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Pedagogies and Strategies for an Anti-Oppression Classroom

by

Carolina Albornoz

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Abstract

Teachers continuously work on improving their practice, and often take professional development courses to help them learn new pedagogies and strategies that will positively impact student learning. In our society's current culture climate, there has been a growing emphasis on providing anti-racist education, culturally relevant programming, and other pedagogies that promote equity and inclusion in the classroom. I would like to explore anti-oppression education and provide examples of pedagogies, conflict resolution strategies and additional tactics that could be readily used by teachers to create a classroom culture of social justice and anti-oppression.

Keywords: Anti-Oppression, social justice education, pedagogies, conflict resolution, assessment, brave spaces, public schooling, reflective practice, (un)learning.

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Introduction

The teaching profession requires educators to continuously work on improving their practice, by having them participate in professional development courses or join professional learning communities so that they can learn new pedagogies. In our society's current culture climate, there has been a growing emphasis on providing anti-racist education and social justice education. I would like to explore anti-oppression education and provide examples of pedagogies and strategies that could be readily used by teachers.

First, I would like to begin by positioning myself in relation to this topic. I identify as a cisgender Latinx woman born to immigrant parents in Canada and living on Treaty 6 territory in Alberta. I am a teacher of seven years with experience teaching in various grades across K-12. What led me to explore anti-oppression education stemmed from my passion for anti-racist education. I want to find the confluence of the two pedagogies as I work in a school of 650 students and 50 staff that are currently aspiring towards becoming an anti-racist and anti-oppressive educational setting.

Throughout my experience teaching at this school, discussions in staff meetings, and my own observations, I have gathered that each teacher is at a different stage in their anti-oppression journey. Some teachers feel very confident and comfortable discussing oppression in the classroom whereas others are unsure of how to begin these conversations with students or have chosen not to engage in these conversations because of their own personal discomforts around these topics. As a result, we have only a few classrooms where anti-oppressive pedagogies are fully integrated in the day-to-day workings of the classroom, and we have many classrooms where these pedagogies have not yet been executed. Therefore, I am approaching this paper in relation to my experiences and beliefs that anti-oppressive change needs to begin with each

individual teacher before it can be implemented into a schoolwide framework. The goal of this paper is to introduce anti-oppressive pedagogies and assessment specifically to teachers that are new to teaching or inexperienced in anti-oppression education.

However, before analyzing anti-oppression pedagogy, it is important to define oppression and hegemony and examine how these concepts relate to the education system; this will inform why anti-oppression education needs to be the norm in classrooms today.

Oppression and Hegemony

Oppression is, "the prejudice and discrimination of one social group against another, backed by institutional power," and it "occurs when one group is able to enforce its prejudice and discrimination throughout society because it controls the institutions" (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017, p. 61). Sexism, racism, classism, ableism, and heterosexism are all specific forms of oppression that can influence "policies, practices, traditions, norms, definitions, and explanations (discourses),which function to systematically exploit one group [and] to benefit another social group" (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017, p. 61). As such, we have dominant groups in society that either actively engage in the exploitation of the *other*, or are complicit in this exploitation whether they are conscious of this or not.

Where oppression is the act of exploitation, hegemony is the power that allows it to continue. Lull (1995) describes hegemony as the "power or dominance that one social group holds over the other," and states that, "hegemony is more than a social power itself, it is a method for gaining and maintaining power" (p.33).

Therefore, one should view education as a system and institution that has been historically complicit in the oppression of others. In many cases, it has actively imparted oppression on both its students and teachers to assimilate them into the dominant culture (Katz,

1976; Starratt 1994). Viewing the classroom as a site for reproducing racism, oppression and other harmful systems is essential to understanding our role as teachers within the classroom. I would like to argue that teachers are either complicit in this system, or teachers can choose to be activists within their classroom to challenge the system by trying to transform it from within (Ahmed 2017; Kelly 2012; Picower 2015).

As universities continue to graduate educators, first year teachers will be faced with so many available pedagogies that they can employ in the classroom. With all the options available, how do newer teachers know which pedagogies they should use in their classrooms? There are cultural competency models, culturally relevant programming, trauma informed classrooms, anti-racist classrooms, classrooms that focus on growth mindset, and others that focus on equity and inclusion. A social justice education curriculum and anti-oppressive approach to education could encompass all of these pedagogies mentioned. However, it is through an anti-oppressive approach to education that would enable and empower teachers to discuss all of the oppressive systems that they or their students experience within society.

