Anti-oppressive global citizenship education in English language teaching: A three-pillar approach

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Anti-oppressive global citizenship education (GCE), a specific strand of critical GCE, is a new field, especially concerning empirical studies within English classrooms (Pashby & da Costa, 2021). Based on an anti-oppressive GCE framework (Carroll, 2021) and the research question, "what does anti-oppressive theory look like in practice in English classrooms and how can this be woven into GCE?", this paper explains the results of a project which used a portraiture methodology (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997) to collect and analyze approximately 6 hours of semi-structured interviews, detailed impressionistic records, and several lessons collected with one secondary school English teacher in Ontario, Canada. The portrait showcases how the language educator implements a three-pillar approach to anti-oppressive GCE language education and the need to shine light on minoritized identities, create healthy soil for the foundation of learning about systemic oppression, and give the proper amounts of water/support to each student.

Keywords: anti-oppression education; global citizenship education; language teaching; portraiture

Introduction

Anti-oppressive global citizenship education (GCE) is a new field with many possibilities and directions. There is not much research in the field of anti-oppressive GCE and more specifically within the English language classroom. This research aimed to fill this gap and develop a foundation for further empirical research within anti-oppressive GCE in English language education. This paper uses desire-based portraiture methodology to imagine an anti-oppressive GCE that is not only focused on social issues and systemic oppression, but also includes two other factors in a three-pillar approach to anti-oppressive education. This paper aims to showcase a more complicated and situated understanding of anti-oppressive GCE within English language classes and how teachers can play a role within their classrooms through both content and pedagogical choices.

Anti-oppressive global citizenship education

Global citizenship education (GCE) is not a new topic but has been growing in popularity across the globe. Since the mid-1990s, GCE has been in school and NGO curricula, especially within the West, the UK, and North America (Sant et al., 2018). There are many types or strands of GCE, and it is not an easy term to define (Sant et al., 2018). Scholars have sorted the field of GCE into multiple 'types' (Andreotti, 2006; Dill, 2013; Franch, 2020; etc.), some of which reinforce power imbalances and neoliberal, capitalist ideologies, while others promote criticality and self-reflection. It is within this critical, self-reflective style of GCE I spend my efforts.

While the beginnings of GCE centered on neoliberal understandings of social justice, such as assumptions of who can be a global citizen, who is the helper versus who is the helped, and other liberal individualizing discourses that assume a benevolent, educated global North and a helpless, uneducated global South, more recent scholars have started to uncover these colonial roots and eurocentric foundation of global citizenship education with a specific critical GCE (Andreotti, 2011; Arshad-Ayaz et al., 2017; Estellés & Fischman, 2021; Pashby, 2015; Sant et al., 2018; Stein, 2015). Like any kind of education, there is no apolitical GCE, so critical GCE scholars critique neoliberal versions of GCE that aim to be apolitical and reproduce the status quo, western bias, and hierarchies (Estellés & Fischman, 2021), as apolitical conversations of equity are reserved for the dominant group alone. However, like any other kind of education, there is no 'right' way to do global citizenship education. The goal of the anti-oppressive kind of GCE I propose is to uncover the colonial roots of development, inequitable local and global power relationships, and systemic oppression (Carroll, 2021); however, the focus of this definition has remained within the realm of the theoretical. As an educator-researcher, my aim is to bridge these theoretical conversations with practice, so the results from this research aim to expand this theoretical definition of anti-oppressive GCE to be more inclusive of anti-oppressive classroom pedagogies in the English classroom.

Anti-oppressive global citizenship education is a new and growing position within the field of GCE. Explained by Stein (2015), anti-oppressive education goes beyond entrepreneurial and liberal humanist styles of GCE with "more critical, politicized, and historicized approaches to global engagement" (p. 246). The focus of anti-oppressive GCE tends to be on how power and knowledge move through colonial, racialized, and gendered systems, with the goal of creating more equitable systems through things like horizontal governance and the dismantling of the oppressive systems (Stein, 2015). I categorize anti-oppressive GCE under a growing field of critical GCE. Critical GCE is a strand of GCE which speaks against and critiques soft forms of GCE, also known as non-critical, neoliberal forms of GCE, through critical thinking and discussion (Andreotti, 2006). The difference, I argue, between a critical GCE and an anti-oppressive GCE is the specific focus on systemic oppression, inclusive of both content and practice. Anti-oppressive GCE is necessary because many forms of GCE that exist do not uncover these systemic issues and GCE has been known to reproduce power inequities with soft or uncritical forms of GCE (Andreotti, 2006). Through anti-oppressive GCE, students and teachers question the ethnocentrism, depoliticization, and deficit-centered GCE and instead use self-reflexive approaches to examine one's own complicity in systemic oppression (Carroll, 2021; Stein, 2015), which will be shown through the participant's own anti-oppressive practices in the English classroom.

While theoretical understandings of general and anti-oppressive GCE approaches are expanding, there is not a lot of empirical research on general GCE published in the primary and secondary education sector (Sant et al., 2018), and anti-

oppressive GCE empirical research is even more scarce. As the field of anti-oppressive GCE is still quite new, the research has remained largely at the theoretical level with Andreotti's critical GCE framework which often includes a systemic analysis (2006, 2011, 2016) and Stein (2015) who briefly explains anti-oppressive GCE as one of four types of GCE, as well as many other articles which theorize the neoliberal, colonial, and violent nature of GCE which reproduce power hierarchies and inequities (Andreotti, 2011; Arshad-Ayaz et al., 2017; Estellés & Fischman, 2021; Gamal & Swanson, 2018; Pashby, 2015). While empirical research is growing in university classrooms about more general forms of GCE (Amos & Carvalho, 2021), different types of GCE within teacher education (Estellés & Fischman, 2020), and many program reviews and theoretical arguments for different forms of GCE (Dorio et al., 2021; Guo-Brennan & Guo-Brennan, 2020; Kester, 2022), the empirical research within the field of critical and more specifically anti-oppressive GCE is lacking.

