TEACHING ENGLISH IN THE GLOBAL AGE: CULTURAL CONVERSATIONS

by

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Globalization and English-language predominance situate English teachers as increasingly influential mediators of both language and culture. In the iconic multicultural hub of Ontario, Canada, teachers work within a causal nexus of social theories of language, the information and communication technologies revolution, and unprecedented global interdependency. Changes in English curriculum reflect these trends, from references to “global citizenship,” to stress on “intercultural communication,” “cultural sensitivity,” and Information and Communication Technology (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007). Delegated gatekeepers of both linguistic and critical literacies, and facing new questions about the purposes and priorities of their discipline, Ontario English teachers must negotiate the divide between an inherited curriculum and the impacts of sociocultural transformation on changing literacy needs.

To contribute to a professional dialogue about teaching English in a multicultural society and global age, this thesis presents findings from interviews with fifteen Ontario secondary English teachers. The focal question, “How is English changing?” introduces a range of pressing issues, such as: displacing the canon, practicing intercultural communication, balancing a democratic discourse, or “common culture,” with respect for diverse values, and managing opposing views and resistance to English curriculum change.
The data reveal how English teachers across levels of experience occupy contrasting positions on the curriculum change debate. In part, this can be explained in terms of epistemological orientations. The participants represent three categories: Adaptation, Applied Research / Collaborative Inquiry, and Activism, each by turn more geared toward reconceptualizing English for social diversity and global consciousness. Beyond these classifications, the teachers reflect dissonant perceptions, sometimes personal ambivalence, on the changing role of text choice, and written and oral dialogue in the English classroom. From passionate defenses of Shakespeare, to radical measures to revamp book lists for cultural relevance, to remarkable illustrations of curriculum linked with global consciousness and civic action, the responses of the English teachers delineate zones of difficulty, change, and possibility. They help, too, to catch sight of a new horizon: the English classroom as a space for “cultural conversation” (Applebee, 1994) where canon- and teacher-centred dialogue give way to intertextual (Bakhtin, 1981; Kristeva, 1980) and intercultural (R. Young, 1996) transactions.
Acknowledgements

I doubt I could have predetermined the trajectory between this completed thesis and the initial ideas with which it began. The “pattern in the carpet” gradually emerged through a series of conversations. Many of these were with my supervisor, Dr. Mary Kooy, who supported me in every facet of my research, and helped me to maintain a vision of my purpose as I progressed through each stage of the Ph.D. I will always be deeply grateful to Mary for her boundless positivity, hospitality and friendship, and for her inspiring example as a champion of dialogic learning.

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I thank the Associate Dean of Teacher Education at OISE, Dr. Mark Evans, for listening to my thesis argument and offering valuable suggestions, especially with regard to globalization and the Ontario curriculum documents.

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I owe much gratitude to all of the English teachers who participated in this study. Their willingness to take time from the heavy demands of teaching to be interviewed for this
thesis was generous. Their carefully articulated perspectives will not only inform important educational research but remind us how richly they serve society.

In the course of teaching English for nearly a decade, I have enjoyed the privilege of teaching hundreds of students. Through the conversations and experiences we shared, I learned from them, and found my way to the questions posed in this thesis. Dear students, I am always inspired by you.

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I stumbled upon gifts…

tundra flowers,

starfish,

desert water,

challenging my reason

with their sweet assurance.
# Table of Contents

Abstract ..................................................................................................................................... ii  
Acknowledgements .................................................................................................................. iv  
Dedication ................................................................................................................................. x  
Chapter One: Locating the English Teacher on a Map of Discourses ............................. 1  
  A Closer Look at the Local Context: Reading the Ontario English Curriculum ....... 4  
Unfolding Questions and Qualitative Research Methodology ...................................... 9  
  Existential Ethnography .................................................................................................. 12  
  Narrative .......................................................................................................................... 12  
  Dialogue .......................................................................................................................... 13  
  Critical Discourse Analysis ......................................................................................... 14  
Concepts for Dialogue on English Teaching in the Global Age .................................. 15  
  Globalization ................................................................................................................... 17  
  Linguistic Globalization ............................................................................................. 19  
  Literary Globalization .................................................................................................. 22  
  Culture ............................................................................................................................. 24  
  Classics and Canon ....................................................................................................... 27  
  Intertextuality and Heteroglossia .............................................................................. 29  
  Intercultural Communication ................................................................................... 31  
  Critical Travelogue ..................................................................................................... 34  
My Critical Travelogue ....................................................................................................... 36  
Chapter Two: Literature Review ......................................................................................... 40  
  Preface ............................................................................................................................. 40  
  What is English? A Curriculum Theory Question ...................................................... 40  
  English at the Centre of Critical Literacy ................................................................... 43  
  Literary Theory’s Puzzles and Problems for English Teaching .................................. 45  
  Postcolonial or Multicultural English? ........................................................................ 48  
  English and Culture: Defining Disciplinary Boundaries .............................................. 50  
  Canons: Renewed Controversy? .................................................................................. 53  
  Holding Patterns and Unfolding Possibilities .............................................................. 56  
  English Teacher Education and Professional Development ....................................... 61  
  What Should English Become? A Curriculum Change Question ................................ 63  
Chapter Three: Methodology ............................................................................................... 67  
  Preface ............................................................................................................................. 67  
  PART ONE: THEORY: Dialogue and Conversation for Reflection and Analysis ....... 68  
  Of Dialogue, Critical Theory, and Border Sharing ...................................................... 72  
  PART TWO: THE STUDY: The Structure of the Study .............................................. 74  
  Participants’ Teaching Contexts .................................................................................... 77  
  Ontario English Department: Teaching English in an Old School, Formerly White -  
    Now Black, in a Suburb with a Depressed Socioeconomic Index .............................. 77  
  Sabrina, James, Gen, and Art: Teaching English at Schools in a Catholic School Board,  
    in a Mixed Race Middle Class Suburb ..................................................................... 78  
  Paolo: Teaching in a Public School Board in the Same Mixed Race Middle Class  
    Suburb ......................................................................................................................... 79
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Pages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Three</td>
<td>Rhea: New, largely Muslim-population school, upper middle class suburb</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpreting the Data</td>
<td>80</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Collection</td>
<td>81</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Analysis Procedures</td>
<td>81</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Validity and Relevance</td>
<td>83</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusions</td>
<td>84</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Four: Representations of the Data</td>
<td>86</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preface</td>
<td>86</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PART ONE: THE PARTICIPANTS</td>
<td>Ties to Educational Research and Change Initiatives:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three Participant Profiles</td>
<td>87</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical Travelogues: Discovering Teacher Narratives</td>
<td>89</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical Travelogue: Paolo</td>
<td>90</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical Travelogue: Rhea</td>
<td>91</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical Travelogue: Gen</td>
<td>94</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical Travelogue (A Beginning): Lucia</td>
<td>97</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three Models of Local Curriculum Reform</td>
<td>98</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adaptation</td>
<td>100</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sabrina and James</td>
<td>101</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Ontario English Department: Adaptation</td>
<td>103</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applied Research / Collaborative Inquiry</td>
<td>104</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paolo as teacher researcher</td>
<td>106</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhea as teacher researcher</td>
<td>107</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ontario English Department: Applied research / Collaborative inquiry</td>
<td>107</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activism: Gen and Art as Social Activist Teacher Researchers</td>
<td>110</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changing Roles of English Teachers</td>
<td>112</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PART TWO: OVERARCHING THEMES OF THE DATA Pictures Moving and Still:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Displacing the Canon</td>
<td>114</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Things as They Are: Old Coexisting With New</td>
<td>114</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Debating Canon Displacement and the Place of Multicultural Texts</td>
<td>121</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shakespeare’s Exceptionality</td>
<td>128</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criteria for Displacing Old Texts</td>
<td>133</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rethinking Cultural Relevance</td>
<td>135</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resistance to Change</td>
<td>142</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linking English Curriculum to Social and Global Justice?</td>
<td>144</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Crossings: Intertextual Challenges</td>
<td>147</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Internet Generation</td>
<td>147</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting Critical Linguistic Literacy Needs</td>
<td>150</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Learning Styles: Positivist Paradigms, Oracy, and Critical Thinking</td>
<td>153</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Common Cultural Capital or Barrier? Attitudes to English</td>
<td>154</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Going There: Controversial Issues</td>
<td>157</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women’s roles</td>
<td>157</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homosexuality</td>
<td>159</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion</td>
<td>159</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pedagogy for Intercultural Dialogue in the English Classroom: Exemplars</td>
<td>163</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers as Learners</td>
<td>166</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Five: Conversations with Ontario English-Literature Teachers c. 2007</td>
<td>168</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Cultural Conversations
Cultural Conversations in English Classrooms
Cultural Conversations in Teacher Education
Cultural Conversations for Professional Development
My Critical Travelogue [Continued]
References
Figures

Figure 1. Kachru’s Typology of World Englishes [Figure created by author for poster presentation, IAIMTE Conference, March 2007]. .................................................................20
Figure 2. Sonntag’s Modified Typology of Global English [Figure created by author for poster presentation IAIMTE Conference, March 2007]. .................................................21
Figure 3. Literary Globalization and the Canadian English Teacher [Figure created by author for PowerPoint presentation, 8th Annual Dean’s Graduate Student Research Conference, OISE]..............................................................................................................................24
Figure 4. Kristeva’s Axes of Intertextuality [Author’s version]......................................30
Figure 5. Participant profiles. ..........................................................................................88
Figure 6. Types of local curriculum reform in English teaching. ..................................100
Figure 7. Secondary English Curriculum in Ontario, Canada – Texts in Use c. 2007 .......122

Appendixes

Appendix A Headlines ........................................................................................................224
Appendix B Aspects of English Curriculum Change in Ontario ................................225
Appendix C Suggested Reading for Methodology Design .............................................228
Appendix D Participation Consent Form .......................................................................229
Appendix E Concordances .............................................................................................230
Dedication

For my husband Peter,
who pushed me onto this frigate
and whose love and patience
ensured my arrival,

and

For my mother,
Rosina Antonia Colarusso née Succi,
who, with little formal schooling,
has always been a great teacher,
through her infinite love
and faith in education.
Chapter One:
Locating the English Teacher on a Map of Discourses

Of all the superstitions that affect India, none is so great as that a knowledge of the English language is necessary for imbibing ideas of liberty.

(Mahatma Gandhi, Young India, June 1, 1921, pp. 24-25)

The following news and information locate me epistemologically as an English teacher and researcher:

- UNESCO announces thousands of languages and the cultures they inscribe will soon disappear. Meanwhile 80% of Internet content is in English\(^1\)
- Economic Transformation North of 60, reports high school- drop out rates and a disproportionate incidence of teen suicide among Canada’s Inuit communities\(^2\)
- Debates rage in Ontario, Canada over publically funded religious schools and Afrocentric schools\(^3\)
- A friend from South Africa relates having read some of the same books in school that I did in Canada
- An ESL student in a mainstream English class comments that she has so many thoughts about a Shakespeare play, but cannot express them
- A student speaks to me about her hobby writing online fan-fiction novels

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\(^1\) As cited in Sonntag, 2003. For more information see the website, www.unesco.org. The UNESCO statistics derive from the research of Professor Stephen Wurm.


\(^3\) The 2007 Ontario provincial election was decided on the rejection of the Conservative party’s platform for publically funded religious schools. In February 2008, a heated public debate on the creation of a pilot Afrocentric school led to a narrow victory of those in favour.
These personal, local, and global points of reference may seem tangentially related at best, but for me, they sound a common note: As English is increasingly a dominant language, and as language inscribes culture, the English teacher becomes an increasingly influential mediator of both language and culture. Dialogue is needed to arrive at understandings on how to undertake this growing responsibility and what should inform our efforts.

At a crossroads of multiculturalism, the Internet revolution, and global consciousness, a new interdisciplinary discourse is evolving, one that concerns English teachers. References to “global citizenship,” “cultural sensitivity,” and “linguistic diversity” in official curriculum guidelines (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007a, 2007b) are harbingers of this global discourse, yet it is not clear whether English teachers find adequate opportunity to respond and express their concerns. Today English teachers can swiftly locate abundant resources including multicultural resources on the Internet (Kovacs, 1993). Meanwhile, the body of educational research specifically related to the secondary English classroom continues to grow, from canon debates (Fairbrother, 2004; Hirsch, 1987); to well-established theories of reading, writing, and critical literacy; to studies based on classroom practices (Applebee, 1994; Cook & Lodge, 1995; Doecke, Howie, & Sawyer, 2006; Kooy, 1991); micro-ethnographies (Dillon, 1989; Fairbrother, 2000; Price, 2004), international settings (Braine, 2005; Ladky, 2005), as well as burgeoning studies on teacher education and professional

---

4 The proliferation of websites includes ones that model social constructivist approaches such as www.teachersfirst.com which features a multicultural book review forum for teachers.

5 The Ontario secondary English curriculum defines critical literacy as, “The capacity for a particular type of critical thinking that involves looking beyond the literal meaning of texts to observe what is present and what is missing...Critical literacy goes beyond conventional critical thinking in focusing on issues related to fairness, equity, and social justice...” (OME, 2007b, pp. 206-207). By this definition, the term “critical literacy,” in my view, does not exclude the variety of literacy practices referred to as “critical literacies.”

Research on the actual content of secondary English classrooms has been less forthcoming, although in the United States, Applebee et al. (1993) produced a survey of resources in use in English secondary curriculum. The results showed overwhelmingly that these resources are by “White” male authors from either the United States or the United Kingdom. Still rarer in both the U.S. and Canada are studies exploring the curriculum rationales of English teachers, or student responses to the cultural content of the English curriculum. An ongoing longitudinal study of teacher and student book clubs in schools, in which I have been privileged to be involved, redresses this problem by providing compelling examples of teacher-student curriculum dialogue (Kooy, 2006). Intensified challenges meeting heightened and diverse literacy needs, within a standardized literacy testing framework, suggest that such research is much needed (Earl, Freeman, Lasky, Sutherland, & Torrance, 2002; Semeniuk, 1997).


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6 The study of book-length texts taught in the secondary English curriculum from 1989-1992 were compared to an earlier study (1963). In the public school sample, 86% of the selections for Grades 9-12 were by male authors, and 99% by White (non-Hispanic) authors; 58% came from a North American national tradition, and 33% came from the United Kingdom (Applebee, 1993, p. 60).

7 White and Black are useful terms to discuss race and ethnicity but problematic as totalizing descriptions and as binary elements. Following APA, I capitalize both.

8 My involvement in Dr. Mary Kooy’s SSHRC research study began in 2005. The book club’s evolution from teacher-based to teacher-student dialogue is documented in Kooy, Colarusso & Wong, in progress.
in keeping with changing times. In Canada, the traditional assimilative function of first language education combined with a national multicultural ethic is a problematic proposition, one whose complexities continue to unfold, particularly in education, as seen in recent years’ headlines (see Appendix A). What concern should be taken, given the absence of research on the adequacy of cultural representation in the Canadian English curriculum? Further, what if anything do global and local realities – like the case of a Sikh student forbidden to wear his kirpan – have to do with the English classroom?

A Closer Look at the Local Context: Reading the Ontario English Curriculum

Taking account of factors such as the preceding ones, it is difficult to ascertain whether Ontario is living up to its potential to provide exemplary secondary English curriculum development that is responsive to the changing social context. Initial questions for this study are: How should English teachers respond to changing sociocultural realities that are at once local and global? What can we learn from each other in our roles as gatekeepers of a privileged dialogic space within a multicultural society? And, what challenges must be faced in redefining secondary school English in ways most beneficial for students?

Clearly, abiding conditions reflect complex responsibilities and tensions:

The English curriculum is in disarray, and teachers themselves must be nimble in their defense of postcolonial and international texts, as well as earlier works from which present literature has sprung …. There is both desire and technology abroad for a stifling conformity which would silence the difficulty and healthy tensions which exist when we try to design curriculum for individual needs according to group rights in classrooms in tandem with fewer fiscal, material, and human resources and ever-larger classes. (Semeniuk, 1999, p. 5)
Semeniuk’s words are set against a historical tide in education in the province of Ontario: In 1997 Bill 160 prescribed Secondary School Reform, externally developed assessment, and evaluation procedures, and compressed curriculum to accommodate change from a 5-year to a 4-year timeline (Shugurensky, 2006). A wide sample study of teachers’ experiences in the ensuing years chronicled a long list of negative impacts: standardization gave second place to research-based educational advancements; externally imposed changes stifled innovation, collaborative and reflexive teaching practices; and policy mandates, rather than curriculum improvement for student learning, consumed scarce professional development time (Earl et al., 2002). It seemed rational-linear approaches to curriculum, which prioritized measurable outcomes, had once again won the day over insights on experience-based and child-centred models of education (Dewey, 1938, 1961; Miller, 1983; Vygotsky, 1978).

Within a milieu of conforming sociopolitical pressures and radical calls for culturally responsive change, English curriculum becomes an important site of struggle. The heightened tensions and lowered morale for teachers and students that resulted from the Ontario secondary school reform measures of the 1990s have been well documented (Earl et al., 2002; Kearns, 2008). In her dissertation on the cultural construction of adolescence, Kearns analyses the specific deleterious effects of the standardization drive upon students who become subject to a stark literate / non-literate categorization. In several ways, English teachers are uniquely poised to redress these and other barriers to educational progress for diverse learners. An initial script for collaboration toward such a goal is the revised policy documents for secondary English in Ontario.

Ontario curriculum policy documents shape the parameters in which English teachers conduct their work, including: suggested program content, curriculum expectations, and
assessments and evaluation criteria. Surveying recent changes to these documents sheds light on the kinds of curriculum development expected of high school English teachers, and the newly envisioned scope of the secondary school subject English. This will allow for triangulation of the thesis study data with the Ontario Ministry of Education’s Revised (2007) English Curriculum guidelines for Grades 9-12, the most recent policy documents in effect at the time of the interviews conducted in this study.

To begin with, the guidelines renew their relatively recent emphasis on skills such as “critical” and technological literacy. Under the revised Program Considerations, the subsection, Role of Technology in the Classroom resumes and augments the theme of preparing students for the electronic age and multiple ways of making connections with the world. Examples and teacher prompts, throughout the courses and strands for English, provide suggestions for the use of new media in language and literature lessons, from cell phone ring tones to podcasts. But new emphases also appear, including metacognitive skills and strategies, that is, guiding students to reflect on how they learn; and mathematical literacy, pertaining to promoting "multiliteracies" and engaging students inclined towards maths and sciences in English studies (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007a, 2007b).

The shift of emphasis in the revised documents can be gleaned from a comparative analysis of various terms used less frequently or not at all in the previous documents (see Appendix B). Different in kind from these new features is an unprecedented emphasis on global citizenship and consciousness. The new documents, like their 2000 antecedents, repeatedly stress the importance of diverse texts and perspectives throughout the strands.

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But the more recent, heftier policy documents for English Grades 9-10 and 11-12 (60 and 96 pages longer, respectively) reveal a bigger change. Perhaps the most notable example is a section in the front matter entitled “Anti-Discrimination Education” stating teachers should “use materials that reflect Canadian and world cultures” [my emphasis], include students’ cultural experiences in classroom discussion, and, “become aware of aspects of intercultural communication” (Ontario Ministry of Education b, 2007, p. 33). Further, the section, Program Considerations for English Language Learners, repositioned to the front matter, encourages teachers not only to incorporate diversity in positive ways (as previous), but also to consider students’ diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds as assets for learning (OME, 2007 b). An extensive description of Ontario’s exceptionally diverse multilingual and multicultural demographics reinforces the point (OME, 2007 b). As well, a new phrase, “sensitivity to cultural differences” begins to be used repeatedly.

Overall, the emphasis on cultural diversity in Ontario secondary English curriculum continues, but with more intensity, fuller supporting explication and an explicit reference to the “global,” including “globalization” (see Appendix B). Implicit in these changes is an expanded definition of English teachers’ core skills, which now tends towards the inclusion of intercultural communication, or ICC, no longer the exclusive concern of ESL teachers. The curriculum support document, Many Roots, Many Voices (Ontario Ministry of Education, 1994), for example, aims at “[m]aking a difference in every classroom” (p. 4), yet provides practical tips for teaching mainly beginner English learners. Some content areas in the document are: "Begin with essentials: the language of everyday life"; "Build bridges:
prior knowledge as a foundation”; "Get them talking: the value of oral language”; "Teach language everywhere: a cross-curricular approach” (p.7).

The 2007 revisions take a step forward from a multicultural approach to English, to a clearer drive toward global citizenship than previously evident. Salient notice of this is the UNESCO quotation introducing the section entitled, *The Importance of Literacy, Language and the English Curriculum*. English teachers are here informed of the expectation that they use approaches which consider “fairness, equity, social justice, and citizenship in a global society” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007b, p. 27). Further indication of the curriculum trend toward global consciousness is the still more recent cross-curricular document, *Environment Education* (OME, 2008) with a rationale and examples for incorporating environmental issues in the English classroom. In these various ways, the revised documents clearly advance a global citizenship perspective in secondary English curriculum.

Since, “[t]aken together, the overall and specific expectations represent the mandated curriculum” (Ontario Ministry of Education 2007a, p. 16), the revised documents provide a policy context for the perspectives presented by the participants in this study. All of the changes suggest a trend, if tentative, toward more intercultural, globally minded English curriculum in Ontario. However, since English teachers have discretion as to how much, when and where to incorporate these emphases in their classroom practice, and since there is no mandate for acquiring and developing the related skills, the curriculum documents as they stand are transactional in nature. That is, they allow for variations of implementation, while avoiding a transmission, or, prescribed, educational orientation (Miller, 1983). At the same time, it is not clear whether they tend toward transformation. Further, as Schweisfurth (2006)
notes, Ontario teachers experience disparity between the creative license of the curriculum, and the pressures of mandated reforms.

Within these widened parameters, and intensified responsibilities, the English teachers in this study responded to my questions about how English is changing, in what ways it needs to change, and the special challenges facing English teachers today.

**Unfolding Questions and Qualitative Research Methodology**

My initial questions arose as I related my personal experience to the implications of local and global realities for English teaching. These questions cascaded into others, as I inquired into the connections between theoretical advances in English language arts, global discourses, and implications for culturally responsive teaching. Gradually, I formulated the following questions which guided my interviews with the English teacher participants in this study:

1. What is your sense of how English is changing / evolving / what it is becoming?
2. To what extent are English teachers responsible for cultural knowledge?
3. Should English curriculum aim to reflect cultural heritage, the cultural identity of students, or as much diversity as possible?
4. How can English teachers bring students’ cultures into lessons in positive ways?
5. How can English teachers balance intercultural communication and critical literacy skills?
6. What rationale do you use when canon texts are replaced with new texts?
7. As English teachers, are we colonizers?

8. Should / How can English teachers keep up with ever multiplying texts and literacies (e.g., youth culture, ICT.)?

9. What are the reasons that some English teachers resist change? What do they fear?

In this study, I explore the issues related to the above questions through qualitative research centred on interviews with fellow English teachers, critical discourse analysis, as well as reflection on the sociocultural context, including the teaching context, the broader local society, and transnational civil society. As the primary interpreters of English as a secondary school subject, English teachers’ daily curriculum and pedagogical decisions transmit the values of English language and literature through students to society. Over recent decades, critics from a variety of perspectives have pointed out that multicultural education, for all its good intentions, often strays into forms of orientalism and neocolonialism (Banks & Banks, 1995; Berlak, 1999; Botelho, 2004; King, 1991; Peim, 1999; Pennycock, 1998; Richardson & Villenas, 2000; Sheets, 2001). Meanwhile, discourses of literary and linguistic globalization lay bare the excesses of English-language cultural dominance. English teachers are increasingly exposed to these charges even as they struggle to balance multiple objectives: English language skills development, literary appreciation, critical literacies, and reflection on social values. English teachers need opportunities to express their views and dialogue with each other on these issues, in order to formulate a

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10 This thesis is among the first cohort of dissertations to be required to be published electronically by the University of Toronto. While this makes possible a more international audience, I choose to use Canadian spelling. Having for many years taught students to use Canadian spelling, it behooves me to do likewise.
conceptually fluent response to the related discourses that guide their praxis (or theory-informed practice).

Qualitative research methods provide the best tools for making sense of data derived from such value-laden, phenomenologically located realties, such as the data of this study on teaching English in the global age. It is easy to go too far in fitting the research and interpretative approaches that I took in this study to particular qualitative methods and orientations, whether ethnography, narrative inquiry, dialogic inquiry, or critical discourse analysis. In essence, I did the following: Conducted seven lengthy interviews with sixteen English teachers, six individually, and one as a group; Recorded observations relating to the environment or the nature of the talk in field notes; Reflected on my personal situatedness in the study; Contextualized the data in the education policy framework; Constantly compared the data with my ongoing research on various areas of critical theory (curriculum, literary, cultural, postcolonial, globalization); Coded the data along multiple thematic axes; Interpreted the data.

In taking each of the above named steps, however, I pursued various goals and values as a researcher. A full account of my research design and methodology is found in Chapter Three. In what follows, I will outline four qualitative research orientations that influenced my methodology from the start, and that became interrelated in essential ways as the study progressed: existential ethnography, narrative, dialogic approaches, and critical discourse analysis.
Existential Ethnography

As a methodology, ethnography is often defined as based on participation, over a significant period of time, in the lived realities of the participants. This study is not an exemplar of participant-observation or long-term narrative inquiry models of ethnography (Clandinin & Connelly, 1999). Yet, I submit that as an English teacher who was immersed in the same milieu as the participants (for example, the Ontario policy framework, professional network, and local history including events in education), for more than 8 years just prior to, and overlapping with the data collection, I had an “insider” ethnographic vantagepoint on the data. During the first year of my Ph.D. studies, I remained employed as a part time English teacher and throughout graduate studies I stayed in direct contact with schools and students through work as a substitute teacher. This continuous engagement in the field allowed me to inform my research with insight into the current social and professional context.

Denzin (2001) refers to “existential ethnography” (p. 39) as aimed at “uncover[ing] the conceptual structures that inform the subjects’ actions” (p. 117). My study explores how English teachers’ professional beliefs inform their praxis and interface with critical discourses; but clearly, the limits of time and scope of the participant interviews do not provide data for full-fledged ethnography. Nevertheless, as a teacher-researcher, I aimed variously to illuminate, inform, check, and validate my own conceptions of English teaching in relation to those of the participants.

Narrative

English teachers’ understandings of teaching and learning can be known through the recapitulation of their experiences as told in their own voices (Carter, 1993; Clandinin,

This study does not offer an example of a prolonged, layered narrative research methodology. For example, it does not include written reflections by the participants, or extensive biographical or autobiographical data. There is, nonetheless, a narrative sensibility at work in this study. The “storying” of experience is fundamental to human existence (Bruner, 2002; Coles, 1989). I further believe teachers of literature are among those especially attuned to the narrative contours of life, as evidenced by the density of details, articulate force, and volubility of the English teachers’ interview responses. Perhaps unsurprisingly, some of the interviews contained unprompted autobiographical vignettes. For reasons I explain in the upcoming section on discourse concepts, I refer to these narrative moments as “critical travelogues.” Narrative is thus an interpretive lens for this study, an aid in identifying the experiences that inform and reveal the participants’ individual and shared perspectives on critical discourses of culture, language, literature, and education.

**Dialogue**

Language and literature function as tools in the perceptions of self, society, and world which are socially constructed (Bakhtin, 1981; Bruner, 1986, 1990). In pre-planning my research methodology while taking Ph.D. courses at OISE, one of the first problems I encountered was the oppositional representation of constructivist and critical theory qualitative research paradigms. Constructivist research was characterized as dialogic and
open-ended, while critical research, as responsive to social political and historical discourses and conditions (Glanz & Behar-Horenstein, 2000; Guba, 1990). I rejected this dichotomy from the start because it seemed to preclude the interdependency and potential synergy between the two approaches. As Guba and Lincoln (1996) observe, “in both these paradigms values have pride of place; they are seen as ineluctable in shaping inquiry outcomes” (p. 114). By now, the qualitative research discourse has altered to imagine a dialogical epistemology essential for critical theory methods. Barbules and Bruce (in press), for example, critique the false distinction between dialogue and critical theory, citing Freire (1985) among others that dialogue is inherently critical. Likewise, this study values the responses of English teachers as having the potential to shape a critical discourse that responds to and acts on the sociopolitical context, but stays in relation to the dialogic. In this way a collective way forward amid separate but conversant epistemologies is possible.

**Critical Discourse Analysis**

Dialogue that responds directly or indirectly to critical discourses can potentially influence the relative power of those discourses on society (Fairclough, 1992, 1995). My research questions led me invariably into the currents connecting English teaching with critical discourses such as postcolonialism and globalization. My initial design for the research was a comparative case study of two English departments where members met several times during a semester to discuss critical discourse readings on topics such as transforming the literary canon, the place of Shakespeare, and critiques of multiculturalism in education. I prepared a list of suggested readings (see Appendix B). For pragmatic reasons (limited time and availability participants), and to hone in on individual teacher responses, I

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11 An example of a research study along similar lines (English teachers meeting to discuss literary theory) can be found in Dr. Graham Parr’s doctoral dissertation (2009).
restructured this plan for one-time interviews with interested participants. Yet I held onto the
crumpled map of discourses I had sketched in my research, as well as curiosity whether
fellow English teachers would find them compelling or relevant tools for reflecting on and
questioning their practice (Eisenhart, 2001). In the following section, I outline the discourse
map that informs several aspects of this study by defining central concepts. It must be
stressed that I was only able to arrive at clearer understandings of these discourses after
multiple passes at comparing and interpreting all of the data of this study.

**Concepts for Dialogue on English Teaching in the Global Age**

English teachers build and apply extensive repertoires of expertise in teaching
reading, writing, oral communication, critical literary, and media analysis to students of
varying proficiencies and backgrounds. The time and attention commanded by this
demanding intellectual and humanistic work (Earl et al., 2002; Langer Meeks & Jewkes,
2003) can displace the task of theorizing the profession to an “automatic pilot” mode that
obscures the implications of contemporary discourses. In this mode, practices become taken
for granted and innovations lack the coherent rationales to promote successful
implementation. Like society as a whole, teachers fall prey to the latent power of
unchallenged discourses (Foucault, 1972; Gramsci, 1991; Habermas, 1984), only they do so
from within education, always a potential tool for the power of those same discourses.
Without a shared understanding of the discourses they inhabit and the stakes of the debate,
how can English teachers achieve optimal communication among each other and with other
professional colleagues?
In the global age, English teaching is a natural focus point for factors changing education. The alignment of social theories of language, globalization, and the Internet shine a more intense light of critical scrutiny on English education than ever before. Awareness of the socially constructed dimensions of language and literature, the postmodern critique of Western linguistic and cultural hegemony, and the English language- and Internet- induced explosion of the boundaries of cross-cultural dialogue together call for a synthesis and new discourse. English teachers have a critical role to play at this round table. This is all the more clear given the growing emphasis on critical literacy in secondary English curriculum, which must necessarily turn inward upon the profession itself.

An essential step toward cultivating a critical professional discourse of English teaching is to achieve conceptual fluency – a common terminology and conceptual map with which to facilitate collaboration, debate, and consensus-building. Curriculum guidelines, such as those of the Ontario Ministry of Education, provide important starting points. For example, the glossaries added to recent revised versions for English Grades 9 through 12 (OME 2007a, pp. 109-121; OME 2007b, pp. 205-217) reflect the importance of a shared language that goes beyond practical terms, such as “précis” and “proofreading” (OME b, p. 213), to include social, philosophical, and political terms such as “culture,” “diversity,” and “non-discriminatory language” (OME 2007b, p. 207, p. 212).

My conversations with participants in this study traversed a varied landscape of such terms and concepts, as I strove to learn with them about the prevailing understanding(s) of the school subject English, its import and destiny in an increasingly English-language dependent world confronting crosscurrents of cultural pluralism and cultural hegemony. Even to speak of a “global age” or to ask such a question as, “what is the place of culture in
the secondary English classroom?” incurs the problem of terminology. Why should the present millennium be singled out as a “global age” compared with others? And, is culture to be understood as ethnic and racial attributes, or a particular society’s intellectual and artistic contributions to civilization? Reflection on the issues raised by the English teachers’ responses and the vantagepoint of comparative theoretical research helped me to arrive at a conceptual map for re-theorizing English, one that adds to existing understandings. The key terms and related terms identified – globalization, linguistic globalization and literary globalization; culture, multiculturalism and intercultural communication; classics and canon; intertextuality and heteroglossia; and critical travelogue – are tools for thinking and talking about secondary English teaching today in ways that actively respond to and potentially influence external discourses which implicate the profession. While a comprehensive etymological and usage analysis of each term is not possible within the limitations of this thesis, in what follows, I attempt to delineate for each the range of meanings relevant to this study.

Globalization

Globalization refers to the acceleration and intensification of transnational activity in the domains of politics, law, economics, and culture (Anderson & Landman, 2003; Held & McGrew, 2007; Steger, 2003). The influence of globalist thinking in education can readily be seen in the proliferation of global education courses and school resources, the growing number of global-education focus schools, and new and heightened emphasis in curriculum guidelines, such as the revised secondary English curriculum’s reference to “citizenship in a global society” (Ontario Ministry of Education 2007b, p.27), and guidelines for incorporating environmental issues in all areas of the curriculum (OME, 2008).
Yet, as Held and McGrew (2007) remind us, globalization is far from a universal hermeneutic for assessing global trends. Their analysis of the globalization discourse contrasts “skeptics,” who see internationalism and regionalism as enduring realities, with “globalists,” who envision a “a transnational civil society” or freely achieved world community (p. 153); “globalizers” who promote a neoliberal world order versus “globalizers” who mobilize to resist its monolithic force. Having illustrated the dividing lines, the authors positively assert the reality of globalization, witnessed by unprecedented interdependency (due to biosecurity, world hunger, violence and war, for example), and institutional alignment (United Nations, World Health Organization, for example). Held and McGrew further advocate for a “double-democratization” that tempers the excesses of neoliberalism.

Held and McGrew’s analysis offers important insights for those, such as English teachers, who work in areas of culture. To begin with, globalization is neither intrinsically good nor bad, but can advantage some and disadvantage others, depending upon its particular forms and local effects. Further, accelerated international interdependency and cooperation make globalization both inevitable and subject to resistance. Citizens can and should monitor and shape the relationship between globalization and democracy, since globalization impacts cultural diversity (Appadurai, 1996; Fairclough, 2006). At the same time, “cultural and political identity today is constantly under review and reconstruction at both individual and collective levels” (Held & McGrew, 2007, p. 176). Steger (2003) concurs, “today cultural practices escape fixed locations such as town and nation” (p. 69) resulting in unprecedented freedom to coordinate via the Internet and related media. Finally, Held and McGrew assert a wager on cosmopolitan democracy, one which accords with curriculum emphasis on “global
citizenship.” World peace itself, they suggest, depends on a global transformation of society: “Each citizen of a state will have to learn to become a ‘cosmopolitan citizen’ as well; that is, a person capable of mediating between national traditions and alternative forms of life” (Held & McGrew, 2007, p. 195). Anderson-Levitt (2003) highlights the paradox: “The world culture is Western in origin, but both its universalistic aspirations and its rationalizing thrust paradoxically facilitate de-Westernization efforts” (p. 252).

In similar respects, the various purposes of English teaching – nationalist, civic, moral – can be carefully reassessed. How to balance, for example, a traditional body, or “common cultural heritage” of English language subject matter with alternative multicultural narratives? What is the relationship between English curriculum overlap in the United States and former British Commonwealth countries, with Anglo-American cultural and linguistic dominance through media and commerce? These questions might seem far removed from the quotidian practices of the English classroom, but critical accounts of linguistic and literary globalization spell out subtle and potent implications that clearly situate English teaching within the globalization debate.