Therefore, for the purpose of this paper I will be using the words anti-oppression education and social justice education interchangeably. I will begin by discussing the foundational work educators need to do before implementing anti-oppression pedagogies in their classrooms. Then, I will examine different pedagogies that support anti-oppression in the classroom and go over classroom management strategies, approaches for conflict resolution and additional tactics that can support a teacher's journey towards an anti-oppression classroom culture. Furthermore, I will examine the limitations that teachers may encounter when trying to implement anti-oppression pedagogies in the classroom and I will conclude with a call to action for educators to become activists in their teaching role.

Anti-Oppression: Foundational Work for Teachers

Before teachers can begin implementing anti-oppression education or a social justice curriculum in the classroom, some foundational work needs to be done. First, teachers need to recognize the act of teaching as being both moral and political. Also, it is necessary that teachers know about oppression and how their role in the education system has been complicit in enacting or allowing injustice and oppression to continue. Following this self-reflection, teachers need to begin the work of (un)learning what they think they know about teaching.

Teaching as a Moral Act

Starratt (1994) describes how on "any given day, teachers will be brilliant and insensitive within the same class period," and how throughout the day students will "hear conflicting value messages urging both creativity and conformity, individuality and community, competition and cooperation" (p.15). The way teachers behave with their students along with the conflicting messaging that they receive from various players in the school are woven into an "ethical tapestry" (p. 15) that can be both confusing and overwhelming for a student. Also, it is important to note that one teacher's view of what is moral may differ from another teacher's outlook (Ermine, 2007; Starratt 1994). However, despite these differences, educators need to remember that although students might forget the curricular content, they will remember how our presence made them feel. The greater lessons in life, such as, how to be kind, empathetic and respectful towards others should be modeled by teachers towards all of the diverse students and staff they work with. Therefore, teaching is a feat that is meant for those of high moral values, understanding that the knowledge they share, and the way they treat their students transcends outside of the classroom walls and trickles into society.

Teaching as a Political Act

Throughout my career, I have heard how important it is for teachers to remain neutral in the classroom when discussing political ideologies or sociocultural issues. However, it essential to understand that teaching in itself is a political act. How we teach, the pedagogies we use, the strategies that we implement to create a specific culture in our classroom are all politically influenced. Either we are teaching and using pedagogies that reinforce the hegemonic systems that control our institution, or we are actively teaching in a way that disrupts the 'system'.

Oppression in the Classroom

After acknowledging that teaching as a practice is both moral and political, it is important that teachers wanting to use anti-oppression pedagogies examine their role within the classroom. Iris Young's (1990) conception of oppression describes the five faces of oppression: exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism and violence. Each face of oppression is evident in our educational institutions, and teachers need to recognize their relationship to each of these five faces. Acknowledging how educators are complicit or actively engaged in the oppression of their students and colleagues is not an easy task; it will cause discomfort. However, taking time to reflect on a teacher's own role in oppression will help educators to be brave in challenging themselves and their relationships with students and staff. Gewirtz (1998) provides excellent questions that educators can ask themselves for this initial self-reflection. Gewirtz (1998) asks, "How, to what extent and why do educational policies support, interrupt or subvert: 1. Exploitative relationships (capitalist, patriarchal, racist, heterosexist, disablist, etc.) within and beyond the educational institutions? 2. Processes of marginalization and inclusion within and beyond the education system? 3. The promotion of relationships based on recognition, respect, care and mutuality or produce powerlessness (for education workers and students)? 4. Practices of cultural imperialism? And which cultural

differences should be affirmed, which should be universalized and which rejected? 5. Violent practices within and beyond the education system?" (p.482). Gewirtz's (1998) questions can help teachers situate themselves in relation to oppression in the classroom and then the real (un)learning can begin.

(Un)learning and Personal Growth

(Un)learning is a vital process that is necessary for teachers to engage in prior to implementing anti-oppression pedagogies in the classroom. The work of (un)learning entails questioning everything a teacher knows about harmful systems such as racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, ableism, classism and so forth. This will require a personal and in-depth study of these topics which will challenge themselves to live in a space of personal discomfort. Through the discomfort, teachers should reflect on why they are having feelings of distress, as this awareness is what will propel them forward in their learning and yield growth in their understanding of these difficult topics (Hackman 2005; Gebhard 2020).