This lack of empirical research that focuses on the field of critical and anti-oppressive GCE was examined by Pashby and da Costa (2021) in their review of empirical research within 'global North' secondary schools (students aged 11-18). The authors found only nine relevant empirical research articles in the field of critical GCE between 2014 and 2020. In five of the nine empirical studies, researchers focus on the analysis of classroom resources and curriculum. As explained by Pashby and da Costa (2021), GCE "curricula are framed by dominant western discourses… while marginalizing other perspectives…" (p. 385) and maintain the binary and hierarchy of 'us' (global North) and 'them' (global South), which reproduce oppressive systems and ways of thinking. The empirical research also examined the simplification of complex issues in curricula and materials, like complicity through "quick fixes" in Karsgaard's (2019) research on Me to We lesson plans in English classes, and Pashby's (2015) research on Alberta's secondary social studies curriculum and lessons which concluded that there is a need to connect local and global systems of inequities. Karsgaard's (2019) research is the only study that explicitly examines GCE in the English curriculum (with the aim of advocating a cross-curricular approach), and helps to show how GCE discourses of action can reproduce inequitable relationships. The research project I explain in this paper builds on Karsgaard's (2019) findings, that teaching the proper language and critical thinking skills are important.

The remaining four critical GCE empirical studies discussed by Pashby and da Costa (2021) examine teachers' and students' perspectives of GCE. The research examined how "GCE is often delivered through universal western liberal values that may evoke discourses of inclusion but serve to assimilate other perspectives" (p. 387), which confirms the findings in the curricula and resource analysis research. These four studies focus on the teaching approach, and similarly to the curricula and materials analysis, show how teaching the language of oppression, including critical self-reflection, is key in an anti-oppressive approach (Reilly & Niens, 2014). Overall, however, the nine empirical studies discussed by Pashby and DaCosta (2021) mainly focus on classroom curriculum, resources, and practices through a deficit perspective, aiming to showcase the ways in which the GCE is not critical or what it is lacking. I stray from this deficit-center approach, with the aim of showcasing what is working well in a comprehensive anti-oppressive GCE approach using a desire-based portraiture methodology.

Focusing on what is going well in the classroom, I blend understandings of anti-oppressive global citizenship education with English language education. As there are differing political commitments in GCE, so too are the political commitments of GCE within language education. Explained by Sant et al. (2018), the different strands of GCE

within English language education include: 1) *economic GCE*, which encourages language learning for employment and economic success; 2) *cultural GCE*, which aims to contribute to intercultural citizenship on a global scale; and 3) *critical GCE*, which teaches language to critically examine assumptions. The critical forms of GCE in English language education mirror the goals of the participant's anti-oppressive approach.

Conceptual framework

To fail to work against the various forms of oppression is to be complicit with them.
- Kevin K. Kumashiro (2002, p. 37)

To understand an anti-oppressive global citizenship education framework, it is first important to understand oppression, prejudice, and discrimination. Oppression is systemic and built on individual prejudice and discrimination. Individual prejudice is someone's thoughts and feelings prior to meeting a person. This 'pre-judgement' is based on internal, biased dialogues, which everyone experiences both consciously and unconsciously (Carroll, 2021; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017). Discrimination, on the other hand, is action or inaction (i.e., ignoring, avoiding, etc.) based on these prejudices. Research has shown time and again that our prejudicial thoughts determine our actions, whether we admit it or not (Greenwald et al., 2015). These individual prejudices and discrimination are often the focus within GCE, and as shown through the portrait, in teacher PD about issues of oppression. In soft forms of GCE (Andreotti, 2006), the belief is that if we change the individual person, we can stop inequality. Unfortunately, this is not true, and the issue is much more complex and systemic.

This anti-oppressive framework and the participant's teaching approach pay attention to the complicated and systemic ways inequities occur in society and works against oppressive institutions and the barriers they create (Kumashiro, 2015). Oppressive systems are created and reproduced by the beliefs, values, and culture of the dominant group, such as education, law, the media, government, and so on. These beliefs, values, and cultures of the dominant group carry the unconscious prejudices about non-dominant groups of people, which creates power imbalances, minoritizes specific groups, and privileges dominant groups (Kumashiro, 2002; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017). Power is important to understand systemic oppression as power is embedded within cultures, knowledges, and societies (Dei & Asgharzadeh, 2001). Power, or "the ability to control people or things" (Oxford, 2021, sec. 1), is intimately connected to oppression. As explained by Sensoy and DiAngelo (2017), oppression is the result of prejudice and power, or simply: "prejudice + power = oppression" (p. 62). Explained by Freire (2020), "the dominant elite increasingly structures its power so that it can more efficiently dominate and depersonalize" (p. 177). Language is always interconnected with relations of power (Freire, 2020), so when teaching the language of power and oppression and examining systemic oppression within education, these terms are important to understand. The portrait shows Janice's commitment to this systemic change, rather than just individual change, and teaches her students about power and oppression as a systemic, not just individual issue.