Linguistic Globalization

The *lingua franca* status of English is hard to dispute: “Today more than 80% of the content posted on the Internet is in English. Almost half of the world’s growing population of international students are enrolled at institutions in Anglo-American countries” (Steger, 2003, p. 84). Even if its dominance, as with Chinese, Spanish, and French, cannot be clearly correlated to the disappearance of languages and cultures, English is clearly a hegemonic force. In *The Local Politics of Global English*, Selma Sonntag (2003) reveals the dynamics of
linguistic globalization by reappraising the famous linguist, Braj Kachru’s typology of "World Englishes" (1992). Sonntag notes that according to Kachru the inner circle of world English consists of the U.S., the U.K., and Anglophone Commonwealth countries; the outer circle, of countries where English has been indigenized, such as India, Kenya, and Ghana; and finally the expanding circle, of countries where English has no institutional status but is a widely used foreign language, such as China, Russia, and much of Europe (see Figure 1).

![Kachru's Typology of World Englishes](image)

*Figure 1. Kachru’s Typology of World Englishes* [Figure created by author for poster presentation, IAIMTE Conference, March 2007].

By contrast, Sonntag’s modification of Kachru’s typology highlights significant variegations among world Englishes, moving from a purely linguistic analysis to a political one. Sonntag reads the United States and United Kingdom as a unified influential core, with Commonwealth countries such as Canada, New Zealand, and Australia close to the nucleus

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12 With Figures 1 and 2, I intend only to provide a basic idea of Sonntag's interpretation of Braj Kachru’s typology of World Englishes in comparison with Sonntag’s alternative interpretation of Global English; I do not claim to represent Sonntag's ideas comprehensively.
(see Figure 2). But English has a mixed status among other nations outside of these inner circles, where it is an official language or unofficial second language. Indeed, English dominance is deemed not to be inevitable – as implied by the contrast of terminology between Kachru’s “expanding circle” and Sonntag’s “marginal use,” for instance – and even undesirable in certain places. Sonntag provides examples such as France, where linguistic activists stave off English even while Bretons resist French language domination within France. Canadians can cite the example of Quebec, where English prevails in some areas and meets fierce resistance in others.

**Figure 2.** Sonntag’s Modified Typology of Global English [Figure created by author for poster presentation IAIMTE Conference, March 2007].

Sonntag’s global-local analysis of linguistic activism highlights that English can be resisted just as much as it can be actively appropriated, whether for reasons of nationalism, class struggle, or other power dynamics (Al-Issa, 2005). An example of how Sonntag’s dual-focus analysis can be applied arises in a *The Hindu* article citing K. M. Marulasiddappa:
“English is a tool of mobility for urban, upper middle-class children; the lack of English knowledge is a handicap for rural, Dalit children” (2006, ¶8). Just as English dominance can threaten traditional language and culture, the control of access to English can secure economic and political enfranchisement for a few, while denying it to many.

From Sonntag, a key lesson to stimulate theoretical reflection on English teaching is that an agentive response is possible to linguistic dominance. This lesson resonates with the ideas of reformers in language arts education such as Harold Rosen, James Britton, and Douglas Barnes, who advocated, starting from the 1960s, for greater openness to minority student dialects in the English classroom (Barnes, Britton, & Rosen, 1971). Research supporting their ideas, and in particular, the benefits of heritage language as a resource in the mainstream language arts classroom, continues to grow (Agirdag, 2009; Cummins, 1986, 2005). Their ideas challenge English teachers to find ways to incorporate linguistic diversity as an asset in classroom practice, for reasons that exceed practical language acquisition to include affective learning. Moreover, the revised Ontario curriculum for English concurs:

These students’ linguistic and cultural backgrounds not only support their learning in their new environment but also become a cultural asset in the classroom community. Teachers will find positive ways to incorporate this diversity into their instructional programs and into the classroom environment . . . . It is also important for teachers to find opportunities to bring students’ languages into the classroom, using parents and community members as a resource. (Ontario Ministry of Education 2007b, p. 31).

**Literary Globalization**

In a way not dissimilar to Sonntag’s problematization of world English, Casanova deconstructs the positional status of literary texts in relation to the Western canon of literature. In *La République Mondiale des Lettres [The World Republic of Letters]*, Casanova (1999) uncovers the historico-political factors of literary globalization and calls attention to
the human and material forces (governments, translators, publishing companies, awards, critics, for example) behind the canon’s apparent inviolability. Also, like Sonntag, she supplies an agentive critique, highlighting moments of literary revolution that signal the freedom to resist and counteract the determinants of inclusion in the world literary forum. For example, she writes about the late eighteenth century change wrought by Johann Gottfried von Herder – “l’effet Herder.” At a time when French classicism dominated, Herder sought to liberate German literature, advocating successfully for the significance of popular cultural tales that mirrored the spirit of the people. Casanova (1999) asserts,

En instaurant un lien nécessaire entre la nation et la langue, il autorise tous les peuples encore non reconnus politiquement et culturellement à revendiquer une existence (littéraire et politique) dans l’égalité. (p. 110)

[By] establishing a necessary link between the nation and language, Herder authorized all peoples yet unrecognized politically and culturally to reclaim an equal literary and political existence [my translation].

Casanova’s analysis, which entails many aspects of literary production and several countries’ literary histories, does not focus on the role of educational institutions in replicating official canons. Nevertheless, it provides many provocative tools for thinking about “literary worth” which can inform English teachers’ rationales for text selection. As English teachers, what is our role in canonization processes? And what rationales do we use to adhere or diverge from this role? In Figure 3, I imagine the place of Canadian English teachers within literary globalization:
To embark on exploring the relationship between global English, cultural diversity, and English teaching requires first defining “culture”\footnote{I wish to acknowledge that at an early phase of this research, I was spurred to investigate senses of the term “culture” through a conversation with Dr. Maria José Botelho.}. What, afterall, is culture? According to the cultural anthropologist, Clifford Geertz, culture is "a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which people communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life" (1973, p. 89). The Ontario Ministry of Education curriculum guidelines for English provide a definition of “culture” that is consonant with Geertz’s: “The way in which people live, think, and define themselves as a community” (2007b, p. 207). However, the versatility of the term “culture” often leads to ambiguity. Phrases such as “Western culture,” “postmodern culture,” “popular culture,”

\textit{Figure 3. Literary Globalization and the Canadian English Teacher [Figure created by author for PowerPoint presentation, 8th Annual Dean’s Graduate Student Research Conference, OISE].}
“youth culture,” and “common culture” appear everywhere. In literature on education, we find titles referring to the culture “of reading” (McCormick, 1994) “of change” (Fullan, 2001), “of education” (Bruner, 1996), and the “cultural imagination” (Florio-Ruane, 2002). It can be argued that though these generalizing terms have no absolute validity, they have relative usefulness. Vygotsky (1991), for example, distinguishes the preexistent knowledge an individual derives from his or her cultural environment from the individual’s independent and socially enhanced potential for knowledge, or, zone of proximal development. But culture in Vygotsky’s sense need not apply to only one environmental context. Similarly, in The Culture of Education (Bruner, 1996), Bruner builds on Vygotsky’s theory, but uses culture in different senses, as both the preconditions for learning, and the betterment of those conditions through enhanced knowledge of self and society.

Limited understandings of culture can be stumbling blocks for effective education. Multicultural literature is often defined as literature in which central characters and themes reflect disenfranchised cultures and groups (C. Allen, 2009). The Ontario English curriculum’s emphasis on a “diversity of texts” therefore upholds the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (1982) and the Multicultural Act (1988) which enshrine the right of Canadian citizens to maintain and express their diverse cultural identities. However, works of literature deemed “multicultural” often implicitly support social power inequities (Botelho, 2004). As well, the concept of “minority cultures” can both acknowledge diversity and imply alienation from a norm, as in the “whiteness” – “non-whiteness” binary (King, Hollins, & Hayman, 1997; Sheets, 2001; Slaughter, 1997; Watkins, 1993). Further, as Cynthia Allen (2009) notes, depictions of race in “multicultural literature” are often historically dated ones from the perspectives of authors whose points of reference to the cultural experience are
questionable. English curriculum is not immune to these stumbling blocks, and works of literature may as often reinforce as break down cultural generalizations, making difficult the development of a “multicultural” curriculum. In this study, I strive to distinguish contingent notions of group identity from ones that essentialize culture as uniform and unchanging (Banks, 1995a, 1995b; Botelho, 2004; Gay, 1993, 2000; Irvine & York, 1995; Nieto, 1999).

The relationship between the identities of students – including ethnic background, race, language, gender as well as elective social networks and practices – and the effective teaching of English literature and language within a diverse social milieu, is a central concern in this study. As such, part of the guiding definition I employ is:

[A] way of life that a group of people develops in order to adapt to a set of external and pre-existing conditions. In addition to language, religion, and social institutions such as the family, culture consists of values, orientations, and symbols that are learned through socialization. (Li, 1999)

This definition encompasses a fairly wide range of enduring foundations of shared identity. But a complete definition also requires acknowledging that we inhabit overlapping circles of culture, with degrees of permeability and transience: geographic locations; histories; languages; social networks united by music, art, sports, desire for social change; religions and ways of practicing them; workplaces; families. One can belong simultaneously to a variety of cultural communities, race and ethnicity notwithstanding.

Within a multicultural society and global electronic age, the social constructedness of culture comes to the forefront. Today, “cultural practices escape fixed locations such as town and nation” (Steger, 2003, p. 69), and any definition of culture that does not include the possibility of newness, change, and hybridity is therefore limited (Archer, 1988). Moreover, the tension between old definitions of culture as inherited and passed on (Arnold, 1869) and
new definitions which emphasize elective belonging, underlie central questions in this study. For example, what is culturally responsive curriculum? Does it aim to reflect the ethnicities of students in the classroom, pay homage to as diverse an array of nationalities and ethnicities as possible, or connect with the youth generation? (Gay, 2000). This study reveals that English teachers wrestle with these questions in selecting texts and learning experiences.

**Classics and Canon**

In my work as an English teacher and occasional teacher over the past decade, I have encountered surprisingly different approaches to English literature programming in schools. Consider the disparity, for instance, in 2009, between an English department where students read *Cue for Treason*, a novel featuring Shakespeare’s times, and at least two Shakespeare plays before they graduate, with one where Shakespeare is not read at all but a graphic novel is a core text, or one where by the time students graduate they have all read *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *The Great Gatsby*, *The Kite Runner* and either *King Lear* or *Hamlet*. Of course, the core, or full length texts required to be read by all students at particular grade levels, do not tell the whole story of an English department’s curriculum. The enacted curriculum may include any variety of texts of different lengths and genres featuring authors of various backgrounds and diverse multicultural narratives. As well, the approaches teachers use to teach these texts significantly affect the intercultural communication dimensions of the learning experience (Bennett, Bennett, & Allen, 2003; Kooy & Wells, 1996; Lázár, Huber-Kriegler, Lussier, Matei, & Peck, 2008).
In Ontario, English teachers in both the public and Catholic school boards enjoy some freedom to choose texts, so long as they facilitate curriculum objectives,\textsuperscript{14} within limits such as budget, availability, department head approval, and the absence of parental objections (see Headlines, Appendix A). The result is a diversity of learning experiences school to school. In my opinion, which many of my colleagues share, this is extremely preferable to censorship and standardization. Yet, in the absence of dialogue to reevaluate them, it is not clear what the rationales for curriculum content – ad hoc or inherited – are, or whether they succeed in particular contexts to provide optimal benefits – cognitive and affective – for learners. Asking what ideas of classic texts, canon, and literary merit inform these rationales can provide a starting point for dialogue that is both clarifying and constructive.

As The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics explains, the term “classic” originates in the 2nd century AD as an economic – class – distinction. *Scriitor classicus* referred to the writer who wrote for those in the highest income bracket and *scriptor proletarius*, by contrast, to works addressed to those with income below the taxable limit (Preminger, 1974, p. 137). The idea of the “classics” as literary capital fuels advocates of capital “C” cultural heritage (Hirsch, 1987; Schlesinger, 1992) who stress that educational equity cannot be achieved by depriving students of exposure to literary wealth, or the “canon” of literature. In this way, the permanence of canonical school texts finds justification in the idea of a right to equal access to English-language culture, a highly contested stance (Brantlinger, 2001; Fairbrother, 2000).

\textsuperscript{14} An exception is the Ontario Trillium List which refers to textbooks and anthologies that necessarily obtained Ontario Ministry of Education approval to be used in schools.
But there is another, Renaissance sense of the word “classic” which relates directly to the class attended by a student. By this definition, a classic is “what is read in school; a book excellent enough to be used as a school exemplar” (Preminger, 1974, p. 137). The tension between this pedagogical definition and the former economic one can recast the canon debate in education from literary worth to educational literary worth. By the latter standard, both canon texts and new texts are subject to thorough critical evaluation concerning their usefulness and effectiveness for teaching and learning in a given school context. The Kooy book club study, for example, generates potent dialogue among English teachers and high school students about the relative benefits of texts and text approaches for the English classroom (Kooy, 2006).\textsuperscript{15} The educational worth, or effectiveness, standard would also implicitly critique the value for public education of academic senses of “canon” as “the greatest literary works,” or “classics” as thematic imitations of Greek and Roman models. It might even renew debate on the place of academic influence on pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) (Deng, 2007).

\textit{Intertextuality and Heteroglossia}

Teaching and learning English involves engaging in a dialogic relationship with literature. For the influential reader response theorist, Louise Rosenblatt (1978), this relationship is inherent to the phenomenology of reading, since a text is not an ideal object, but “happens during a coming together, a compenetration, of a reader and a text. The reader … crystallizes out from the stuff of memory, thought, and feeling a new order, a new experience” (p. 12). For Julia Kristeva, a feminist philosopher of language and culture, the interaction between text and reader is a central dimension of literary experience, which

\textsuperscript{15} This longitudinal multi-site study is ongoing. The initial phase of the study is described in \textit{Telling Stories in Book Clubs: Women teachers and professional development} (Kooy, 2007).
ripples outward to include multiple literary and sociolinguistic connections. Kristeva (1980) coined the term “intertextuality” (p. 69) to refer to two axes along which textual experience operates (see Figure 4).

**Figure 4. Kristeva’s Axes of Intertextuality [Author’s version].**

Wikipedia, itself an intertextual phenomenon, supplies a basic definition of intertextuality as, “the shaping of texts' meanings by other texts. It can refer to an author’s borrowing and transformation of a prior text or to a reader’s referencing of one text in reading another” (2009). However, for Kristeva, intertextuality cannot be reduced to discrete instances of allusion, imitation, parody, or individual moments of literary comparison in reader response. Kristeva’s concept of intertextuality ties in with Mikhail Bakhtin’s social theory of language. Bakhtin’s notion of “heteroglossia” for example – literally, *many languages* – refers to the plural discourses and genres of speech found within any work of
literature, most particularly novels. According to Bakhtin (1981), novels exemplify the multiple overlapping ways in which language is socially constructed. Further, friction between a narrator’s knowing stance and these diverse voices creates awareness of perspectival variance (pp. 295-296). Both Kristeva and Bakhtin see *all* texts and speech utterances as socially constructed. The profound implications of this theory for English instruction have only begun to be explored (Atwell-Vasey, 1998; Ball & Freedman, 2004).

Conversely, intertextuality can refer not only to the socially constituted and constitutive aspect of language but also to its power codes, including cultural practices (Weirzbicka, 2006), literary hierarchies (Casanova, 1999), and practices (Hutcheon, 1985). Classical allusions permeate popular culture, and several educational reformers assert that students should be exposed to canonical texts in order to apply their own critical judgment (Freire, 1998; Pirie, 1997; Thomson, 1998). Thus, the total exclusion of the cultural heritage texts of any given context (Shakespeare a prime example in the English-speaking world) can also be a paternalistic practice. The ambivalence of many of the participants in this study to the idea of new texts displacing canon texts from the English curriculum timetable underscores this complexity. New conversations about canonical texts must consider both axes of intertextuality, must apply critical literacy not only to their cultural status but to the question of their benefits for student readers (Barone, 1982; Booth, 2007; Fairbrother, 2000).

**Intercultural Communication**

There is heteroglossia in Ontario English classrooms. The teacher acts as narrator, the shaper of the learning, but students bring multiple voices to the learning. The disparity
between a mostly White middle class teaching force (Carr, 1995; Zeichner, 1993)\(^\text{16}\) and a multicultural classroom creates a heightened need for intercultural communication. Research on intercultural communicative competence, or ICC, informs English-as-a second-language (ESL) teacher training (Bennett, Bennett, & Allen, 2003). Although revised Ontario curriculum now suggests all English teachers should “become aware of aspects of intercultural communication” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 33), neither a fuller explanation nor a glossary entry is provided. It is an instance perhaps of policy prefiguring or giving advance notice to teachers of new required competencies.

A cursive look at a host of Internet citations, suggests the term, “intercultural communicative competence” [ICC] applies to many fields including business, international relations as well as language education, where it receives emphasis especially within second-language instruction. Broadly,

> [I]ntercultural communication …involves the use of significantly different linguistic codes and contact between people holding significantly different sets of values and models of the world …. [I]ntercultural competence to a large extent is the ability to cope with one’s own cultural background in interaction with others. (Beneke, as cited in Lázár et al., 2008, p. 9)

Bryam’s model (as cited in Lázár et al., 2008) further stresses that ICC requires “certain attitudes” which include “curiosity and openness as well as readiness to see other cultures and the speaker’s own without being judgmental.” The “skills” and “attitudes” mentioned might include addressing cultural learning styles (Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003; Irvine & York, 1995), or developing habits of inviting students to engage in dialogue on culture. ICC in the English classroom has only begun to be explored.

\(^{16}\) According to the Zeichner report, “Educating Teachers for Cultural Diversity,” 85% of U.S. teachers are White and monolingual while 40% of students are poor minorities, and only 15% of novice teachers are interested in teaching in urban areas.
Intercultural Communication is a multidisciplinary term, however, and in Robert Young’s view, it holds the key to world education, in the sense of global problem solving. For Young (1996), the idea of absolute cultural difference and the assumption that “we are all the same deep down” are equally false (p. 5). He asserts a “pragmatic wager that it must be possible to preserve difference (but not absolute difference) while finding enough common ground to communicate and cooperate” (p. 12). To this end, he works at removing ICC roadblocks inherent to particular discourses: postmodernism’s critique of Eurocentric democracy, and fatalistic (or agency-blind) Foucauldian perspectives, for example. Inspired by Habermas, Young wagers on “a counterfactual hope” (p. 77) of respectfully achieving understanding with the cultural stranger. This hope is “counterfactual” because it looks past incommensurable differences in search of the possibility of mutual learning and common ground. A profound illustration of such a pragmatic, intercultural, and counterfactual hope is chronicled in Oasis of Dreams (2001), Grace Feuerverger’s ethnographic portrait of a Jewish-Palestinian bicultural community and school.

Such a hope entails a paradox: “[W]e can only communicate between cultures when speakers are prepared to admit the possibility of change in their own culture … a two-way cultural learning process (R. Young, 1996, p. 86). Further noting that “[t]here are critical professionals as well as acquiescent ones” (p. 163), Young uses a pedagogical example to assert that “the teacher who seeks student opinion but does not value or allow it any logical role in the lesson’s structure of reasoning” (p. 165) undermines intercultural communication.

Robert Young’s analysis provides another lens through which English teachers can assess their practice. For example, what opportunities do we provide for a “two-way cultural learning process” which includes criticism of the target culture (that is, Western,
Anglophone, American-influenced, and Canadian) in class discussion? And, when is multicultural content in the English classroom a premise for authentic dialogue, and when is it only a goodwill gesture masking “assimilative multiculturalism”? (1996, p. 200). The English teachers in this study admit grappling with these difficult questions and express different beliefs. Like Held and McGrew, Young envisions global peace wrought by respectful dialogue at all levels of society. Education can hardly be excluded from this vision, and the English literature classroom and professional dialogue are vital channels.

**Critical Travelogue**

Emily Dickinson (1894) wrote:

There is no Frigate like a Book  
To take us Lands away  
Nor any Coursers like a Page  
Of prancing Poetry –  
This Traverse may the poorest take  
Without oppress of Toll -  
How frugal is the Chariot  
That bears the Human soul.

These timeless lines by the reclusive 19th century poet express, among many splendid things, the pleasure of vicarious adventure through reading. One of the pleasures of teaching English is the opportunity to read and discuss stories that allow us to explore imaginary settings and situations, whether realistic or fantastical. An English teacher’s career affords a parallel reading life that can be anything but reclusive. We are the tour guides for fictional landscapes and societies, but the bus is filled with knowledgeable others, who see and understand what we miss. I recall my English teachers in high school always seemed to enjoy (as much as I have in my teaching career) saying, “I never noticed that before” in response to a student’s
comment on a novel. Dialogues with students transform our understandings of texts, even ones we’ve read multiple times.

In addition to socially mediated reading adventures, English teachers’ careers often include one or more career moves, and several visits, to other schools, which can also expand cultural knowledge. Their “mobile ethnographies” (Marcus, 1998, p. 79) include encounters with students themselves, the living texts of culture and social diversity and change. Dialogue with students is cultural learning. Moreover, the diversity of reading experiences, dialogues, and cultural encounters which enable English teachers to grow in knowledge about their students and the world, can potentially transform professional practice (Clandinin, 2003). For this study, I draw upon “an arts-based metaphor for education” (Diamond, 1999, p. 223), that of a travelogue. A critical travelogue is a particularly apt metaphor for narratives of teaching in a multicultural society and global electronic age. Since multicultural classrooms, like books and the Internet, provide ways to meet the world without getting on a plane, critical travelogues include changes of philosophical, as well as physical location.

Besides, the idea of reflection and critical inquiry combined with awareness of different sites of experience resonates with important cultural theories. In Orientalism Edward Said (1978 / 1995) prompted a major reevaluation of European civilization from a global perspective. His study highlighted the interconnections between Europe’s vision of an “Other” – the Orient – and the expression and exercise of its global supremacy. Orientalism was a study in what Said called “imaginative geography,” (pp. 49-73), an “exploration of the myriad ways in which one part of the world imagined another in the process of dominating it” (Moe, 2002). Said’s breakthrough deconstruction of geographical / cultural
representations (Sardar & Van Loon, 1997) can mark a critical reference point for self-inquiry in English teaching.

My exploration of the role of the English teacher in the global age is necessarily informed by my own experiences of teaching English in Ontario, Canada; book-based inquiries into theories, practices, and policies as an educational researcher; lived dialogues and interactions with students, teachers and research colleagues, as I explore my research questions; and, reflections on the expanding responsibilities of teaching English language and literature as I, along with fellow citizens, grow in global consciousness through increasing world connectedness (McLaren, 1993; Narayan & Harding, 2000).

The critical travelogues in this study trace a journey through and out of the “imaginative geography” of the West (Said, 1978 / 1995), into the “inner landscapes” of teaching (Palmer, 1993) and between the intervals of intercultural dialogue.

My Critical Travelogue

I made my first foray into research on cultural issues in English language and literature teaching during my pre-service teaching year. In a paper on teaching Shakespeare with English-language learners, I explored the imposing cultural and linguistic barriers they faced and the potential of intercultural methods to overcome them, including the use of thematically linked multicultural tales. I gave little thought at the time to any contradiction between my love of Shakespeare and British literature and the Canadian delight I took in diverse cultural knowledge. I had yet to reflect fully on my personal educational journey, through which I embraced learning French (my first trip away from home was to participate in a French Immersion program in Quebec), but relatively ignored my own Italian language and culture. I was also yet to grapple with the idea of English literature as “cultural capital,” even though in
hypothesizing ways to make Shakespeare accessible, I was at least in part conceding to canonical tradition. Finally, my focus on the cultural rested conveniently on untested assumptions; that students generally value their ethnocultural heritage, for instance.

During several years as an English teacher in a middle class suburb north of Toronto, I strove to inspire others with my enthusiasm for British literature and diverse cultures. I elicited intercultural comparisons when teaching Shakespeare plays (making intertextual comparisons with multicultural stories like the Indian twin-story to Romeo and Juliet, Ramu and Rani, for instance). I organized Native presentations featuring music, dance, storytelling and spiritual prayer to Mother Earth. In my first year, I showed a Grade 9 class slides of a several month visit I made to northern Manitoba where I engaged socially with Dene, Cree and Inuit people. (Prior to full time teaching, I had also used these slides and related artefacts to make presentations at schools, but I didn't ask myself then the questions of representation and appropriation that concern me now). I also collaborated with colleagues in the implementation of culture and global-issues based units. Yet my efforts were mainly confined to my own practice, since I could not at the time imagine the scope to do more.

On one level, school life and English classroom experiences seemed to recognize the multicultural context. On the other, most texts were still British and American, with their related sociohistorical contexts (routinely included in the programmed learning) dislocated from the new world at our doorstep. When students from year to year asked, “Miss, why do we have to read this?” concerning certain texts, I had no trouble replying articulately. But I remained troubled by the question. I grew aware of systemic limitations: books were an expensive commodity and once purchased were more likely to be refurbished than replaced; new acquisitions seldom involved a dialogic process; curriculum rationales seemed “up in the air”, a patch work of design and inherited conditions. When a rare purchase turned out to be yet another novel
by a White male Anglophone author, I wondered, how can ideals of broadened cultural knowledge and thoughtfully defined relevance be reconciled with the material limits of resources, funding, and time for dialogue and research?

The Ph.D. program provided opportunities to explore the roots of my concern with teaching English vis-à-vis cultural diversity. I realized that in some ways my cultural sensitivity as a teacher clashed with my fondness for British literature. My memories of rejoicing in multiculturalism go back to elementary school, where we learned dances, customs and traditions of diverse cultures and celebrated them during an annual multicultural festival. (The steps of an Irish jig and the graceful cadences of a Japanese Chrysanthemum song are still with me). Whether through religious (I attended Catholic schools) or social education, or both, I developed empathy for visible minorities. Despite the limited English language proficiency of my parents, I remember inhaling the colour coded story sets of the self-paced reading programme, and becoming a young avid reader. I can only wonder if those now forgotten stories also informed my passion for intercultural dialogue.

By the time I became a teacher, I had traveled throughout Europe, and relocated myself for periods of time on a few occasions. One of the most memorable experiences of my life was a half-year volunteer position at a mission on the Hudson Bay. Fully expecting that it would entail braving the tundra by kamatik to do outreach work, (in elementary school, my adored Grade 7 and 8 teacher, Mrs. Murphy, told stories of working on a Native reserve, and I was spellbound by the Arctic romance of Mr. and Mrs. Mike), I found myself instead assisting the curator at an Inuit museum. Artists, school groups, wildlife specialists, and adventurers from around the world came through the museum to peruse the ancient artifacts, whalebone and soapstone sculptures. I found the landscape, and the closeness with people whose lives remained (however fragilely) independent of city life, potent attractions. My stay was only a resting stop before becoming a teacher. But, when I was given
a tour of the local cemetery, I was struck by a fact: a disproportionate number of capstones bore the names of Native teenagers.

By self-storying, I arrive at some of the sources of my cultural sensibilities: British literature; Canadianness as uniquely Aboriginal, bilingual, and multicultural; a broken thread of Italian culture. Given this hybridity, shared by most Canadians and more and more people in a world of permeable boundaries, what does it mean to be a teacher of “English” today? The question, posed by Britton at the Dartmouth conference decades ago, resurfaces: What is English, and what should it be?
Chapter Two: Literature Review

Preface

Research on English teaching is broad and complex; the educational literature often overlaps with other disciplines such as literary theory and sociolinguistics. To explore the ways English teachers construct their identities and articulate praxis requires broaching even deeper theoretical waters, including curriculum theory, critical pedagogy, and cultural studies. While the problems and questions faced by secondary English teachers are often shared by teachers in other subject areas, as well as all educational or “cultural workers”, this study seeks to understand the particular challenges English teachers confront as guides to textual interpretation and a global language that shape and in turn become transformed by the changing global context.

What is English? A Curriculum Theory Question

How has subject English historically been defined? How did it arrive at its current conceptualization in which language and literature are the two central pillars and a variety of texts representing an established set of periods and genres (novels, plays, prose, and poetry) provide the centrepieces of learning experiences? And how does school subject English become redefined as language, literature, and society change? Answers to these questions lie in part in the unfolding of curriculum itself, institutionally, academically, and sociologically, through a series of reconceptualizations, otherwise named, curriculum theory.

English has traditionally been conditioned by academic definitions of its content and purposes. Its origin as a school subject was the idea that language skills and an encounter with great works were essential to the formation of good citizens (Eagleton, 1983). As
Eagleton explains, before English achieved the status of other academic disciplines, it was “literally the poor man’s Classics – a way of providing a cheapish “liberal” education for those beyond the charmed circles of public school and Oxbridge” (p. 23). Over time, the evolution of a literary canon in both England and America, in tandem with the development of standard forms of English language in both of these countries, led to expectations of minimal familiarity with a fixed constellation of works as the hallmark of adequate education. Canada, like other English-speaking nations, followed a similar pattern (W. R. Wilson, 2007) and even today the traces of an original conception of meritorious literature dwells in our book rooms and students’ knapsacks.

As early as 1933, Douglas Barnes in an NCTE address questioned the pragmatics of “heady stuff” in English classrooms; decades later 50 American and British scholars gathered to reconceptualize the defining purposes of English at the 1966 Dartmouth Summit. This high-calibre dialogue led to significant new emphases for the subject: the Growth Movement which replaced the transmission or top-down model of education with a student-centred one (Barnes, 1990, 1995; Dixon, 1975), writing across the curriculum (WAC) (Martin, D’Arcy, Newton, & Parker, 1976), writing to learn (Britton, 1972), and welcoming language diversity in the English classroom (Rosen, 1981).

The fact that school English was originally mediated by an elite social class, however, continues to have echoes in modern North American notions of what English is and what English teachers should know. In this regard, it is worth looking closely at Deng’s analysis (2007, pp. 279-295) which suggests that the notion public school subjects should follow academic disciplines (e.g., Shulman, 1987) represents a false turn in the road of curriculum theory.
Deng carefully separates the positions of major theorists, Jerome Bruner, John Dewey, and Joseph Schwab: He shows that in contrast to the concept of professional content knowledge of teachers [PCK] as shaped by academic subject experts, Bruner (1966) refers to the psychology of a subject matter, emphasizing the teacher’s role in converting it for the classroom – curriculum conversion. Nevertheless, Bruner places the onus of defining the subject matter primarily on academic subject experts. Somewhat similar is Schwab’s (1973; also Schwab 1964, 1969) idea of curriculum translation whereby academic experts determine content, but the teacher’s role is to “translate” it to meet the practical needs of the local situation. Despite the reliance on academic PCK, Deng explains, Schwab places more emphasis than Bruner on learner needs, deliberation, and local context. Dewey alone, Deng asserts, conceives of subject matter as having psychological origins in relation to which academic disciplines are elaborate decontextualized outgrowths. For Dewey it rests with classroom teachers to uncover the child’s experience of the subject in order to transform the subject back to its roots. On this basis, Deng goes one step further, arguing the crucial role of school curriculum experts as wholly separate from academic experts.

Deng’s thesis has significant implications for English language and literature curriculum. What would be involved in bringing English back to its psychic roots in experience? Dialogue on this question can inform a reevaluation of English curriculum which considers whether it is over-determined by the values of the academic world (however subject to change). Such inquiry can also clarify areas of shared concern in academic subject and public school English – digital literacies and intercultural pedagogy, for example.

Re-establishing the basis of English curriculum expertise bears on the question of a more global English curriculum: do we move closer or further away from the “roots” of
English – the core needs it meets for students – when we set out to respond to the global context? Exploring both the experiential roots of English as a domain of learning, and its place in the world, moreover, entails the questioning of cherished assumptions.

**English at the Centre of Critical Literacy**

The Ontario Ministry of Education curriculum guidelines for secondary English strongly promotes “critical literacy” as:

The capacity for a particular type of critical thinking that involves looking beyond the literal meaning of texts to observe what is present and what is missing, in order to analyse and evaluate the text’s complete meaning and the author’s intent. Critical literacy goes beyond conventional critical thinking in focusing on issues related to fairness, equity, and social justice. Critically literate students adopt a critical stance, asking what view of the world the text advances and whether they find this view acceptable. (OME b, Glossary, p. 206).

Throughout, guidelines provide examples of ways to tie in critical literacy skills to lessons. If secondary English is to be a home for critical literacy skills, necessarily this implies turning critical literacy upon itself.

Numerous education theorists have identified the latent involvement of teachers in historically constructed barriers to a more fully democratic education: Henry Giroux’s gloss of Antonio Gramsci (1991), and Michael Apple’s gloss of Paolo Freire (1990), are two examples of this abiding concern with the teacher as passive state apparatus (Althusser, 1970). Gramsci’s “consciousness” and “cultural hegemony” (1992) and Freire’s “conscientization” and “pedagogy of the oppressed” (1970) are key terms of critical pedagogy, relating to questioning the status quo in education, and recognizing teacher agency to effect positive social transformations. Arguably, all teachers whet the acculturation side of education, consciously or unconsciously replicating ideas of class, race, and social values
that serve the power and profit motives of institutions. Though it may seem unlikely that teachers today entirely neglect to engage their own and their students’ critical perspectives, especially in this age of democratized information and communication (from youth zines to teacher blogs to YouTube), nevertheless, it is precisely the taken-for-granted nature of democratic education that can lead to injustice. In both the Gramscian and Freirian perspectives, only by introducing counter-hegemonic discourses – opportunities for students to question norms and exercise critical awareness of hidden power relations – can teachers avoid implication in social injustice.

Critical theorists such as Michael Apple, Henry Giroux, and Roger Simon also remind us that there are many forms of textual representation – aural, visual, as well as verbal – as reflected in Edward Said’s notion of “text-in-the-world.” Questioning the concept-constructs (memes) and belief constructs (metanarratives) of society is not, therefore, strictly a matter of critical literary or historical-literary interpretation: there are the obvious media of film, music, advertisement, but there are also the semiotics of school and classroom where artifacts and routine actions also communicate meaning (Barone, 1982; Garfinkel, 1967; Saussure, 1971). None of these ideas of text are uniquely relevant to subject English, but because English is ontologically situated within language and culture, and because meaning in all forms can always be re-constructed linguistically (writing, reading, speech, and dialogue), English teachers incur heightened responsibility for media as well as cultural literacy. Despite growing emphasis on critical thinking and writing as transversal to all educational levels and disciplines (Russell, 2004), the very fabric of English teachers’ work positions them at the fulcrum of critical literacies.
**Literary Theory’s Puzzles and Problems for English Teaching**

Marxist, feminist, and postmodern thought have brought about the incorporation of all human discourses . . . as a subject matter for analysis by the literary theorist. Using the various poststructuralist and postmodern theories that often draw on disciplines other than the literary—linguistic, anthropological, psychoanalytic, and philosophical—for their primary insights, literary theory has become an interdisciplinary body of cultural theory. Taking as its premise that human societies and knowledge consist of texts in one form or another, cultural theory (for better or worse) is now applied to the varieties of texts, ambitiously undertaking to become the preeminent model of inquiry into the human condition. (Brewton, 2006)

Based on Fairclough (1995), Brewton’s description of the consolidation of critical theory into “literary” and “cultural” represents complex territory for English language arts educators. In working with a variety of texts, perspectival complexity is the routine challenge of English teachers. Inquiry into how English teachers inform their professional practice must inevitably address transformations in views of text, language, and meaning.17

Traditional approaches to literary criticism, evident as early as the 19th century, attributed stable objective referentiality to language and literature. New Criticism, inspired by the Leavis school in England, and prominent in American universities in the 1930s and 1940s, broke with historical context and author-biography approaches, in favour of close reading, sympathy with author sensibility, and sensual appreciation for words on the page (Brooks, 1947). Like traditionalists, the New Critics (F. R. Leavis, J. C. Ransom, I. A. Richards and C. Brooks, for example) upheld the moral power of literature. Like Formalists such as R. Jakobson, they prioritized formal structural and artistic features over sociohistorical content. The explication of poetry and analysis of leitmotifs are mainstays of English teaching which reflect this tradition.

