (1996) argues that radical community education is usually rooted in the pedagogy of Paulo Freire. Although this thesis does not focus exclusively on educators who use the Freirian model, the work of Freire is relevant to the work of many educators who are, in some way, challenging oppressive relations in society in some way. Therefore, I will spend some time looking at the Freirian approach to community education and the way it has informed critical pedagogy.

Paulo Freire was an education professor at the University of Sao Paulo in Brazil during the 1960s who worked with communities living in poverty (Popple, 1996). His

thinking was revolutionary because he believed that the peasants with whom he worked could challenge their oppression by the state and the capitalist system through education. Freire developed a critical pedagogy for undertaking this challenge—a pedagogy that is still considered radical today. He argued that education is a political tool that can be used for either oppressive or liberatory purposes and was critical of what he called the “banking” model of education, where students were simply supposed to retain information disseminated to them from their teachers. This form of education, he argued, mirrors the oppressive relations in society because it devalues dialogue and it considers knowledge “to be a commodity accumulated in order to gain access to positions of power and privilege” (Popple, 1996:158). Instead, Freire developed ‘education for liberation’ where learners and teachers engage in a non-hierarchical education process “in which abstract and concrete knowledge, together with experience, are integrated into *praxis* (which can be defined as action intended to alter the material and social world)” (Popple, 1996:159). The first step, according to Freire, was, ‘conscientization’, the process of becoming aware of one’s oppression (Freire, 2003; Shor, 1993) as well as one’s role in perpetuating oppression. According to Freire (2003), “Only as [people] discover themselves as “hosts” of the oppressor can they contribute to the midwifery of their liberating pedagogy” (31). This idea of reflecting on how one can manifest oppressive tendencies through one’s practices is an idea that is central to the thesis.

Freire’s work has had a strong influence in educational practices worldwide (Giroux, 1993), including in some adult education practices. The growth of adult education in North America since the 1950s has been associated with the rise of capitalism (Holford, 1995). Work-related learning accounts for more than 80% of adult

education (Birden, 2004). Birden (2004) argues that “as the values of government and industry are increasingly injected into adult education, the field socializes individuals into the market-based system and into the culture of specific occupations” (257). This larger percentage of adult education can be classified as professional practice education (Holford, 1995). A smaller percentage of adult education can be classified as representing a cause and/or a democratic movement for social justice (Holford, 1995). It is this smaller category of adult education that I explore in my thesis. As Birden (2004) argues:

Understanding the richness of emancipatory pedagogical encounters that are grounded in the economic, social, and political forces of their time underscores the one-dimensional nature of contemporary adult educational practice and can lead scholars and practitioners into new insights (258).

It is this potential that I am interested in. More specifically, how do educators speak about the possibilities they see in the pedagogical methods? What are the limitations? How are their methods and strategies shaped to challenge oppression?

Several examples from this second social justice category of education have been outlined in the adult education literature. For instance, Butterwick and Selman (2003) worked with a feminist group, using popular theatre to help them develop a deeper understanding of the dynamics of their group, including the way oppression functions within their collective. Palmer and Nascimento (2002) have written about the way that popular theatre has been used to educate seniors from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds about how to seek help for issues such as elder abuse and gambling. Birden (2004) examines the coalition-engendered education that took place with the Boston Women’s Health Collective where a group of women who felt that they lacked medical knowledge about their bodies researched and wrote a book about the female body. This was a “radically democratic project” because there was no formal teacher or agenda.

Instead, the women developed their own curriculum collectively and all assumed teacher roles (Birden, 2004). Although the literature on adult education outlines several in-depth studies of single, progressive education initiatives (See for example: Birden, 2004; Ellsworth, 1989; Butterwick and Selman, 2003; Palmer and Nascimento, 2002), a gap in the literature is that there are few works that compare and contrast the strategies of progressive community educators in a single study. This thesis seeks to help fill that gap by compiling methods of community educators in a single study and placing these methods in conversation with each other. This is an important step because significant debate continues about the ways to challenge oppression through education (Kumashiro, 2000).

There is a significant body of literature on challenging privilege through education. Several authors in the education literature have written on using practices in the classroom in order to get students thinking about privilege (Kumashiro, 2000; Kumashiro, 2002; Ellsworth, 1989; Boler, 2004b; Rasmussen, 2006; Razack, 1993). For instance, anti-racism scholars have written extensively about the challenges of confronting white privilege in schools and colleges (Berlack, 2004; Razack, 1993; Ellsworth, 1989) and more literature is now emerging on the work of challenging other forms of privilege in the school system (Kumashiro, 2000; Rasmussen, 2006; Cuthrell *et al.*, 2007). However, less has been written on applying these methods to non-institutional settings. Srivastava (Srivastava, 1995; Srivastava, 2005; Srivastava and Francis, 2006) has written extensively on the challenges of confronting privilege when doing anti-racism education in community organizations, and other authors have written on anti-oppressive community education more generally (Curry-Stevens, 2007; Curry-Stevens, 2005;

Bishop, 1994). Curry-Stevens (2005) uses the term, “pedagogy of the privileged” (a play on words of Freire’s ‘pedagogy of the oppressed’), to refer to community education that is aimed at transforming privileged learners on various issues of oppression such as racism, classism and sexism etc. Similarly, many of the educators in this study sought to challenge more privileged learners about oppressive relations. This study picks up on a number of challenges that have been identified by previous authors when carrying out education with those who are from more privileged social locations such as how to deal with strong emotions that may come up in the process (Razack, 1993; Srivastava, 2005; Curry-Stevens, 2005; Bishop, 1994) and the challenges around promoting dialogue in workshops (Curry-Stevens, 2005; Srivastava, 2005; Bishop, 1994). My thesis adds another dimension to this analysis through my post-structural reading of how educators spoke of challenging privilege. Post-structural analysis highlights the tensions and negotiations of power that are often visible in our attempts to make sense of the work that we do. In doing so, I hope to highlight the complex ways that pedagogies of the privileged simultaneously challenge and reproduce oppressive relations.

Methods

Design of the Research: I used qualitative methods to secure my data because it allowed me, as the researcher, to gain a more in-depth understanding of the diverse experiences of community educators. As D’Cruz and Jones (2004) argue, qualitative methods are preferable when the research focus is on informants’ experiences. In particular, I used semi-structured interviews because of the way it offers access to people’s “ideas, thoughts, and memories in their own words” (Reinharz, 1992:19). In this study, using qualitative methods such as semi-structured interviewing was advantageous

because of the exploratory nature of this study. Brun (2005) argues that while quantitative methods are good for pursuing descriptive or explanatory research, qualitative methods, are better equipped for pursuing exploratory questions, such as examining people's experiences. Therefore, since the focus of my research is to explore the experiences of community educators, qualitative methods were more appropriate for this study. In my semi-structured interviews with participants, I used an interview guide with open-ended questions (see Appendix A) in order to facilitate discussion on pedagogical strategies. I also asked follow-up questions to some of the issues that participants raised during the interview. As well, I allowed space for participants to raise issues that I, as a researcher, may not have raised.

Recruitment Procedures: I used a small sample of nine community education workers who focus much of their practice on challenging oppression. My goal was to gain an in-depth perspective of some of the processes involved in their work. The small size of the sample meant that the results, while providing a great deal of specificity about the particular participants, are not generalizable beyond the sample. Moreover, this study only speaks to the experiences of this group of community educators who are working to challenge oppression, not the experiences of all community educators. Because recruitment was by self-selection, my study probably attracted certain kinds of community workers, particularly those who were conscious of their efforts to challenge oppression.

To recruit participants, I used word of mouth, snowball sampling, as well as recruitment letters sent through listservs. I started my recruitment procedures by looking at the websites of different community organizations in two Canadian cities to get an idea

of the different kinds of education programs that they offered. I then contacted the agencies that appeared to have education programs that focused on challenging some kind of oppression by sending an information letter. My letter outlined the objectives of the study and the kind of community education work I was seeking to discuss with them (see Appendix B). Community educators could then decide if they felt that their work fit the criteria. I also relied on word of mouth and contacted agencies who I heard had progressive education programs. I sent my information letter over listservs that I thought anti-oppressive community educators would subscribe to. Finally, I relied on snowball sampling for recruiting participants for this study. Snowball sampling refers to the process of recruiting people through existing participants (Brun, 2005). In my study, I asked participants to pass on my contact information and letter to anyone else who they thought might be interested in participating.

Data Collection: Interviews took place in a location that was mutually acceptable to the participants and the researcher. While most interviews took place in the participants' offices at their agencies, if a participant was particularly concerned about their anonymity, I would book a private room at a local community centre or public library. Some interviews also took place over the phone.

Interviews lasted approximately 60-90 minutes. At the start of the interview I asked permission for audio-recording and note-taking. Both written and verbal consent were obtained before the interview proceeded. The interviews followed an interview guide (see Appendix A), but I also asked follow-up questions based on what the participants had said. During the interview, participants were also given the opportunity to opt out of particular questions, or the interview itself.

I then transcribed all of the interviews myself. In the transcriptions, all names were changed and any identifying information removed in order to help preserve the anonymity of the participants. The tape recordings of the interviews and the transcriptions were kept in a secure location. When the thesis was complete, participants were supplied with a summary of findings and interpretations of the research if they wished.

The content of the interviews was not confidential, but names, places of work, and other identifying data were kept confidential. To protect the identity of participants recruited through snowball sampling, I asked participants to tell others who might be interested in my study to contact me. This helped to protect the identity of those participants because they were the ones making the decision to participate and to reveal their identity to me. At the end of a successful defense, which is projected for September 2007, all of the recordings of interviews will be destroyed.

Potential risks of participating in these interviews were unlikely but had to be taken seriously. It was possible that some participants experienced some distress when talking about issues of oppression. Moreover, as discussed above, while many measures were taken to protect confidentiality and anonymity, there was the possibility that some worried that their co-workers might find out what was discussed. When either of these concerns arose, I reminded participants that their participation was entirely voluntary and that they could withdraw from the study if they felt uncomfortable.

Data Analysis: After interviewing the participants of this study, I then transcribed the interviews. As I did this, I would sometimes make notes to myself about some of the themes that I saw emerging. Themes can be defined as “conceptual ideas that capture

related categories” (Brun, 2005:162). I then did three readings of the transcripts. In the first reading, I highlighted relevant themes that I saw emerging in the narratives of participants. In the second and third readings I then reduced these themes to codes, which are “labels given to words or phrases that compose a single idea” (Brun, 2006:162). These codes provided the basis for each chapter of my thesis. After I had coded my data, I analyzed it from a post-structural perspective.

In my readings of the transcripts, I looked for key words and phrases that described educators’ thoughts on how they worked to challenge oppressive relations. Some of the discourses that I saw as salient were how educators spoke about pedagogical strategies, self-reflection, working with diverse groups, and the conditions of their work. In my readings, while I tried to focus on the topics that participants cited as important, it was also not possible for me to ever be neutral. In particular, my interest in deconstructing social change processes may have shaped what I saw as the most interesting in the data.

Conclusion

The central question of this thesis looks at how community educators speak about challenging oppressive relations through their work. In this chapter, I introduced this under-studied line of work and some of the key areas of inquiry that I sought to explore. For instance, what are the conditions of their work; what are the possibilities, tensions, and challenges of their methods; how do they negotiate power relations among their workshop participants; what are the implications of how they position themselves in relation to their work? In Chapter 2 I examine how community educators defined the problems they were addressing and how they positioned their work in relation to these

problems. In Chapter 3 I look at the context of their work and how educators often had to compromise their ideal vision of a workshop when planning and negotiating their work. In the following chapter, I explore how educators spoke about interpersonal dynamics in the workshops. In particular, I focus specifically on how educators negotiated diversity and feelings of (dis)comfort among participants from different social locations. In Chapter 5, I delve into the different pedagogical strategies that were used by educators. By doing a post-structural analysis of their methods, I was able to analyze some of the possibilities, tensions, and challenges of creating change. Finally, in Chapter 6, I explore the educators' personal reflections on their work. I argue that when educators are cautious about painting their work uncritically as 'good work' and make critical reflection a central part of their work, possibilities for social change may expand.

CHAPTER 2: LOCATING OPPRESSIVE RELATIONS

The main argument of this thesis is that the work of community educators is implicated in complex social relations that are important to attend to in practice. However, this dynamic was not always visible through the discourses that educators drew upon to construct their practice. In this chapter, I argue that community educators, when speaking about their work and the oppressive relations that they were seeking to challenge, located these two dynamics as being largely separate from each other. An analysis of this separation begins to reveal some of the tensions that are embedded in their practice.

I open this chapter by first outlining the different forms of oppression that educators sought to confront. I then explore how they defined these oppressive relations. Many educators defined oppressions structurally, and some also spoke about how they saw structural oppression manifesting itself in the local practices of the participants. I argue that it is this latter definition that is central to the post-structural analysis that informs the main argument of this thesis. In the final section, I explore how educators located their work in relation to the oppressive relations that they wished to confront. I argue that since they usually located their work as separate from complex power relations, the way that their practices both disrupted and reified oppression was obscured.

Naming Forms of Oppression

In this section, I explore the different oppressive relations that educators focused on in their work. The literature on critical pedagogy and anti-oppressive education addresses a wide range of power relations; for instance, racism (Ellsworth, 1989; Ring, 2000; hooks, 2003), sexism (Blackmore, 2006; Birden, 2004), and class oppression

(Cuthrell *et al.*, 2007; Freire, 2003). Similarly, the participants in this study focused on racism, heterosexism and homophobia, and oppressive relations as a whole, as well as areas where oppressive relations had created stigmatizing discourses such as sexual assault, ritual abuse, and reproductive and sexual health.

White privilege was discussed by several participants as a force that they were addressing through their work. It can be defined as “a system of benefits, advantages, and opportunities experienced by White persons...simply because of their skin colour” (Donnelly *et al.*, 2005:6). In the following excerpt, Lynn spoke about why she felt it was important to address White privilege:

From a racialized-white population perspective, white people can choose if they want to completely insulate themselves against ever associating with any person of colour. Because, all the decision-makers are usually white. And they can go into any store and talk to a white person if they want to (Lynn).

Here, Lynn talked about practices that assert dominance in society and often appear invisible to people who belong to privileged groups. As Donnelly *et al.* (2005) state, “white privilege is so common and advantageous that most white people are unaware of its existence” (7). Thus a challenge that educators faced was how to make these processes visible to the groups that were benefiting from these social relations, and doing it in a way that they were receptive to learning about it and working towards change.

Some educators faced this challenge when they focused their efforts on increasing the visibility of people who faced intersecting oppressions. For instance, another interviewee, Meiling, who was an anti-oppressive educator from a queer women of colour group, stated:

We started [our collective] because we were frustrated with the lack of visibility of queer women of colour. We felt like we did not fit in at queer events in this city or within our ethnic communities (Meiling).

Here we see Meiling wanting to address the lack of awareness of what it is like to be marginalized in both ethno-cultural and queer communities. In her interview, while racism remained central to her analysis, she also expressed the desire to raise more awareness about the intersectionality of oppressive relations because it was central to her marginalized identity. Similarly, other educators, even though they focused their work on addressing one oppressive relation in particular, often found they needed to attend to intersecting forms of oppression. For instance, Chris, who did GLBTQ training, spoke about how other forms of oppression intersected with the work he was doing:

We live in a society where racism is highly institutionalized and highly stratified. Is your approach going to be [just about homophobia]? Are you going to talk about how things interact? You know? Cuz I try to more and more talk about how ethno-cultural [aspects of identity interact with being queer]. Well you know, what if you're Muslim¹ and gay (Chris)?

Here, Chris considered other marginal identities to be central to how people experienced identifying themselves as queer. In this case, he felt it was important to reflect on how different forms of institutionalized oppression affected individuals who situated themselves within multiple social locations that were marginalized.

By building an analysis of intersecting oppressions, educators have the opportunity to work with participants in developing a richer and heightened awareness of how multiple oppressive relations operate simultaneously. This is consistent with Kumashiro's (2002) argument that educators who focus on multiple privileges and norms can unravel the shared ways that oppression can operate simultaneously, ways that are often masked by "common sense". This idea of "common sense" can be seen as relevant to Meiling's example of how the queer women of colour in her group often felt excluded

¹ Being Muslim is not a racial/ethno-cultural identity. While many Muslims are people of colour, there are also Muslims who are white. Therefore, to classify Muslims as an ethno-cultural group is problematic.

from queer and ethno-cultural events. The experiences of these women may be so poorly recognized in the dominant narratives of society, that to not consider how they feel excluded is not ‘anything out of the ordinary’ for the organizers of these events. However, as I will discuss later in this chapter, this was also a risk that could surface in the work of community educators because of the way that they seemed to remain focused on oppression as external to their pedagogical methods. This external focus could create difficulty in attending to the way these same relations played out through their own practices.

As indicated above, heterosexism and homophobia were oppressive relations that were significant in determining educators’ agendas. Liz, a sexual and reproductive health educator, found that she often addressed these relations because her workshops sometimes created spaces in which participants brought up oppressive views about people who are attracted to, or partner with, people of the same sex/gender:

I think working in the sexuality field one of the [stereotypes] that rears it’s ugly head quite often are GLBTQ [stereotypes]. So people who are not really familiar with homosexuality and different kinds of gender identities or sexual orientation, [will sometimes articulate views that are oppressive towards those who are not in heterosexual relationships]. So [I work on] challenging a lot of those myths and making people aware that even in their group there’s probably somebody who identifies as gay or lesbian or bi or transgendered (Liz).

Liz challenged heterosexism through normalizing different gender identities and sexual orientations. The resistance that she encountered to this normalization could perhaps be seen as a reflection of the “deeply held moral convictions regarding the immorality of queer-identified individuals” (Feigenbaum, 2007:5) and the widespread social pressures to distance oneself from homosexuality (Chesir-Teran, 2003) in our society. This is an

indication of the magnitude of the structural forces that informed the stereotypes that educators were often trying to challenge in their work.

Other educators sought to challenge what they saw as experiences that were misrepresented in or denied by society:

The main goals of our work are to... challenge the myths about sexual assault and to create a better understanding, and ultimately to teach people how they could support a survivor of sexual assault. I guess the biggest challenge that we have is people's ideas about what sexual assault is (Kelly).

Those who have been ritually abused, [have] a kind of oppression, because they are not believed, and in general, society does not know about this and does not acknowledge it (Eleanor).

In both of these cases, the educators were looking at the culture of society and how the dominant narratives served to stigmatize. Sexual assault awareness educators often seek to challenge the cultural norms that support rape (Klaw *et al.*, 2005). For instance, the dominant discourses in society of what constitutes a 'legitimate rape' (i.e. raped by a stranger), stigmatizes the vast majority of rape survivors who are victims of acquaintance rape (Starzynski *et al.*, 2005). Therefore, as Kelly indicated in the excerpt above, if one of the goals was to work towards having better support for survivors, then she had to address dominant patriarchal views of sexual assault. Although not as much has been written on public education initiatives around ritual abuse, there is a movement aimed at countering the dominant discourses of "disbelief" that often hinder survivors who try to tell their stories (Scott, 1998). As Eleanor indicated in the above excerpt, choosing to deny ritual abuse can be seen as an act of oppression because it is an exercise in power over survivors. In these excerpts, both Kelly and Eleanor spoke of trying to reshape the dominant discourses which stigmatize survivors and in turn, help to perpetuate these oppressive practices.

In this section I have addressed various oppressive relations that educators sought to challenge through their work. They not only challenged different forms of oppression, but also the stigmatization of certain practices which served to reinforce power relations. In the following section, I concentrate on how they located these problems structurally and/or locally.