Paulo Freire is also an important scholar that contributes to anti-oppressive pedagogies and helps contribute to the understanding that no education is neutral or apolitical, and all education is contextual based on the power structures and systemic oppression in that environment (Freire & Macedo, 2005). According to Freire's

pedagogy of liberation, education should go beyond the development of social skills and cognition and should focus on the critical consciousness that allows learners to respect others (Freire, 2020). Learning the causes and naming oppressive systems and how they connect to one's own experience helps students develop linguistic skills to empower themselves and engage in discussions to transform the current oppressive system (Freire & Macedo, 2005). This research and Janice show that all students are differently implicated by/in systemic oppression based on their various subject positions and experiences. This research and Janice follow Freire's ideas of oppression and extend them to understand that there is no simple oppressor versus oppressed, but all students and teachers are differently positioned within complicated systems with privilege based on some subject positions and oppressive barriers due to others, which are all dependent upon the context.

Lastly, another term that arose throughout our conversations was 'horizontal governance'. Horizontal governance is a term used within governance, policy, and leadership studies. It is rarely used within the field of education; however, a comprehensive overview of the term within education was explained by Levy et al. (2018). The authors explain horizontal governance as a balanced or shared authority, which contrasts with top-down, hierarchical governance based on vertical, power hierarchies. There are three chapters in the book which touch on school-level horizontal governance, but none of the authors explain horizontal governance within an individual classroom. Therefore, it is important to imagine, what does horizontal governance look like in the classroom between teachers-students and students-students? Stein (2015) also mentions the idea of horizontal governance and explains its importance for an anti-oppressive position, but does not elaborate on what this means in the classroom. Horizontal governance is counter to oppressive, hierarchal governance structures. Within the classroom, this would mean decision-making was shared and came from the bottom-up (from students), instead of from the top-down (from the teacher and/or principal).

In addition to these important terms, I conducted this research from a desire-based perspective, not a deficit or damage-centered perspective (Tuck, 2009). Where damage-centered research "operates… from a theory of change that establishes harm or injury in order to achieve reparation" (Tuck, 2009, p. 413), desire-based research does not focus on lack or deficit but instead prioritizes the "complexity, contradiction, and self-determination of lived lives" (p. 416). This desire-based perspective pairs well with portraiture, explained next.

Methodology

This research is the pilot project of a larger three-year Japanese government funded project. In this pilot project, the goal was to understand what anti-oppressive theory looks like in practice in an English classroom in Canada and how this can be woven into global citizenship education. To develop an initial understanding, convenience sampling was used to select a participant whom I knew practiced anti-oppressive teaching methods. Due to the restrictions of COVID-19, starting with one participant, Janice[1], whom I had a prior relationship with, allowed for flexibility and trust in sharing private information during the research process (Cotterill, 1992). Working with someone I had known previously and am in good relationship with also reminded me of the responsibility I have to maintain our respectful and reciprocal relationship, important both in research and in our lives outside of the research (Wilson, 2008). Portraiture was

used as the methodology for the project, which enabled me to enact a desire-based lens to the research and portrait of one participant. A desire-based portraiture was also an important choice for this project to highlight success (desire-based) and less-told stories (portraiture).

Desire-based portraiture was used to develop a deeper understanding of anti-oppressive theory in practice through Janice's successes. Portraiture methodology seeks to blend "aesthetics and empiricism in an effort to capture the complexity, dynamics, and subtlety of human experience and organizational life" (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. xv). In a goal to speak to audiences outside of the academy, portraiture's aim is to be a readable, authentic, and self-reflexive perspective of the participant(s) (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Through participating in and re-investigating the interviews with multiple readings, I created a "portrait" of the participant, which is "a narrative that is at once complex, proactive, and inviting, that attempts to be holistic, revealing the dynamic interaction of values, personality, structure, and history" (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 11). The portrait which I construct "document[s] and illuminate[s] the complexity and detail of a unique experience… The portraitist is very interested in the single case because she believes that embedded in it the reader will discover resonant universal themes" (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 14). It is different from other methods as the portrait includes five features: context, voice, relationship, emergent themes, and aesthetic whole (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997).

Working with one participant through the desire-based portraiture methodology allowed me to spend more time understanding Janice's successful practices and the methodology allowed me to show one, subjective version of her practice to enact change within education. Similar to case study research, portraiture research does not aim to be representative or replicable, but instead aims to enact change by highlighting successes. In education research, portraiture can be used to enact change by "unearthing goodness and highlighting successes, while recognizing that imperfections will always be present within a social system" (Hackmann, 2002, p. 54). Instead of focusing on deficit or damage-centered research (Tuck, 2009), portraiture focuses on success and strength (Hackmann, 2002; Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997), which is one reason why portraiture method was the methodology chosen for this desire-based research.

Portraiture methodology also pays attention to my own investment in the research, biases, and perspectives. This methodology does not hide the subjective nature of research (Hackmann, 2002). As a white settler in Canada, it is also important to note my subject positions and complicities in systemic oppression and colonialism. This is especially important as the participant, Janice, is an East Asian woman. I have also known Janice for years before the research started, which creates a somewhat strange power imbalance when I become the researcher. Having a prior relationship with Janice also made me feel as though I was an insider in some ways and of course an outsider in others as we hold many different subject positions and experiences (Merriam et al., 2001). To try and mitigate these problematics due to my subject positions and position of power as the researcher, I tried my best to ensure that Janice felt comfortable with the information shared. Throughout the interview process she was able to stop and/or refuse to answer questions, share as little information as she felt comfortable with, check the transcripts and edit them for both accuracy and comfort, and I sent her this manuscript prior to publication. I trust that she would tell me if she was uncomfortable with any of my conclusions or actions during the research; however, due to our positionalities, it could have impacted her ability to do so due to discomfort. As the interviews were online, there were also limitations in my ability to create a portrait that is both

representative of Janice's experiences and context, and interesting for the reader; however, it is also an opportunity to conduct research in diverse ways that pay attention to the needs of the participant and researcher. This research is also an important foundation for further research about university educators' anti-oppressive GCE practices in pre-service language teacher education across Canada (forthcoming).