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17 I have relied extensively upon Terry Eagleton (1983) and Brewton (2006) to construct the cameo history of literary theory that follows.
The death of the author, and of the stable signifier, were proclaimed by both structuralism and poststructuralism. Unlike the latter, structuralism (by way of F. de Saussure, C. Levi-Strauss, and T. Todorov) maintained the formalist concern for an underlying objective form (“langue”) that could be extracted from content (“parole”). Saussure especially sought to decode literature to arrive at the way a particular society creates a language system. Structuralism was gradually informed by the work of M. Bakhtin (1981, 1986) illustrating that all language is socially dynamic, and the individual can only become free through dialogue. By contrast, theorists labeled “poststructuralist” (R. Barthes, J. Derrida (1976), J. H. Miller, P. de Man, J. Lacan) subject all notions of objectivity, including form, to radical scrutiny. Ideas such as deconstruction, the constant deferral of the sign, and the cultural contingency of all signification systems apparently led to the relativizing of all literary value and significance. This extreme conclusion introduced new understandings of literature as open rather than closed meaning systems, which set the stage for the reader response movement (Fish, 1980; Iser, 1996; Rosenblatt, 1938 / 1964; 1978). From this perspective, English classroom practices of open dialogue, reader response, and acknowledging alternative text interpretations can be seen as poststructuralist in spirit.

Gradually, postmodern approaches such as poststructuralism were deemed too open ended and divorced from constructive agency, which led to a Marxist re-assertion of historical context. For the New Materialists such as R. Williams, and New Historicists such as M. Foucault, the indeterminacy of language and literature point not to anarchy but to the potential agency of human actors to resist and/or respond to textual and ideological propositions of reality: “As an interactive part of ongoing historical processes, language, and hence ideology, is open to change; and it is open to it through dialogue and narrative” (Lye,
1998, ¶21). In the English classroom, the application of a specific critical lens – feminism, race, or class, for example – to a work of literature through comparative analyses of scholarly articles, or the deconstruction of editors’ practices among different versions of a work, or the subversive re-telling of classic stories, are all examples of the influence of these movements, increasingly modelled in contemporary resources for English teachers that stress critical literacy, contextualized pedagogy, and action research (Doecke, Howie, & Sawyer, 2006; Roberts, 1992).

Three very broad perspectives on literature emerge: literature as a closed meaning system (traditional), literature as an open meaning system (postmodern), literature as historical-political artifacts subject to criticism and agency (critical or social ameliorist). Within this complex array, English teachers face the implications of literary theory for shaping learning interactions with texts (Britzman, 1992; Holden, 1973). English teachers often work with school editions and accompanying manuals which indirectly prescribe specific approaches to text with their built-in chapter questions and suggested activities. The way they use these resources and/or create original lesson plans may reflect ways of reading texts and how they view the nature of literature and its role in education. There is still little research on how English teachers juggle these theoretical approaches and make transitions between them, and on how their students respond. Whether secondary English instruction should entail substantial teaching of literary theory itself is also matter for debate (Appleman, 2000; Holden, 1973; Parr, 2007).

While case studies, research, and exemplars of various modes of working and/or playing with literary texts in the language arts classroom are available (Daniels, 2004; Kooy & Wells, 1996; Shepherd, 1991), research on how literary theory influences the practices and
outlooks of novice and experienced English teachers is scarce (Parr, 2007). How do traditional and reader response approaches to assessment and evaluation compare when taking into account the diverse cultural identities and linguistic proficiencies of students? As well, how do English teachers bridge the divide between programmed curriculum with its stable definitions of culture and common-cultural values, and the differences of their students which are increasingly voiced (through electronic social networking, for example) and yet simultaneously suppressed (through hegemonic assumptions and the “null” curriculum) (Kanu, 2003)?

**Postcolonial or Multicultural English?**

The challenges of literary theory combined with urgent calls for critical literacy in education (Dozier, Johnston, & Rogers, 2005; Lankshear, 1997; Shor, 1996, 1997) are transforming English teaching. Together, they inform the “umbrella” theory, *cultural studies*, which gathers into its orbit the unfolding discourses of linguistic, literary, and cultural globalization (Casanova, 1999; Held & McGrew, 2007; Salvi 2002, Sonntag, 2003; Steger, 2003). In Canada, the English colonist association has faded behind the unfolding of multicultural national identity. Yet, at the crossroads of critical theory and global English, can English teachers – especially in a multicultural society such as Ontario, Canada – ignore the postcolonial nature of their work?

Edward Said first introduced postcolonialism as the West’s reductive view of Middle Eastern culture (1978 / 1995). Awareness of the exotic “othering” of the colonial subject, “orientalism,” spurred the critique of historical cases of national imperialism such as the British colonies. Gradually the term “postcolonialism” expanded to include the ways vestiges
of imperialism continue to influence social and political conditions, even within an independent multicultural society (Ziauddin & Loon, 2004). The teaching of British and other Anglophone literature can be held subject to this critique (Irvine, 2003; Shor, 1997). At times multiculturalism is viewed as antidote and at other times accomplice to postcolonial repression (Banks, 1995a, 2003; McLaren, 1993; Narayan & Harding, 2000; Richardson & Villenas, 2000). English teachers, whose work is culturally laden, are open to attacks on all sides, for tokenism, cultural criticism, betrayal of the common culture, essentialism, and most recently, lack of adequate cultural pedagogical knowledge, or “cultural competence” (Johnson, 2006, p. 235).

The history of multicultural education in countries such as Canada, Australia, and the U.S. is relevant to an understanding of the tension between postcolonialism and critical pedagogy in the English classroom. In particular, research chronicling the introduction of multicultural policy and practice in Ontario schools, and ensuing problems and debates (Beairsto & Carrigan, 2004; James, 2004; Virjee, 2004) aid us to revisit the assumptions that inform policy, beginning with the Multicultural Act of 1988 and unfolding with changes to provincial curriculum guidelines. Until recently, there has been stronger focus on separating multiculturalism from postcolonialism in ESL, where there has been substantial research and policy development in the area of Intercultural Competence, or ICC (Bennett, Bennett, & Allan, 2003; Lázár et al., 2008). Although, compared with English literature and language education, English as a Second Language [ESL] seems more focused on linguistic learning than learning with literary texts, to some extent this is a false dichotomy. Both ESL and English language and literature instruction rely on language and literature as springboards for cultural learning and comparison. Both fields are in some measure geared toward
assimilative cultural enfranchisement, even if on the surface for ESL it is a more practical matter of social adaptation.

Conversely, the literary aspect of English instruction does not overshadow its shared role with ESL in linguistic homogenization. The popular success of Bill Bryson’s *The Mother Tongue: English and how it got that way* (1990) is the tip of an iceberg of profound fascination with the potential of English as the new *lingua franca* of the world. Analyses of this phenomenon are multiplying, ranging from literature and linguistics (Dzuzak & Okulska, 2004), to feminist philosophy (b. hooks, 2000; Harding & Hintikka, 2003; Narayan & Harding, 2000, Pagano 1990), to global education (Anderson-Levitt, 2003). Global English places renewed emphasis on postcolonialism among cultural critics and educational theorists. If education is a key site for coming to terms with the political, cultural, and social implications of English in the world, then the English classroom all the more so becomes a focal point in this struggle.

*English and Culture: Defining Disciplinary Boundaries*

As English teachers adjust to policy changes which call for standardization, there are increasing calls for “cultural competence” – a term linked to health care and education (Coles, 1989). The movement for cultural competence urges practicing and prospective teachers to expand their knowledge of various cultures (defined by ethnicity and language as well as a wide range of group identities) in order to ensure that equity is modelled and experienced in the classroom. Related to the promotion of cultural knowledge is cultural learning styles pedagogy (Gay, 2000; Irvine & York, 1995; Virjee, 2004). The theory that students learn differently according to their distinct cultural backgrounds implies that teachers must become conversant in both students’ cultural backgrounds and their learning
styles in order to teach effectively. For English teachers, who deal directly and routinely with representations of culture (both through texts and classroom dialogue), these sharp pedagogical tools require careful handling. On the one hand, they make possible a community of intercultural dialogue; on the other, applied unreflectively, they can impose oppressive categories on groups and individuals (Botelho, 2004; Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003; Parker, 1997).

    Ways of cultural belonging now include virtual communities. These communities may sometimes lack the longevity, or sense of place, implied by traditional definitions of culture, but they do possess unique linguistic and social practices that are transforming conventional ideas about literacy and culture (Bigum & Lankshear, 1997; Booth, 2006; Knobel & Lankshear, 2002). Significantly for English teachers, these digital age cultural fora are the meeting places where many youth make sense of the world through dialogue. As Knobel and Lankshear (2002) suggest, while teachers teach critical literacy practices based on print, television, and film, there is a point at which they can only rely on students to teach them the critical literacy practices that they themselves employ on the Internet. Whether or not these cyberliteracies are class markers which separate have and have-not students (Barbules & Bruce, in press), they add a new facet to cultural competence which intensifies the complex epistemological task of defining English as a profession and subject area. At the same time, it is worth considering how the connection between Web literacy and global consciousness can potentially transform the English classroom. Recent pedagogical research on Internet literacy, or “functional literacy,” indicates a new path for English teachers’ professional inquiry and development (Knobel & Lankshear, 2002; Snyder & Bulfin, 2007).
As technology transforms methods of communication and social interaction, the subject English continues to expand. As follow up to a 1998 study that examined the extent to which Web Literacy and Information Technology were incorporated in all subject areas in the curricula of Canadian provinces, the Media Awareness Network (2002) conducted research to re-examine media outcomes in Language Arts. Educational research struggles to keep up with new media, new technologies, and the advent of virtual communities through the Internet. The gradual decline of the British model of English language arts in Canada (Report of the British Council, 1986), the growing harvest of Canadian literature, and evolving multicultural policies in education, have positioned English for vast possibilities of reform. How will Web literacy and globalization further transform the English classroom, and what possibilities do they offer for greater intercultural dialogue, are important questions facing English teaching practitioners.

The new imperatives of English language arts do not displace the old ones. Shakespeare appears more and more in the elementary classrooms of Ontario, as evident by the explosion of teaching and learning-support resources on Shakespeare for children Grades 4-8 (Colarusso, in press). At the same time, many structural and political barriers intensify the everyday challenges of teaching in Ontario: government mandates for compressed curriculum, standardized reforms, standardized testing, and economic constraints on resources. Add to this the commonplaces of teaching: heavy marking, extracurricular involvement, and the emotional and time intensive labour of guiding young people in a multitude of challenges, goals, and issues (Langer Meeks & Jewkes, 2003). In this context, it is not easy for English teachers, unsupported, to take stock of evolving moral and
philosophical implications of their work (Tillema, 2000) – what they teach and how they teach it – as others shape the discourses of English studies.

**Canons: Renewed Controversy?**

In English classrooms in North America, the imbalance of English-culture texts is exacerbated by the asymmetry of teacher-student demographics. In a 1999 report on educational equity “Educating Teachers for Cultural Diversity” showed that as of 2000, 85% of U.S. teachers are White and monolingual while 40% of students are poor minorities; and only 15% of novice teachers are interested in teaching in urban areas. (Zeichner, 1993)

Closer to home, “[a]lthough student diversity in Ontario has greatly increased in recent times, racial composition of the province’s teaching corps has altered only slightly, remaining predominantly White” (Klassen & Carr, 1997, p. 69). If the English classroom is to be a community of reading, writing, reflection, and dialogue, how do these statistics bear upon the experiences and materials teachers choose to present to students? What limits to conversations involving greatly diverse students exist when so few of the teachers who facilitate and partake in them are “non-White”? How should White English teachers, communicate with their “non-White” classes? Although issues of ethnocultural equity are on the table (Ontario Ministry of Education, 1993), it is not at all clear what models of multicultural curriculum are best to follow: A randomly selected variety of texts? Determined by class demographic-cultural composition? Keyed to current events and global issues? These are difficult questions that English teachers, educational administrators, and teacher educators struggle with in terms of pedagogy and curriculum as well as education and employment equity (Carr, 1995; Zeichner, 1993).
Even late in the 20th century, the traditional role of English teachers, to transmit a literary canon and train students in separate areas of literacy, was still predominant. With few exceptions: the incorporation of media, sporadic attention to literary theory (Appleman, 2000), experiments with whole language and writing process, and initial efforts to rethink multicultural curriculum through new policies on antiracism and ethnocultural equity requiring boards to create and implement equity policies (Ontario Ministry of Education, 1993), it is questionable whether substantial changes have taken place in the teaching of language arts (Applebee, 2006; Langer, 1991; OME, 1993; Yagelski, 1997).

Books on English department shelves in Canada still tell the old story of a Western literary tradition, based on mostly British (e.g., Shakespeare, William Golding, John Wyndham, the Brontës) and American male White authors (e.g., Arthur Miller, F. Scott Fitzgerald, John Steinbeck, Tennessee Williams), with a little Canadian (e.g., Margaret Atwood, Margaret Laurence, Timothy Findlay, Joy Kogawa), and some multicultural content (in short story and poetry anthologies, mainly), for good measure. While there seems to be no recent study of what English departments in North America actually contain on their shelves, a survey of Coles Notes titles can serve as a fair indication. Certainly, new literary voices find their way into schools (Maya Angelou, Amy Tan, Ann Marie MacDonald). There are, moreover, striking examples of teacher-led curriculum innovation. Fairbrother (2000) describes her single-handed efforts at ELA reform, replacing “high-status” canon texts with works that spoke directly to the cultural experiences and backgrounds of her African American, Chinese American, and Chicano students. Closer to home, at an Ontario high school, significant changes initiated as the result of an English teacher’s successful efforts (Gen, featured in this study) to introduce fictional works reflecting global issues and to
further connect this to the support by teachers and students alike of a fledgling school in Tanzania, Africa. These are exceptional examples and only more stories of English teachers in the field can help assess whether the planned, enacted and experienced (Marsh & Willis, 2000) curricula are responsive enough to cultural change in language arts classrooms.

As Ontario society continues to become multicultural and education evolves, English teachers are often asked to take sides between those who defend a cultural continuum and those who do not. In *Cultural Literacy*, Hirsch departs from the experience-based educational theories of Rousseau and Dewey and laments the “romantic formalism” evident in curriculum-neutral policies (1987, p.111). This is in marked contrast to Gramsci (1991), Freire (1970), Apple (1982, 1999), and Simon (1992) who instead encourage critical literacies that disrupt established authority. Diasporic voices such as those of Prem Poddar (2002), Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1987), and Ashley Dawson (2007) are particularly challenging in weighing decolonizing, democratic responsibilities of English teaching.

As witnessed by study participant comments, the rub in the canon debate is the place of Shakespeare in English teaching and learning. It has been my personal observation that even in English departments with unconventional practices, Shakespeare texts predominate across grades and course syllabi, unlike the works of any other writer. Shakespeare’s allusive reach is global, and the notion that the plays are monocultural has been rigorously contested, if not decisively so in the international court of public opinion. Is Shakespeare the exception to any argument for rethinking the canon for school purposes? What role does Shakespeare play in the place of English in the world and what is the place of the English classroom in this phenomenon? While works of differently biased thinkers provide insight into these
questions (Brantlinger, 2001; Roberts 1992) the experiences and perspectives of English teachers themselves are yet to be heard.

**Holding Patterns and Unfolding Possibilities**

As with curriculum content, many doubt whether language arts pedagogy has changed significantly over the past quarter century. Texts continue to be treated as closed meaning systems, writing and reading considered separate activities that follow linear processes, and evaluation behaviourist in purpose and form (Applebee, 1994; Davison & Moss, 2000). In contrast with “sensitive observation” (Egan, 1992, p.150) and “connoisseurship” (Eisner, 1998, p.63), purposes and variety of evaluation can be limited, tests focused on pre-selected points of importance, and writing products judged along rigid lines that exclude reflection and revision processes (Langer, 1991). And yet, while the idea that “[t]he finest instrument we have for evaluating degrees of success … is the teacher’s sensitive observation” (Egan, 1992, p. 150) seems to apply most of all to imaginative engagement with literature, English teachers face pressures for more objective and standardized evaluations.

Similarly, despite the displacement of New Criticism by post-structuralism from the 1970s onward (Eagleton, 1983) the modeling of close reading to arrive at a single valid interpretation persists in language arts. Historically, English studies had emphasized literacy first, and literature represented enfranchisement into a common culture (Eagleton, 1983; Squire, 2003); critical thinking and individual responses are hardly privileged in such a framework. The academic model with its top-down instruction, and conformity to convention, also seems to influence the longevity of the positivist paradigm in secondary
English teaching in which important meanings are prescribed and predetermined (Applebee, 1994; Miller, 1983).

A positivist English language arts paradigm persists despite milestones across half a century. Louise Rosenblatt is among those who have revised common understanding of literacy instruction. *Literature as Exploration* (1938 / 1964) is Rosenblatt’s response to the New Critical demands for a validation of English studies as a rigorous scientific discipline. In it, she distinguishes between *efferent* – “to carry away” – and *aesthetic* reading, upturning ideas of literary reading as pragmatic exercises that have little to do with the personal response of the reader. Rather, literature can be an aesthetic act, where each reader’s unique experiences help produce the meaning. For Rosenblatt (1978), literary reading is “transactional,” involving reciprocity of meaning making between readers and texts. Similarly, Suzanne Langer (1957) contrasted subjective and objective approaches to literature, highlighting the reader’s active role and that the text cannot be reduced to one objective interpretation. Jerome Bruner (1986, 1990) added the social dimension: literature is *interactional*; that is, it invites the social construction of meaning through the sharing of understandings among diverse learners. A growing number of studies with both students (Cook & Lodge, 1995, 1994; Kooy, 1991, 1999, 2006) and teachers (Flood & Educational Resources Center 1994; Kooy, 1998) support these theories. This literacy – of how meaning is really made on personal and social levels – is arguably the most significant role for literature in education – and yet it is precisely what is overlooked in positivist approaches (Egan, 1992; Meyers, 2002).

Still, in 1991, Judith Langer wondered whether the world of English teaching was getting the message but missing the meaning of these theories. Her title, *The Process of*
Understanding: Reading for Literary and Informational Purposes, captures the lessons of reading process theory. Decrying the unchanged condition of English teaching practice over the previous 25 years, Langer advances a nuanced demonstration of literary thinking as an experience and activity wholly different from scientific thinking. She describes four major stances of reading: stepping out and moving through envisionment, rethinking what one knows, and objectifying the experience. The crucial lesson of her re-theorizing of reading process, is that it is not a linear, but a recursive one, involving an inquisitive journey toward a horizon of possibilities.

Writing process was not left out from the new thinking on meaning-making in the literature classroom. This activity began with the famous NCTE conference in Dartmouth in 1966. Initially, efforts turned towards loosening writing instruction from strict attention to conventional forms and mechanics, at the expense of process and growth of reflection. In concert with traditional perspectives on the social value of literature and verbal literacy, student writing was primarily seen as an exposition of learning of the transmitted information, and assessment of writing, likewise, was more often than not, behaviourist in design. It was James Britton (1972), who laid bare the differences between writing that is “transactional” (in a sense different from Rosenblatt’s use of the term) – the results-prescribed kind that formed the bulk of student writing opportunities – and writing as creative expression. As with reading theory, the extent of transfer of writing process to language arts instruction, especially in the secondary classroom, is questionable. According to Applebee, students report feeling that although teachers encourage them to demonstrate independent critical thinking, they often angle for particular responses, encouraging some
and discouraging others (1994). This in turn can make responding in writing or orally an unpleasant experience for students.

The notion of writing as a linear formula was further disproven by cognitive research illustrating that writing process is recursive, involving reflecting and re-visioning at every turn (Flower & Hayes, 1981; Noskin, 2000). Placing less emphasis on mechanics and more emphasis on engagement in the writing process releases learners from the straightjacket of relating received knowledge, and frees them to value and practice articulating their own unfolding understandings. Some critics such as McCormick (1994) question the subjective response emphasis resulting from the research, and try to wrest the emphasis back to sociohistorical contexts, traditional mechanics, and manuscript conventions. Others, such as Sommers (1982), question these reactions against subjective writing as confining learning to the transactional (prescribed results) paradigm where a focus on mechanics and products blocks effective communication skills development.

The benefits of improved understandings of reading and writing for students could not be fully tapped without awareness of the ways in which these processes are mutually-supportive (Martin et al., 1976). The very notion of “language arts” as a bundle of discrete domains, also contributes to the isolation of literature as an unchanging “universe of meaning.” Smagorinsky (2002) bids teachers to consider, “Does the teaching of literature come first, with language and writing covered in service of literature, or should all three (or more) strands be given equal priority and emphasis?” (p. 3). The answer might depend on teachers’ awareness of studies showing how integrating literary reading and writing rather than segregating them as reception and production acts, respectively, works better to increase literacy skills (Tierney & Shanahan, 1991). Further, reading and writing integration lead to
increased critical thinking skills: “reading and writing in combination have the potential to contribute in powerful ways to thinking” (Tierney, Sloter, O’Flahavan, & McGinley, 1989, p. 166). Instructional scaffolding (Langer & Applebee, 1986) in which students receive different degrees of guidance through the reading and writing process, thus becomes an important strategy in the support of the reading – writing connection.

Also key to combining and interrelating the reading and writing processes, is the creation of learning communities (Noddings, 1995; Rogoff, 1994). The idea that knowledge is socially constructed (Bakhtin, 1986; Vygotsky, 1978, 1991) and that consequently both writing and reading involve social conversation (Applebee, 2006; Bruner, 1986, 1996; Kooy, 2006; Pagano, 1990) is one that contradicts the prevailing norms of “sage on the stage” teaching predicated on rote learning and imitation. That social conversation includes the individual learner, the text, and the whole group of learners, including the teacher, threatens notions of canonical literacy built on received and transmitted authority (Hirsch, 1987; Schlesinger, 1992). In the following teacher reflection, for example, student writing is described in interpersonal terms: “At the simplest level, when I read my students’ writing and observe how they connect themselves to the assignment, I am observing who they are and what has shaped their lives… Similarly, when I interact with them they are seeing my life” (Prentice, 1987, p. 1). In social, metacognitive processes of reading, writing, and literary thinking, the student becomes aware of entering a conversation in which his or her ideas and cultural context are of equal value to those of others. In turn, the teacher learns who individual learners are and how they learn. English, in Applebee’s view, thus becomes a “domain for culturally significant conversations (1994).” In this way, the social processes of reading and writing in the classroom directly inform teacher epistemology.
There is a gap between theoretical advances and practice in English classrooms (Applebee 1994; Langer, 1989; Yageslki, 2002). English teachers are accountable to students, schools and systems and teach a subject that can potentially include a vast array of materials and learning experiences. This context is a challenging one in which to operationalize theoretical advances in reading, writing, and critical literacy approaches. The English teacher’s work demands competencies in multiple literary genres, literary criticism, social and historical knowledge, media and technology (Sawyer, Watson, & Gold, 1998), diverse learning needs and styles, language conventions, assessment and evaluation expertise, multiple learning theories (Langer Meeks & Jewkes, 2003), as well as voluminous reading, writing and evaluating. English teachers must also contend with perceptions which cast English as less objective therefore less significant, the conditioning of students in scientist outlooks, and required compliance with politically predicated policies. In these circumstances the much needed time and resources for meaningful collaboration with colleagues (Tillema, 2000) are scarce.

Yet perhaps the most significant barrier to teacher development that produces improved practice is motivation. Traditional models of teacher development have not been deemed worthwhile by teachers (Moon, Butcher, & Bird, 2000). Context-blind, quick-fix professional development workshops led by external experts have not been found relevant or persuasive (Feiler, Heritage, & Gallimore, 2000; Goldenberg & Gallimore, 1991). The lack of follow-up and evaluation also contribute to their inefficacy (Clark, 2001).
Happily, there is growing awareness effective teacher development places the emphasis on teacher knowledge and experience, and has lasting benefits when it involves teachers actively and collaboratively in the process of reflective and collaborative practice (Clark, 2001; O’Connell Rust, 1997; Florio-Ruane, 2001). The emerging paradigm of teacher development is that of sustained dialogue through learning communities (Clark, 2001; Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1999; Kooy, 2006).

In typically small-sized groups (Hord, 2004) that meet regularly, teachers share their classroom and career experiences and evolving philosophies and professional insights. Whether talk is structured around school events, professional texts, literary texts, or personal and professional narratives of experience (Clark, 2001; O’Connell Rust, 1997), the common goal is mutual support in becoming better teachers. These professional learning communities exist on their own, but the past decade has seen a number of research projects, involving individual (Grossman & Wineburg, 2000; Stokes, 2001) or multi-site school locations (Darling-Hammond, 1998; Hawkins, 1998), or models bringing teachers from different career positions and teaching environments together (Kooy, 2006).

Conducive to the effectiveness of teacher learning communities is narrative inquiry (Connelly & Clandinin, 1986, 1988). Sharing perspectives and experiences on teaching necessarily involves the universal phenomenon of meaning making, in which individuals review and make sense of the past through retrospection introspection and dialogue with others and themselves, in a “spiral iterative” continuum (Kooy, 2006). Story is well-suited to educational inquiry (Carter, 1993; Clandinin & Connelly, 1999; Noddings, 1991) because teachers’ knowledge – rapidly unfolding through daily multiple human and textual
interactions – can best be ordered through narrative (Beattie, 2002; Beattie & Conle, 1996; Butt, 1983; Elbaz, 1991; Noddings, 1991).

For English teachers, narrative has added significance as both method and matter of teacher development. The art of eliciting reading and writing responses using diverse texts with diverse students is nurtured by collaborative practice and reflection on these processes (Rainer, Guyton, & Bowen, 2000). The use of literature in learning communities nourishes a reading life (Kooy, 2006) and offers unique opportunities to explore issues of English teaching through the hypothetical lenses of fictional stories. In the book club model of professional learning community (Florio-Ruane, 2001; Jarvis, 2000; Kooy, 2006), teachers connect their understandings by intertwining their responses to stories and personal and professional narratives, with those of others. As English remains a largely female profession, English teacher book clubs offer a haven from positivist patriarchal barriers to inquiry (Kooy, 2006; Sumara, 1996). These promising directions in teacher development and professional inquiry hold out hope for curriculum reconceptualized not through disembodied theories or uncontextualized policies, but through teacher directed dialogue (J. H. Young 1990a, J. H. Young 1990b).

What Should English Become? A Curriculum Change Question

Co-operation and resistance to curriculum change in English, whether it originates institutionally or through change agents in local contexts, reflects both the ongoing conflict between traditional and non-traditional conceptualizations of the subject and of the explosive growth of curriculum theory as a field rife with competing claims and lines of development. As synoptic works on the curriculum field (e.g., Marsh & Willis, 2003; Schubert, 1986) and
English Language Arts (e.g., Flood, Lapp, Squire, & Jensen, 2003; Harris, 1991) strive to capture this diversity, and journals and subject associations expand and multiply, educational theorists are restless in battling the “null curriculum,” through new perspectives and approaches, from cultural revolution (Pinar, 1974) to chaos theory (MacPherson, 1995) to postmodern theorizing (Slattery, 1995). For English teachers, the resulting landscape is one of contradictions: academic-inspired curriculum objectives and materials, vastly expanded curriculum possibilities, and a tension between literature and language priorities.

In the midst of these problems of theory and the social and political challenges they inscribe, some articulate practical solutions. Goodson (1983) reminds us that “subjects are not monolithic entities but shifting amalgamations of sub-groups and traditions” (p. 3) where both academic and non-academic subject groups have influence within a complex interplay of forces. Likewise, Reid (1999) harmonizes the institutional and practical dimensions of curriculum change, advocating principled deliberation where change is informed by teachers and students but also accommodates the functional demands of school systems. Lieberman and Rosenholtz (1987) shine the light on teachers as the best resources to each other for pedagogical and curriculum leadership. Roby (1985) and Tillema (2000) meanwhile stress the benefits of critical reflection for curriculum change, awareness of the habits which impede curriculum deliberation and the habit of self directed learning.

Against this complicated shifting terrain of altered paradigms and expectations (Paris, 1990) teachers do not easily find the time to meet all the demands or the motivation to take new initiatives. The conflict of professional identity experienced by English teachers has recently been explored in an Australian study (Illesca, 2004). Illesca’s findings call those of Poppleton (which included Canada among nine other countries) into question. The latter
study of English teachers’ receptiveness or resistance to institutional changes concluded, “English teachers were overwhelmingly positive about change. Few considered themselves resisters (Poppleton, 2000).” Yet Illesca’s research points to an alternative reality in which teachers facing dramatic changes in pedagogical and curricular expectations are hard-pressed to deliver on standardized testing requirements and narrowly defined expanded curriculum expectations while maintaining their professional integrity. The chronological and ideological chasm between these studies and the scarcity of their like highlights the pressing need to provide ways for English teachers to convey their experiences and perspectives with each other and with the wider educational community.

The domino effect of curriculum standardization among many English language first world countries and its resulting pressures has inspired hopeful trends: renewed interest in coming to understand what teachers do through their own narratives of experience (Beattie, 2002; Clandinin, 2003) and inquiry into how the “new curricularists” develop praxis for complicated times (B. Green, 1990; Hlebowitsh, 1992), for example. The field of secondary English teaching, which is otherwise under-researched, has benefited richly from these trends as evident in new voices for curricular and pedagogical renewal (Semeniuk, 2000; Smagorinsky, 2002; Yagelski & Leonard, 2002), emerging forums for professional dialogue (Davison & Moss, 2000), psychological analysis of English teachers’ work (Lemmonier Schallert & Bayles Martin, 2003), close studies of the nature of teaching reading (McCormick, 1994), writing (Brereton, 2007), literary theory (Appleman, 2000) and hypertext (Braaksma, Rijlaarsdam, & Janssen, 2007) in the modern English language arts classroom, and action research in subject English (Burns, 1999; Herndon & Fauske, 1994).
More challenges for all English educators are in the offing. Globalization and the dominance of the English language are receiving concerned attention from those who wonder if English curriculum is keeping pace (Yagelski, 1997; Waks, 2003). Waks (2003) describes a future of pragmatic, globally-networked curriculum change in which elites and education consumers respond to the perceived crisis of environmental and economic sustainability with, “new synthetic visions of educational institutions in better accord with models of rational action in networked environments” (p. 383). In Canada, the Western provinces have formed coalitions to standardize curriculum (Saskatchewan Education, 2004). As English is a discipline that is highly conducive to modeling the social negotiation of meaning, English teachers can play a role in articulating a response to these challenging trends (Yagelski & Leonard, 2002). How do we grapple with these powerful forces of change while striving all at once to imbue a love of Shakespeare, respect for national authors, and appreciation of diverse cultural voices? How can we harness the universal moral consciousness made wonderfully possible through literature, but avoid conscription to “McDomination” and cultural loss (Schiller, 1976)? Through professional reflection and dialogue in collaboration with the educational research community, the voices of English teachers can make a difference (Peim, 1999; Schubert, 1991).
Chapter Three: Methodology

Preface

I believe that many English teachers experience vivid philosophical tensions innate to their work, all the more so in a multicultural society and global age. This thesis began with a personal recognition that teaching English was the teaching of English-ness a certain consciousness embedded in national history(ies) and language. This perception developed into a problem for inquiry, through encounters with diverse individuals within and outside of school teaching, and with critical texts that have made me aware of my divided value system as an English teacher: There is the joy of reading and effective communication that I wish for all learners. There is my strong belief in the humanizing effects of good literature – its capacity to nurture empathy, wisdom, even love for humanity. But there is, too, the hold of canon literacy on my philosophy of English, the almost moral drive to introduce others to the “best” written English words, the most finely crafted poems, stories, and essays. At the same time I advocate – with the aid of literature – cultural literacy in many senses: of unique human experiences, of historically and humanistically informed democratic values, of a changing world and its diverse peoples. To be an English teacher involves much more than practical language skills; it involves brokering the gulf between common and plural culture(s). But what does it mean to be an English teacher today, and how do we articulate and defend our rationales for the way we balance the priorities before us?

These questions arise from my own experience, but at one and the same time, as Bakhtin’s theory of language shows, they are socially constructed (1981). For this intersubjective inquiry, it is important first to ask, do the questions I pose resonate with
fellow English teachers? If so, why are we asking them, and how do they inform our epistemologies and practice? Qualitative research methods are best-suited to finding answers to these questions.

**PART ONE: THEORY:**

*Dialogue and Conversation for Reflection and Analysis*

The orientation of this study is qualitative, since the central data, which is reflection on experience, does not lend itself to objective measurement (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The validity and relevance of my research questions can be known through dialogue with others in the field of English teaching (Kvale, 2002). If one person’s narrative can have meaning for others, then many co-related narratives can have much more significance for describing, and making knowable, a particular social and cultural context. Although a small sample, the teacher interviews, which include six secondary English teachers and ten members of an English department in southern Ontario, afford valuable data for my research questions. The balance of shared and divergent perspectives of the participants, and the striking differences among their curriculum orientations, offer a provocative composite sketch of the epistemological terrain of English teaching in Ontario today, one that may correlate fruitfully with English teaching, or for that matter, first language teaching, in multicultural societies elsewhere.

In educational research, as in journalism and historiography, in-depth interviews are valued ways of achieving a more truthful picture of an event. As noted in the Literature Review [see Chapter Two], there is a gaping need for more studies chronicling ways in which students experience the English curriculum (Shor, 1996). This study does not specifically address that area of inquiry. However, it responds to the equal need for English-
teachers’ responses to the tension between inherited curriculum models and change spurred by education policy and research, and sociocultural developments at local and global levels.

Among educational professionals, such as academicians and curriculum experts, it is English teachers whose daily experiences and decisions on curriculum and pedagogy make them the chief interpreters of English as a secondary school subject. Deliberation on the purposes and priorities of English requires time for sustained reflective dialogue often scarce in the lives of teachers. Yet, successful curriculum change depends on reflective practitioners. A particular advantage of qualitative research methods in education (such as in-depth interviews), is that they stimulate professional dialogue and reflective inquiry. This study offered the English teacher participants an opportunity to step back, pause, and reflect on their work through purposeful conversation. In this sense, as researcher, one role I play is as their proxy to the educational research community, dispatching their impressions on things as they are in the field of English literature teaching. It is important to distinguish the notion of interviews as a medium for transmission of information, however, from one where the interview information is “collaboratively produced and continuously under construction” (Holstein & Gubrium, 2008, p. 388).

I use the terms “conversation” and “dialogue” flexibly, to refer to both the individual interviews and the group department interview. Yet it is worth noting the distinction Cavazos (2004) makes between these two terms as they apply to teacher talk. For Cavazos, conversation is “a highly active and engaged form of talk where participants learn … by sharing opinions, ideas, and references” (p. 159). Dialogue, by comparison, is “a conversation directed towards discovery and new understanding, where the participants question, analyze, and critique the topic of experience” (p. 160). The term “purposeful
conversation” (Bestor, Steinhoff, & Bestor, 2004, p. 93) meanwhile bridges these two definitions. I apply these definitions flexibly to the interviews for several reasons. My rapport with the interviewees was collegial and, in some cases, I enjoyed some prior familiarity with them through teaching or educational research activities. This permitted fluid lively exchanges of opinion – conversation. However, I limited my contributions because the central object was the teachers’ professional reflections and I felt there was more to be learned if they had freedom to conduct the flow of topics. The resulting discussions combined the formal purposefulness of dialogue with the more interpersonal and creative qualities of conversation – purposeful conversation.

As a novice interviewer, I relied somewhat on a handwritten list of questions for the first two interviews. But with these “first runs” behind me, I proceeded to conduct the remaining interviews in an unstructured way. By opening each with broad questions such as “What is English?” and “How is English teaching changing?” I invited interviewees to help shape the itinerary. This also eliminated the effect of built-in patterns across the data resulting from an ordered set of questions. As Rubin and Rubin (1995) note, “broad initiating questions encourage the conversational partners to provide in an unfiltered way their own take on an issue and as such often evoke unexpected themes” (p. 161).

The patterns of convergent and divergent data that emerged through comparative analysis are therefore more reliable as genuine reflection-on-experience of the participants, and therefore more authentic and significant. Certainly, participants were apprised of my research questions, through the introductory conversations and participation request letters, for instance (see Appendix C). As well, I strove to interweave the questions I had formulated

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18 I owe thanks to my thesis supervisor, Dr. Mary Kooy, for this invaluable suggestion.
throughout my preparations for the study, but for the most part I did so only if and when the participants broached them. Part of the story of this study is that they invariably did.