Locating the Problem of Oppression

Many educators spoke about challenging structural relations of oppression. In the critical pedagogy literature, there is often an emphasis on the structural inequalities and injustices that compel educators to carry out their work. For instance, as Birden (2004) points out, Freire had stated that grasping the structural realities that create oppression was one of the first steps in working towards emancipation. The structural context refers to a style of analysis where social problems are situated within the larger social and economic societal forces and power relations (Lundy, 2004). In the interviews that I conducted, many of the participants in this study were interested in creating broader structural change in society. In other words, they wanted to see changes in the way social relations were organized. Ellsworth (1989) talks about this kind of change as being the goal of critical pedagogy:

The goal of critical pedagogy was a critical democracy, individual freedom, social justice, and social change—a revitalized public sphere characterized by citizens capable of confronting public issues critically through ongoing forms of public debate and social action (300).

Widespread social change was seen as an aspiration of these initiatives. As I discuss below, this is a theme that could be traced throughout some of the interviews in which educators spoke about social change as the goal of their work.

Some educators desired to have certain subjugated knowledges become more mainstream. For instance, Liz, a sexual and reproductive health educator talked about her wish for pro-feminist and pro-sexuality information on sexual and reproductive health to be more widely known in society:

[I'd] really like to see more comprehensive and accurate information out there, and for it to be a really standard thing. For it to be like, everybody should know this and it should be part of our way of thinking in society and it shouldn't be like swept under the rug and it's part of your health and you need to take care of your health (Liz).

Liz's comment mirrors other participants' sense that they were working to disseminate and create discussions around information that was often subjugated in society. Foucault used the phrase 'subjugated knowledge' to refer to the idea that certain ways of knowing are held in place by institutions and centralizing powers (Triantaffilou and Moreira, 2005). Thus the work of challenging dominant ways of knowing can be difficult because they are reproduced by major institutional structures in society. In this case, Liz saw herself as contributing to the change process by working to disseminate sex positive information that protects people and validates their behaviour, rather than validating the dominant patriarchal views of guilt around sex.

Other participants connected the change process to the desire to challenge structures of exclusion:

It's that piece about wanting to change society, create a more inclusive society. That is the goal for me. Yeah, that social kind of change (Chris).

Here, we see Chris' desire to create a more widespread sense of belonging. Feelings of exclusion can stem from not feeling included in the dominant narratives in society. Kumashiro (2002) argues that "oppression is produced by discourse, and in particular, is produced when certain discourses (especially ways of thinking that privilege certain

identities and marginalize others) are cited over and over” (50). Thus a way of challenging oppressive relations at the structural level involves trying to find ways to cite discourses that disrupt the dominant narratives (Kumashiro, 2002). This idea of ‘citation’ is an important concept to consider because it resonates with how many educators portrayed the importance of their work. Several had spoken about the way that their education was presenting information and experiences that were often under-recognized in mainstream society. By working to cite marginal discourses through their work, many of these educators were challenging notions of exclusion and privilege in society.

Some educators also talked about the problematics of solely focusing on structural change in anti-oppression work. They recognized the need to address how oppressive relations shape local interactions. One aspect of this is recognizing and dealing with oppressive tendencies among participants. Cho and Lewis (2005) argue that participants are often seen as objects of oppression, as “victims” of the oppressive form of conventional education. As a result, trying to perform critical pedagogy can become problematic if participants in workshops show evidence of having oppressive tendencies. Using a post-structural and psychoanalytic analysis, they contend that if a participant is an object of oppressive forces, then, it should be explored how that person is also a subject of those same power relations (Cho and Lewis, 2005). Several of the educators who I interviewed felt that participants in the workshops were not only victims of, but were invested in, oppressive relations. Many of these educators pursued their line of work to make changes at the personal level because they felt that oppression does not operate solely at the societal and institutional level. For instance, as an anti-oppressive educator,

Ella argued that too much focus on the institutional level could detract from the oppressive relations that take place at a personal level:

I think that in anti-oppression work, oppression and anti-oppression often get set up as very structural, institutional things, right? Racism exists because we have racist institutions. Sexism exists because we have sexist institutions and structures and stuff. And I think that's important, I think that's valuable. But I also think that that kind of discussion about oppression, very matter of fact, structural discussion of oppression, ignores the interpersonal nature of oppression as well. Um, and I think the kind of interpersonal stuff that happens around oppression, that happens around stigma and bias, and stereotypes and that sort of thing is also important (Ella).

While a structural view of social justice sees structures as the source of injustice in society, post-structuralists posit that people should not be able to lay the blame outside of our daily human activities when addressing these issues (St. Pierre, 2000). Ella drew on this analysis when discussing how oppressive relations tend to be removed from the individual when using a structural analysis. Structural analysis can obscure the idea that people perpetuate oppressive social relations—in other words, it has a tendency to locate social justice outside of the individual. Locating the possibility for social change in the individual can be important for challenging oppressive relations at the structural and institutional level. As Ife (1999) argues, personal and structural levels of change are often seen as being in opposition with each other. However, post-structuralism sees more possibilities for change in a dialectical perspective where personal and structural dynamics are held in tension with one another.

Educators did not always view the connection between the structural and the interpersonal in this way. For instance, Chris talked about the importance of reminding himself that fighting for change at the interpersonal level is just as important as working towards organizational change:

Sometimes I critique that part that I don't want to do. I just want to do organizational change. But some of my colleagues remind me that no, it's really important [to do work at the interpersonal level too]. And when I ask at the beginning [of a workshop], how many of you have gay friends, I forget that I should sometimes be saying, how many of you have ever met an openly gay person? Because I forget that there are some people who haven't (Chris).

Here, there is the implication that Chris did not initially view interpersonal change to be as important as organizational change. However Scheurich (1994) argues that structural and personal change should not be viewed as separate, with one being more 'advanced' than the other, but rather, there is greater possibility for change when they are intertwined:

For the poststructuralists...“deep structural phenomena” and “surface phenomena” both occur at the level of daily human micro-practices. As Foucault has said, all is surface, meaning not that everything is superficial but that everything happens at the surface, i.e., within the context of human activity (303).

Following Scheurich's argument, by viewing personal change as important and as connected to deep structural changes, the possibilities for confronting oppressive power relations widen.

In this section I explored different ways that educators conceptualized the change processes that they were working towards. While some educators emphasized the change they wanted to see at the structural level, I argued for the importance of seeing the interconnectedness of structural forces and local practices. In the following section, I look at how some educators spoke about these connections and how they often described their work in a way that characterized it as being “separate” from these social relations that they were trying to address.

Positioning Anti-Oppressive Community Education Work

Educators often located their work in opposition to power relations, as a tool for challenging oppression:

We're always constantly trying to challenge the close-mindedness that people have towards sexuality (Liz).

We seek to challenge issues of sexual violence and oppression (Kelly).

When you give people access to the accurate information, you're able to challenge the myths and stereotypes, show them that that's not real (Chris).

Here, an emphasis was placed on “‘unlearning’ what one has learned as ‘normal’ and normative” (Kumashiro, 2000:37). This language of challenging suggests that the main relationship educators saw between their work and the oppressive relations that they addressed was that of fixing what is broken. This perspective is useful because it helps mobilize others towards change. When community education is positioned directly in opposition to oppressive relations, it can be seen as an alternative to perpetuating oppression. At the same time, this polarization can also obscure the ways that anti-oppression work can be implicated in complex social relations, including the ones that they are trying to challenge.

In addition to locating their role as one that challenges oppression, many educators mobilized language around their work as imperative:

We really do love the work that we do, because it's close to our hearts and stuff that we think that really needs to be done (Aisha).

I think, like obviously I think it's valuable because we keep doing it and I keep grudgingly agree to do workshops even though I was sick of it two years ago. Um, so obviously it's important, I think despite my concerns about it I think that that work is important (Ella).

I love to do it, I have a really good time, and, umm, it's really enjoyable, but I do see it as uh, just scratching the surface of what actually has to be done (Kelly).

This language suggests that they saw their practice as needed and important. Given the difficulties around community education that I will discuss in subsequent chapters, it was encouraging to see this kind of determination from educators. At the same time, an unintended implication of these discourses is that their practice was framed as “good work” and thus remained unchallenged. For example, Dei (2000) argues that often in social service agencies, “antiracist workers may recognize and discuss systemic racism and yet fail to see themselves as implicated in the structures that perpetuate and reproduce racism” (31). Thus it becomes important to think about how oppressive relations are pervasive and can affect all aspects of our lives, including anti-oppression workshops.

Locating community education uncritically, in opposition to oppressive relations, can be problematic because it does not allow for the possibility that this work is complex and, at times, tension filled. For instance, Lynn, an anti-racism educator conceptualized her practice as follows:

We’re challenging, challenging ideologies that are destructive, and in ways that are starting to gradually dissolve the structures and replace it (Lynn).

Here we see a high degree of confidence on the part of Lynn about the structural change that she was working towards. However, she did not talk about the way that her community education could be compromising to anti-racism goals. For instance, there is the critique of the way that the civil rights movement from the 1960s has now been co-opted into diversity and multicultural workshops (Lasch-Quinn, 2001). Lasch-Quinn (2001) argues that the focus of these workshops becomes consciousness-raising, which serves to individualize the broad, public, movements of the 1960s. She goes on to say that

workshops tend to “professionalize” anti-racism work which can also reduce the possibilities for bringing about deep structural changes (Lasch-Quinn, 2001). In other words, she suggests that the structure of community education practice itself can sometimes be constraining on the social change process. At the same time, as I argue later in this thesis, working as an anti-oppression educator was an opportunity workers saw where they could dedicate their career to social justice goals. For the most part, this tension was invisible in my conversation with Lynn and other educators. In this thesis, I seek to make some of these complications around social change more visible. The purpose is not to discount the potential in this work, but rather to develop a more complex understanding of how these possibilities function in the face of the complex power relations in which this practice is implicated.

Conclusion

In this chapter I looked at the way that educators defined the problems that they were addressing through their work. Consistent with the literature on critical pedagogy, many of the educators defined these problems in structural terms. Some educators also explored how structural oppressive relations were manifested at local levels, thus citing the need to address interpersonal oppressive behaviour as well. While educators problematized these social relations, they did not problematize their practice and often portrayed it as being separate and removed from the oppression they were seeking to address. However, as I will argue in the next few chapters, community education was implicated in these social relations, which set up challenges, tensions, and possibilities for the kind of change that they were working for.

CHAPTER 3: NEGOTIATING THE CONTEXT OF SETTING UP COMMUNITY EDUCATION PRACTICE

In the previous chapter I looked at the social relations that community educators sought to challenge and how they often located their work as separate from the problems they were defining. While this separation occurred when discussing the purpose and goals of their practice, it shifted when they talked about the realities of running workshops and sessions. Here, educators began to speak more about how their work was shaped by other factors.

In this chapter I unpack the ways that they spoke about the contexts of setting up their workshops. It is important to examine these contexts of practice because participants recognized that there were external factors shaping the various workshops and training sessions. I agree with Fook (2002) who argues for connections to be made between structural and local practices in order to develop a richer understanding of the possibilities for change. According to Fook (2002):

[A critical post-structural perspective] will focus both on how structures dominate but also on how people construct and are constructed by changing social structures and relations, recognizing that there may be multiple and diverse constructions of ostensibly similar situations. Such an understanding of social relations and structures can be used to disrupt dominant understandings of structures, and as a basis for changing these so that they are more inclusive of different interest groups (18).

As Fook (2002) argues, an understanding of how contextual factors shape practice can be important for challenging dominant power relations. Similarly, the conditions that I outline in this chapter inform the pedagogical strategies that are discussed in later chapters.

In this chapter, I argue that while many of the educators had been very clear about the social relations that they wanted to change, they used a language of compromise

when talking about the immediate conditions of doing their work. Further, I argue that this language of compromise reflects the power relations involved where community educators are positioned as having relatively less power. This idea of compromise is something I unpack throughout this chapter as I analyze the context of the educators' practice. I first outline locations of practice and then trace this analysis of compromise through the educators' narratives of money, resources, and control over their work.

Who Are They Working For and Why?

The educators that I interviewed in this study all carried out their practice in a variety of contexts. The following is a sample of the range of settings:

Mainly I'm involved with doing professional development for teachers, community groups, and also institutions and agencies that are looking to improve their cultural competency (Lynn).

I'm out in the community pretty much every day. So at least one speak a day and we do a variety of things in the community. So, we do anything from talking to grade 5 and 6s about puberty and anatomy all the way to talking about sexuality through the life cycle, talking to parents about sexuality and talking about menopause and things like that so it's a whole broad spectrum of sexuality (Liz).

We do introduction to anti-oppression workshops so there are organizations who are doing board training and as part of their board training is anti-oppression work or organizations who have volunteers and part of their training is anti-oppression work. So I guess what we do is we help volunteer-based organizations fulfill an anti-oppression part of their training, for the most part, we've done maybe one or two general anti-oppression training sessions just to people who were interested [in anti-oppressive training], but for the most part we give them to help organizations fulfill an organizational requirement (Ella).

And the other half of my job is kind of community development so part of that is doing training and workshops. And part of that is helping schools be more inclusive in working with other youth-serving agencies and trying to make schools more inclusive. So that's kind of a few different pieces in. But within that, I do training to youth service providers, teachers, and community organizations (Chris).

These educational practices intersect with the mainstream educational setting, non-profit sector, and civil society. Giroux (1993), when talking about educators who draw on

Freire, urges them to “resist the recuperation of Freire’s work as an academic commodity, a recipe for all times and places” (184). His approach to practicing Freirian education allows for a richer analysis because it unpacks the way critical pedagogy operates in specific localities. In thinking through how these diverse settings reshape pedagogical practices and outcomes, I attend to some of these complexities in this chapter.

Educators in this study were often invited by groups and individuals to speak as part of a health class or to help an agency fulfill some sort of strategic plan. In the following excerpt, Kelly talks about some of the reasons that an agency might ask her to do public education for them:

We have been asked to do presentations about child sexual abuse. So the adult groups that would generally call us for that, for the child sexual abuse presentations that take place, we generally get groups of adults who are working with children or working in that type of area that would like to have more information about it or groups of parents. We’ve had a few requests for healthy sexual development presentations, so interest from parents for how they would be able to distinguish what types of behaviour are normal in children...versus what types of behaviours might indicate that a child’s been abused. With sexual harassment, it’s usually workplace, so various work environments that would contact us for those type of presentations. And, sexual assault presentations, again, in the workplace, umm, that’s agencies that are working with individuals who’ve been sexually assaulted and want to make sure that they know how to work with survivors and things like that (Kelly).

This quote highlights how mainstream systems that are trying to appear more enlightened on issues around sexual assault and other oppressive relations rely on community educators to bring subjugated knowledge and marginalized identities into view. However, as I will discuss later on, there was also some self-management on behalf of educators to attempt to provide information that was aimed at creating change while not being too disruptive for the organization. In this way, anti-oppression education is often a careful

negotiation of how far can educators push existing boundaries, while remaining able to speak about uncomfortable topics.

Some educators actively pursued different locations and groups. For instance, Lynn talked about how she tried to do anti-racism workshops and trainings in all kinds of different sectors. For instance, if someone came to their organization wanting to lodge an individual complaint of racism, she would try to find a way to also incorporate some kind of group education around the issue. She also spoke about the way she actively pursued anti-oppressive education contracts in different areas:

I'd like to balance communities, with business, with institutions. So we're working at all those sectors. Community doesn't pay. Institution pays very, very little, business pays well. So we want to use the work in the business to subsidize the work in the other two areas. To do that requires a certain amount of institutional complexity and relationship building that takes time (Lynn).

Here, Lynn articulated an ideal where she hoped to see a balance in spaces where she carried out her practice. It is interesting that she talked about wanting to work with businesses for the sole reason that they offered more opportunities for financial compensation. It appeared that she preferred community groups and organizations.

However, there may be an increased demand for anti-oppressive educators to do trainings in businesses because of a move towards emphasizing diversity in the workplace. According to Jolna (2003), the term diversity has become a "corporate catchphrase"(7) with 75% of Fortune 500 companies having at least some policy on diversity in the workplace. At the same time, there is the criticism that this new kind of "diversity management" in the business workplace is of a superficial nature. It can be seen as an ideology that mystifies and obscures social inequalities and their structural bases. Wrench (2005) argues that this approach to diversity is too superficial in nature,

emphasizing aspects such as training, teamwork, and communication skills, rather than structural change and accountability. Thus, we see here that the business atmosphere is often constrained because it only allows for a surface level of change.

In addition to the non-profit and business sector, several educators focused on securing more workshops either in schools or with teachers or decision-makers in the school system:

Around the end of August, we did a mass fax out of the presentations that we generally do and we faxed out to schools. So we do try to solicit presentations by getting our information out there (Kelly).

We have a relationship, a very good relationship that's taken a long time to develop with the school systems here, not all the school systems, but a number of them. And we keep in regular contact with the decision-makers that have been assigned to work with us and that has been really slow and frustrating, but very important (Lynn).

I mean it would be so amazing if we could do more with the school board, I just see it so, so clear, it's really clear to me that we need to make changes around ethno-cultural stuff in the schools as well. The teaching staff is not reflecting the wave of immigration that we've had over the last two years. And you know, the curriculum's not inclusive (Chris).

These quotes provide some insight into how schools are viewed as a site of possible change. For instance, Kelly seemed to view school as an important location for disseminating information. However, Lynn's quote reveals that there are still frustrations involved when interacting with schools and that community educators must find ways to function within the system so as to have their voice heard. Chris' perception of schools is that it is imperative to collaborate with the school board in order to make changes at the institutional level. Taken together, these quotes imply that the school, as an institution, is seen as a place where there is lots of possibility to make change. Although none of the

educators in my study were formally employed by the school system, it is clear that many of them saw schools as a key institution with which to become connected.

One of the dominant discourses around the school system is that it is a tool for socialization (Wilkins, 2005). Schools are powerful institutions that have historically been used to produce a citizenry strongly bonded to the state and its interests (Kirova *et al.*, 2006). As a central institution in the lives of children and youth, tapping into schools, through carrying out public education with the students, teachers and/or administrators can present greater possibilities for change. For instance, Liz stated in her interview that she accessed about 15,000 youth a year when her community education program entered the schools. However, as I discuss later in this chapter, entering the school system and other organizations can be challenging for community educators, particularly when they are viewed as a threat to the current order. Moreover, even though educators had a clear vision of where they would want to do work, resource and time limitations shaped these possibilities.

Negotiating with Limited Resources

In previous sections, we saw that educators were clear in articulating how they saw the problems they were trying to address and what they envisioned as some of the best spaces for carrying out their work. However, when they started to talk about resources, the notion of compromise began to emerge.

Many educators saw money as playing a crucial role in the nature of interventions that they were able to do. For several of the educators who were employed by non-profit organizations, they did receive some kind of funding for their practice and workers made tentative statements that alluded to funder satisfaction:

Umm, I haven't had a lot of interaction with the funders, but, I'm guessing that they wouldn't continue to fund our program if they didn't think it was important (Kelly).

However, many of these educators still felt that they could benefit from more financial resources:

This isn't really a great paying job, you know. I mean we've improved over the last few years...it's, it's now it's reasonable but it's not great. You know, so, it's hard to earn a living, it's financially hard to keep, and it's the level of energy and creativity that's requires to do this job, we should all be paid way way more (Lynn).

[What is] challenging? I would say uh, the lack of resources would be a big one (Liz).

This lack of funding can affect the change process that educators are striving towards. As Butterwick and Selman (2003) point out, adequate funding (which is often hard to come by in this field) makes the difference between educators being able to develop specialized, responsive programs for each group with whom they work, or simply giving standardized trainings. They argue that the undervaluing of planning, reflection, and analysis "can lead to unconsidered recipe book approaches rather than...responsive processes for which proponents aim" (Butterwick and Selman, 2003:12). However, even though there was a general feeling of not having enough funding, some educators felt the financial limitations more than others. Specifically, educators who were carrying out community education independently as opposed to working for an organization or centre felt the lack of money even more intensely. The funding that they received was very unstable:

We get our funding as we go along, we get sponsorships and we try to get donations and things like that, but we're not formally funded (Meiling).