Data collection and analysis

The research question for this project was: What does anti-oppressive theory look like in practice in Canada and how can this be woven into global citizenship education? To answer this question, I interviewed Janice, a Canadian high school language and humanities teacher, three times for a total of approximately 6 hours. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we met online using password-protected online video meetings. I audio-recorded the meetings and transcribed the audio. The transcripts were edited for readability and were checked by Janice and edited further for privacy, comfort, and readability.

During the interviews, I took notes and after each interview, I journaled creating an "Impressionistic Record" (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 188), which helped to develop my thoughts about the interview, hypotheses, changes in my perspectives, and further ponderings for the subsequent interview. After the interviews were complete, I inputted these impressionistic records, the final edited transcripts, and Janice's lesson plans and other teaching materials she graciously shared with me into Nvivo to organize the data and used an iterative and recursive process of analysis, which began in the first interview when she explained the foundation of her anti-oppressive approach as having three pillars.

I used Nvivo to organize the data through an "immersive engagement" method to read the data multiple times and code the data focusing on the 3 different pillars as the codes (Ravitch & Carl, 2021, p. 261). Organizing the data by the 3 pillars allowed me to mold the data into narratives, using my own voice throughout. This research was approved by the Okayama University Faculty of Education Ethics Board..

The portrait

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, Janice and I met online. This meant outside noises like televisions, a dog's bark, and other people's conversations sometimes joined our conversation. I logged onto Zoom and Janice joined the conversation and was patient with my sleepy, jet-lagged replies, as I had recently travelled from Japan to Canada for the research. Janice and I are long-time friends and as we are both educators and social justice advocates, we always have a lot to catch up on. Of course, we complained about COVID-19, both of our governments' failings, and our predictions about the future, before diving into the interview. Although our politics and goals within education are similar, our identities differ. Janice is a cisgender, East Asian, Canadian, upper-middle class woman in her early 30's and has been teaching for more than 6 years. She has a Bachelor of Education, and her master's degree focused on social justice issues in education. She is qualified to teach Ontario (Canada) high school English language and humanities courses.

During the interviews, Janice shared insights with me to help answer my research question "what does anti-oppressive theory look like in practice in Canada?". As she is not an educator or scholar invested in conversations of GCE, she did not have much to say specifically about the field itself to answer the second part of my intended

research question, but provided many insights to help answer, "how can anti-oppressive theory and practice be woven into GCE?". What follows is one portrait that strings together Janice's three-pillar approach to anti-oppressive education.

The three pillars: Sun, soil, and water to ensure the plants thrive

Starting her career in education, Janice was committed to equity education early, and this version of equity education was always "beyond just representation" (Janice) or inclusion, which is a similar critique other social justice scholars have made (Arvin, Tuck, & Morrill, 2013; Kumashiro, 2002). Through our long conversations, Janice shared three main parts to her anti-oppressive approach: representation, challenging power with language and activism, and teaching to the needs of all students. Through further reflection, I felt that if anti-oppressive education was a method to take care of healthy plants, these three pillars would be the sun, soil, and water needed to keep the plants healthy and help them grow, which I've woven as a metaphor throughout this portrait. Throughout our conversations we continued to travel back to these three necessities in healthy growth, which Janice defined as:

1. Representation, or "make sure your texts are reflective of the students in front of you and other diverse communities" (Janice). I felt that this represents the sun that sheds light on the plants, as different levels of light are required, especially those often-forgotten ones.
2. Challenge power with language, or "building students' capacity to be advocates and activists outside of the classroom. So, for example, using the language of social justice in the classroom, incorporating more activism-based kind of issues in education… like really challenging power structures and the status quo" (Janice). I thought this represents the soil or the foundation of anti-oppressive education. This is the content that allows the roots to grow healthy and deep.
3. Teach to the needs of all students or be "mindful of the different students in your classroom, make sure you differentiate, make sure you are providing accommodations when needed" (Janice). This is the water required by plants. Each plant needs different amounts of water, and it is the job of the person watering the plant to understand how much the plant needs to thrive.

Janice shared that her commitment to social justice education started from her own experience in high school. She explained,

> I felt like when I was in high school, I often had to teach myself [about social
>
> issues]. I went to a religious high school, so I learned all this stuff online and then I
>
> went on to pursue education that gave me that language.

Janice's own experiences in education (and her need to go outside of the 'traditional' education offered to her) helped her develop this three-pillar approach.

Shining light on minoritized identities

Through our lengthy conversations, Janice explained that it is important that the texts represent the students' identities and experiences, similar to a culturally relevant or responsive approach (CRRP) that is mandated by the Ontario Ministry of Education.