One way for teachers to begin this self-pursuit of knowledge is by engaging in readings that teach about oppression and starting a *thoughtbook* as a weekly learning activity. Thoughtbooks are an ongoing critical inquiry or personal reflection in which participants write their thoughts on a topic and then they may revisit their entries at any given time in their learning journey to add more information or critique their previous thoughts (Ginni-Newman & Case 2015). Thoughtbooks allow us to think about our thinking and question why we have certain ingrained beliefs and values. This process of examining our beliefs will highlight our unconscious bias which is when, "our brains [make] incredibly quick judgements and assessments without us realising," and are influenced by "background, cultural environment, and experiences" (Tate & Page, 2018, p. 141). Unconscious bias often occurs without one's

awareness and can lead to actions, thoughts or statements that may be damaging towards others. As teachers look through their thoughtbooks, they may identify their own unconscious bias and begin questioning why they do the things they do in the classroom. For example, teachers may realize that their methods for calling on students may only benefit the loudest and strongest voices, while silencing the voices of many others. Or they may begin to notice that they have unconsciously labelled specific students as "troublemakers" or certain students as "low achievers" due to gender, class, race or ethnic background. Questioning the actions that one takes in the classroom and attaching it to unconscious bias is a powerful step in self-awareness and challenging our roles as teachers in the oppressive education system.

Another strategy that teachers can use for their (un)learning journey is engaging in professional development (PD) courses or sessions offered at school districts or universities. However, it is important to note that a one-time PD course on a topic like racism does not ensure that a teacher will be prepared to bring this topic into the classroom and effectively guide students in an anti-racism curriculum. McManimon & Casey (2018) describe that a one-time PD session on racism would "largely [fail] at sustaining *ongoing* work to combat structural racism" (p.395). Furthermore, in their study, the authors examined how beneficial it was for a group of eight teachers to engage in monthly PDs through reading and discussion over the course of two years. The teachers would select readings and come to their meetings ready to discuss and challenge each other in how they would put into practice their understandings of anti-racism. As a result, the teachers in the study not only began to feel more comfortable in recognizing their own discomfort and complicity in oppression, but they also recognized "concrete manifestations of white supremacy and discrimination across multiple settings and worked in material ways to combat them" (McManimon & Casey, 2018, p.403). What this study demonstrates is that the

work of (un)learning our beliefs about systems of oppression is best done in a long-term PD setting in which all participants are able to acknowledge that they are in a constant state of learning and becoming (McManimon & Casey, 2018).

While teachers are (un)learning what they know about harmful systems of oppression, they also will need to (un)learn everything they know about what "good teaching", "good classrooms" and "good students" look like. Many teachers enter the profession with a vision of what their classrooms will look like and how their students should behave; often times their classroom culture is modeled on their own student experience and their relationships with their former teachers. Although our professional calling is to address the academic needs of each student, schools are not only meant to sharpen our cognitive skills, as they are also spaces of socialization where students learn societal norms, behaviours and values (Shaked 2020). As such, educators teach a curriculum that was created by the dominant culture, along with the *hidden curriculum* (socialization skills) that our society deems acceptable. As the systems of oppression are reproduced in the classroom, teachers need to understand that the beliefs society has shaped on what a "good student" looks like are unreasonable, and sometimes unattainable (ie. silent, obedient and always engaged) (Gebhard 2020; Starratt 1994). Teachers need to contemplate the harmful effects of constantly imposing these model behaviours on students without taking a student's individual life circumstances into account. These expectations were formed during the beginning of public schooling when there was a focus on "standardizing" students into gender roles and into the dominant culture through assimilation (Katz 1976). Prior to public schooling, young people were taught by their families and through their communities. However, with the advancement in technology and urbanization during the industrialization period, the need for schools in this fast-paced lifestyle became urgent.

Katz (1976) states that schools became agents of cultural standardization that would target immigrant children. To be successful, this "massive task of assimilation" needed to "weaken" the connection between children and their families (p.399). Public schools truly existed to "shape behavior and attitudes, alleviate social problems and reinforce a social structure under stress" (Katz, 1976, p. 401). These ideas about the roles of school were widely accepted, and public schooling became popular because it legitimized the social order and the capitalist agenda at the time.