We don't have any funders, so I can't say whether we have to justify funding all the time. Although, I do have to say when we negotiate our fee, people are like, um that's pretty expensive, and our fee is like pretty cheap (Ella).

These types of quotes speak to the value that society places on anti-oppressive education. It remains a marginal, precarious practice that is often viewed as a "nice perk", rather than as an integral component of creating just, democratic states. Negotiating fees for service in such an environment is often very difficult. In capitalist societies, the fee paid for service signifies the worth and credibility of the practice:

Having our credibility being tested, too, is like, one of the major challenges to us, you know? It's uh, it's, for instance, we ask for financial support for our work, in compensation for doing the workshop – sometimes we've been asked to – we've been challenged by that – and that's kind of – you know – not cool (Meiling).

Some people are critical of the way that social justice work has become a paid job and argue that this is dangerous for creating social change. For instance, Roy (2004) contends that "the NGO-ization of politics threatens to turn resistance into a well-mannered, reasonable, salaried 9-to-5 job...Real resistance has real consequences. And no salary" (7). However, for some educators, they felt that their practice was so devalued that they could not even negotiate a "reasonable salary".

We have a flexible fee depending on the organization's resources, so our fee's pretty low actually. Like, it's not even 10 bucks an hour basically. Um, so it's pretty low, and um, I think how people respond to our fee is pretty indicative of how important they think the work is as well. People are like, that's pretty expensive for this kind of workshop, I'd rather have a workshop on safer sex, which is a valuable workshop, but um, like anti-oppression is always getting pushed to the side for that reason (Ella).

Thus community educators are forced into a perpetual practice of pitching topics that people are willing to pay for. Oftentimes this means sidelining more radical structural topics for those that attend to band-aid, short-term solutions that are less disruptive. Having to justify the significance of their work in order to get funding puts these

educators in a position of reduced power. Moreover, as Ella points out, for agencies with limited funds, this means having to rank the importance of what they pay for. This need to have to bargain signals a devaluing of anti-oppressive community education.

Participants outlined a number of ways that they thought their practice was perceived by others. In addition to the perceptions listed above (i.e. viewed with skepticism, having to justify credibility), there were a number of other possibilities which ranged from favourable, to threatening, to superficial:

Our [workplace] diversity training is popular – people are lined up wanting the full two-day thing. We just did one and I think the next one is already full (Carol).

Here we see that in some cases, there is clearly a demand for some kinds of trainings. However, by limiting the training to two days, there may be a tendency of participants to claim a commitment to diversity without much motivation to continue challenging oppressive relations following a workshop. Moreover, as Lynn pointed out, participants might not be as receptive to community educators if it is seen as being too challenging to their workplace:

The anti-racism work that we do is viewed by the general population as a threat. So, I mean, I'll phone somebody and say, you know, I'm from the [name of organization] and we have a client who wants to lodge a complaint. So even though we're getting to do some workshops, you can see all the facial expressions and people changing their sitting position. You know they automatically think it's gonna be a problem (Lynn).

This excerpt shows how the strong stigma in society around being labeled 'racist' was a significant barrier for Lynn in entering an organization to do anti-racism training. Thus a tension for her became how to negotiate between allaying the organization's fears enough to let her in, while still being able to push their boundaries in order to help bring about change. A major challenge for educators was creating a space to have uncomfortable

dialogue. Even when that space was created, some educators still had their usefulness questioned:

Some people perceive the work that we do as pretty surface, it's not really anti-oppression work unless you're clearly part of the revolution...some people perceive the work as invaluable, totally invaluable, and this I've been told before. Like, why do you bother doing it? Nothing's going to happen in a workshop, oppression doesn't exist anyways, what's the point? I've definitely gotten that reaction before (Ella).

Thus a reality that many educators face is having their work criticized and questioned. However, this criticism is even more difficult to negotiate because it comes from both ends of the spectrum for change. On the one hand, there are the people who do not wish to change anything and on the other hand there are people who do not believe the workshop is radical enough to effect any meaningful change.

People's perceptions of educators' practices are a major factor in the negotiating and planning process. In particular, if the work of an educator is viewed as a threat or a waste of time by groups and organizations, educators can have a more difficult time negotiating fees and audiences. Moreover, the social relations in which their practice is embedded, places most educators in a position of relatively less power where they must justify their 'usefulness'. Thus an entrepreneurial effect of anti-oppressive education emerges wherein a capitalist economic context, educators must attempt to "sell" the commodity of their education. In the following section I discuss the negotiating processes that took place between the educators and the organizations requesting their services, and how language of compromise emerged in this context.

Negotiating, Planning, and Compromising

Once contact was made with an organization, negotiating and planning of the content of the anti-oppression work usually took place. This negotiation process often

focused on the goals of the organization and the specific issues they would like to have addressed. Many of the educators outlined this planning process as a key component of their practice:

We try to figure out other ways that might be context specific that would be useful to that particular group. So that requires outside work—meetings, small group discussions, observation and coaching onsite, and then feedback, that kind of thing (Lynn).

I guess one of the challenges is always just, trying to relate, and trying to tailor our presentations to specifically address the concerns of the group. Whenever we do a presentation, we go through and we, umm, we try to make it as applicable as possible to the place that we're going, so we're constantly going through our presentations and changing them and adapting them to make them suitable to wherever we're going (Kelly).

These educators identified the importance of tailoring their work to the different groups. However, this approach also brings up questions around whose interests are represented in how the workshops are tailored.

This dynamic often reflects a power relation between the different parties. In the following passage, Lynn talked about the delicate balancing that is involved in negotiating an intervention with an organization:

Yeah we do a needs assessment that might be, could be more informal, like on the phone or talk—coming in and meeting with a number of people involved, or it might involve a community focus group first, but um, usually it involves talking with decision makers or a number of decision makers and stakeholders. And then after that saying “I see this as being the needs of the situation, did I correctly assess that?” And they say, “well, based on what you just said, I think we might maybe like to look at this, or we disagree with you on that.” So you negotiate back and forth and it takes a few phone calls. And sometimes there are formal needs assessments where participant fill out a survey or some kind of questionnaire and after we tell you, “well we think this is the portrait” and from this portrait we say “what would you like to work on” because it's usually complex with a number of different issues and people can't work on everything and you have to start with something that they think they might be able to handle successfully and that people will be happy with (Lynn).

Educators may view the planning process as part of the negotiation. However, the other parties may not view it in the same way. Lynn went on to say that if she felt that an organization was not willing to collaborate with her—in other words, insisted that things be done their way—then she would back off:

To learn from the other people, we have to know what they already know, rather than just saying do this, do that. Do it my way or get out. You know? Um, certainly you have to talk about what is the bottom line and if you're doing a contract with them what their issues are. But at the same time, there are lots of commonalities so to just say, do it my way or do it their way hardly speaks to cultural competence. So, uh, depending on what people say, you know if you can move forward or not. And, you sort of have to watch for the signs and then you go as far as you can, and then as soon as some resistance comes on you back off that's about it (Lynn).

Here, we see that Lynn felt it was important to have some compromise involved in the negotiating process, but at the same time she felt that there was a point where she could no longer concede. Again, the dilemma about how far to “push” for change arose. In anti-oppressive practice, it is common that this kind of work may cause people to feel uncomfortable. Boler (2004a) argues that a central issue that emerges for critical educators is to what extent do they cause people to feel discomfort and what are the risks around doing that? This was not only a tension that was central to setting up workshops, but also, as I argue in the next two chapters, it was also a key dynamic to consider when implementing them as well.

Other educators did not feel that they could make demands. For instance, in the following quote, one of the educators from the queer women of colour organization lamented that they were not in a position to shape or determine the type of program they offered:

Depending on what kind of workplace, organization it is, they'll have that as a requirement, a mandate, a goal, to have anti-oppression work, you know, so

sometimes, we're just, like, a goal to have. So, it's not really a commitment to change. I know a person personally, a facilitator, who does this kind of anti-racism and anti-oppression facilitating and workshops, professionally. And she has the luxury to be able to say no, you know, to those kind of organizations without the commitment, and this of course is how I'd like to be, but I don't have the luxury (Meiling).

In this case, we see how some educators felt that they were simply being invited in to fill some part of the mandate rather than actually create change. There was a sense that the title "anti-oppressive educator" was simply being used to make the organization seem anti-oppressive rather than having them make any real social justice commitments. These feelings are consistent with the research of Hyde (2004) who found that when she interviewed diversity trainers, several of them felt that they were being brought in for a quick, short-term solution to crises, as a token to say that they did diversity training. At the same time, this could be a difficult dynamic to determine because Hyde (2004) also found that many employees that were interviewed desired more time from the diversity consultants and were also just as critical of the lack of organizational change. Taking Hyde's results into consideration, an important question to ask is what are the possibilities for change if educators have allies within the organization? In Meiling's case, connecting with allies could have perhaps reduced the amount of compromising she felt she had to do.

The above quote also showed how some educators perceive other educators as having more "bargaining power". As Meiling stated, she did not feel that she had the same "luxury" or the same credibility as her friend who did anti-oppressive training professionally. Although she did not state openly what this "luxury" was, Meiling had talked at length in her interview about not having the support and the reputation in her city to make a living out of this work. In this case, Meiling's ability to inspire what she

saw as meaningful change towards anti-oppression was hampered by her “bargaining position” with organizations. This begs the questions: What factors help to construct a positive “reputation” around anti-oppressive practice? What places some educators in a social location where they do not have to compromise as much when they are negotiating? Can the creation of a ‘positive reputation’ compromise the politics of challenging oppression? These are areas that are not addressed in the literature and may warrant further study. Both Meiling and Aisha, members of the queer women of colour organization, felt that their group was not given the recognition it deserved in the queer communities or by the greater communities in their city. Thus, while beyond the scope of this thesis, an important factor to consider is the way that marginal social locations can affect the “credibility” assigned to educators.

In addition to content, time was also a big factor that entered into the conversations between educators and the organizations and/or groups with which they were working. Not feeling like they had enough time to cover the content they wished to address was a major concern for most educators:

Like I can be consistent, right? But if I’m only there once, it, it doesn’t do a lot right (Liz)?

I’d rather have a week, to address issues of like, harassment, issues of power, issues of oppression. It’s kind of hard to address such serious issues in an hour and a half (Kelly).

This sentiment of having insufficient time to address these issues in depth is an idea that is echoed in the literature (Hyde, 2004; Srivastava, 2005) and becomes problematic when high expectations are placed on community educators. These expectations become impossible to address in such a brief visit (Srivastava, 2005). The way that educators had

to constantly battle with not having enough time is another indicator of the way that anti-oppressive community education is devalued.

When talking about time, many educators articulated that they needed more time to do their job in what they felt was a more thorough manner, but many also talked about compromising their ideal expectations by accepting whatever time allotment a group or organizer could give them. Time constraints led some educators to try to negotiate for more time with the agency/organizers/groups with which they were working. Some educators would try to book more time with the group, but were also accepting if they could only go in once:

We try to see you know, if someone calls us, and they want a presentation on something, we say would you like to have this one and this one too that kind of go with it? And you know, often it's, well I only have time to slot you into this slot for this, but, you know. But we try because it does, it does work a lot better (Liz).

Here, we see that educators are often put in the position where their bargaining attempts for more time are often turned down by organizations. In some cases, educators would adapt if they were not given enough time. In the following excerpt, Carol talked about agreeing to do a workshop with less time:

I think they wanted everything in an hour and a half or two hours or something, normally, we've got three hours, so that would be a bit condensed. We – basically, I've never, uh, I've never said to a group, "we can't do what you want", I always feel that the more people out there, that get a bit of training, the better, if I can persuade them to, you know, look at it and, try and put it during a staff meeting and add an extra hour or you know, talk about how to get a big enough block of time, but...but, in the end, I just feel the topic is so important that I'll do with what I have (Carol).

But at what cost do educators compromise the content of their work by giving in to a reduction in time? It could be argued that educators reinforce the devaluation of their practice by agreeing to present in a short time slot (Hyde, 2004). But from Carol's point

of view, she would not have access to some groups if she did not agree to drastically cut down the time of her training. This becomes a tension that educators must negotiate: in a field where educators feel like they never have their ideal amount of time to challenge oppressive relations, how much of a “time cut” does one accept without compromising the integrity of “working for change”? In other cases, educators insisted on a minimum time commitment:

So what I negotiated with them was, they said, well we only have two hours to have you in, and I was like 2 hours isn't enough, I will do two hours in September but I have to do 2 hours in January. Because 2 hours isn't enough to cover this material (Ella).

This is an example of how educators may try to negotiate the constraints that are placed on them. In Ella's case, this involved taking some degree of risk, because there was the possibility that the organization would refuse a January booking. For educators whose vision of change is different from the vision that the organization puts forward, this kind of negotiation can be particularly challenging. As I discuss below, although Ella was successful in challenging the time allotment she was given, in the end, she was unsuccessful in challenging privilege.

There are often limits to the amount of challenging that educators can do in an organization. In the case described above, Ella was “uninvited” to do the second two hour session after the organization representative said that she made some people uncomfortable in her first session with her discussion around white male privilege. Some key staff members in the organization questioned the need for her to be discussing such topics in their workplace, which subsequently resulted in the cancellation of her second session. Again, we see the precarious dance of anti-oppressive education—how much can I push for change and how much do I have to work to make people comfortable so they

stay in the conversation. We know that progressive change relies on discomfort, particularly those in dominant groups, but when those are the same people controlling access, the fear is that education has to become less unsettling.

Thus, this is also a prime example of how power relations play out in this planning and negotiating process. In this case, Ella negotiated the extra time she felt she needed to adequately address the issues in her workshop. She was, however, overruled when influential staff in the organization were upset by her first visit. This revealed more troubling power dynamics because the staff members that were upset were white males who felt that they as a group were being unfairly attacked. This is an example of how the relations that educators are seeking to challenge can impede them from carrying out their work. In other words, people who are in privileged social locations become the gatekeepers of anti-oppressive practice. As Ella discussed in the following excerpt, the cancellation of her second session reinforced the oppressive relations that she was trying to challenge:

And I was like, actually what you're doing is you're allowing like the two most dominant, privileged people in the room to prevent the organization from fulfilling its requirement of anti-oppression training (Ella).

This tension regarding how much discomfort educators can create becomes a greater challenge when the educator has less power than the organization or group that has contracted them. The dynamics are complicated. Although an organization or agency holds the power for whether or not an educator is able to enter into an organization to do a workshop, educators are also situated in social relations that position them as “experts” (Srivastava, 2005; Hyde, 2004). This highlights some of the complexities of the power relations in this work.

As this section on negotiating and planning illustrates, an organization or institution where community education takes place must be willing to change in order for educators to be invited in. Thus, social change is a dynamic process where both the educator and the people/groups/organizations that they are working with must have commitment to the process. However, when these social relations are located in the broader structural context, we see that market forces operate to ensure that only some types of education and change are possible, thus functioning to regulate the possibilities of disruption. So relations of power are similarly challenged and reproduced in these negotiations. The problem and/or question then becomes, in order for anti-oppressive education to have market-value and to have access to mainstream organizations, are educators compelled to dilute their practice to the point that the possibility for structural change becomes limited?

Conclusion

In this chapter I explored some of the conditions that community educators faced as they were setting up their workshops. In particular, I focused on how the relatively little power that educators had meant that they often had to compromise. Community education was carried out in a number of locations such as in community organizations, schools, community centres, and private businesses. While most educators received some funding, none of the educators felt that they received enough. This was problematic in particular for educators who were not formally employed by a non-profit organization, as they often had to negotiate a fee with the groups with which they were working. This could be a difficult process because often there was the perception that anti-oppressive community education should be free. My analysis then moved to looking at the planning

and negotiating process which revealed that power relations were intertwined with negotiations, often putting educators at a disadvantage and in a position where they had to compromise what they considered to be their ideal practice. Often educators felt that they did not receive enough time and a number of them felt that they had to compromise on their content, making the conditions for setting up workshops challenging. In the next chapter I continue my analysis of complex social relations that educators must negotiate by looking at some of the power relations and dynamics that occur within their trainings.

CHAPTER 4: NEGOTIATING DIVERSITY AND (dis)COMFORT

In the previous chapter, I traced how educators spoke about the change process when discussing the contextual factors that are involved in setting up their workshops. The ideal conditions for challenging oppressive relations were to work with a group that was committed to the process and that was open and willing to be challenged. However, as many educators observed, this ideal was rarely found in reality. In this chapter, I discuss the way that educators saw themselves negotiating complex social relations among their participants. I argue that negotiating workshops where participants came from diverse social locations was challenging because it also meant having to negotiate power relations in the group. When trying to negotiate these complex social relations, one has to think about comfort and discomfort and whether the idea of ‘safety’ can actually be achieved. Drawing on the work of anti-oppression education scholars (Berlack 2004; Boler, 1999; Ellsworth, 1989), I contend that an exploration into how emotions function in this environment might suggest important possibilities for negotiating these social relations. However ultimately, educators are faced with a largely impossible task of trying to simultaneously attend to feelings of discomfort and challenge power relations within the confines of a short workshop. Thus, I suggest only that attending to emotions might offer some possibilities for educators to work through their anti-oppressive workshops in different ways, not as a technique for eradicating feelings of discomfort.

Conceptualizing Diversity in Workshops

Many educators spoke of the groups that they worked with as not being very diverse:

We rarely have a really diverse group to work with. Like it tends to be a group that will have less visible minorities (Lynn).

When I'm doing the [workplace] diversity training [for non-profit organizations in the city], it's primarily a white crowd. There are some centres with a larger visible minority population. But for the most part, the people who are coming to the training are white (Chris).

Not a lot [of diversity]. They're nearly always women. I think, only twice I have spoken to groups where there was some men present. So, in general, I think I'm speaking to women who work with survivors of violence, there's often lesbian women, and there's usually some racial diversity (Ella).

Here we see that the educators speaking in these excerpts perceived the groups that they worked with as lacking diversity. The mentioning of race in each of the excerpts suggests that they also seemed to attend to particular social locations more often than others. The centrality of race to people's perception of the term 'diversity' is consistent with the literature. Several authors use the term 'diversity training' interchangeably with multicultural education (Hyde, 2004; Washburn, 2003). Other discourses on diversity take a broader approach to how diversity is conceived. For instance, diversity can be seen as a way to acknowledge difference in areas such as culture, race, gender, religion, and sexual orientation (Blackmore, 2006; Allard, 2006). However, even within these broader definitions of diversity, certain differences may become the focus more than others. For instance, in Blackmore's (2006) study of discourses in diversity training, she points out how efforts are usually made to incorporate some forms of diversity more than others. In her specific study, she speaks to the process of diversity training in the workplace, wherein inclusiveness around gender and race were particularly focused upon. This suggests that in diversity discourses, visible differences may become the focus more than other kinds of diversity. For instance, Cuthrell *et al.* (2007) make the case for poverty to be considered "one of the most critical aspects of diversity" (276) in the school system, citing that it is often overlooked because it may not be as visible. This suggests that

within the dominant discourses of diversity, some social locations are constructed as being more salient than others.

The above excerpts from my conversations with the educators also point to how the dominant discourses around diversity tend to categorize people into fixed groups such as ‘white’, ‘woman’, ‘lesbian’ etc. However, a post-structural approach to identity theorizes identity to be much more dynamic, and interconnected by fluid networks of social locations. The following excerpt describes identity from a post-structuralist perspective:

[Post-structuralists] think about gender, class, ethnicity, race as intersecting identities, changing and changeable. Such identities or ‘subjectivities’ stand in contrast to understanding the ‘self’ as fixed, rational, coherent, and unified, that is, as the notion of ‘self’ that is theorized within liberal humanism. Rather ‘subjectivity’ encapsulates the idea that individuals in different contexts and at different times may act upon competing beliefs and values, take up contradictory positions in different discourses (Allard, 2006:323).

