

## **Adapting to Canada's Need for Human Trafficking Preventative Education**

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As undeniably beautiful as Canada is, it also has been identified as a country rampant with human trafficking and this horror, hidden in plain sight, can no longer be ignored (Public Safety Canada, 2024). Fortunately, educational landscapes are beginning to adapt in response. In 2021, the Ontario Ministry of Education mandated all publicly funded schools to receive training on human trafficking, with a focus on recognizing signs of sexual exploitation in their students, and to deliver curriculum on this ever-growing problem (Ministry of Education, 2023). As a teacher educator and doctoral student in education specializing in curriculum, I will describe my doctoral work with in-service teachers and discuss other areas to raise awareness, including faculties of education that must prepare pre-service teacher candidates for the responsibility that awaits them, and more institutions who serve vulnerable groups.

### **Curriculum in Context to the World We Live In**

Ontario has the highest reported incidences of sexual exploitation in all of Canada (Statistics Canada, 2023). The Canadian Centre to End Human Trafficking (2022) tracked data from 2019 to 2022, that highlighted Alberta, British Columbia, and Quebec followed, in order of number of incidences reported to the hotline (p. 1). Due to the fear of repercussions, this crime often goes underreported and unnoticed by teachers who have victims still regularly attending school, as well as by loved ones (Public Safety Canada, 2024). The definition of human trafficking by Public Safety Canada (2024) is “recruiting, moving, or holding victims to exploit them for profit, usually for sexual reasons or forced labour. Traffickers can control and pressure victims by force or through threats, including mental and emotional abuse and manipulation” (para. 2). For my dissertation, I will focus on sexual exploitation, using the term human trafficking to show my ongoing awareness of the often-overlapping occurrences with the other types of trafficking, including drug and labour trafficking.

In 2021 Ontario’s Ministry of Education released Policy/Program Memorandum 166 (PPM 166), which mandated that all school staff be aware of, and act on signs of students affected by trafficking; partake in training on human trafficking; and for boards to develop anti-sex trafficking protocols. Our current curriculum also expects educators of 4–12 year olds to teach about healthy versus unhealthy relationships in the primary and junior divisions, as traffickers are often masked as intimate partners and best friends, and provides language for victims to identify family members who are coercing them into unhealthy behaviours. The concepts of exploitation and coercion are introduced in the intermediate and senior divisions, with some suggestions to prevent and resolve these issues.

The Ministry of Education in Ontario (2021) highlighted our urgency to act in socially responsible ways, as “children and youth are among those most at risk of being targeted by sex traffickers. The average age of recruitment into sex trafficking in Canada is just 13 years old” (para. 7). This average coincides with Louie’s (2016) finding in Alberta, that children as young as *seven* can be lured. Since children and youth spend the majority of their weekdays in school, the hope is that schooling is not just about schooling but offers curriculum in context to the world we live in (Grumet, 2006). Understandably, learning and teaching about the nuances of human trafficking is much more multifaceted and emotionally jarring than most other curriculum

subjects, thus needing research that understands how educators are grappling with this newly imposed responsibility. For this purpose, my research question is: “How are teachers in Thunder Bay, Ontario experiencing human trafficking curriculum-as-planned versus as-lived?”

The two differ, as Fuchs (2019), explained in reference to the work of curriculum scholar, Ted Aoki:

Curriculum-as-planned [is] the given and mandated content as described in curriculum documents that guides the “what” of an educational experience[,] typically made by outsiders ... and travels to the classroom to be taught by a teacher. While the curriculum-as-planned lays out goals and objectives for the year, it [cannot predict the diversity of] students that are expected to achieve those goals nor the experiences of a teacher working towards them. These student and teacher experiences, being unique, diverse and dynamic elements of any classroom, are another type of curriculum—a lived one. This curriculum-as-lived encapsulates the hopes, dreams, motivations and curiosity of pupils, their experiences in a school setting, and their past histories, regardless of what the planned curriculum indicates. (p. 1)