To further illustrate this point, public schools during the Industrial Era further advanced the ideals of individualism. For example, students could now fail or succeed in their studies. If students were to fail it would be due to a "lack of energy or ability," and this further justified the distribution of inequality in society by rewarding only those that can live up to the expectations laid out by the elites (Katz, 1976). Therefore, individualism and competition became a way of life for students entering the education system, because even if all students worked to their full potential, "there would still be a bottom 50 percent," because, "our society cannot yet tolerate a whole graduation class of valedictorians" (Starratt, 1998, p.17).

Not much has changed in our current day and age. Our neoliberal world still emphasizes productivity, and the goals of schooling continue to support "educating and shaping human behaviours for the corporate workplace" (Spring, 2015, p.2). Think about the behaviours we expect of our students: they need to be obedient, demonstrate conformity, and have a "passive acceptance of authority" (Starratt, 1994, p.24). These same behaviours are also expected within the workplace after students graduate because it is easier to control a workforce that does not attempt to undermine the authority in place.

Teachers need to (un)learn their beliefs and understandings of teaching within our education system and cannot dismiss the knowledge that our education system has always promoted individualism and competition while also favouring those we consider "good students".

Following the arduous work of accepting our role as teachers as being both political and moral, and (un)learning everything we know about oppression and education, teachers can begin to introduce anti-oppression pedagogies in the classroom. However, it is necessary to understand that all of these reflective practices and learning do not end at specific point; the process of (un)learning is a journey without destination so, teachers should continuously engage in these practices while they are implementing these pedagogies (Gebhard 2020; Rio 2017).

Anti-Oppressive Pedagogies

Educators need to understand that there are various pedagogies they could use in the classroom, but not all of them can be considered "anti-oppressive". For example, a pedagogy that emphasizes cultural competency, can contribute to an anti-oppression classroom but is not an anti-oppressive pedagogy in itself. The same goes for culturally relevant programming, and programs that celebrate multiculturalism, diversity and inclusion (Galloway et al., 2019). These programs are meant to prepare students to work in a diverse society (Ford & Whiting, 2007), and are on the right track in guiding students to develop empathy towards each other, but usually fail to deeply examine histories rooted in oppression, or they tiptoe around racism, centering their program on culture instead. The danger with putting culture at the center of our teaching practice is that it, "[comforts] privilege rather than [discomforts] inequity, [and] by doing so we mask racism, xenophobia, and other oppressions, undermining the goal of equity" (Gorski, 2016, p. 224). This does not mean that culture should not be celebrated or included in the classroom. On

the contrary, these pedagogies still have a place in the anti-oppression classroom, but it is imperative that analysis on oppression and hegemony are emphasized. Galloway et al. (2019), states that anti-oppressive pedagogy is one that is "explicitly race-, class-, language-, gender-, ability-, and sexuality conscious," and *compels* students to explore our "socially constructed notions of race" while also exposing, "the role systems, structures, and power play in producing and sustaining disparities" (p.494). In other words, students need to go through the same process of (un)learning as teachers did prior to introducing anti-oppressive pedagogies in the classroom. Teachers will know how uncomfortable this journey is, and they will be excellent at guiding students through the emotions and discomfort they will feel in this process.

Teachers will need time to prepare the foundation for an anti-oppression classroom pedagogy. Accessing books that are student friendly, finding ways to integrate their learnings of oppression into the curriculum and redefining their classroom behaviour expectations will take time. However, I would like to describe two resources teachers can use as a reference: Hackman's (2005) *Five Essential Components of Social Justice education,* and Arao & Clemen's (2013) conception of *brave spaces.* Following this, I will analyze how these strategies contribute to restorative practices for classroom management.

Five Essential Components for Social Justice Education

Hackman (2005) describes five essential tools for social justice education and anti-oppression education. Each tool is effective in itself, however, if teachers were to use all five tools in their teaching, their capacity for positive changes in the classroom will increase. The first tool is content mastery, which deals with critiquing curriculum and ideologies. This tool challenges educators to ensure that the facts they share do not contribute to the reproduction of hegemony, but rather that there is a variation of perspectives outside of the mainstream being

analyzed and discussed with students (Hackman, 2005). When educators master the curricular content and are well versed in the multiple perspectives of each topic, they can model to students how to view various pieces of information through the lens of social justice.

The second tool is critical thinking and analysis of oppression. Through this tool, students are challenged to think critically about curriculum by "considering perspective, positionality, power and possibilities with respect to content" (Hackman, 2005, p.106).