Curry-Stevens (2005) argues that considerable tension can arise from trying to talk about privilege because it “requires that identities be “fixed” in place—locating them so they can be understood. If they were to remain as a relative concept, they begin to ‘float’” (282). She suggests that possibilities for addressing this tension may exist in examining the concept of privilege from a post-structural perspective.

For instance, intersecting forms of oppression is something that educators in this study recognized as important. In the following excerpt, Chris talked about the challenges someone who was gay and Muslim would face by feeling that they were not fully a member of either marginalized community:

What if you’re Muslim and you’re gay? Some people feel like, am I going to choose with all the Islamophobia? Am I going to risk outing myself to my parents who are my main source of support, who I go to when I feel threatened because

I'm Muslim or appear Arab. And then the gay community is pretty racist too (Chris).

Mullaly (2002) talks about intersecting forms of oppression and the way that the more forms of oppression a person experiences, the more deep and complex the oppression they suffer from will be:

Just as a black woman will experience sexism differently from a white woman, so, too, will she experience racism differently from a black male. Both will experience racism, but only the black woman will also experience patriarchy as a form of oppression, and patriarchy will mediate how she experiences racism. This exacerbates the level and severity of racial oppression she experiences, and thus makes the black woman's racial oppression more complex or multi-dimensional than racial oppression experienced by a black male (all other things being equal) (Mullaly, 2002: 155).

According to Mullaly, the more forms of oppression that are experienced by a person, the more oppressed they are. However, this approach of simplifying the experience of oppressive relations into a mathematical equation tends to reduce individual experiences of oppression into neat categories that may not necessarily reflect people's reality. For instance, in the above excerpt from Mullaly, he does not take into account the complexities of the different dominant discourses that exist around black males and females. For instance, black males are often labeled as "dangerous". What are the implications of this stigma and how does it operate across different contexts? A more complex and situated exploration of privilege can be offered from a post-structuralist perspective. Curry-Stevens (2007) asks:

Can we ever consider the Black woman with a disability as privileged? Whereas many might quickly respond "no" or "yes", perhaps the answer should be "sometimes" (37).

Here, privilege is seen as contextually situated. An implication of this approach is that privilege may play out in different ways with different groups. This way of

conceptualizing diversity and privilege is useful to consider in the following section where educators speak about negotiating feelings of comfort and discomfort in their workshops.

Comfort, Discomfort, and Different Social Locations

One of the central challenges for many of the educators who were interviewed for this thesis was negotiating the “safety” of their workshop, that is, how comfortable participants, particularly more marginalized participants felt. As discussed in the previous section, many educators felt that they worked with groups that were not diverse and contained few participants from more marginal social locations. The process of challenging oppressive relations has the potential to bring out views that can be very hurtful to people who hold relatively less power. This presents challenges for the educator because raising painful issues can result in stereotypical responses and thus make the workshop more uncomfortable for participants who are affected by these prejudices (Boler, 2004a). Thus a central concern becomes how to actively challenge oppressive views across diversity where participants have different degrees of power.

The issue of “safety” came up frequently when talking about diversity. Some educators perceived there to be a lack of safety in the group when there were only a few participants from marginal social locations:

Let’s say you have this scenario of 28 staff members participating in a workshop where there will be—2, maybe, visible minority staff members there. Well, those people can’t speak about things that might be problems [for them] because if they do, it will cause problems for them later on. They can’t bring something up with their co-workers that is going to cause them to be further victimized, marginalized, or silenced (Lynn).

Here, Lynn explored the limits that a lack of diversity has on workshops in terms of decreasing the comfort for staff members of colour to speak out. However, there is also

the implication here that people of colour are expected to want to speak about the oppressive relations that they have felt. At the same time, the members who are white are not expected to speak about the oppressive relations that they benefit from. As Srivastava and Francis (2005) argue, in anti-racism workshops, the dominant white majority are often granted the privilege of not having to explore painful issues associated with their role in perpetuating oppression.

The construction of what a “safe space” should look like can also be closely tied to dialogue. For some educators, keeping the space safe for individuals coming from marginalized social location meant that they did not tolerate any comments or views that they felt were hurtful:

I do try to do activities so that people will feel comfortable...feel like this is a safe space and that they can talk. And um, and I do try to get everyone to participate in the activities. Sometimes that doesn't always happen. But I try to make them feel comfortable if I can. And to obviously, like I said before, at the beginning to always lay the ground rules down where we say these kinds of things are not tolerated, comments about whatever so that if, if an individual is in one of those marginalized groups they can feel more comfortable (Liz).

Here, we see that Liz's perception of safety is centered on comments and participation. She strove to make a safe environment for everyone through trying to control and influence these two components of her workshop. Rasmussen (2006) criticizes discourses that grant educators the ability to “create” safe spaces of learning for marginal students, arguing that these discourses completely disregard structural factors associated with safety. In regard to creating ‘safe spaces’ for queer youth in schools, she argues:

Assuming that people have the desire or the capacity to construct learning environments safe for all students ignores teachers' and students' investments in sustaining heteronormalizing processes within educational contexts (Rasmussen, 2006: 20).

In other words, as long as there are oppressive relations at the structural level that affect certain individuals in the workshops, achieving “safety” is dangerous, if not an impossibility. Thus the social relations in which their practice is implicated makes it difficult for educators to have complete control over how comfortable participants are able to feel. In the case of Liz’s excerpt above, setting ground rules in her workshop may help to reduce some of the discomfort felt by marginal group members, but will likely never fully eradicate those feelings. As long as the dominant social relations in society are organized to perpetuate oppression, feelings of discomfort will continue.

Other educators talked about the safety of their workshop group as extended to the group’s relations outside of the workshop. For instance in the following quote, Chris talked about how he tried to assess whether or not he felt that he was in a space where people who identify as queer could feel comfortable:

I ask at the beginning—I want to know what people know and how comfortable they are before I go into this stuff—so I wanna ask them, have you already had a workshop like this? I mean, do you have any friends that are gay? Do you have any family members who are gay? It’s interesting because if people don’t raise their hands, you gotta think ok, maybe it’s not even in a context where it’s ok to raise your hand and say I have a gay friend, or a gay family member (Chris).

In this case, Chris was referring to his initial sense of the group and the safety within it. Feelings of safety or the lack thereof is already often established before the educator even begins. There are already likely to be informal rules among participants about discussing diversity and oppression. These rules can make it intimidating and uncomfortable to talk openly about one’s experience or concerns around privilege and power relations. Chris also suggested that there is always uncertainty around how the safety is perceived and whether achieving it was actually possible or not within the group. This suggests that

safety is a concept that is fraught with tensions and that can never fully be defined or assessed.

Other facilitators expressed that they saw tensions around the idea of safety as it often made it difficult to have open and honest conversations. In the following excerpt, Ella talked about some of the challenges and possibilities with facilitating a diverse group:

One of the things that's really valuable in working with a diverse group, that's also difficult working with a diverse group is that it's hard to maintain a safe space for people. So yeah, if you have all sorts of heterosexist things being said, you have to challenge them because you want to create a safe space. But at the same time, if those things aren't on the table, you can't challenge them. And so there's a real, I think there's a real tension there in terms of maintaining a safe space for people not to feel harassed or threatened in their own learning environment. But at the same time, we need to get some of those ugly things on the table so that they can be challenged (Ella).

Here, Ella highlighted the tension around trying to create safety, and challenging oppressive views. On the one hand, she would like people to express their oppressive views because it would give her the opportunity to address them, but at the same time, the expression of these perspectives may serve to reproduce oppression by creating discomfort for those who are stigmatized by these ideas. Thus an important question that emerges is to what extent should marginalized groups be fashioned into "learning items" for others and what risks does this pose for them? This is a complicated dilemma because although marginalized members may not desire to take on this role, they may feel it is necessary, and hence wish to do so in the context of challenging the assumptions of others. Thus what members may feel comfortable doing and what they may actually wish to do in a workshop can sometimes differ.

This is a difficult dynamic to negotiate and in some cases, educators may inadvertently end up making these kinds of decisions for marginalized participants. Lynn, an anti-racism educator, talked about trying to have the voices of visible minorities heard in a workplace anti-racism workshop with predominantly white participants. The following quote is quite lengthy but it illustrates an example of how Lynn assessed the dynamics of the group she was presented with, and negotiated what she felt was the best possible way to challenge racism in the group. She goes into more detail about the instance she talked about earlier in this chapter where she did a workshop at a school where the majority of the staff members were white and the custodial staff members who were present were visible minorities:

I asked if the whole staff could be present, not just the teaching staff, but all the support staff, the custodians as well. And there were four custodians there, and of course the custodians are all visible minorities. And uh, the, two custodians came up to talk me during the coffee break. One of them, had been working in a number of community support organizations. He's Hispanic, and he, he was concerned when he moved here, he was concerned about the Aboriginal youth in his neighbourhood and he started a basketball for Aboriginal youth group. And got grants for it and everything like that. Ok, so he comes and tells me this, he's a custodian. The school has no clue that he says he does this. Um, one of the other custodians tells me that she's been doing tutoring—with a couple of other groups. She was Filipino, with the Filipino community and also with another, another group, I think it was through the college. So here she's doing math tutoring and the school just thinks, well she's a custodian, why should we talk to her. And, they came, and they wanted to tell me about it and the other two, we had two Aboriginal facilitators—so they went and they talked to them and they talked to me—told us about the stuff—they were very free talking about what they did. But then to try to bring their expertise into that workshop where it would be recognized was really hard. And so, the only thing that I could think of, at the time, was to say, “well um, there are three people who told us some interesting things at the break and I'd like them to share what they shared with us.” And so I specifically, deliberately started with the two custodians and went to someone who was a teaching staff to highlight their expertise and their experience and to give them first say...and...the staff was surprised that they were so articulate and that they had these stories. But I don't know if it made a difference in the way they perceived them—I hope so (Lynn).

In this case, Lynn talked about seeing the power dynamics within the group and trying to challenge oppressive relations within that. As she pointed out, this seemed like a very uninviting space for members of the visible minority groups to speak their mind, so she took a step back and simply sought to have these members recognized for their achievements. She adjusted her method to the group and pushed to the extent she felt she could. She also sought to make the visible minority members comfortable. However, despite her positive intentions, Lynn's actions were also problematic because she was the one to define "comfort". While she sought to reduce discomfort for participants by not asking them to talk publicly about how they experienced racism in the workplace, she may have increased these feelings by inviting them to publicly share what they had disclosed to her without asking their permission beforehand. This is an important factor to consider because as Srivastava and Francis (2006) argue in their study of anti-racism and anti-homophobic workshops, pedagogical methods in these settings often tend to place participants with the least power as "objects of interrogation and display" (276). This points to the need for educators to not only take special care in attending to how their methods for challenging privilege can reproduce oppressive relations, but also to find small ways that allow more marginalized members to have increased control about their own participation in the workshops.

In the case described above, it was the comfort of the participants who came from relatively more powerless social locations that was compromised for the purposes of consciousness-raising. However, as introduced in the previous chapter, more privileged participants could also feel discomfort when asked to explore their power (Boler, 1999; Kumashiro, 2002; Curry-Stevens, 2005; Curry-Stevens, 2007). Some educators sought to

reduce that dynamic by seeking to create a “safe space” for more privileged learners. For them, an ideal workshop was one where people felt more “free” to express their opinions without the worry of being “stigmatized” by political correctness:

I’ve been to too many trainings where I thought – where you think of what you wanted to say and you think, oh, they’re going to think I’m...being...you know, something, because things can get twisted by the facilitators, and I just never want that (Carol).

Carol spoke about the importance of facilitating people to feel safe by not making them feel afraid to say anything that might be considered “the wrong thing”. I asked her what she would do if someone did say something that could perhaps be considered hurtful to others:

I’ll just see [the negative comment] in the best light, and sort of, and then always say, “any other – does anybody have any other ideas – were there any other ideas out there, you know, not, this one’s wrong, but, let’s hear some more responses to that,” and then when I’m kind of going over them, I’ll say, “oh, to recap,” and then I’ll mention the kind of top – best ones and maybe just kind of forget...to mention [the negative comment]... at the end, every now and then, somebody will come up to me and say, you know, after I said something I was really embarrassed and realized that probably that wasn’t the right thing to say (Carol).

Here, Carol took a discrete approach to challenging oppressive relations in her group. She relied on other people in the room to gently challenge the assumptions that someone may be making about a particular group. She also reinforced this by recapping the “better” contributions. Through this approach she sought to make herself come across as a “safe”, non-directive person and also gave people space to come to realizations on their own. But at the same time, while her approach may have made more “privileged” participants feel comfortable, what were the implications for the comfort levels of participants who came from more marginal social locations? Carol faced complicated tensions because while a

laid-back approach could be useful and effective for challenging privilege, it could also serve to obscure the pain felt by those who do not have it.

In other cases, educators who did not place high importance on the comfort of more privileged group members could lose their “credibility” with some groups. A prime example was discussed in the previous chapter where Ella was not invited back to an organization to do the second half of her anti-oppression training because two white men with very high positions in the group felt that she was making them feel guilty for “no reason”. Therefore, there were also limitations around disfavoring the comfort of more privileged participants. An example that Berlack (2004) discusses suggests that discomfort without emotional debriefing can produce strong resistance to challenges that an educator might pose to privilege. She describes a case that occurred in her classroom where an African-American educator came into her class to talk about anti-racism. The discomfort felt by White students resulted in their discrediting her. It was up to Berlack to work through these emotions with these students in order to help them reconstitute the way they had read her presentation (Berlack, 2004). In this example, we see how processing emotional responses can open up more possibilities of understanding for members of dominant groups. This is an idea that I take up further in the following section.

Working Through Emotions

As seen in this chapter and the previous one, feelings of comfort and discomfort, particularly among participants who came from more privileged social locations, could be a very powerful determinant for whether or not a workshop would take place or be permitted to continue. Therefore, one possibility for addressing this tension could be for

educators to focus more on the role of emotions in anti-oppressive education. In order to prepare participants to experience discomfort, some educators would acknowledge this discomfort upfront and explain that it was part of the process. For instance, Ella used an analogy with her participants to talk about challenging themselves in the workshops:

One time I explained it this way—so let's say you're very comfortable making chocolate chip cookies, you could probably do it with your eyes closed. You're not learning a whole lot every time you make the chocolate chip cookies. But let's say you want to make some oatmeal and chocolate chip cookies instead. You probably have to stretch a little bit right? You have to figure out how to work with the oats. You have to toast them, if you don't toast them you're going to do a really crappy job and the cookies aren't going to taste as good—but you have the basics there. At that point you're on a learning curve. You have to stretch yourself a little bit, but you're also partially in your comfort zone, and that's ok. But let's say you have to make a pumpkin pie... so you might have all sorts of feelings and anxiety. Am I good enough? Is this going to turn out? Is it going to fall flat? Are they going to think I'm a failure? Are they going to think I'm not worth my time? So you might have all these feelings and anxieties. So there are different ways to stay in our comfort zone and learn nothing, or stretch ourselves a little bit and only do a variation. Or we can face our anxieties and fears of guilt and really stretch ourselves and learn more. And anti-oppression training is kind of like that. You can stay in your comfort zone, not acknowledge your privilege, not acknowledge oppression, and that's really good if you want to stick with being insular, not knowing about these things, and not challenging oppression, but all you're ever going to know, is your privilege. Or you can choose today to stretch yourself, and try to push a little bit further and try to stay in the comfort zone but also learn a little bit more. And that's fine, but you still might not move past that zone that you've created for yourself that's comfortable. If you do decide if you want to, and we leave it up to them if they want to make the decision or not, but if you do decide that you want to feel uncomfortable, and stretch yourself, and learn about your privilege and experience the pain of understanding your privilege but also where you might be oppressed or places where you can act as an ally. You're gonna feel a lot of tension, and that's ok. If you're not feeling tension, then you probably haven't moved past your zone or you're not acknowledging those things (Ella).

Here, we see that Ella focused on normalizing discomfort and privileging it over feelings of comfort. Several authors have written about the challenges associated with conveying the desirability of “discomfort” to people in privileged positions. Boler (1999) argues for a ‘pedagogy of discomfort’ which poses the central question, “what do we—educators

and students—stand to gain by engaging in the discomfiting process of questioning cherished beliefs and assumptions” (176)? This question becomes critical when working to challenge oppressive relations because as Pitt and Britzman (2003) argue, the concept of ‘difficult knowledge’ redefines the relationship between education and social justice, suggesting that the “capacity to know” (756) can also be a traumatic process. Thus, a crucial focus is on the way emotions define how and what we choose to see and not see (Boler, 1999). In other words, people may choose to not see something if it becomes too painfully emotional for them (Butterwick and Selman, 2003). This suggests that if the recognition of emotion is more central to anti-oppression work, that there may be more possibilities for change.

However, working with emotions can be challenging for educators. Curry-Stevens (2005) interviewed community educators who defined transformative change as “building an analysis of the status quo and catalyzing the learner’s support for undoing systems of domination” (210). Many educators in her study argued that, for the “privileged learner” (Curry-Stevens, 2005:210), this could be a risky endeavour where they are asked to shift their alliances away from a system that has benefited them. However, it also becomes an important endeavour when participants from more privileged social locations often have a great deal of control over the course that the workshop takes. Thus, the work that educators like Ella do around normalizing discomfort for more privileged participants becomes central.

At the same time, educators must also take into consideration the emotions involved for people who are from more marginal backgrounds. Thus a tension that emerged for educators was how to negotiate the different emotionalities of their

workshops. In particular, attending to one kind of emotion could sometimes lead to overlooking another one. For instance, an implication of the process outlined above meant that educators could spend more time attending to the discomfort of more privileged participants because their feelings of discomfort usually had more control over the course that the workshop took. Rich and Cargile (2004) point to an example in their college classroom where one frustrated participant of colour got angry with the way attention had to be placed on making White people feel open to change when doing anti-racism work:

When you discuss race with White people, you are basically saying, ‘come here, sit down and I will only take up the time you can spare to sit back and begin to understand me (352).

The frustration expressed here is reflective of the idea that people of privilege often get to control the transformative process by how much they are willing to invest themselves in it. Thus power relations can even be reflected in how we attend to emotions. Educators face a monumental task of negotiating feelings of discomfort among participants from different locations as they facilitate their workshops.

Conclusion

In this chapter I introduced the way that educators spoke about diversity and explored this concept using a post-structural lens. From this perspective, identity became fluid and privilege was a much more contextual concept. Then I traced how these unequal power relations shaped negotiations of the ‘safety’ of the group. My analysis revealed that the degree of safety and security felt by participants was directly influenced by structural factors, raising the question of whether safety is a possibility. For individuals who were often subject to oppressive relations, this meant that the educator could never

fully create 'safety' for them, and at times, worked to reproduce conditions of discomfort. For the individuals who came from more privileged social locations, feelings of discomfort and lack of safety could emerge when educators sought to challenge their privileged social locations and draw attention to the way these performances of privilege could work to perpetuate oppressive relations. This could be a difficult task because of the resistance of more privileged participants to feeling discomfort. I concluded this chapter by exploring the idea of integrating a focus on emotions in this area of work. More possibilities for challenging participants from dominant social locations may be possible if the emotional component of this process is explored and introduced in workshops. But ultimately, educators were often left with the impossible task of trying to find ways to address 'uncomfortable' topics in their workshops, while simultaneously attending to different participants' feelings of discomfort. In the next chapter, I show how the pedagogical strategies of educators were often fraught with this tension.

CHAPTER 5: PEDAGOGICAL STRATEGIES AND TENSIONS

In the previous two chapters I examined some of the challenging contexts that educators negotiated when setting up and running their workshops. In this chapter I explore some of the pedagogical tools that educators used and I argue that these strategies were not detached from the tensions and complex social relations that informed the context of their work. The four strategies that are analyzed are: using the facilitator as a tool, presenting information, promoting dialogue, and activities and games. I investigate some of the possibilities and limitations for each strategy in order to highlight their tensions and to provide the possibility for an enriched reflective practice. One important cautionary note—while I suggest that this type of practice would increase the possibility of challenging oppression, the constraints around such a practice are not to be situated on individual workers. While I see a reflective practice as a possibility for resisting complicity in oppressive relations, the effectiveness of anti-oppressive practice is largely reliant on broader social and political shifts.