CRRP "recognize[s] that all students learn in ways that are connected to background, language, family structure, and social or cultural identity" (Ontario, 2020-2021, para. 5) Explained by Janice, teachers should "get to know your students as people" but this is really difficult "because there's so many of them, like how am I supposed to get to know 30 kids?" This conundrum, which many teachers face, is aided by Janice's relaxed and flexible attitude toward her students. She shared that,

> … on the first day or the first week or so, I try to get them comfortable, get to
>
> know me as I think the first week it's more important for them to get to know me
>
> than vice versa, because there is no way I can get to know them on the level that I
>
> want to within the first week… So in the beginning, I usually get them to fill in
>
> their get-to-know-you form… and then a lot of what I learn about them, it's
>
> through their work, it's through their day to day interactions with me in the class.

For Janice to shine light on her students' identities, likes, dislikes, and so on, she learns about them slowly through daily interactions and a get-to-know-you form students submit at the beginning of the course. She also allows her students to get to know her and her expectations, which helps them become comfortable and perhaps open up through the development of a trusting and reciprocal relationship (Wilson, 2008).

> This conversation moved into a conversation about her identity as an East Asian woman, teaching in an area with a high Asian population and with a majority white teaching staff. Although Janice downplayed the importance of a representative teacher, she did share that she didn't have many opportunities to meet racialized teachers and said,

> I wish I had seen more teachers that were like the teacher I would become someday
>
> so that I can just imagine what it would be like. What does it sound like, look like
>
> to have an East Asian teacher in the front of the room teaching me and who I can
>
> relate to?

As an East Asian woman, she brings into the classroom important cultural experiences that majority of the teaching staff at her school don't have. She explained, "I grew up eating Chinese food, chopsticks, whatever, like things that might seem stereotypical, I'm not afraid of talking about it because that's kind of the kids' lives right now". She connects with her students through their shared experiences and hobbies like watching anime or listening to K-pop, which allows her to shine and share light on their interests, identities, and realities. Janice's presence in the classroom and ability to relate with students who share similar minoritized backgrounds allows for systemic change, where the students' teachers continue to remain mostly white.

Although Janice said that the "representation is the easiest thing to do", she still "want[s] to do better in terms of representing their interests and their passions and their identities in the texts that [they] read". One way she did this was by allowing students to choose their own texts, which I consider a kind of horizontal governance, or bringing the students' voices into the decision-making process. However, I asked Janice if she

ever taught in a mainly white class, what would she do? Although representation is important in any CRRP approach, Janice explained that,

> if I was teaching to a class of mostly white students, I actually would really make an effort to find texts with non-white characters… within the confines of what I can do, I will always use texts with non-white characters, probably, because you're right, it is a different… If I had a class full of Asian kids, I would do the same thing… any homogenous group would benefit from learning about vastly different people with different experiences. So I would follow the same logic... Well, OK, that's not totally right, because if it was in a more homogenous group of a racialized minority, then I would also have some identity-affirming stuff.

Extending beyond the representation of students in the class to shine light on the narratives of often forgotten minoritized groups, Janice transcends the kind of representation advocated for by scholars such as Ladson-Billings (1995) and Gay (2000), to ensure all homogenous groups learn about experiences that are not their own, especially shining light on minoritized groups that may not be in the classroom. Explained by Janice, her teaching strategy would necessarily change if the homogenous group was white or racialized. Shining light on the identities that do not have the light shined on them in society is pertinent.

Providing a foundation to grow healthy roots in anti-oppressive education

Janice explained the second pillar of the three-pillar approach, which builds the foundation of

> students' capacity to be advocates and activists outside of the classroom… using the language of social justice in the classroom, incorporating more activism-based kind of issues in education… really challenging power structures and the status quo.

There were three main parts of this second pillar: teaching the language to diagnose the problem (oppression), helping students understand the systemic nature of power and oppression, and actually doing the work of challenging power within the classroom, school, or society. These three parts of this second pillar build a foundation for the 'plants' to grow healthy roots or a healthy foundation to further their growth and thriving.

Janice explained that "we can't afford *not* to do this work". Like Freire and Macedo (2005), Janice understands that no education is apolitical and to avoid this work is to reproduce the systemic oppression within the curriculum. Instead, we should give students the linguistic skills to name, understand, and transform the current oppressive system (Freire & Macedo, 2005). The students are already trying to make sense of the social issues they are connected to through things "like social justice TikTok", but Janice explained,

those nuggets of information are not sufficient in getting them to understand those

terms. But they want that language. They want to be able to do something about the

things that they're witnessing, like climate crisis and race, like race-based

environmental disasters.

To talk about these issues, Janice explained that it is first important to diagnose the problem through language.

But if you can't even diagnose the problem, you can't pinpoint what the issue is,

where the power imbalance is, et cetera, where the injustice is, there's a barrier,

like there's an end point in which you can, you know, that your actions or your

words can enact any change.

As explained by Freire and Macedo (2005), teaching students in the language classroom requires educators to teach skills such as reading and writing, but more importantly, it requires students to think critically about sociohistorical discourses and language, or giving students the foundation to think, read, and write about oppression. Through critical literacy activities in her class, Janice explained that she helps students diagnose the problem of oppression by teaching the language to describe systemic oppression which helps "students empower themselves with a language that will allow them to understand themselves as active subjects in history" (McLaren & Da Silva, 1991, p. 42). It is this pillar of teaching about systemic oppression and critical thinking that Janice is the most skilled in, as she studied the language and theory of systemic oppression in her graduate studies. This is the foundation or soil that creates a healthy foundation for students to learn and grow to develop a "critical comprehension of reality" by learning the language to describe systemic oppression (Freire & Macedo, 2005, p. 157).