The open structure of the interviews also conveys the *dialogic* quality of this study in both Bakhtin’s particular sense of socially constituted and constructive linguistic communication (1981), and the prosaic sense of “dialogue-based”: The teachers’ participation during a busy school semester, and their voluble and carefully articulated comments (as displayed in Chapter Four), clearly signaled their intention to communicate purposefully with the educational research community. A third dialogic dimension of this study pertains to the potential of the data combined with future interpretation, to generate further collaborative inquiry. In this sense, qualitative research is innately dialogic. Circulation of dialogue between practitioners and researchers promotes the possibility of a fluent conceptual language for action and debate on the critical discourses challenging secondary English.
Of Dialogue, Critical Theory, and Border Sharing

In Chapter One, I outlined the theoretical framework and methodology of this study as informed by existential ethnography, narrative, dialogue, and critical discourse analysis. Here, I will delineate a common thread among these interpretive lenses. While earlier qualitative research analysis (Guba, 1990; LeCompte, 1990) tended to stress the incommensurable aspects of constructivist and critical theory approaches, my study explores their shared borders. As Guba and Lincoln (1994) observe, “in both these paradigms values have pride of place; they are seen as ineluctable in shaping inquiry outcomes” (p. 114).

I propose that an inquiry that is both critical and constructivist best suits a study such as this one, which aspires to critical discourses with data that is at once social, historical, and existential. To rethink English teaching is therefore to engage in a recursive process from insights from the data, to the critical context, and back. Ragin calls this process retroduction (as cited in ten Have, 2004, p.10). More specifically, current data on the practice of teaching English literature can be held up against existing theory, in order to arrive at a new more robust and consistent theoretical framework.

At the same time, dialogic epistemology serves critical theory’s interest in redressing local problems and injustices (Barbules & Bruce, in press). As Denzin explains, “in the feminist, communitarian sense, ways of knowing are ethical and moral” (2001, p. 4). Arguably it was Julia Kristeva who paved the way for a critical-constructivist epistemology. According to Atwell-Vasey (1998), Kristeva broke the gender bias in Freud and Lacan’s psychoanalysis of language by connecting bodily language as it is learned through the mother with germinal perceptions of a world of action. In this way, Kristeva feminized language.
theory, reclaiming the mother’s role in somatic language acquisition and its significance in preparing the child to engage critically with the world.

On one level, dialogue in education is both a learning tool (collaborative learning) and an objective (intercultural communication). On another, it holds the potential to move beyond words to a course of action that fulfils the furthest reaches of educational potential. Dialogue in itself can be compared to poststructural literary theories such as deconstructionism, in that too narrow a focus on how language is constituted can suspend meaning and/or action indefinitely by obfuscating the pragmatic, contextual nature of communication (R. Young, 1996) – dialogue’s potential to lead to action in the world.

This study values the responses of English teachers for shaping a disciplinary discourse that takes account of and responds to external critical discourses which implicate the profession of English teaching. At the same time, the study data reveal how English teachers conceptualize their role in societal change very differently. It shows English teaching as a value-laden enterprise in which dialogue facilitates collaboration, and makes possible local transformations. These in turn have the potential to transform separate epistemologies into a collective way forward.
PART TWO: THE STUDY:
The Structure of the Study

This research project entailed interviews with several English high school teachers and one English department during the spring semester of the 2008 school year in southern Ontario, Canada. Six interviews were conducted involving a total of 15 participants: 14 secondary school English teachers and 1 student teacher. All of the participants were active in full-time English teaching at the time of the interviews.

Four interviews were individual (all at different schools; two at different school boards), one was a pair interview (teaching in the same department), and one a collective interview of the nine members of an English department at a school board different from all of the others. I hypothesized that the group interview would allow the expanding and honing of perspectives through dialogue with others, while the individual interviews would provide the complementary advantage of a sustained opportunity for the articulation of personal vantagepoints.

The department and one individual teacher interview took place at the participants’ schools, while in other cases, participants asked to be interviewed at home. It should be noted that although I had not previously met some of the teachers, particularly in the department group, I was acquainted with several of them: I had taught at the same school as the couple interviewed (Gen and Art)\(^{19}\) and in the same board as two of the individual teachers interviewed (Sabrina and James). As well, four of the participants (Rhea, Paolo, Teacher A and B in the group interview) are involved in a SSHRC research project on book clubs in schools, in which I am also involved as a researcher (Kooy, 2006).

\(^{19}\) All of the names used to refer to participants in this study are pseudonyms.
The interviewees were well informed about my research interests (see Appendix C) and my own teaching background. Therefore, rather than a stance of objective distance, or a false impression that I was there as a more knowledgeable other, or MKO, to use Vygotsky’s expression (Bestor, Steinhoff, & Bestor, p. 88), I tried to communicate a collaborative research intention. Thus, while not a participant observer in the technical sense, I was nonetheless an “insider,” a colleague with common questions and experiences who took a shared role in the dialogue. In this sense, I was also a “participant” in the study.

I planned to conduct 90 minute interviews and to videotape and / or audiotape each one to ensure accuracy. In addition to the interview transcripts, I created field notes and kept a research journal on emerging related curriculum documents, educational reports, or educational news stories. The interview transcripts record the English teachers’ responses to my initial research question, “How is English changing?” and follow up questions which were posed if and when they complemented the topics that arose during the unstructured interviews. Therefore, certain questions recurred in different wordings and at different points in all of the interviews, as a result of my effort to bring my own research interests into dialogue with the topics brought up by the teachers. They are as follows:
1. What is your sense of how English is changing / evolving / what it is becoming?

2. Why do some English teachers resist change? / what do they fear?

3. To what extent are English teachers responsible for cultural knowledge?

4. Should English curriculum aim to reflect cultural heritage, the cultural identity of students, or as much diversity as possible?

5. How can English teachers bring students’ cultures into lessons in positive ways?

6. How can English teachers balance intercultural communication and critical literacies?

7. What rationale do you use when canon texts are replaced with new texts?

8. As English teachers, are we colonizers?

9. Should / How can English teachers keep up with ever multiplying texts and literacies (e.g., youth culture, ICT)?

Although I could not predict the interviewees’ responses to these questions, I hypothesized that they would find them relevant, and would be able and willing to connect them with past and recent teaching experiences. As they invariably did so, I often quote the English teachers in this study generously, to avoid overshadowing intended meanings and in an effort to check the inherent risks of interpreting multivalent data. Fuller “swatches” preserve and make available the denser ethnographic fabric of the teachers’ responses.
**Participants’ Teaching Contexts**

The participants in this study represent a purposive sampling of English teachers working in secondary schools in southern Ontario. A combination of practicality and method were involved in their selection. An important advantage for the study is that they represent different perspectives on how the subject English is changing, if/how it needs to change, as well as varying approaches and degrees of commitment to change. The students in the schools where the participants teach represent a wide variety of ethnic backgrounds and there is a significant presence (for example, 5% or more) of visible minority and ESL students. The teachers work at schools within different school board districts, suggesting the possibility of meaningful differences in the two sets of teachers’ attitudes to matters such as resources, or cultural content in the curriculum. The participants’ shared experience of the standardized testing era that has spanned over a decade and continues currently will increase the comparability of the data. In the following I outline the social, cultural, and economic context for each interview:

**Ontario English Department: Teaching English in an Old School, Formerly White - Now Black, in a Suburb with a Depressed Socioeconomic Index**

The Ontario English Department is in a public system Catholic school located in a lower middle class area of southern Ontario. In existence for over 30 years, the school has moved both physically to a new site, and demographically, from a mainly White to a mainly “non-White” population, with a majority of African Canadian students. Despite this, most of the teachers in the school are White: at the time of the interview, there was only one “non-White” and one male English teacher. The ESL population of the school has increased sharply over the past decade.
During my visits for research and follow up, I noticed the following cultural details about the school: The tradition of an annual multicultural festival; the good comportment of students; the uniform worn properly by the majority of students; and, besides glass display boxes celebrating the history of the school, sports victories and science projects, photographs of students and teachers participating in the Mother-Daughter Book Club. I also happened upon a possible example of cultural sensitivity: a morning announcement featured a song by Pink about a lesbian girl’s relationship with her father. In addition, I was invited, without prior discussion into a teacher’s “credit recovery” class where I witnessed first hand her caring guidance towards a group of senior students who depended on retaking parts of failed courses in order to graduate. The setting for this class was the Career Room neatly decorated with posters about future careers.

_Sabrina, James, Gen, and Art: Teaching English at Schools in a Catholic School Board, in a Mixed Race Middle Class Suburb_

Sabrina, James, Gen, and Art all work in the same Catholic school district in a middle class suburb. Sabrina and James previously taught in the same school English department, while Gen and Art are department colleagues in a different school. The demographic shift in the school district is referred to by both James and Art (both in English teaching for 2 decades). At each of their schools, a pronounced Italian student population has been replaced by an increasing number and distribution of racial and ethnic groups, “a combination of Italian, Russian, Spanish, Korean, Trinidadian. . . a real blend. It’s everything . . .” according to James. Despite this, “non-White” teachers are in the minority. Sabrina, James, Art, and Gen are themselves all White Canadians with European backgrounds except for Gen whose mixed roots include Chinese ancestry and cultural experience. Regular visits to
schools by Aboriginal speakers and spokespersons for diverse religions and ways of life coexist with Catholic practices and traditions such as mass and common daily prayer. A recent Board-wide initiative, bringing teachers from all English departments together for professional learning around book clubs, suggests ongoing efforts towards building professional learning communities.

**Paolo: Teaching in a Public School Board in the Same Mixed Race Middle Class Suburb**

Paolo’s current context is as department head in a Public school board in the same district as the teachers described in the preceding paragraph. Paolo had previously worked in schools with a prominent South Asian population, but is currently at a school with more Asian students. Paolo describes a community that is economically mobile with some parents favouring a traditional, transactional (Miller, 1983) educational orientation. As department head, Paolo mentors colleagues but some of the teachers he works with are more traditionally minded, resisting new texts and dialogic methods, for example. As well, he encounters challenges when promoting dialogic classroom practices and culturally attuned curriculum change at School Board professional development meetings.

**Rhea: New, largely Muslim-population school, upper middle class suburb**

Rhea’s current school context also consists of a mainly “non-White” student body and mainly White teachers. The school, only 2 years old at the time of the interview, had just over 700 students enrolled in Grades 9 through 11. It is located in a sprawling, rapidly developing middle class suburb in a largely Muslim community. Approximately 85% of the school’s student population is east-Asian. Grades 9 and 10 were phased in first, followed by an additional grade-level each subsequent year. The new principal and staff work collectively
and conscientiously to develop school culture and curriculum. For example, the principal has given her full support and participates in Rhea’s teacher-student book club, in which members collaboratively discuss literature, what they are learning from students, cultural issues, and potential English course book selections.

**Interpreting the Data**

As noted in Chapter One, this study is not naturalistic in the sense of the researcher *living herself* into a social context, as in participant-observation or long-term narrative inquiry models (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988). While I consider all observations made during visits to the teachers’ schools potentially relevant to my data interpretation, I cannot prioritize this kind of contextual information. While the study will not focus on the whole-school culture, the culture of the specific English department will be of interest, to the extent that the teachers’ opinions appear to be shaped by a collective approach or abiding local tradition, as will be described in Chapter Four. Although this is not a grounded theory study pre-testing a specific program (for example, a new curriculum), I will examine how the teacher interviewees articulate their experience of the changing landscape of the discipline of English teaching.

Of special interest, will be the unfolding, or *currere* (Pinar, 1975) – of each individual English teacher’s perspectives, which may include past school and / or English department locations. The idea of “mobile ethnographies” (Marcus, as cited in Denzin, 2001, p. 86) applies, since biographical narrative across sites of experience is key data. In this sense, narrative inquiry is critical for tracing the English teachers’ connecting of experiences,
values, and opinions, both individually and collectively, into coherent perspectives that can stand their ground with other critical discourses of culture, language, literature and education.

**Data Collection**

Data collection is not separate from the data interpretation process. Rather, during the data collection phase (making observations, conducting and transcribing the interviews), I continuously compared elements within the growing body of data and reevaluated ways of coding it. I noted informal observations of participants to determine how the English teachers represented their attitude towards the form and content of the research process. Small actions and gestures, tone of voice, silences, repetition, and rephrasing and other small details are potentially significant as evidence of active interviews. This accounts for the lengthy quotations which sometimes include reference to guttural expressions (laughter) and bodily actions (“waving arms,” for example). I used probing questions and occasionally requested for specific examples or elaboration in order to encourage a fuller, more descriptive narrative. To my surprise, this was not often unnecessary.

**Data Analysis Procedures**

With this research, I seek to “uncover the conceptual structures that inform the subjects’ actions” (Denzin, 2001, p. 125) in order to achieve cognitive and affective understanding of participants’ perspectives. Denzin’s term “existential ethnography” (p. 147) is useful for this kind of research which does not attempt to circumvent the subjective nature of experience and the “emotional dimensions” of research (Fonow & Cook, 1991, p. 9), but engages with it critically and with a sense of moral and social responsibility.
In the following, I outline my data analysis procedures as reflecting various qualitative research theories compatible with this study’s critical-constructivist process:

1. Theorize from data collected throughout stages of project (analytic induction, constant comparative method (Glasner & Strauss, 1967);

2. Compare data collected to social and historical context (historical introduction of multicultural policy in Ontario, policy documents, practices / culture of individual English departments). Note relevant documents as well as artifacts in the environment;

3. Look for the “narrative strategies” participants employ in their verbal and written narratives. How do they frame and prioritize content? (Chase, 2003, p. 663);

4. Code data from interviews, discussions, and written reflections, following key stages. Identify themes, categories, and their parts (axial coding) and the ways they relate to each other (cause / effect, type, etc.) (Seale, 1999);

5. Read for “idiolect” (Barthes, as cited in Denzin, 2001, p. 91) or special language of English teachers, e.g., “standards,” “great,” “classic,” “relevant”;

6. Locate “illuminative” and “recalled lived” epiphanies (Denzin, 2001, p. 37) however minor (as also evidence of critical travelogues);

7. Compare stories and reformulate the initial research questions and hypotheses. Contextualize findings to sociohistorical context.
**Validity and Relevance**

My disposition towards my study participants is not only as a researcher but as a fellow English teacher. This means I can more easily relate to their experiences, but it does not mean I have an easy, objective access to them. The risk of “objectifying the subject” (Heywood, 2007) is an active problem of validity in this study. Although I use the contextual and transcript data to arrive at classifications of the participants, I qualify these as tools for thinking with (Eisenhart, 2001), rather than representations of the participants. I therefore also make it a point to resist smoothing out the inconsistencies of their self-stories (Gee, as cited in Arber, 1996, p. 53) for the sake of a unified theory. Instead, I have tried to heed Hall’s (1996) reminder in the wake of postmodern ideas of identity and language that, “[I]dentities are … points of temporary attachment to the subject positions which discursive practices construct for us” (p. 14).

The question of the role of teachers as critical pedagogues: “[H]ow do we encourage student “voices” while simultaneously encouraging the interrogation of such voices? (Simon, 1992, p. 62) also applies to the constructivist researcher’s problem of subjective parity versus reform. A study that seeks to make teachers aware of the “discursive regimes employed in the production of subjectivity” will lack integrity if it does not proceed with what Simon aptly calls “communicative openness,” and a “sense of collective venture” (p. 61).

The data of this study is intersubjective dialogue and narratives based on memory and existential awareness. These are nebulous areas for science, but as argued earlier, they are the inescapable phenomena of social inquiry. As many experts in the field of qualitative research have pointed out, rigour and relevance are all the more important when dealing with these phenomena. Thorough listening, perceptive observation, continual checking and cross-
checking (triangulation), seeking acknowledging and making sense of negative cases, imaginative conceptualization and contextualization that does not diminish unresolved contradictions, are all necessary means of validation (Kvale, 2002). Further, making these strategies transparent allows both the participants and the research audience to more easily determine whether conclusions have been extrapolated accurately from the raw data.

Finally, as a qualitative researcher, my identity is an intrinsic part of the data interpretation. Within the qualitative paradigm, my subjectivity must be carefully accounted for, in a process which looks at apparently isolated cognitive and emotional knowledge as potentially transferable, or even universal. In this sense, Denzin refers to all research participants as “universal singulars” (2001, p. 39). For this reason, I include my own critical travelogue reflections as potentially elucidating to the context of the study.

**Conclusions**

In this study, I do not conceive of myself as an objective outsider, or a spokesperson for all English teachers. My research is “critical” in the sense of bringing multiple perspectives together in search of solutions. I am not above the epistemological problems I seek to describe. By the same token, however, I can facilitate a sifting through of these problems, and a contextualizing of them in history, theory, and current social realities, so that effective pathways in teacher praxis and education can be more easily sighted.

Considering both the diverse perspectives and the commonly shared values and experiences of English teachers is an important starting point. While it is beyond the scope of this research project to ensure or directly effect particular changes in particular locations, it is possible “to gain increased understanding of the multitude of meanings that are created by
practitioners and by researchers working together and to thereby empower all the participants in the process” (Elbaz-Luwisch, 1997, p. 76).
Chapter Four:
Representations of the Data

Preface

Chapter One introduced complementary data important to this study: the curriculum policy context in Ontario, and the evolving global context. This chapter will describe the central data of this study\(^\text{20}\), the English teacher interview transcripts, in two parts.

Part One. I present a way of thinking about the participants as an aid to describing the data. While the Methodology section (see Chapter Three) described the basic structure, process, and procedures of the study, in this section I return to a description of the participants as data, or “texts” in the sense of critical differences of background and orientation. Aside from the practicality of re-introducing in greater detail the participants whose voices are highlighted in this chapter, to categorize them is also to engage in interpretation, adumbrating the final chapter. However, data description also requires an organizational framework, and for this purpose I here introduce three complementary ways of classifying the participants. These are:

1. their educational backgrounds and teaching contexts;

2. an analysis of how they represent three types of local (specific-site) curriculum reform proposed as: Adaptive, Applied Research / Collaborative Inquiry, and Activism; and

\(^{20}\) Quotations from the interview data are quoted word for word except where ellipsis or comments or supplied words in square brackets are used to aid comprehensibility. Some phatic expressions are excluded. “Int.” refers to Interviewer (author). Three asterisks indicates elapsed time or digression from the topic under consideration.
3. examples of autobiographical narrative in the transcripts, interpreted as

*critical travelogues.*

Part Two. I describe the interview data highlighting correspondences and divergences among participants’ responses on similar themes. I identify two overarching categories. The first, *Canon and Text,* explores English as an increasingly contested curriculum domain undergoing a decentring of former boundaries, especially content boundaries. The second, *Intertextual Challenges,* surveys areas of heightened difficulty and possibility in English teaching as a result of growing consciousness in education as in society of the dialogic interplay of language, literature, and culture (Bakhtin, 1981; Kristeva, 1980, 1991).

**PART ONE: THE PARTICIPANTS**

*Ties to Educational Research and Change Initiatives:*

***Three Participant Profiles***

Participants differ significantly in terms of educational backgrounds and teaching orientations. Some, such as Sabrina, James, and the majority of the Ontario English Department, are not involved in formal research, graduate studies in education, or social activism. Others, such as Rhea, Paolo, and a few members of the Ontario English Department, are teacher researchers. Gen and Art are teacher researchers, with Gen also pursuing graduate studies in education; however, the social activism thrust of their curriculum and school change efforts justify a separate category as teacher activists. In order to highlight participant categories according to their active ties to the educational research community and levels of active research, this section will use abbreviations to distinguish each (see legend, Figure 5).
Figure 5. Participant profiles.

Legend: ED1 Ontario English Department; T1 Sabrina (teacher); T2 James (teacher), TR1 Rhea (teacher researcher), TR2 Paolo (teacher researcher), SA1 Gen (Social Activist), SA2 Art (Social Activist).

As a collective, ED1 needs to be classified in two ways. Only some of the department’s members are engaged in educational research and this is represented with an asterisk. At the same time, the majority of members are in neither the a, b, or c categories and therefore ED1 also belongs, with T1 and T2, in the last category (neither a, b, or c) as shown with the checkmark. Since generally only some secondary school teachers are enrolled in graduate studies in education, participating in educational research, or leading school-based social activism projects, the separating line highlights that T1, T2, and ED1 may represent a kind of norm against which the other participants (TR1 and TR2, SA1 and SA2: teacher researchers and activists), and the interview data as a whole can be compared. To some extent ED1 also represents a typical English department in the variety of levels of engagement or non-engagement of its members in the categories. Rare indeed would be a
secondary school English Department in which every member was a graduate student in Education, an educational researcher, or a social activist.

**Critical Travelogues: Discovering Teacher Narratives**

Earlier, I related my personal educational journey that led me to the questions I pose in this thesis about teaching English in a multicultural society and in a global age (see Chapter 1). I introduced the concept of the critical travelogue as an “arts-based metaphor for education” (Diamond, 1999), embodying reflection through time and space. In a multicultural society and global electronic age, the critical travelogue becomes an ever more apt depiction of the journey of education for teachers and students alike. The spreading pattern of multicultural classrooms throughout the world, the continuous flourishing of world literature and translation, and the Internet as a global meeting place, are all powerful examples of changing and virtual modes of intercultural experience. Some participants chose to relate more detailed autobiographical information, allowing for a more “close-up” portrait of the experiences that inform their English teaching. When the autobiographical pieces are lifted up from the data and placed together (like a collage) a significant fragment of their critical travelogue emerges.

While all of the teacher interviews display various degrees of critical reflection and conscientious professional growth, Rhea, Paolo, and Gen, in particular, delved into chronological accounts of their English teaching experiences, tracing a personal journey. For Rhea and Paolo, the beginning point is formal education – whether days as a high school student or early pre-teaching days. For Gen, childhood memories also enter the portrait. All
of these individuals completed their Masters of Education and are involved in formal education research.

**Critical Travelogue: Paolo**

In launching the interview with Paolo, I suggested various entry-points to the question, “How is English changing” such as his own schooling, previous versus current teaching experiences, or simply his view of where English is going. A young department head in his early thirties, Paolo chose to start from his not-so-distant experiences as a student:

Well, I think when I was growing up we, in English class, studied canonized texts such as *To Kill a Mocking Bird*, *The Lord of the Flies*, *The Stone Angel*, and we were taught about the Judeo-Christian symbolism in these texts and a lot of the learning I did in high school was really more …rote. I was told the symbols and I was told how to think of the novel and essentially regurgitate that back to the teacher, and I did very well in high school. And I think that continued until maybe my 2nd year of university when suddenly I started to read a lot of theory and [we] were challenged more about the meaning of the text and meaning started to be negotiated….But then when I went back into teaching and, for example, got my first job [as an English teacher], I reverted back to the kind of teaching that I had when I was in high school.

Paolo’s educational journey zig-zags across educational locales: his traditional schools, his theory courses at university, and back to the familiar still extant traditional practices in his first teaching context.

“[S]tarting over” begins with Paolo’s second teaching position at a school that little resembles his prior experience, not only in terms of the students, but in terms of the mentor he discovers there:
I was introduced to a department head whose idea of English teaching was to teach students how to think – not what to think but how to think – and so incidentally I was at a school with a very high ESL population, it was called “The Brown School.” There were no White students.

Before this career move, Paolo had never really known multicultural diversity: both his neighbourhood growing up and his university experience outside of Toronto were mainly Anglo-Saxon. His description of this experience resembles a traveller’s account of arriving in a foreign country:

But when I walked out … on the first day into that community and I was away from the sort of community where I grew up, where I started teaching, I was a bit overwhelmed. It was different. The students were mostly of a Tamil background – East Indian, Pakistani – Middle Eastern essentially…. So, to talk about the … Judeo-Christian symbolism of a text would really mean nothing to these students. So, it was interesting how suddenly, as a teacher, I was the foreigner. I was the person who didn’t know the Koran. I didn’t know the religion and the religious symbolism that these students had been privy to growing up.

Characterizing himself as a “foreigner” Paolo makes a significant leap away from the terra firma of paradigmatic teacher authority to the uncertain ground of being an outsider to cultural knowledge. It is this role of “cultural learner” that inspires his ongoing efforts at curriculum change.

**Critical Travelogue: Rhea**

At the time of the interview, Rhea had arrived at a crossroads of professional inquiry and development: a teacher researcher leading a book club study at her school, a Masters of Education graduate newly returned from the U.S. to Toronto, a former department head with
a strong record of curriculum reform, now spearheading professional learning at a newly
built school in a largely Muslim community in Ontario.

Besides many similarities with Paolo’s career path, Rhea did not face as much
isolation as a novice teacher. She began her teaching career with ties to the educational
research community which remained unbroken throughout her career to the present. Her
habits of dialogic inquiry were nurtured from the start by joining the novice teacher branch of
Dr. Mary Kooy’s longitudinal SSHRC book club study, where she and several other first-
year teachers experienced literature (mainly novels about teachers and teaching) as a
springboard to collaborative professional inquiry (Clark, 2001; Kooy, 2006).

Autobiographical elements in Rhea’s interview gradually emerge to elucidate turning
points in her professional inquiry as an English teacher. Initially, Rhea’s response to my first
question, *Have you changed your view of what English is as a subject area and what it
entails?* was to refer to formal curriculum changes she had observed, especially the emphasis
on “literacy” and standardized testing. Rhea’s view that this system-mandated emphasis is
appropriate and worthwhile seems at odds with her progressive initiatives in education, such
as revamping reading lists with non-canonical texts. As well, she associates the literacy
testing mandates with an increased emphasis on *critical* literacy skills, “teaching students
how to be critical readers.” Rhea’s position can be better understood in light of her
background as a resource teacher for literacy support Grades 7-10. In describing what she
learned from this role, Rhea identifies the source of her enthusiasm for the literacy initiatives,
but also uncovers a crucial insight that motivates her practice and illuminates many of her
interview comments:
A lot of the research that I uncovered when I was in that role was that one of the ways to engage readers or to get at that struggling reader or that student who is not interested in reading is by giving them the appropriate kinds of texts that [are] appropriate for their reading level, but also appropriate for them in terms of what they can connect to. You know, can they see themselves in the text? Is there some kind of personal connection or relevance to them? So, I started to see relevancy as a very big important aspect of teaching English.

Rhea’s experience developing literacy support for diverse students is a crucial juncture on the way to her bold initiatives as a first year department head discovering a chasm between students and texts:

So, [this is] one of the first things I did at my former school, that had a diverse student body. It was made up primarily of, about 50% Blacks and 50% South Asian. There was a very, very small representation of White students, but yet, their book room and all the books that were used in the curriculum. You know, 90% or more of them were representative of White authors and the White experience in terms of characters…. I realized we had to offer more reading experiences to students so that they could see themselves represented in the texts, so that they could somehow identify or connect. And also, this was a school that had the lowest literacy scores in the board.... And so, we started to bring in more culturally diverse texts.

Rhea’s recognition of the difference cultural relevance can make to student learning led her to initiate profound changes. Determined to better meet her students’ needs, she began to explore the literary world outside of the sanctioned school canon. Her quest led her beyond the school and its English bookroom, and past the Ministry curriculum resources, to contact
small book stores in and around Toronto for advice on culturally diverse books for teenagers, and eventually to ask the students themselves for their opinions on new reading materials.

After leaving the school, Rhea linked her graduate studies in education with her research activities by organizing a teacher book club at a school where she would later resume her teaching career. She continues to combine her role as teacher with formal educational research and professional development.

**Critical Travelogue: Gen**

In responding to the question, “How is English changing?” Gen begins by highlighting the instigation of the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test [OSSLT] as a new and, for her, highly undesirable part of the English teaching landscape in Ontario: “I think it’s designed to get the results that you aim to get, not what I feel English is for.” But Gen drops the Literacy Test topic midstream to address “personal changes” and to trace her encounter with English teaching from prior influences, to the beginning of her career, to the ongoing direction of her work. Throughout the twists and turns of the interview, her teacher autobiography grows, as she draws upon recollections of significant experiences within and outside of teaching English, including childhood influences.

She re-starts, “I was going to say, the more that I am comfortable to take big risks… but, actually, I remember that I did something crazy on my first year too…. For Gen, what English was in the past, or is now as a general phenomenon, is secondary to her feelings about “what English is for.” Reflecting on changes in English, she turns inwards, to her own professional development, beginning with her start teaching Civics:
As a young Civics teacher, Gen devised a unit which engaged students in raising money towards alleviating world poverty. In her B.Ed. year at OISE, she was introduced to the notion of advancing the whole class full marks for an assignment, only deducting marks afterwards where results fell short of expectations. She felt she had nothing to lose in trying it out (she could always teach in another country, she noted). Colleagues disapproved of her unorthodox approach; she had not requested prior approval. But her gamble paid off: the students raised $6,000 towards the purchase of a school for a poor village in India; they learned about injustice and how they could make a difference; what is more, the majority earned a high proportion of the 100 pre-allotted marks.

Gen changed to a new school where she taught English. In her first year, she set in motion a curriculum overhaul, introducing a unit based on a new set of books featuring global and social justice issues such as AIDS, war, and world poverty, and set in places such as China, Africa, and South America. She created lesson plans and linked the new unit to the support of a fledging school in Tanzania through a book writing project, and an appeal to parents to purchase and later donate the new novels. Asked to explain what inspired her to transplant her Civics approach to English, Gen looks back at her life as a high school student:

I did my undergrad in International Development so, yeah, that definitely influences me. But I mean I guess I can go even back further to when I was a student at [name of school] and the biggest thing that probably changed the course of my life was doing development work in El Salvador when I was a student with Mr. Mikulich …. So to me, no matter what I learn, I’m always thinking about how can I connect what I’m learning to bigger issues in the world because, I can’t be like, “Oh, that’s so sad” and then move on. I see it as part of your human commitment and I happen to be an English teacher…. [I]t’s a reflection of who you are when you teach the course – what comes out.
The metaphor of critical travelogue is especially suited to Gen’s autobiographical teacher narrative. The relationship between learning and making connections to the world informs her whole experience of education. The value she places on raising students’ awareness of global issues is not rooted in Civics; it travels with her to English. Wherever and whatever she has taught, she has created authentic connections to the world outside of middle class Ontario, outside of Canada, and outside of Western culture and privilege. For her, English has a home in global education.

The portrait of Gen’s motivations and influences takes on more life with details of her childhood as she responds to my provocative question, whether given the example of Shakespeare’s dominance in the curriculum, English teachers are colonizers. I quote her at length here in order to capture the thick description of her spontaneous narrative:

You know what it makes me think of? … This is my little story: My dad who grew up in Hong Kong – he used to tell me – like, our garage was filled with books and it was all English literature – and, he used to tell me since I was a little kid, “English literature is the best. You have to read these books. They are so beautiful they will bring you to tears.” So I would spend my childhood days in the garage picking out [acts this out] books and reading them. And then he forced me to join a racket club and I didn’t even like it. I did everything I could to wear inappropriate clothing when he dragged me to the court…. And then later on he’s telling this story to somebody else and I hear him say that everyday when he used to walk to school he would walk by this racket club, a British – obviously – racket club, and it said on the gates, “No dogs or Chinese allowed.” It made me think – he was just telling this casually to someone else – and it made me realize, like everything sort of came into perspective, “Oh, my God, my dad is still struggling in that colonial mentality where you hate the colonizer but you secretly subconsciously want to be them. You idolize them.” And it made sense – that’s why he forced me to join racket
ball at this crazy club that was so expensive. I didn’t even want to do it; he made me do it because he wasn’t allowed when he was a kid, you know? And I thought, why was he always pumping British literature down my throat? The colonizers; they were the ones. I mean, when I went to a British private school in Hong Kong if you were bad you had to write out lines: “The sun never sets on the British empire.” I think they drilled it into your head that this is the height of sophistication and culture. So, does it surprise me that countries that have been colonized before are seeing Shakespeare as, you know, the epitome of the literate world and its highest form? No, not at all. I think it has a lot to do with, again, class and race and the history of colonialism…. I mean, no one is going to deny it’s great literature – but I think there’s a lot to it that’s beyond just the quality of it.

In reaching back to her childhood, and further still into her father’s childhood stories, Gen produces an important piece of the puzzle of her teaching philosophy and praxis. Her travelogue as an English teacher is especially “critical” because from an early age she questioned the imbalanced power structures behind the conventional wisdom of reading the English canon. Her father’s childhood story mise en abîme with her own indicates the developed reflection of Gen’s teacher self-narrative. Ultimately, for Gen, planting English in global education is a personal moral imperative.

**Critical Travelogue (A Beginning): Lucia**

The unexpected monologue of a practice-teacher in a concurrent Bachelor of Education programme that arose late in the Ontario English Department interview was all the more notable for its uninterrupted length (here abridged), candour, and struggle of ideas and expression. It may represent the beginnings of a certain trajectory of critical reflection on English teaching.
I feel that English is changing and I feel that it is moving perhaps more to a democratic feel in the classroom…. When I was a student in high school it kind of felt more like knowledge was embodied in the teacher and was being passed down, but …. picking texts that are applicable to their lives kind of empowers students to say, "I have knowledge as well that I can pass on to others". So, that’s kind of something that I’ve been seeing. And I think that … they’re afraid to share the knowledge they have because they don’t feel that it is valuable within an academic setting…. I understand the marking because you have to have a way to evaluate … people want to know numbers. But, still, as a student that does kind of stifle…. So, it’s kind of a catch 22 situation…. You know, it’s okay to think, it’s okay to try, but then, inside, I say, “So what are you looking for exactly? You’re the machine and you’re looking for this and I want to meet all this criteria…."

Still involved in her courses for the Bachelor of Education, Lucia shares the connection with the educational research community. Her voice transitions between the teacher and student perspective. She is only beginning to critically reevaluate her educational experience of English teaching.

*Three Models of Local Curriculum Reform*

Gen, Rhea, and Paolo’s critical travelogues reveal the personal change and reflection that informs their sense of professional agency. Together with some of the other participants, they represent proactive models of English curriculum reform that stand distinct from the daily and diverse efforts of English teachers to meet the changing needs of their students (Colarusso, in press b). I suggest that they illustrate three models of reform in English teaching: Adaptation, Applied Research / Collaborative Inquiry, and Activism, (further explored in Chapter 5). The Adaptation model is evident where teachers routinely make
modifications on an ad hoc basis within a context of openness to change. Curriculum change is “loosely coupled,” typically “small-schedule” changes take place independent of school programming or formal educational research and as a result are usually circumscribed in their impact (Marsh & Willis, 2000, p. 183). Similar to a “Conflict” model (p. 182) of competing, or non-conversant specific-site curriculum change, Adaptation nonetheless often relies on collaboration. Individuals or small groups can identify a problem and work with others to develop solutions. By contrast, the Applied Research / Collaborative Inquiry model depends on a shared vision and a common goal to produce actionable knowledge through an extended collaborative process of trial and error (Elliott, 1980). As an internal school process, it can feature action research, involving a small group of practitioners in dialogue with educational researchers and a range of stakeholders (Marsh & Willis, 2000). The Activist model shares some features with Applied Research / Collaborative Inquiry in that it can be coupled with an extended commitment towards actionable knowledge. A critical difference is that specific objectives, informed by a vision for social justice, are articulated. Activist teachers are individuals who pursue systematic curriculum change through a variety of means including at the subject, school, and professional development levels. They pursue all means of support for curriculum transformation that leads to civic transformation.

The Ontario English Department represents the Adaptation category; Rhea and Paolo are primarily examples of applied research and collaborative inquiry; Gen and Art are alone in the Activism category, as outlined in Figure 6:
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<th>Adaptation</th>
<th>Applied Research/ Collaborative Inquiry</th>
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**Figure 6.** Types of local curriculum reform in English teaching.

Legend: ED1: Ontario English Department; T1 and T2: James and Sabrina; TR1 and TR2: Rhea and Paolo; SA1 and SA2: Gen and Art.

As will be seen, these models are not mutually exclusive or in any way “finished portraits” of the participants.

**Adaptation**

Marsh and Willis (2003) define “adaptation” as “teachers modifying a planned curriculum as they implement it” (p. 365). The data arising from my interviews with the Ontario English Department and two individual interview teachers, Sabrina and James, provide varying portraits of adaptation and openness to change within the practical limits, real and perceived, of everyday school life. These examples reflect small scale changes carried out informally, without particular concern for wider applicability or ties to formal educational research. For example: The Ontario English Department members differed on
various matters from standardized testing, to the usefulness of Shakespeare for different kinds of students, to how to promote oracy and reading skills with ESL students, and the relative value of certain books on the curriculum. At the same time, they proudly reported and expressed appreciation for colleagues’ initiatives and approaches: one member’s spearheading of a graphic novels project for boys, the department head’s responsiveness to teacher’s requests for new materials, the former department head (now principal)’s conscious nurturing of a culture of openness to change for improved student learning.