The Facilitator as a Tool

Several educators saw the identity of the facilitator as an important tool for creating change. Both of the anti-racism educators that I interviewed for this project, stressed the importance of facilitating workshops as a multi-ethnic team in order to provide a model of positive cross-cultural interactions:

We try to have an Aboriginal, a visible minority, and a white facilitator working together and so that's one sort of strategy that we've been trying to consistently use because that way we all learn to work together across difference. And we can also model, as we are doing it we are usually at least a few steps ahead of the participants, we can model how we can work across difference and find commonalities so that's the main strategy (Lynn).

Modeling can be seen as an example of a pedagogical strategy that is inspired by the ‘contact hypothesis’, which is the idea that inter-racial contact will reduce prejudice (Srivastava and Francis, 2006). Lynn’s approach of modeling “positive” cross-cultural relations is beneficial because it increases participants’ exposure to healthy interactions. However, it is also important to unpack other messages educators are sending when they use this pedagogical strategy. For instance, different power dynamics shape the experiences of white anti-racism facilitators and facilitators of colour. As Srivastava and Francis (2006) argue, the contact hypothesis is only successful when “positive” representations of cross-cultural interactions are produced. In order for these positive representations to occur, it is often up to the facilitators who come from marginalized social locations to dispel any “negative stereotypes” of themselves (Cook, 1978). Placing the onus on members of marginal groups serves to simply reify power relations, where it is up to the less powerful groups to follow scripts that will enable them to be better accepted by the dominant groups. Thus, like many of the pedagogical strategies explored in this chapter, using a multi-facilitator approach has both liberatory and oppressive consequences.

Some educators saw the multi-facilitator approach as working to the facilitator’s advantage in terms of building rapport with participants. In the case of educators who were members of “dominant groups” (eg. white), having a co-facilitator from a minority group could help them to develop relationships with and gain trust from participants who were from marginalized social locations:

One of the ways we gain trust is by working in a multi-ethnic team. You know if you have a multi-ethnic team and your staff is diverse, which we do have...why should people trust me as a white person if they’ve had bad experiences in the past, so being patient with that (Lynn).

In this case, Lynn believed that having a diverse multiethnic team allowed her group to gain more “credibility” and more trust, particularly with participants of colour. It is not uncommon for white anti-racism educators to have their legitimacy and personal agenda questioned by participants of colour (Ring, 2000). Therefore, having educators from other backgrounds could help white facilitators to gain more “insider status” with these participants.

At the same time, some educators of colour felt that they were taken more seriously if they co-facilitated with a white educator. In the following excerpt, two educators from a queer women of colour organization talked about how they felt that they were perceived more positively if they did a joint panel with women who were white:

Aisha: [Usually when we do] an anti-racist workshop, then usually we have a couple of other white women doing it with us as well –

Meiling: To show that racism affects everyone...

Aisha: [*Sarcastically*] To epitomize our voices, because apparently women of colour’s voices [are not legitimate enough on their own to talk about racism]

Meiling: And that’s another thing that I was talking about in terms of why people like our work better. Sometimes it’s just because we have white women with us giving the workshop. For instance, like, oftentimes I do workshops with white women in the field and somehow that makes our work... easier to follow.

The two facilitators in this excerpt talked quite sarcastically about how it was important for them to have a white woman with them to “raise their profile” and make their work more “digestible”. Here they suggested that their predominantly white participants felt less discomfort when one of the co-facilitators was white. It is interesting to note that these participants were usually from non-profit organizations that claimed to be seeking a more progressive anti-racist framework for their organizations. However, it is not uncommon for employees in the non-profit sector to be resistant to anti-racism work, particularly if they already have a strong moral sense of self (Srivastava, 2005). More

specifically, white participants can sometimes become emotionally defensive towards people of colour who try to make visible painful, oppressive relations that they have experienced. Butterwick and Selman (2003) provide an example of how in a feminist group with which they worked, several of the white feminists grew angry and defensive when feminists of colour articulated ways that they felt dominated by white feminists. Therefore, the implication of this kind of dynamic is that the presence of a white facilitator makes anti-racism training seem less threatening to participants.

Race is a visible part of educators' identities and cannot usually be hidden from participants. Therefore, facilitators make conscious or unconscious decisions about how to use their social locations around race and ethnicity in their workshops. Queer identity, on the other hand can be less visible, which is why choosing to be out can be seen as a political act (Kirsch, 2000). Queer social locations were used by facilitators in different ways. For instance, Chris was a GLBTTQ educator who described himself as being "very out" with his gay identity and often drew on his experiences to talk about homophobia and heterosexism in his workshops. This could be considered an important pedagogical technique because often in anti-homophobia workshops the only personal experiences around being queer that are presented by people in the room are those raised by queer facilitators themselves (Srivastava and Francis, 2006). Thus by choosing to share his experiences, Chris was presenting participants with at least one possible representation of what it is like to experience homophobia and heterosexism. But by choosing to narrate his gay identity and experiences so publicly, he also put himself at risk. In the following example Chris talked about feeling unsafe in a workshop:

I did this workshop for these new, they were newer Canadians, they were Middle Eastern, they were like grade 10 and 11 boys, um phys ed class. ... and their

starting point was it's ok to kill gays. And it [was] so not appropriate for me to be there (Chris).

This excerpt shows how the problems/tensions of discomfort also extend to the educator and there are spaces where the educator's sense of safety may also be compromised, particularly if they are members of a minority group. In this excerpt, complex and difficult social locations of power and privilege came into play. As an openly gay man, Chris was in a vulnerable position in relation to the boys in his workshop who seemed to openly identify as straight. At the same time, Chris had some privilege as a white, Canadian-born male in this situation. Thus, how to negotiate these social relations could be complicated and challenging, especially since it was probably difficult for Chris to see his privilege in a situation where he was feeling unsafe.

Alternately, some queer educators may choose to not be as open about their queer identity for strategic reasons. For instance, Ella, a queer anti-oppression educator usually chose to reveal her identity later on in the workshops so that she could use it strategically:

I don't come out early in the workshop. So, um, cuz I like to see where people are going to go and if the conversation goes to kind of an ugly place, I can always use my queer identity to get people to rethink their assumptions (Ella).

Here Ella played a dual role where she used her identity to create both comfort and discomfort among participants. This is also an interesting example because it speaks to tensions around being out, and how choosing to not be immediately visible can also be a political act. Rasmussen (2006) argues that all identities are profoundly political and that in an educational context, what is important to consider is how identities are articulated. How "sexual and gender identities are deployed, rationalized, negotiated, and prohibited at different moments" (Rasmussen, 2006:60) has implications for how heterosexism and homophobia are challenged in the workshops. Both Ella and Chris used their queer

identity to some extent as pedagogical tools but did so in different ways. Each approach had the potential to be both disruptive and/or implicated in oppressive relations. Chris' approach disrupted oppressive relations because it may have compelled some participants to confront their discomfort around openly queer individuals. Ella's approach of revealing her queer identity later on was also useful because it could force some participants to re-examine the assumptions they made about people who identify as queer. However, by not coming out right away, she could perhaps send the message that it is better to keep one's sexual orientation to oneself unless required to address outright bigotry. A limitation of Chris' approach on the other hand, could be that he may not have the opportunity to address outright bigotry because people may start censoring themselves from the beginning when they find out that he is openly gay. Thus there are tensions with each approach.

As seen in the examples above, often when parts of the facilitator's identity were drawn upon, it was usually their marginal social locations that were used strategically. This speaks to the way that educators often presented themselves through discourses of innocence. Razack and Fellows (1998) use the phrase 'race to innocence' to refer to the process where people come to believe that their own subordination is the most pressing, and that they are not implicated in the subordination of others. In referring to the tendency among feminists to 'race towards innocence', the authors remark:

The systems of domination that position white, middle-class heterosexual, non-disabled men at the centre continue to operate among all other groups, limiting in various ways what women know and feel about one another. Feeling only the ways that she is positioned as subordinate, each woman strives to maintain her dominant positions (Razack and Fellows, 1998:336).

Curry-Stevens (2005) calls for educators to be more willing to “face [their] complicity with the status quo, and not stop at a transformation that just places the blame outside of [themselves]” (214). She argues that the change process begins with educators facing the many ways that they express dominance (Curry-Stevens 2005). In other words, having participants become conscious of their privilege begins with educators displaying consciousness of their own. Such an exercise is extremely risky for educators at the margins because they place their own authority in question. At the same time, it is an important step in securing social justice. The desire to identify as innocent is often of paramount importance for members of groups whose only possibility for social respectability and authority is through claims of virtuousness. Thus it is important to read these tensions, not only as issues of individual desires and fears, but rather as performances that are significantly determined by social norms and expectations.

Presenting Alternative Information

A significant part of the work that these educators did was to impart information/knowledges/ways of seeing that were different from dominant worldviews. For instance, some educators saw their role as counteracting the sexual stereotypes that are dominant in the media:

I personally, try to counteract a little bit of the influence of the media that youth get. Um yeah, a lot of stuff around that, and a lot of—we’re doing more and more speaks on body image and self-esteem and healthy relationships. Kind of the softer side of sexuality I guess you could say (Liz).

In this example, we see how Liz’s pedagogy was just one of many different pedagogies that participants were exposed to. In particular, she was trying to counteract the learning that happens from the media. Giroux (2004) talks about how the media is part of a larger ‘public pedagogy’ that includes sites such as sports, entertainment media, cable television

networks, and churches. The few hours that most educators were usually given to do their workshops was miniscule compared to the amount of time participants were exposed to these kinds of public pedagogy. This imbalance puts a lot of pressure on the two to three hour workshop and highlights the impossible expectations that are placed on educators.

Educators used various techniques for delivering information to the group. For instance, several educators spent some time defining terms that they felt were not well known or well-defined in society:

I usually gather up definitions, you know, sometimes people don't understand what definitions are, they don't know simple things like, what is 'racism'? What is 'immigration'? What is 'refugee women'? And all that stuff (Meiling).

Here, we see that Meiling grounded the orientation of her workshop by defining specific terms in ways that she felt were important and not well-known. Some may criticize this as reflecting the oppressive banking model of education that Freire (1970) writes about. But at the same time, these methods can be seen as challenging oppression because they are presenting subjugated information. In the following quote, Kelly talked about how she saw the delivery of information as important to challenging myths around sexual assault:

I guess the first challenge to this type of oppression is to name it, to identify it, to define it, so that everyone can understand that this is what it is, and – and everyone's on the same page (Kelly).

In this excerpt, we see how defining a term can be seen as strong political act for change. Chasteen (2001) traces how feminists over the last thirty years, radically changed the mainstream definition of sexual assault through providing an alternative framework of understanding. Thirty years ago in North America, rape was not defined as a “woman's issue” and it was not understood as a common experience; the concept of ‘acquaintance

rape' was virtually unknown (Chasteen, 2001). However, the feminist anti-rape movement used the feminist discourse around sexual assault to challenge dominant discourses. Therefore, aspects of the feminist discourse, particularly those as defining rape as a crime of violence rather than a crime of sex have become more mainstream (Chasteen, 2001). Even the act of openly defining sexual assault changed society because it had been previously obscured by silence. Thus working to change the dominant discourse is part of the transformative process.

As a result of the feminist redefinition of sexual assault, we have criminal offenses that men can be charged with, sexual assault centres with treatment programs, and a greater understanding of how rape affects survivors (although Kelly's role as a public educator indicates that there is still a lot to be done in terms of understandings). At the same time, it also shows how the change in definition creates its own discourse, not necessarily an "objective fact". Thus, when considering this approach, questions around how the definitions that are presented frame a particular point of view become important.

Another response to the criticism that imparting information is simply a banking style of education is that for some people, this is a delivery method that helps them to come to more understandings. For instance, in the following excerpt, Carol talked about how even though she strove to use an adult education format, the delivery of information in a lecture format was a way of learning that some of her participants prefer:

There are all kinds of different ways [of learning] depending on what you've got. Some people like facts—some people, you appeal to their hearts...and in trainings, I guess you do a little bit...of one thing, and a little, you know [of other things] (Carol).

Curry-Stevens (2005) argues that the tradition of avoiding speeches and presentations in anti-oppression-type trainings can hinder the transformative potential because it removes

a delivery method that might be optimal for some participants. She stresses that she is not calling for a return to banking-style education, but rather for educators to view the delivery of information as a having a time and place, where its usefulness can be maximized.

When referring to information, many of the educators spoke about participants having different “levels” of knowledge. They talked about some participants being ‘stronger’ in the knowledge than others:

Well if someone were saying to me...‘I take the businessman’s perspective that the newcomers have to assimilate and they can’t do it unless they know exactly what it will involve...so you’ve got to tell them what’s expected of them.’...So when I heard that I thought, ok...he’s at about a level one (Lynn).

This quote suggests that Lynn had some kind of standardized sense of different levels of knowledge regarding race relations. However, when unpacking this quote, it is possible to wonder whether ‘the businessman’s perspective’ is not necessarily a different “level” of knowledge, but rather a different discourse of knowledge. Blackmore (2006) argues that when deconstructing social change processes, it is important to understand how different parties see the change process. She takes the example of the term *diversity*, “a seemingly progressive stance” (182) as she puts it, and deconstructs it in two different ways. One discourse is what she refers to as the “capitalizing on diversity” discourse. This approach sees market value in having a diverse workplace and aims to “assimilate and promote consensus or cohesion” (184). If one was following this discourse, the ‘businessman’s perspective’ might seem appealing. Another discourse that Blackmore (2006) presents is the “transformative diversity” discourse. This is where diversity is conceptualized in terms of “the fundamental transformation of organizations and the need to make leadership more ‘inclusive’” (185). This is perhaps a discourse that Lynn was

more supportive of and was hoping that her clients would be as well. However, this is not always the case, suggesting that an enormous part of engaging with participants in anti-oppressive workshops requires being open to listening beyond the “hot button” words that cause us to rely on our own stereotypes to make sense of people, and instead try to be curious about their stories. Change can be understood in a different, less linear way if we think about it in terms of the way people narrate their lives and their world. The challenge is that such an approach takes time, which as I have previously outlined, is rarely available.

Promoting Dialogue

Dialogue has been cited as a key component of education that is aimed at bringing about progressive social change. Freire (2003) saw dialogue as indispensable to critical pedagogy:

Only dialogue, which requires critical thinking, is also capable of generating critical thinking. Without dialogue there is no communication, and without communication there can be no true education (92-93).

deCastell (2004) argues that increased dialogue is often looked upon as a cure for social injustices. In particular, dialogue is seen as a way to hear voices that have previously been silenced (deCastell, 2004). However, it is not an “innocent” pedagogical tool. As Boler (2004b) argues, it is deeply intertwined with power relations:

All speech is not free. Power inequities institutionalized through economies, gender roles, social class, and corporate-owned media ensure that all voices do not carry the same weight...similarly, not all expressions of hostility are equal...Hostility that targets marginalized people on the basis of their assumed inferiority carries more weight than hostility expressed by a marginalized person toward a member of the dominant class (3).

In this section, I look at how educators use and negotiate dialogue as a pedagogical strategy in their work.

The majority of educators stated that dialogue was very important to their work. For some educators, they saw it as significant because they felt that the issues they were addressing were silenced in society. For instance, in the following excerpt, Liz, a sexual health educator talked about how her workshops might sometimes be the only place where people are given a space to openly talk about sexuality:

Number one strategy is just talking about it in the first place, right? Just giving people a space to talk about these things. Because often when I do go into a classroom or a community group, this is the only time people will get to speak about these issues...we just try to encourage them to discuss and be more open...giving people a space to do that because maybe they don't get that education at home, maybe they don't get it at school, maybe um, their friends won't talk to them about it or maybe their parents won't talk to them about it. Maybe, they feel like they can't even have a conversation with their sexual partner about it so they need a space to be able to do that (Liz).

Dialogue, in this case, could play an important role in challenging oppressive relations because it gave participants an opportunity to talk about issues that they may not be able to discuss openly in other areas of their life. I began to wonder what the implications might be of having dialogue on topics that have not been openly discussed. Literature on anti-oppression work talks about how dialogue around oppressive relations can be wrapped in pain, resistance, frustration, and power relations (Ellsworth, 1989; Fellows and Razack, 1998; Boler, 2004b; Srivastava and Francis, 2006; Butterwick and Selman, 2003). Moreover, the heterogeneity of a group that an educator is working with can heighten these tensions. It is challenging to raise painful issues around oppression in mixed groups because it brings out prejudices that affect some participants (usually those with less power) more than others (Boler, 2004b).

There could also be a variety of challenges around participants wanting to talk about issues in different ways. For instance, Srivastava (2005) gives the example of a

feminist organization that was working on anti-racist change. At the organization, White staff members would talk about how they were pleased with the way staff were moving towards being able to talk about racism. However, women of colour employees expressed frustration with the “let’s just talk about racism” step. They felt that it led to stagnation. This example shows how the usefulness of different kinds of dialogue can be viewed differently by participants. A tension that educators may have to negotiate when using dialogue as a pedagogical strategy is the way that participants envision how dialogue should function in the change process. In other words, dialogue can be change in itself, but it can also be used to avoid action. Tensions emerge because it is often both at the same time.

Many of the facilitators hoped that participants would start to take more control of the discussion themselves and start to challenge each other. They envisioned a more Freirian kind of dialogue:

We do a lot of small group work, you know, where people get a chance to explore their ideas in a small group, we avoid a lecture, this is adult education format...I think I hope that people will challenge each other. Umm, one of the things people really like about our training is that it’s non-threatening and it’s fun. And that...you can say anything. So my whole goal, is to keep everything so open (Carol).

So we try to get, umm, a good discussion about it, to have people getting to that point where they understand what the issue is, and they’re thinking about it now, and challenging what other people are saying about it (Kelly).

Both of the educators above talked about how they wanted participants to challenge each other’s oppressive assumptions. This suggests that even though educators may recognize, at least to themselves, that they might have an agenda, many imagine dialogue as remaining relatively separate from their agenda, thus signifying the ideal, non-coercive practice. What this allowed was the possibility to imagine an anti-oppressive discourse as

a true, collective, emancipatory process. What was avoided was the ways such a discourse could be coercive and further certain political agendas over others.

There is a tension between promoting a dialogic approach and also promoting one's agenda as an educator. One of the educators, Ella, highlighted this tension in the excerpt below:

The other thing too is once you commit to the process as well as the product, the process is important, but it can sometimes take over, so, you can have endless dialogue about heterosexism, and not actually get anywhere. You can have a really good process, and it can be difficult to balance that in a short-term workshop... It can be hard to honour the process of dialogue while making sure at the same time that everyone gets something out of it... that's one of the drawbacks of dialogue, you make an attempt to honour the process, but you can never fully honour the process... So I think one of the drawbacks of honouring that dialogue is that you can never really do it without intervening in some way. Or you can honour dialogue, and have conversation work the way it does, and work through one small piece of information that you want to work through, and that's fine (Ella).

There is the recognition here that although educators may wish to have pedagogical approaches that are more dialogic, they are also faced with constraints such as time. This is a particularly salient constraint considering, as I discussed in Chapter 3, the negotiating status that community educators have often means that they must settle for having less time. Thus the reduction of dialogue becomes an example of how contextual limitations and structural factors shape the pedagogical strategies that educators are able to use.

Activities and Games

Several educators also had specific games and activities that they used to challenge oppressive relations. These activities ranged from games, to arts exercises, to simulations. The purpose of many of these exercises was to make oppression more visible and/or to push the boundaries of possible ways to challenge it. As Razack (1993) argues, part of radical or critical pedagogy is finding ways to open up spaces for participation of

voices that have traditionally been marginalized in conventional education practices. Therefore, seeking alternative and creative pedagogical methods can be seen as part of striving towards anti-oppressive practice.