The Minister of Education (2021) who released PPM 166 ensures that the Ontario curriculum is not in fact not made by outsiders, but “informed by the Ministry of Education’s Anti-Human Trafficking Working Group, which includes persons with lived experience of being trafficked, frontline community-based organizations that support survivors, Indigenous communities and organizations, representatives from Black and racialized communities, newcomers and students” (Lecce, 2021, para. 8). These collaborative efforts are well-intended and necessary, given how ubiquitous trafficking is, however we have yet to learn how teachers in the classroom are grappling with the curriculum.

### **Emerging Research Design**

To ask our teachers to deliver a human trafficking curriculum involves reflection of it and of themselves to be able to act in responsive and responsible ways. Learning and teaching about human trafficking is work “for those who are concerned with creating safe and just spaces which embrace equity, responsibility, sharing, and authentic educational pursuits ... doing what humans should be doing” (Steinberg, 2022, p. 211). Giving voice to key actors through narrative inquiry can offer knowledge that might be transferable to support a widespread of educators tasked with this responsibility. These stories, as Eisner (1988) shared in his foreword of Connelly and Clandinin’s (1998) book *Teachers as Curriculum Planners*, offer readers an understanding of education, with “a human face” (p. xi), where readers can imagine the teacher in the classroom and are gifted their perception of their work. These stories of experience are the knowledge we need to support schools and each teacher in the classroom, in their attempts to provide effective preventative education, because “education is a development within, by, and for experience” (Dewey, 1938, p. 28).

This study hopes to share the successes of educators already delivering preventative education, as well as barriers to innovative, supportive, and long-lasting solutions. While Ontario is currently the only province with a mandate, other provinces may soon look to our work to see what is effective, as the need to develop their own curriculum and anti-sex trafficking policies becomes undisputable. The methods of collecting stories will include an initial city-wide survey of all in-service K-12 teachers, and then interviews with interested participants who wish to

share further. The open-ended survey will be one question, asking teachers to describe in any length, their experience(s) with the human trafficking curriculum as-planned and as-lived, with the brief description by Fuchs (2019), quoted above. Mertova and Webster (2020) eloquently shared the analogy of broadening versus burrowing, where the latter involves interviews that offer researchers more insight to “identify human-centered research issues” (p. 73). The broad survey tool could serve as both an opportunity for otherwise unaware teachers of this study to engage and consider the curriculum-as-planned versus as-lived tension for the first time perhaps, as well as create an outlet to further share in an interview if they wish. Braun et al. (2021) explained that “fully qualitative surveys [using open-ended questions only] *can* produce the rich and complex accounts of the type of sense-making typically of interest to qualitative researchers—such as participants’ subjective experiences, narratives, practices, positionings, and discourses” (p. 641).

I will use Zoom to transcribe any virtual interviews and those in-person will be done manually. I will then offer each participant the opportunity to member check (Chase, 2017; Erdmann & Potthoff, 2023) and encourage them to add, remove, or edit their stories as they wish. I will also request feedback on the first draft of interpretations to offer “an opportunity for reflexive collaboration” (Tracy, 2010, p. 844). I will review transcripts of both the interviews and survey responses multiple times before coding to become familiar with the data. Lyons and Kubler LaBoskey (2002) termed data analysis as “the sense-making process” (p. 166) and this aligns well with coding conducted manually. Kim (2016) advised that programs are not “particularly useful for narrative inquiry” (p. 208). Analytical coding is a time for “interpretation and reflection on meaning” (Richards, 2015, p. 135) of individual transcripts, and eventually, of the transcripts taken together as a whole, when codes will be combined into comprehensive categories that can potentially be applied across interviews and survey responses. I will identify themes by looking for similarities between participants’ stories and perspectives, and I will also be on the lookout for discrepancies that might be revealing (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The latter, also known as disconfirming evidence, provides further credibility when shared as it displays that reality is multiple and complex (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