The third tool is action and social change which emphasizes promoting hope and moving students away from cynicism by teaching them how to participate in social change (Hackman, 2005, p.107). Anti-oppression and social justice classrooms that only focus on the injustice of our world can get caught in a cycle of negativity leaving students feeling emotionally exhausted and powerless. The tool of action and social change is necessary to teach students how to participate in democracy, and how to voice their concerns and become activists. Giving students opportunities to enact change within their school, or create social justice clubs based on their vision for the future will help inspire hope within students and continue to fuel their passion for positive change in society.

The fourth tool is about importance of creating time and space for personal reflection in the classroom. Through this period of personal reflection both teachers and students need to sit with their discomfort about the materials they are analyzing.

Finally, the fifth tool is about multicultural group dynamics and discusses how teachers need to view each topic through a trauma informed lens. By doing so, teachers need to address the needs of their student grouping by modifying their lesson plans and being sensitive to the topics that may be triggering for marginalized students (Hackman, 2005). Hackman's (2005) five

tools for social justice education are truly essential for teachers to consider when seeking to challenge oppression within their classrooms and schools.

Brave Space for Classroom Management and Culture

Another pedagogical approach teachers should consider using is Arao & Clemens' (2013) framework on 'brave spaces' to challenge privilege and biases within the classroom. Brave spaces are usually used as a strategy for talking about controversial or triggering ideas, however, when creating a classroom environment of anti-oppression, teachers are inviting their students to daily challenge their beliefs, values and biases. In this regard, the classroom in itself becomes a brave space, and there are rules that all who enter the space need to abide by. Although brave spaces were initially created for discourse, they can be used for learning activities, conflict resolution, classroom management and culture building.

One fundamental aspect of brave spaces is the transition from the well known 'safe space' to 'brave space'. Although most teachers would agree the on importance of cultivating a classroom culture in which students feel safe to express their opinions and ideas, Arao and Clemens (2013) challenge the terminology of "safe spaces" because when discussing social justice issues or dealing with conflicts in the classroom, controversy is unavoidable. As such students may feel discomfort and a range of other emotions that would be incompatible with the feeling safety (Arao & Clemens 2013, Ravitch 2020).

The classroom brave space should be co-constructed with students, and they will learn through this process that their classroom is a tight knit community in which members at one point or another will be "vulnerable" and "exposed". Through this vulnerability and expression of deep emotions in the classroom, students will begin to "interact authentically with one another in challenging dialogues" (Arao & Clemens, 2013, p.149). When co-constructing classroom

brave space guidelines, it is important that some popular rules are avoided. For example, a typical rule for classroom discussion is “agree to disagree”, however, Arao & Clemens (2013) suggest that instead of seeking to understand opposing views, this approach contributes to avoidance behaviour toward conflicts (p.143). Instead, “controversy with civility” should be used, as it frames conflict as natural while emphasizing the need to “understand the sources of disagreement and to work cooperatively towards common solutions” (p.149). Similarly, the idea of “don’t take things personally” is often emphasized when dealing with classroom conflict, but this rule pushes participants that are negatively affected by the conflict to “hide their feelings and process them internally” or “shame them into silence” (p.145). Instead, the Arao & Clemens (2013) suggest using the following statement, “own your intentions and your impact”. This statement posits that our actions and intentions are not always congruent, as sometimes good intentions can have negative impacts on others.

Over the last three years, I have worked with my students in co-constructing our brave space. It is time consuming because for it to be effective, there needs to be consensus on our brave space rules. Despite the time constraints, this task is highly rewarding because it creates a strong bond between all members of the classroom. To ensure that the brave space rules are remembered, I have them on a large poster paper in a visible space at the front of the classroom, and I do weekly circle meetings in which we read aloud our rules before our discussion.

Both Hackman (2005) and Arao & Clemens (2017) provide essential pedagogical approaches to the anti-oppression classroom. Although these were discussed in a physical classroom setting, Ravitch (2020) discussed how brave spaces could be used online to help students with their emotional wellness while navigating the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic. The pandemic has challenged social justice education as not all students have had

access to technology, reliable internet, safe spaces to learn and other educational needs met. Ravitch (2020) does well in addressing how school administrators can work against these challenges and supports by having brave spaces as a school wide framework that can be used both online and in the physical classroom.