Some activities sought to help participants understand oppressive relations through simulation. In the following lengthy excerpt, Lynn described a simulation exercise that she did to show participants what oppressive relations might look like and to put them in the position of having to deal with them:

We tell everybody, that are participants in the group, “we’re going to be doing a simulation and you will most likely feel uncomfortable with some aspects of it and that’s part of the exercise and afterwards we’ll talk about it.” And so then you divide up the group into, you know, As and Bs. And you differentiate on anything you notice in the group. Like maybe half the people are wearing jeans and the other half aren’t...you differentiate in something that’s hard to see, that people won’t notice right away. And then you ask them to, within their context what might be an issue that comes up regularly. And they give you an issue. And then you say, well, let’s hear from both sides on this issue. And so one side you systematically marginalize. You exclude them, you interrupt them, tell them they’re not being respectful of the other group. Whereas the other side, everything they say is great, they get all the perks, they get all the privileges. And, of course the group notices this is happening. But nobody ever stops it, nobody ever stands up to say anything. Sometimes the oppressed group gets rebellious. They start standing up and saying, “I don’t like the way this game’s working” or “I insist on having my whole opinion heard” or something or something like that. Uh, one time, we had someone from the uh, from the uh, oppressed group get up and sit with the privileged group. We’ve never had someone from the privileged group get up and sit with anyone from the oppressed group. And then afterwards we stop it and we say, so what was happening? And they say we were picking on this group and favoring the other group. Sometimes people get very emotional about it. But it’s short, you’re not playing it for longer than five minutes maximum. Because that’s all the frustration people can stand when it’s happening in that situation. And then you say, “well what was happening here?” and so they explain. And then we would say, “well how did you feel if you were oppressed, how did you feel if you were privileged”, you know that sort of thing, and then we’d say, “well now why didn’t anyone do anything about it?” And *that’s* where it gets really interesting. “Well we didn’t because it was a game” or “we didn’t because you’re in charge, we didn’t because we thought it was going to change eventually and we were just waiting for that to happen. Well we didn’t do anything because we didn’t want to cause a problem, you’re supposed to be the expert.” So well, like all these different things would come up. And then people

will say, well what would happen if you did do something?" Well probably...like let's say for a real situation. What would happen? You would get squished as a group and then people would be suspicious of everything that you did. So that's another reason why people don't arrive to revolt. So if revolt isn't going to work, what would work. What kind of things *could* you do to induce systemic change? Who is *responsible* for the change? Is it always the victim that has to be the one that does the change? What about the people who are not the victims? Don't they have a responsibility? What would their responsibility look like? And you keep, you open up the discussion. People are usually really amazed by this. They go "wow, this learning (Lynn).

This was an interesting exercise because it not only focused on the experience of being oppressed, but it also focused on the experience of being an oppressor and showing people how effortless it could be.

Through this exercise, which is based on the "Brown Eyes-Blue Eyes" exercise², Lynn was able to unpack many of the complex social relations that surround anti-oppression work. For instance, she used this exercise to talk about the invisibility of privilege, the onus being on marginalized groups to draw attention to their oppression, the emotionality of the process, and the challenges involved in working towards change. In other words, she was able to convey some of the "messiness" involved in the social justice process. Bishop (1994) argues that simulations such as these present possibilities for working with an unwilling crowd because the strong experience of the role reversal may compel some resistant participants to process the experience of what it is like to live with injustice. Moreover, an advantage of this activity is that it does not put the onus on more marginalized participants to convey their experiences of oppression to the group. As with any pedagogical strategy, these kinds of simulations are also problematic

² This is a simulation that was started in 1968 by Jane Elliot, a third-grade teacher in rural Iowa, following the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. In order to make real the experience of discrimination to her students (who were all White), she implemented a simulation where, for one day blue-eyed students were treated unfairly and the next day brown-eyed students received the same kind of treatment. For more details, see Byrnes and Kiger (1992).

because trying to give people who come from more privileged social locations a sense of what oppression is like may result in claims that they now know what it “feels like” to be oppressed. This is, of course, problematic because a five minute simulation still does not compare to what it is like for people who live under systemic oppression (Byrnes and Kiger, 1992). The challenge in any workshop is to try to resist this type of closure.

Some activities were geared towards getting participants to visualize oppressive relations. This could happen either through interactive activities or through more arts-based drawing activities. For instance, the queer women of colour group used the “step back, step forward” game to get participants thinking about the complexity of multiple privileges and multiple oppressions:

So, let’s say you have [a group standing in a line]. And then they step back and step forward depending on the questions that you [ask about whether or not they have a certain privilege], and like, often time people have multiple oppressions and multiple privileges in their lives. So people see that it is more complex than just being a racist or being a person of colour, or something you know, like, people can be a person of colour but then can also be from a wealthy family, but then a person could be white but also, like, gay and living with a disability, so...it’s multiple things that we experience as people (Meiling).

On the one hand, this activity is advantageous because it can work to visualize the complexity of multiple oppressions. It also has the ability to convey the systemic privilege that certain participants in the group have over others. As it is embedded in unequal power relations, there were also limitations to this activity in terms of the way that it made oppression visible. The nature of oppressions differ and therefore asking participants to make their multiple social locations identifiable by stepping forward or back could have a wide range of implications. For instance, some aspects of people’s identities, such as sexual orientation and parenting status, tend to be invisible. Even parts of identities that seem like they are generally quite visible such as race and gender can be

ambiguous. Therefore, it could be problematic to ask people to “out” themselves by stepping forward or stepping back. Here we see some of the enduring tensions of anti-oppressive practice around negotiating feelings of comfort and discomfort among participants from different social locations.

Another way that some educators worked with participants to visualize power relations was to imagine what the world would look like without oppression. For instance, Ella carried out the following activity with groups that she worked with at a large organization:

I broke participants out into small groups, gave them a big piece of chart paper, and I got them to draw their workplace. And each group had a different form of oppression, and I got them to design their workplace without ableism, a workplace without racism, a workplace without sexism or homophobia. And then after they designed these ideal workplaces without these types of oppression, we looked for connections to how oppression is linked and how these types of initiatives that they envision could work together, and how they could have an oppression-free workplace. So we kind of trouble-shooted about tasks they could do and tasks they could take on to fight oppression. And that was a good way I think to link the theory and the practical (Ella).

Shepherd (2005) argues that “the mere act of imagining alternative visions of the world” (50) can offer important possibilities for social change. By thinking about other ways of organizing social relations, conditions that were considered ““unchangeable” or “just the way things are” come to be understood as both unjust and mutable” (Shepherd, 2005: 52). Thus one of the possibilities in Ella’s work is that it presses participants to think about what the social change process would look like. However, the difficulty around an activity such as this one was how to follow through with the change. Changing large organizations can seem like a monumental task. In the following excerpt, Bishop (2005) talks about the challenges of trying to change a university:

The institution itself takes on a character. It is not a living being, but it can sometimes behave as if it is one...It can put pressure on individuals—choosing, forming, punishing and rewarding them, shaping their attitudes and framework of understanding. As a result, certain patterns tend strongly to hold true, even when many individuals within the institution want them to change (4).

Given the strength of such an institution, what are the possibilities for changing this?

More relevant, what can facilitators do to work towards changing it, given the conditions under which they work? Several authors have written on working with groups to bring about organizational and institutional change (Ellsworth, 1989; Butterwick and Selman, 2002; Klaw *et al.*, 2005), but often these changes take place over time. For instance, Klaw *et al.* (2005) write about working with college students to dismantle a rape supportive culture at a university. The authors argue that the program was successful in terms of developing a 'rape consciousness' among students, and developing their confidence and desire to work towards changing the rape culture at the university. At the same time, they emphasize that these kinds of understandings with students would not have been possible if facilitators had not had four months to work with participants. When most facilitators are only getting to work with groups for one or two half days, what are the possibilities for working with participants towards institutional change? This suggests that time is a major limit on the possible pedagogical strategies that educators are able to develop.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I sought to draw connections between the complex social relations that I had discussed in previous chapters and how educators were able to challenge relations of power through their pedagogical strategies. Through a post-structural analysis, I reflected on the possibilities and challenges of the different pedagogical

strategies that they used. I found that their methods were fraught with tensions and never free from the oppressive relations that they sought to challenge. Making these tensions more visible could perhaps help educators to strengthen the areas where they are able to disrupt oppression and challenge the conditions that may lead their methods to reify power relations. This being said, the limitations of such an approach is that it requires time that is rarely available to underpaid and devalued community educators. In the following chapter I explore some of the self-reflection processes of the educator which is where, I argue, educators may be able to enrich their practice.

CHAPTER 6: POSITIONING AND SELF-REFLECTION

In this thesis, I have analyzed the tensions, possibilities, and challenges of how community educators, who are working to challenge inequality, speak about the process of working for social change. In this final chapter, I explore how they position themselves in relation to their work. I argue that, for the most part, educators had a positive image of their role and their efforts. Having a positive perspective is particularly important because it provides sustenance and counters the devaluation of anti-oppressive community education. At the same time, there are moments when it also masks the tensions that are endemic in this work. In this chapter, I remain mindful of the importance of a positive perspective, while also exploring some of the limits that a positive construction of anti-oppressive education can present. I hope that such a critical reflection may cause us to pause, and allow for the emergence of new, more subtle possibilities for enriching the valuable contributions these educators make to consciousness-raising. In particular, I posit that this critically reflective stance, encouraged through post-structuralism, may present opportunities to resist some of the oppressive conditions that can affect how community educators do their work.

I begin with an examination of how educators connected their personal background to the importance of their work, then explore how they viewed their roles, and finally unpack the way that educators constructed their knowledge. In this last section, I offer some possibilities that could perhaps emerge through challenging these constructions, but also identify some of the tensions that could complicate such a shift in practice.

Connections to Background

For many educators, their narratives of endeavoring for social change incorporated parts of their background, particularly past struggles that led them to do this work. Davies and Harre's (1990) argument that people position themselves in relation to certain story lines is particularly relevant here. Examining the way that educators positioned areas of their past in relation to their current work is useful because it offers insight into the narratives they used to understand their work. Although there were many different reasons why educators chose to enter the field, most of the story lines incorporated wanting to address some sort of injustice. For some, their desire to do community education stemmed from a sense of personal injustice that they had felt in their lives. For instance, Chris talked about being excluded and bullied as a child and stigmatized for being an openly gay adult:

Growing up I was bullied and teased and made fun of a lot at a young age, even before I knew I was gay [in the sense that gay means having sexual attraction to other people who are of the same gender]. I was told that I wasn't a boy, that I was a girl and a sissy. And in grade school sometimes I was being beaten up and teased and like spitballs in class....and then at work...I experienced homophobia and they threatened to fire me...[They made] jokes around AIDS and things like that because I was an openly gay man (Chris).

He went on to talk about how these painful experiences motivated him to address these injustices through his job:

My own experience around victimization around things like homophobia led me to say, "well, I kinda want to try to make a difference" (Chris).

Here we see that Chris perceived himself as having a direct stake in his narrative for social change. When educators draw on their own experiences of oppression to do this line of work, how does that shape the way they imagine the process of transformation? In this case, the oppressive relations that were experienced by Chris were personalized.

When he talked about wanting to make change in his interview, he often talked about wanting to make conditions better for queer and questioning youth in schools. For instance, in the following quote, he expressed concern over the risk factors for GLBTQ youth:

Suicide, depression, and substance abuse have been researched and it seems that people, especially in the larger group of 25 and under have been seen as three times higher risk than their peers of being susceptible to depression, substance abuse, and suicide because of homophobia. Not because they're gay, but because of living in a broader context of society that is not open to people having same sex experiences, let alone to use labels like gay, lesbian, and bisexual, which are labels that affirm same sex behaviour. So that, you know, we need to teach people the impact, the personal impact, teach people the cognitive stuff (Chris).

In this case, we can see that aspects of Chris' narrative of his child and young adulthood were intertwined with his narrative of the kind of change that he would like to see. It provided helpful tools to focus and sustain his work.

Different personal encounters with oppressive relations may lead educators to have divergent ideas of what they think the change process should look like. For instance, Kumashiro (2002) describes the experience of growing up as an Asian American who would later identify as bisexual. For him, he found Asian American communities to be more heterosexist and homophobic than mainstream American communities. Furthermore, he argues that the "typical" Asian American boy "might be seen as queer or effeminate by U.S. standards since he lacks the dominant or hegemonic form of masculinity, but that is because he exhibits a different form of masculinity, one that is valued in his own culture" (Kumashiro, 2002: 79). Thus queer Asian American boys may not be ostracized in the same way as queer White boys for deviating from dominant discourses of masculinity. So we see here that although both Chris and Kumishiro might have been seen as more effeminate in comparison to the prevailing norms in North

American society, the nature of these exclusive practices vary. Thus the narrative Chris draws on relies on an experience of whiteness and queerness and the position from which he approaches his work is one that draws upon his experiences of privilege and oppression.

Similar to Chris, other educators were also motivated to do anti-oppressive education because of what they saw as the invisibility of people like themselves. For instance, Meiling and Aisha started their queer women of colour group because they felt that they did not have a presence in their city:

We started our group because we were frustrated with the lack of visibility for queer women of colour (Meiling).

These women felt that narratives around being a queer woman of colour were mostly absent from dominant identity constructions. From their perspective, their identity as queer women of colour did not fit in with the queer community, which was made up of people who were predominantly white, nor did they feel that they fit in with their ethno-cultural communities because of the largely heterosexual environments. For these women, part of the change process included having their identities incorporated into the mainstream (Kumashiro, 2002). An implication of narrating the change process in this way is that it compelled these women to incorporate their own identity into their work. Again, such practices highlight how anti-oppressive community education is highly personal for many of the educators.

Others began their work more reluctantly, but at the same time felt that there was a strong need for anti-oppressive practice. For instance, Ella, saw the importance of initiating anti-oppressive education in her organization because she felt that it had not been taking place:

Like I'm committed to the work, but I also started it because nobody else was doing it, and it needed to be done (Ella).

In this discourse of reluctance, one can also locate a narrative of heroism. Ella's work could be considered quite radical because it sought to make oppressive relations visible in an organization that she felt had previously left them unaddressed. In the above excerpt, she suggested the work is a social necessity and, I would argue, this helps sustain her efforts. It helps to reconcile some of the frustrations of the impossibility of creating change under the conditions in which she works. Todd (2005) argues that when community organizers invoke a narrative of radicalism to make sense of their work, there can also be a narrative of courageousness which is "linked to the necessity of a moral citizenry" (146). Justifying the need to do this work could help an educator stay in a field that has as many frustrations as anti-oppressive education.

While Ella used her position in her workplace to initiate anti-oppression education, others carried out this work because it was part of their paid job:

Well, I volunteered at a sexual assault centre for the past few years while I was in school, and I was involved in their public education program. And um, I was just really excited [when a paid position as public educator came up at another sexual assault centre] for the opportunity to continue educating people about sexual assault when I graduated (Kelly).

Here we see that Kelly was enthusiastic about her role as a sexual assault educator and perceived herself and her employer as having the same interests. At the same time, this is a role that she may not have continued had she not gotten the job after she finished school. In this case, her interest in carrying out public education on sexual assault awareness was constituted as a practice of work, which, while not directly linked to her personal experiences, was a personal interest and was something about which she could get excited.

At the same time, there were tensions involved in seeking out this role as a career. All of the educators in this study who carried out their education work through their job were employed by non-profit organizations. One of the challenges of doing anti-oppression work with a non-profit is that the possibilities for social transformation are often constrained by organizational imperatives and funding requirements. The organizational discourse and practices are often oriented to organizational survival which relies upon maintaining the status quo (Kivel, 2007). The non-profit sector, as opposed to social movements, depends on the current economic and government structures to survive, and thus the calls for change tend to focus on messages that are the least disruptive and/or individualized (Kivel, 2007). Thus, within this discursive context, the possibility for workers to think critically and transformatively can be limited. To have a career in social justice is to have an employer who will pay you and thus your message has to fit, at least somewhat, with the organization's goals.

For many educators, however, the non-profit sector was the main route they could see for the possibility of pursuing a social justice career. For instance, Lynn had set parameters around what kind of job she wanted:

After doing my Masters degree I really wanted to move into the NGO field. Cuz I like the "NGO in the middle" kind of capacity where you can use academic understandings and still be connected to community issues and real people and be working for change in a tangible way. So I thought, well I can use my education degree and experience in another capacity...so I looked for work in an NGO...I probably would have considered working with any organization that was going to be working on an issue in a tangible way (Lynn).

Despite all of the limitations around working in a non-profit organization, this sector still seemed to Lynn like the area that had the most promise for being able to challenge oppressive relations through a paid position. As discussed in Chapter 2, educators who

did not do this work as part of their main, paid job felt more burnout and a lack of resources in terms of time and money to do their work. Thus, we run into another impossible tension of anti-oppressive work. In order to survive economically, educators have to accept less radical positions where one can access resources. Alternately, more radical work is often marginalized and severely under-resourced. There are no innocent choices—instead, it is how people negotiate these struggles that becomes important. By this I mean that the focus of the analysis remains on the tensions that are inherent in all the approaches to addressing inequalities.

Lynn's excerpt also reveals that within her paid position, she saw a number of possibilities around using her academic education to work for social change in the community. The literature on community service learning highlights the opportunities for enriched practice that can emerge when academia and work in local organizations are partnered (Chesler *et al.*, 2006; Rosner-Salazar, 2003; Lounsbury & Pollack, 2001; Hondagneu-Sotelo & Raskoff, 1994). This kind of learning has often been seen as a site of possibilities for college and university students to generate new understandings through crossing “pedagogical and epistemological borders between campus and community, between academic text and community experience, as sites and ways of learning” (Chesler *et al.*, 2006:343). In a similar vein, Lynn's narrative of why a job in a community organization was so appealing also highlighted some of these possibilities. She reworked her job as a space of applied critical analysis where she could come to new understandings that were informed both by her academic background and her experiences in the community.

At the same time, the literature on community service learning also points to some of the tensions with pairing the academe with the community. When service learning began in the 1960s in the U.S., it was conceived as an initiative that sought to promote non-traditional learning outcomes. However, in order for service learning to gain more 'legitimacy' and to become more widespread in North American universities, it had to be repackaged as a 'pedagogical tool', as a useful way for students to learn and advance their knowledge for their degree requirements (Lounsbury & Pollack, 2001). Some of these same tensions around constructing the work in a "legitimate way" could be seen in Lynn's narration of her job. In the above excerpt, she located work in the non-profit field as an ideal space to apply her two university degrees. Such an integration is the ideal of most anti-oppressive practice. At the same time this kind of professional narrative can work to reify relations of dominance (Todd, 2005) because there is the danger that Lynn's knowledge is positioned as "more legitimate" than the knowledge of others (without professional credentials) with whom she works in her organization and in the community. Such assertions of privilege can, Kivel (2007) argues, result in anti-oppressive workers in the non-profit sector becoming less critical about the tensions in their practice. He points specifically to the job of race relations trainer being a watered down part of anti-racism work (Kivel, 2007). Thus a tension emerges for educators such as Lynn around maintaining a positive view of their role in order to continue carrying out valuable work to address systemic oppression and also recognizing the way it is inevitably caught within these same social relations. In the following section I unpack some of these tensions as I explore how educators imagined their role within their workshops.

Perception of the Community Educator's Role

The educators in this study viewed their roles in a variety of ways. However, the vast majority saw themselves as facilitators, not leaders:

I have to be a bridge for people. I have to be as much as possible a bridge so people can connect (Lynn).

I'm there to facilitate discussion, to challenge people, to bring up ideas, um, to educate, yes, but I'm also there to learn from them. I learn as much from them as they do from me right? I'm—they're not going to learn as much from me if I'm standing up there and just blah blah blah, like just talking about whatever it is I want to talk about right (Liz)?