One of the foundational aspects of teaching this language, Janice explained, is helping students understand power and that power and oppression are systemic, which I saw as the second part of this second pillar or the foundational soil to the growth of the plants. She explained at length this process,

… they knew right away what I meant when I said power, because I would say, do

you feel powerful in this classroom? They'd be like you know yeah or whatever.

Who has more power though, me or you? And they can articulate exactly why I

have more power, what gives me that power over them, what gives me the

authority to have that power over them... They know all the ways in which their

lives are constrained… there's so many people that have power over them. Look at

the pandemic right, like go back to school, stay at home, passing, failing, their

mental health, isolation, all of that, so much power over their lives… And then

through the text that they read, they will learn more and more about how power

works. And there's always a group that has more power over another... How do we

undo that power imbalance and power relationship? … I was thinking we need a

power framework and then every text thereafter… They will apply it over and over

again and learn it... increasingly develop their skills of using social justice language

and being able to analyze texts through this framework of power and oppression…

Within this second part, Janice also spoke about the need to uncover these issues on a systemic level, without getting stuck or focusing on self-reflection, which she explained is all too often done in teacher professional development (PD). She explained that the PD focused so much on individual teachers' identities in relation to their students. Following the conceptual framework explained earlier, it is important to teach and focus on systemic oppression instead of focusing on individual identities, and to do this, Janice explained that we should first talk about the problems or results of systemic oppression.

These are the consequences, impacts, effects of white supremacy in our schools…

I'm almost kind of like problem first… the gist of it is you're not still having to

work with teachers to just admit the white supremacy exists… Like get that

knowledge, that understanding piece out of the way, and then let's talk strategy,

let's talk tactics, thinking of going to war or something. Like if you're going to

fight a battle, if you're still questioning whether there is a battle to be fought then

you're not talking about how to fight the battle, right?

This second section of the second pillar moved into the third part, which I understood as actually doing the work of challenging power within the classroom, school, and society. Janice explained that teachers often get involved in equity work because it feels good, but it does not actually change the system. She explained,

I did participate in my school's equity group and helped develop some teacher PD.

That made me feel good. But now that I'm talking to you, I'm like, yeah, it made

me feel good because it didn't help. Because it served the board's ability to check

off a box... That's what makes it tempting to do and keep doing. Other people are

doing it [real, interventions to systemic inequities]… And that's the work that I

want to support and pour more energy into. Because it doesn't feel performative.

Like it feels like that very practical intervention.

This is intimately connected to the conversation she explained about focusing on systemic oppression, rather than individual identities, echoed in the conceptual framework. She explained that when we center ourselves, it becomes "a self-perpetuating cycle of doing nothing. Like it literally reinforces inaction because you're always reflecting on yourself, it's never-ending". Focusing on individual prejudice and discrimination ignores the systemic barriers people face and sees individual success as proof that systemic oppression isn't as bad as it is (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017). Instead, helping students understand systemic oppression and the ways they are implicated in it can help students be empowered to act to transform systemic oppression.

Giving appropriate amounts of water based on the needs of each student

When Janice first explained this third pillar, she used the words "accommodating diverse students' needs", but later she corrected herself. She explained,

> I should've just said being inclusive of all learners because when you think about accommodating it's always like, oh *five* students in your class need accommodations. Actually, *all* students need it in some way, regardless of what their achievement or progress happens to be… students learn differently.

It is this pillar that is the most challenging, explained by Janice, and where she aims to spend more of her energy. Like giving plants water, it is difficult to judge how much water is enough, or how much is too much. Not giving enough water, Janice realized that she was teaching to her university-pathway students, but equity education should not only be for the academic or university-streamed students, it should be for all learners. She explained her thinking,

> Equity education always seems to be like the area for academic and university-pathway students… the focus, always seems to be incorporating and building upon more and more complex ideas of how to address social injustice in those courses. Whereas the college and applied stream and the locally developed and essential stream is more focused on… build[ing] on the students' deficits. Like that's the idea like, oh, of course they can't tackle social justice ideas. I'm paraphrasing, this is my perception. We need to make sure they can read and write first, that kind of thing, but I can see kind of why it's become that way. I've certainly also perpetuated those kind of ideas because I've been like pretty much teaching exclusively in academic and university pathway, sometimes by choice and sometimes by circumstance… And then now I'm starting to see that you can't just serve one pathway of students.

This is intimately connected to the second pillar, as the language and critical thinking taught must reach *all* learners and their diverse identities and experiences. We talked about what it means to be inclusive of each student's needs and experiences through this anti-oppressive approach and she explained,

> … make sure my pedagogical practices ensure every student makes improvements and develop in their skill sets, while also incorporating that framework, like still that activism, education type of thread into the curriculum and the materials I use and the conversations we have… why do we not see students developing, you know, increasingly, progressively developing skill sets? … that's an equity issue to me…Because the well, first of all, we had to come to a common understanding that our regular pedagogical practices *do* leave students behind. So that's already

inequitable to begin with. So that's targeting the inequities within the school system and the structures and all of that.

"What are these practices that are leaving students behind," I asked. She explained,

> Well, it's basically how we went through schooling, right. The most obvious one would be every student is expected to learn at the same pace, do assessments at the same time, not get opportunities to try them again... Like students who… maybe on the first assessment get a level one and then are taught the same way as the other students who are achieving like level four on the first try, and are expected to just get it, like eventually you will get it… [But there are more effective] assumptions about learning, that it is individual, that everyone has their own timeline, that mastery is the goal, that students should be allowed to retake and retry because… the whole point of failure is what you can learn from it and improve. It's not just like you failed that's it.