Likewise, Sabrina and James expressed different views on English teaching and curriculum change, but offered several examples of how they and their department colleagues cope and adapt to change. Moreover, both the group and individual teacher participants revealed philosophical contradiction within their own epistemological perspectives: a tendency to both embrace change and value traditional approaches and ideas about English teaching

**Sabrina and James.**

Like most members of the Ontario English Department, and most teachers, Sabrina and James are neither social action leaders, nor involved in ongoing educational studies or research projects. However, their openness to being interviewed itself signals interest and cooperation with formal educational inquiry, and they do not necessarily oppose English curriculum change. Rather, they reveal mixed opinions: scepticism towards some new theories or practices of teaching English, enthusiasm for others; conditional commitment towards certain kinds of change, resistance towards others. Besides lacking ties to formal education studies or research projects, they are not committed to any particular unified vision for change in English Language Arts beyond a professional collaborative ethic. Rather, they
tend to portray themselves as independent players, honing their art of English teaching within
the constraints of government, School Board and Department level obligations, but in a
largely personal and autonomous fashion, meeting the needs of the classes they teach based
on the insights of their own careers.

The ad hoc and episodic nature of the adaptation model can be seen in the subject-
based internal curriculum change process that Sabrina experienced at her former school. For
example, there was “experimentation” around which books worked best with which students
(e.g., grades, levels).^21

It was a trial and error thing and sometimes there were some really
unfortunate results to using a text that perhaps was too advanced for a Grade
11 College class, that should have been used in a Grade 12 College class. And
that may have turned some students off during the transition. But then there
were surprises too, for a text we didn’t think would work well and actually did
work well in a certain class.

Sabrina goes on to name J. D. Salinger's novel *Catcher in the Rye* as a text that worked best
when a class had more male students.

Change also happened through independent initiatives, often by new teachers:

When teachers come into the department they offer suggestions of introducing
something new and with it comes their qualifications and an understanding of
that text which is always nice and fresh and it’s rewarding…. And so, I think

[^21]: The practice of streaming students into “levels” is controversial. In contrast to most provinces in Canada,
Ontario streams students in each grade based on predicted outcomes and postsecondary destinations. In Grades
9 and 10, these include “applied” (college destination); “academic” (university destination) and “essential”
(workplace or college destination). In Grades 11 and 12, the levels are “college” and “university.” Courses are
designated acronyms accordingly, e.g., Grade 9 or 10 Essential - 9E, 10E; Grade 9 or 10 Applied - 9P, 10P;
Grade 9 or 10 Academic - 9D, 10D; Grade 11 or 12 College- 3C, 12C; Grade 11 or 12 University - 11U, 12U.
that there are always, from my experience, teachers who strive to get the best material into the classroom.

Sabrina uses the term “transition” to refer to the trial and error shuffling of existing texts. Her examples describe adaptations of undetermined influence and duration that unfold through a combination of individual improvisation and informal collaboration.

Both Sabrina and James describe inventive lesson plans that they created for various units of study. For example, excursions to a television broadcasting station for a media unit (Sabrina) and the use of a story about a cancelled music concert to invite dialogue on censorship (James). These artful innovations reflect the day-to-day adaptations English teachers make in planning and enacting curriculum in tandem with unfolding sociocultural circumstances.

*The Ontario English Department: Adaptation.*

The Ontario English Department differs from this common model of adaptation in some key aspects: namely, a pronounced philosophy of teacher choice, including funding and department head support for teachers to try out new materials and approaches, and a heightened collective drive to discover “what works” for a much more culturally and linguistically diverse demographic of students:

Teacher E: [T]he best part about being in this department is calling [Teacher A], and saying, "Have you ordered any books yet? I read one this summer and I was just wondering…” and she always gets them for us, you know.

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22 Given the large number of teachers in the Ontario English Department interview, each will be referred to as Teacher A, B, C… for easier recognition as group interviewees and to avoid confusion with the other teachers in the study.
Teacher A: …I did have these conversations: "How could they teach two different books?" and I’m, "it’s not a big deal" [comically in low whisper]. But that’s the culture here; I don’t think it’s the culture everywhere. We had a teacher who went to [Name of Board] and came back here [because there] she felt totally constrained in that there were clear plans for the entire year: "This is what you do first, then this, then this, and then that". As a matter of fact there was a test already made up for you [general laughter]…. [T]here was no space for her to really be dynamic in the classroom …. But I think that everyone here has the professional level and ... we trust their judgment that they’re going to make the right choices…. So I do think we have a fine balance here....

Ontario English Department is unique from other adaptation-model English departments, because – through the department head and principal’s support and the enthusiasm of members – it cultivates and explicitly encourages a culture of innovation. The English teachers have optimal latitude to make choices that suit their own judgment and criteria. However, the stress on teacher independence also exposes the limits of the adaptation model: less emphasis on collective agency, the development of a shared vision and collaborative course of action towards integral change.

**Applied Research / Collaborative Inquiry**

Among the teacher researcher participants, two in particular lend themselves to shared categorization: Rhea and Paolo were both involved in graduate studies in Education at or shortly before the time of the interview, and are actively involved in educational research and / or professional development leadership. Strangers who teach English at different schools and School Boards, Rhea and Paolo nonetheless share many things in common: Both taught English at more than one school and became early-career department heads;
completed a Masters of Education degree during their teaching careers; and transplanted their formal educational research experiences to the schools at which they teach. Rhea and Paolo mutually value the Book Club heuristic for student learning, English teaching and professional development, having both been involved in Book-Club courses and / or research projects designed by Dr. Mary Kooy of the Curriculum Teaching and Learning department, OISE/UT. For both, the Book Club heuristic provides a genial methodology for co-constructing learning at the classroom and professional development level. Paolo developed the possibilities of book clubs for the classroom as he moved from a school with much needed but little openness to change, to a school where the department head encouraged innovation. After becoming department head, he continued to model the book club method for his department, and also for his school board through his own practice, mentorship, and in-service presentations. Similarly, Rhea gradually built upon the various stages of her educational research, moving from participation in a pre-service book club as part of a SSHRC research project (the same project as the teacher researcher described earlier), to completing a Master’s Degree based on this ongoing book club research experience, to enhancing her contribution to the longitudinal SSHRC study by implementing an after-school teacher-student book club (now in its 2nd year) where she currently teaches. Paolo and Rhea are therefore both change agents of applied research and models of collaborative inquiry.

Neither Paolo or Rhea hesitated to initiate bold changes to the English curriculum at their schools, introduce culturally relevant reading materials, and build the support of their colleagues. In this sense, the “activist” label is not inapplicable. However, because they are especially involved in modeling the book club heuristic for dialogic learning, and because they differ from the other activist models in this study who are more directly and intensely
oriented towards a multi-pronged approach towards social justice based curriculum reform, it is useful for the purpose of this study to hold them up as “teacher researcher” models.

**Paolo as teacher researcher.**

Paolo applies collaborative inquiry at the subject and department level, leading a process of constant review and renewal of English department reading materials. One goal is to “offer a choice at every grade level.” Paolo explains further how he and a group of colleagues select a few novels each year to read and consider for English course inclusion. If approved by the school board, they add them to the stock of book club novels:

I find individuals I tend to want to work with and select people who are readers. A lot of English teachers aren’t. It’s amazing, they’re not really readers. So, I think that has been a criterion of mine and as a new department head. I think, one of the questions I would like to ask a new teacher coming in to my department is, “What’s the latest novel that you have read? What are you reading right now?” and it’s interesting to hear what people say.

It is important to note that the short term active research aspect of Paolo’s curriculum reform efforts depends on selective involvement of likeminded colleagues. A parallel but slower track is to re-culture the department through both mentorship and strategic hiring.

Active ties to the educational research community also adds an applied research dimension to Paolo’s initiatives. His book selections and preference for dialogic English classroom practices (for example, the use of book clubs and interactive journals) are influenced by his graduate studies and ongoing ties with OISE/UT:

[M]y colleague and I recently had some books approved – for example, *Purple Hibiscus*, *The Book of Negroes*, . . . I sent in *Mr. Pip* because this was
a novel … which I really loved. So, we’re constantly looking for what’s new … and I think our Board welcomes the diversity of authorship that we send in.

**Rhea as teacher researcher.**

Rhea spells out her leadership role in overhauling the curriculum at the former school at which she was the department head:

I’m going to go back to when I was at [Name of former school] which is where we bought a whole new set of texts. What we did was – part of it was research, so we went out and we did some research on what culturally diverse texts there are and that was a re-educating on the teachers part too, because you know, we were so used to the literary canon, what we’ve been teaching for years, what we were taught, what’s available in the book room, so it was even a re-educating there. So, we had to do a little bit of research. I contacted some book stores in Toronto - Another Story and A Different Book List, I think are the two different book stores that I contacted, and also another bookstore in Brampton that focuses on Afro-American texts – and so we contacted them to find out what was there, what were people reading, what were students, you know, teenagers reading. So that, coupled with our research. And then, also just giving students - calling up students to read and to provide us with some feedback…. And then we read books, reviewed books and - our own impressions of the books and the relevancy, so we kind of based it on those factors.

**Ontario English Department: Applied research / Collaborative inquiry.**

Although as a whole, the Ontario English Department fits the Adaptation model, it also warrants use as illustration of the Applied Research / Collaborative Inquiry model on account of some of its members. At the time of the interview, the department head and Teacher B regularly participated in book club research project at their school. A former
English teacher who later switched to teaching Civics began the mother-daughter book club for students as a product of her educational journey, or “currere” (Pinar, 1975). In pre-service she was introduced to the Book Club heuristic and volunteered to participate in the SSHRC Book Club study (Kooy, 2006).

As a teacher she continued her research, obtaining a Masters in Education while continuing her commitment to the research project as it expanded to multi-site. Teacher A and Teacher B of the department group interview were at the time the only participants involved in the after-school book club. The book club (still running at time of publication) is not designed specifically to supplement English or other courses. It involves girls from all grades, as well as some of their mothers, in extracurricular reading and dialogue. The involvement of these English teachers nonetheless displays their awareness of the relevance of this research to their practice and their passionate interest in learning about how students can grow in their love of reading, develop confidence and skills in speaking and listening, and overcome misplaced perceptions of limited potential. As such, while it is not clear yet how the book club affects their classroom practice, these teachers fall into the “applied research” category (see asterisk in Figure 6). Teacher B is nearing retirement while Teacher A is head of the department who in the year following the interview accepted a secondment to lead Literacy development for the school board.

Among the other department interview participants, the data supplies another example of a teacher who fits the “applied research” bill. Teacher C’s colleagues credit him for spearheading a graphic-novels boys literacy initiative. Teacher C took on the responsibility of implementing the school board-designed and -supported initiative for students of English at his school. The project was in its third year at the time of the interview
and expanded from $3,000 to $5,000 of funding under Teacher C’s leadership. In supporting Teacher C’s intention to make a difference with graphic novels, Ontario English Department represents variations on the “norm” where traditional approaches prove themselves ill-fitted to new challenges (low literacy scores, gender gap in literacy, non-improving drop out rates, and anecdotal evidence of decreasing engagement due to youth media overload, for example) and a variety of remediations are tried, some old-fashioned (after school workshops) and some relatively new (graphic novels or Internet-based lessons and units).

Since the group interview did not afford the opportunity to obtain a full profile of each teacher’s contributions to positive change in their department and school, no final generalizations can be made about the extent of curricular activism in the department as a whole. Nevertheless, Teachers A, B, and C reflect the frequent existence within any given department at any given time of at least some teachers who take bolder strides towards change. The volubility of their talk during the group interview, as well as the frequency with which other participants responded or referred to them, suggest they play leading roles in their department. It is important to note, however, that such teachers, and department heads, rely on the cooperation and support of others to implement worthwhile curricular experiments and research-backed change initiatives.

Together, the examples of Teachers A, B, and C warrant the asterisk under “applied research” for Ontario English Department. While it is difficult to determine whether most English departments in Ontario feature a few such key players, it may well be fair to conclude that a significant number of them do. This can be extrapolated from the number of regional and board-based as well as university-based educational research projects related to English teaching multiplied by the number of teacher researchers and field based teachers
and administrators required to be involved in order to carry out the design, implementation, and support of these projects. It is also important to remember that while some of the success stories of reform and innovation in English teaching find their audience through publications such as *Professionally Speaking*, or networks such as the English Language Arts Network [ELAN], it is likely that many others remain relatively untold.

**Activism: Gen and Art as Social Activist Teacher Researchers**

Gen and Art are the only English teachers in this study who fall into all three categories of graduate studies, applied research, and social activism. More precisely, Gen is pursuing a Ph.D. in education, leading changes to her English department’s curriculum, and endeavouring to re-culture the professional development approaches of her school board. Art, her husband and new department head when Gen joined the school, takes inspiration from Gen’s vision to overhaul the department’s longstanding curriculum resources in favour of more culturally diverse materials better attuned to social and global justice issues. Besides these changes, which require them to overcome resistance and gradually build colleague and Board support, the teacher activist couple implemented several school and board wide initiatives for social justice including a letter writing campaign in protest of the Darfur genocide, followed by a diplomatic school trip experience at the United Nations headquarters in New York, and an environmental awareness day which included presentations by outside experts. Their curriculum reform activities to date have also included: mentoring colleagues on the importance of increasing global consciousness; organizing school presentations by global issues author Deborah Ellis whose books they have incorporated in the new English reading lists; and obtaining Board approval and funding to orchestrate Book Club model professional development days for English teachers. This multi-pronged, cross-system, and
activist approach to changing the way English is taught identify Gen and Art as distinct examples of an activist approach to subject English reform.

While focused from the start on a clear vision and values for curriculum change, Gen and Art’s initiatives nevertheless unfolded from reflective practice, as revealed in the following set of quotations capturing the gradual steps and cumulative development of their English curriculum change project:

Gen: I told him [Art] it was sort of terrible that our reading list was so antiquated. And then there was the constraint of budget and the fact that, you know, you just can’t go out and buy tons of books. And I said, “Well okay, what about if we do a CPT [culminating performance task] and they can buy the books?” And then came up with the idea, the kids can donate the books if they wanted to at the end of the semester…. So, we’re changing that list all the time and I think it’s been interesting and the kids seem to really like the books. It’s hit and miss. Sometimes they don’t really like it, but they chose it, so….

Art: There’s a wide variety and they could choose from that. But also... the reading becomes a gift of reading now so they can pass it on to the children in Tanzania. And I think that’s been a great initiative and I was, I guess, as a new department head apprehensive changing but this idea just made so much sense.

Gen: And it sort of spread because once we had that sort of working with the CPT and saw that the kids really liked it and became more confident … then we started changing bigger stuff…. “Let’s look at all the courses and see what all the books are and see where we could make changes… one course at a time.”

***
In the first year that we changed it no one had to do any work. Then I rewrote everything and made the assignments and rubrics and everything so it was all done. … Made sure that it matched up with all the expectations so it was completely solid, so that… if they [teachers] wanted, all they had to do was photocopy. Because … if we introduced something new and we said, ‘And you’ve got to create new work,’ that would not go over well.

With each step, Gen and Art began to crystallize a long term strategy for change:

Well, we actually planned it out from Grade 9 - like the whole program - and said, “Throughout this program let’s cover every single continent and an equal balance of genders….?” So, if they stay in this program, they will feel like they have gone on a trip around the world and they’ll see the global village is really quite small…

Like Paolo and Rhea, Gen and Art combine collaboration and direct action while pursuing educational culture change, in order to overcome resistance. A constant process of revaluation to improve results is another common feature. However, while the teacher researchers share similar values and active research processes, Gen and Art’s efforts have developed rapidly to include a broader and more defined political framework – global issues – and the pursuit of more immediate cultural and social impact.

**Changing Roles of English Teachers**

The categories described above are meant to cast into relief different models of reform, not to imply that the majority of English teachers do not contribute to positive change simply because they are not pursuing graduate studies or involved in an educational research project. An English teacher does not have to be linked to the academic research community to be considered an “educational researcher.” As part of their daily work, English teachers
use assessment techniques to measure both student learning and the effectiveness of their teaching strategies. Each English teacher is unique in the extent or intensity with which he/she reflects critically on classroom practice or applies professional development learning. Many English teachers, with different degrees of frequency and sustainment, update existing and create new curriculum materials, design and try out novel learning experiences, and/or take risks to promote learning (Elliott, 2008). Furthermore, teacher activists can emerge in school communities independent of the English or other classroom context.

Likewise, English teachers do not have to be social justice leaders at their schools to participate in bringing about social justice. As part of their cultural work (Giroux, 2005), English teachers guide exercises of reading, writing, listening, and representing towards increased critical literacy practices and awareness of social justice issues. They can inspire students to imagine and prepare to make forms of contribution to meaningful change in the world, through communication skills and critical literacies. They can set examples by contributing to the social justice projects at their school or developing cross-curricular initiatives. Furthermore, that English teaching in Ontario is linked to social justice is now explicit in the Revised Ministry documents (OME 2007b, p. 27; OME 2007a, p. 28).
Reading between the lines of classroom practices and revised Ontario curriculum can provide glimpses of possible trajectories for English as a high school subject. While a report on the impact of Ontario Secondary School Reform begun in 1997 suggests teachers are overwhelmingly in favour of curriculum reform every 5 to 10 years (OSSTF, 2002), system mandates do not guide or determine every aspect of change to a school subject. However, Rhea suggests that a “transition” is happening in English:

The texts that appear on the literary canon and what we have been doing traditionally over the past 20-30-40 … years you know, that’s starting to change …. [C]learly, one of the challenges as an English teacher is including a diverse set of reading experiences and diverse set of texts for all of the readers… I mean culturally diverse, but I also mean diverse in terms of the reading levels and reading expectations…

Although the teachers in this study differ on how English is changing and in what ways, if at all, it needs to continue to change, many concur with Rhea’s description of a “transition.” For example, Teacher B notes changes in both printed and living texts (students) as she describes cleaning out materials in preparation for retirement:

I found courses of studies… from the 80s, and they’re really quite funny in the sense of how prescribed they were. I’m sure it had everything to do with the type of school we used to be. … Our demographics have changed incredibly since the founding of our school more than 30 years ago, and even from the time I first started teaching here in the early 80s…
Paolo, who also uses the term “transition” to describe how English is changing, describes the same transmission-model in the “course packs” in use at his first teaching placement in the 1990s. As his Critical Travelogue (p. 90, above) reveals, he too encountered a gap between the “Eurocentric” English curriculum and the cultural identities of students. Similarly, Art sees changes in methods, content and the role of student identity. Besides latest policy on metacognition and media, he notices, “different approaches to English – I mean, a movement I hope away from the content quiz, the standard things and getting a little bit more into analysis and creative ideas.” But without further prompts, his response becomes focused on content change, as he recollects the moment he first noticed a shift towards cultural relevance in English:

A lot of them [classics] are the cornerstones and still are regarded as the greats of literature. But I remember in the late 80’s [Name of consultant] coming into the school I was at and saying that you really have to have your courses represent more of the populace of the new clientele of your community.

Sabrina’s and James’ assessment of how English is changing is similar, yet qualitatively different. Sabrina began teaching in 2000 at a school that may well be typical of what Art and Paolo describe, one that keeps to the paving until provoked by a change agent or dramatic demographic shift. She credits the Department Head for assuring that “all was in place” in terms of a variety of British and American novels, an assortment of “very good texts” for teaching, such as Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *Shakespeare*, and Tennessee Williams' *The Glass Menagerie*. She notes, however, that they were not all in use, just “ready to use, all part of the mix for teaching.” She further observes, “there is no overall focus” and that culturally diverse texts were “minimal” and inconsistently used:
We had anthologies mainly for the Grade 12s and the senior grades and perhaps some of the resource books were spotted with poetry from various authors, but it wasn’t a main focus in any of the classes. It was blended in with others things we did in class. But, unfortunately, we weren’t all consistent in how we were using it in the classroom. So, some perhaps were using it more than others.

James’ account of how courses are developed at his current and previous school seems to confirm the prevalence of old texts:

One of the concerns every time we build a course is to make sure …[it] has a broad spectrum of different literature and we usually, of course … start with Shakespeare…..[In] the course I’m teaching right now we go from Macbeth into Gatsby which is American, then 1984 which is British, into Handmaid’s Tale which is Canadian, so everything gets basically covered.

For James the English high school curriculum as it is, including the standard U.K., U.S. and other Anglophone novels, offers sufficient breadth.

These images suggest things as they are in many high school English departments in Ontario, where traditional reading materials and teaching manuals coexist with various degrees of homage to national culture and multicultural society, where culturally varied texts are inducted from time to time, but reserve, inconsistency, and slow teacher uptake often prevails. They contrast with the images of conscious concerted planning for change initiated by Rhea, Paolo, and Gen in transforming English course reading lists. As seen in their Critical Travelogues, although at different school districts, they all found themselves at schools where the curriculum seemed too much at odds with the students.
This exchange among teachers in the Ontario English Department adds to the impression of slow curriculum change as familiar norm:

Teacher A: It would be interesting to go somewhere else. I had a student teacher – it was years ago and she went to a school my brother went to, and my brother went to that school in the late 50s and she had the same Grade 9 novel that my brother did...

Teacher B: Yay, *Chrysalids*! I was at the same school and I read the same book. So, they’ve been reading it for almost 40, 50 years.

Teacher E adds, “Where’s the growth in that? If you’ve been teaching the same book to Grade 9s for 40 years, where’s the growth for the educators?” Notably, even in contexts that, like the one that can be inferred from Sabrina’s comments, lack a robust culture of deliberative inquiry and reform, individual teachers can nonetheless be well disposed to curriculum change. Sabrina joins Teacher E in linking fresh books to teaching effectiveness:

I think that we have to be careful we are not just teaching it because we feel most comfortable with it and we are afraid to learn something new and we are afraid that it will not be taught well to the class . . . because sometimes our freshness about a text will help to invite things from students and will [actually] help us to learn the text better.

However, a limited sense of agency seems to inform the solutions Sabrina offers for teachers afraid to tackle new ground. She suggests shorter-length pieces:

If teachers aren’t familiar with novels that come from authors from other than British or Canadian backgrounds we should look for maybe essays or we should look for poetry from various authors of a different background just so that the students are exposed to it and ready for it.
She additionally proposes another alternative place for cultural diversity outside of the required English courses: “specialized” or “optional” courses. Describing pre-service at a school with Russian Literature courses, she recalls: “I thought that it was kind of neat to bring in something that the students can relate to, that their parents could relate to. . . to compare to the [English] classics.” When her request as a first year teacher to develop such a specialty course was declined, she reflects, “there was so much more I had to learn about how it works on a political scale, in terms of funding and in terms of school agendas and systems and things like that.” Sabrina clearly places importance on intercultural communication and relevance in English, yet at the same time, she projects a conception of multicultural content as outside of the centre. Whether due to a prohibitive environment or her conscious values as an English teacher, or both, her comments suggest cultural diversity is outside the centre of the English curriculum.

Similarly, for James, cultural diversity in the English curriculum leaves the traditional core intact. He refers to the CPT – the cumulative performance task usually comprised of an independent novel study of a work selected by the student – as a good means for students to experience different cultures in their literature. He later names Civics and World Religions as courses outside of English where students can encounter more multicultural content. Significantly, his and Sabrina’s portrayal of the traditional core of English – specifically, reading lists – as a kind of impenetrable fortress, resonates across the interviews. Yet the phenomenon is widespread: In the Ontario English Department interview where there is much celebrating of diverse texts, and teacher and student choice, the CPT is repeatedly mentioned as the place for the new multicultural novels. Even Gen and Art, activist
curriculum reformers, explain that they needed to begin their global literature program with the Grade 9 CPT in order to avoid a department backlash (see Activism, p. 109).

While describing the wrestling that goes on in developing curriculum, Rhea acknowledges the problem of canon displacement:

Int: And … when it comes to bringing in new books does that necessarily lead to the loss of the classics in the department? Do they lose their place?

Rhea: Right. In some cases maybe they do. I know that in the schools where I’ve taught we still hold strong to Shakespeare – so that will seem to always have its place…. [H]as it lost its place? In some respects, yes - if we’re making an effort to include more culturally diverse texts, yes. I guess some of those literary pieces that are in the canon have kind of fallen to the wayside. Having said that, we also encourage students to read some of those books on their free time or when they have their independent reading that they have to do – we have the – kind of like the old ISU – independent study units where they choose their book and we will encourage them to explore those books because they have heard of them too.

Rhea draws attention to the fact that even though some old standards may not be literally discarded, they drift from the centre of course designs, class activities, classroom time and discussion – the exact opposite view from one where multicultural texts are relegated to off-centre in independent units or optional courses.

The centrality of the canon, and the slow-changing nature of English curriculum in Ontario schools, is also in tension with the views and feelings of students themselves. Paolo relates an anecdote which reveals how some students feel making their way through the standard fare of old White-author books:
I remember recently a student asking one of my colleagues, "How come we don’t study Black history?" and she is a Black student. My colleague said, “Well, it’s not history, it’s English”. Well, I think her question has to do with whose writing are we reading and are we being fair in terms of what we are able to provide in terms of reading materials? I think we are, but I think the student’s comment had something to do with the fact that she didn’t see herself enough in what she was reading. I think that sends a very strong message. When we thought about it we thought, “How many Black writers do we have in our Grade 9 or 10 courses? We have some, but is what we are reading representative of who we are teaching? No it is not”.

But Paolo also experienced the shortcomings of monocultural curriculum from the opposite side, as a White Canadian with European roots learning English within a Judeo-Christian symbolic framework: “I was told the symbols and I was told how to think of the novel and essentially regurgitate that back to the teacher.” His experiences mirror those of Lucia, a practice teacher in Ontario English Department: “I think when I was a student in high school it kind of felt more like knowledge was embodied in the teacher and was being passed down” (see Critical Travelogue, Lucia, p. 96). Both experienced how students’ prior knowledge, including cultural knowledge, is often overlooked in traditional approaches to English literature that embrace canon-based theoretical approaches (New Criticism, for example) that confer stable meanings which can be conclusively known. Both Paolo’s start as a teacher in the late 1990’s when “delivery and assessment [rubrics] were new, but content and resources stayed the same” and his more recent experiences facilitating professional development add to the impression of widespread slowness of change in both English curriculum content and methods:
I think there are many teachers who have still not switched over from teaching *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *Lord of the Flies* . . . and *The Stone Angel*. They’re still teaching those old texts even in my own Board and I gave a workshop or a talk on book clubs in my board just recently and I had some eyes rolling. I had a teacher who put up her hand and said, “Well, how are students learning about symbols when you are doing book clubs?” Her question already indicates that she hasn’t been able to see outside the old ways of teaching and schooling and reading novels. I am what you would consider very left right now and a lot of teachers in schools are still very right.

*Debating Canon Displacement and the Place of Multicultural Texts*

The conflicting interview responses point to rethinking of the canon as a crux of tension among English teachers. The references to old books and an expanding array of new books in English prove that the canon variously referred to by participants as “classics,” “standard” texts, “traditional literature,” “the greats,” and “golden oldies” – is necessarily undergoing displacement, as illustrated in Figure 7.
Figure 7. Secondary English Curriculum in Ontario, Canada – Texts in Use c. 2007. [Figure 7 created by author for PowerPoint presentation, 8th Annual Dean’s Graduate Student Research Conference, OISE]. Diagram created by Dana Colarusso. Examples cited are based on the author’s experience of teaching in Ontario between 1999 and 2007.

James, for example, expresses deep scepticism towards English curriculum change predicated on what he fears would be cultural content for its own sake:

Int: What do you think is the role of the cultural identity of the student in the English classroom?
James: Well, you know, that’s the trickiest question of them all…. because that’s going to bring out what sounds like a racist response, especially from an English teacher who loves teaching English and recognizes its universal importance….. what happened in 1968…the Hall Dennis Report, where the child started to drive the curriculum and a lot of us, our generation, kind of lost out … [W]e basically waddled through a lot of crappy literature to try and find our Canadian identity. Now, I think we’re finally getting past all of the political correctness … to realizing, you know – bring the subject to the child. The child is, you know, secondary to the subject. That might sound radical, but that’s the way it has to be . . . because if you give them the choice, they’re going to choose crap. Our job as English teachers is to have them crop high leafage, you know – reach for the good stuff. If they can’t get there, well then, that’s okay. At least they tried to take a bite out of something good.

James bluntly names the flashpoint of debate among English teachers’ perspectives as that between the literary quality and the cultural-educational value of texts, which recurs throughout the interviews, yet not always as a binary proposition. For example, when asked whether the priority in selecting course texts is cultural representation of students, Teacher E fiercely contested the notion of a dichotomy between “great old literature” and inferior new literature: For her, the department’s new selections earn their place on the basis of literary worth:

It’s just great literature, that’s why we pick it …. [I]t is very accessible to the kids that we teach, very accessible. So we don’t consciously do it, you know, like okay here’s our Middle Eastern group, here’s our African group. No, we don’t do that. We just pick great literature and it just happens to be… [moving arms in a wide ripple motion].

Gen and Art likewise defend their global curriculum selections against attacks such as James’, referring to the “beauty of the language” and their “universality,” Art asserting,
“there is a plethora of great global material out there,” Gen averring, “they’re really thoughtful and profound.” Rhea also broaches the controversy, addressing canon bias:

I think there’s a lot of contemporary literature that’s well-written, that’s very challenging, that is relevant, but it’s just not in the canon, you know? …. [B]y choosing contemporary literature, or culturally diverse literature, are we giving them the second best? I think that would be very close-minded to think that things in the literary canon are the only amazing reads out there.

Notably, the merit of the “classics” (understood as standard high school English literary texts with perceived critical acclaim) was not considered indisputable in all of the interviews.

Within the group and couple interviews, debates arose: Teacher B’s confession of disliking *Julius Caesar, Lord of the Flies* and *Glass Menagerie* led other members of Ontario English Department to rally in defense of the old books:

Int: But, the thing is … has your view changed of the literary merit of those texts or just in terms of their curricular merit?

Teacher B: I don’t care for either one. I don’t think they have … It’s personal.

Teacher A: I think it is personal … There’s merit to them…

Int (to all): You wouldn’t say that they are terrible works that should never have been in the (curriculum)?

Teacher B: Oh, no!

All: No, no, absolutely not…

Teacher D: We still teach *A Streetcar Named Desire* …

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Teacher A: To be honest when the new books come in …they don’t have that “great book” to them.…

Belying the contradicting statements, is Ontario English Department’s conscientious effort to resolve the dilemma of literary merit and multicultural content. Teacher B describes her version of the department’s experiment using award winners. The source of her selection list for the 4U independent study (culminating English reading and writing assignment in the Grade 12 University stream) is the winners’ lists of an array of prestigious literary prizes, including Orange Prize for Women, Man Booker for the Commonwealth, Pulitzer Prize for U.S., and Pacific Rim. Students have responded positively:

I found that quite a number of students moved towards the Middle Eastern stories and a lot of them were the immigrant to, especially England, -type stories because they seem to be very popular and award winning recently. And, in terms of the cultural background of our student population now, I think that’s the way we’re going to achieve it. It may have to wait till the later years for the students anyway but hopefully there’ll be something that is suitable for the younger students as we go along and as we become more familiar with all these award winners and important texts that are out there.

The department head, Teacher A, further explains her rationale in trying to achieve (she says, “I sort of mandated it”) “a balance of classics and not” that has varied throughout the years. She explains the Grade 11 ISU (independent study unit) uses older books while the 4U ISU books have to have been written in the last 5 or 6 years, “so that they’re fresh and students are reading what other people are reading.” By contrast, the 11U [Grade 11 university] books need to be 8 or 9 years older “so they have that classic background and then the next year they can move into more modern literature which there isn’t going to be a lot of support
material for.’’ She adds that while there is choice for students and teachers within these parameters, the 4U [Grade 12 university] books all need to be award-winners: ‘‘so they’re not just taking anything, so that they get some guidance.’’

The allocation of award winners to senior grades (11 and 12), however, leaves the problem of merit unsolved for younger grades (9 and 10), the absence of the ‘‘great book’’ quality of the new selections. Nor does curriculum leadership for multicultural content such as undertaken by Teacher A, solve the problem of canon displacement: how the introduction of the new affects the place of the old, which texts shift, which fall into disuse, and why.

Teacher A is not alone among her reform minded colleagues in the study who also exhibit both a commitment to more cultural representation in the curriculum and a concern to keep ‘‘great books’’ available. On the contrary, despite her experience in radical curriculum reform, Rhea too expresses ambivalence when reflecting on the desire of some students to be exposed to the canon of great English literature:

I guess they’re interested in knowing why do these books have a reputation and almost as though, ‘‘maybe I’m missing out if I don’t read them’’. And that is definitely a question that has been brought to the attention of teachers: Are we gaining something great by bringing in new texts, but losing something great at the same time? Can we create a balance? Or do we take some risks? Because, the canon will always be there … So what’s our role as English teachers: to expose students to books that are not necessarily on the ‘‘Canon’’ but are fantastic books and are diverse…. Or is there some kind of injustice going on if we’re not subjecting our students to those [canon] books? That’s a question that we wrestle with for sure. I wrestle with that.

Intrapersonal struggles parallel interpersonal ones: Though partners in curriculum reform, Art and Gen exhibit differences in their regard of the old standards:
Art: Well, I think that when a book focuses on a theme that is central to the human condition, like *Lord of the Flies* and the duality of humankind, then that’s gonna have a lot of staying power, and the power of that storyteller, you know, of Golding – that’s why a story – or *To Kill a Mockingbird*, the American classic by Harper Lee – when you’ve got a story that good about issues that are that central to our, to our evolution…

Gen: I don’t really think it’s a matter of “irreplaceable” ….The way I see it is – okay, first of all I love that book and I have nothing against it and I would still teach that book…. I’m just saying that those books that we all have in common, to me are still the discourse of the dominant, you know? And we’re still talking about the voices of those who made it to us and how did they make it to us? Because of money and power and class and privilege. There are other voices that could have been just as powerful but didn’t make it to us because they didn’t have that power to make it across the oceans like that, or vice versa. So I don’t really see it as you know, “Which is better and which isn’t? ” I just see it as, let’s just make room for other voices at the table. And don’t get rid of other books, by all means read them, but let’s give a fair play to other voices that wouldn’t have a chance to be heard. Because these kids, some of them will only read what they read in high school, so let’s give them a variety of voices to be heard.

Gen’s stance is one of affirmative action – “making room for other voices” previously unjustly excluded, which takes precedence over the “classics” not losing their place.

However, both Gen and Art agree that a touchstone for English books, whether part of a global theme or not, is simply a “great story.”
Shakespeare’s Exceptionality

The topic of Shakespeare received extensive discussion in all six interviews, and came up without prompting in all the interviews but one. Some of the most animated moments were on the question of Shakespeare’s place in the curriculum, and no other author was referred to more often or discussed at greater length (see Appendix D). As an emblem of the White male Western Canon how do English teachers explain Shakespeare’s dominant place in the English curriculum (Colarusso, 2009, in press) against charges of cultural hegemony (Brantlinger, 2001), especially given linguistic diversity and diverse literacy needs? How, furthermore, do teacher researchers with multicultural and global curriculum reform objectives conceptualize Shakespeare’s ongoing influence?

Shakespeare was being taught at all of the participants’ schools at the time of the interviews. Both Art and James, in the same Catholic school district, confirmed that Shakespeare was taught in most grades in all streams. Whereas, at Ontario English Department, the department head (Teacher A) explained that in general, they do not do Shakespeare in any version for the non-academic streams of Grades 10, 11 and 12, unless a teacher particularly desires to do so using an adapted version (see footnote 21, p. 101).