Finally, with brave spaces being operational in classrooms, teachers will have an easier time establishing restorative practice routines for conflict management.

Anti-Oppressive and Restorative Practices for Conflict Management

The development of brave spaces for an anti-oppressive classroom culture and environment, is essential for conflict management and can be a part of restorative practices. Frey et al. (2013), states that, "all learning comes to a halt when the trust of a classroom community has been violated," and that the approach one takes to the conflict will determine the effect on everyone involved (p.56). The writers describe that restorative practices need to involve the entire school faculty's and student body's buy-in for it to be most effective. Unfortunately, this may not be possible, but in the classroom context, a teacher can use restorative practices within their brave space to deal with student conflict.

Mirsky (2014), author of *The Power of Circle,* describes that restorative practices work best when teachers provide opportunities for "weekly proactive circles [in] the classroom routine," where "participants sit in a circle, with no physical barriers" (p.52). Usually, a "talking piece" is passed around which indicates whose turn it is to speak, and participants are invited to share their thoughts and feelings or they have the option to "pass". Using circles is important as they "provide opportunities to build trust, mutual understanding, shared values and behaviours" (p.52). Most importantly, it gives space for teachers and students to reflect on their words and behaviours. Circles in conjunction with brave spaces can be used explore social justice issues,

academic topics or conflict mitigation. For this conflict resolution strategy to be successful, students must also be involved in its implementation. For example, students should have an active role in restorative practices such as being co-mediators with the teacher. Or, students can lead out their own circles within the classroom to have discussion on topics they are interested in. Students need to develop their leadership skills, and they need opportunities to acknowledge their identity in the classroom and talk about the ways in which they experience the world. Teachers can guide students in these matters by involving them in all aspects of the classroom community including conflict resolution.

Additional classroom strategies for an Anti-Oppression Classroom

There are many strategies that can be used for an anti-oppression classroom, but there are a few that I would like to highlight apart from what has been discussed in pedagogical approaches and conflict management such as anti-oppressive assessment and radical compassion and self-care.

Anti-oppressive Assessment. Teachers that want to step away from oppressive assessment can do so by providing multiple opportunities for students to demonstrate their learning, giving a space for reflective practice and stepping away from a standardized style of assessment. One method teachers can use is project-based learning, where students learn through hands-on activities and teachers lead their classrooms through inquiry. Through this process, students will learn that teachers can be curious learners, and not only "knowledge droppers or performative experts" (Ravitch, 2020, p.5). This helps students recognize their own knowledge as both valid and valuable and will allow them to enjoy an authentic learning experience alongside their classroom community (Bryce, 2019). Similarly, teachers can use observations and conversations as a form of assessment. Products such as tests or written assignments should

not be the only assessments used in formal progress reports because a student can demonstrate great depth in their learning through reflective practices such as in small group discussions, journaling, or other artistic means.

Radical Compassion and Self-care. Ravitch (2020) discusses how school leaders should support and model self-care and compassion with staff. In the same fashion, teachers should model this to students. Living in a neoliberal world that values productivity, sometimes teachers fall into the trap of pushing curriculum over emotional well-being to meet deadlines. One of the greatest acts of resistance to neoliberalism is having compassion for oneself and others and taking time for self-care (Ravitch, 2020; Rio, 2017). Teachers can demonstrate compassion by emphasizing emotional connections with their students through authentic community building activities, having students participate in "check in" activities to see how they are feeling, or routinely practicing mindfulness with their students to help them cope with stress. Finally, teachers should model self-care to their students, whether it be by taking the class for a walk in nature, or taking a day off to refresh, students will appreciate and learn best from a teacher that is rested and happy to be with them rather than one who is running low on patience due to being overworked, tired and stressed.

Roadblocks and Limitations

Social justice and anti-oppression educators will have many challenges as they try to implement strategies and teach curriculum through a lens of justice. The number of inequities to address in a classroom or school will be insurmountable for a teachers and leaders to mitigate in their careers. Therefore, it is important to address the limitations of anti-oppressive and social justice education and understand that that there is "no single theory [that] can guide this complex and messy work" because the meanings of justice are constantly evolving and important school

stakeholders may not agree with a teacher's pedagogical practices (Scanlan, 2013, p.350; Kelly 2012).