In this approach, Janice explained that students can work at their own pace and re-take assessments until they "mastered" the skill. This pedagogical approach is truly inclusive and individualized in that it allows teachers to think critically about what supports each student needs to master the skill. This is also interconnected to the first pillar of shining light on minoritized identities, as engaging students and their diverse learning needs requires teachers to think about and incorporate the students' identities and experiences. She and her colleagues were able to put this approach of thinking about the students' diverse needs into practice during the pandemic by including pre-made videos in different modules, which the students could watch and re-watch using a scaffolded, guided-notetaking approach. When Janice spoke about the way they implemented this program, she always had real passion in her voice. Although inclusion of different students' needs is not easy, it's where she wants to dedicate her time.

Janice explained that it took her time to reach this point of self-reflection, where she realized that she wasn't serving her students the best way she could. She explained,

> … if someone were to ask me again, what did you do, what interventions did you put into place for a kid who's achieving like fifty-five, and if I did have those interventions and they continue to achieve it, then OK, then we have a different conversation, right? But if I don't even have those interventions because I don't know how to do them, right… Then, like…you're right. Like, I have nothing in place to support the students who are achieving a different level. I have nothing in place to make the material more accessible.

She explained that these supports included not only self-pacing and mastery checks, but other concrete supports for students. Again, this is intimately connected to knowing

students and their diverse identities and needs, but it is also anticipating diversity in the classroom.

> They're always saying, like, you need to meet your students first, then you
> [differentiate], but then sometimes there are some physical, concrete things that
> you could have created beforehand, like vocabulary lists for your units or pre-made
> notes for certain lessons or that kind of thing, right, like you gotta prep that. So,
> start with creating the resources and then removing the supports to support the
> students who don't need the support… instead of going with least support and then
> ramp up the support… Everyone will be supported if the most marginalized are
> supported in your class.

"If the most marginalized are supported," explained by Janice, everyone will be supported. This is an important goal and way to achieve this last pillar of providing the right about of support.

It is also important to note that academic levels are intimately connected to systemic barriers both within and outside of schools, which are connected to the students' identities and the power hierarchies in society. Racialized and working-class students are over-represented in special education and are streamed into the lower level, college/workplace classes, which is connected to the colonial, Eurocentric school system (McLaren & da Silva, 1991) as well as deficit-thinking based on teachers' biases of marginalized identities (García & Guerra, 2004). Janice's method of individualizing learning so that ALL students can succeed ensures that students can face fewer barriers within her classroom. As explained through Janice's stories, starting out with lots of water for the plants and then checking to see what level of water is needed is really important in this last pillar in order to remove the systemic barriers many students face.

Discussion

The three-pillar approach that Janice explained through our time together started with the "easiest part", which is representation or shining light on differences, especially minoritized identities. She explained that this pillar includes getting to know the students, but also having the students get to know you to build comfort and trust. Allowing proper sunlight or emphasis on diversity can help the students grow. This means including texts and materials in the English classroom that go beyond the dominant group's identities, or shining the light on those forgotten, shaded areas. This also meant that if the classroom was a homogenous group, she would ensure that there were both identity-affirming (in the case of marginalized homogenous groups) and also different non-dominant identities represented. This would necessitate different methods, depending on if the homogenous group were a white or minoritized group.

In the second pillar, Janice showcased the most knowledge and skill. The foundation of her anti-oppressive approach is the soil to the plants. Teaching the language of power and method to analyze texts in the English class through the lens of power and oppression in order to challenge power and oppression was where Janice spent a lot of her focus in her beginning years of teaching to build the students' foundational knowledge, or to strengthen their roots. Similar to Freire's approach to critical literacy, Janice helps students build their capacity to be advocates for themselves

and understand systemic oppression by educating about the language and understanding power and oppression through texts. Focusing on the systems, not individual identities, Janice advocates for a problem-first approach to focus on the practical solutions, rather than getting stuck in identity-politic arguments or whether or not oppression exists.

Lastly, the third pillar is where Janice explained the need to include all learners in conversations of power and oppression, which means teaching to the most marginalized from a strengths-based perspective and believing they too can and should learn about systemic oppression. The amount of water we feed our plants can determine whether they thrive or suffer neglect. Who and how to provide proper water is an ongoing challenge for Janice, as she and all other teachers went through the academic/university pathway to become teachers, so understanding students who require more supports requires more effort. One important way to help ensure students' success is to ensure there are enough supports at the beginning of the year, and the teacher can remove any supports that are not needed once they understand the students' diverse needs and identities.

Through the portraiture, we can see that Janice is a passionate social justice advocate and has many successes in her classroom. She is clearly skilled in the second pillar based on her university career, but wants to spend time on the third to ensure each of her students are learning and growing in the classroom. Although desire-based research portraiture asks us to focus on the successes, in reality, there are some weaknesses in any educator's approach and areas for growth. When speaking broadly about anti-oppressive education, the conversation often went back to the second pillar as a kind of default. Janice also shared a few lesson plans with me which showed her anti-oppressive approach, all of which focused on this second pillar or the foundation of her anti-oppressive approach. There was space for the third pillar through diverse formats like videos and group work. She also provided a note-taking template to help scaffold the note-taking process for students while they watched two documentaries. However, the main focus was on the second pillar. Of course, I did not witness the lessons and the lessons did not explain the classroom method in detail; however, it seemed through the three interviews we had together that the second pillar was the default of anti-oppressive education for Janice and myself too as I find the third pillar is also my own weakness. As she explained in the interviews, she is still working to improve her abilities in the third pillar, but it is where she has struggled the most. Through a desire-based portraiture approach, we can highlight Janice's success and also make room for the growth needed to continue improving her practice.