All but few of the participants deemed Shakespeare the most irreplaceable of all canonized texts in the curriculum. James would sooner stop teaching his favourite author, Mavis Gallant, than Shakespeare. Rhea affirms she still sees Shakespeare taught everywhere, but, despite her radical stance on cultural relevance, admits, “I don’t seem to have a problem with that either. I don’t know why, but I don’t.” And Art, though actively revamping course reading lists to include more and more global perspectives novels, clearly states, “I’m a
Shakespeare lover … so nothing’s gonna displace that for me.” Art’s memories of learning Shakespeare fuel his opinion:

For me, anyways, as a student, a light went on… It’s almost like, “this kingdom is lost to me. It’s a lost language.” But then, all of a sudden, it’s, you know, “Wow, this isn’t lost at all.”

Shakespeare also inspires Sabrina to reminisce:

I came to the classroom full of passion for Shakespeare from my heyday and my teachers used drama in the classroom to a certain degree, but it was a well-studied classic appreciation of Shakespeare that was in the way they taught it. I remember being bored sometimes, but … in the end, I was always very appreciative and understanding that Shakespeare is important.

In a rare instance of direct literary discussion the playful banter among teachers in Ontario English Department reflect their joy of Shakespeare literacy:

Teacher A: *Hamlet* makes me want to strangle him all the time…

[Laughter].

Teacher D: Then what’s the point?

Teacher C: Just kill him already!

Teacher A: – I know, but I don’t want to spend a month [saying], “I know he’s stupid but…”

Teacher B: He’s not stupid.

Teacher A: Ahhhh…. he’s a man. But, that’s the thing; it’s a great text, it’s one of the greatest texts, but it’s not what I choose to teach. I choose to teach
King Lear which I think is also a great text, and I think it has an important message.

While the teachers also refer to difficulties teaching Shakespeare, they provide various perspectives on whether Shakespeare is suitable for all learners. Teacher C is starkly against such an idea:

You’ve got half the class who are struggling with literacy as it is, so the idea of introducing them to what is a language which is difficult is just going to alienate them further; it’s rather stupid, if you ask me, actually. Like, if I was sitting there as a kid like that I wouldn’t do it – it’s just another barrier that I don’t need, so why…?

He is deftly interrupted by Teacher D, who opposes: “I’m going to start a simplified version of Macbeth with my 3E’s [Grade 11 Essential level] next week though.” The majority of participants agree that Shakespeare is beneficial for all learners. Paolo does not take a one-sided stance, but acknowledges the validity of the point of view of some parents who have told him withholding Shakespeare would deprive their sons and daughters of “the privilege necessary to participate in a Western culture.”

Teacher A notes that Shakespeare as cultural capital does not escape the perception of students. Teacher A describes the reactions she noticed when Grade nine students in all streams did the same Shakespeare play:

[W]e had the academics, the applieds, and the essentials - all doing Romeo and Juliet the exact same time of the year…. I know that some of the students were moved around at mid year and a kid came in, and … at a certain point we were talking about, “Well, when we did Romeo and Juliet…” [mimicking student’s reaction] – “Oh, you guys did Romeo and Juliet?” “Yes, of course
we did.” I think there was that sense that we were all doing the same thing, there wasn’t that separating out.

Teacher B adds:

I think that continuity, that sense that we’re all together and we’re not judging you, separating you, evaluating you, putting you down, saying you can’t do this…. I think the message they get doing something like that is a positive one.

The intense interest in Shakespeare teaching methods [confirmed in the dominant Internet presence of teacher Shakespeare websites (Colarusso, in press)] implies a common sense among participants that equity of cultural capital extends to breaking down barriers to Shakespeare. Several suggested methods for overcoming obstacles to Shakespeare learning. One was the use of popular films: for Romeo and Juliet: Titanic (Teacher G) and Baz Luhrman’s adaptation (Art); and for Hamlet and Macbeth: The Godfather (Sabrina). James put on his classroom teacher persona to illustrate his manner of engaging reluctant young Shakespearians:

That’s my question to them. You know, does Shakespeare frustrate you? Do you fear him? Do you hear the word Shakespeare and tremble? And then we talk about the disparity of time. There’s 400 years difference between us, and I always introduce the idea that Shakespeare, if we brought him back to life and threw him at the kitchen table and asked him to read the newspaper, he wouldn’t be able to read it. That doesn’t make him stupid and doesn’t make us less worthy in time than he was….

The problem of the steeper barriers Shakespeare poses for ESL students in mainstream courses was another preoccupation. Teacher A shares a poignant story of a very bright
English language learner trying painfully to cope with *King Lear*: She said, “When you ask questions Miss, I have all these thoughts, and … I would like to tell you, but I can’t – I can’t tell you in English’.” After describing her own difficulties in coping with the ESL students, Sabrina wanders her way into retheorizing traditional practices towards novel intercultural ones:

We should be saying, “Well, this is a language of its own. It’s really not the English we know anyway, so why does it have to be studied in that form? ” Why can’t we teach a Grade 12 University student who knows how to read Chinese only? Why can’t we teach Shakespeare to them in a different way? Why can’t they perhaps watch or read an excerpt or read it in Chinese and have their understanding of it translated in English?

The multitude of possible Shakespeare accommodations all tend toward reinforcing Shakespeare’s dominance in the English curriculum, however. The debate between reform partners, Gen and Art, highlights the persisting tensions resulting from the collision of Shakespeare’s exceptionality with critical literacy perspectives:

Int: As English teachers are we colonizers if we teach in a multicultural society – Is it about eradicating cultural difference in the end?

Art: No. No …. [The] reason why I said I’d keep Shakespeare on is for universality, not: “Here is English and this is why it’s going to be ruling”… Or, “I’m choosing Shakespeare because it is the most important English writer.”

Gen: I think you definitely think that [turning to Art].

Art: No I don’t. I think it’s there because of the richness of the tales and … the language, right? I don’t think I have to say more than that …. I mean, I definitely would want to see more cultures represented on every course. So, I
don’t think it’s that, either. I would throw out every other English novel, play, whatever, before I threw out Shakespeare because I would like that universality to stay there ….

Gen: Yeah, but it is - the universality of *The Merchant of Venice* is that a totally racist woman gets to kick down a Jewish guy and he is the greedy dog who at the end has to convert.

Art: But, you know what? The way we teach *The Merchant of Venice* –

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Gen: But a lot of the kids after reading this are like, ‘How are we supposed to be happy at the end? – That Portia is having her party?'

Art: Exactly!

Gen: She’s racist…

Art: And I think that’s a fantastic [premise] –

Gen: Because I had seven Black kids in my class this year and they were all like, ‘She’s a total racist’.

Art: Yeah, I know. It’s hard to dispute that, especially with the comment on the Prince of Morocco….

Criteria for Displacing Old Texts

Given these tensions within, between, and among English teachers differently situated in canon and curriculum reform debates, what criteria actually inform the selection of new texts or the redesign of course reading lists for the English curriculum in schools? James’ response to the question of English teachers as cultural workers (Freire, 1992; Giroux, 1992; Simon, 1992) sheds light on a traditional curriculum theory of English:
Int: To what extent is that also the responsibility of the English teacher to be a cultural worker in the sense of making use of education as the hub for positive change in the world?

James: Oh, that’s huge. That’s what good literature does. That’s why when we make our choices for texts, you know, usually the satires go to the top because they point out all the obvious foibles and follies, and so, you’re left with, at the end of a really good text, a jarring and poignant message … the cautionary tale. …[A]nd so good literature causes us by just our experience with it to become better people and that’s why the literature has to be first and it shouldn’t be so much a concern about where the book comes from because it’s the human experience which is always at the forefront of good literature.

James invokes the Leavisite perspective that great literature is a liberalizing force for human progress (Eagleton, 1983; Sawyer, Watson, & Gold, 1998). His foil on the question of programming cultural breadth into English curriculum, Art, has surprisingly similar view of literature as revealing wisdom for a good life:

[S]o much of literature is the theme of the journey … And somehow I think maybe my main focus is to - for (students) to discover who they are – if you ever really discover who you are – at a certain time. And – probably I didn’t do this well as a student, but – learn from the choices of the characters and hopefully gain some knowledge about how to make proper choices by studying literature. On a very secondary but very practical level, I suppose it’s to communicate effectively because you can’t talk about the inner yearnings of the soul without being able to try to communicate that.

The traditional roles that novels such as William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* and George Orwell's *1984* have played in serving the educational values expressed by both James and Art may explain why many politically liberal-minded English teachers revere the canon
as much as their more conservative counterparts, and why there is so much vacillation of opinion among teachers. The view of canon texts as repositories of human liberty received impetus from the Frankfurt school and New Left thinkers such as Raymond Williams and Fredric Jameson in the 1970s (Eagleton, 1983). Furthermore, for theorists of New Criticism and Structuralism alike literary theory embodies both an objective body of knowledge and a moralizing influence (Brewton, 2006).

Gen reconceptualizes the idea of literature as upholding universal moral values. Expressing her view on “what English is for,” she raises the issue of stereotyping, a point that subtly corresponds with her critique of monocultural canon literature:

Really when you get down to it, I think that it’s to help them to become the best human being that they can be….how can you communicate yourself, you know, free of ego, free of all the fears that are put upon you because of stereotypes or, you know, ideas that society has put in your head that that’s what your potential is because you’re a woman or because you’re a Black youth or because you have special needs….

Rethinking Cultural Relevance

Humanism, nationalism, and multicultural values coincide in the revised English Curriculum (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007b) which requires that: “The study of literature and the media provides students with an awareness and appreciation of the culture that surrounds, challenges, and nourishes them.” At the same time, English should entail reading “a variety of student- and teacher- selected texts from diverse cultures and historical periods…Moreover, the example provided suggests, reading “editorials and articles in newspapers, magazines, or journals reflecting two opposing views of Canada as a multicultural society, to prepare for a debate . . .” [bold added].
The tension between a single common “culture” and “diverse cultures” embedded in the policy documents is also evident among the English teachers in the study. In particular, James, despite championing many standard British and American texts, was the most voluble of all the participants on the role of English in fostering a common sense of Canadian identity. For example, he makes a clear distinction between multicultural Canadian literature and world literature in translation:

I don’t think that necessarily you have to try to placate every culture out there …. Not that there’s not great literature from other cultures, but most of the time it exists in translation and it doesn’t translate well.

However, by referring to “other cultures” James draws the line at national boundaries:

“Canadian writing as a whole is an amalgam of every culture and especially the stuff that rises to the top.” Professing he is, “very boldly Canadian” James believes students from diverse ethnic backgrounds need help to develop a sense of national belonging:

[F]ourth generation Italian, or Irish, or whatever … I’m always interested in announcing that the hyphen can still be there, but… no matter where they came from, that we do, in our short history, have an identity and a voice and that they can be a part of that voice. And most of the Canadian authors, I mean – at a point in time there, every great Canadian author was Indian; you know, you had Rohinton Mistry, Ondaatje…. [L]iterature can make them aware that when you land in some place and make it your home you become a part of that, whereas they feel mostly fragmented and not included in the fabric of Canada….

In comparison, Rhea does not relate cultural representation as specifically and primarily Canadian when qualifying its role in curriculum:
Int: I mean, like, do Iranian students need to know about Inuit culture?

Rhea: Right, yeah…Well, yeah, I believe that they do.

Int: Oh, so why?

Rhea: Because … we live in a multicultural world; we live in a multicultural society – it’s important to know about other traditions and other experiences. And so, I definitely think that it’s important to know about the other experiences, other than their own. You know, 85% of our students are Muslim – does that mean all of our books need to reflect those kinds of experiences or characters? No. I don’t. But … for many, many decades … the White Western culture has always dominated our curriculum. And I don’t see room for that anymore …. I think that it’s still the White modern experience [that] is prevalent in so many aspects of their life that it doesn’t necessarily always need to be brought into the classroom as well.

For Rhea, the importance of learning about Inuit culture relates more to breaking down racial and cultural hegemony than to instilling a sense of national culture.

Nevertheless, Rhea shares Teacher B’s belief in the benefits of some degree of cultural representation. Teacher B’s description of an independent reading unit she did with one of her classes supports her conclusion that culturally reflexive literature, not too narrowly defined, engages students more effectively:

[L]et’s see, one group did *A Map for Lost Lovers*…and then each of the students in the group had to choose another book to which they could compare it. And they all chose novels like *Brick Lane* … [and] a number of others that feature the whole immigrant experience. [T]o a great extent even if they weren’t from that particular culture, I mean, they understood that connection, certainly that experience of the immigrant, if not for themselves than certainly their parents, even their grandparents. Given the number of students that I’ve had (who’ve said): “I know exactly what’s going on here; my mother does this
to me all the time” sort of thing, and [open hands gesture] - what more could you ask for?

Similarly, Rhea views “appropriateness” of English content as relating to, “can they see themselves in the texts?” But she makes it clear that “personal connection” and “relevance” also entails their individual lifestyles, not simply their ethno-cultural identity. Asked about whether content should be calibrated to reflect the cultural identities of students she replies:

No, I don’t think so, but I also think you need to respect your clientele, you know, and see who are your students and what are their interests…. not just their cultural backgrounds. But also … what are their reading abilities, what are their reading needs? … I don’t think we can say, “all Grade 10s should read this all the time” because our students are always changing. In 5 years time this student body may look very different.

Agreement on approaches to cultural relevance does not guarantee agreement on choices of texts. Even when a collaborative action is identified, there is difficulty:

[W]e still struggle with what texts we should have in the classroom, because we do have to make those decisions. Like, just because a book is written by a White author with White characters and this isn’t a White school, does that mean that we should not have it as part of the curriculum? And one could argue “yes” and another could argue “no” …but these are the complex decisions we have to make now.

Rhea shares Gen and Art’s desire to see less “dead White guys” and more cultural diversity in English, yet her opinion on which books could be displaced varies significantly from their’s. For example, for both Gen and Art *To Kill a Mockingbird* continues to merit its place on the curriculum, but for Rhea, there is good reason to let it go:
It’s a wonderful book, but the only reason that I say it is because it tends to be the book –“the Black book” [hand gesture quotation marks] - the one that has the Black characters in the book, and it does, but … I don’t think that’s the reason to have that book in the curriculum. There are other books that are out there...let me see if I’m saying this right – I feel like that is the book that people kind of use to say that ‘we use multicultural literature’, when that’s not the case. Like, the writer’s White – right? Harper Lee, she’s White - and it’s told through a White perspective.

Gen and Art also differ among themselves on which standard English novels should be retired, as shown in this debate about a young adult novel:

Gen: And the kids were complaining saying how boring it was and I was like, “I know - I hate this book too”.

Art: [Laughing] It’s funny because Crabbe actually resonates with a lot of the kids that I teach.

Gen: That’s because you’re a White guy.

Art: It resonates with kids because I’m a White guy?

Gen: No, but you’re like the White guy that went to camp that goes camping, that likes...you know, it’s your demographic.

Art: Not me, I’m talking about the students.

Gen: I know but I’m sure that’s why you like it because you’re Mr. Camp. Mr. Camp, I went to camp, I want to camp [mimicking voice, humorously].

Additional complexities surround a cultural diversity agenda. James’ nemesis on canon displacement, Paolo, nevertheless agrees with James on cultural diversity for its own sake as a flawed approach:
Well, I think it’s possible for the students to respond to anything. I think that representation in literature is also important, but there’s nothing wrong with reading any text and then having any student bringing his or her own cultural values to that text…. I don’t want to say that it would be an excuse for a student to say, “Well, I refuse to read this or analyze this or talk about this because it is not reflective of me and my culture or of who I am” because my comment to that student would be, “Okay, you realized the place of the writer and his or her cultural values, but how do yours come in conflict?.” So, there is no reason why we still can’t analyze that piece. As long as there is respect for the values of everyone involved – the writer, the reader, the student . . .

Paolo here introduces intertextuality (Bakhtin, 1981; Kristeva, 1980), not texts, as the primary factor in intercultural dialogue, which will be further explored in section 7.

The value of a transactional, discursively open, approach to literature (Rosenblatt, 1938 / 1964; 1978) is evident throughout the interviews to different degrees. Sabrina’s opinion of cultural representation also takes the emphasis off of changing books, to drawing students in as the cultural “texts”:

There is no way that we can know everything about everything. We can’t, and I think that that’s a perfect invitation for the student to step in and maybe create a project where they can, if they wanted to, bring in their Persian identity into a presentation of Shakespeare …. I think it should be an invitation.

Even reform-wary James acknowledges his obligation to model intercultural learning in the English classroom:
Having not been afforded the opportunity to travel all over the world, I would say that’s one of my weaknesses, but that doesn’t erase my sensitivity toward different cultures. So they (students) bring me into that fold.

Paolo elaborates criteria for selecting new books which go beyond cultural representativeness and literary merit:

Int: …[T]here might be two wonderful multicultural books that fall into that category of multicultural or just an amazing story, but why would one be more suited to being taught than another?

Paolo: I think we keep our school communities in mind. I think we do look for controversial social issues and social realism in the texts that we selected. However, in Grade 10 we have recently selected a slew of fantasy novels because it is something that we as English teachers have ignored for a long time because we tend to forget that not every student wants to read social realism. Some students like horror and fantasy and why can’t we read some of those texts…. I mean, the book clubs are for them and we ought to give them choices. And we force ourselves to each read a sci-fi novel or a fantasy novel because as English teachers we’re biased. And so, part of what you do is work against that bias and you say, “I don’t personally like… but I know kids that would, so let’s send it in for approval.” That’s one thing that we’ve also done to challenge ourselves. I think sometimes when I’m reading a text and it’s maybe for the senior grades, I look at the level of complexity, and the narrative voice, and how complex the narrative is. I think that for the senior grades I want to choose something with a more fragmented narrative as opposed to a linear narrative or a multi-narrative or I look at the fact that something is not only a good story, but also beautifully written – very literary, especially in the senior grades, because I want students to think more about figurative language and subtext.
Similarly, while explaining her epiphany that “seeing themselves in the texts” can engage struggling or reluctant learners, Rhea also acknowledges the importance of privileging students’ interests, which can very well gravitate away from any constructed idea of cultural or generational relevance to curiosity about older famous works, from the familiar to the unfamiliar:

[If] I presented them with options and said, ‘we can read *The Kite Runner* and this is what it’s about’ and give them some insight into that book but also give them some insight into *Catcher in the Rye* and what that’s about. And, if there was clearly a demand for one more than the other, then wouldn’t that be nice to do that then? In that case you’re not getting rid of the classics or a golden oldie because you feel like you should (or) because the students don’t look like Holden Caulfield, don’t have the same experiences as Holden Caulfield. But if they want to learn about it then who am I to hold them back from that too?

Rhea further problematizes curriculum change, showing how the “classics” are not necessarily antithetical to student engagement.

*Resistance to Change*

Magnifying the nuances and intersections among the English teachers’ responses can overshadow the realities of curriculum conflict. As narratives of radical curriculum reform, the stories of Gen, Art, Rhea, and Paolo highlight common forms of resistance they had to overcome in their English departments.

Art identifies the “biggest fear factor” he and Gen faced in making changes to their English department curriculum: fear of a larger work load, to which, he notes, older teachers
are most prone. Paolo vouches for the fear factor, but sees its source as the prospect of losing authority:

Certain English teachers fear their English teaching colleagues who are readers because I think they suddenly realize that they are clinging to something antiquated and they haven’t kept up with the movement and the evolution of literature and to catch up would be too overwhelming and would cause them to sound unsure or leave their place in front of the class…. So, they would prefer to be an authority on antiquated canonical text as opposed to being a participant in the reading and analysis of something very new and fresh and contemporary. … [T]hey fear other teachers who have moved on, who have kept up with the revolution …[T]hey’re intimidated.

The following exchange with Rhea pinpoints both these objects of fear (work and lost authority) as causing resistance to change:

Int: How did your department receive this process? Were they open to it?

Rhea: Some of them were very open to it and some of them were not.

Int: Was it the work or the concept?

Rhea: I think it was both. I think the work was daunting: finding the new texts, thinking of creating new units of study on new books, the fear of bringing in a new text that they knew nothing about especially if it had some political background or historical knowledge –that was I think fearsome for some people – it was fearsome for me. But for me it didn’t affect whether or not I was going to bring it in, but it was an understanding that I was going to have to do a little bit of work myself.

But Rhea also locates the resistance in scepticism toward new texts, including a host of questions that suggest fear of the unknown:
But also, the resistance may have been – you know, there’s some scepticism about contemporary literature and just because it’s contemporary it doesn’t mean that it should be read in the classroom – What about the classics? There’s a lot of merit to the classics; a lot could still be learned from the classics; they’re very well written. And there was a resistance to new texts coming in. Are they as profound? Are they as English-y? You know, like traditional English classroom material. Are they as well-written as a lot of the texts that are typically, or were typically, used in the curriculum? So, those were the two schools of thought.

Echoing Art, Paolo, and Rhea, but going a dramatic step further, Gen links fear of English curriculum change to racism:

We knew that it would be really difficult with certain members of the department to just change things because they would freak out and say things should be the same all the time. They have this mentality that the classics [makes finger quotation marks] are the only way to go and that other literature is inferior …. and … laziness of making new materials and fear of trying something new and … Honestly, I feel. . . . there is a very latent - I mean, if you asked any of these people directly they would be aghast at the thought that they were racist, but to me [they] definitely [are] because every time you bring up a book by somebody of colour who isn’t in the canon, you know, and who isn’t widely renowned, right away, it’s like, ‘Oh, this is so inferior; this is so childish’.

**Linking English Curriculum to Social and Global Justice?**

The most strident resistance reflected in the interviews was directed toward the kind of radical reform proposed by Gen and Art. The idea of a global issues / social justice orientation for English raises concerns for a number of the participants. Sabrina and James
signaled resistance, or, different points of “proximal development” (Vygotsky, 1978, p.84) on the matter. Sabrina suggests the primary place of global and social justice issues is Media:

I think that we have to blend in all of this as much as possible where it comes up. The biggest way to do that is … include Media into the classroom as much as possible – into the English class or a World Issues class or a Science class. ... It could be a documentary …. So, if we bring in Al Gore’s famous documentary *The Inconvenient Truth* to show documentary form in the way of reporting … but then also … the subject and how well it was brought out in the documentary. But the actual ins and outs of global warming are reserved for the World Issues class…..

Further, including global and social issues should depend on an individual English teacher having expertise in areas which are not part of core skills for teaching English:

[For example] if you have a strong passionate teacher who has done a lot of work in that area then it is exciting to have a teacher like that and be lucky enough to be in his or her class. I don’t think it should be what every teacher is expected to do because it is not the calling of every teacher and I think it would take away from the literary merit of the text. If there is a place for it in the classroom, upon the teacher’s discretion, then bring it in. There might be something that’s happening locally that might inspire a teacher to do something … that comes up with one of the texts being studied, but I don’t think that it should be expected of every teacher. There is a place and a time for it too. Activism can be very dangerous. Unless a teacher has been trained to do it well, then I don’t think that it should be expected …. 

James’ response reflects a deeper scepticism that extends to globalism itself. He fits Held and McGrew’s depiction of globalization sceptics (2007) in that he seems to debunk the premise of global citizenship and challenges students to question it as well:
Some of them argue that they want to be worldly, they want to be internationalists, but again, it’s almost like they’re a filtrate…. So, the Internet has made it possible for people now to be world savvy, to have some sort of sense of the cultures of the world around them and everybody wants to be worldly and internationalists, but when it comes down to it, most people are actually regionalists.

James further shares Sabrina’s opinion that incorporating global issues and social activism depends on the background of the individual teacher: “It’s all teacher-dependent what skill set they have in terms of their education and their interest in world events that will drive the classroom, but that’s really not what we should be totally doing … about the hundred other things that we do.” Referring to the discontinuation of Grade 13 as a result of Secondary School Reform, he suggests the limits of adding global content to an already overcrowded English curriculum outweighs potential benefits:

Now, well we brought down to 4 years from 5 which really shuts down a lot of the electives that we could have. And then you get rid of Canadian History. You introduce Civics as a course, which is supposed to make them citizens of our nation and understand them as citizens of the world, which is artificially done in half a semester. We do have World Religions and that helps, and that’s a good thing, but everything is so streamlined…. So, the idea of the global student … some of them are naturally driven that way … really wide-eyed and interested in what’s happening around the world … but very few … but we’re not in it …. 
Cultural Crossings: Intertextual Challenges

Throughout teachers’ responses to my questions about how English is evolving as a subject, various examples arose of ways in which multiculturalism and globalization make the work of English teachers in Ontario more complex and challenging than ever before. Among them: the literacy needs of today’s students; the competing literacies of the electronic age; tensions surrounding English as cultural capital; and the often delicate and controversial discourse entailed in cultural learning (Onosko, 2006). These challenges can be understood as “intertextual” because they relate to the limits as well as possibilities of intertextuality. The dynamic, social genealogy of language and the plural discursiveness, or “heteroglossia” of literary texts do not in themselves overcome intercultural communication roadblocks. In fact, the more ambitious the effort at intercultural communication, the greater risks of communicative failure (Barbules & Bruce, in press). Despite narratives of concern and dismay, there are also reflections of enthusiasm, illustrations of pedagogical practices, and a hopeful trend toward recognizing teachers and students as interdependent in co-construction of learning and education for a global age.

The Internet Generation

While the interviews focused on the multicultural identities in today’s schools, the English teachers in this study frequently acknowledged a hegemonic electronic-age youth culture which presents challenges for literacy education. With different degrees of global consciousness and Western capitalist conformity (Held & McGrew, 2007) today’s students engage to an unprecedented extent with transnational communication technologies including online videogames (Warcraft, blogging, MSN, YouTube, FaceBook, MySpace, for example), and a growing number of other Internet based electronic entertainment and social networking
activities. These trends add additional complexity to the prospect of increased intercultural practices in education.

Teacher D fears TV, movies, and video games result in young people who “don’t have to think” while the Internet gives them everything “at the tip of their fingers.” Teacher E adds, “there’s no process – they even know how to cut and paste the ideas from the text.” In Sabrina’s view, students have shortened attention spans as the result of “modern communicating on the Net, text messaging friends, and using short form.” She regrets the gap between the Internet generation and a more “studied culture” she remembers as part of her high school education in English: “[T]heir minds aren’t trained to take in Shakespeare in the same way we took in Shakespeare.” A further concern is the widening of the generation gap between teachers and students as a result of video games:

Games are the new literature of our age…. [S]tudents come in and say, well they do not necessarily say it, it is in their attitude, that, “Teachers just don’t get it. Adults don’t get it”. Wouldn’t it be nice if we did get it?’ But, we don’t. We honestly don’t. We can’t possibly “get it” in the same way that a student does because they were born into that culture.

While James has used blogs in his English classes and likes to bring in Rap music, he nonetheless sees youth culture “as almost an infection” in need of a cure:

They deserve an iPod, they deserve a cell phone and that’s really where they place their values and so teaching literature is another huge leap and we try to get them on side with that. And you know, I heard a kid on his cell phone today … while he was walking down the halls. He said, “Yo, Mom. Yo, Mom . . . wait a minute....” He hold-ed his cell phone to have a conversation with his friend, [and then] he said, “Yo, Mom, sorry. Yo…” and that’s his
conversation…. There’s this kind of privileged quality to the youth voice that needs to be, sort of, somehow tempered.

According to James, the consumerist aspect of youth culture also contributes to apathy:

You see, that’s the irony…. [Y]outh culture used to be that way intuitively…. Teenagers should be rebellious by nature, but right now they are lulled into a sense of ennui – happy with iPods, happy with Game Boy, happy with, you know, everything that has been afforded them...as much as they’d like to think they’re from a different culture; they’re insulated....

James’ reference to students as culturally “insulated” contrasts with his earlier comment on students with “hyphenated” identities. Art shares James’ concern with “tempering” youth culture through critical literacy skills, but links this specifically with Media and alludes to intercultural teacher-student dialogue as a way forward:

I think it’s more [about] instructing youth culture and that’s why you have the media course and that’s one of the reasons you’re giving more credence to media in the break down of evaluation. Um, certainly it would be important for the students, for [us] to know why that is important to them, instead of just following a trend.

Gen’s response highlights the pedagogical opportunities, rather than barriers, of youth culture in the English curriculum. She provides an extended pedagogical illustration of how English can build bridges between youth culture and critical literacy perspectives:

I think that youth culture is the perfect way to connect with the literature.... [T]ake for example the iPods that you’re constantly taking away from them because it’s the school rule ....As they’re complaining, you ask, ‘Oh what music are you listening to?’ And it’s, you know, this new Hip Hop tune or this Rap music, and ... [i]f you’re discussing *Raisin in the Sun* .... I was showing
them the Robert Taylor - you know, those huge projects in Chicago and how many famous Hip Hop artists grew out of that. You show poetry from Tupac Shapur who’s said that ‘the rose that grew out of the crack in the concrete’, that they’re these people who have so much historic anger tied up in them and that it plays out in the music. And then it’s a great way to introduce the Black history through music and how this music that they’re listening to is just one stage in an evolution of music that really represents the history of the people and, ‘By the way we’re reading this play that this rapper that you love played the lead character… went to an art high school before he got killed in the gang wars, and he played Travis on stage’ …. So … let’s learn about it.

Meeting Critical Linguistic Literacy Needs

Many students do not participate fully in the culture of their generation, however, due to two factors: lack of money and / or lack of proficiency in English, whether oral, writing, reading or all areas. Although Teacher C believes his department and school have “done a great job of adapting to our circumstances,” (demographic transformation, low social economic index, spiked ESL influx) he is concerned that the “greatest issues we’re facing is simple sentence structure, the basics. They’re coming to Grade 9 – they’re far below where they should be, far below.”

He also puts forward his belief that there are limits to the extent to which a teacher can relate to his students:

I don’t know their home lives, obviously. I didn’t grow up in this community … so I can’t really say what it’s like to live in that community. I’ve gone into the buildings. I’ve gotten to know the kids very well, [but] coming from White [name of upper middle class Ontario town], or my old community [Name of Area] – you can’t really understand where they’re coming from, to be honest.
A White middle class teacher in a mainly “non-White” school, Teacher C makes visible the sociocultural distance between himself and his students. Teacher B adds to this portrait of cultural disparity by delineating the challenges facing the high proportion of immigrant students at the school as well as the implicit challenges for teachers:

We don’t necessarily get students who have been through the school system from Grade JK to 8 in Ontario, or in Canada period. I mean, it’s insane the level to which ESL is funded in high school, because – and especially where we are…. I mean, I got off the boat, but our students get off the plane and arrive at our doorstep. And with interrupted educational experience, with no educational experience … How can we … I understand, trust me, the frustration of reading something that is the student’s best work, and you can pick out the ideas, but that’s only because you’re an experienced English teacher and you’ve been reading this for 20 years, so you can decipher it. Anybody else out there, would take one look and say, [what is this]?

Teacher B extends her analysis of the heightened literacy to the semiotics of the grocery store:

The fact that Campbell soup has gone to putting pictures of broccoli and cheese and whatever - that says a lot about our society. It’s not that it’s illiterate; it’s that the ability to function in English is limited by the experience of the people … [W]e are so immigrant-dependent in terms of our economy, our society, everything – we are a society of immigrants.

Teacher A confirms the heightened difficulty English teachers in Ontario are facing, as she elaborates on her example of the ESL student struggling with *King Lear*:

You still have to get to the thinking questions, those deeper thinking questions, so that they feel like their intellect is being challenged, or at least utilized. Because this girl who I know is very smart; if I were to just ask her
one content question after another, I would think she would be a bit despondent …. So I don’t know how we’re going to manage this…. 

The struggle of ESL students also arises in Sabrina’s account of her former school’s initiative to expand their ESL program:

I think it was hard for the students who were coming in who did not speak a word of English to all of a sudden to be thrown into this school that made all of these promises about what they would be learning and I can just [see]… a lot of disappointment.

Many of the ESL students found their way into regular English credit courses, where they depended on passing in order to go forward into university, often for Sciences or Math.

Sabrina:

They hardly spoke a word of English … and they’re trying to get through the language barrier of conversation enough as it is and then trying to learn a text - and there’s nothing that is designed in the [English Literature] classroom that helps them out at all.

Like the teachers in Ontario English Department, Sabrina depicts the struggle as one faced by both the students and the teachers. She describes the conflict that resulted among English teachers who differed in their beliefs on what accommodations were appropriate: “And what are we as English teachers allowed to do? .... There was no consistency … so it was up to the discretion of the teacher to have a soft spot for the ESL student or not. And that becomes a real issue…. ”
Cultural Learning Styles: Positivist Paradigms, Oracy, and Critical Thinking

Besides linguistic literacy, the participants also discussed the barriers posed by positivist paradigms that students absorb in other subjects, or in former school years often outside of the North American system. Teacher A explains how the content-driven approach in other subjects affects critical thinking skills development:

And they’ve done so much content work, but the time they get to 4C [Grade 12 College-level] and we’re asking them to think – to read a whole book and not answer so many content questions, but to do a thinking piece, to do a reflection, or personal response, I think that’s hard for them because it’s like a muscle they haven’t used. And in the end … that that’s all that really matters. I mean, when we read a book, we don’t talk about it afterwards – and … we’ll discuss books here, and we wouldn’t be, like “Yeah, on page 59 … was he doing this?” No. It’s like, overall, how did it make you feel, how did you engage with it? Because that’s the lifelong learner. That’s what they’re gonna do beyond here. They’re gonna think about how it made them feel and the connections and those things.

The nature of today’s English students and difficulties in getting them to speak or express opinions are debated among the other teachers in the department. Teacher I speaks up for the first and last time in the interview to counter the notion that ESL or non-academic students are reluctant readers:

Teacher G: Do you think it’s a cultural thing too? Because I know that there’s a lot of cultures that emphasize oral communication, and I wonder if that’s also [part] of it – because we’re so literate based, but –

Teacher D: I think everyone loves to be read to.

….
Teacher I: No, my kids like to read. They don’t let me read; they say, “Please let me read” [acting out a student raising her hand] – they all want to read. Oh, no-no. Applied, ESL and my 1D [Grade 9 Applied-level] – “Do you want to read?” – They all want to read. ”

Teacher H: That’s good. When you ask them to think or write an opinion piece, remember they’ve never been asked their opinion about anything. It’s always, you have to do this, you have to do this…Everything has always been dictated to them, and here we are starting English class – what’s your opinion on this? “I don’t know, tell me, what do you want me to write?”

Teacher D adds her own experience to support the depiction of students as mired in a positivist paradigm of learning:

I find that that’s a huge problem, actually. For me right now with my 4Cs [Grade 12 college stream students] especially; they get stuck very easily and they don’t know, like, they’re almost afraid to put something down in case it’s going to be wrong. And that’s my struggle lately, just trying to get them to attempt something even if it’s not 100% absolutely correct.

Teacher C concurs, adding, “It’s kind of scary, really, to be honest with you.”

*Common Cultural Capital or Barrier? Attitudes to English*

Many participants brought up the attitudes of students and their parents to English – the only subject in the Ontario curriculum that requires four credits – as a point of tension, and potential barrier to student motivation. The following excerpt from the department interview resonates with the ESL narratives and reflects teachers’ awareness and different shades of empathy for the burden English carries for many students:
Int: Is there an attitude that creates a barrier in terms of an attitude to the subject English that you’re aware of? There’s the boy girl thing, and then there’s also the College and University thing…

Teacher D: No, there’s a reader and a non-reader thing.

Teacher C: Look what we’re asking them to do - They come in [pause]. I couldn’t even begin to…

Teacher H: A lot of them are reluctant to learn. They’re here. They have all the opportunities. We’re willing to give them our time, but they don’t, how am I going to say this, they really don’t want to learn. I’ll explain. Remember, they left their country because of political conflict. So here they are in a new country, new language and this English is going to be shoved down… they have to learn it … but they are very reluctant because they haven’t accepted it. So … they are not reading. I don’t think they’re even reading their own language. And speaking of their home life, there’s no routine. If you ask them to go home, read something, do these questions, think about this – um, no, they’re not going to do it. You tell them, “but you’re going to lose marks…” – They say, “it’s okay, I don’t want this stupid English”.

Teacher B: I can see their thinking… I’m turning my back on my country, I didn’t want to leave, and this is forcing me to accept the possibility that I won’t be able to go back. I could see where that would be very scary.