One roadblock that an anti-oppressive educator may encounter is the absence of support from administration in the delivery of anti-oppressive pedagogies in the classroom. This could be due to many factors, such as an expectation for teachers to emphasize academics over social justice issues, or the lack of knowledge that some administrative staff may have in regard to anti-oppression or social justice education. For example, Capper & Young (2014) describe how many school leaders do not have a proficient understanding of intersectionality and how the lived experience of marginalized students has many layers of oppression. Also, vocal advocates of anti-oppression education may find themselves becoming the "go to" person for all issues related to equity and social justice. Bustamante et al. (2009) did a study on the implementation of culturally relevant programming in schools and found that most of the work on equity and cultural competence initiatives were tasked to one staff member (not the principal) which was regarded as the "leader" of the initiatives. In fact, most principals in this study did not believe that cultural proficiency initiatives needed to be a collective responsibility but rather a suggested practice that would be led out by a competent and knowledgeable teacher. In an ideal school setting, anti-oppressive pedagogies and social justice initiatives would be a collective responsibility among staff members, however, when this is not the case, many teachers will find themselves thrown into a position of becoming an informal leader on the topic.

Another issue is the emphasis placed on school district goals of improving student achievement, usually in numeracy and literacy. Although social justice education supports the idea that all students should have access to a high-quality education and demonstrate high achievement in academics (Shaked, 2020), some would argue that these academic goals justify

high stakes testing which "not only undermines teacher professionalism but also impedes social justice work" (Capper & Young, 2014, p.160). When academics takes precedent over anti-oppression education, schools are contributing to the oppression of marginalized students because much of the standardized tests are created so that students in the dominant group of society can succeed (white, cisgender, heterosexual, fluent/native English speakers, etc.). Standardized tests normalize the low performance of marginalized students because it signals a lack of acculturation and assimilation into mainstream society (Shaked, 2020).

Additionally, social justice educators may find that there is a lack of coherence between their classroom policies, school policies and the centralized policies of the wider school district. For example, educators with a brave space in their classroom may have difficulty justifying the way they handle classroom conflicts if a school policy on conflict is more about swift and strict action (zero tolerance policies, suspensions, etc.) rather than dialogue (restorative practices and talking circles). As a result, an anti-oppressive educator seeking to create a socially just classroom and school environment can only go as far as the school and district policies will allow.

Finally, another roadblock that anti-oppressive educators will encounter is the exhaustion that comes from trying to incite change from within a traditionally oppressive and flawed system. Committing to advocating for anti-oppressive pedagogies in the classroom and practicing them is working within a system and against a system at once; this can become emotionally taxing and demoralising when changes are slow to come by (Ahmed, 2017; Gebhard, 2020; Rio, 2017). Similarly, teachers that live in the intersections and have experienced oppression in their lives may find it both exhausting and triggering when having discussions about social issues that can reopen old wounds or make them feel revictimized (Rio, 2017).

Therefore, is imperative that teachers beginning this journey understand that it is a lifelong learning experience, and that they are choosing a path of resistance because the work of anti-oppression is never finished and social justice is a process, not an end goal (Kelly 2012).

Finally, it is difficult to adapt teaching strategies and relational approaches when teachers have been socialized to viewing the profession through a hegemonic lens, and the process of (un)learning may be considered radical to their colleagues. As a result, some teachers may begin the process of anti-oppressive education but fail to become activists and participate in social action. Picower (2015) describes how educators view their teaching as activism in itself and fail to recognize that teaching about social issues is not the same as creating social change. Any social justice educator or anti-oppressive teacher ultimately needs to teach their students how to engage in social action by modelling this themselves.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I believe that despite the limitations and roadblocks, teachers that are passionate about anti-oppression and social justice should continue to strive towards creating anti-oppression classrooms in which students can learn about social issues through a social justice lens. This paper has only touched on some of many strategies that can be used by teachers to create an anti-oppression classroom culture, but the suggested pedagogies and tactics in this paper can be used as a resource for teachers looking for a place to start.

Ultimately, teachers that take on this extremely difficult work should know that their commitment to anti-oppression and social justice may be emotionally taxing throughout their careers, but through their personal growth and change they can influence their colleagues and incite a school wide movement towards anti-oppression. I would like to urge teachers to continue on their journey towards anti-oppression and becoming social justice educators despite any

difficulties they may encounter. In truth, educators play a significant role in the lives of young people, and the small changes we do to improve the lives of our most vulnerable students makes anti-oppression education worth the struggle.

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