Within her classroom, horizontal governance is one way Janice practices anti-oppressive GCE. Although Janice had not heard the term, she practiced this through her three-pillar approach. Janice connected with students and valued their input and choice, shared rubrics/assessment guidelines in advance, and allowed students to re-take assessments. These strategies give students a more equitable footing and voice in the class. Of course, the teacher will always hold the power; however, these simple strategies allowed for some horizontal governance within the hierarchical system. Further research will explore anti-oppressive horizontal governance methods to bring this important conversation into the field of anti-oppressive GCE.

Although Janice was skeptical of self-reflective approaches to anti-oppressive education, she had her students thinking about their own identities through her anti-oppressive approach. However, as she explained in our interviews, it cannot remain within this individual perspective. The conversations of individual identities reflected in the texts read in the English class always went back to the oppressive structures and power dynamics in society. As explained in the conceptual framework, focusing on

individual prejudice and discrimination can ignore the systemic barriers people face. Janice's concerns of the concentration on self-reflexive activities echo the research which explains "that self-reflexivity that focuses only on the 'what' (privilege of positionality) and not the 'how' (the way power circulates) can in fact deepen knowledge hierarchies" (Langdon & Agyeyomah, 2014, p. 48). When self-reflexivity remains superficial, the results may lead to "disconnection, simplistic acceptance of privilege, or a desire to act in ways divorced of any analysis of power" (Langdon & Agyeyomah, 2014, p. 57).

As explained by Sensoy and DiAngelo (2017), oppression is systemic which means that it is insistent and throughout all parts of the education system, and it can be argued this is a greater issue within language education, as language has and continues to be used as a tool for colonialism and imperialism. As explained by Stein (2015), previous researchers and educators who are practicing anti-oppressive global citizenship education are doing so through criticality, politicization, and historicizing complex systemic issues, which can be seen through Janice's three-pillar approach. However, while Stein (2015) introduces anti-oppressive education, the focus is often on the content, without mention of the teaching practice. The three-pillar approach explained fills this gap to include important pedagogical considerations for real, systemic change. Teaching practices that exclude learners cannot be anti-oppressive. While English language teachers can bring diverse materials into the classroom and teach the language of power and oppression, it is also important that teachers are using anti-oppressive pedagogical approaches that ensure each student is able to learn and grow at their own pace.

Conclusion

Through our conversations, Janice shared many experiences, stories, and hardships regarding her anti-oppressive teaching practice. Before she started teaching she realized the importance of an anti-oppressive education that not highlights the representation of marginalized identities in the English classroom, but also teaches students the language of power and oppression so that students can be advocates for themselves (Freire, 2020). After getting used to her work as an educator, this focus on teaching students the language has evolved into the importance of prioritizing real, systemic equity issues in the class and school. Including each student's diverse learning needs and abilities is where Janice is pouring her efforts, but her anti-oppressive approach which includes the three pillars continues to evolve as she gains new and different experiences.

Janice works against the curricula which is "framed by dominant western discourses" (Pashby & da Costa, 2021, p. 385), to help students understand power and oppression through both content and practice. This research adds to the anti-oppressive GCE empirical research explained by Pashby and da Costa (2021), which focuses on teachers' perspectives and focuses on a desire-based approach through portraiture. This research is unique in that it focuses on what is working well in the class, instead of the too-often deficit perspective in research which focuses on what is wrong (Tuck, 2009). Using portraiture to highlight the successes in Janice's English classroom can help other educators reflect on their own teaching environments and how to support healthy growth in their classroom. By focusing on what is working well through desire-based portraiture, we can build teaching practices that speak against the oppressive, colonial systems.

While bringing all three pillars of this anti-oppressive approach to education are not easy, it is necessary for a truly anti-oppressive GCE curriculum. Following the metaphor of the healthy plant developed in the portrait, the proper sun, soil, and water are necessary for the plants to thrive. However, there is also the air which plays an important role in the nutrition of the plant. If the air has pollution, it will be difficult for the plant to survive. The atmosphere or systems of oppression are woven through every aspect of the classroom. Whether it is the language educators use or the assumptions they make, the media students have access to, and so on, the systems of oppression are always circulating. Through Janice's three-pillar approach, she helps the students grow despite the pollution that exists within the school and society. With strong roots and sunshine to highlight often-forgotten identities, she continues to strive to add the right amount of water to ensure each student thrives. When the atmosphere in the classroom is healthy, the students can filter out the pollution they often encounter through the systems they are embedded in. And like healthy plants, when they become independent and strong, they are able to convert the carbon dioxide from the air into clean, breathable air for those around them.

Notes

1. The participant's name and any other identifying information has been changed to protect her identity.

Disclosure statement

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Notes on contributor

Shawna M. Carroll is an Associate Professor at Okayama University in the Graduate School of Education. Before arriving in Japan, Shawna completed her teacher training from Kindergarten to Grade 12 in Ontario, Canada, and also taught at the postsecondary level within education and women & gender studies departments. Her research expertise focuses on anti-oppressive and anti-colonial English teaching and research methods in language education. Most recently, Shawna is the author of *Anti-oppressive global citizenship education theory and practice in pre-service teacher education* (2021) and *"Language lives in our bodies not just in our heads": Embodied reading and becoming beyond the molar* (2022).

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