Teacher D: …I see the student in the applied level in the same way. “Reading is important to you – it’s not part of my world: I don’t read, I don’t have books lying around, I don’t have a love of story.” It’s just not part of their world. Survival, dealing with conflicts at home with family situations – that’s their world … taking care of their little brothers and sisters. You know, sitting down under a tree reading a novel for pleasure is just not part of their world.
The idea of possible resentment or reluctance toward English as ‘a’ – perhaps, ‘the’ – major hurdle, contrasts with the notion of English as essential cultural capital. But parents’ views differ school to school and board to board. While at the “Brown School” Paolo encountered scepticism towards a curriculum with scaled down White “British historical” content, James’ experience is completely the opposite:

Oh yeah . . . In my school right now the parents are especially aggressive and if the student is science [or] math bound they don’t want to see them wasting their time on what they consider to be wrongful and antiquated language. “So, why aren’t they getting the basic grounding in sentence structure and all that sort of stuff?” And so, spending 4 or 5 weeks on Shakespeare is a waste of time as far as they’re concerned, but they’re obviously missing the human element….

However, like James, Paolo has experienced the same bias that subordinates English to other subjects in many parents’ minds:

I’ve had a lot of parents be … less than sympathetic towards English teachers because they don’t think English is a necessary subject and they resent the fact that our curriculum forces English on students when really Math and Science are the only important subjects because they lead to careers in Medicine, Accounting, Engineering, and Pharmacy … “the only careers that are important to aspire to.” [S]o I’ve had a lot of battles over the value in reading literature. “What is the value of reading literature and why do we read books if it doesn’t give you knowledge, it doesn’t give you information?” That is often what I’m faced with…. I’m always selling English. So, in a school that I taught at where students were of all different backgrounds - this is a different type of community and it’s the community somewhat dictates the relevance of the subject to them and their lives. When I was growing up we all saw English as important but I went to a Catholic school that was White and we all saw the
value in it …[F]or a lot of our students and parents, students take English, and especially in the senior grades, very begrudgingly.

Teaching at a different school board, Sabrina noticed the same attitude:

There is a push to do really well in the sciences and the maths …. I think that the attitude of a lot of students is basically, "English is: I need that mark to get into university. . . This is the mark that can go one way or another depending on whether you have a strict teacher or a lenient teacher… I just want to get it over with" – type of thing. That’s what we are struggling with more and more…. [U]nless they are going to pursue English at the university level, they just want that course just to get that grade and they couldn’t care less for the subject.

*Going There: Controversial Issues*

Several teachers used the expression “going there” to refer to the challenges of English classroom dialogue in the global age. The following excerpt from the interview with Paolo portrays the areas of cultural sensitivity and potential controversy entailed in teaching English students from a wide range of backgrounds, even (or especially) when, as in Paolo’s case, the curriculum and pedagogical approaches you take are geared towards intercultural conversation. For Paolo, cultural dialogue is linked with critical literacy: “the analysis comes in when you realize that perhaps your values are in [conflict] with the values of the writer and you have to somehow resolve or mediate that [conflict]) –” His examples include the topics of women’s roles, homosexuality, and religion:

*Women’s roles.*

Paolo: I can think of times when students have shocked me with their responses to literature based on maybe very conservative cultural values or just sort of responding to the sheer shock of something that they’ve read…
which makes for good dialogue. I’m not sure if I should recount … do you want me to?...

Int: Sure.

Paolo: Well, recently, in a Grade 9 class, we were talking about, in a small group, *The Curious Incident of a Dog In the Night Time* by Mark Haddon. This is a Grade 9 Academic class and I was sitting with a group of four students. The students were talking about the parents – Christopher’s father versus his mother - and I felt that they were being very, very hard on Christopher’s mother. So, they spoke for a while and I interjected and said, “You know, I think that you are being very critical of Christopher’s mother and I can understand your reasons for that, but what about Christopher’s father? He was violent. He also had an affair. Christopher’s mother did, but so did the father, but how come we keep focusing on the affair that the mother had and not on the affair that the father had and not on the father’s violent tendencies?” Even the fact that - it seemed as though the students were really just on the father’s side and weren’t being critical of him and he was just absent from that conversation, and so when I said that the students really showed a lot of loyalty towards the father and still not the mother. I think I found that kind of shocking and upsetting. So, my follow-up question was, “Well, don’t you think that we’re, in our society, harder on our mothers and women than we are on men and fathers?” and one particular student was, I think, offended by that comment . . .

Int: Why?

Paolo: Well … I happen to know this – students often divulge things in their response journals – . . . [S]everal of my students live in single parent families and have very strong opinions about the roles of parents…[B]ecause I am in a school where a lot of the students are religiously and culturally conservative [and] women tend to have a lower place in the home and that seems to come through in our dialogue. And I think they can see that I am pushing the
envelope and challenging them and I think that that offends especially some male students who may be treated in a way that they now believe that they are superior to their sisters – because they are male, they have more privileges . . .

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**Homosexuality.**

I remember another time in a senior class we were talking about … *The Wars* [Timothy Findlay], and I think one of my students who was very conservative and was very offended by the text and another student were talking about the text and referred to homosexuality. And this other boy who was quite conservative said, “What’s homosexuality?” So this was a Grade 12 student who comes from a Muslim home and I thought, ‘Oh boy, the baggage that’s here’ and how do you begin to unravel that kind of question and cultural conservatism? I mean I’ve had students tell me all kinds of things. I’ve had female students, for example, say that they are very happy to just get married even though they’re very bright and they can go on and study that they would be happy to just get married and that’s their aspiration. Many struggle with that, and I think sometimes, is it offensive of me to assume that they should have to aspire to more, because … as women in the 21st century that is very demeaning to women to think that way or behave that way and they should challenge their parents?

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Int: So you mentioned the importance of controversial texts and others have mentioned the importance of critical literacy, so what do we do with this tension with some people’s family held values?

**Religion.**

Paolo: For example, Hosseini who wrote the novel has written a story that is open to criticism and interpretation and we have a right to criticize and
interpret that novel. Reading the text and discussing it is not a form of brainwashing students to thinking a certain way. In fact, what better way for a student to critique a text by saying that I disagree with the writer’s depiction of Allah and portrayal of Allah and how wonderful it is to have that perspective especially for me as an individual who doesn’t really have a lot of knowledge about the Muslim culture, and I would say to a parent, “You know, as someone who has read this text, your son or daughter’s input about that culture was so valuable to me because maybe I did have a negative view of the Muslim culture after reading that, but your son or daughter was able to provide me with differing perspectives....”

Like Paolo, Rhea acknowledges the importance for teachers to traverse controversial terrain in the course of intercultural dialogue arising from printed texts, the students, or from their own role as facilitators. She further explains her perceptions on why many teachers refrain from broaching controversial topics as she responds to the question of whether teachers can teach materials or engage in discourses in which they lack full cultural knowledge:

I think it’s very possible. I mean, through *The Kite Runner*, when we were talking about things…. I talked about my cultural experiences and my religion …[S]o – it didn’t reflect Christianity or Catholicism, but I was able to bring in my experience. So yes, I do think that you can talk about those things without having that novel reflect a certain culture, but I don’t know how many teachers actually go there…

Int: Why? Like why wouldn’t they “go there”?

Rhea: Um....

Int: See, if I may – I’m trying to trace a huge thread from the beginning when you brought up the centrality of literacy today in our mandate as English
teachers to this challenge, and I guess, opportunity, from the way you’re portraying it of learning from each other, teachers and students alike through a cultural dialogue, right? So, do the two connect? Like, is it an important connection [between] the cultural dialogue and the literacy?

Rhea: Uh… yeah, yeah! I think there is a connection. I think it helps to have a culturally relevant text, though, to do it. And the only reason why I say that is because [pause] when it’s in our – when it’s there, and we’re discussing it, like, when it’s in our face we have to discuss it; when it’s not in our face we can choose to ignore it, or choose not to go there.

Int: And that’s a second question, why would some teachers choose not to “go there”?

Rhea: Well, again, I can’t speak on behalf of everyone but I think based on what I hear, and even on my own experience, I think it’s that lack of education: “I don’t know where to go with this because I’m not really educated on it myself, so I don’t want to engage in a conversation when I don’t have the answers.”

Int: You’re not the expert?

Rhea: I’m not the expert. So there’s that, and I think it’s also the fear that if you talk about things like religion or any touchy subject that could create conflict. Some teachers feel threatened by that ’cause they won’t know how to monitor some sensitive issues, you know. And I think we talked about that when we [the teacher book club] were talking about the book *Cartography* … a teacher kind of implying that some teachers may not want to “go there” because they feel at risk “going there”… Because … war … especially when it’s religious war … triggers responses in students, because some students may feel very passionate or very devoted to an ideology, and there’s a risk of setting someone off or having students engage in some conflict and a teacher not knowing how to deal with that…. I think it’s risky for teachers to go there.
….. So, if it’s not a text that’s dealing directly with those issues, then that may allow for an out to not incorporate those kinds of discussions.

Rhea’s reference to the potential for religious debate to “trigger” anger, is a point of resonance with Sabrina’s reticence towards involving students in social activism:

Int: What do you mean it could be very dangerous – activism?

Sabrina: Well, let’s just say a teacher doesn’t know how to do it well…

Int: You mean how you integrate it into the classroom?

Sabrina: Yeah. Imagine. Now-a-days? . . . It’s not angst anymore - we’re talking about anger that leads to violence in the classroom, which is a big problem that the computer age is fuelling . . . If we give [too much of] this license to students then we’re in big trouble…and then what’s at stake? The subject – English - is at stake and we can’t let go of that.

The Ontario English Department responses also shed light on another delicate side of intercultural dialogue in the English classroom – discussions of race (Berlak, 1999):

Int: Is this cultural conversation important in your view?

Teacher A: It is. I think we need to consider that to some degree. A few years ago we brought in a couple of different books and a couple of kids said in one class, why are we doing two Black authors in one course? You know, my first thought was, “Well, look around – the majority of the students in the class are Black, well why wouldn’t we?” I didn’t even go there. My first response was, “Why did you never question why we’ve done entire courses written by dead White guys, why are we not questioning that?”

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And I know, sometimes it’s hard, you know, if you want to talk about racism, well, it may just be their experience of life and the reality is that they experience racism every single day of their lives, when they’re out walking down the street, so why not address it? To be honest, a lot of them don’t know the history behind things and when I teach them history and [explain] Black history…

**Pedagogy for Intercultural Dialogue in the English Classroom: Exemplars**

Among many anecdotes of successful lesson plans incorporating methods which overcome various barriers to intercultural learning in the English classroom, including literacy needs, and cultural differences, Paolo and Gen render in detail outstanding examples from their own teaching.

For Paolo, the key is to use dialogic methods of education, in particular reading response / writing logs and student book clubs (Kooy, 1999). He explains that the response-based method of analyzing literature involves giving students prompts (e.g., “How do your personal values affect the way you respond to this piece of literature?) but allowing them to record their “gut responses” to literature freely in a journal. These responses become the raw material of reflection analysis and quotations for their Inquiry Paper. Paolo explains:

So the prompts had a lot to do with how they, as individuals, could connect to the text based on their own personal life experiences and most of their personal life experiences were the immigrant experience, so this is how they related to the text. So, when they were writing their “Inquiry” papers they did write a lot about their religious and cultural values and beliefs.

Paolo further provides an extended example of how intercultural dialogue through book clubs can work, in response to the question, “How does an English teacher then invite the student
to, if you will, write themselves into a conversation? How do you invite intercultural
dialogue with literature that’s not going to reflect everybody’s culture? How do English
teachers create spaces for that?”

So, usually the students are given a set of prompts where they must read the
text and make notes and respond to it in a certain way and then bring those
tickets of admission to a colloquy discussion where (and I usually keep the
groups fairly small and it depends sometimes) I’ll read aloud to the class and
we’ll have a whole class discussion. But in the book club experience they tend
to keep the groups smaller and I tend to take turns sitting in on each of the
groups and I would say that I probably – I definitely don’t dominate the
discussion. I may or may not interject, but I allow the students to discuss the
text on their own terms and to sort of negotiate their own ideas about the text.
Then, I may interject in order to, let’s say, up the ante of the level of critical
discussion. I would say that, by-and-large, the students eventually learn to do
that themselves and I guess one of the important things is that the students
make connections to the real world and to their lives and to their life
experience through the discussion.

Int: --Do they feel safe to do that?

Paolo: In time, they do.

Paolo adds that to overcome the fear and intimidation some students feel to express their
thoughts freely, he sometimes uses online bloggers.

Gen provides an example from her classroom practice to answer similar questions,
describing in detail how a lesson plan involving one of the global issues novels succeeded at
energizing the sense of inclusion and relevance of English for an immigrant student:
In your philosophy of education or your practice, how important is it, do you think, to draw into any literary conversations particular ethnic gender and other identity experiences of the students themselves? Do their identities get imprinted into the literary conversations based on these novels, or is that something that just happens, or not?

Gen: I’ve found it’s a great way to draw in kids who are on the margins and a great way for the kids who are at the centre to sort of get beyond themselves and see what it’s like from the perspective outside looking in. For example, this semester I have a kid in my class who I get a note from the office saying, ‘If there’s any amount of money that you need for anything please forward it to us’. This kid is really poor, you know? -Refugee family. So we’re reading this book *Chu-Ju’s House* about this girl – [there’s a] one child policy – who runs away so [for the sake of] her family … and this boy is from the Philippines, he’s not Chinese, he’s not grown up in China with the one child policy. But at the point when she’s scaling the fish and talking about the carp, then she’s working in the rice paddies, he’s getting so excited reading this book and he’s like, “Miss, I used to work in the rice paddy, I know how sore it is on your back, cuz…” – Oh, when I introduce the novel, I do a slide show ’cause I want to bring the book alive for them because I realize that a lot of them have zero point of reference –

Int: That’s a really good idea.

Gen: I’m a real picture person – So, I do a slide show of all the different places they’re going to see in the book and I say “It’s like a trip we’re going to go on”. We haven’t read the book yet but they love looking at the worms and how disgusting they are spinning the silk, the women putting their hands in the boiling water to take out the cocoons. You know, I was trying to describe the backbreaking work of working in the rice paddy and this kid, as I said, was so excited to say that he had worked in the rice paddy and then the kid – you know, the Italian kids who tend to be more wealthy and not in this refugee situation are like, “You worked like that?” You know, he’d never wanted to
talk about his income or being poor, but he was proud to say that he had done that work because that novel said it was okay, gave his experience legitimacy.

**Teachers as Learners**

We saw that James, in the midst of expressing aversion to ‘placating cultures’ admitted the importance of cultural learning: “So they [the students] bring me into that fold.” Similarly Sabrina, despite reserve about activism and controversial issues recognizes: “We as teachers have to tell them everything, we have to show that we need to understand things about culture.” Teacher C expressed his awareness that he could not fully comprehend his students’ lives.

The teachers, researchers, and activists in this study, however, provided more fully formulated perspectives on reconceptualizing English for cultural learning. Rhea explains her view of intercultural dialogue in English:

I would say as a teacher the challenge for me is becoming more educated in the lives, in understanding the lives of my students, their cultural traditions, their religion. I don’t share those same experiences as they do, but yet when I’m teaching a book like *The Kite Runner*, I want to be knowledgeable because I don’t want to assume that just because they’re from a certain part of the world, that they know everything either – I don’t want to make those assumptions. So I want to be able to fill in those learning gaps. So, it’s educating myself, it’s finding out – but it’s also, just being able to be vulnerable too, and expose your lack of knowledge in certain areas, and turning to them as the experts and saying: “What does this word mean? What is this all about? Is this tradition or this a unique experience to the character and what does your religion say about this? ”

Int: Do you think students are open to teachers having to learn about their culture rather than being an expert, a knower?
Rhea: I think so…. [A]though I’ve read *The Kite Runner* several times, this is my first year actually teaching it. …And I think they saw that I didn’t have all the answers, and I think it was pretty obvious when I turned to them and I asked, “What does this mean?” And, not only were they educating me, but they were also educating each other as well. So I think that was interesting because they were able to say, “Well, this isn’t the case in my family. You know, we may have the same religion but we don’t do it that way”. Or, “this may be against our religion but I don’t see it the same way you do”. So, it’s interesting because it allows them also to see that we’re all kind of learning from one another. And it makes it more student-centred rather than teacher-centred.

Similarly, Art, inspired by Gen, recognizes teachers’ need to bridge the distance with all students by creating the classroom opportunities to learn more about them:

Well, I think really what Gen just illustrated was – several of those points was the deconstruction of it and if you can show students why - For instance, she [Gen] always talks about why is there’s so much “bling” or things [like that] in Rap Music…and it comes from the history of not having anything, and if you don’t have anything, then to have something is everything, and that explains that. But, what I mean is that what kind of music do they listen to, what kinds of videogames they play - to explore that question, “Why are you drawn to this?” Is it really a continuum, like in those examples, and if it is, then it’s worth knowing that in a historical sense.

In these ways, the teachers interviewed for this study witness to the lived realities, conflicts, tensions, and hopes for the future that are – in policy and practice, in small increments, and leaps and bounds – transforming English teaching in Ontario.
Chapter Five:

Conversations with Ontario English-Literature Teachers c. 2007

*Bring the subject to the child.* – James, English teacher

*Can they see themselves in the texts?* – Rhea English teacher / researcher

*Suddenly, as the teacher, I was the foreigner.* – Paolo, English teacher / researcher

**Culture Matters:**

*The Unfolding Secondary School English Curriculum*

The differing perspectives of the English teachers in this study implicitly critique each other in valuable ways. Their depictions of the unfolding secondary school English curriculum reveal the forces of debate underlying new policy guidelines. The entry point – How is English changing? – gave way to more problematic questions: Should English curriculum and pedagogy become more culturally responsive and / or globally conscious? If so, in what ways? While interviewees’ responses differed, reflecting a range of readiness and scepticism towards change, they also expressed similar concerns revealing a desire to explore the link between culture and literacy (Florio-Ruane & Raphael, 2001; Nieto, 1999, 2003). Their engagement in this inquiry is timely in light of the revisions to the Ontario English curriculum policy guidelines which take their cue from social change marked by multicultural diversity and unprecedented global connectedness. The challenging implications of these policy trends for English teachers’ work include consideration of students in terms of their ethnic, cultural, racial, and individual identities, as citizens of a multicultural democratic society, and as future global citizens.
A few English teachers in this study suggested no radical revamping of the English curriculum: with its mix of old school classics, multicultural anthologies, and more and more titles by new and diverse authors, it is unfolding as it should (see Figure 7, p. 121). A corresponding view suggests that attempts at cultural representation risk lowered standards through empty tokenism. Additionally, efforts to connect English with social action on global issues misplace priorities – “the hundred other things we should be doing” (James), and may even threaten, “the integrity of the subject” (Sabrina). Some may also show philosophical resistance towards student-centred curriculum design. James’ assertions that, “The child is … secondary to the subject” and that the English teacher’s chief responsibility is to have students “crop high leafage” resonate with the cultural heritage perspective based on a stable literary hierarchy.

While James and Sabrina approve of diverse text choices, neither entertain interventions that would destabilize the core of secondary English content. Instead, they imagine alternative content at the periphery of programmed learning whether in independent assignments or optional courses. Regrets expressed for the fading of opportunities to teach a “studied appreciation of Shakespeare,” and the distractions dividing students’ attention away from “the good stuff” also recall the cultural heritage ideal.

By contrast, for reform-minded English teachers, the wide gaps between policy and practice, student needs, and curriculum content justify radical steps. In Gen’s view, cultural diversity and global issues in English curriculum, “exist in board documents, but when you go into the schools it’s not true.” Rather, the urgent need to engage diverse learners requires ending a longstanding bias in school curriculum – the “discourse of the dominant,” or,
“imaginative geography” of the West according to Said (1978 / 1995, pp. 49-73). Ontario English Department teachers cited examples of schools where many English course materials are used perpetually without revaluation. Rhea further highlighted the connection she observed between cultural engagement and literacy learning, emphasizing, “I think it helps to have a culturally relevant text, though, to do it.”

While Canadian studies are relatively lacking, Reeves refers to Levin’s 2008 study as proof that, “Ontario has achieved formidable success in reaching literacy standards in the past decade, not only by improving curriculum and instruction but also by responding to the cultures of language-minority students” (Reeves, 2009, p. 88). By comparison, there is growing American scholarship highlighting the “implementation gap” between theories and practice of multicultural language arts learning in schools (Applebee, 1994; Rance-Roney, 2009; Yagelski, 1997; Zeirs & Crawford, 2009). From both perspectives, collaborative efforts to balance the curriculum’s cultural content (not excluding cultural representation), as well as classroom strategies that promote intercultural dialogue and reflexive teacher / student learning, become primary. In the case of activist teachers like Gen and Art, there is also the vision and will to build a vital bridge between language learning, global awareness, and social justice.

Importantly, however, significant common ground exists between these polarities. In all the interviews, teachers admitted their need for cultural knowledge, whether students’ racial ethnic class or generational identities and experiences. The majority also spoke to the inherent difficulties of using constructed ideas about cultures: they distinguished students’ ethnicities from their individual identities, existential needs, and collective interests, and what is more, accorded all of these factors importance for designing relevant English
curriculum. They agreed (with one exception) on the enduring relevance of Shakespeare, regardless of its Anglocentric frame of reference or association with a canon that marginalizes diverse authors and cultural narratives. Generally, they acknowledged the difficulties of formulating a rationale for delisting “classic” texts when introducing new ones. They often echoed each other on the challenges of meeting the expanded literacy goals of the curriculum, including critical literacy and widened experience of multicultural literature. And many expressed shared concerns about finding effective ways to assist limited proficiency English language learners and developing practices that ensure meaningful and up to date literacy pathways for all students.

Policy and Social Transformation

All these points of agreement and disagreement among English teachers lie beneath the tapestry of revised policy, where a new culturally and globally responsive concept of English curriculum implicitly critiques and progressively reinterprets the old. A glossary of terms related to English teachers, including, “culture,” “diversity,” “non-discriminatory,” and “inclusive language” appears for the first time. Further, an embedded rationale accompanies the revised curriculum’s underscoring of global citizenship, intercultural communication, and cultural sensitivity (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007a, 2007b). This includes a detailed portrait of Ontario’s linguistic and cultural diversity and the educational disparities among international students:

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23 Culture: The way in which people live, think, and define themselves as a community; Diversity: In reference to a society, the variety of groups of people who share a range of commonly recognized physical, cultural, or social characteristics. Categories of groups may be based on various factors or characteristics, such as gender, race, culture, ethnicity, sexual orientation, ability/disability, appearance, age, religion, and socio-economic level. (OME, 2007b, p. 207); Inclusive language: Language that is equitable in its reference to people, thereby avoiding stereotypes and discriminatory assumptions. (OME b, p. 210); Non-discriminatory language: Language that conveys respect for all people and avoids stereotyping based on gender, race, religion, culture, social class, sexual orientation, ability, or age (OME, 2007b, p. 212).
Ontario schools have some of the most multilingual student populations in the world. The first language of approximately 20 per cent of the students in Ontario’s English language schools is a language other than English. Ontario’s linguistic heritage includes several Aboriginal languages; many African, Asian, and European languages; and some varieties of English, such as Jamaican Creole. Many English language learners were born in Canada and raised in families and communities in which languages other than English were spoken, or in which the variety of English spoken differed significantly from the English of Ontario classrooms. Other English language learners arrive in Ontario as newcomers from other countries; they may have experience of highly sophisticated educational systems, or they may have come from regions where access to formal schooling was limited. (OME 2007b, pp. 30-31)

This portrait verifies Teacher B’s observation, “we are a society of immigrants,” and supports her department’s rationale for introducing multicultural reading lists and course units. The Ontario English Department school’s shift from mainly White to mainly Black demographics over a span of thirty years represents the changing panorama many Canadian English teachers experience over the course of their educational lives and careers: the mainly White European school recedes into history as richly multicultural schools as well as schools with predominately Black or Muslim student populations become the norm. Contrasting this trend is the teacher demographics, still a White, female and middle class majority in Canada (Carr, 1995) as in the United States (Banks & Banks, 2003, Zeichner, 1993).

Given this imbalance, and to achieve educational equity, English teachers must find “positive ways to incorporate this diversity into their instructional programs and into the classroom environment” (OME 2007b, p. 31). Spurred by social transformation, this policy emphasis gives renewed force to the English Language Arts reform proposals of Rosen (1981), Britton (1972), and Dixon (1975) decades ago, including openness to linguistic diversity (Cummins, 2005; Gay as cited in Agirdag, 2009) and a “growth” model of English that privileges prior student knowledge – particularly cultural knowledge – and experience
(Dong, 2009; Price, 2004). At the same time, it throws critical light on the hegemonic semiotics of the traditional English classroom: the layering of White-author, White protagonist and Western setting texts, with historical background lessons, film adaptations, and student products on display (a George Bernard Shaw banner, pages from Juliet’s diary, a gallery of model medieval English castles, for example) and related discussion (Castenell & Pinar, 1993). As Smagorinsky points out, even this “whiteness” can be narrow, excluding by omission and misrepresentation a vast range of White cultural experiences and identities (2002, p. 299). But it makes, nonetheless, for a stark contrast with the polychromatic demographics of the province captured in the OME portrait.

Especially in the communication skills framework of language arts, such a monocultural environment has the potential to alienate many students whose identities are untapped and unvoiced. Teacher A’s anecdote about her students’ surprise at their reading Black-author texts, despite a largely Black school community, and her comment, “they experience racism every day of their lives” confirms that this alienation can be taken for granted. Likewise, Gen and Art’s remarks about racism in *The Merchant of Venice* noticed by students, points up that some canon texts have the potential, especially if not handled in a critically careful way, to perpetuate racism. Nor does a multicultural curriculum policy necessarily prevent experiences of racism and cultural alienation (see Headlines, Appendix A). Among other recent events, the turmoil over Afrocentric education in Ontario reveals how an unmet need for critical analysis of multicultural priorities and practices in education (Botelho, 2004; Nieto, 2003) can contribute to profound distrust and upheaval in the public education system.
Despite the rationale cumulatively embedded in the OME curriculum documents, the potent implications of the official policy notes on cultural equity are not fully elaborated, leaving specific actions and orientations up to English teachers and their department heads. The varying philosophies and approaches to teaching English of the study participants reflect the lack of consensus on justifications for change or interventions for culturally balanced curriculum. A more thorough rationale for cultural equity, one that Agirdag (2009) cautions must overcome resistance of parents and students as well educators, might begin with Carol Booth Olson’s list of “reasons to integrate multicultural literature into the English language arts curriculum” (2007, pp. 169-172):

1. To be responsive to the changing demographics of the nation and responsible to the increasing number of culturally diverse students we serve;

2. To help level the playing field between mainstream students and students of color;

3. To give culturally diverse students access to the “codes of power” and develop academic literacy so they can “beat the odds”;

4. To empower students of culturally diverse backgrounds by enabling them to see themselves reflected in the literature that they study in school;

5. To [affirm] diversity and to foster mutual cultural awareness, understanding, tolerance, and respect among students, regardless of their cultural backgrounds; and

6. To enrich the literary canon for all students by integrating high-quality multicultural literature into the curriculum.

Olson’s list could very well serve as a point of departure for professional dialogue among English teachers, a draft mission statement awaiting collaborative deliberation, or key goals
in an action plan that teachers can use to brainstorm on specific steps tailored to their specific school circumstances.  

**Teaching English With a View to Both Diversity and a Common Culture**

As stated in Chapter Four, the revised curriculum for English makes a key distinction between diverse cultures and the common culture that “surrounds, challenges and nourishes” students (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007b, p. 6). What does it mean for English teachers to engage students in “a culture” [italics added] that both “challenges” and “nourishes” them? The tension is manifest in the contrast of singular and plural ideas of culture, between a conscious cultivation of dialogue about difference and the parallel effort to develop appreciation for a democratic culture which makes such a dialogue possible, while also calling forth critical perspectives. In Robert Young’s view (1996), this mutual cultural criticism is an essential aspect of intercultural communication that makes peaceful coexistence possible. As cultural mediators, language and literature teachers have a role to play in nurturing this capacity for intercultural communication, for skills of critical literacy that turn both inward and outward.

This highly complex role is brought out in the film, *Entre les murs* (Cantet, 2008) depiction of a teacher’s difficulty managing a new wave of secondary language arts students who increasingly resist and question dominant discourses, including discourses of common societal values, or national identity. James’ interest in national literature and his concern that students today are culturally “fragmented” and need to be shown the way they fit into

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24 Olson elaborates on each point in her book on teaching/learning strategies for secondary reading and writing, including references to the supporting educational research and statistics.

25 *Entre les murs.* (English title: *The Class*) is a film portraying the challenges faced by a first language teacher in a multiracial middle school in Paris.
Canadian culture proved unique among the teacher interviewees. In English Canada’s case, the journey from colonial dependency and English Protestant - French Catholic duality to a multicultural ideal reflects the English language arts curriculum shift from mainly British and American, to more Canadian-origin (Writer Trust, 2002) and culturally diverse stories and authors (see Figure 7, p. 121). However, the new curriculum, besides including an optional Canadian literature course, does not specifically privilege Canadian content. Most references to “Aboriginal” experience do not specify nationality, for example. As well, only a few Canadian authors are instanced throughout, fewer in total than references to Shakespeare. Whereas, as noted, the revised policy documents place increased emphasis on “global citizenship,” an emphasis reflected in Gen’s initiative to introduce global issues and direct action projects. In these ways, education contributes to “double democratization” (Held & McGrew, 2007, p. 216) whereby legal political and civic processes extend Western democratic values globally. How will Canadian English teachers balance this global ideal with a national multicultural ideal still in the process of being defined? Given philosophical variance on what distinguishes an “ideal” (or, perfect desirable end) from an “ideology” (or, set of values underpinning a particular social or political system) cosmopolitanism, multiculturalism, and nationalism are subject to debate not only as reconcilable propositions, but as propositions in themselves. Since policy on its own cannot resolve or foreclose this debate, teachers must face the challenge of defining where they stand, individually and collectively, and acting upon their beliefs.

Perhaps culture matters less and less as global English eclipses thousands of extinct languages, the Internet generates a culture-neutral space (Sawyer, 1997), or at best a transitory written-oral culture, and hypertext eludes cultural frameworks, generating endless
talk-text connections. As many globalization analysts note, however, Internet aided cultural freedom can support both cosmopolitan and ethnocentric ideas, organization, and agency (Barber, 1995; Held & McGrew, 2007, Sonntag, 2003). Individuals can choose hybrid cultural identities, deepen cultural ties with dispersed members, and / or strive towards a global village of shared values and ideals. Ann Burke (2008), in her study of youth multiliteracy practices in the socially transient province of Newfoundland, argues that these out-of-school digital communication practices are how youth experience literacy and construct their identities. Further, Burke asserts, they cannot be ignored in the classroom: “multimodality has changed the landscape of communication for youth, and is demanding greater attention in the spaces of learning” (p. 220).

The interviewed teachers display mixed feelings and perceptions about students as increasingly identifiable as members of an electronic age youth culture. In James’ view, ethnic cultural diversity belies the fact that students are “insulated” within common habits of media consumption including iPods, GameBoy, and the like, requiring English teachers to temper what he identifies as the “privileged quality to the youth voice.” Resonating with James’ view, are the increasing number of news stories about educators noting the “deficits” of the Wikipedia Generation (Rushowy, 2009). Art, who also acknowledges youth culture, suggests that English teachers need to investigate, (and challenge students to investigate), the reasons for their engagement in these media. Gen uses the example of iPods to show how youth culture, particularly their musical interests, can be applied to engage them in the curriculum.

However, most English teacher interviewees conceived of these new media as competing with students’ ability to develop language arts literacy, a view widely held in
academia (Rushowy, 2009). Such disparities (youth tech as curriculum-friendly as opposed to curriculum-adverse) suggest disagreement among teachers as to the place of new media, or “multimodal literacies” (Booth, 2006; Lankshear & Knobel, 2002, 2008) in the curriculum. Further, the idea that youth culture always plays a positive role in developing authentic appreciation for self, ethnic, and cultural identity, or bringing about multiculturalism and global citizenship is not clear to some researchers who point out youth culture’s susceptibility as a key market and replicating force within a monocultural Western capitalist hegemonic order (Klein, 2000; Ritzer, as cited in Steger, 2003).

* Cultural Texts: Reflecting on, Articulating, and Communicating Critical Rationales *

When it’s in our face we have to discuss it; when it’s not in our face, we can choose to ignore it – Rhea, teacher / researcher

I don’t think it’s an excuse to say I don’t have to read this because it doesn’t reflect my culture – Paolo, teacher / researcher

Nothing to me is irreplaceable…. Something’s got to give. – Gen, teacher / activist

Even as standardized testing aims to fix and narrow the definition of literacy, a new literacy debate is beginning where Dartmouth left off. As David Booth (2006) argues, concepts of literacy limited to traditional modes of linguistic performance fail to capture the shape and content of today’s multimodal practices. Moreover, “[t]he way we incorporate texts into our school curricula can lead to limitations in the lives of students” (p. 14). From this perspective, it is vital to develop school cultures that celebrate diverse literacy practices across the curriculum (Booth & Rowsell, 2007). Multicultural literature, fiction and non-
fiction global issues books, young adult (YA) literature, adolescent (AD) literature, a variety of new-media texts from graphic novels to zines and video game narratives, now form a part of the language arts curriculum. Lankshear and Knobel (2002) also highlight that these texts are part of new social practices of literacy (Knobel & Lankshear, 2002, 2008). As well, there is gradually more sensitivity and openness towards homosexual narratives, and narratives from the perspective of youth with physical challenges, advocated by authors such as Gary Bargar and Jean Little, respectively.

While some welcome the shift from a literature- to text-based curriculum (Boomer & Scholes, as cited in Pirie, 1997; Pirie, 1997), others may well wonder whether English teachers within the same education system operate in a kind of Tower of Babel when it comes to curriculum content and pedagogies. Does it matter if the next generation of high school graduates will look back on vastly different experiences of learning English language and literature in school, and share few common reading experiences? Comparing the various English teacher participants’ rationales for developing English curriculum provides a starting point from which to unravel this conundrum.

**Exploring Differences Among English Curriculum Rationales**

The lack of bases for agreement on how to define and develop secondary English curriculum exposes the field to public criticism and top-down direction from government institutions inadequately informed by the realities of the classroom. A chief barrier to formulating a shared rationale for designing secondary English curriculum is the opposing views of literature such as reflected among the Ontario English teachers in this study. The

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“canon perspective” upholds a stable literary hierarchy that only rarely admits new entrants, whereas the postmodern perspective critiques this as, *la croyance littéraire*, belief in “the myth of an enchanted universe” of literature [my trans.] that obscures the forces which marginalize certain voices in society (Casanova, 1999, p. 22). Teacher researcher and activist, Gen, makes the postmodern argument when she comments that power, class, and privilege created the canon and its silencing of “other voices.”

For most teachers in this study, however, the problem with the school “classics” lies at the practical level: the barriers they pose to student engagement. As evidenced by their responses, openness to change does not equate with similar ideas about where change is needed or how it should be accomplished. For example, Sabrina refers to Glass Menagerie as an American depression era play that tends to alienate students, a sentiment shared by Teacher B who admits disliking the play. However, Sabrina wonders at which grade and level the play would work best, whereas Teacher B celebrates the prerogative she has in her department not to teach it. In Teacher C’s opinion, introducing Shakespeare to “struggling” or, discourse-inexperienced, students is “stupid” because it simply imposes another barrier they don’t need, in contrast to Teacher D who chooses to teach Shakespeare in an adapted version to her Essential level class.

Although Art disagreed, Gen cited the young adult novel Crabbe, featuring a rich White adolescent and the iconic Canadian experience of a canoeing adventure, as a text that bores students due to its White middle class storyline. A variation on the problem of engagement with classic texts arose in the Ontario English Department interview, where

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27 “[D]iscourse-inexperienced” offsets the label “struggling” which conceals the systemic disadvantages some students face, an example of what Kearns (2008) calls, “the social construction of illiterate identities” (title).
members repeatedly expressed the importance of teacher preference as a determining factor in the way students experience texts. As the department head stressed, “You have to do what you’re passionate about.” Rhea, by contrast, stressed that the teacher’s interests were “not really what it’s about.” Another variation was introduced by Paolo, who emphasized dialogic pedagogy as a factor that outweighs choice of text, whether classic or contemporary, in producing student engagement.