So we try to decenter ourselves, like we try to make it very conversation oriented and decenter ourselves as facilitators so that we're not put in an expert position (Ella).

I guess my role is just to facilitate the dialogue (Meiling).

Only one educator clearly named her role as being that of teacher:

Fauza: How do you see yourself in relation to the groups that you're presenting to?

Eleanor: Well, I suppose as a teacher.

The language that is invoked by most of the educators in these excerpts suggests that they saw themselves as key social actors in the process, but at the same time, viewed the workshops as being participant-directed. Much of this language is consistent with the popular education literature (Freire, 2003; Butterwick and Selman, 2003). Such a narrative, like all perspectives, makes some elements of the work visible, while obscuring others. What was often obscured was the authority of the educator. For workers who feel as though they have a lack of power, it can often be difficult to attend to our agency and responsibility. Educators who are brought in to address oppressive relations, whether they agree with this role or not, are often brought in as an "expert". In his article on diversity training, Washburn (2003) argues that diversity trainers have a certain degree of privilege

because they have the ability to examine and intervene at multiple levels in an organization. As a result, high expectations can be placed on educators to “fix” all the oppressive tendencies of a group. Srivastava (2005) points to how anti-oppression educators can sometimes be elevated to “divine status”, setting up unrealistic expectations for the amount of work that they can accomplish in a short amount of time. In the following excerpt, she describes how an anti-racist consultant was viewed by a feminist organization that was struggling with racism:

Both god and godsend, the anti-racist consultant appears to inspire the emotional and religious reverence of a spiritual leader, of a great civil rights leader. Without a clear moral guide to anti-racist behaviour, people look for guidance, even a saviour (Srivastava, 2005:55).

This is hardly the decentered, almost invisible role that the educators imagined themselves as holding. Some possible reasons that educators may have found it difficult to name the authority they hold could be that many of them had long histories of feeling oppressed, had relatively little power when negotiating their work and often found social change impossible to achieve. This difficulty in asserting their agency also resulted in some educators finding it difficult to make visible what they contribute to workshops.

When asked about how their interests shaped the education process, most educators answered quite tentatively:

I definitely bring – I don’t know, I don’t like the word agenda, because it’s so...strong, but, I think that I do have an agenda. And the agenda is to, umm, to...enlighten [people about sexual assault] – I just, I want people to understand, basically what the issue is, understand why it’s important (Kelly).

Other educators were reluctant to describe any interests:

As far as I can tell, I’m pretty neutral, not biased – and certainly that’s my aim, to not be biased (Eleanor).

Kelly's dislike of the term "agenda" and Eleanor's assumption of neutrality signal that perhaps they had some discomfort with articulating that they wanted workshop participants to conform to a certain way of thinking about the issue. This may have been reluctance on their part to want to address the idea that even progressive education is a practice of socialization. However, Ellsworth (1989) argues for the importance of exploring the interests that those in the 'teacher' position bring to their work. Drawing on her own experience as a professor for a university course on anti-racism, she points to how her own multiple subject positions and privileges always played a role in the work that she did in that class, sometimes working against her progressive intentions. In the following excerpt, she troubles the notion that she could ever be 'neutral' as an educator:

I could not authentically "help" a student of colour find her/his authentic voice as a student of colour. I could not unproblematically "affiliate" with the social groups my students represent and interpret their experiences to them...I brought a social subjectivity that has been constructed in such a way that I have not and can never participate unproblematically in the collective process of... naming oppression (Ellsworth, 1989:309-310).

In this excerpt, we see how Ellsworth (1989) interrogated the limitations that her subjectivity brought to her intentions. This process can become particularly important when, as outlined earlier, many community educators are often cast in an "expert role" and face pressures to bring about unrealistic change. As Davies and Harre (1990) argue, positioning may not always be a conscious decision, but examining it can provide important insight into the ways we may shape our interactions. This suggests that identifying and questioning 'taken for granted' beliefs about one's work could be a useful tool for exploring the limits and possibilities of being an anti-oppressive community educator. In the following section, I explore some of the limits and possibilities of how educators constructed their knowledges.

Construction of the Knowledgeable Self

In previous sections, I have argued that many of the educators who I interviewed were challenging dominant ways of knowing. Foucault uses the term “regimes of truth” to refer to the way that knowledge is “produced and transmitted under the control of a few dominant political and economic apparatuses” (Ali, 2002:235). Thus the goal of many of the educators was to challenge these regimes of truth by making subjugated knowledge more visible. But how did the educators speak to their own ways of knowing and what are the implications of this? In this section I explore the way they constructed their own knowledge in relation to their work, drawing attention to how their ways of knowing could both resist and reify power relations.

All of the educators in this study saw themselves as knowledgeable in their area of community education. There were, however, different ways that they spoke of attaining the status of ‘knowledgeable’. Some educators talked about developing knowledge from certain life experiences. For instance, Eleanor always grounded her work in her personal story of ritual abuse, which then provided the basis for further discussions in her workshops. This could be a powerful way of conveying subjugated knowledge because her first-hand account as a survivor of ritual abuse made it difficult for people to deny its occurrence. However, Razack (1993) argues that it can also be dangerous when suppressed ways of knowing are not viewed as a subjective account. Scott (1992) offers the following explanation for why the perspective of seeing knowledge as truthful could be problematic:

When experience is taken as the origin of knowledge, the vision of the individual subject (the person who had the experience or the historian who recounts it) becomes the bedrock of evidence upon which explanation is built. Questions about the constructed nature of experience, about how subjects are constituted as

different in the first place, about how one's vision is structured...are left aside (25).

Thus, the way experiences are shaped by relations of power becomes minimized. In Eleanor's case, presenting her story as a subjective experience could possibly open up further opportunities for creating understanding for why ritual abuse is minimized and denied so much in the dominant discourses of society. However, it is also important to recognize that framing personal stories as a subjective experiences could also be painful for the storyteller and could work against social transformation because it is being told in a society where objectivity is highly valued, and where such subjugated knowledge is always contested. The risk, of presenting stories of oppression as constructed, is that dominant knowledge will remain certain and these marginal stories will be disregarded.

Other educators grounded their knowledge in their marginal social locations. In some cases, the experiences that they shared were specifically connected to the oppressive relation that they were challenging. Chris, as discussed in the previous section, saw his personal experiences as a driving force in his GLBTQ training and often drew on them during his workshops. In other cases, educators saw their experiences as allowing them to understand feelings that a marginalized group may have. For instance, Lynn saw part of her knowledge on racism as being shaped by her experiences as an outsider when she was growing up:

I was in 10 different schools between kindergarten and grade 12. And so I was always the newcomer, always dressed the wrong way, bringing the wrong food for lunch, saying the wrong things, and always bullied the whole time...so for me, this experience as a newcomer, and always on the outside, was very much a part of me growing up (Lynn).

In this quote, it seems like Lynn was suggesting that she had a degree of "emotional knowledge" that enhanced her ability for doing this kind of work. She seemed to value

empathy as an important skill/knowledge to have. While it is clear empathy is invaluable to anti-oppressive educators, Boler (1999) cautions against what she terms 'passive empathy', which she defines as 'uninterrogated identification' with the oppressed group that removes responsibility for the person who is empathizing/judging. Lynn talked about working towards countering that dynamic in her workplace by having staff members question each other and speak openly about how they may see racism operating in their organization:

In the development staff meetings, we really wrestle with issues on our own level. What we've learned from our own programs and working with them, and also to overcome racism ourselves because it is not just like you decide to work in anti-racism and everything's fine. And it's difficult and it's painful...and because we're trying to make ourselves open to something. If somebody here that we work with and respects says to us, "well you know, this was a problem for me", we really work at saying, "ok, tell me what I need to do to change my behaviour" (Lynn).

Here Lynn spoke to how she and her colleagues valued challenging each other as a way for opening new possibilities for thinking about racism. Engaging in this kind of challenging and questioning can be helpful for educators to rethink their assumptions and look at what knowledge they may take for granted. It is important to note, however, that this is a practice that Lynn described as happening only among fellow staff members and not in the workshops with participants. It is likely that there was little time for such reflection in workshops, but without it, there is a danger that anti-oppressive education can result in participants developing a passive empathy and failing to fully interrogate their complicity in oppression.

Other educators spoke about developing their knowledge about oppressive relations through observation and education. For instance, Kelly talked about how she

used to have some of the same oppressive views about sexual assault that she now challenges through her work:

I can remember the time when I was absolutely shocked to learn about the myths surrounding sexual assault because I adhered to a lot of them...you know, I went to high school too and I, along with everyone else, thought that a person could 'bring it on,' or a person could 'ask for it'...I was adhering to those myths too, so I try to remember that when I talk about these issues because everyone's kind of coming from a different place (Kelly).

This kind of understanding can be helpful for educators who want participants to abandon their internalization of dominant, oppressive discourses. A challenge for educators then became how to make sense of and work with different, more subjugated ways of knowing in their workshops. In the following excerpt, Ella talks about she tries to engage with the different discourse that people bring to her workshop:

So we do a go-around, take the temperature of people in the room. We also use that to kind of get a sense of where everybody's coming from like in terms of knowledge. And that's where we make a decision about how to proceed and what kinds of language we're going to use and what sorts of assumptions we're going to make (Ella).

Ella's excerpt reveals some of the constant adjustments that educators have to make when negotiating workshop participants' knowledge, suggesting that this is an important skill for educators to have. A necessary tension that haunts this skill is that it can become a practice of "assessing" knowledge, which then starts to place the knowledge of the educator "above" those of the participants (Curry-Stevens, 2007). Thus as educators undertake the challenging task of negotiating participants' knowledge, they run the risk of reifying the expert role that is often assigned to them by others. This kind of impossible knot seemed to be part of participants' discomfort with the role of expert. Chris described his knowledge base in the following way:

And I think that piece about I'm not the expert, I don't know everything from my experience. I know the experience of my life, I know the experience of the clients that I've worked with. I know the experiences of what I've learned and read about, but I don't know everything, you know? And sometimes people, around GLBT stuff, they think you're going to know everything (Chris).

This excerpt draws attention to a conflict between educators not wanting to see themselves as an expert while at the same time having to justify their 'knowledge base' for the job. Recognizing how one may consciously or unconsciously see the community educator role as an expert is important. From a post-structuralist perspective, any person's politicized voice will be multiple, partial, and contradictory (Ellsworth, 1989). Therefore, positioning the educator as having the most 'expert knowledge' on the topic of anti-oppression fails to see their knowledge as partial. Here the tangles of anti-oppressive practice are again highlighted. From earlier chapters it is clear that the skills and experience that educators bring to their work are often devalued, requiring that they assert a degree of expertise, yet doing so also problematically reproduces the very relations they seek to challenge. There is no easy escape, instead most participants seemed to move back and forth, attempting to assert expertise when necessary and avoiding it when it impeded the social change process.

The 'expert role' also meant that educators had to challenge oppressive relations in a way that was 'professional' and 'controlled'. Educators often found this difficult when participants articulated oppressive, and sometimes personally painful, beliefs. For instance, Meiling talked about her anger around having to simplify the oppressive relations that she had felt personally in her life:

For me as a facilitator, umm, the kind of thing that I've gotten a lot of praise for is my methods, although it makes me really uneasy about why that is. And, I'll explain this too. Why people find my work to be easy to understand, and why people really favour my facilitation skill, is because I'm patient, and also I make it

really easy to digest...Like we explain definitions of what racism means, what immigrant women means, what ...women means. But you also have to keep in mind that anti-oppression work is often done by people that have experienced oppression personally, so it is personal stories and things that are very sensitive. A lot of other anti-oppression facilitators in this community, like, in this city and community, that are known and respected for their work, some of those people don't really like their work. And that's because they've experienced a lot of the things that we talk about personally, and they've experienced racism even from people who have asked them for their work, and they've been angry over it, so that's, oftentimes, what people can't really swallow is the anger and the frustration that we feel when we do this kind of work. So, while sometimes people find my facilitation message to be easy to swallow, that doesn't make me feel any better about that (Meiling).

Here we see that Meiling felt a lot of frustration around having to “soften” the material she was presenting to make it more “polite” for her participants. In other cases, educators felt angry because of having to be polite to participants who they felt were not open to examining how they may perpetuate oppressive relations:

I think it's tiring to hear the same old stereotypes and the same old hatred and hear the same old tiring oppressions—to get the same resistance all the time over and over and over again. And I don't care what anybody says, that is hard to hear, and that is hard to deal with. And so, part of it too is not only not seeing advancement in the group, but having to confront that all the time and be like no, that is not the case, but at the same time having to do it in a dialogue format right? When all you really want to do is say, you're a fucking racist, shut-up. Or homophobe, or whatever, right (Ella)?

Here Ella highlights how she felt constrained by the model she was using. Taken together, these two quotes shows how the educators are not “emotionally passive” in the process of working for change. Many of the issues that come up in workshops can be painful for them. As seen with Meiling, the educator is part of the social relations that they are working to challenge. Her example also illustrates how the role of ‘expert educator’ can sometimes work to marginalize/silence educators’ local experiences. Therefore, how anti-oppressive education is hurtful to the people who practice it and how the expert role can exacerbate these feelings of hurt becomes important to consider.

Given all of these tensions around knowledge construction and the ways that community educators are often placed in expert roles, how can/do they work to resist these structures?

While knowledge construction can sometimes be a site for reifying oppressive relations, it can also be a point for resisting. In his work on power/knowledge, Foucault argued that the mind of the individual becomes an important site of resistance to oppressive environments (Ali, 2002). As I argued throughout this thesis, community educators must negotiate many challenging and complex conditions in order to carry out their work, which sets up largely impossible goals for challenging oppressive relations. Therefore, perhaps more possibilities could be accessed through also focusing on the oppressive factors that place limitations on their work. For Foucault, power manifests itself at all levels and localized forms of resistance through knowledge-building are pivotal to challenging dominant discourses (Ali, 2002). Taking up this idea of localized resistance, I argue that one possibility for knowledge-building may lie in critical self-reflection, which is a practice that is central to post-structural practice. Fook (2002) argues:

From a critical and postmodern perspective, the reflective practitioner engages with knowledge that is obtained empirically and through reflection in a way that recognizes the processes by which this knowledge (and thus power structures and relations) are maintained. Through deconstructing this knowledge, and unearthing multiple constructions, they are able further to develop their own practice in inclusive, artistic, and intuitive ways which are responsive to the changing (uncertain, unpredictable, and fragmented) contexts in which they work; and in ways which can challenge existing power relations and structures (41).

Taking Fook's quote into consideration, I suggest that critical reflection can be useful for unsettling how we think about and mobilize power. As I have argued in this thesis, workers often spoke about themselves as holding relatively little power as community educators. For instance, they talked about how their work was devalued when setting up their workshops and how they often saw themselves in role of decentered facilitator

rather than as an expert. At the same time, I sought to show how educators are not powerless and that it is important for them to recognize the power that they do hold so that they could use it in more reflective and strategic ways. I also argued that not owning ones power is dangerous, often leading to the unconscious replication of oppressive relations. The central argument of this thesis is that engagement with the process that Fook outlines above, could help educators become more aware of how they are situated in power relations and, in turn, offer an opportunity for them to rework power relations in a manner that more effectively helps to secure social justice. This reworking of power could involve a number of aspects; including a more self-conscious approach to the knowledge that educators bring to groups, and a more ethical awareness of the ways they draw on power to effect the change they want to see. Thus, the aim of this work is not to argue that educators forgo power, but rather they reconstruct their practice in order to use their power for achieving social justice goals.

For some educators, perhaps the idea of thinking about their devalued line of work as a “powerful” position could be challenging. Fook (2002) also offers insight on how to negotiate this critical reflection process in the face of having little power in the overall structure of society, a position that is often where community educators find themselves:

One of the ongoing questions for me, raised by my practice and thinking on post-modern and critical social work, is the issue of just how much critical analyses...can really substitute for what I feel is my relative lack of structural power...Yet I also reflect that if I was someone different, working from a different social position, I would have different challenges and opportunities open to me...Perhaps, I reflect, it is my relative social position, my identity and place as a marginal person, a woman of Chinese descent working in a predominantly white male culture, that has forced me to find other ways in which to be influential or to change structures. The point I am making from my experience is that it is not what type of power (structural or personal) I have at my disposal which is important, but how I use, engage with, and create opportunities available to me (Fook, 2002:167-168).

Therefore, a central issue for community educators may not only be how they can work to combat certain structural forces, but also how they can challenge their own work to create the most opportunities for questioning oppressive relations within the current context. However, although critical self-reflection presents some small possibilities for localized resistance, there are still limits with this approach. For instance, what are the implications of interrogating a line of work that is already so devalued in society? Of the participants in this study, the one who appeared to be the most critically reflective in the interview was also the participant who expressed a high desire to leave this line of work:

Yeah it's important [work]...it's both frustrating and liberating...so yeah, it's important...it is important that somebody do it...just not me, because I'm tired (Ella).

Ella's quote underscores some of the fundamental tensions in community education. It's a line of work that can appear to have great possibilities for challenging power relations but at the same time, is also fraught with impossibility. Therefore, critical self-reflection could be a possible tool for rethinking practices in community education, but how much of this is possible when there are already so many frustrations and challenges with doing this work?

Although this is a tension that can never fully be resolved, one way to negotiate it is to perhaps broaden the way we think about critical self-reflection. This thesis has been largely a project of critical reflection on the work of community educators who seek to challenge oppressive relations. Through this reflection, I sought to show how structural relations were manifested in the local practices of this work and how that informed the possibilities and limitations of striving towards social change. Therefore, although there are some fundamental tensions around engaging in critical self-reflection as a community educator, I argue that if this practice incorporates a reflection of how structural relations are implicated in the (im)possibilities of anti-oppressive activities, it is a practice that could perhaps offer some degree of hope to people who engage in this work.

Conclusion

In this chapter I explored how educators positioned themselves in relation to their work and the implications of this positioning on working for social change. I argued that they generally had a positive view of their work, which was necessary for reconciling the many impossibilities of community education. This could be seen by the way that they

incorporated their work into a narrative with their personal background and through the way that they constructed their role as an educator. In the final section of this chapter, by analyzing the way knowledge was constructed, I sought to question some of these narratives and also suggest possibilities for using self-reflection to reconstruct knowledge in a way that further challenges oppressive relations and to reconstitute how power is used. I argued that critical self-reflection, although fraught with tensions, could offer some possibilities not only for reconstructing localized practices, but also for reinforcing the idea that until the broader social structures change, the difficult conditions of this work will continue.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

In this thesis I explored how a small group of community educators who sought to challenge oppressive relations accessed a series of discourses to make sense of their work. Education has often been seen in the social justice field as a tool that holds possibilities for achieving social change. As bell hooks (2003) states “educating is always a vocation rooted in hopefulness” (xiv). I discussed in my introduction how as a Muslim woman of colour, part of the reason I initiated this study was because I often hoped that the dominant discourses of Muslims could be transformed through anti-oppressive community education. However, as I will discuss later in this chapter, now that I have completed this research project, while I do believe that this kind of education still has several possibilities for challenging oppressive relations, I now see these possibilities as being more subtle and fraught than I had previously envisioned them.

I used semi-structured interviews to explore my central research question which was: how did a small group of community educators speak about the social change process in their work? For this study, I sought educators who mostly worked with adults and who were not employed by the formal education system. In total, I interviewed nine community educators who challenged a variety of oppressive relations through their work. Some of the issues that educators addressed were anti-racism, sexual assault awareness, as well as general anti-oppression education. Participants were asked questions about their pedagogical strategies, how they negotiated working with diverse groups, questions around the settings of their work, and self-reflection questions about their practice. From this data, I coded the themes that I saw emerging which then provided the basis of my analysis.

When I began this research project, I had originally thought that I would be focusing more on the pedagogical strategies of the educators and analyzing the tensions, challenges, and possibilities of these tools. However, as I started to interview community educators, they spent just as much time talking about the challenging conditions of carrying out their work. Therefore, the conditions, rather than the pedagogical strategies, became a central theme that organized this thesis.