I intend to combine the data analysis methods of thematic and narrative, in what Zelčāne and Pipere’s (2023) described as the pluralistic approach to qualitative data analysis. They explain that thematic analysis often answers the what of a research question, showing themes across participant experiences, whereas narrative analysis offers up the how, showing the behind the scenes to stories of success and those of struggle. Frost et al. (2011) explained that “a pluralistic qualitative approach to data analysis can aid the quest to ‘know more’ about a phenomenon by providing a more holistic, multilayered understanding of data” (p. 93). To represent the evidence, I will try to ensure that a range of experiences are on display and that each participant is directly quoted in the findings. I will include excerpts from the participants’ interviews and surveys that might draw the attention of readers, helping them to gain a sense of, and empathy for, participants’ experiences (Josselson et al., 2007). My hope is that the direct quotes will create “verisimilitude, statements that produce for the readers the feeling that they have experienced, or could experience” (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p. 129). The findings will be descriptive, offering rich details of the educators’ experiences with the policy, training, and curriculum, as well as how the latter has come to life in their classroom, highlighting what worked and what barriers exist in the delivery of curriculum-as-planned (Barkhuizen, 2022). My interpretation of the data will be rooted in listening “deeply to what people have to say, to see

beyond what they do in order to grasp the meanings that their doings have for them” (Eisner, as cited in Connelly & Clandinin, 1988, p. x).

There is no foreseeable harm associated with participating in this research, however given that the participants are all in-service teachers at the time of the study, if any distress surfaces during the sharing of their experiences, I will encourage them to access the mental health services available to them. All participants will be adults and not considered part of a vulnerable population due to their age. There is no deception in this study as my intentions are clear, with a keen awareness of relational ethics, where we engage in a reciprocal relationship of responsibility to, and for, one another and the readers of this study (Caine et al., 2020).

### **Interdisciplinary Awareness in Adult Education**

As a relatively new contract lecturer and faculty advisor in the Faculty of Education department of Lakehead University, I was permitted to co-create a seminar for all Bachelor of Education (BEd) students this past academic year. The seminar was a mandatory component of their teacher training, regardless of their subject matter expertise. My friend, a provincial trainer on human trafficking, enthusiastically agreed to deliver the seminar. The ideal is to offer survivor-led training and this is someone with lived experience and a wealth of current knowledge, since she also counsels as a frontline worker with sexually exploited youth in our area. While the ideal is a survivor centered, trauma informed approach, I was reminded in my Master of Education program by my peers that we cannot expect these brave individuals to tackle work alone and so, teachers in classrooms without lived experience need to link arms. PPM 166 clearly delineates the need for this seminar, since soon teacher candidates will be in schools as working professionals, expected to know about human trafficking in order to respond to potential situations. However, many of these BEd students are also prime targets for traffickers, especially if they find themselves teaching in a new place, missing home, and vulnerable to what these keen predators will notice and offer. My role in this preventative education piece was to assess the student feedback to refine our future seminars and inform the framework of other programs, to be as beneficial as possible. As much of my training has been with Kris Carlson, our provincial trainer, I was not surprised to see how deeply engaged the learners were with her story and pedagogy; our soon-to-be teachers are now more knowledgeable about what is hiding in plain sight and are comforted in knowing they have us to continue the conversation with. Although the statistics on human trafficking are staggering, these bonds offer hope to be able to help.

As an instructor at my local college, I am also taking advantage of the opportunity to present to staff in our yearly Academic Showcase, to raise awareness on the prevalence of human trafficking and share how discussion of it can be woven into their many disciplines. This is similar to the “Lunch and Learn” I offered to the education faculty at my university. I have also been a guest speaker on this topic for instructors who wanted support taking up this work, and have been invited to speak with public health nurses in our region at their next conference. I wholeheartedly understand this is not easy work to engage in, but it is necessary to educate to reduce and ultimately eliminate human trafficking.

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