Even though the English teachers had a shared understanding that relevance and engagement justifies sourcing new texts, they seemed to struggle with the implications for traditional school texts. Shakespeare’s plays, *Catcher in the Rye, and Raisin in the Sun* are a few examples of texts they named as deserving their enduring place in the curriculum.28 Yet Rhea carefully articulated her colleagues’ concern, “Will the new texts be as English-y?” Similarly, Teacher A, while overseeing the introduction of new culturally diverse novels in her department, expressed, “what if they don’t have that “great book” to them?”

Ambivalence was also evident in the way most curriculum reformer participants wanted the traditional texts to remain available for use but at the same time demurred from directly acknowledging that new course reading lists would displace and marginalize the canon texts. Moreover, the teachers revealed ambivalence within their perspectives. For example, while unapologetically pursuing a systematic overhaul of English course reading lists, Gen suggests that “the old books can still stay there.” Rhea, too, admitted doubt and concern whether Shakespeare could remain immune from the content transformation process. Even James’ confidence that Canadian literature enfolds cultural diversity, leaves the

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28 That Shakespeare continues to be a touchstone of the English curriculum in Ontario is clear from its being cited more frequently than any other author across the strands in the Ontario Ministry of Education (2007) Revised Grades 11 and 12 University courses, for example.
problem of which books stay in circulation, and which do not, unsolved. The inverse perspectives on which should be core, and which optional reading materials (i.e., those allocated to independent studies or one-unit literature circles), further demarcates the inevitability of displacement: For many of the teachers, diverse texts are conceptualized on the periphery whereas for Gen, Rhea, and Paolo, they (also) belong in the centre.

The English teachers recognized another aspect of relevance and engagement: the motivation to participate in a common conversation of literature. When asked to address the argument that society benefits when education allows for some consistent literary experiences, Art extrapolated this notion to the idea of a standardized book list, for which he expressed abhorrence. Nonetheless, as he and Gen underscored, several new curriculum books, such as *The Kite Runner* and *The Breadwinner*, are cropping up throughout the school system, and creating a ripple effect of intercultural dialogue. Other teachers also agreed that students benefit from engaging in the wider social conversation of literature. Teacher D stated her belief that students should read “what the world is reading,” including those best sellers, such as *Life of Pi* and *Glass Castles*.

Teacher A’s story about the positive reaction of “essential” level students upon discovering that they were reading what all their Grade 9 peers were reading – *Romeo and Juliet* – also argues for the social and affective value for students of common reading experiences, if not critical awareness of cultural heritage. Curriculum reformer Rhea admits that some students express interest in the cultural heritage of English literature. Her openness to teaching classic texts when there is a desire among students differs significantly from James’ view however, that guiding students to “taste the good stuff” is a non-negotiable task of English teaching. Between these positions, Freire offers a golden median: that cultural
Comparing Problem-Solving Approaches

The Ontario English Department strives to solve the problem of displacement, with department head Teacher A’s guidance, by striving for “a balance of classics and new.” In addition, their recent initiatives to add award-winning multicultural novels to culminating performance tasks (CPTs) combined with a several year commitment to a graphic novels experiment are further evidence of an effort at balanced curriculum change. As cited earlier, Teacher B’s description of the research she conducted on award winning multicultural literature displays several criteria of her rationale:

I narrowed the field, and tried to present different possibilities, you know, Orange Prize for Women, the Man Booker for the Commonwealth, so to speak, Pulitzer prize for Americans, Pacific Rim, things like that, and I found that quite a number of students moved towards the Middle Eastern stories and a lot of them were the immigrant to – especially England – type stories.

Teacher B values fair representation of gender (Orange Prize for Women), geographic locations (Commonwealth, Pacific Rim), and student cultural relevance and interest in her approach to shaping the new reading list. She also prioritizes literary merit, as defined by experts. Notably, the cultural literature programming in this department remains grounded in the traditional processes of canon construction, the reliance on authorities. However, the “enjeu de lutte,” or, “stakes of the game” of literary canonization (Casanova, 1999, p. 23), have changed to be far more inclusive than they used to be. The plethora of award winning
novels reflecting authors from diverse backgrounds fuels Ontario English Department’s efforts to correct an increasingly untenable view of a dichotomy between multicultural literature and literary merit.

The reliance on multicultural stories and graphic novels further illustrates Ontario English Department’s openness to tapping new resources for literacy growth. Such resources provide an expanded array of contextual hooks that may connect with students’ concrete lived experiences, a critical aspect of truly effective education according to Freire (1998). Rhea and Paolo, both dedicated to creating a more culturally diverse English curriculum, also emphasized the centrality of getting to know students well. For example, Rhea rejects teacher preference which she sees as always secondary to students’ interests, and Paolo highlights the importance of including alternative genres such as fantasy and science fiction to engage students, explaining that English teachers often have to “work against [their own] bias,” that is, including their own textual preferences and “comfort zone” in order to acknowledge students’ diverse tastes. Gen and Art’s global issues model of curriculum development, provides an interesting comparison. In order that the complete English programme allows students to take “a trip around the whole world,” books are selected according to global issues. The student engagement they seek extends beyond classroom interaction, however, to direct interaction with society. As such, they take a global approach to the Freirian ideal of learning that is connected with the complex contexts in which students live.

**Envisioning Common Solutions**

Even if there could be consensus on cultural diversity and global consciousness in the secondary English curriculum, it would not make curriculum theorizing unnecessary, but
only provide a new starting point. Current lack of consensus lends enormous complexity to the factors to be considered, as can be glimpsed in Smagorinsky’s list (2002, pp. 290-291) of questions that problematize the goal of culturally balanced English curriculum, as quoted and summarized below:

1. In a society composed of countless cultural groups with distinct histories and identities, how can teachers include the voices and experiences of all or most of society’s various cultures?

2. Should the selection be driven by
   a. race, religion, ethnicity, continent of origin, region?
   b. the potential offensiveness of a work?
   c. the particular moral, social, or political values imparted through a text?
   d. the potential community response to particular topics?
   e. achieving a balance of positive and negative images in the depiction of various cultural groups?

3. Should the selection include texts often misunderstood due to the author’s use of sophisticated literary techniques?

4. Should the author’s personal life matter?

5. Can a member of one cultural group authentically write about the experiences of another?

6. At what point do the selection principles become censorship, given that any effort at inclusion inevitably results in the exclusion of something, based on some kind of discrimination?

7. If teachers involve students in curriculum planning or allow them to read books entirely of their own choice, can these issues be sidestepped?

8. Can teachers solve any or all of these problems by providing an appropriate instructional context for the literature used in their classroom? In other words, can teachers teach any text in such a way that it can be potentially valuable experience for any student?
As with Olson’s rationale for multicultural literature, Smagorinsky’s list of questions for cultural programming can serve as a template for professional inquiry among English teachers. Dialogue on these questions can highlight the subtle complexities and unavoidable imperfections involved in English curriculum design, engender understanding of the importance of professional research and communication, and inform a fluent conceptual framework for articulating rationales for text selections.

Importantly, the multitude of variables can be managed by focusing on common ground. For example, a touchstone for text selection mentioned in several of the interviews was that of “a great story.” Calls to “stop teaching literature and start teaching texts” (Scholes, as cited in Pirie, 1997, p.17) may overshadow how young people today still take enjoyment from deep droughts of artfully told narratives (Sumara, 2002). This fact is made clear by the monumental success of the *Twilight* series, graphic novels, and the *Harry Potter* phenomenon. At the same time, adult efforts to co-opt the subculture of literacy practices that young people create (Booth, 2006; Klein 2000) can be misguided. In this sense, Sabrina’s warning against overconfidence with youth culture curriculum deserves attention, as does her suggestion that introducing such content and / or activities should begin with an “invitation” to students to provide their ideas and input.

Furthermore, since great reading experiences cross generational lines, Paolo’s emphasis on a reflexive learning process, which continuously invites student knowledge to shape the learning, can also be applied to the identification of remarkable narratives for the classroom. Rhea’s department head initiatives included consulting with students on cultural reading materials; as well, new research points to student participation in curriculum inquiry as a promising possibility (Kooy, 2006). However “good reads” for the English classroom
are found, such decisions require depth of reflection that extends to pedagogical approaches. Innovative and cultural heritage text choices are equally amenable to paternalistic treatment where teachers monopolize the expert role (Macedo & Araújo Freire, 2008).

Several interviewees felt that trying to balance cultural content through global or student-based cultural representation is unadvisable. If not impossible, it is a questionable goal, since no single book can represent a culture (Botelho & Rudman, 2009). Between the two risks of essentialising culture on the one hand and creating an implied norm by ignoring difference, on the other, the English teachers cited an expansive range of book choices as a key to managing a balance. In her relatively new school, Rhea imagines an “ideal” situation in which a vast array of literature, including “classics,” contemporary and culturally diverse works are available for teachers to choose from in order to best correspond with students’ needs. Given the diverse tastes of teachers and students, the subjective complexity of culture, the constant transformation of student populations, and the unlikelihood of English department budgets grand enough to fund sets of books exempt from routine use, it is surely a utopian ideal. And yet, innovations such as e-books and digital readers, portable electronic devices that can store hundreds of full length literary works, may explode the possibilities of reading choice and with it, motivation, relevance, and engagement (Booth, 2006). Some problems related to course programming depend on sharing limited resources and may also be solved by text technologies. Even so, in this study it appears the complexity of English curriculum development and programming remains: a range of genres and themes, the need to ensure a growing level of complexity across grades, gender balance, variety of learning experiences are among the numerous factors English teachers are still required to take into account in their curriculum practices (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007a, 2007b).
Cultural Conversations

They experience racism every single day of their lives. – Teacher A, Ontario English Department

Activism can be very dangerous. – Sabrina, English teacher

There is a world out there, and even if you don’t want to meet it - it’s still going to hit you right in the face. – Mr. Simonet, Pay It Forward²⁹

English is a highly contested curriculum domain: teachers and society in general have different ideas of what English is and what English is for. Literature and language are alike socially constructed and culturally located in complex ways. In the age of globalization, global English towers over a linguistic and cultural map on which many smaller players are disappearing (UNESCO, 2000). As Steger reports, “Today more than 80% of the content posted on the Internet is in English. Almost half of the world’s growing population of international students are enrolled at institutions in Anglo-American countries” (2003). Through media and commerce, English fuels the spread of neoliberal philosophy (Barber, 1995; Ritzer, as cited in Seger, 2003; Ziauddin & Van Loon, 2004). At the same time, it enlarges the potential for free, critical, intercultural communication, arguably making the achievement of a cosmopolitan society more possible than ever before. In addition, world literature in English is transforming the canon, while the growth of multicultural societies throughout the world is transforming the educational milieu (Appadurai, 1996). Meanwhile, the ICT revolution presents a whole new spectrum of textual forms and communication processes with powerful implications for language learning. In light of these conditions, the teaching of critical literacy skills necessarily entails turning critical literacy inward upon the

²⁹ American film featuring fictional Grade 7 Civics teacher, Mr. Simonet.
discourses of the subject English itself: its traditional frames of reference such as the literary canon and cultural heritage, its representations of nationalism and multiculturalism, and the ways it interprets new literacies. Thus, in discussing the place of culture in their philosophy and praxis of English teaching, the English teachers in this study contribute to an urgently needed professional dialogue.

As several researchers point out, curriculum change is unlikely to occur when teachers do not believe and invest themselves in the process (Ancess, 2001; Elmore & Burney, 1999; Feiler, Heritage, & Gallimore, 2000; Goldenberg & Gallimore, 1991, Hawley & Valli, 1999). Moreover, students inherit the results of reflection and dialogue or lack of reflection and dialogue on the part of English teachers on these questions. Teachers’ different perspectives on the link between relevance and cultural content, and literacy and cultural content inform what they teach and how they teach it. The adaptation, collaborative inquiry and activist models of curriculum reform represented by the participants in this study provide examples of different ways in which dialogic spaces are created in the English classroom that take consideration of students’ diverse identities, interests, and experiences. But such practices may amount to finite, often department head- or change agent-dependent experiments in the absence of means for developing habits of professional dialogue and collaborative learning. Without the resources of open-ended peer support, teachers may very well choose to bypass the challenging controversial and delicate aspects of acknowledging and making an educational resource of cultural diversity (Onosko, 2006).

An accumulation of headlines reminds us, however, that these issues cannot be overlooked without negative consequences (see Appendix A). Given the subtle, dynamic qualities of intercultural communication, the ICC skills promoted by current English
curriculum policy depend very much upon optimizing the social learning opportunities of the classroom, teacher education, and professional development (Brooks & Brooks, 1999).

**Cultural Conversations in English Classrooms**

_Does anyone know Homer’s The Odyssey?_

_I know Homer the Simpson._ – Teacher to Student, Freedom Writers

_I don’t talk about my life._ – Student to Teacher, Entre les murs

_Okay, you realized the place of the writer and his or her cultural values, but, how do yours come in conflict?_ – Paolo, English teacher / reformer

On one level, English as a school subject is inherently dialogic. Much literature features the “heteroglossia” (Bakhtin, 1981) of multiple discourses. Shakespeare’s plays provide a key example of texts deemed to be “universal” due to their perspectival variance (Bloom, 1994). Many postmodern texts highlight multivocality, through play with genre and form. Furthermore, reading itself is an active, transactional (Rosenblatt, 1978), rather than passive, process in which the reader’s subjectivity engages dynamically with the text.

Contemporary English students receive regular opportunities to articulate their perspectives: from the 1970s onward, a stress on the students’ personal reflections and experiences influenced the teaching of writing (Doecke, Howie, & Sawyer, 2006). And through practicing skills of open ended discussion, students and teachers can collaboratively interrogate the constructedness of any text (Nystrand, Gamoran, Krachur, & Pendergrast, 1997).

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30 *Freedom Writers* is a film based on the true life story of Erin Gruwell, an unconventional English teacher at an inner city high school in California.

But the built-in dialogic potential of literature as a subject area competes with conditions and practices which inhibit dialogue. One of the first gestures of communication in the English classroom is, arguably, the reading agenda. Which multicultural texts, multimodal texts, canon texts are excluded or included and why? What do multicultural students think when they read the English course syllabus? Is the oppression that some students feel looking at a menu of George Orwell, George Bernard Shaw, and Henry James entirely the product of their disinclination towards reading? Is there a well-considered rationale for the agenda, which serves their interests? If they do not see themselves in the texts, can they look forward to learning activities and opportunities for oral, written, and multimedia expression that make the texts more relevant and meaningful? Will they find creative spaces and structured opportunities to express themselves back into the classroom experience, to learn from each other, to reveal their own cultural knowledge?

While compelling arguments can be made for particular canon and non-canonical texts, the majority of the teachers in this study argue for the value of cultural texts. Cultural texts provide starting points for exploring diversity and as many of the interviewees attested, support affective engagement. Gen’s example of teaching *Chu-Ju’s House*, set in China, illustrates the way students make connections when texts describe cultural experiences similar, if not identical to their own. Gen’s use of a slideshow to evoke the experience of working in the rice paddies plays a significant role in awakening the Philippine refugee student to the relevance of his life and culture to the learning context. Moreover, she points out that the other students in the class were surprised by the student’s revelation that he knew exactly what it was like to be doing the labour depicted in the story. By encountering
difference, students’ realms of experience become less circumscribed and they too can grow interested in intercultural communication and experience.

The dependency of critical literacies on dialogic pedagogies applies equally to multicultural and cultural heritage texts. Getting to know students is not a demographic exercise. Whether or not we agree with Jacques Lacan that the idea of a fixed, stable self is a Romantic fiction (Lacan, as cited in Brewton, 2007), the feasibility of changing curriculum for each new cohort of students’ hybrid identities is questionable. Students occupy unique and hybrid social positions of race, ethnic culture, gender, class, religion, and evolving social practices. Without multiple points of entry into the communication activities of the classroom, students can become the direct objects of untested and incomplete knowledge, which can in turn teach them to resist authentic communication. English teachers’ efforts to shape curriculum in culturally responsive ways as a result may never be perfect. But, as several of the participants in the study show, there are good reasons and ways to try.

Paolo describes optimizing such points of entry through book club and reader response methods. By having students use reading response journals as raw material for student led dialogue and writing, Paolo places value on students’ prior knowledge while creating spaces for comparing cultural outlooks. His examples of treading controversial terrain with students and parents reveal how English teachers can model the spirit of intellectual and intercultural inquiry. It is important to note that Paolo refers to variations on the book club approach – fishbowl organization, blogs, whole group, for example. As Pirie (1998) cautions, any English teaching method, even dialogic reader response, can lose effectiveness if its use becomes mechanical. Powerful and diverse learning experiences that incorporate intercultural communication should also include dramatization, multimedia
(wikis, learning objects, e.g.), experiential learning among others. All of these methods allow teachers to be brought into the fold (to use James’ words) of students’ cultural knowledge, to model this learning and build a community of producers of culture:

The ideal for which we are striving is the creation of an English classroom in which students are not parasites on the body of literature, but active participants in an unfinished culture, agents with the power and responsibility to make sense of that culture and to contribute to its ongoing construction. (Aronowitz & Giroux, as cited in Pirie, 1997; p. 73)

Notably, the phrase “unfinished culture” conjures once again the notion of a shared, common experience: the “academic talk” (Zweirs & Crawford, p. 72), “challenging discipline-specific knowledge and skills” (Dong, 2009, p. 27) and social capital (Macedo & Araújo Freire, 2008) that all language learners need to “make sense of” and appropriate. But, at the same time, it advocates a reciprocity that conceives of culture as dynamic and socially constructed.

Cultural Conversations in Teacher Education

Faculties of education in Ontario differ by offering either a choice between a concurrent programme (where the Bachelor’s degree in a specific discipline is combined with the teacher’s degree) and consecutive – post-Bachelor – programme, or only the latter. As a result, pre-service teachers in concurrent programmes, like Lucia (Teacher J from the Ontario English Department interview), enjoy relatively more extensive opportunities to engage in dialogue with peers and experienced teachers, over time (i.e., 3 years). However, all candidates complete Bachelors’ degrees with significant differences among them. They come from English Departments steeped in certain eras of British literature, or specific categories of multicultural literature, literary theory, or any combination of these with an additional
minor or double major in another field. Or, as currently in Ontario where only two courses are required, they have little background at all. Therefore, despite common practice in literary analysis, their perspectives and prior knowledge are likely to differ substantially. These disparities make it all the more crucial that teacher education provide opportunities to compare perspectives on education and reflect critically on multicultural literature, teaching materials, and strategies (Botelho & Rudman, 2009; hooks, 1994, 2003). They further highlight the importance of critical literacy and multicultural courses in teacher education that prepare students for the changing world.

A highly appropriate starting point for cultural conversation in English teacher education is the literacy autobiography (Allen & Hermann-Wilmarth, 2004; Kooy, 2006; Soliday, 1995). By reflecting on and narrating personal and educational experiences of literature and reading, teacher candidates can begin to recognize the parameters of their perspectives on teaching and learning *viz a viz* those of others. They can experience for themselves the effectiveness of literacy narratives as a way to achieve cultural knowledge of students (Dong, 2009 p. 30). And they can start to uncover the “sacred stories” (Feuerverger, 2007; p. 42) that inform their senses of cultural identity, and chart the critical travelogue (Diamond, 1999) of their unfolding teacher selves as it emerges between sites and insights. A crucial step is to use the written narrative as talking points for group discussion so that each reflection can enrich those of others.

A common problem in the gap between theory and practice is that teachers are expected to use dialogic teaching methods they have not experienced on an ongoing basis themselves (Florio-Ruane & Raphael, 2001; Holt-Reynolds, 2000). Teacher education becomes a vital time to acquaint future English teachers with dialogic practices they were not
likely to have experienced much of in their university courses. A compelling example of the potential effectiveness of dialogic methods introduced during preservice course is evident in Dr. Mary Kooy’s longitudinal study on book clubs and teacher development (2006, 2009). Several of the teacher reformers profiled in this study developed the use of book clubs, and dialogic approaches to reading, through involvement in the Book Club course and/or the schools-based study. In Rhea’s case, she built upon her teacher education experience by joining a novice-teacher book club. This led gradually to her facilitating a teacher book club at her school which evolved into a teacher-student reading and curriculum inquiry group. The teachers (all White) and students (mostly Muslim) exchange views on the strengths of various texts as reading experiences and as potential syllabus or school library additions, while discussing the texts' literary qualities and cultural content from diverse perspectives.

Another example of building teacher candidate skills in dialogic methods occurs in Alison Cook-Sather’s study documented in the chapter article, “Translating themselves: Becoming a teacher through text and talk” (Cook-Sather, 2001). In the study, preservice teachers engaged in a cycle of practice, reflection, journal writing, and electronic communication with each other, with supervising teachers as well as with students. They reported growing awareness of the ways in which their own personal narratives informed their perceptions of teaching, and changes in those perceptions resulting from the dialogue. For example, one participant realized that the academic jargon she was prone to use interfered with her communication with students, and how by learning to hear the “student voice” she became more adept at engaging the students in return.

A variety of approaches can be taken to accustom teacher candidates to habits of collaborative inquiry that could nourish a lifelong teaching-learning continuum.
Brainstorming and debating the implications of official English curriculum policy can serve to break open the many complexities of praxis that await them as English teachers in a multicultural society. An activity that can enhance this process can be modelled on a recent phenomenon called “Living Libraries.” Living Libraries entitles visitors to libraries to “borrow” a human being who is supposed to represent a certain stereotype or cultural identity. A brief casual meeting follows which provides the borrower an opportunity to test and revise their assumptions through dialogue with the human “book.” This activity could be easily adapted to the preservice English class and connected with literature, for example, multicultural short stories. Other effective approaches might include imaginative use of drama and role play activities to reflect on societal perceptions of culture, disrupt essentialist notions, and problematize efforts to fulfil the ideal of a multicultural curriculum.

The subtle complexities of broaching issues of cultural identity present intriguing challenges for teacher education. More and more cultural groups are speaking out about lack of representation in school curriculums (Rushowy, 2007). At the same time, who is to speak for other cultures? What are realistic goals for preparing future teachers for cultural sensitivity and dialogue? Clearly, the answer does not lie in any business travel reader on cultural skills that reduces intercultural dialogue to a set of tips and taboos. If novice teachers are to grow in skills of dialogic inquiry and intercultural communication, they will need ongoing professional development that makes such growth possible.

**Cultural Conversations for Professional Development**

As the breadth and complexity of secondary English teaching expands to include new requirements such as Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test preparation, up to date
information and communication technologies skills, media literacy, and intercultural communication competence – there is little reprieve from prior responsibilities such as enforcing Canadian spelling, teaching grammar and rhetorical devices, and designing incrementally complex reading and writing exercises.

As they strive to keep up with a growing list of job requirements and responsibilities, English teachers need to practice the theorizing of their practice (Freire, 1998; Luna, Botelho, Fontaine, French, Iverson et al., 2004; Pirie, 2007; Thomson, 1998). Given the critical discourses related to English teaching described throughout this thesis, failing to theorize their practice places English teachers at risk of becoming perpetuators of dominant ideologies. Without renewing a collective answer to the question, “What is English?” we may watch as the boundaries of the discipline collapse (Boomer, as cited in Pirie, 1998) to the satisfaction of Cultural Studies advocates (for example, Stuart Hall, Meaghan Morris, Tony Bennett, and Simon During, as cited by Pirie, 1998). English teachers need to be vigilant and adaptive in recreating course programmes in ways that respond to all of students’ needs through a balance of diverse texts and learning experiences. Without dialogic approaches to these tasks, however, the world of English teaching will continue to be fraught with bitter tensions. Cooperation with initiatives of department heads and change agents provides less personal professional satisfaction without mutual understanding or prior means of communication and involvement. And, as Pirie points out, individual English teachers often suffer tensions within their own practice as they strive to reconcile conflicting models, for example, alternating between reader response and new criticism literary analysis without a consonant rationale.
According to Florio-Ruane and Raphael (2001), the difficulty of teaching about literacy and culture in responsive, dialogic ways is another important reason for professional learning experiences based on the model of teacher conversation groups. Their 2-year study chronicling a teacher book club focused on cultural texts, suggests that teachers can change their discursive practices over time to inquire more deeply into the implications of race, culture, social class, and language diversity for teaching and learning.

The revisions to the OME English curriculum documents, and a 2008 initiative called, Teachers Learning and Leadership Program, conveys a system mandate for change. The program invites teachers to apply for funding to initiate research development projects at their schools. Art, Rhea, and Paolo, as English department heads, are particularly well-placed to enact curriculum transformation. However, Gen’s story of curriculum reform leadership began before she taught English, in her first year as a civics teacher, illustrating how teachers of any subject can independently enact change. And yet, all of their accounts of curriculum reform entail difficulties overcoming the resistance of colleagues who fear change, extra work, and lost authority. Particularly for Art and Gen, whose quest is to inspire students and colleagues to connect learning with humanitarian responses to global issues, the challenge of creating a culture of dialogue is one that cannot be ignored. Accordingly, the critical travelogues of most of the researchers and activists in this study include gradual movement to efforts in the area of professional learning. Rhea went from radically revamping the book room as department head at her former school, to creating a professional learning community at her new school which has evolved to include students in discussions about choosing school texts. By way of its ties to the Kooy book club study (2006), Rhea’s teacher-student learning
group becomes a potential model for curriculum change in English. Similarly, Art and Gen turned to professional development geared at broader influence. As Art explains:

If the problem is that people are not willing to change the curriculum because … it’s easy to maintain the status quo, then I think it’s going to take people like Gen to have workshops to show how easy it is. And I’m not saying it’s our school that needs to be held up, but to just have that conversation through subject councils or through meetings on PD [professional development] days. Now, wouldn’t that be a good topic for PD days? I mean, something that could affect all the schools in your Board. . . .

The critical travelogues in this study trace a journey through and out of the “imaginative geography” of the West (Said, 1978 / 1995), into the “inner landscapes” of teaching (Palmer, 1993) and between the intervals of intercultural dialogue. Through cultural conversations, English teachers can learn how to learn from students and each other. They can tap cultural knowledge and develop intercultural understanding in order to respectfully acknowledge difference in meeting learners’ needs and invite them to a world of discourse, *Without oppress of Toll* (stet, Emily Dickinson, 1984).

*My Critical Travelogue*

*Continued*

While writing this thesis, one of my elementary school teachers serendipitously crossed my path – a tiny force to be reckoned with then and now, a single mother from Ceylon who rose above the social barriers minority women immigrants faced to become a much loved and respected teacher. Conversations with Marie Wijeyewickrema rekindled memories and informed my reflections while writing this thesis. Her teaching experience bridges traditionalist, postcolonial education and child-centred curriculum which she embraced as a teacher in Canada. Marie taught fractions with cake and pizza, and upheld the potential of every student.
In those days, my Italian immigrant neighbourhood enjoyed regular visits from the Bread truck, the Ice Cream truck, the Popcorn and Candy conveyance, and the Bookmobile, each vehicle more magical than the next! It was the Bookmobile that brought literacy to our doorsteps, and enhanced the budding worldly knowledge of children whose parents spoke little English at home. Between that, and the television set, and the radio, and the candy wrappers, we became literate. There was school, too, where we found adventure, boredom, charm, warmth, difficulty, the strange, and the familiar.

It was *Jane Eyre* that changed everything. At the age of 13, it was my first self-selected novel. With an early taste for the Brontës, I was destined to devote myself to English literature. School reading never matched the pleasure of independent reading, but I valued it nonetheless, and adored my English teachers. By the time I had travelled a fair bit and reflected on cultural heritages – in the plural – my course was set for teaching. Gradually, and especially after my beloved Italian immigrant grandparents passed away, I began to notice and question the gap between my own cultural narrative and the limited range of narratives I had chosen to privilege in education. As a teacher candidate, my attention turned to the question of how to bring intercultural conversation into the teaching of Shakespeare.

On one occasion, when I was teaching John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men* with an audio recording, one of my students stood up and walked out of the classroom. I had failed to adequately contextualize sensitive content in the play. There were few visible minority students in that particular class, and when the racist words were spoken aloud from the CD player, they must have hit with a great force. In that same class, I noticed how well all of the students responded to Elie Wiesel’s *Night*.

Just days before writing this, I was at a high school as a substitute teacher. Students told me that their core English texts include Shakespeare each year, *To Kill a Mockingbird, Death of a Salesman, Lord of the Flies*… Through
frequent informal surveys like this, I have found that the traditional school English canon is very much alive in Ontario schools. But also, students have very individual tastes. The students I talk to often have difficulty expressing precisely what would make the difference in terms of English approaches. Generally, they seem to agree it would involve more “enjoyable” lessons and “more interesting” texts.
References


202


Rushowy, K. (2007, August 30). An unequal measure: Many South Asians are falling through the cracks in a school system that provides little support for students of


Appendix A

Headlines

Ontario, Canada 2007-2009

Religious Schools Funding Debate Rages as Ontario Election Nears
By Joan Delaney, Epoch Times Victoria Staff Sep 28, 2007

Controversy erupts after schools pull 'atheist' book
The Halton Catholic District School Board ordered "The Golden
Compass" to be removed from library shelves at dozens of schools
CTV.ca News Updated Fri. Nov. 23 2007 3:10 PM ET

Girl, 16, dies after hijab dispute with father

Debate rages over Afrocentric schools after vote
Toronto.ctv.ca Updated Wed. Jan. 30 2008 2:37 PM ET

Toronto school board reviewing Atwood novel after parent complains

Canada & US 2005-2009

Quebec private schools must allow hijabs, skullcaps: human rights commission
CBC News. Last Updated: Thursday, June 16, 2005 | 3:35 PM ET

Top court rules today on kirpans in schools
The Gazette, Published: Thursday, March 02 2006

New Brunswick school principal received death threats in anthem dispute
February 10, 2009 www.cbc.ca (accessed March 22)

Controversy Over Anti-Semitism in Shakespeare’s Merchant of Venice: Should the Play Be Censored or Banned?
By Elle McDee, AC: Associated Content/Education, New York.

*All accessed on the Internet, January 17, 2009
Appendix B
Aspects of English Curriculum Change in Ontario

*The Ontario Curriculum, English 2000*

viz. *The Ontario Curriculum, English 2007, Revised*

1. “global”

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<td>p. 28 “citizenship in a global society”</td>
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<td>p. 35 “bring the global community into the local community”</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>p. 61 “locate global, national, local news…”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>p. 106 “presenting their point of view on a community or global issue”</td>
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<td>p. 35 “bring the global community into the local community”</td>
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<td>p. 59 “global issues in literary texts”</td>
<td>p. 93 “an expert panel about global warming”</td>
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<td>p. 62 “develop a thesis … about a global issue”</td>
<td>p. 115 “the likely effects of global warming”</td>
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<td>p. 70 “how Canadian works … present universal themes or global issues”</td>
<td>p. 155 Media Studies 2.3 “Global Awareness and Globalization”</td>
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<td>p. 86 “search the Internet …global issue”</td>
<td>p. 158 2.3 Technology Perspectives: “global audience”</td>
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<td>p. 167 “presentations about a global issue”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>p. 170 “make connections between … personal, and global or community events”</td>
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<td>p. 176 Writer’s Craft: “research recent works on global expression”</td>
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<td>p. 155 “analyse the impact of the media on countries, cultures, and economies around the world…and / or the relationships among them, focusing on globalization”</td>
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<td>p. 33 “Antidiscrimination Education in the English Program” (plus 3 references)</td>
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<td>p. 32 “sensitivity”</td>
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<td>p. 43, p. 61, p. 77, p. 93, p. 113, p. 129 “sensitivity to cultural differences”</td>
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<td>p. 44(x2), p. 62(x2), p. 94(x2), p. 113 (x2), p. 130(x2) “sensitivity to audience needs and cultural differences”</td>
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*Previously, only a separate cross-curricular School Boards policy document was in place: *Antiracism and Ethnocultural Equity in School Boards: Guidelines for Policy Development and Implementation* 1993.*
Appendix C
Suggested Reading for Methodology Design

Brantlinger, Patrick. “Who Killed Shakespeare: An Apologia for English Departments”

Fairbrother, Anne. “School Reform and the Language Arts Classroom” in Confessions of
a Canon-loving Multiculturalist.
http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qa3935/is_200004/ai_n8894278/print.16/08/2005

hooks, b. (1994) Embracing change: teaching in a multicultural world in b. hooks,
Teaching to transgress: Education as the practice of freedom. (p. 35-44), New York:
Routledge.

James, C. E. (2001) Multiculturalism, Diversity and Education in the Canadian Context
in Global Constructions of Multicultural Education: Theories and Realities, eds. C.A.

Pennycock, Alastair. (1998) English Language Teaching and Colonialism in English and
Appendix D
Participation Consent Form

University of Toronto
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education
The Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning
252 Bloor Street W.
Toronto, ON M5S 1V6

Consent Form: Teacher Participants in Schools

I agree to participate in a research project entitled, “Teaching English in the Global Age” by Dana Colarusso, Ph.D. candidate in the Curriculum Teaching and Learning programme at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto. I understand that the purpose of the research is to explore the changing role of the English teacher in the context of multiculturalism and globalization. I agree to participate in one or more interviews to respond to questions related to this topic. I understand that the interview(s) will be recorded on audiotape and / or videotape.

I understand that I will not be identified by name or school in any report of the research results. I also understand that I will be allowed to read a draft of the written report of the research results and will be allowed to veto the inclusion of any particular data. I understand that I may decline to participate in this research without fear of sanction, may decline to answer any particular questions, and am free to withdraw from the study at any time.

If I need further information or details regarding the study, I can contact Dana Colarusso at [---] dcolarusso@oise.utoronto.ca or her Ph.D. supervisor, Dr. Mary Kooy at [----] and mkooy@oise.utoronto.ca

Date: __________________________

I agree to participate in this interview for research on teacher learning and development. I have carefully read the description (above).

[Name of Teacher] [Name of School]
_____________________________________Signature

229
## Appendix E

### Concordances

Concordance, Paolo

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<th>Cited Texts</th>
<th>Read in School/</th>
<th>Teach/Pro</th>
<th>Teach/Anti</th>
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<td>“canonical texts”</td>
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<td>Lord of the Flies</td>
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<td>The Koran</td>
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<td>of a Dog in the Nighttime</td>
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<td>The Wars</td>
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<td>Shakespeare</td>
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<td>Modern Drama</td>
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<tr>
<td>Purple Hibiscus (added to course)</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Book of Negroes (added to course)</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Mr. Pip (added to course)</td>
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<td>Stardust</td>
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<td>The Haunting of Hill House</td>
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<td>Theories of Relativity</td>
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<td>The Kite Runner</td>
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<td>Slam poetry</td>
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Concordance, Rhea

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Concordance, Sabrina

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Concordance, Gen and Art

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<td>Global CPT</td>
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<td>The ‘classics’ (air quotations)</td>
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<td>New literature x2* (culturally diverse)</td>
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<td>New assignments and rubrics</td>
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<td>Asphalt Angels (Brazilian)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Crabbé</td>
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<td>Marty</td>
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<td>Chu-Ju’s House</td>
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<td>Rap Music</td>
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<td>Raisin in the Sun</td>
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<td>Robert Taylor images</td>
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<td>Tupac Shapur</td>
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<td>Girls Gone Wild</td>
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<td>Lord of the Flies</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shakespeare</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shakespeare x 3</td>
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<td>Global material / books</td>
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<td>Marty</td>
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<td>Chapters bestsellers</td>
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<td>Merchant of Venice</td>
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<td><strong>Art</strong> Classics, “greats of literature”</td>
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<td>Media, Videogames</td>
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<td>X old crap</td>
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<td>Shakespeare x6*</td>
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<td>Hugh Hood</td>
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<td>Robert Kroetch (survey)\</td>
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<td>Atwood, Laurence</td>
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<td>A Fine Balance (favourite novel - not for teaching)</td>
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<td>Romeo &amp; Juliet ++</td>
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<td>- Orange Prize for Women, Man Booker – Commonwealth,</td>
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<td>Robert Cormier, Eric Walters</td>
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