Using a critical post-structural analysis, I examined the tensions that emerged around the way that community educators spoke about their work. From this analysis, it was possible to draw a number of conceptual conclusions from the data. I argued that this work was much more fraught than often suggested by a superficial reading of the interview transcripts. As the educators outlined themselves, there were many difficult dynamics within their work that they had to negotiate. An implication of this, I argued, is that while it is often individually and even politically important to view anti-oppressive practice as a socially just intervention, attention to the context surrounding it often exposes a far more complex interplay of power and privilege. Such an approach attended to the power relations that are manifest in daily human practices (Ali, 2002; Scheurich, 1994) and suggested that wholly optimistic and hopeful portrayals of anti-oppressive education can, in itself, be problematic.

The intention of this critique was not to claim that the work of community educators is 'bad'. In fact, I sought to argue quite the contrary. Rather, through troubling the positive images that many educators used to portray their work, I considered the post-structural idea that danger is inherent in all social relations. As Foucault asserted, "My point is not that everything is bad, but that everything is dangerous, which is not exactly

the same as bad” (St. Pierre, 2000:484). Thus by suggesting that the possibilities of their work could co-exist with dangers, I sought to draw attention to the dialectic between potential and risk that is endemic in this work.

I argued that there may be some possibilities for resisting dangers through critical self-reflection as advocated by Fook (2002), however, it must be stressed that it is not in itself a solution to these tensions. Moreover, this suggestion was complicated by the fact that community educators often hold very little power and work in difficult conditions that can make their social justice goals impossible. I tried to reconcile some of these tensions by advocating that critical self-reflection include a consideration of how structural relations are reconstituted at the local level. As I outlined in Chapter 3, educators are often in the position where they lack resources and must compromise on the ideal kind of work that they would like to be able to do. Thus, could the positive images that several community educators use to portray their work also be a survival tactic for undertaking a project that is often devalued and assigned expectations that are too high? While this is not a question I asked directly in my thesis, it is an area that merits further research given the findings of this project. Moreover, while I offer critical self-reflection as a possibility, further research needs to be carried out to determine its usefulness for community educators.

The specific findings of this study offered a number of insights into the difficult conditions and social relations that community educators had to negotiate. In Chapter 2, I explored how educators defined the problems that they were addressing and how they located their work in relation to them. Many defined these problems structurally and focused on what they saw as gaps in the dominant discourses as well as the

intersectionality of oppressive relations. A few educators, when defining the problems they were addressing, also spoke about the interconnectedness of local and structural social relations. However, what was often overlooked was how these complex relations shaped their own work. I found that educators often located their practice in opposition to the relations that they were challenging and would define it as imperative for addressing these inequalities. This positive view was useful for opposing dominant discourses in society, however, this positioning also tended to obscure how community education could be implicated in the same social relations that they were challenging. This risked setting up a dichotomy between good and bad. However, as I found in the next chapters, workers highlighted more of the complexities and complications of community education when talking about the realities of doing their work.

In Chapter 3, I explored the way that educators spoke about the contexts of planning and organizing their practice. The participants in this study carried out their workshops for a wide range of groups such as for community groups, non-profit organizations, students and teachers in schools, and business workplaces. Some educators actively pursued certain locations, particularly the formal school system. This suggests that schools and school boards were seen as an institution where many possibilities for bringing about change were located.

Although there was a range in the amount of resources educators received to do their work, none of them felt that what they had was fully adequate. In some cases, particularly among educators who were not formally employed by a non-profit organization, there was much frustration around having to justify their importance. This suggested that in the capitalist economic context there was the increased need to “sell”

the commodity of their education. When negotiating and planning their workshops, many educators felt that they were not given enough time which in turn, affected the content of their workshops. Some educators also felt that they had to reduce how much they challenged oppressive relations in order to attend to the discomfort felt by people in dominant social locations. While some educators sought to tease these constraints, a language of compromise was evident when educators spoke about negotiating their practice. Although there seemed to be a demand for their work, this constant compromising was an indication of how little power these educators had in defining what their practice should look like. As I outlined in later chapters, these conditions affected how educators were able to carry out their workshops.

Chapter 4 examined diversity and privilege from a post-structural perspective in order to show the complex dynamics that educators had to negotiate in their workshops. A major challenge for them was how to navigate the comfort and discomfort experienced by different participants because often those feelings were connected to power relations. Many educators sought to minimize discomfort felt by those who came from more marginal social locations; however there was no easy way to address the issue. With regards to participants from more privileged social locations, discomfort could arise when educators tried to engage with them in consciousness-raising. More specifically, there were dilemmas around how much discomfort educators wanted to/felt they could invoke in these participants in order to draw attention to their privileges. Many educators raised the concern of wanting all participants to feel “safe” in the workshops, but I also questioned whether this was something that could ever be fully defined or assessed. I ended this chapter by offering an analysis of how integrating a focus on the way emotions

are tied to feelings of (dis)comfort could be helpful for negotiating some of these tensions around such difficult knowledges.

In Chapter 5, I explored some of the main pedagogical strategies that were discussed by educators in the interviews. The four categories of strategies were: using the facilitator as a pedagogical tool, delivering information, promoting dialogue, and carrying out activities. Within each of these categories there were some key tensions. My purpose for reflecting on these complexities was to highlight the possibilities, limitations, and challenges of each approach and how these were often informed structural factors of their work. The first strategy that I explored was the way that facilitators used themselves as a pedagogical tool. Most of the educators did not view their identity as neutral and actively used some of their social locations strategically. More specifically, when unpacking some of the tensions around this use, I drew on Razack and Fellows' (1998) idea of the 'race to innocence' in order to explore how educators often made use of their marginal identities as a pedagogical tool for social justice work more than they made use of their privileged social locations. An implication of this was that the focus of this pedagogical method was more on the marginal experiences of educator rather than on the way that privilege was functioning. In the second section of this chapter, I looked at how educators used the delivery of information as a pedagogical practice. For many educators, they viewed the dissemination of subjugated information as an important way to counter dominant ways of knowing as well as a way to negotiate time constraints of the workshop. At the same time, there were tensions around to what extent educators viewed this subjugated knowledge as an alternative discourse and to what extent it was framed as an 'objective'

fact. Portraying subjugated knowledge in an objective way could run the risk of reproducing some of the processes that they were seeking to challenge.

The third pedagogical tool that I explored in this chapter was the use of dialogue. Many educators found it helpful to offer participants a space to speak about recognizing and challenging oppression. However, there were a number of paradoxes that emerged around dialogue, namely, how it could be both a tool for change and avoidance, how it could both challenge and reify power relations, and how to negotiate feelings of discomfort that would emerge around such challenging discussion topics during the limited workshop time. Thus dialogue could be seen as a tool that had possibilities for both challenging and reifying oppressive relations. The final pedagogical tool that I explored in this chapter was the activities and games that educators used. These were often aimed towards making privilege more visible to participants as well as providing ways for them to explore actions for change. These methods opened up more possibilities for challenging resistant participants. At the same time, one of the dangers that educators had to negotiate was the risk that people from privileged social locations would assume that they now knew what it “felt like” to experience a particular form of oppression. As a result, educators would have to negotiate how empathy became constructed in their work. Another danger was that despite the creativity of some of these approaches, there was still insufficient time to address ways to work for sustainable social change. My analysis of these four main pedagogical strategies indicated that they all had possibilities for addressing oppressive relations; however it was impossible to have any strategies that were free of dangers. Therefore, how educators thought about their work and their role in it became crucial factors to consider.

Chapter 6 delved into the way educators positioned themselves in relation to their practice. Many integrated their work into a narrative with some part of their background. This provided insight into how personalized and important the work was for educators, particularly those who were driven to do it because of their experiences of oppression. At the same time, narrating these deep personal connections may have obscured some of the tensions around how their positioning could also be problematic. For instance, educators viewed their role in workshops as being largely decentered, which masked complexities around some of the positions of power that they had assumed as a facilitator. As well, the way that they constructed their ways of knowing could, at times, place them in an expert role, particularly if they conceived of knowledges in terms of different “levels” rather than as different discourses. Thus, knowledge could be both liberating and constraining at the same time. I argued that knowledge construction could also be an important site for resisting some of the tensions in this work and suggested that critical self-reflection could offer some small possibilities for these purposes. However, future research would have to be carried out in order to explore this idea further.

This thesis provides a useful exploratory analysis of the conditions that make the work of community educators difficult and of how a small group of educators negotiate these challenges. The findings provided some insight into the pedagogical practices of an under-researched group of workers. In addition, through a small, but diverse sample, I was able to make connections about the limitations and possibilities faced by local community educators who were challenging a wide range of structural factors. These connections were particularly relevant to social workers engaging in anti-oppressive practice because it made visible some of the tensions involved in seeking to challenge

oppressive relations. The critical self-reflection process that I outline in the final chapter could be useful for the practice of all social workers who are working towards social justice goals. Like community educators, many social workers work under frustrating conditions that make it difficult to achieve social change. Therefore, critical reflection could present more possibilities for them to see how their work is implicated in structural relations and also to see the small possibilities for reconstruction in their practice.

However, a limitation of the data is that it was restricted to the experiences of the educators who were interviewed, meaning the results could not be generalized. Another limitation was that the scope of this research project included only community educators and not workshop participants. There were areas in the analysis where it would have been enriching to have perspectives from workshop participants to compliment some of the discourses articulated by community educators. As a result, I take up this idea further in my areas for future research.

In addition, post-structuralism was useful for making discourses and power relations more visible, but it also had limitations. For instance, although the framework that I used stresses deconstruction *and* reconstruction processes as important for working towards social change (Fook, 2002), it was the deconstruction process that was emphasized in this thesis. Deconstruction is an important practice for making social relations and connections visible, but without reconstruction, it can sometimes come across as hurtful. I tried to reconcile this dynamic by exploring both possibilities and limitations when I deconstructed the tensions of this work. Moreover, reconstruction is much more personal and localized and thus it was difficult to delve into an analysis of this process from my data.

However, despite these limitations, I now draw on Ellsworth (1997), who writes about some general insights into how reconstruction can be done in an educational environment, in order to offer ideas of how it could take shape in community education. Ellsworth (1997) takes up the idea of deconstructing the binary around teacher and student roles, arguing that to deconstruct and reconstruct this relation of power does not mean that the student should now be privileged, but rather, the relationship should be troubled on an ongoing basis. She describes this process as follows:

And so reinscribing *teacher* and *student* means keeping “both the old and the new hierarchies off balance (Chang, 1996:143)”. Rewriting the teacher-student relation this way means refusing to let the question of the teacher-student relation to be settled. It means working in and through the oscillating space of difference between teacher and student as positions within a structure of relations. And it’s in that space of difference-between that a new concept of the teacher-student relation erupts. But...it’s a new concept that refuses to settle into any single meaning (Ellsworth, 1997:140).

Here we see that for Ellsworth (1997), there are no fixed solutions to the problems she poses. She does not see reversing the teacher-student hierarchy (i.e. privileging the student) as the solution to disrupting the power that teachers hold in educational settings. Rather, she sees possibilities for reconstruction through constantly disrupting how we think about hierarchies. Similarly, in this thesis, I have not presented tensions for the purpose of advocating that educators abandon their current methods, but rather because I see some possibilities in disrupting how we think about our practices. For instance, in my critique of the way that facilitators can take on an expert role, I am not advocating that educators discard their ways of knowing in their workshops. Rather, by drawing attention to some of these complications and contradictions around knowledge construction, I argue that there may be some benefit to troubling these positions.

As Ellsworth (1997) argues, “pedagogy is a much messier and inconclusive affair than the vast majority of our educational theories and practices make it out to be” (8). She unpacks what she perceives to be some of the ‘paradoxes’ in teaching and offers some possibilities for reconstructing these tensions. For instance, when exploring the “paradox of power and authority in teaching” (Ellsworth, 1997:150), she argues that a way to reconstruct this paradox is to think about how “the teacher [can empower] the student by practicing reciprocal, dialogical relations that equalize power relations among teachers and students” (151). This approach, Ellsworth (1997) argues, could encourage students to take on responsibility in the learning process. She posits that by offering no easy solutions to social injustices, by trying to leave the resolution to a problem as “incomplete” there may be some possibilities for inducing more students, particularly those from more privileged social locations, to struggle with ways to address these problems. This approach may present some opportunities for community educators to reconstruct responsibility for challenging power relations. As I’ve argued throughout this thesis, the work that these educators carry out is largely impossible, yet it seems like the responsibility is often placed on them to effect social change. Given the difficult conditions that these educators face when navigating their work, perhaps reconstructing the way that responsibility is conceived of in this practice might have some possibilities for easing these tensions.

Therefore, one area of further research that emerges from this analysis is an exploration into the perspective of participants on the social change process in community education. Because the scope of this research was confined to how educators spoke about their work, the perspective of participants was not part of the analysis.

However, it is important to consider how workshop participants (“students”) speak about anti-oppressive community education because as Shor (1993) argues, they experience education as something they do, not as a process that is done to them. Some studies have explored the perspectives of the community education participants in a particular project or workshop (Butterwick and Selman, 2003; Birden, 2004; Srivastava, 2005), however, more research is needed to explore specifically how participants in several different community education workshops see their subjectivity and responsibility in the process of challenging oppressive relations.

Another area for further research that arises from this study is the possibility of local reconstruction practices in community education. While this study suggests that reconstruction can present some small opportunities for resisting the oppressive relations that are implicated in this work, further research is still needed on the limits and possibilities of these practices. There is some literature on reconstruction in more formal education institutions (Fook, 2002; Ellsworth, 1997), however, very little exists on these practices in less formal community education. Therefore, a more in depth exploration into the reconstructive practices of community educators, might offer some insight into the possibilities of challenging the difficult conditions of this work.

I conclude with some of my own reflections on how this study has informed my views of anti-oppressive community education. As I stated at the beginning of this thesis, I set out on this research project wanting to gain insight into some of the social processes of community education in order to better understand how it worked to challenge oppression. My hope as a Muslim woman of colour was that I could come to a greater

understanding of how to challenge the dominant discourses that had caused me and others a considerable amount of pain in our daily lives.

After completing this study, I still see community education as a field that holds many possibilities for challenging oppressive relations, but I also see it as a line of work that is fraught and laden with tensions. I have not stopped envisioning it as work that holds possibilities for addressing oppression, but I conceive of these possibilities as being much more tentative and troubled because this study has made visible for me some of the complex social relations that are tied to this work. I no longer have the tendency to see community education as the all encompassing solution.

However, what struck me in the analysis is that despite how little power community educators had, there was still a demand for their presence. The opening quote of this thesis made this dynamic quite clear and for me, these demands offer some small pockets of hope. The fact that several of the community educators were seen as “experts” in their field and that there was still indeed a demand for these educators makes me feel somewhat optimistic because it suggests that it is not just educators who have a positive view of this work. Reflecting back on my analysis, I think that the positive portrayals of this work that I challenged in this project, while still problematic, can also be useful to educators for identifying key allies who support their work. Thus while the analysis of this thesis has left me more tentative of how I view community education, it is important for me to remember that all dangers of this work, are also fraught with possibilities.

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APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. Can you start by telling me about the work that you do as a community educator?
2. How long have you been working in your current position as a community educator?
3. What drew you to the work that you do?
4. Can you describe to me the typical format of the education work that you do?
How long does it usually last? What kinds of activities do you do? How much of it is planned beforehand?
5. What groups do you work with?
6. Can you identify some of the oppressive relations that you seek to challenge through your work?
7. What led you to decide on focusing on these specific forms of oppression in your work?
8. What are specific strategies that you use to challenge the oppressive relations that you identified earlier in the interview?
9. How did you come to choose these strategies? What do you see as their effectiveness?
10. What do you see these strategies rooted in? Ideology? Theory? Intuition? Experience? Something else?
11. How do you evaluate whether these strategies are effective? Do you have a process for reflecting on and revising your strategies?
12. Can you describe the diversity of the groups that you work with?

13. Are there any challenges associated with working across diversity in your community education work?
14. How important is it for you to create dialogue in your work?
15. Can you give some examples of how dialogue has benefitted your work of challenging oppression?
16. What are some challenges that you see around creating and facilitating dialogue?
17. To what extent do you try to have more marginalized voices heard through your community education? Do you have any specific strategies that you use?
18. In what settings do you carry out your work?
19. How does setting affect the nature of your work?
20. Do you feel that you are supported by your place of work?
21. How do you think that your work is viewed by others (the organization where you work, the community, your funders)?
22. Do you feel that you have an adequate amount of resources to do your work?
23. Can you tell me about any kind of resistance, opposition that you have encountered in doing your work?
24. How does this affect the way that you do your work?
25. How do you view your role as community educator?
26. What do you see as the goals of your work?
27. How do you see yourself in relation to the groups that you work with?
28. Do you see yourself as bringing certain interests to your work? What are they?
29. How do you see these interests playing out when you carry out your work?
30. What do you enjoy about your work?

31. What do you think that you do well as a community educator?
32. What parts of your role do you find challenging?
33. How do you deal with these challenges?
34. Why do you see your work as important?

APPENDIX B: INFORMATION LETTER

My name is Fauza Mohamed and I am a Master's of Social Work student at Carleton University. I am currently working on a study for my thesis, which explores the pedagogical strategies and methods of community educators who are working to challenge different forms of oppression. For example, community educators who are involved in anti-racism work, anti-oppression work, and feminist work. I am interested in interviewing educators who not only seek to challenge oppression through the content of their education but also those who seek to challenge it through the methods that they use. The purpose of this study is not to evaluate your methods but rather to invite you to reflect on them. I am more interested in exploring what you see as the possibilities, limitations, and challenges of your work.

If you decide to participate in the study, you will be asked to take part in an interview that will last approximately 60 to 90 minutes and will be audio-recorded. The interview would take place at a mutually agreed-upon location and time. The interview would cover topics around your work as a community educator such as your methods for challenging oppression and your reflections on the work that you do. The questions are open-ended and you are free to decline to answer any of the questions.

If at any time during or after the interview you have any questions, concerns, or you wish to withdraw from the study, you may contact me at 613-236-4689 ext.3 (I am the only person who has access to this voicemail box), my supervisor, Professor Sarah Todd, at the Carleton University School of Social Work at 613-520-2600 ext.4498, or the Chair of the Research Ethics Committee, Prof. Antonio Gualtieri at 613-520-2517. Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary and there is no penalty for withdrawing or refusing to answer questions during the interview.

I will be the only person who knows your identity and I will be transcribing all of the interviews myself. To protect your anonymity, your name will not appear on the tape or in the transcripts. If you use any identifying information in the interview, this will be changed in the final product. In the final product, I may use direct quotes but will not attribute them to any one person in particular.

Tapes will be stored in a locked box in my home and I will be the only person with keys to the box. Upon completion of the final project (approximately September 2007), all tapes will be destroyed.

I hope that this project will help to provide community educators with insight into their practices for challenging oppression and will help build solidarity among educators who undertake this kind of work. However, it is unlikely that you would receive any specific benefits for your participation.

While the risks of participating in this study are minimal, and your identity will remain anonymous, there is the risk that someone could read this study and respond in a way that is positive or negative. For this reason, I will take every precaution to remove all

identifying information in my report to ensure your anonymity. Therefore, there are no foreseen risks of your participation in this study.

I would be happy to give you a copy of your transcript upon request. You are also welcome to have a summary of the findings on completion of the study. Findings will be used in support of the final research project. The findings may also provide the basis for conference presentations and published articles.

This project has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the Carleton University Research Ethics Committee. If you have any concerns or questions about your involvement in the research process, you may contact the Chair of the Committee, Prof. Antonio Gualtieri. You can contact him by phone at 613-520-2517 or by email at ethics@carleton.ca.

I appreciate your interest in this project, and I look forward to the opportunity to work together.

Sincerely,

Fauza Mohamed
Master's of Social Work student
Carleton University